

Learning Leninism:
Factional Struggles in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia
during the Great Purge (1936–1940)

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of factional struggles in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) during the Great Purge, from 1936 until 1940. An understanding of this conflict is crucial for completing the picture of the evolution of the KPJ in the interwar period, and its relationship to the Communist International, as well as for reevaluating the roots of the Tito-Stalin Split. The research sheds new light on the process of appointing a general secretary in the midst of the Great Purge, whilst also offering an alternative understanding of the relations between the Comintern and its constituent parties. In spite of the frequently repeated assumption that the KPJ was an insignificant satellite of the Comintern, completely subjected to the decisions of its Executive Committee, the argument of this work is that the Yugoslav communists still enjoyed a large degree of autonomy. Their Moscow superiors were far from detached, but they encouraged and expected independent actions. Tito was the candidate who understood this expectation the best, which gave him a crucial advantage in the factional struggle. Moreover, the struggle involved communists from many other communist parties, showing how political networks of the Comintern often transcended national ties, and reminding us that the history of national sections of the Third International can never be observed in a vacuum.

The research begins by tracing the rise and fall of Milan Gorkić, the de facto leader of the KPJ from 1932 until 1937. The clash between him and his opponents, who accused him of “rightist deviation” at the April Plenum in 1936, drew the attention of the Comintern, which saw the conflict as a revival of factionalism. The following year saw the purging of the former oppositionists within the KPJ, mostly Trotskyists. Gorkić soon became a victim of the Great Purge as well, sparking an all-out struggle for leadership over the party. The main contenders for the vacant position of the general secretary were Josip Broz Tito, whose group was dubbed the Temporary Leadership; Ivo Marić and Labud Kusovac, who led the so-called

Parallel Center; Petko Miletić, the leader of an ultra-left group called the Wahhabis; and Kamilo Horvatin, the KPJ representative to the Comintern. After over two and a half years of conflict, Tito emerged as the new general secretary.

The KPJ was, by and large, a party on the left of the international communist movement. All of the main leadership candidates were leftists, which was not ideal in the period of the popular front, when the Communist International required moderation and cooperation. Tito prevailed over other candidates primarily because of a proper understanding of Leninism as defined by the Comintern at the time, and the practical achievements in reviving the party organization in the country. As a consequence of the purge, the factional struggle, and the practical political experiences of the newly-formed leadership, the period between 1936 and 1940 became the key formative period, playing a crucial role in the making of the KPJ as we know it from the 1940s on. Thus, the story of the KPJ leadership struggle in the late 1930s is, in a lot of ways, a prehistory of 1948.

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Abbreviations and Glossary

AVNOJ – Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia, the umbrella organization of Yugoslav antifascist groups during the Second World War

CC – Central Committee

Cominform – The Communist Information Bureau, a group of leading European communist parties formed in 1947 as a quasi-successor to the Communist International

ECCI – Executive Committee of the Communist International, the governing body of the Comintern

Gorkičevci – Supporters of Milan Gorkić, the purged general secretary of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia

GPU – State Political Directorate, the formal name of the Soviet secret police, 1922-1923

GUGB - Main Directorate of State Security, the formal name of the Soviet secret police, 1934-1941

HSS – Croatian Peasant Party

KIM – Young Communist International

KPH – Communist Party of Croatia, founded in 1937 as a subsection of the KPJ

KPJ – Communist Party of Yugoslavia

KPS – Communist Party of Slovenia, founded in 1937 as a subsection of the KPJ

KUNMZ – Communist University of the National Minorities of the West

NRPJ – Independent Workers' Party of Yugoslavia

PCE – Communist Party of Spain

PCF – French Communist Party

Profintern – The Red International of Labor Unions, a communist trade union organization created to unite the communist trade unions and coordinate communist activity among the reformist ones

SIM – Servicio de Información Militar (Military Information Service), the intelligence department of the International Brigades

SRN – The Party of the Working People, a legal and broad left-wing party led by communists in Yugoslavia from 1938 to 1940

SRPJ(k) – Socialist Workers' Party of Yugoslavia (communists), renamed to Communist Party of Yugoslavia in 1920

SKJ – League of Communists of Yugoslavia, the name of the KPJ from 1952

SKOJ – League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia

Ultra-left – An individual communist attitude or a communist party line characterized by perceived adventurism and sectarianism, such as individual acts of terror or refusal to engage in any cooperation with the non-communist left

VKP(b) – All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)

Yezhovshchina – The colloquial name for the Great Purge in the Soviet Union

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Introduction

On July 3, 1937, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ), Milan Gorkić, informed his comrades in the Politburo that he had been summoned to Moscow by the Comintern. According to the subsequent recollections of those close to him, he was calm and optimistic about the journey; he expected to be back in Paris, where most of the Yugoslav communist leadership was exiled to, within ten days.¹ His close friend, the Austrian-French communist writer Manès Sperber, asked him in private whether he was worried about the trip, given their shared knowledge of mass arrests in Moscow. Caring little for his own security, Gorkić merely reminded him that disobeying Comintern orders would amount to an act of treason and that it could be detrimental for his party.² This was the last time Sperber saw his friend alive. Following Gorkić's arrival in Moscow, the KPJ Politburo ceased receiving letters from him or the Third International. Soon after, Comintern financial aid was halted, without any explanation or prior notice.

The arrest and execution of Gorkić marked a turning point in the history of the KPJ. While hitherto the main targets of the Great Purge were members of the Yugoslav party who had opposed Stalin (a campaign that Gorkić wholeheartedly supported), from the summer of 1937, the NKVD turned against the KPJ leadership and other Yugoslav political émigrés. Communists, sympathizers and the non-affiliated were targeted with equal intensity. Furthermore, the Great Purge revived the factional struggles and created new ones. Due to the mass repression by the NKVD, this renewed struggle was more volatile than any previous one. Some of the contenders for the party leadership would also fall prey to the Purge. On April 19, 1939, eleven top Yugoslav communists, including two former general secretaries, two secretaries of the Communist Youth (SKOJ), and three Spanish Civil War veterans, were

¹ Ivan Očak, *Gorkić: život, rad i pogibija* (Zagreb: Globus, 1988), 319-320. As a consequence of state repression, the party leadership was scattered throughout the continent, operating in several countries, with Paris as its primary headquarters.

² Očak, *Gorkić*, 321.

executed together, most probably as a result of direct orders from Lavrentiy Beria, Andrey Vyshinsky, and the Politburo presided by Stalin.³ This mass execution of some of the most prominent party figures has never before been a subject of historical research. The causes of their execution at a time when NKVD repression was subsiding, remain a mystery. The surviving Yugoslav communists who aspired to the position of general secretary were expelled from the party that same year, following the establishment of a new leadership headed by Josip Broz Tito.

Before Tito received a mandate from the Comintern, however, the power grab affected all levels of the party and all areas of its activity, lasting for more than three years and taking place across four different countries. The international character of the conflict was not limited merely to KPJ activists abroad; other foreign communists also became heavily implicated in the Yugoslav intraparty struggles. The influence these parties had on the outcome of the KPJ's leadership competition raises the issue of transnational connections' impact on power dynamics within the Comintern. The factional struggle was never just an internal KPJ affair, even though it has always been presented as such.

The period of the Great Purge remains one of the most controversial and under-researched points in the history of the KPJ. Although it marks the time of Tito's ascension to power, very few authors have examined the causes of his success, and fewer still have attempted to understand the alternative paths that the party could have taken. This research will help shed a new light on the general history of the KPJ by uncovering new facts on one of the most chaotic and controversial moments in the party's existence. In my work, I intend to go beyond the "teleology of Tito," since all the currently existing works on the topic center around the character of Josip Broz and his rise to the position of general secretary of the KPJ. Such a perspective, wittingly or unwittingly, leads to a presumption that Tito was in some

³ S.A. Melchin, A.S. Stepanov, V.N. Yakushev et al., "Сталинские списки - введение," *Memorial*, <http://stalin.memo.ru/images/intro.htm> (accessed March 27, 2017).

way predestined to become party leader, or, in the more orthodox accounts from the socialist period, that his rise to power presents the end goal and the culmination of the Yugoslav communist movement's development. My research will argue for a move away from this teleological approach, presenting Tito as just one of the actors who fought for power, rather than the central figure in the Yugoslav communist movement. Even though he undoubtedly became that by 1940, his position between 1936 and 1939 was no less precarious than that of his rivals.

Taking all this into consideration, my thesis will try to ascertain the origins of the KPJ's factional struggles which, as I will argue, first resurfaced in 1936, after being allegedly ended through Comintern intervention in the late 1920s. I will offer an answer to the question of how and why different factions emerged or dispersed in the period of the Great Purge, taking into account their respective strategies, ideological views, and the reasons for their success or failure. In part, I will touch upon the impact of external institutions and organizations – such as the Comintern, the Soviet government, the NKVD, and other foreign communist parties – on the factional struggles within the KPJ. Finally, I will assess the long-term impact of the Great Purge on the KPJ itself, the formation of its policy, and the consequences it had for the subsequent split with Stalin in 1948.

I will argue that the victory of Tito's party line, which was firmly on the left of the Yugoslav communist movement, over its competitors, was a consequence of his proactive policy prescriptions and understanding of the expectations that the Comintern had of the KPJ. Although his rise was foreseeable in light of Comintern policy, it was by no means inevitable. However, the appointment of a new general secretary retrospectively became a key formative moment in the history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. At this time, the "Titoist" party line was formulated, and it remained more or less unchanged until the first serious attempts to reform the Yugoslav system after 1948. As such, the roots of party policies in the 1940s,

including those that led to the Tito-Stalin Split, can be traced back to the ideological intra-party struggles in the late 1930s.

Historiography

There are only a handful of quality historical works about the KPJ in the late 1930s, and most of them do not treat the subject of the Great Purge in depth, in spite of its extraordinary significance for the overall development of the party. The topic was relatively taboo in Yugoslav academic circles until the 1980s, but the brief explosion of works on the period in that decade stopped as the country's system began to collapse. These works, although of high quality, have become dated and some of their findings require reassessment. Such is the case with Ivo Banac's *With Stalin against Tito*,⁴ which provides a detailed overview of the factional struggles in the 1930s, but which overemphasized the importance of the national question in these struggles. Generally, the scholarship on the KPJ has tended to overly focus on the issues of nationality, which is something I also intend to move away from. The prolific Croatian historian Ivan Očak has written several biographies of famous Yugoslav victims of the Great Purge,⁵ although at the time he was still unable to ascertain the exact circumstances of their downfall and death. A journalist, Petar Požar, has succeeded in compiling a book on the more prominent Yugoslav victims of Stalinism,⁶ and his account is very useful for gathering certain factual data on them, although it was written in the style of popular history.

⁴ Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁵ Aside from the already cited biography of Milan Gorkić in footnote 1, Očak published three more biographies of Yugoslavs killed in the Great Purge. The first was the biography of Danilo Srđić, the most prominent Yugoslav in the Red Army, a hero of the Russian Civil War who participated in the storming of the Winter Palace: Ivan Očak and Mihailo Marić, *Danilo Srđić, crveni general* (Belgrade: Sedma sila, 1965). A decade and a half later, he published a biography of Vladimir Čopić, another participant in the Bolshevik Revolution, a founder of the KPJ and the party's first organizational secretary, who was the commander of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War: Ivan Očak, *Vojnik revolucije: Život i rad Vladimira Čopića* (Zagreb: Spektar, 1980). Finally, he published a biography of Đuro and Stjepan Cvijić in 1982: Ivan Očak, *Braća Cvijići* (Zagreb: Spektar – Globus, 1982). Đuro was a one-time secretary of the KPJ between 1925 and 1926, while Stjepan, his younger brother, was the organizational secretary of the Young Communist International in 1934.

⁶ Petar Požar, *Jugosloveni žrtve staljinskih čistki* (Belgrade: Nova knjiga, 1989).

More recently, there have been three works of great historiographical merit that have dealt with the topic to some extent: by Nikita Bondarev,⁷ Geoffrey Swain,⁸ and Slavko and Ivo Goldstein.⁹ Bondarev wrote a dissertation about Tito in Moscow in 1935 and 1936, which helps shed light on the conditions within the KPJ at the very beginning of the Great Purge. Geoffrey Swain's excellent 2010 biography of Tito goes even further and covers the entire period of his rise to power, explaining his unique strategy in dealing with the Comintern. The book by the Goldsteins draws on a large variety of secondary sources and makes for the most comprehensive biography of Tito, and his activity during the Great Purge is extremely well-covered. All three works, however, focus on the person of Tito and treat the KPJ as a mere background to the story. Even when contemporary biographies, such as those of Swain and Jože Pirjevec,¹⁰ present Tito's rise as contingent and precarious, the story always revolves around him. This creates an incomplete picture of the KPJ, as all those who lost the factional struggle are brushed aside. The consequence of this is, at best, a misrepresentation of various marginalized ideological traditions within the KPJ,¹¹ and at worst, their complete oblivion.

Despite the opening of the archives in the 1990s, the Comintern as a whole remains under-researched. The documents dealing with the KPJ are no exception, and thus much of the party's interwar history remains unknown. The very first "wave" of research in the early 1990s focused precisely on the Cominternians who became victims of Stalinist repression.¹² In the Yugoslav case, however, this "first wave" consisted only of a single article by Ubavka

⁷ Nikita Bondarev, *Misterija Tito: moskovske godine* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2013).

⁸ Geoffrey Swain, *Tito: A Biography* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

⁹ Slavko Goldstein and Ivo Goldstein, *Tito* (Zagreb: Profil, 2015).

¹⁰ Jože Pirjevec, *Tito i drugovi*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: Laguna, 2013).

¹¹ The works that do address Tito's marginalized rivals in the KPJ usually present them through the lens of the official party line, describing them as having undermined party unity and weakened the revolutionary cause. For examples, see Ivan Jelić, *Komunistička partija Hrvatske 1937–1945*, vol. 1 (Zagreb: Globus, 1981), 115-116, 223-238, and Sibe Kvesić, *Dalmacija u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi* (Zagreb: Lykos, 1960), 8-9, 21-23. The post-Yugoslav historiography has been markedly more sympathetic, although few works have actually presented Tito's rivals as central figures that they were. An excellent biographical account that goes against this tendency is Jelena Kovačević, "Petko Miletić (1897–1943) – od revolucionara do "frakcionaša," *Tokovi istorije* 1/2017: 47-73.

¹² Brigitte Studer and Berthold Unfried, "At the Beginning of a History: Visions of the Comintern After the Opening of the Archives," *International Review of Social History* 42 (1997): 425-426.

Vujošević and Vera Mujbegović, listing the executed Yugoslavs that they managed to identify.¹³ No comprehensive account exists on the fall of Milan Gorkić, although there have been attempts to explain it.¹⁴ The most successful of these came from Ubavka Vujošević, who published Gorkić's last autobiographical account, written just days before his arrest.¹⁵ Vujošević is the only Yugoslav historian who relied extensively on the newly-available documents from the Comintern, although her own research into the KPJ in this period was cut short by her death. As such, even a thorough examination of the last year of Gorkić's life is currently lacking.

When considering the KPJ during the Great Purge, the most fundamental oversight in existing research is the exclusion of foreign communists from the story. Although a vast body of literature touches upon the issue of foreign – particularly Bulgarian – involvement in Yugoslav intra-party struggles after the arrest of Gorkić,¹⁶ they all fail to engage in a deeper analysis of the impact this might have had on the outcome of the Yugoslav leadership struggle, or the broader implications of such ties for understanding the functioning of the Comintern. The KPJ is observed in a vacuum, and the non-Yugoslav figures constitute mere footnotes, whose role in either the Comintern or their own national parties is unimportant. The collected works of Tito, for example, mention several times the obstruction of his work by the French Communist Party (PCF),¹⁷ but never inquire about how or why this occurred. This same lack of inquiry is evident when it comes to German communists, in particular Wilhelm

¹³ Ubavka Vujošević and Vera Mujbegović, "Die jugoslawischen Kommunisten in den stalinistischen 'Säuberungen' 1929 bis 1949," in Richard Lorenz and Siegfried Bahne (eds.), *Kommunisten Verfolgen Kommunisten: Stalinistischer Terror und "Säuberungen" in Den Kommunistischen Parteien Europas Seit Den 30er Jahren* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1993): 157-173.

¹⁴ For a pioneering work on the topic, see Swain, *Tito*, 17-20.

¹⁵ Ubavka Vujošević, "Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ," *Istorija 20. veka 1/1997*: 107-128. Writing autobiographies to the Cadres Department of the Comintern was a regular practice among the communists.

¹⁶ See, for example, Vjenceslav Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: Rad, 1983), 84-86; 94-96, Goldstein, *Tito*, 158, 162-163, or Pirjevec, *Tito i drugovi*, vol. 1, 102-103. *Enigma Kopinič* remains a controversial book due to Kopinič's self-serving narrative about his role in World War II, but is extremely useful for his insights into the period from 1937 to 1940, as his testimonies on events from that time match the findings of historians.

¹⁷ Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela*, ed. Pero Damjanović, vol. 4 (Belgrade: Komunist, 1981), 60-61, 230, 233.

Pieck and Wilhelm Florin, who were among the most influential individuals in the Comintern, and were directly involved in Yugoslav affairs.¹⁸ I will argue that the power struggle in the Yugoslav party cannot be understood without a deeper examination of the involvement of foreign communists, and will attempt to reconstruct it.

Sources

The primary source research will be based mainly on archival materials from the Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, the Open Society Archives in Budapest, and the published memoirs of participants in the communist movement. The Archives of Yugoslavia hold the fonds of the KPJ and the Comintern section for Yugoslavia, as well as the unpublished memoirs of labor movement organizers from the interwar period. Many of these memoirs and documents have not really been thoroughly researched despite the fact that some of them have been in the archive since the late 1960s. The Open Society Archives in Budapest contain the digitized Comintern Archives, originally held in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI). Its documents have only been made available in the past three decades, and have largely remained unexamined by historians of Yugoslavia. I will use these digitized documents, in particular those from the Secretariat of Wilhelm Pieck,¹⁹ in order to gain a better understanding of the KPJ's position within the Comintern and to gain new insight into the course of the factional struggle. Finally, the newly available lists of people arrested and deported by the Soviet regime, compiled by the Moscow-based NGO Memorial and published online, will help me discover more about the individual destinies of

¹⁸ Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela*, ed. Pero Damjanović, vol. 3 (Belgrade: Komunist, 1981), 90-91; 93-95; 102; 124-125; and Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 105-106.

¹⁹ The communist parties of the Balkan countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey) were organized under the Balkan Länder-secretariat of the Comintern starting from 1926. From the late 1920s, the secretariat became increasingly irrelevant, as the Comintern moved away from world revolution and towards defending "the first country of socialism." The Balkan Länder-secretariat was officially abolished during the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935. However, it de facto continued to exist under the Secretariat of Wilhelm Pieck, which endured until the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943. In this text I will occasionally refer to Pieck's Secretariat as "the Balkan Secretariat," as this is what it really was in practice.

prominent communists, and to reassess the impact that the Great Purge had on the KPJ and the Yugoslav émigré community in the Soviet Union.

Regarding printed primary sources, the thesis will rely on the collected works of Josip Broz Tito,²⁰ as well as documents gathered by the journalist Pero Simić.²¹ I will also rely upon published memoirs and diaries, such as those of Rodoljub Čolaković,²² Milovan Đilas,²³ and Georgi Dimitrov,²⁴ to examine the variety of individual views on the factional struggle. Articles from communist newspapers and magazines, such as *Proleter*, the organ of the Central Committee of the KPJ, will help me understand the changing party line and the ideological confrontations between factions.

Theory and Methodology

For a broader contextualization of the Great Purge, I intend to draw primarily on the insights from the revisionist school, as explained by authors such as J. Arch Getty, Oleg Naumov,²⁵ and Sheila Fitzpatrick.²⁶ For understanding the specific situation in the Comintern during the Purge, I will greatly rely on William J. Chase's *Enemies within the Gates?*²⁷ I see the process of purging party and the Comintern as being simultaneously a part of Stalin's "revolution from above,"²⁸ and an expression of bottom-up popular grievances against abuses of power by the rank and file of the All-Union Communist Party. However, this violence from

²⁰ Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela*, ed. Pero Damjanović, vols. 3 to 5 (Belgrade: Komunist, 1981).

²¹ Although his methodological approach was highly questionable and his interpretation of documents tendentious, misinformed and misleading, Simić gathered and published an impressive amount of extremely useful primary source documents from the RGASPI. See Pero Simić, *Tito: svetac i magle* (Belgrade: Službeni list SCG, 2005) and Pero Simić and Zvonimir Despot, *Tito – strogo poverljivo: arhivski dokumenti* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2010).

²² Rodoljub Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 2 (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1968) and Rodoljub Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 3 (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1972).

²³ Milovan Đilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973).

²⁴ Ivo Banac (ed.), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov 1933–1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

²⁵ J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

²⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), and Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁷ William J. Chase, *Enemies within the Gates? The Comintern and Stalinist Repression, 1934-1939* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

²⁸ Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 151, 163-170.

below was always kept in check by Stalin and his inner circle, as there was always a danger that the situation could get out of hand if the masses turned against the very top of the party.²⁹ Furthermore, the perception of an impending foreign threat was a key constitutive element of Stalinist repression. This led to the rise of xenophobia and suspicion of all foreigners within the country, which facilitated the intensification of repression within the Comintern apparatus.³⁰

Based on the findings of the revisionist school, I acknowledge the agency of both individuals and the communist parties as a whole during the Great Purge; they were neither mere passive recipients of directives nor helpless victims of repression.³¹ Using this starting point, I would like to emphasize that there has been a general tendency to reduce the KPJ to a mere puppet of the Comintern in the interwar period.³² By contrast, this research should not only be a step towards a greater understanding of foreign parties during the Great Purge but also to a completely new perception of the KPJ and its agency in relation to the Comintern. Far from wanting to control and micromanage all aspects of the Balkan parties' affairs, the Comintern expected that the members themselves, in particular those untainted by the stigma of factionalism, would take the initiative and resolve the problems of their party on their own. The Comintern, naturally, had the final word, but the interaction between the two was constantly present and very much required.

This approach and my focus on ideological disagreements within the KPJ necessarily raise the issue of individual belief of the communists involved. Were the ideological disagreements between Yugoslav communists genuine or should they be observed as merely the tools of cynics pressed on winning political power? Chase has succinctly summarized both the dilemma and the answer to it:

²⁹ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 14.

³⁰ Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates?*, 102-104.

³¹ Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates?*, 6-9.

³² See, for example, Hilde Katrine Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia: Tito, the Communist Leadership and the National Question* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016).

[R]hetorical homogeneity was a feature of party discourse under Stalin. Different historians might interpret this rhetoric in different ways. Some might view it as evidence that whatever doubts party members harbored, they were too afraid to express them and hence adhered to party discipline and used the rhetoric as a means of self-defense. Others might view the homogeneous rhetoric as evidence that party members believed entirely what they said, that the rhetoric faithfully reflects their understanding of reality. Without evidence of a person's private thoughts, either interpretation tells us more about the historians than it does about historical reality.³³

Therefore, I will accept and examine the theoretical arguments presented by various groups involved in the factional struggle as genuine, without assuming them to be the products of nefarious motives or fear. Even though I intend to use a vast body of memoirs reflecting on this period, the impressions written down several decades later should not be interpreted as accurate descriptions of the individuals' thoughts and feelings in 1937 and 1938. This is particularly true for the many who came to question their Stalinism after the Tito-Stalin Split in 1948. Even if they disagreed in private during the 1930s (an assumption which is nearly impossible to prove), doing so in public would have certainly cost them party membership at a time when even expressing minor reservations was seen as an act of treason.³⁴

The most fundamental theoretical issue that I will have to contend with is factionalism within communist parties. Factionalism referred to real or alleged formation of groups within the party or a movement which hold views different than those officially presented by the organization at a given moment. The origins of the term and its evolution are important for understanding the KPJ during the Great Purge, since "factionalism" was the most common accusation emerging from all sides involved in the struggle. As such, it is obvious that the role of the term was primarily functional, not merely theoretical, and factional struggles did undoubtedly have a negative effect on the unity of the KPJ.³⁵ Factionalism has been a persistent feature of leftist political organizations since the nineteenth century, and

³³ Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates?*, 43.

³⁴ Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates?*, 94.

³⁵ For further elaboration of this view, see Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 45-116; Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 17-58; and Slavoljub Cvetković, *Idejne borbe u KPJ 1919-1928* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1985).

Bolshevism itself developed out of a factional split in 1903. After the October Revolution, several factions were formed within the Bolshevik party, most notably the Workers' Opposition and the Democratic Centralists, with varying degrees of success. Up until that point, factions were considered a normal feature of party life, and would often disperse after fulfilling their goals, or decisively failing to do so. However, at the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921, a resolution banning factions was passed. Although no one was aware of the ramifications of this decision at the time, the ban on factions effectively made the entire party subject to the will of the Central Committee, and any kind of dissent from its decisions could be interpreted as factionalism, and therefore an attack on the party itself.³⁶ Throughout the 1920s, however, factions persisted both within the Soviet party and other constituent sections of the Comintern. They arose primarily as a consequence of disenchantment caused by the failure of revolutions in the West and, in relation to this failure, on the issue of how to construct socialism in the Soviet Union. Factions were marginalized and politically incapacitated with the rise of Stalin, and former factionalists were either expelled from the party or given insignificant posts. Broadly speaking, the left faction argued for intensified revolutionary radicalism and export of the revolution abroad, whereas the right faction argued for a more gradualist approach to building socialism and a less aggressive policy towards the capitalist countries.

The success of the Stalinist faction laid, among other things, in Stalin's ability to fashion his group as a non-faction, a party center which was neither left nor right, and was thus the only form of Bolshevism which did not present a deviation.³⁷ Equally significant was Stalin's own position as general secretary, which enabled him to appoint party cadres and thereby creating a network of loyalists within the organization and the state apparatus.

³⁶ Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 765.

³⁷ Robert Wesson, *Lenin's Legacy: The Story of the CPSU* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Press, 2017), 125.

Leaders of the constituent communist parties of the Comintern would try to mimic this tactic. Indeed, all the major pretenders to the leadership of the KPJ adopted this approach to some degree after Gorkić was arrested. Usually, this meant fashioning oneself as a compromise candidate and accentuating both the positive and negative aspects of the political opponents' work.

However, the perception of intra-party opposition was becoming increasingly negative in the 1930s. In the wake of the Kirov assassination, a fundamental shift occurred. Former oppositionists were no longer seen as mere political rivals but were dehumanized as terrorists and foreign elements who consciously worked to undermine Soviet socialism.³⁸ The KPJ and other parties of the Comintern largely uncritically accepted this change of attitude, facilitating the coming repression of their own cadres. The KPJ's own bitter factional struggles, combined with the double isolation of émigré life and the illegal status of the party, provided further justification for the belief that one's opponents might be concealing nefarious counter-revolutionary motives. As Ondřej Vojtěchovský observed in his case study of Yugoslav postwar Stalinist émigrés in Czechoslovakia, delusions, loss of contact with current affairs in the home country, collective frustrations, personal feuds, and ideological disagreements all feature prominently in the life of political émigré communities in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe.³⁹ The increased sense of internal threat in 1935 and 1936 could have only served to confirm the doubts that the émigrés already harbored about each other. It created a mindset which, according to Chase, was characterized by conformity and obedience, reinforced through a sense of community, a rigidity of standards of judgment, and a

³⁸ Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates?*, 43.

³⁹ Ondřej Vojtěchovský, *Iz Praga protiv Tita! Jugoslovenska informbiroovska emigracija u Čehoslovačkoj* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2016), 1.

conspiratorial mentality.⁴⁰ I will examine the factional struggles with these crucial factors in mind.

Aside from the development of factionalism, other political practices also played a significant role in determining the relations between party members. The KPJ was organized as a secret underground party, very much along the lines of Lenin's program outlined in *What Is To Be Done?*, which emphasized the necessity of the creation of a conspiratorial party in conditions of illegality.⁴¹ Yugoslavia's own authoritarian monarchy gave the communists plenty of reasons to project the Russia of 1902 onto their own country, particularly in the wake of the 1929 dictatorship. This created a distinct process of ad hoc decision making, and left little room for true intra-party democracy, which only served to exacerbate the existing conflicts between members of the KPJ.

Finally, when examining the inner workings of the Communist International, I will employ Brigitte Studer's distinction between three levels of the Comintern (the international, the transnational, and the national) as a framework for interpreting the various relations between members of the KPJ and other constituent parties. In this model, the international refers to the ultimate goal of the communists, the world revolution; the national, to the domestic political arenas in which their activities were carried out; and the transnational, to a connection between the other two, a space of entangled exchanges of individuals and ideas.⁴² I will show the entanglement of these three levels and will devote particular attention to the transnational aspect, using it to understand the networks of power and influence that the Yugoslav communists were involved in, and which transcended national lines. Further drawing on Studer's work, my thesis will avoid the perpetrator-victim dichotomy, which is untenable in studies of the Comintern during the Great Purge, and replace it with an approach

⁴⁰ Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates?*, 29-31.

⁴¹ Vladimir Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), 86-91.

⁴² Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 4.

that acknowledges the deep entanglement of individual accusation and self-accusation that took place at the time.⁴³

Outline

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with the overarching issue of factionalism, particularly in the context of the KPJ, between 1919 and 1936. In it, I will examine the early ideological development of the party, and the emergence of factional struggles after the KPJ was banned by the Yugoslav government in 1921. After that, I will briefly outline the course of the disputes between 1921 and 1928, presenting the main arguments of the party left and right. As the factional disputes almost tore the party apart and isolated it from broader political life of the Kingdom, the Comintern intervened in 1928, supposedly bringing an end to factionalism. However, as I will argue, the divisions remained under the surface, which was reflected in the Comintern's own interventions in the party leadership between 1928 and 1935. I will devote a subchapter to the consolidation of the party under Milan Gorkić, who I will argue played an instrumental role in reviving the KPJ in the 1930s. A final subchapter will deal with the first repressions of Yugoslav communists in the USSR, beginning in 1929, which set a dangerous precedent for the future.

The second chapter concerns the high point of Milan Gorkić in 1936 and his rapid downfall in 1937. I will present an answer to the question of why Milan Gorkić – who just a year before had his authority cemented by a Comintern decision from above – fell out of favor so quickly by the summer of 1937. To do this, I will examine his critics on the party's left, and their attack at the April Plenum of 1936. The Comintern interpreted this as a revival of factionalism, which prompted it to formally name Gorkić general secretary. From here, I will examine the purge of the Yugoslav oppositionists in the Soviet Union after the Kirov assassination, as well as the actions of Yugoslavs who were charged with reviewing and

⁴³ Studer and Unfried, "At the Beginning of a History," 426.

expelling fellow party members. I will conclude the chapter with an overview of Gorkić's personal relations and political miscalculations that led to his arrest.

The third chapter is an overview of the main factions that developed after Gorkić's arrest in Moscow, outlining their membership, views, and strategy. It will be divided into four subchapters, each presenting one of the main competitors for the leadership of the party. The competitors were Josip Broz Tito, whose group came to be known as "The Temporary Leadership"; Ivo Marić, who led the so-called "Parallel Center" together with Labud Kusovac; Petko Miletić, the head of the "Prison Committee" of the KPJ in the Sremska Mitrovica prison; and Kamilo Horvatin, the KPJ representative to the Comintern who does not seem to have gathered an organized group around himself, but was most likely Wilhelm Pieck's main candidate for the position of party leader. The Marić and Miletić groups worked together but will be examined individually as they largely acted so, with Marić being the first to present a leadership challenge, and Miletić doing so much later, upon his release from prison.

In the fourth chapter, I will present the course of the dispute itself and the response from the Comintern. I will look at the bitter struggle waged in the early months of 1938 between the newly established groups. While most of the conflict took place in Paris, where the leadership remained after Gorkić's arrest, I will also examine the events behind the frontlines of the Spanish Civil War, and within the Communist Party of Croatia, which posed the most serious challenge to the legitimacy of Tito's so-called Temporary Leadership in the country. After that, I will examine the deliberations of the Comintern and the trips that Tito and Miletić took to Moscow. A part of the subchapters on these two individuals will be dedicated to analyzing the mass arrests of leading Yugoslav communists in the Soviet Union, most of whom were executed between 1937 and 1939. By January 1939, Tito was confirmed as the de facto leader of the KPJ, although it took another year before Miletić, his final major competitor, was ultimately defeated.

The conclusion will present the victory of Josip Broz Tito and examine the reasons that prompted the Comintern to give him the mandate. I will argue that Tito's taking of initiative appealed to the Comintern and that he was the one figure who best understood the importance of maintaining a proper party line throughout the period. However, this is not to imply that he played a well-calculated game which made him destined to take over from the start: a certain amount of luck was involved, especially in escaping the NKVD interrogators. In the end, I will outline Tito's final moves at "cleansing" and centralizing the party organization, which in turn made him the uncontested ruler of the KPJ. The ghosts of the factional struggles lived on, and they affected the patterns of repression of intraparty opposition in 1948 after the Tito-Stalin Split. Most importantly, I will demonstrate that the victory of Tito's party line already set the stage for the future conflict. His tendency to act independently of Moscow was seen as a desirable course of action during the popular front period, and was thus supported by the Comintern Executive. However, even by the time the war with Nazi Germany broke out, Tito's leadership style had become a liability.

On Party Unity: Factional Struggles in the KPJ, 1919-1936

“Many had then left the party out of fear, especially when the gossip started, not only gossip but arguments about who is this and who is that, who is a leftist and who is a rightist. For the workers, these arguments were pretty unclear and inadequate. Saying that somebody was a leftist or a rightist meant practically nothing. I came to understand it only later, in Moscow, when I entered the higher party forums.”

Milan Radovanović, metal worker and participant at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern⁴⁴

The history of all hitherto existing Marxist organizations is the history of factional struggles. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia was no exception. Like other communist parties, its very foundation was the consequence of a split, namely the one revolving around the issue of socialists' support for the Great War and participation in their respective countries' bourgeois governments. The party's founding congress in Belgrade in April 1919 marked a final break with the right of the socialist movement, parts of which even entered the first royal Yugoslav government after unification.⁴⁵ However, this was not the last disagreement within the Yugoslav communist movement. As was the case with communists elsewhere, the Yugoslavs' factionalism was the consequence of an attempt to come to terms with the failure of revolutions outside of the Soviet Union and the need to decide upon a revolutionary strategy under the new conditions.

In this chapter, I will argue that the roots of both Stalinist repression and factional struggle in the period between 1936 and 1940 cannot be understood without examining the battles within the KPJ in the preceding period. The KPJ's poor standing within the Comintern largely stemmed from the belief that the Yugoslavs were unable to establish and enforce a coherent party line, which in turn facilitated and even legitimized repression.⁴⁶ Furthermore, it

⁴⁴ Archive of Yugoslavia (Arhiv Jugoslavije, AJ), Memoirs' Collection (516 MG), 2919, “Razgovor sa drugom Milanom Radovanovićem,” 11.

⁴⁵ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 46-47.

⁴⁶ This was true even within the party. Milovan Đilas would later claim in his memoir that “we were delighted that the Soviet Union had dealt a final blow to the immigrants” and that “this was particularly true of Tito and

created a need for a party leadership that would, in the eyes of the Comintern, be able to both unite the party and keep it disciplined, a process that was termed “bolshevization.” I will start by briefly presenting the factional struggles from 1919 to 1928, first between the revolutionaries and “the centrists,” and then between the left and the right. I will then examine the first wave of bolshevization, which was attempted in the mid-1920s and seemingly enforced following the Comintern’s “Open Letter” in 1928. From there, I will provide an overview of the party’s meanderings through the so-called “Third Period.”⁴⁷ Following Geoffrey Swain, I will argue that the success and consolidation of the KPJ from 1932 to 1935 were achieved thanks to the work of the interim leader Milan Gorkić, who effectively already began pushing a popular front line. I will also briefly examine the overlooked expulsions – and even executions – of former factionalists in the USSR in this period, which set a precedent for the events that unfolded after the arrest of Gorkić.

Between the Left and the Right

The Second Congress of the party took place in June 1920 in the Croatian town of Vukovar. At this congress, the Socialist Worker’s Party of Yugoslavia (communists) was renamed the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, a name under which it would be known for the next thirty-two years.⁴⁸ The name change was not purely cosmetic: it was a sign of a major split between the delegates present. At the Second Congress, the so-called “centrists” were

Kardelj, who were more familiar with the situation in Moscow,” although he adds that Tito had complained about the excesses of the Purges very early on. Đilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, 303-304.

⁴⁷ The “Third Period” of the Comintern began with a victory of the ultra-left line in 1928. The organization, as well as its constituent parties, adopted the view that the collapse of capitalism is near and that the communists should therefore radicalize their actions, preparing for armed uprisings and other revolutionary measures. As a consequence, they renounced all cooperation with the other forces on the left, seeing the social democrats and socialists as “social fascists.” This was a period of extreme sectarianism which weakened the already poor position of the KPJ. Following the establishment of the royal dictatorship in January 1929, the communists responded with preparations for an armed uprising, which never took off. However, it gave the government a pretext to decimate the ranks of the KPJ, killing, among others, the newly-elected party secretary Đuro Đaković.

⁴⁸ At the Sixth Congress, in 1952, the KPJ was renamed the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (SKJ). The change was meant to reflect an ideological shift away from Stalinism. The name “League of Communists” was chosen after the name of the revolutionary socialist party founded by Karl Marx in 1847, and thus symbolized a return to Marxist roots.

defeated and expelled from the nascent KPJ. The centrists were socialists who adopted an anti-war stance, but were either undecided on, or hostile to, the revolutionary position. The KPJ thus foreshadowed a broader split within the Communist International, which took place along the same lines a month later, at the Second Congress of the Comintern. The communists insisted on the expulsion of centrists from the movement because of their insistence on continuing the practices of the Second International, which the communists considered to be discredited due to its support for the war.⁴⁹ In the case of Yugoslavia, the centrists deliberated on whether to attempt a takeover of the SRPJ(k) or to engage in joint political action with the social democrats.⁵⁰ This deterioration of relations between the centrists and the communists could help explain why the split occurred within the KPJ even before the centrists were expelled from the Comintern itself.

Although no major splits of the party occurred after 1920, the KPJ remained deeply divided throughout the 1920s. This was a consequence of disagreements on how to continue communist activity after the wave of revolutions had obviously passed and European states began stabilizing and reasserting control. Unlike the Soviet communists, the Yugoslavs were by and large not divided on the issue of how to construct socialism in the USSR, although some who immigrated to the USSR became involved in those disputes as well. The main division within the KPJ was between the left and the right wings of the party. The left still considered that the revolution in Yugoslavia was imminent, while the right was skeptical of this idea. These starting positions determined their views on the course of revolutionary action.

In 1921, the KPJ was banned by the royal Yugoslav government and its leadership was either imprisoned or forced underground. By this point it had become evident that the national question, which the communists originally thought would be resolved by the

⁴⁹ Duncan Hallas, *The Comintern* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2008), 29.

⁵⁰ Cvetković, *Idejne borbe u KPJ*, 79.

formation of a centralized Yugoslavia,⁵¹ remained a point of contention, as many ethnic groups were dissatisfied with their position in the new state. The left and the right primarily quarreled over two issues: how to continue communist activity in conditions of illegality and how to resolve the national question in Yugoslavia. The left argued that the way forward was the creation of a Bolshevik-style underground party, operating on the principle of illegal party cells subjected to the central leadership.⁵² Regarding the national question, they came to consider national and class oppression as intertwined, eventually adopting the position that the Serbian bourgeoisie oppressed both the Croat and the Slovene bourgeoisie,⁵³ laying the basis for their federalism. This view was in line with the general tendency for the leftists to “come from the nationally discontented sections of the population.”⁵⁴ Accordingly, the group was dominated by the Zagreb-based communists Đuro Cvijić, Vladimir Čopić, and Kamilo Horvatin, although Belgrade party intellectuals such as Kosta Novaković, Triša Kaclerović, and Rajko Jovanović were also prominent on the left.

The right wing, on the other hand, believed the banning of the KPJ would be temporary, and argued that operations should continue through the still-legal communist-run Independent Trade Unions, which would serve as a cover for the illegal party structure.⁵⁵ They believed that the state should not be organized on an ethnic-federal basis, but on an autonomist basis, which was not too far from the original support for a centralized Yugoslav state espoused by the KPJ at its foundation in 1919. The right felt that if the revolution in Yugoslavia was still far away, autonomism would be the best course of action for minimizing

⁵¹ Ben Fowkes, “To Make the Nation or Break It? Communist Dilemmas in Two Interwar Multinational States,” in *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917–53*, eds. Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 209. It is noteworthy that the party was named the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, while the state itself was named the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and only renamed to Yugoslavia in 1929.

⁵² Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 52.

⁵³ Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 25-30.

⁵⁴ Fowkes, “To Make the Nation or Break It?,” 214.

⁵⁵ Swain, *Tito*, 10-11.

ethnic divisions within the country.⁵⁶ The right was led by Sima Marković, Lazar Stefanović, and Ljuba Radovanović, all members of the pre-war Serbian Social-Democratic Party with strong links to the trade unions. It is important to note, however, that both the left and the right saw the national question primarily as a means to an end: the leftists thought federalism would accelerate the revolutionary process, while the rightists expected autonomism to do the same.⁵⁷

The historical background of the two groups confirms Ben Fowkes' thesis that the Eastern European communist parties were, broadly speaking, divided into former social democrats radicalized by the war and the Bolshevik Revolution, and the former ultra-leftists⁵⁸ and anarchists who believed Bolshevism to be the first step in bringing the long-awaited revolution to their own countries.⁵⁹ The former became the KPJ's right wing, while the latter formed the party's left. The two groups engaged in a drawn-out doctrinal struggle, which officially lasted until 1928, and which led to over-intellectualization of the contemporary political issues at the cost of actual active engagement with the working class. The ideological solipsism further cemented the isolation of the KPJ, which already lost the status of a mass organization as a consequence of state repression from 1921. The Independent Workers' Party of Yugoslavia (NRPJ), founded as a legal communist front in 1923, merely served to showcase the KPJ's internal struggles to the public, and thus failed to garner significant support.⁶⁰ The success or failure of the two factions depended largely on the Comintern: when the left was dominant in the Comintern, it also dominated the KPJ; when the right prevailed, a rightist leadership would take control of the Yugoslav party. Although this illustrates the depth of the divisions within the Comintern itself, the organization did not approve of such

⁵⁶ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 55-56.

⁵⁷ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 55-56.

⁵⁸ Much like the historical communist movement itself, I use the term "ultra-left" to describe adventurist tendencies in the movement, such as individual acts of terror or untimely attempts at fomenting revolutionary upheaval.

⁵⁹ Fowkes, "To Make the Nation or Break It?," 207.

⁶⁰ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 54.

behavior within its constituent parties. In May 1926, the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) characterized the KPJ as “paralyzed and transformed into a permanent debating club.”⁶¹ The KPJ developed the reputation of a troublesome and disobedient party, which would haunt it throughout the period of the Great Purge.

Thwarted Bolshevization

The Comintern first called for bolshevization at the Fifth Congress in the summer of 1924. The process of bolshevization meant not only the creation of a unified and centralized organizational structure among all individual communist parties, but also their “Russification in an embryonic Stalinist form.”⁶² While calls for bolshevization persisted for several years, the Comintern only truly managed to enforce it at the time of the Sixth Congress in 1928. Although certainly an act of Russification, bolshevization was not merely a consequence of interference by the Soviet party. Young communist radicals, dissatisfied with the older generation and alarmed by the deteriorating global situation which they thought would accelerate the advent of revolution, played a major role in pushing their respective parties towards greater discipline and centralization.⁶³ The bolshevization of the KPJ happened along the same lines.

In February 1928, two young communist workers from Zagreb, Josip Broz and Andrija Hebrang, persuaded the city’s party organization, which was the largest in the country, to adopt a resolution against factionalism and appeal directly to the Comintern to end the factional struggles within the Party.⁶⁴ This appeal resulted in an Open Letter from the Balkan Secretariat of the Comintern in April that same year, which endorsed the “Zagreb

⁶¹ Geoffrey Swain, “Wreckage or Recovery: A Tale of Two Parties,” in *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period*, ed. Matthew Worley (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 130.

⁶² Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London: MacMillan, 1996), 45.

⁶³ Notable examples include Klement Gottwald in the Czechoslovak party, Luigi Longo in the Italian party, and Maurice Thorez in the French party. McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, 72.

⁶⁴ Swain, *Tito*, 12.

Line” and called upon the party to act. In the following year and a half, the party managed to seemingly put an end to factionalism. In reality, as within the Communist International itself, the ultra-leftist faction prevailed under the guise of anti-factionalism. Therefore, the leading leftists of the younger generation, including Broz and Hebrang, successfully fashioned themselves as anti-factionalists and fighters for party unity.⁶⁵

At the Fourth Congress of the KPJ in Dresden in November 1928, the Comintern line was fully adopted. Broz and Hebrang were not considered for party leadership because they had both been arrested in the months leading up to the Congress. Instead, Đuro Đaković became the organizational secretary, while Jovan Martinović-Mališić became the political secretary. Both were Moscow-trained organizers and both were on the party’s left. The older prominent leftists, however, were marginalized: Đuro Cvijić lost the post of political secretary and was not reelected to the Politburo. The rightists were treated even more harshly, with Sima Marković being expelled from the party.⁶⁶ The new leadership rejected all collaboration with the non-communist left and began preparing for ill-fated revolutionary action. They embraced the view that Yugoslavia should be forcibly dissolved in order for the revolution to progress, and even attempted collaboration with militant nationalist movements to reach this goal.⁶⁷ The crisis of the Yugoslav state, which culminated in the institution of a royal dictatorship in January 1929, seemed to confirm the righteousness of the confrontational course, as the communists interpreted the dictatorship to be a sign of the regime’s instability. Confrontation with the still-strong state authorities, however, proved to be fatal. In April 1929, Đuro Đaković was killed by the Yugoslav police. By 1930, the surviving party

⁶⁵ This view of leftists as “anti-factionalist” remained prevalent in Yugoslav historiography during socialism. See Cvetković, *Idejne borbe u KPJ*, 202.

⁶⁶ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 60.

⁶⁷ Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 32.

leadership had fled to Vienna; they would not return to the country until 1938. The decimated national party organization would only start to recover in 1932.⁶⁸

Blame could not be placed solely on the Yugoslav repressive apparatus, as it was obvious that the policy adopted in 1928 played a significant role in facilitating the party's repression by the state. In August 1930, Martinović-Mališić was attacked by the ECCI as a "putschist," accused of merely forming a "third group" as an alternative to the old party factions, and promptly sacked.⁶⁹ The Comintern appointed Antun Mavrak in his place and Filip Filipović as a replacement for the deceased Đaković. Mavrak, a former leftist and a key supporter of Broz and Hebrang, turned sharply to the right during his mandate as party leader.⁷⁰ His conflicts with other party members merely showed to the Comintern that the factional struggles, although officially ended in 1928, were still ongoing. Stabilization only came in 1932, with the appointment of Milan Gorkić as the interim party leader. Over the next four years, Gorkić was extremely successful in consolidating the party and creating an illusion of unity, although discord continued, particularly in the émigré community, whose numbers rose dramatically after 1929.

Consolidation under Gorkić

Milan Gorkić was born Josip Čižinský in Sarajevo in 1904, to a Czech family that had moved there five years earlier. His adopted last name was an adapted "Yugoslav" version of Gorky, and he ethnically identified as Bosnian.⁷¹ In his youth, Gorkić was one of the most active young KPJ organizers. He was forced to immigrate to the USSR in 1923, aged only nineteen, and from there followed a path typical for a foreign communist. After completing his education in Moscow, he worked in the Comintern apparatus, and became secretary of the

⁶⁸ Branko Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918–1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914–1941* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1988), 213.

⁶⁹ Swain, "Wreckage or Recovery: A Tale of Two Parties," 133.

⁷⁰ Swain, "Wreckage or Recovery: A Tale of Two Parties," 134.

⁷¹ Požar, *Jugosloveni žrtve staljinskih čistki*, 192.

Young Communist International (KIM) in 1928. A competent theoretician, he rose through the ranks thanks to his friendship with Nikolai Bukharin, as well as the patronage of Dmitry Manuilsky.⁷² As one of the attendees of the meeting at which the Open Letter was composed, he came to be seen as a leading anti-factionalist in the KPJ; in reality, his views were close to the earlier right faction, although he was never involved in it. This became evident in his subsequent actions as interim leader. Largely because of Gorkić, throughout the latter part of the Third Period, the KPJ already pursued a line similar to the popular front.

The Croatian historian Ivo Banac has called Milan Gorkić “by disposition a man of the popular front.”⁷³ From the very beginning, his work marked a clear break with the earlier sectarian attitude towards the reformist left. He encouraged activity within existing non-communist trade unions, rather than the formation of alternative revolutionary ones, and changed the KPJ’s policy towards the socialists. The communists were now expected to work with the socialist rank and file, while still condemning their reformist leadership, in what was already considered to be a “united front from below.”⁷⁴ As a consequence, the KPJ became a sort of cautious vanguard of the developments which would be sanctioned by the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in August 1935.

Furthermore, Gorkić insisted on independence of the KPJ, going as far as to (rightfully) criticize the Comintern as the main culprit for the prolonged party crisis that began in 1929.⁷⁵ Although a disciplined follower of the Comintern line, he did not hesitate to criticize the International when he felt that his party was being treated in a patronizing manner.⁷⁶ His divergence from the Third Period line regarding the socialists and the trade unions was perfectly complementary with the Comintern’s flexibility on policy, and it

⁷² Očak, *Gorkić*, 82, 335.

⁷³ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 64.

⁷⁴ Swain, *Tito*, 15.

⁷⁵ Očak, *Gorkić*, 170.

⁷⁶ Nadežda Jovanović, “Milan Gorkić (prilog za biografiju)” *Istorija 20. veka* 1/1983, 39.

ultimately helped the recuperation of the party.⁷⁷ While many accounts argue that the recovery of the KPJ between 1932 and 1934 took place independently of party policy,⁷⁸ it is much more appropriate to attribute it to Gorkić successfully avoiding sectarianism.

These moves were not uncontroversial. Vladimir Čopić, an old leftist who joined the temporary leadership, criticized Gorkić's "right errors" as early as 1933.⁷⁹ In the following years, their disagreement would escalate to the point that the Comintern would interpret it as a renewal of factionalism. Unfortunately for Čopić, Gorkić's allegedly "deviationist" course was legitimized by joint decisions of the Comintern and the Profintern regarding activity in reformist trade unions, passed in 1931.⁸⁰ Gorkić's overall attitude, however, was largely reconciliatory. He attempted to bring Đuro Cvijić, another former leader of the party left, back into the party leadership,⁸¹ and argued that earlier belonging to factions was not a measurement of one's loyalty or ability.⁸² The most ardent ultra-left challenge to Gorkić and the popular front line would come from a group in the Sremska Mitrovica prison, which would cause serious headaches to the leadership later on.⁸³ At the time, however, the existence of these troublemakers was a secondary issue.

From 1932, Gorkić gradually assembled a leadership team in which he was the first among equals. In the beginning, he led the party in a triumvirate with Blagoje Parović and Vladimir Čopić, then gradually expanding his inner circle. The team's full composition was completed by December 1934, when, at the Fourth Land Conference of the KPJ in Ljubljana, they came to form the new Politburo. Aside from Gorkić, the members of the Politburo were

⁷⁷ Swain, "Wreckage or Recovery: A Tale of Two Parties," 148-149.

⁷⁸ For example, Avgust Lešnik, "The Development of the Communist Movement in Yugoslavia during the Comintern Period," *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies* XI/18 (2005), 53-54 and Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918–1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914–1941*, 214.

⁷⁹ Swain, "Wreckage or Recovery: A Tale of Two Parties," 142.

⁸⁰ Furthermore, these decisions helped establish Gorkić's patron, Manuilsky, as a leading figure in the Comintern. Swain, "Wreckage or Recovery: A Tale of Two Parties," 140-141.

⁸¹ For a detailed overview of Gorkić's relationship with Cvijić and the efforts to restore him into the leadership, see Očak, *Gorkić*, 174-179.

⁸² Jovanović, "Milan Gorkić (prilog za biografiju)," 38-39.

⁸³ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 65-66.

Blagoje Parović, Adolf Muk, Josip Broz, and Kamilo Horvatin.⁸⁴ Vladimir Čopić, whose relationship with Gorkić by then was more hostile, occupied the very influential position of party representative to the Comintern.⁸⁵ Four years later, Broz was the only one of the six who was both still alive and a party member.

At the time, the leadership was seemingly more or less harmonious, and it reflected Gorkić's "big tent" approach. Muk was the only figure who could truly be described as one of Gorkić's cronies, while Parović was the most consistent promoter of Gorkić's policy on the trade unions and the united front.⁸⁶ Broz had just come out of prison and was uninvolved in doctrinal disputes; Gorkić clearly remembered him as one of the initiators of the 1928 anti-factional line.⁸⁷ Čopić was becoming increasingly hostile to Gorkić, while Horvatin, another old member of the party left, did not have any disagreements with the leader at the time. Although Gorkić's practical policies seemed "rightist," nothing about his choice of top party cadres showed a preference for the party's former right wing.

The most important policy change at the Fourth Land Conference was a revision of the party's attitude towards Yugoslavia. As the fascist threat became more acute following the Nazi takeover in Germany, the KPJ began supporting the unity of the Yugoslav state, a stance that had been abandoned almost a decade earlier. The Conference reiterated the need for an armed uprising against the "fascist" Yugoslav dictatorship, without explicitly calling for the dissolution of Yugoslavia.⁸⁸ This was a first, albeit rather shy, expression of the need for an antifascist front in the country. The same Conference decided to organize the communist parties of Croatia and Slovenia within the KPJ, which was not finalized until 1937. This, too,

⁸⁴ Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918–1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914–1941*, 237.

⁸⁵ Očak, *Vojnik revolucije*, 231. According to this source, it was actually Čopić, and not Horvatin, who was the fifth member of the Politburo. Očak, *Vojnik revolucije*, 237.

⁸⁶ For a thorough examination of Parović's prolific activity, see Đorđe O. Piljević, *Čovek ideja i akcije* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2001), in particular pages 297-504.

⁸⁷ Swain, *Tito*, 14, and Jovanović, "Milan Gorkić (prilog za biografiju)," 41.

⁸⁸ Desanka Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje* (Belgrade: Izdavačka radna organizacija "Rad," 1983), 264-265.

presented the beginning of reorientation towards a line that the Comintern itself would adopt half a year later at the Seventh Congress.

The First Repressions

While Gorkić was stabilizing the fragile and marginalized party organization, more ominous parallel processes began to take place among the Yugoslav émigré community in the Soviet Union. The first executions of Yugoslav communists in the Soviet Union took place as early as 1930. This confirmed the belief of some of the émigrés that there might be police spies in their ranks, but it also set a very dangerous precedent. The concerns about treason and espionage would come to haunt the entire party by 1937. Furthermore, the Third Period was the time of the first anti-factionalist campaigns and purges, which legitimized the complete expulsion of the party opposition, something that had not been done since the early 1920s, when the party was still ridding itself of the centrists.

In the fall of 1929, the Soviet police arrested two Yugoslav communists. The first was the Croat Mate Brezović, who had been a member of the All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks) since 1920, and had spent seven years living in Yugoslavia as a professional revolutionary after the end of the Russian Civil War. Upon his return to the Soviet Union, he was arrested in Moscow in September 1929 and shot as a spy on April 13, 1930.⁸⁹ According to Yugoslav sources, he was first arrested in Zagreb in 1929, and uncovered the entire Zagreb party organization to the police, after which he became their informant. He was then sent to the Soviet Union to spy on the communists. Once this was discovered, the KPJ leadership reported him to the Soviet police, which led to his arrest and execution.⁹⁰ While the Yugoslav historiography acknowledges his collaboration with the police, and this incident confirms that

⁸⁹ “Брезович-Егер Матвей Матвеевич,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 8, 2018, <http://lists.memo.ru/d5/f268.htm>.

⁹⁰ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 303.

“watchfulness” regarding the émigrés was not a matter of mere paranoia, the other case is much more controversial.

The other arrested and executed individual was the Macedonian revolutionary Stefan Popivanov, and his case is far more intriguing. He had been active in the socialist movement from the first decade of the twentieth century, a founding member of the KPJ, and one of the most prominent leaders of its left faction. Yet, he allegedly became an agent provocateur in 1928, after almost a quarter of a century of activity on the radical left. He was also arrested as a spy, just a week after Brezović, and shot on March 6, 1930.⁹¹ Interestingly enough, he was rehabilitated in 1963,⁹² during the Khrushchev Thaw, which further casts doubts on his guilt. It is highly unlikely that Popivanov was in fact a police agent, which makes him the first Yugoslav communist to have been wrongfully accused and executed in the USSR. The true reasons for his arrest and execution, at a time when persecution of oppositionists was not as extreme, remain unknown. Either way, the cases of these two individuals, one most likely guilty and one most likely innocent, confirmed the belief that there might be spies among émigrés. With the onset of the Great Purge, these cases were explicitly referenced to justify the need for watchfulness and to confirm that there were provocateurs among communists.⁹³

A far more common form of political punishment in the period was expulsion of the opposition, from both the left and the right. Although certain individuals on the party left, in particular Vojislav Vujović⁹⁴ and Ante Ciliga,⁹⁵ have been frequent subjects of academic research, there are no academic works on the Yugoslav Left Opposition as a politically

⁹¹ “Поп-Иванов Стефан Македонович,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 8, 2018, <http://lists.memo.ru/d27/f35.htm>.

⁹² Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 303.

⁹³ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 207 and Russian State Archives of Socio-Political History (Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории, RGASPI), 495-11-357, Б.Н.Петровский, “О задачах борьбы с троцкизмом в Югославии,” October 17, 1937, 6-7.

⁹⁴ Branislav Gligorijević, *Između revolucije i dogme: Voja (Vojislav) Vujović u Kominterni* (Zagreb: Spektar, 1983), and Milisav Milenković (ed.), *Revolucionarna misao i delo braće Vujović* (Požarevac: Braničevo, 1981).

⁹⁵ Ivan Očak, “Ante Ciliga – otpadnik komunizma i staljinske čistke,” *Radovi* 22 (1989): 267-296, and Stephen Schwartz, “Ante Ciliga (1898–1992): A Life at History’s Crossroads,” *Journal of Croatian Studies* 34/35 (1993/1994): 181-206.

organized group in the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, as I am primarily focusing on a later period, this subchapter will not be an original contribution to the latter. Instead, I intend to focus on certain prominent individuals as case studies of pre-1936 factionalism and political repression of Yugoslavs in the Soviet Union. I will examine the two most infamous “renegades” at the turn of the decade, the aforementioned leftist Ante Ciliga and the leader of the right, Sima Marković.

Ante Ciliga, a founding member of the KPJ, was among the most vocal leftists of the 1920s. The main focus of his polemics was the national question,⁹⁶ which is significant in light of his subsequent reorientation towards radical Croatian nationalism. After immigrating to the USSR in 1926, he became a professor at the Yugoslav section of the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West (KUNMZ). By 1929, Ciliga openly endorsed Trotsky and formed a Trotskyist group at KUNMZ.⁹⁷ Moreover, he and the other Trotskyists were members of a group of Yugoslav leftists dubbed “Group Forty-One,” named after the number of signatories of their open letter to the ECCI, in which they criticized both the leadership of the KPJ and the KUNMZ for alleged rightist deviations. Other leftists, however, subsequently distanced themselves from their openly Trotskyist co-signatories.⁹⁸ Ciliga and his group were subsequently expelled from the KUNMZ, the KPJ and the VKP(b), and were forced to move to Leningrad. In 1930, they were arrested after forming a Trotskyist group there. Five of them were sentenced to three years in prison, and the remaining twenty were exiled to the Soviet provinces.⁹⁹ At the time, this pattern of imprisonment and exile was much more common than execution.

When the letter of the forty-one reached the ECCI, they responded by condemning not only the left, but also the right. The letter was seemingly used as an excuse for a broader

⁹⁶ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 56-57.

⁹⁷ Očak, “Ante Ciliga,” 276.

⁹⁸ For the most comprehensive existing overview of the controversy, see Očak, *Gorkić*, 109-111.

⁹⁹ Očak, “Ante Ciliga,” 279.

showdown with all Yugoslav factionalists. Mirko Marković, one of the punished leftists in 1929, noted that none of the leftists were expelled at the time, whereas “siminovci” (the supporters of Sima Marković) were.¹⁰⁰ Marković had already been targeted by the Comintern several times, most notably in 1924, when he and Stalin disagreed on the national question. While Stalin attempted to enforce the Comintern line of fomenting national conflict at all costs, Marković’s view was that national tensions should be ameliorated, and that trying to connect them with proletarian internationalism could be detrimental to the communist movement.¹⁰¹ Marković eventually fell into line, but at the Fourth Congress of the KPJ in Dresden in 1928, he was attacked by the Comintern delegate Palmiro Togliatti,¹⁰² and promptly removed from the leadership. By 1929, the KPJ insisted that he leaves Yugoslavia to avoid arrest. He refused, leading to his expulsion from the party.¹⁰³ Marković would later claim that he chose not to comply with the party’s orders because he believed that there were police informants in the leadership, a fact which was confirmed by the aforementioned arrest of Brezović in the USSR.¹⁰⁴ Marković was not informed of this decision by the KPJ, and only found out upon his arrest in Belgrade in 1930. He would remain isolated from the party until 1934.¹⁰⁵

The cases of Marković and Ciliga show that only the most vocal opponents of the party line were punished with expulsion at the beginning of the Third Period. The right was punished more harshly than the left, because the Comintern as a whole turned against the “rightist” communists at the time. By 1936, the tables had turned, with the former leftists

¹⁰⁰ Očak, *Gorkić*, 110.

¹⁰¹ Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 136-141.

¹⁰² Požar, *Jugosloveni žrtve staljinskih čistki*, 158-159.

¹⁰³ Nikita V. Bondarev “Sima Marković – moskovske godine (1935–1938),” in *Društveno-politička i naučna misao i delo Sime Markovića*, ed. Aleksandar Kostić (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 2013), 47.

¹⁰⁴ Požar, *Jugosloveni žrtve staljinskih čistki*, 160.

¹⁰⁵ Bondarev “Sima Marković – moskovske godine (1935–1938),” 47.

being subjected to harsher repression.¹⁰⁶ This was a consequence of fears regarding their potential association with Trotskyism.

The purges of 1932–1933 set a new precedent for Comintern interference into Yugoslav party affairs. They were not followed by mass political repression, but they were a clear sign of the Comintern’s ever-increasing control over its sections. The Comintern expected the KPJ Control Commission, under the guidance of leadership member Blagoje Parović,¹⁰⁷ to expel 25 percent of party members.¹⁰⁸ The imposition was not uncontroversial. Đuro Cvijić, whom Gorkić was trying to reintroduce into the leadership, protested against what he saw as unjustified interference by the Comintern in the KPJ’s internal affairs, and additionally attacked both the leadership and the Comintern for their refusal to take responsibility for the mistakes committed in 1929 and 1930.¹⁰⁹ Such an attitude eventually led to Cvijić’s expulsion.

Gorkić was more pragmatic than Cvijić. He accepted the purges, but was not uncritical of them, successfully positioning himself as a moderate and a mediator.¹¹⁰ Gorkić eventually managed to restore Cvijić’s party membership, although his stubbornness made it impossible for him to be considered for the party leadership again. Much like with Cvijić, Gorkić succeeded in overturning the expulsions of prominent leftists Antun Mavrak and Kosta Novaković,¹¹¹ and ameliorating the punishments of Filip Filipović and Kamilo Horvatin.¹¹² All of these individuals, aside from Filipović, were on the party left. The only individuals that Gorkić never made an effort to save were those who were already stigmatized as Trotskyists

¹⁰⁶ This could help explain why Lazar Stefanović, one of the closest associates of Marković, who was expelled from the party and KUNMZ in 1929, survived the Great Purge and lived in the Soviet Union until 1944, when he returned to Yugoslavia and became a leading trade union organizer.

¹⁰⁷ Piljević, *Čovek ideja i akcije*, 209.

¹⁰⁸ Piljević, *Čovek ideja i akcije*, 201.

¹⁰⁹ Ivan Očak, *Braća Cvijići*, 367-372.

¹¹⁰ Jovanović, “Milan Gorkić (prilog za biografiju),” 39-40.

¹¹¹ Piljević, *Čovek ideja i akcije*, 211-212.

¹¹² Piljević, *Čovek ideja i akcije*, 207.

and exiled, such as Ciliga or the former head of the Communist Youth International Vojislav Vujović, who had already been banished to Central Asia due to his support for Trotsky.

Gorkić's moderation, however, did not stop attacks on him from all sides. He was accused either of being a rightist or, at times, of forming a "third group" after the Open Letter of 1928. The accusations of a "third group" appeared immediately after the victory of the "anti-factionalist" line, and they most likely originated from Đuro Cvijić. This new "faction" allegedly overestimated the danger from the left, ignored the fight against the right, and engaged in excessive "intellectualism."¹¹³ Gorkić himself was either accused of committing "right errors" or of simply being a rightist.¹¹⁴ Most notably, such an accusation came from Čopić himself, a member of Gorkić's inner circle. As a consequence, during the 1932 purge, Gorkić conducted self-criticism, and completely accepted the accusations that his work amounted to the formation of a third group.¹¹⁵ This was most likely done to minimize the potential damage that a renewal of factional struggles, caused by an open clash with his opponents, could have inflicted on the party. Parović still supported him, and Čopić decided to do so too, in spite of his reservations,¹¹⁶ presumably because he too was worried about party unity.

Conclusions

Factionalism has been a prominent feature of Marxist parties from their very inception. In this regard, the story of the KPJ was quite typical. A successful mass party at first, it became a minor underground sect riven with internal tensions after it was banned in 1921. It was torn between the more radical "left" wing and the more moderate "right" wing, and the open animosity between members of the two groups became the rule. The sorry state of affairs prompted the Comintern to intervene in 1928, allegedly abolishing the factions.

¹¹³ Očak, *Gorkić*, 124.

¹¹⁴ Piljević, *Čovek ideja i akcije*, 206-207.

¹¹⁵ Očak, *Gorkić*, 141.

¹¹⁶ Piljević, *Čovek ideja i akcije*, 208.

However, the ultra-left sectarianism of the Comintern's Third Period only pushed the party deeper into isolation. It also gave the Yugoslav government an excuse to decimate the KPJ after the establishment of a royal dictatorship in January 1929. For the following three years, the party was in a state of disarray, which was only stopped with the appointment of Milan Gorkić as the interim leader in 1932.

By the time of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in August 1935, the KPJ was in a much better state than Gorkić had found it in when he took over three years earlier. As the rising star of the party, he played an instrumental role in transforming it from an ultra-left sect riddled with factional struggles to a growing mass organization. Furthermore, it was becoming the vanguard of the popular front within the Comintern and its influence in the Yugoslav trade unions was growing. The abandonment of adventurism and anti-Yugoslavism made non-communists more sympathetic to the party. The factional struggles which had harmed it so much in the 1920s seemed to have finally been ended. At the same time, there were plenty of signs of internal dissent, showing that not everything was perfect. Specters of prior factional struggles were still haunting the KPJ. Despite grandiloquent proclamations of "bolshevization," the party was far from unified. Most former leftists and rightists still largely held to the same views as before 1928, including Gorkić. Some members of his own inner circle, most notably Vladimir Čopić, opposed him, influenced by their own earlier leftism.

The most worrying trends, however, pertained to the Comintern's increasing control over the party, which was most vocally opposed by Đuro Cvijić. These trends included not only the first expulsions of intra-party oppositionists, but even their executions, as was the case with Stefan Popivanov. The executions of spies, real or alleged, set a dangerous precedent, serving to confirm the fear that political disagreement might in fact be a sign of treason. By 1937, this example would haunt the party as much as the earlier factional struggles themselves, and would lead to the arrest and execution of almost an entire generation of leading Yugoslav communists, including the general secretary. For the time

being, however, the KPJ seemed fairly stable under Gorkić's leadership. His domination of the party was only seriously threatened for the first time after he had lost the support of Čopić.

The Peak and Fall of Milan Gorkić

“I must still say that recently I have had thoughts about whether Gorkić himself might not be a provocateur. After careful consideration, I came to a conclusion that all these affairs on which I have written are characteristic of the style of Gorkić’s work. In itself they do not point to provocation.”

Kamilo Horvatin, Report to Wilhelm Pieck
dated August 5, 1937¹¹⁷

“In a period of revolutionary tension or external threat there is no clear-cut boundary between political divergences and objective treason.”

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*¹¹⁸

On August 5, 1937, Kamilo Horvatin, one of the KPJ representatives to the Comintern, arrived at the Secretariat of Wilhelm Pieck the ECCI member in charge of Balkan affairs. Horvatin submitted two documents to Pieck: a shorter one, concerning the arrest of Betty Glan, the general director of Gorky Park; and a longer one, regarding the internal situation of the KPJ. The two reports had a common denominator: Milan Gorkić, the husband of Betty Glan and general secretary of the KPJ. Nine days later, Gorkić was arrested by the NKVD, together with Ivan Gržetić-Fleischer, the main KPJ representative to the Comintern. Fleischer was shot on October 3, and Gorkić on November 1. At the time of Gorkić’s execution, Horvatin was still submitting reports to Pieck on the misdeeds of the now-sacked party leadership. The purge of the KPJ was now in full swing. Just one year earlier, Gorkić was at the height of his career: with the help of his allies in the Comintern, virtually all of his opponents had been sacked from the party leadership and he was officially named general secretary of the Central Committee. In this chapter, I will explain the circumstances that led to Gorkić’s success and his sudden – but not unexpected – downfall. I will begin by examining the course and the consequences of the April Plenum of 1936, which the Comintern interpreted as the re-emergence of factional struggles. From there, I will continue with an account of the purges of Yugoslavs who openly supported the opposition to Stalin, most of

¹¹⁷ RGASPI, 495-11-335, Petrowski’s [Kamilo Horvatin] Report to Wilhelm Pieck Dated August 5, 1937, 14.

¹¹⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 34.

whom were imprisoned or executed by the spring of 1937, when Gorkić was still in power, often with the knowledge and approval of party leadership. Finally, I will present the multitude of reasons that led the Comintern to believe that Gorkić might be unreliable, and which eventually led to his arrest in August 1937.

The April Plenum of 1936

The first serious challenge to Gorkić's leadership arose out of a conflict with his once-close associate, Vladimir Čopić. In April 1936, the Central Committee of the KPJ held a plenary session in Vienna. Relations among the leadership were so strained that one of the party members present at the plenum, Rodoljub Čolaković, noted that Gorkić did not even greet fellow members of the CC upon his arrival.¹¹⁹ This session marked the culmination of dissatisfaction with Gorkić, but the events that followed marked Gorkić's greatest triumph: his official appointment to the post of general secretary of the KPJ. The plenum pitted Gorkić and his closest associate at the time, Adolf Muk, now called "*gorkićeveci*," against the "leftists" led by Čopić. Čopić was supported by Đuro Cvijić's brother Stjepan, and the leading young Slovenian members of the Central Committee, Karlo Hudomalj and SKOJ secretary Boris Kidrič. Notably, among those present at the plenum was Ivo Marić, a worker from Split who had a long-standing dispute with Gorkić,¹²⁰ but there is no evidence that he participated in the attack, suggesting that his relations with the group around Čopić and Cvijić were not too close. The plenum took place without the presence of a Comintern representative, which would later be used to attack both sides and question the legitimacy of the session altogether.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 2, 516.

¹²⁰ Marić, a trade unionist, was among the leading Dalmatian leftists from the party's foundation and had a dispute with Gorkić since the late 1920s, when Gorkić's associates were attempting to establish the anti-factional line in Dalmatia. Marić would later claim that he knew Gorkić was a "spy" since 1928. AJ, 516 MG, Box 58, 2231, Ivo Marić, *Iz istorijata radničkog pokreta Dalmacije*, 209.

¹²¹ Očak, *Gorkić*, 244.

The immediate pretext for the attack on Gorkić was the series of mass arrests that shook the party organization in the fall of 1935. Even Gorkić loyalists, like Blagoje Parović, began expressing concerns about the flaws in conspiratorial work of party members in the country, a point which Gorkić was forced to concede.¹²² This probably encouraged his opponents at the top of the party to launch a premediated attack. The true cause of dissatisfaction was Gorkić's implementation of the popular front policy, which the party left considered to be rightist. Gorkić had begun to "legalize" party members by moving the focus away from illegal activity and pushing for an alliance not only with the non-communist left, but also with all forces in the country opposed to the monarchical dictatorship. This was denounced as liquidationism, a tendency of "abandoning, or 'liquidating', the underground committee structure of the Party in an attempt to legalise the Party and thus make easier an alliance with the liberals by keeping the radical leadership in emigration at a distance."¹²³ As this was a Menshevik position which Lenin criticized in the early 1900s, Gorkić's policy came to be seen by many in the party as essentially anti-Leninist. Moreover, the leftists considered the attempts at legalizing the work of the communists to be the main reason for mass arrests. The only change in policy that Gorkić brought about which remained largely uncontroversial appears to have been the support for Yugoslav unity, which even the leftists, like Stjepan Cvijić, had now come to actively embrace.¹²⁴

The plenum followed a pattern typical of communist intraparty putsches. Čopić spoke first, presenting a critical report on the state of the party. He was followed by Stjepan Cvijić, who supported him.¹²⁵ The leftists argued that Gorkić was still pursuing the formation of a

¹²² Piljević, *Čovek ideja i akcije*, 539. Even worse for Gorkić, Parović was soon removed from all positions because of a breach of rules of conspiracy, after having an affair with a Soviet Embassy worker in Budapest. This left Gorkić without one of his most capable close associates. Piljević, *Čovek ideja i akcije*, 543.

¹²³ Swain, *Tito*, 17.

¹²⁴ Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 2, 518-519, and Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 64.

¹²⁵ Očak, *Gorkić*, 241.

“third group” within the party,¹²⁶ continuing the trend of leadership pretenders accusing their opponents of deviation while fashioning themselves as the center. While not explicitly stated at the plenum, the leftists intended to replace Gorkić with Karlo Hudomalj.¹²⁷ Hudomalj was the logical choice. A true proletarian, he was a locksmith and was uninvolved in intraparty struggles before 1928, although he was clearly on the left. Cvijić and Čopić knew that nominating themselves, or anyone else from their group, would have led to renewed accusations of factionalism, as they were all intellectuals, and therefore illegitimate. Furthermore, Hudomalj was a member of the temporary leadership in 1930, following the sacking of Jovan Martinović-Mališić, who was close to Gorkić.¹²⁸ Hudomalj was to assume the role of a new Đuro Đaković, and the parallels between the two individuals were in fact striking, even down to the fact that they were both locksmiths.

Factions in the KPJ, 1936

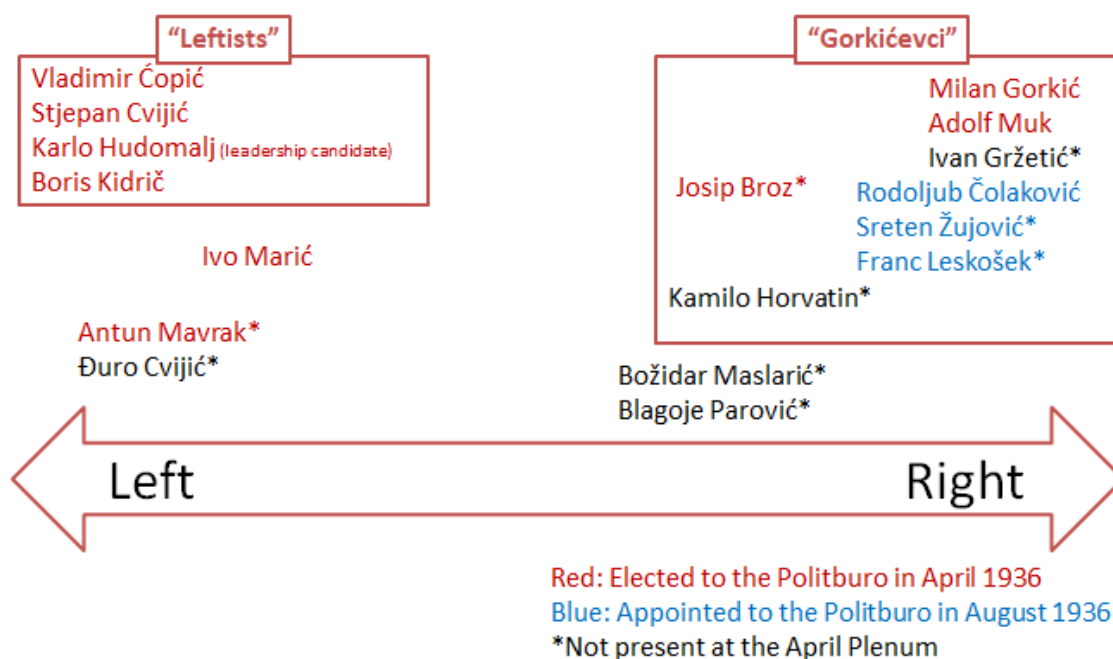


Figure 1. Factions in the KPJ from the April Plenum to the Moscow Consultation.

¹²⁶ Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 2, 524.

¹²⁷ Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 2, 526.

¹²⁸ Požar, *Jugoslaveni žrtve staljinskih čistki*, 148. Leftists constantly brought up the fact that Gorkić was closely behind Martinović-Mališić, but opportunistically turned his back on him when the Comintern denounced him. Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 2, 524-525.

Gorkić was once again forced to cave in and engaged in self-criticism.¹²⁹ The new Politburo consisted of his opponents Mavrak, Čopić, and Hudomalj, while Cvijić and Marić, both also unfriendly to him, became candidate members. The only figures he could count on in the new Politburo were Broz and Muk.¹³⁰ This was supposed to be the beginning of the end of Milan Gorkić. It would have likely turned out so were it not for the fact that, unlike the leftists, Gorkić had his man on the Comintern Executive: Dmitry Manuilsky.¹³¹ The Comintern reacted furiously to the decisions of the April Plenum, not least because they had not been notified or consulted in any way. Gorkić's Comintern patrons were intent on preserving his domination over the KPJ, as he enjoyed their utmost trust, unlike the majority of Yugoslavs they had worked with. They therefore summoned a meeting of the ECCI in Moscow in August and September at which the decisions of the April Plenum were to be critically reassessed.

Although the official line was that both sides of the conflict were to blame, the consultation in Moscow was heavily slanted in Gorkić's favor. Both Cvijić and Čopić were invited to the meetings of the ECCI, but neither of them ultimately showed up; they were allegedly unable to receive their entry visas in time.¹³² This is unusual, given that they had an official invitation from the Comintern. Equally suspicious was the fate of other opponents of Gorkić – Marić, Hudomalj, and Kidrič were all arrested by the Viennese police in a raid in July,¹³³ and therefore none of them were able to attend the Moscow meeting. Although there is no evidence that Gorkić or his allies had anything to do with the arrests, some leftists at the time thought otherwise; Marić was now convinced that Gorkić did not even intentionally betray them to the police in order to neutralize them politically, but rather that he betrayed

¹²⁹ Očak, *Gorkić*, 243-244.

¹³⁰ Očak, *Gorkić*, 245.

¹³¹ Bondarev, *Misterija Tito*, 174.

¹³² Očak, *Vojnik revolucije*, 294.

¹³³ AJ, 516 MG, Box 58, 2231/2, "Razgovor sa drugom Ivom Marićem u Splitu 27.XI 1963," 39.

them because he was actually a police agent himself.¹³⁴ Those close to Gorkić, however, attributed the arrests to Marić's own lack of vigilance.¹³⁵

By the time the ECCI convened in Moscow, Gorkić was once again dominant in the party. All of the prominent Yugoslavs at the meeting were his loyalists, such as Broz, Ivan Gržetić-Fleischer, Blagoje Parović, Simo Miljuš, and Božidar Maslarić.¹³⁶ Also present were former leftists who could have questioned Gorkić's political course, such as Vilim Horvaj, one of the leaders of the SKOJ in the 1920s. They, however, had already been politically marginalized at the time, and had no connections to Cvijić or Čopić. As such, they served more as tokenistic figures than actual representatives of the intra-party opposition.

The only criticism that Gorkić was faced with in Moscow concerned the convening of the plenum itself without consultation with the Comintern, and his failure to confront the criticism from Cvijić and Čopić, choosing to compromise with them instead.¹³⁷ On the other hand, the Comintern interpreted the moves of the left as a revival of factional struggles in the party. The ECCI proposed that the KPJ return to its pre-April 1936 course, which included pushing for a popular front "from below" rather than "from above," returning the exiled leadership to Yugoslavia, and arranging the foundation of the communist parties of Croatia and Slovenia.¹³⁸ Accusations that Gorkić's line was opportunistic were rejected. However, the accusation that leftists were pushing for a popular front "from above" was unfounded. Rather, the dispute revolved around whether or not the KPJ should act as a part of the liberal United Opposition, with the left claiming that it should not.¹³⁹ Gorkić disagreed, and was able to

¹³⁴ Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 3, 126.

¹³⁵ Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 2, 616.

¹³⁶ Očak, *Gorkić*, 246. Božidar Maslarić, an ethnically Serbian schoolteacher from Osijek in Croatia, had been a supporter of Gorkić since 1928, when he sided with the anti-factionalists while studying at KUNMZ. He would become one of Gorkić's close associates in Spain in the final months of Gorkić's life. Milan Radanović, "Jugoslavenski interbrigadisti pred Kontrolnom komisijom CK KPJ 1945–1949." (Bachelor's thesis, University of Belgrade, 2016), 56.

¹³⁷ Bondarev, *Misterija Tito*, 182.

¹³⁸ Očak, *Gorkić*, 246-247.

¹³⁹ Očak, *Vojnik revolucije*, 270.

continue this course for another year, veering dangerously close to liquidationism. The distinction between the popular front from “above” and “below” would make a comeback after July 1937, when Broz would fashion his approach to the popular front as a popular front from below. Indeed, the popular front from above seems to have become anathema due to perceived mistakes in its implementation.

Under the auspices of the Comintern, a new Politburo was elected, consisting of Gorkić, Broz, Čolaković, the Serb veteran activist Sreten Žujović and the Slovene worker Franc Leskošek.¹⁴⁰ Only the first two had been in the Politburo before, but the remaining three were all seen as loyal to Gorkić. The Comintern, however, proposed that Gorkić permanently remain abroad, with the others permanently in Yugoslavia, and that the two groups could veto each other’s decisions. Rather than ensuring the domination of Gorkić, this significantly weakened the KPJ, putting it under the direct control of the ECCI.¹⁴¹ While Yugoslav historiography had claimed that Broz was named organizational secretary at this time,¹⁴² no such position appears to have existed by 1936, and he was equal to other members of the Politburo. The Russian historian Nikita Bondarev considers that this new division of power was detrimental to the KPJ, and that it was this, rather than Gorkić’s incompetence, which led to the KPJ’s major failures in the following year, “as it fostered formalism, negligence, and unhealthy competition within the party.”¹⁴³

One thing that Gorkić could have affected, but did not, was the move away from the view of the United Opposition as a kind of a popular front, a stance upon which he continued to insist, persistently arguing against it being liquidationist. Manuilsky’s support and victory over his rivals seem to have only emboldened him. This eventually brought Gorkić into conflict with Broz, who began distancing himself from Gorkić and criticizing liquidationism

¹⁴⁰ Bondarev, *Misterija Tito*, 188.

¹⁴¹ Bondarev, *Misterija Tito*, 188-189.

¹⁴² This claim was then uncritically repeated by English-language historiography on Tito. See Phyllis Auty, *Tito* (London: Penguin, 1974), 136.

¹⁴³ Bondarev, *Misterija Tito*, 189.

from late 1936.¹⁴⁴ Being the only other member of the Politburo present at the Moscow meeting, Broz must have carefully noted the Comintern's expectations, as these essentially became his policy prescriptions for saving the party after the fall of Gorkić. Although Broz would also eventually engage with the liberal opposition, he would always attempt to do so on the communists' terms and under communist leadership, unlike Gorkić, who was content with the communists merely supporting the liberal opposition.¹⁴⁵

The defeated faction was scattered around the globe. In October, Stjepan Cvijić was ordered by the Comintern to move to the United States, where he was in charge of recruiting volunteers for the International Brigades.¹⁴⁶ Although he initially remained critical of Gorkić,¹⁴⁷ he soon fully complied with the new party line, going as far as to state, in 1938, that "everybody knows that a popular front without bourgeois parties is pure nonsense."¹⁴⁸ Čopić appears to have been less compliant, but he did not express this publicly, maintaining his Bolshevik discipline.¹⁴⁹ Instead, he opted to go to Spain and join the International Brigades. He arrived in late January 1937 and became the first political commissar of the newly-formed XV International Brigade, popularly known as the Abraham Lincoln Brigade; he became its commander two weeks later.¹⁵⁰ Before his departure to Spain, his relationship with Cvijić had also turned sour.¹⁵¹ This was the final nail in the coffin of the opposition to Gorkić. At the time, however, Gorkić was undoubtedly far more worried about another

¹⁴⁴ Swain, *Tito*, 19, and AJ, 516 MG, 2013/3, 88.

¹⁴⁵ Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 43.

¹⁴⁶ Očak, *Braća Cvijići*, 426.

¹⁴⁷ RGASPI, 495-11-300, André (Stjepan Cvijić), "Bemerkungen zu dem Brief der Genossen Gorkic, Fleischer, Petrowski, Schmidt und Walter an die Genossen Manuilski, Pieck und Waletzky," November 10, 1937.

¹⁴⁸ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 64.

¹⁴⁹ He made one last-ditch attempt at criticizing the party leadership by addressing the Pieck Secretariat regarding the KPJ's mistakes on the national question. While the contents of his letter are unknown, the report from the Secretariat dated March 20, 1937, which was apparently written in response to his letter, stated that he was in fact wronged by not being able to appear at the ECCI session and that the matter should be investigated. The unknown author also claimed that Čopić's criticisms of the party's mistakes in Serbia were correct, and that he rightly pointed out that the party organization in Croatia was weakened, something that the leadership was unwilling to admit. At the same time, the author notes Čopić's anti-Yugoslav stance, something that was not expressed by his co-opponent Cvijić. RGASPI, 495-11-20, "Записка о Сењко," March 20, 1937.

¹⁵⁰ Očak, *Vojnik revolucije*, 312.

¹⁵¹ Očak, *Vojnik revolucije*, 303.

opposition, the one which was believed to have tried to murder Stalin and overthrow the Soviet leadership in order to establish capitalism.

The Purge of the Oppositionists

When the NKVD uncovered the alleged involvement of Kamenev and Zinoviev in a plot with Trotsky to assassinate Stalin, the oppositionists were transformed from political opponents into two-faced vicious murderers. At the time, most of the Soviet citizens and political émigrés had little reason to suspect that the charges against the oppositionists were fabricated. This led to widespread fear and anxiety among communists worldwide, and the Yugoslavs were no exception. They began looking for spies within their own community, which, according to the Comintern, consisted of about five hundred individuals in the Soviet Union, 180 of them in Moscow.¹⁵²

From the KPJ's side, the purge was primarily conducted by Ivan Gržetić-Fleischer, the party representative to the Comintern. A lumberjack from Karlovac near Zagreb, Gržetić was an active trade unionist and joined the KPJ in 1920, soon after its foundation. He began his rise to the party leadership in 1932, and was one of Gorkić's most trusted lieutenants. Gržetić collaborated with Zigmas Angaretis, the Lithuanian Bolshevik who worked in the International Control Commission (ICC) of the Comintern, and reported to Gorkić on the expulsions that took place.¹⁵³ The ICC was originally an appeals board to which those expelled from constituent parties could lodge complaints about the decision, but it also investigated foreign communists who were suspected to have committed personal or political mistakes.¹⁵⁴ As such, it became one of the main tools of repression within the Comintern after

¹⁵² RGASPI, 495-11-6, "О работе представителей партий," January 20, 1936. This number could have been even higher, as the Yugoslav historian Ubavka Vujošević collected biographies of six hundred Yugoslav victims of the Great Purge before her death, in research that has yet to be published. Miroљjub Vasić, "Dr Ubavka Vujošević Cica (1930–2015)," *Istorija 20. veka* 1/2016, 223.

¹⁵³ Branko Lazitch and Milorad M. Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern* (Stanford: The Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 157-158.

¹⁵⁴ Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates?*, 22.

the First Moscow Trial. The second most significant institution was the Cadres Department, which carefully kept information on Comintern members for over a decade and a half. As the persecution of potential “enemies of the people” intensified, the Cadres Department supplied the NKVD with massive amounts of information, greatly facilitating repression of the Comintern apparatus.¹⁵⁵

The only direct involvement of Gorkić appears to have been his attendance at the session of the ECCI Secretariat of September 5, 1936, at which Béla Kun was banned from working in the Comintern and the Communist Party of Hungary, beginning his downfall.¹⁵⁶ His fall from grace, however, lasted for almost two years,¹⁵⁷ and Gorkić could not have played a crucial role in it, as he was a mere candidate member of the ECCI. Aside from this, he does not appear to have been directly involved in the Purge, although he was well aware of it and publicly spoke in support of it. Responding to critics of the Purge and the trials, Gorkić wrote that

Some naïve comrades are asking the following question: how is it possible for people who have spent decades in the workers’ movement to stoop so low? It is an inevitable consequence of the factional struggles within the party. Whoever fights against the party and its leadership cannot truly wish success to his party. On the contrary, he does everything to prevent or slow down our successes, and while doing so, whether he wants it or not, he ends up encountering the class enemy, and if he is blinded by his factional interests, he connects with them, in fact becoming their mere tool. The case of Trotskyites is not the first case in the history of the workers’ movement.¹⁵⁸

Gorkić thus explicitly connected factionalism with treason. From this starting point, it was not difficult to justify persecution of seemingly innocent people, considering them in fact to be hidden enemies. In early September, Gorkić wrote a circular to the KPJ members, in which he fully endorsed the decision of the First Moscow Trial to execute the accused, and attacked the known Yugoslav oppositionists, Vojislav Vujović and Ante Ciliga, calling for the

¹⁵⁵ Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates?*, 22.

¹⁵⁶ RGASPI, 495-18-1112, “Protokoll (A) Nr. 70 der Sitzung des Sekretariats des EKKI am 5.Sept.1936.”

¹⁵⁷ For an extremely interesting microhistorical account of Kun’s downfall, see William J. Chase, “Microhistory and Mass Repression: Politics, Personalities, and Revenge in the Fall of Béla Kun,” *The Russian Review*, 67/3 (2008): 454-483.

¹⁵⁸ Ivan Očak, “Staljiniski obračun s jugoslovenskim partijskim rukovodstvom u SSSR-u,” *Radovi* 21 (1988), 98.

death penalty for the former and the ostracism of the latter.¹⁵⁹ Ciliga was released from prison in 1935 and, having been an Italian citizen, left the USSR to settle in France, where he tried to influence fellow Yugoslav émigrés. The communists thought that he used connections with the Italian Embassy in Moscow to leave the country, which merely confirmed to them that the most infamous Yugoslav Trotskyist must be a fascist spy. Vujović was in exile in Tashkent, and was arrested there in July in connection to the First Moscow Trial. He was executed on October 3, 1936.¹⁶⁰ Despite the bombastic pronouncements in the party newspaper, the case of Vujović was still a matter of the Soviet state, and not of the KPJ. Therefore, Gorkić probably had little or nothing to do with his execution.

The period until the end of 1936 was a time of expulsions and arrests of former left oppositionists, but by January 1937, the situation within the Comintern, and thus within the KPJ, took a turn for the worse. After the trial of the so-called “Parallel anti-Soviet Trotskyist Center” of Karl Radek, Georgy Pyatakov, and Grigori Sokolnikov implicated Nikolai Bukharin and Alexei Rykov, the Central Committee of the VKP(b) held a Plenum from February 23 to March 4, which heavily focused on cadres policy, calling for increased vigilance and the rooting out of alleged enemies.¹⁶¹ By early April, a joint resolution of the ECCI Presidium and the ICC Bureau stated that “The I.C.C. must bring to strict Party accounting leading Party workers guilty of having recommended agents of the class enemy in their parties to the ranks of the leading sections of the Communist International.”¹⁶² With “agents of the class enemy” having been very loosely defined, virtually everyone became suspicious, and the rise in arrests of foreign communists intensified almost immediately.

At this point, the KPJ itself became directly involved in the Great Purge. The Yugoslav émigré community, already consisting largely of bitter factionalists with mutual

¹⁵⁹ Očak, “Staljinški obračun s jugoslovenskim partijskim rukovodstvom u SSSR-u,” 87.

¹⁶⁰ “Вуйович Войслав Дмитриевич,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 8, 2018, <http://lists.memo.ru/d7/f354.htm>.

¹⁶¹ For a summary of the Plenum, see Chase, *Enemies within the Gates?*, 217-221.

¹⁶² Chase, *Enemies within the Gates?*, 223.

disputes, quickly became engulfed in a wave of mutual accusations. Gorkić's contemporaneous correspondence with Fleischer shows that he was closing ranks with his supporters in the Soviet Union, who were coming under increasing criticism from fellow émigrés.¹⁶³ Gorkić explicitly identifies four individuals who were seen by opponents as members of his "clique": Fleischer, Horvatin, Simo Miljuš, and Grgur Vujović.¹⁶⁴ Miljuš had been the party's organizational secretary from 1923 to 1926, and was a leftist, while Grgur Vujović was the brother of the arrested Trotskyist Vojislav. He was a former secretary of SKOJ and Gorkić's representative to the Comintern before Fleischer. The investigations surrounding these individuals would be a dark foreshadowing of the fate that awaited Gorkić in Moscow.

Before the investigations of Gorkić and the "*gorkićeveci*" began, the KPJ was attempting to move as many political émigrés out of the Soviet Union as possible.¹⁶⁵ This was practiced by other Comintern parties as well, and it was not a conscious attempt to save foreign communists from repression, but a necessity which arose out of fear that there might be spies among their ranks.¹⁶⁶ At the same time, the ICC was examining members of the pre-1928 KPJ factions. Aside from Angaretis, a person under the pseudonym Crnogubec or Gubček appears to have been frequently in contact with Fleischer. Gorkić was telling Fleischer to either send this person information on particular individuals, or request permission to publish the identities of Yugoslav volunteers to Spain from the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, the person in question is most likely Moisei Chernomordik, the deputy head of the Cadres Department, although I have not been able to establish this with absolute certainty.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter from Gorkić to Fleischer no. 34, April 29, 1937.

¹⁶⁴ RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter from Gorkić to Fleischer no. 8, January 21, 1937.

¹⁶⁵ RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter from Gorkić to Fleischer no. 22, April 5, 1937, 3.

¹⁶⁶ Chase, *Enemies within the Gates?*, 105-107.

¹⁶⁷ See RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter from Gorkić to Fleischer no. 22, or RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter from Gorkić to Fleischer no. 8, February 5, 1937.

¹⁶⁸ Očak alleged that "Crnogubec" refers to the Comintern itself, although this seems rather unconvincing. Očak, *Braća Cvijići*, 464.

The most well-known individuals questioned by Angaretis in the spring of 1937 were Đuro Cvijić, Kosta Novaković, and Radomir Vujović (the third of the Vujović brothers, and a former party representative to the Comintern).¹⁶⁹ According to Fleischer, Cvijić maintained his belief that he had done nothing wrong, even using the investigation to attack Fleischer and Gorkić.¹⁷⁰ Cvijić and Novaković were investigated as members of the same leftist faction, and Cvijić was expelled from the party in July 1937.¹⁷¹ Novaković, who had already been expelled in 1932, was never reinstated,¹⁷² but was investigated nonetheless. Neither of them had been arrested at that point, but they were completely ostracized from Soviet society.¹⁷³ Although they apparently accused Gorkić and Fleischer of a variety of offenses, their testimonies still did not mean much at the time. The first sign that the party leadership was also deemed suspicious was when Fleischer himself came under investigation.

Fleischer was first interrogated by the ICC on March 26, 1937. He was criticized for indulging in a series of love affairs which damaged his reputation as a party representative, and of “rotten liberalism.”¹⁷⁴ The latter meant that he was too lenient and insufficiently vigilant to intra-party oppositionists. However, as Fleischer pointed out, this was not his fault, but Gorkić’s.¹⁷⁵ As I have shown throughout the previous chapter, while Gorkić put all of his efforts into enforcing party unity, he did not do this by expelling the former factionalists, but by actively trying to bring them back into the fold. By 1937, this could have been interpreted as outright enemy activity. Although Fleischer engaged in self-criticism, the pressure on him did not cease, and he was becoming increasingly frustrated. He complained to Gorkić that the émigré community hated him, and that he was faced with the unpleasant task of signing

¹⁶⁹ Očak, “Staljinski obračun s jugoslovenskim partijskim rukovodstvom u SSSR-u,” 92.

¹⁷⁰ RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter from Fleischer to Gorkić no. 7, April 27, 1937, 2-3.

¹⁷¹ RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter from Fleischer to Gorkić, July 17, 1937.

¹⁷² Vujošević, “Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ,” 122.

¹⁷³ Both were left unemployed and without a roof over their heads. Očak, “Staljinski obračun s jugoslovenskim partijskim rukovodstvom u SSSR-u,” 93-94.

¹⁷⁴ RGASPI, 495-11-337, “Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung der IKK vom 26. III-37.”

¹⁷⁵ RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter from Fleischer to Gorkić no. 7, 2.

everyone's expulsions, pointing out that this was supposed to be Gorkić's job to begin with.¹⁷⁶ He requested to be relieved of his duties and allowed to join the rest of the party leadership in Paris. Already in early May, he notified Gorkić that the ICC, the Cadres Department, and the Pieck Secretariat had all approved of his transfer,¹⁷⁷ but the transfer never took place. After several months of stalling, Fleischer was arrested before he obtained the permission to leave the Soviet Union.

The Arrest of the General Secretary

On July 23, 1937, the ECCI Secretariat met to discuss the question of the KPJ general secretary, Milan Gorkić. He had already been summoned to Moscow without much information, as was customary at the time. His patron, Manuilsky, was out of town, as he had been granted a month-long holiday.¹⁷⁸ A special commission was set up to investigate Gorkić's case, led by Wilhelm Pieck, and consisting of Georgi Damyanov (Belov), Mikhail Trilisser (Moskvin) and Traicho Kostov (Spiridonov). The July 23 meeting already sheds light on some of the main reasons for the arrest of Gorkić: namely, the earlier arrest of his wife, and the failure of the transport of volunteers to Spain.¹⁷⁹ However, as I will show in this subchapter, there were many more reasons for his detention. In many ways, the KPJ general secretary was a tragic victim of a series of unfortunate circumstances. In another era, they would have led to his (somewhat justified) demotion, but during the Great Purge, they pointed to treason, and thus led to his execution.

I identify three major factors that contributed to Gorkić's downfall: the general context of intensified political repression within the Comintern; policy errors and lack of vigilance;

¹⁷⁶ Očak, "Staljinski obračun s jugoslovenskim partijskim rukovodstvom u SSSR-u," 98.

¹⁷⁷ RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter from Gorkić to Fleischer no. 38, May 12, 1937.

¹⁷⁸ RGASPI, 495-18-1213, Protokoll Nr. 172 (A) des Sekretariats des EKKI, zusammengestellt auf Grund fliegenden Abstimmung unter den Mitgliedern des Sekretariats des EKKI, vom 1.8.37." According to Vladimir Dedijer, Gorkić stayed in Manuilsky's apartment in Hotel Lux, where he was arrested by the NKVD. Vladimir Dedijer, *Josip Broz Tito: Prilozi za biografiju* (Zagreb: Kultura, 1953), 257.

¹⁷⁹ RGASPI, 495-18-1211, "Protokoll (B) Nr. 167 zusammengestellt auf Grund fliegenden Abstimmung unter den Mitgliedern des Sekretariats des EKKI am 23. Juli 1937."

and Gorkić's connections to certain compromised and arrested figures. His mistakes in all three fields could have led the NKVD to the conclusion that he was a Trotskyist, or at the very least a sympathizer of Trotsky. The most commonly accepted explanation in the literature is that Gorkić was arrested and executed for being a British spy.¹⁸⁰ At the end of this chapter, I will show that the accusations against him were far more extensive than that.

The first cause of Gorkić's downfall, however, was the intensification of investigations and repression within the Communist International and the Soviet state as a whole. Were it not for this, he would probably have faced a mere demotion, like many of his predecessors. The fact that he was a foreigner probably aggravated his position as well, given that xenophobia reached its peak from mid-1936.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, the members of the Cadres Department in charge of foreign parties, Anton Krajewski and Chernomordik, were arrested in May and June respectively.¹⁸² Their testimonies would also play a crucial role in the arrests of foreign communists in the months that followed. Aside from that, Chernomordik and Gorkić were close friends, a fact that was noted in a report on Gorkić from late July.¹⁸³

Gorkić's more concrete errors pertained to party policy and a lack of vigilance; after the arrest of Kirov, vigilance was the order of the day. It was considered the ultimate Bolshevik virtue, and lacking it put the Bolshevik party, the Comintern, and the entire communist movement in grave danger.¹⁸⁴ Gorkić's main mistake was that he envisioned the Communist Party of Yugoslavia as a broad church, incorporating various views on the party's revolutionary course, and collaborating with a wide variety of political organizations in an anti-fascist front. This belief was certainly reinforced by the policy prescriptions of the Seventh Congress. Gorkić failed to realize the limits of this openness, in particular regarding

¹⁸⁰ Geoffrey Swain, "Tito and the Twilight of the Comintern," in *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919–43*, ed. Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 210.

¹⁸¹ Chase, *Enemies within the Gates?*, 145, 176.

¹⁸² Chase, *Enemies within the Gates?*, 237.

¹⁸³ Vujošević, "Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ," 128.

¹⁸⁴ Chase, *Enemies within the Gates?*, 5-7.

the attitude towards bourgeois parties and intraparty oppositionists. Some of the consequences of this misunderstanding were insignificant, and were merely amplified by the anxiety that the Great Purge triggered. Others, however, seriously threatened the KPJ.

The more benign ones pertained to Gorkić's policy towards real and alleged factionalists. As already mentioned, Gorkić's idea of party unity was not the expulsion of dissenters, but their return to the fold. He appears to have had a very democratic view of relations within a communist party. This explains his persistent attempts to persuade Đuro Cvijić of the correctness of his party line in 1932–1933, his compromise with Stjepan Cvijić and Čopić at the April Plenum, and his preference for leaving the expulsions of 1937 to Fleischer. While his attitude to intra-party opposition is admirable, it was completely incompatible with the contemporary Stalinist vision of the party. By the time he arrived in Moscow, Gorkić was aware of his, now life-threatening, mistakes. In his last party autobiography, written on August 3, 1937, he criticizes his lenient attitude to individuals like Čopić and Stjepan Cvijić, justifying it as an attempt “to save intra-party peace and save the party from a renewal of factional struggles.”¹⁸⁵

Another issue that stemmed from Gorkić's lenience towards factionalists and oppositionists was his perceived meek attitude towards Trotskyism. At this point, Trotskyists were no longer seen as a current in the international communist movement, but rather as a group of traitors and criminals who worked for the capitalist powers. This is something that Gorkić failed to understand: a report by Kamilo Horvatin written after Gorkić's arrest points out that under Gorkić, the party newspaper engaged in intellectual polemics with the Trotskyists, rather than simply uncovering them as traitors and murderers.¹⁸⁶ This attitude was enough to accuse Gorkić of having harbored Trotskyist sympathies. Additionally, Gorkić

¹⁸⁵ Vujošević, “Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ,” 120.

¹⁸⁶ RGASPI, 495-11-357, Петровский, “О задачах борьбы с троцкизмом в Югославии,” 2, October 17, 1937. I will write more on Horvatin's radical change of attitude towards Gorkić at the end of the chapter.

defended the publication of Čolaković's *ABC of Leninism*,¹⁸⁷ which was later denounced as a Trotskyist theoretical piece.

Gorkić's more serious errors were related to his interpretation of the popular front. As mentioned earlier, he was accused of various other "rightist errors" as early as 1933, and specifically of liquidationism from 1935. His attitude towards the 1935 election in Yugoslavia was that the communists should support the United Opposition regardless of the fact that they were not granted any concessions. The leader of the opposition, Vladko Maček, correctly calculated that they would receive communist votes anyway.¹⁸⁸ Gorkić's vision of the popular front was one in which the communists merely support democratic parties against a dictatorship, rendering them virtually indistinguishable from the bourgeois opposition. In order to facilitate this cooperation, Gorkić focused on legalizing the work of party members. He saw this as a way to halt the mass arrests in the country, whereas the Comintern saw it as the cause of mass arrests.¹⁸⁹ The Comintern was correct, and Gorkić's actions led to the decimation of the party organization in the country. Paired with this was Gorkić's continued inability to return the party leadership back to the country, where it was supposed to focus on turning the KPJ into a mass organization once again.¹⁹⁰ From here, it was not too difficult to conclude that mass arrests were not a cause of individual failures, but of systemic problems with the party, or even significant police infiltration in the highest party organs.¹⁹¹ Although this final conclusion was more the product of excessive fear, Gorkić's liquidationism did undoubtedly damage the party and, ultimately, his own reputation.

The third major factor that led to Gorkić's downfall was his connection to individuals who had already been denounced and arrested. This was rather typical for victims of the Great

¹⁸⁷ RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter from Gorkić to Fleischer no. 20, March 26, 1937, 3.

¹⁸⁸ Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 43-45.

¹⁸⁹ Swain, *Tito*, 18-19.

¹⁹⁰ RGASPI, 495-11-335, Petrowski's Report Dated August 5, 1937, 2.

¹⁹¹ This last charge was mounted by Kamilo Horvatin, who at this point had completely turned his back on Gorkić. RGASPI, 495-11-335, Petrowski's Report Dated August 5, 1937, 3.

Purge, although Gorkić's inner circle at times made embarrassingly careless errors that only cemented the belief that he is a provocateur. Long before this became obvious to the NKVD, other arrests which shook Gorkić's position took place. Bukharin, his ally from the 1920s and patron prior to Manuilsky, was arrested in February. Even more damningly, his wife, Betty Glan, who was not directly involved in Yugoslav party politics, was arrested in June.¹⁹² However, the noose truly began to tighten with the arrests of his close KPJ associates, Sima Miljuš¹⁹³ and Grgur Vujović,¹⁹⁴ in late July. Gorkić travelled to Moscow aware of their arrests, and they certainly did not help relieve his fear for his own life.¹⁹⁵ Their testimonies, as well as those of Đuro Cvijić, Kosta Novaković, and Kamilo Horvatin, were all used to gather a file on Gorkić's mistakes, both real and imagined.¹⁹⁶

The biggest problems came from Gorkić's innermost circle; the party representative to the Comintern, Fleischer, the head of the party press, Živojin Pavlović, and the Politburo members, Čolaković and Muk. I have already explained the case of Fleischer, although it is also worth noting both his and Gorkić's sheer recklessness at the time, as the two men were found to have lovers. Given that another of their close associates, Blagoje Parović, had been removed from all his posts just a year before for the exact same reason, they should have been aware of the potential peril for their own careers (and, at this point, lives). As for Živojin Pavlović, Gorkić's personal secretary and head of the party press, he was already under fire in January 1937, when a special party commission reprimanded him and removed him from most of his duties.¹⁹⁷ Although it was not specified why exactly he was investigated, it is most

¹⁹² Očak, *Gorkić*, 335.

¹⁹³ “Кубурич Илья Георгиевич,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 10, 2018, <http://lists.memo.ru/d18/f349.htm>.

¹⁹⁴ “Вуйович-Митрович-Грегор Григорий Дмитриевич,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 10, 2018, <http://lists.memo.ru/d7/f354.htm>.

¹⁹⁵ Vujošević shows that his last autobiography is written as a detailed attempt to exonerate himself while still engaging in self-criticism, which suggests he knew the situation to be dire at this point. Vujošević, “Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ,” 109.

¹⁹⁶ Vujošević, “Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ,” 126-128.

¹⁹⁷ RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter from Gorkić to Fleischer no. 8, February 5, 1937.

likely related to the fact that Pavlović, a journalist, had met with Leon Trotsky in Turkey and interviewed him.¹⁹⁸ He was later expelled from the party and in 1940, he published a book titled *Bilans sovjetskog termidora* (The Balance Sheet of the Soviet Thermidor),¹⁹⁹ one of the very first critical accounts of the Great Purge. This, combined with the fact that he began working for the so-called Central Press Bureau of the Yugoslav Royal Government,²⁰⁰ which was essentially an intelligence agency, confirmed to the communists that Pavlović, like Gorkić, had been a police spy. In 1941, he was shot by the Yugoslav Partisans.

An even bigger problem for Gorkić was the new Politburo member Rodoljub Čolaković. As fellow Bosnians, the two had known each other since 1919,²⁰¹ virtually throughout their entire time in the communist movement. A member of a communist terrorist organization called *Crvena pravda* (Red Justice), Čolaković was arrested in 1921 and sentenced to twelve years in prison as an accomplice in the assassination of the Yugoslav Interior Minister, Milorad Drašković. This presumably did a lot to save him from being involved in factional struggles. From 1933, he was an émigré in the Soviet Union and studied at the International Lenin School. He worked as a CC representative in Yugoslavia and one of the main writers for the party newspaper, until he was coopted into the Politburo in August 1936. By mid-1937, serious doubts were being raised about him. The source of these doubts was unknown, but he was already branded as “a provocateur and a traitor since 1921.”²⁰² The cause was most likely the assassination itself, which was interpreted as an ultra-leftist terrorist act which harmed the party. Furthermore, Horvatin explicitly accused him of being a

¹⁹⁸ Vujošević, “Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ,” 127.

¹⁹⁹ Živojin Pavlović, *Bilans sovjetskog termidora* (Užice: Kadinjača, 2001).

²⁰⁰ Očak, *Gorkić*, 332.

²⁰¹ Vujošević, “Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ,” 117.

²⁰² Vujošević, “Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ,” 127.

Trotskyist soon after.²⁰³ Had he been in the Soviet Union at the time, Čolaković undoubtedly would not have made it out alive.²⁰⁴

Even this was not the most worrying of appointments conducted by Gorkić. Adolf Muk was by far his greatest liability. Muk was a party organizer from the Montenegrin Littoral and enjoyed extreme popularity in his native region, although he never showed ambition to engage in the party at higher levels. Nevertheless, he rose through the ranks rapidly from 1934 on, as one of Gorkić's closest protégés, and entered the Politburo at the end of that year. Universally identified as a bland, gray apparatchik, Muk was later described by Čolaković as "one of those people who, when they reached a high position by chance, suddenly started believing themselves to be smarter, braver, and in every sense superior to those hierarchically below them, and who insisted on showing that off at every opportunity they got."²⁰⁵

Muk's first major blunder came in the summer of 1936, when he openly disagreed with the decision to execute Zinoviev and Kamenev, which he saw as harmful to the reputation of the USSR, although he never questioned their guilt. He wrote a short statement on it only four months later, essentially stating that he did not and would not engage in self-criticism, as that would only benefit Čopić's and Cvijić's factionalist work in the party.²⁰⁶ No further measures were taken against him, and he remained in the Politburo. Moreover, Gorkić even nominated him for the post of KPJ representative in the International Brigades,²⁰⁷ although that task was eventually given to Parović. Muk was then given an arguably even more responsible Spain-related assignment, and botched it completely.

²⁰³ RGASPI, 495-11-343, Petrowski's Report to Wilhelm Pieck Dated October 2, 1937, 1-2.

²⁰⁴ His co-conspirator from 1921, Rudolf Hercigonja, was arrested on August 22, 1937 and shot four months later. "Миронов Сергей Николаевич," in "Списки жертв," *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 16, 2018, <http://lists.memo.ru/d23/fl.htm>.

²⁰⁵ Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 2, 622.

²⁰⁶ RGASPI, 495-11-335, Petrowski's Report Dated August 5, 1937, 10.

²⁰⁷ AJ, Fond Communist International – KPJ Section (790/1 KI), 1937/5, "Protokol sednice PBCK 12.I.1937."

Muk was tasked with organizing the transport of over 500 Yugoslav volunteers to Spain on the ship *La Corse* in March 1937. The culpability for the eventual failure of the ill-conceived plan remains a subject of controversy, and is beyond the scope of my research. What is certain is that the plan was discovered by the Yugoslav police, and Muk, as its main organizer, was arrested. Under torture, he confessed everything, and gave the Yugoslav police detailed information on every single individual member of the Central Committee, most of whom had been known to them only under pseudonyms at that point.²⁰⁸ This was the largest single act of betrayal in the history of the KPJ, although Gorkić, having initially been given incorrect information, insisted that an international campaign for Muk's release be organized. From the Comintern's perspective, things looked alarming. Not only had Gorkić made his closest associate a person who questioned the outcome of the First Moscow Trial, not only had he given that person two extremely responsible tasks regarding Spanish volunteers, and not only had that person failed and betrayed the party in the process, but that person had also enjoyed Gorkić's unrelenting and unconditional support throughout.

The final nail in the coffin for Milan Gorkić was the loss of Kamilo Horvatin's support. Identified as a member of Gorkić's "clique" in the final year of his leadership, he became Gorkić's main accuser. From June, at the request of Wilhelm Pieck, he began presenting regular reports on the misdeeds of Gorkić and the rest of the Politburo, most notably Muk and Čolaković. In his report from August 5, he went as far as to suggest that Gorkić should be removed from the post of general secretary.²⁰⁹ As I have shown in the case of the April Plenum, just a year earlier, this had been an extremely bold and dangerous move. By August 1937, however, the gravity of Gorkić's errors was too big to ignore, and even his Comintern patrons were renouncing their support for him. Horvatin would go on to launch a leadership bid of his own, which I will elaborate on in the following chapter.

²⁰⁸ Očak, Gorkić, 285-288.

²⁰⁹ RGASPI, 495-11-335, Petrowski's Report Dated August 5, 1937, 13.

Gorkić did not surrender without a fight. His final party autobiography submitted to the Cadres Department was an extremely detailed personal exoneration, in which he accentuated his anti-factionalist credentials,²¹⁰ and attempted to present himself as vigilant, noting his opposition to already expelled or purged individuals such as Osip Piatnitsky, Henryk Walecki, Béla Kun, and Vojislav Vujović.²¹¹ By now, however, it was too late; his mistakes indicated not only incompetence, but even potential treason. In 1937, that was all that it took to draw the attention of the NKVD.

The files from Stalin's personal archive shed light on Gorkić's imagined crimes. His alleged counterrevolutionary activity began in 1923. From 1927, "on behalf of Bukharin, he created an anti-Soviet organization within the KIM, which he headed until 1930," after which he was the leader of the counter-revolutionary organization within the KPJ.²¹² Furthermore, according to documents from the FSB Archive obtained by Ubavka Vujošević, his "counter-revolutionary organization" within the KPJ was "proven" to have had ties with the anti-Comintern group of Piatnitsky and Wilhelm Knorin,²¹³ directly connecting Gorkić to the purge of the Comintern apparatus. He was also found guilty of intentionally damaging the KPJ by filling it with Trotskyists and police provocateurs.²¹⁴ All of this information was obtained through the confessions of Fleischer, who had been arrested on the same day, and his Comintern associates Krajewski and Chernomordik.²¹⁵ After a lengthy period of investigation

²¹⁰ Vujošević, "Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ," 119.

²¹¹ Vujošević, "Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ," 123-125.

²¹² "ГОРКИЧ Милан Миланович," in "Сталинские списки," *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 16, 2018, <http://stalin.memo.ru/spravki/4-68.htm>.

²¹³ Vujošević, "Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića, sekretara CK KPJ," 111.

²¹⁴ "ГОРКИЧ Милан Миланович," in "Сталинские списки," *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 16, 2018, <http://stalin.memo.ru/spravki/4-68.htm>.

²¹⁵ "ГОРКИЧ Милан Миланович," in "Сталинские списки," *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 16, 2018, <http://stalin.memo.ru/spravki/4-68.htm>.

(which was used to implicate other Yugoslav communists),²¹⁶ Gorkić was executed on November 1, 1937.

Conclusions

The tragic downfall of Milan Gorkić was a consequence of both contingency and of his personal mistakes and flaws. His vision of the KPJ as a broad church did not appeal to everybody and his approach to the popular front seemed to his opponents to be a rightist deviation. His rivals, led by Vladimir Ćopić and Stjepan Cvijić, led an unsuccessful attack in April 1936, which merely served to cement Gorkić's power, with the Comintern officially naming him the general secretary of the KPJ in the fall of that year. He was at the height of his power, yet he had just over a year left to live. The Comintern interpreted attacks on him as a renewal of factional struggles, and thus threw its support behind him, seeing Gorkić as the only individual who could keep the party united. The situation within the Comintern itself, however, was getting worse by the day. By the spring of 1937, the Great Purge was decimating its ranks.

The KPJ was swept up in the process: anyone who had been involved in factional struggles before 1928 became suspicious. This would still have kept Gorkić in the clear, were it not for his own cardinal mistakes. While intensified repression within the Comintern certainly did not help him, the state of the KPJ proved to be much more damning for his position. His unchanging attitude to the popular front was not only liquidationist, but had also led directly to mass arrests of many of Yugoslavia's prominent communists. The men in the

²¹⁶ In an endless circle of mutual accusations, Fleischer was also "uncovered" as a spy through the (presumably forced) confessions of Gorkić. "ФЛЕЙШЕР Стефан Петрович," in "Сталинские списки," *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 16, 2018, <http://stalin.memo.ru/spravki/3-135.htm>. The second major wave of arrests of prominent Yugoslavs, on February 7, 1938, was a direct consequence of the interrogations of Gorkić and Fleischer. Đuro Cvijić, Filip Filipović, Kamilo Horvatin, and Antun Mavrak were arrested on that day. See "КРЕШИЧ-ЦВЕЙЧ Георгий Георгиевич," in "Сталинские списки," *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 16, 2018, <http://stalin.memo.ru/spravki/8-35.htm>; "БОШКОВИЧ-ФИЛИППОВИЧ Филипп Васильевич," in "Сталинские списки," *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 16, 2018, <http://stalin.memo.ru/spravki/7-199.htm>; "ПЕТРОВСКИЙ Борис Николаевич, он же ХОРВАТИН Камило," in "Сталинские списки," *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 23, 2018, <http://stalin.memo.ru/spravki/7-7.htm>; and "КЕРБЕР Карл Яковлевич," in "Сталинские списки," *MEMORIAL*, accessed April 16, 2018, <http://stalin.memo.ru/spravki/7-201.htm>;

party's top were widely considered to be there due to personal loyalty to Gorkić rather than any actual competence for the job. Their major mistakes were overlooked, until they became so massive that the Comintern and the NKVD both took notice. The failure to transport five hundred Yugoslav volunteers to Spain, organized by his closest-associate-turned-police-informant, had finally sealed his fate. While Gorkić was most certainly not a traitor, he definitely appeared to be one in the febrile atmosphere of 1937. His arrest and death brought about what he feared the most, and what the Comintern had accurately predicted: a renewal of factional struggles, much fiercer than that of April 1936.

The Factions

“Sometimes it looked as if a factionalist hated the factionalists from the competing factions more than he hated the class enemy.”

Rodoljub Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*²¹⁷

The political landscape of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia between 1937 and 1939 was shaped by two main factors. One was the attitude to Gorkić’s real or alleged supporters (*gorkićevci*), and the other was the direction in which the party should be heading during a worsening international situation. The émigré community lived in uncertainty, while most of the members within the country (aside from those connected with the émigrés) were unaware of the magnitude of the emerging struggle. In this chapter, I will present what I consider to be the four major factions that vied for power within the KPJ from August 1937. I will argue that all of them, in their own way, attempted to present themselves as occupying “the center,” while everybody confronting them was presented as a deviationist of the left or the right. At the same time, they tried to create (or at least leave the impression of creating) a wide-ranging, non-sectarian political organization. This was a typical Stalinist tactic, which was based on simultaneously presenting one’s own political line as the only correct one and persuading as many adherents as possible to support it. Before I investigate the four factions, however, I will briefly examine the impact of foreign communists on the struggle. From there, I will present the policies and tactics of the major groups.

The groups’ names stem from established historiography and are not intended to give value judgments on their political positions: they did not come up with the names themselves, as that would have implied that they recognize themselves as factions, which was something nobody was willing to admit. Each of the four factions that I will be presenting also had its own candidate for the vacant post of general secretary, although the groups’ precise membership, due to their unofficial nature, was not always clear. With the rise of Stalin, the

²¹⁷ Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 2, 526.

post of general secretary became (and remained) the “apex” of power,²¹⁸ and factional struggles within groups were, in essence, a struggle among individuals for a single post, with hand-picked candidates (usually close supporters of the individual in question) becoming the new Politburo once the leader had been appointed. It is quite telling in this regard that even the Comintern explicitly identified the factions according to the names of the individuals who led them.²¹⁹

The first one was the Temporary Leadership, led by Josip Broz, who during this period increasingly began using the pseudonym Tito. Though his group was not confirmed as the temporary leadership until January 1939,²²⁰ the name stuck in Yugoslav historiography, as yet another reminder of the cliché that history is written by the winners. The second was the so-called Parallel Center, led by Ivo Marić and Labud Kusovac. The name was pejorative and it was given to them by their opponents, invoking the “Trotskyist Parallel Center” of Radek, Pyatakov and Sokolnikov, who were tried in January 1937. The third competitor was Kamilo Horvatin, the only Moscow émigré involved, whose leadership bid was hitherto unknown. I argue that he did try to win the post of general secretary, although proof that he was forming a faction similar to those of Tito and Marić is still lacking. The final group was the so-called Wahhabis, supporters of Yugoslavia’s legendary political prisoner Petko Miletić. Named after the Islamic extremist movement, they were devout ultra-left followers of their leader. Marić and Kusovac were well connected to Miletić and eventually began considering him as the potential future leader of the KPJ; nevertheless, I will treat the Parallel Center and the Wahhabis as two separate groups. This is because, on the one hand, they had very different political ideas, and on the other, they operated at different times. While Marić and Kusovac were politically neutralized by early 1939, Miletić only left prison in June 1939, going on to

²¹⁸ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 107.

²¹⁹ The Temporary Leadership was called “The group of Walter” and the Parallel Center “The group of Zhelezar,” after Tito and Marić’s respective pseudonyms. RGASPI, 495-20-647, “тов. Димитрову (сводка по югославским материалам),” March 29, 1938, 1.

²²⁰ Simić, *Tito: svetac i magle*, 97.

pose the last serious challenge to Tito's leadership. I will argue that Marić and Kusovac did not consider him a potential leadership candidate until they themselves were defeated.

The struggle between these groups was not purely an internal Yugoslav party affair. Many members of the Comintern and foreign communists were directly involved in it, forming transnational networks that not only transcended the alleged unity of national parties, but sometimes pitted members of the same party against each other. The most famous case of this is certainly Georgi Dimitrov's support for Tito,²²¹ although this support, as I will show, was far more precarious than previously thought. As I already noted, Kamilo Horvatin enjoyed the confidence of Wilhelm Pieck, the head of the Secretariat in charge of Balkan affairs, who was continuously commissioning reports from Horvatin during the half year when Tito's telegrams were being left unanswered.²²² This shows disagreement and divergent preferences even at the highest levels of the Comintern. Furthermore, one of the crucial actors in the Yugoslav factional struggle appears to have been Georgi Damyanov, Bulgaria's post-World War II Minister of Defense and Chairman of the National Assembly. From June 1937, under his Soviet name Alexander Belov, Damyanov headed the Cadres Department.²²³ As already mentioned, he was part of the special commission set up a month later to investigate the case of Gorkić, and was later the main supporter of Petko Miletić's leadership bid.²²⁴ He was probably also connected to Marić and Kusovac, although their main international contacts appear to have been in Spain and France, namely the International Brigades' Comintern representative, Bulgarian communist Anton Ivanov – Bogdanov,²²⁵ and Maurice Tréand

²²¹ Marietta Stankova, *Georgi Dimitrov: A Biography* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 141.

²²² After several letters, Pieck finally replied to Tito on December 17, 1937, although Tito only received the letter on January 7, 1938. Swain, *Tito*, 21.

²²³ RGASPI, 495-18-1204, "Protokoll (A) Nr. 153 zusammengestellt auf Grund fliegenden Abstimmung unter den Mitgliedern des Sekretariats des EKKI am 23. Juni 1937," 2.

²²⁴ Goldstein, *Tito*, 162-163.

²²⁵ AJ, Fond CK KPJ – KPJ émigrés in France (507 CK KPJ – France), I/30, Kristina Kusovac, "Kratka biografija," 1.

(Legros),²²⁶ head of the cadre commission of the French Communist Party. Finally, the role of Ivan Karaivanov, although widely acknowledged,²²⁷ remains unclear. Karaivanov was a Bulgarian communist who worked in the Cadres Department of the Comintern from 1934, and was most likely also an operative of the NKVD. He was particularly close to Tito and supported him throughout the period. In return, he received high posts in the postwar Yugoslav state, where he immigrated already in May 1945. As a loyal supporter of Tito, he was later one of his leading propagandists following the split with Stalin. Although he always spoke of Tito in superlatives, he shed little light on how much exactly he had helped him during the Great Purge.

Overall, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia did not fare well in the eyes of the ECCI, and this made the impact of foreigners crucial in the factional struggle. Looking at the primary sources, it appears that an informal hierarchy existed within the Comintern, with Bulgarian communists essentially charged with resolving the internal party affairs of the KPJ, and the Yugoslavs, in turn, being responsible for one of the few organizations that ranked even lower than the KPJ, the Communist Party of Albania (which effectively existed only on paper). For example, in the same way that Bulgarians were heavily involved in special commissions pertaining to Yugoslav affairs, Gorkić was made responsible for investigating Albanian Trotskyists.²²⁸ This informal division appears to have replaced the earlier structure of the Balkan Communist Federation, an umbrella organization founded in the 1920s which, by this point, existed in name only. I will interpret all the processes within the KPJ with this power hierarchy in mind.

²²⁶ AJ, 516 MG, Box 58, 2231/2, “Razgovor sa drugom Ivom Marićem,” 46-47.

²²⁷ Bondarev, *Misterija Tito*, 196; Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 95-96; Goldstein, *Tito*, 163-166; Jasper Godwin Ridley, *Tito* (London: Constable, 1994), 140.

²²⁸ RGASPI, 495-18-1195, “Protokoll (B) Nr. 134 zusammengestellt auf Grund fliegenden Abstimmung unter den Mitgliedern des Sekretariats des EKKI am 15.IV.1937.”

Factions in the KPJ, 1937-1940



Figure 2. Factions in the KPJ from the fall of Gorkić until the end of 1940. The names of faction leaders are bolded. The names of those not involved in any factions are in black. The group around Ljuba Radovanović was composed of former disciples of Sima Marković, but none of them attempted to take over the KPJ.

The Temporary Leadership

Following Gorkić's departure to Moscow, the Politburo members in Paris stopped receiving letters from him, which was unusual. Fleischer also stopped writing. Furthermore, the Comintern inexplicably ceased sending funds which the Politburo badly needed for propaganda activity.²²⁹ Unsure of what to do, both Tito and Čolaković kept writing letters to Fleischer and Gorkić, the last one having been sent as late as September 21, 1937.²³⁰ The Politburo was aware that something was wrong, and certainly suspected the worst, although they were not receiving any specific information from anyone. Already at the end of August,

²²⁹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 95.

²³⁰ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 95.

Tito wrote a letter directly to Wilhelm Pieck. The letter shows an attempt to continue with business as usual, briefly inquiring about the situation with Gorkić and Fleischer, but primarily focusing on party affairs and seeking the Comintern's guidance.²³¹ This was Tito's first display of initiative, and the beginning of his rise to the leading position in the party.

As he began to take action, Tito had a very clear advantage in Paris, simply due to the fact that he enjoyed support from the majority of the party's most prominent members there. According to Čolaković, the rump Politburo had accepted Tito as the de facto leader on its own volition in August 1937. Apparently, he and Žujović decided to invite Tito to Paris once they realized Gorkić was not replying to their letters.²³² Why he was chosen by his fellow communists as the first among equals remains unclear. As mentioned earlier, the theory about Tito having been the party's second-in-command after the April Plenum has been discredited by Bondarev's recent research.²³³ For lack of a better explanation, I will posit that he was simply the most experienced member of the Politburo, with Čolaković and Žujović having been part of the leadership for less than a year.

Čolaković further claims that the Comintern was notified of Tito taking over the duties of party secretary in a letter to Pieck in late August 1937.²³⁴ This, however, is untrue: Tito's letter to Pieck does not contain any information on him becoming general secretary.²³⁵ In reality, he did not dare put such a motion forward until later in 1938. If he or anybody else had done it in August 1937, it would have been considered a major breach of party discipline and a challenge against the democratic centralist nature of the party, as Gorkić was still

²³¹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 90-91.

²³² Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 3, 151.

²³³ It is interesting to note that Tito does seem to have already enjoyed high standing in the KPJ for some time: in August 1935, the Yugoslav delegation at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern unanimously supported his candidacy for membership in the ECCI. The Comintern interpreted this as an attack on Gorkić (who supported Tito's candidacy), and punished the KPJ by refusing to give it seats on the ECCI. Gorkić was eventually elected, but merely as a candidate member, and not a full member, meaning he did not have voting rights at ECCI meetings. This incident is even more remarkable given Tito's relative obscurity at the time. Bondarev, *Misterija Tito*, 112-118.

²³⁴ Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 3, 156.

²³⁵ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 90-91.

formally the leader. It remains possible that Čolaković merely wrote this to establish a retroactive legitimization of Tito's leadership. Given the informal nature of most day-to-day operations of the illegal party, the arbitrary decision of putting Tito in charge, although certainly illegitimate, would not have been too out of the ordinary. Horvatin's direct proposal to remove Gorkić, written almost at the same time, was a far more formal breach of party discipline. Both, however, tell us a lot more about Gorkić's poor standing at the time of his demise than of particularly vile scheming on behalf of his fellow party comrades.

For all practical purposes, Tito did increasingly behave as a general secretary in the making from the late summer of 1937. He was the first individual to take initiative and start writing directly to the Comintern, although his letters initially went unanswered. Originally dealing only with questions of cadres,²³⁶ he soon began accelerating work on the issues on which Gorkić had been procrastinating, such as moving the party leadership back into the country. These were not yet early signs of independent decision-making, as he was merely continuing what Gorkić had already begun.²³⁷ As such, they did not cause too much controversy.

Tito's first steps were very cautious. The issue of moving the party leadership back into the country, under the slogan of reconnecting it with the masses, would have been particularly appealing to the Comintern. As most high ranking members were scattered between Moscow, Vienna, and Paris, returning them to Yugoslavia would have made communication easier and ameliorated the negative effects of political emigration, such as

²³⁶ Tito, Čolaković, and Lovro Kuhar were members of a special commission which, in September 1937, investigated Hudomalj's lack of party discipline due to his behavior at the April Plenum. Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 190. Interestingly, the original members of the commission were supposed to be Čolaković, Marić and Drago Marušić, who ran the party press in France at the time. The new commission consisted of people markedly more sympathetic to Gorkić. AJ, 790/1 KI, 1937/164, "Zapisnik sjednice 28.VI.1937."

²³⁷ One of Gorkić's last acts as party leader was to prepare a letter to the Prison Committee in Sremska Mitrovica with Edvard Kardelj. However, the contents of this letter are unknown. AJ, 790/1 KI, 1937/164, "Zapisnik sjednice 328.VI.1937."

factionalism.²³⁸ This was a development welcomed by both the Comintern and the rank and file, and Tito would not be the only leadership candidate who would emphasize this proposal. Notably, this policy echoed the old Bolshevik slogan “A single party center – and in Russia,” which Lenin fought for in the early 1900s.²³⁹

The policies proposed by Tito represented, in essence, a close following of the Comintern’s instructions from the Moscow meeting of August 1936. From the end of 1937, his Temporary Leadership would more or less consistently push for them. The most significant proposals, aside from returning the party leadership back into the country, were pushing for a popular front “from below,” working on the creation of a united workers’ party, preserving the territorial integrity and social order of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, calling for an antifascist foreign policy based on collective security,²⁴⁰ renewing the focus on work among women’s and students’ organizations, and reorganizing the party structure in order to avoid both liquidationism and mass arrests. As I will later show, it was only the policy towards the Yugoslav state that would undergo more radical alteration in the latter half of the factional struggle, but this would more or less coincide with the new leftward turn in the Comintern following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.²⁴¹

The most important policy shift was Tito’s political struggle against the menace of liquidationism. This was the issue over which he had already criticized Gorkić in late 1936, and he was determined to show the Comintern that the party would be changing its course. As previously discussed, the attempts of legalization at all costs were seen by the Comintern and the party opposition as the cause of the mass arrests which plagued the country in 1935 and

²³⁸ In addition, the push to get as many émigrés out of the USSR as possible was certainly also a factor that made the Comintern view this proposal favorably.

²³⁹ Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky, *Revolutionary Silhouettes* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 37.

²⁴⁰ Collective security refers to the Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s, which was focused on pursuing a grand antifascist alliance with France and the United Kingdom against Germany. For a detailed account of it, see Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933–39* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

²⁴¹ Swain, *Tito*, 25.

1936, while the unconditional political alliance with the opposition almost made the party indistinguishable from the bourgeois parties. Like Gorkić, Tito reported on the working of the United Opposition, and saluted their efforts, but consciously decided not to propose continuing attempts to form an electoral alliance.²⁴² As he kept sending letters to Pieck without reply, he always emphasized the need for unity of the working class and collaboration with the socialists, but refused to associate the party with the liberal opposition parties.²⁴³ In terms of party structure, he focused on forming secret party cells within legal organizations in the country, such as trade unions, opposition parties, or student associations. According to Swain, this was the most significant discontinuity between Tito and Gorkić:

Tito would not have contradicted Gorkić's view that the underground was discredited, but rather than abandoning it he concentrated on reforming the underground, making it more secure and more in tune with workers' needs. He concentrated on trying to break down the old 'super-conspiratorial' three-man cell structure – in which student revolutionaries had debated the pros and cons of the dictatorship of the proletariat – and establish Party cells in the legal workers' movement.²⁴⁴

In Tito's view, the popular front essentially meant communist infiltration in legal organizations, the creation of party cells subjected to the Central Committee within these organizations, and ensuring the party's guiding role in them. It was not so much a "popular front" as it was a transformation of major legal organizations in the country into communist fronts. It was a huge success, with the party gaining ground in the majority of prominent organizations in the country, and increasing its membership from 1,500 in 1937 to 8,000 in 1941.²⁴⁵

The major argument against Tito, in the eyes of the Comintern, was his cadre policy, particularly regarding his relationship with individuals close to Gorkić. Overall, Tito proceeded with relative caution in this area as well, but a number of his choices seem rather reckless in retrospect. While his calls for moving the leadership to the country, along with a

²⁴² Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 105-108.

²⁴³ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 124-125.

²⁴⁴ Swain, *Tito*, 22.

²⁴⁵ Swain, *Tito*, 27.

more Leninist approach to party organization and the popular front, were in line with what the Comintern wanted, his cadre policy was consciously or (more likely) unconsciously rebellious. This might have seriously undermined his leadership bid in the first months after Gorkić's arrest. Aside from keeping Čolaković and Žujović as his closest associates, he also remained close to CC member Ivan Krndelj, who was soon singled out in Moscow both as a leading *gorkičevac* and as an alleged Croatian nationalist.²⁴⁶ Undoubtedly his bravest act in these months was his call for the release of Fleischer, who, as Tito certainly knew, had already been arrested by the NKVD;²⁴⁷ needless to say, the effort to save him was not successful. Even more mysteriously, Tito appears to have actively collaborated with Živojin Pavlović in the fall of 1937, even though Pavlović was already obviously falling out of favor as a "Trotskyist" even before the arrest of Gorkić. Tito had attempted to assign him to a high responsibility post, coordinating the work of Yugoslav émigrés in Canada, before an intervention by Stjepan Cvijić led to an investigation by the Cadres Department that eventually resulted in Pavlović's expulsion.²⁴⁸

Cvijić was in touch with Tito and had good relations with him, unlike with Gorkić.²⁴⁹ In late 1937, he was back in Moscow and, considering his earlier oppositional work to have been vindicated, wrote a report to Pieck, outlining his proposals to restore order in the party. Cvijić gave a measured overall assessment of all the major leadership candidates (Tito, Marić, Horvatin), proposed the restoration of several others to the party leadership (his brother Đuro, Filip Filipović, and the already arrested Simo Miljuš), and engaged in self-criticism, admitting that his actions from 1936 were reckless, although his opposition to Gorkić was justified.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ RGASPI, 495-11-343, Petrowski's Report Dated October 2, 1937, 2.

²⁴⁷ RGASPI, 495-20-647, "тов. Димитрову," March 29, 1938, 2.

²⁴⁸ Vujošević, "Poslednja autobiografija Milana Gorkića," 127.

²⁴⁹ Tito's later letters to Pieck were sent through Cvijić. Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 124.

²⁵⁰ RGASPI, 495-11-336, Stjepan Cvijić (André), "An den Genossen W. Pieck und an die Kader-Abteilung des EKKI," December 14, 1937.

His moderation did not help him. He was arrested on July 19, 1938 and died in the Lefortovo prison hospital two weeks later, officially of tuberculosis.²⁵¹

Why did Tito keep all the *gorkićevci* so close? The most likely explanation is that he worked with those cadres who were already in an established position of authority, and that he was simply unaware of the severity of the charges that were being prepared against these individuals in Moscow. In fact, many similar charges were being brought against him, too. This explanation shows Tito more as a regular individual caught up in a chaotic process, rather than a mastermind who understood the rules of the game and used them to rapidly rise to the top. An equally likely explanation for his behavior is that he was attempting to reach a compromise, or at least present himself as a compromise candidate. As I have already pointed out, this was a common tactic among individuals trying to gain the Comintern's mandate. This, too, would not reflect the moves of a tactical genius as much as those of somebody with a clear understanding of the most elementary rules of conduct in the communist movement.

In November, Tito wrote to Pieck that he did not co-opt anyone into the leadership, but that he was actively working with Marić, Kusovac, Krndelj and the Slovene communist writer Lovro Kuhar.²⁵² They formed his ad hoc informal Politburo. The former two were notable for their opposition to Gorkić, while Krndelj was his close associate, and Kuhar was in good standing with both groups. Although Marić's subsequent reports – critical of both Tito and Politburo proceedings – clearly show that there was a preference for *gorkićevci* in these early months,²⁵³ Tito might have been trying to paint a different picture of the newly emerging leadership. Whatever might have been the case, Tito gradually did distance himself from all the *gorkićevci*, while simultaneously marginalizing the critics of Gorkić.

²⁵¹ Simić, *Svetac i magle*, 88.

²⁵² Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 124.

²⁵³ According to Marić, he was invited to Politburo meetings a total of four times in six months. AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/8, "Izjava Željezara broj 2," 4-5. Although not all Politburo proceedings have been preserved, those that have been testify that his attendance was indeed rare.

At this time, the situation was showing no clear signs of improvement. Although the émigrés were frequently writing to Moscow through Tito, they still received no reply. According to Tito's collected works, he had sent at least five telegrams and messages to Pieck. The only reply had been a telegram ordering him to come to Moscow, with a follow-up message instructing him instead to wait in Paris;²⁵⁴ the latter probably saved his life. He also wrote directly to the ECCI at least twice. When the ECCI ignored his inquiry about sending a Politburo representative to the country in early December, he decided to act unilaterally and send Čolaković.²⁵⁵ This was a bold and independent move, considering he had no formal position that would allow him to send a fellow Politburo member to another country without prior approval from the general secretary. His subsequent justification for such independent action was that he had received unanimous support from all key party members in Paris.²⁵⁶ This was even corroborated by Marić, his bitter opponent, who stated that he had originally accepted Tito's primacy.²⁵⁷

The end of the year saw the arrival of two young communists to Paris, both of whom would become Tito's personal friends and members of his inner circle. The first was Boris Kidrič, the former secretary of SKOJ and Gorkić's opponent at the April Plenum. Kidrič had harangued the party leadership ever since his release from prison in mid-1937, and was among those who felt absolved by Gorkić's arrest. Tito, however, successfully swayed him to the side of the Temporary Leadership, making an important political ally in the process.²⁵⁸ The second was Ivo Lolo Ribar, the son of Democratic Party politician Ivan Ribar, who, with historical irony, had presided over the Royal Parliamentary Assembly which banned the KPJ in 1921. Handpicked by Tito during his trip to Yugoslavia at the beginning of 1937, Lolo

²⁵⁴ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 11.

²⁵⁵ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 245.

²⁵⁶ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 77.

²⁵⁷ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/8, "Izjava Željezara broj 2," 3.

²⁵⁸ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 240. Kidrič would go on to become the architect of Yugoslav self-management before dying of leukemia in 1953, just one day after his forty-first birthday.

Ribar was named the new secretary of SKOJ. An incredibly skilled organizer and a master of conspiratorial work with excellent personal networks, Lolo Ribar collected information on the actions of Petko Miletić in the Sremska Mitrovica prison, which was used to condemn Miletić upon Ribar's arrival in Paris.²⁵⁹ Unlike sending Čolaković abroad, this was the kind of bold and independent move that some members of the party leadership considered illegitimate, leading to the first open clashes after the fall of Gorkić.

At the very end of the year, Tito must have felt relatively at peace. In spite of certain disagreements in the leadership and silence from the Comintern, the majority of Yugoslavs in Paris accepted him as the de facto party leader. He left Paris for several weeks, in order to “liquidate” the party headquarters in Prague as part of his push to move the KPJ back to Yugoslavia. On this trip, he visited Vienna where he met with Ivan Kralj, a miner from Bosnia who worked for the NKVD.²⁶⁰ He returned to Paris on January 7, 1938. There, he found a letter from Pieck, the details of which remain unknown. The letter was dated December 17, and it stated that Čolaković and Žujović should be immediately suspended, as they might be traitors.²⁶¹

Tito took heed, but his independence of action did not falter. He immediately recalled Čolaković and Žujović from their assignments, but kept them in responsible positions for quite some time after the letter, suggesting that he might have been testing how far he could go in disobeying the Comintern. According to Čolaković's memoirs, at the meeting at which he was informed of the Comintern's decision, Tito went so far as to say that “until we received an explanation for these measures from the Comintern, he considers that this leadership should continue its work in its current lineup.”²⁶² In the proceedings from the meeting, which were sent to the Comintern, they merely wrote “We consider that this

²⁵⁹ Jozo Petričević, *Lolo* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986), 110.

²⁶⁰ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 314.

²⁶¹ Swain, *Tito*, 21.

²⁶² Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 3, 421.

leadership runs the business of the house [the KPJ] until a resolution is reached, and that the main responsibility for work lies with comrade Otto [Tito].”²⁶³ The phrase “in its current lineup,” which would have suggested that Čolaković and Žujović remained within the leadership, was conveniently omitted. From this point on, the Comintern was aware that Tito considered himself the de facto leader of the party.

The situation, however, was far from clear. At the time, the primacy of the Temporary Leadership was being directly challenged by Ivo Marić and Labud Kusovac, the figureheads of the Parallel Center group. To make matters worse, they were supported by key members of the French Communist Party, the PCF. Žujović recalled that he went to complain to the PCF Central Committee about the preferential treatment given to Kusovac and Marić at the expense of the Temporary Leadership. The PCF representative he spoke to asked Žujović if he could produce a document from the Comintern proving that Tito and his comrades had the mandate to lead the party. Žujović did not have one, and had to leave the building.²⁶⁴

The Parallel Center

At first glance, there was little that separated Josip Broz and Ivo Marić. Both were proletarians, both were ethnic Croats, both were only coopted into the party leadership under Gorkić, and both were largely untainted by the earlier factional struggles in the party, even though they had both been members since the first half of the 1920s. While Broz had built up his reputation as an anti-factionalist, Marić had become one of the most popular and well-known Dalmatian party organizers, and gathered a mass following in what was one of the strongest regional sections of the KPJ. Both of them were in fact on the left of the party in the 1920s,²⁶⁵ but managed to avoid prominence in the factional struggles of the time, leaving the impression of disciplined members who always followed the party line. This certainly helped

²⁶³ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 220.

²⁶⁴ AJ, MG 516, 2013, Sreten Žujović, *Sećanja iz predratnog partijskog rada*, 32.

²⁶⁵ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 59.

propel their near-simultaneous ascent to power in the second half of the 1930s. The only thing that set them apart was their attitude toward Gorkić.

Marić was supported by Labud Kusovac, a Montenegrin lawyer and journalist who was a founding member of the KPJ. He had returned to Paris earlier in 1937, after having worked in the Profintern for four years. He lived in Moscow with his wife Kristina (née Nikolić) who worked for the Comintern. While Marić was the one who usually directly addressed the Comintern, the Kusovac family was in charge of maintaining a complex network of contacts intended to secure the takeover of the KPJ by the Parallel Center. This network was transnational and vast. Aside from the PCF, it included some leading Bulgarian and Spanish communists, Comintern workers in Moscow, the Prison Committee of Sremska Mitrovica, and even the Soviet military intelligence. According to Kristina Kusovac, she worked for the Balkan section of the GPU and, along with her husband, played a crucial role gathering evidence of Milan Gorkić's alleged espionage.²⁶⁶ Marić, on the other hand, maintained ties only with the Dalmatian party leadership, whose informal head was Vicko Jelaska.²⁶⁷ It is unclear who had primacy in this group. Milovan Đilas, a young student who enjoyed the trust of Kusovac, reported to the Central Committee in early 1938 that both he and Marić were expecting the Comintern to invite them to Moscow and take over the party.²⁶⁸ Marić was probably charged with directly addressing the Comintern because of his proletarian origin, and the Comintern certainly considered him to be the leader of the Parallel Center.²⁶⁹ Either way, there is no indication that they considered Miletić as a general secretary candidate yet, although this was the impression of the Temporary Leadership.

²⁶⁶ The GPU (State Political Directorate) was actually at the time called the Main Directorate of State Security (GUGB). Kusovac disclosed this information to the Cadres' Commission of the KPJ in the immediate postwar period, mistakenly providing them with the earlier name. AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, 1/29, Kristina Kusovac, "Centralnom komitetu KP Jugoslavije, preko druga Veljka Milutinovića," 1.

²⁶⁷ At the Seventh Congress, Marić had tried to nominate Jelaska for KPJ member of the ECCI as an alternative to both Tito and Gorkić. Bondarev, *Misterija Tito*, 118.

²⁶⁸ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/16, "Izveštaj Veljka CK KPJ iz kaznionice," March 23, 1938, 1.

²⁶⁹ RGASPI, 495-20-647, "тов. Димитрову," March 29, 1938, 1.

The conflict openly began during the party meeting of December 3, 1937, at which Lolo Ribar presented his report on Petko Miletić and the events in Mitrovica prison. Marić dissented against the decision to accuse the Prison Committee of being an “anti-party” group.²⁷⁰ Marić later admitted that he might have “acted rashly,”²⁷¹ at the meeting that essentially brought him into open conflict with the rest of the party leadership. The main disputes regarded the Prison Committee and the party in Dalmatia, both of which were viewed positively by Marić, and negatively by the Temporary Leadership. Marić was also worried that the top of the party was infested with *gorikičevci*, meaning there were still potential traitors in its highest ranks.

These grievances are laid out in Marić’s letter of December 8, 1937, which was addressed to Tito, but which he also requested be forwarded to the Comintern. It dealt only with the issue of cadres, protesting against the attack on Miletić at the Politburo meeting and stating that he would not attend any more meetings in which Krndelj, Čolaković, and Žujović were present. He did, however, express willingness to continue working with Kuhar and Tito,²⁷² as well as Miletić’s opponents in Mitrovica.²⁷³ Even later, when his rhetoric sharpened, Marić continued insisting that he could cooperate with Tito. Before the escalation of the conflict at the beginning of 1938, both sides seemingly showed willingness to compromise, at least in the documents they directed at the Comintern and each other. However, the two groups were already actively plotting against one another. In late 1937, Marić and Labud Kusovac got in touch with Petko Miletić in Mitrovica prison through Dušan Kusovac, Labud’s brother, advising Miletić to ignore the Temporary Leadership’s condemnation of his policy.²⁷⁴ Therefore, his appeal for continued cooperation sounded less than convincing, and the Temporary Leadership immediately informed the Comintern of

²⁷⁰ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1937/109, “Zapisnik sednice 3/XII/1937.”

²⁷¹ AJ, 516 MG, Box 58, 2231/2, “Razgovor sa drugom Ivom Marićem,” 44.

²⁷² AJ, 790/1 KI, 1937/112, “Izjava Eisnera,” December 8, 1937.

²⁷³ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/10, “Izjava Željezara broj 3,” 2.

²⁷⁴ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 252.

this.²⁷⁵ Moreover, Dušan Kusovac was not a party member, but was given confidential information by his brother, which was a serious breach of party discipline and rules of confidentiality.

Simultaneously, Tito's own claims of openness to collaboration with his rivals were somewhat farcical. As noted earlier, he generally avoided inviting Marić to Politburo meetings, and tacitly excluded him from many aspects of party work even before relations between the two groups deteriorated. Although the open dispute began in December, tensions were obviously bubbling beneath the surface for quite some time. Personal correspondence of Kusovac, retrieved after the war, reveals that around October 1937, he had been informed by Soviet intelligence that Gorkić had been arrested, that the current leadership was illegitimate, and that all issues were to be resolved at a KPJ congress in the country.²⁷⁶ This seems to be much more than the Temporary Leadership knew at the time. Tito, on the other hand, tried to keep potential supporters of the Parallel Center at bay. Hudomalj was punished for breaching party discipline at the April Plenum and sent to work outside of Paris, and an unsuccessful attempt was made to send Marić to the United States.²⁷⁷ Other potential allies of Marić and Kusovac, such as Kidrič and Đilas, were swayed by Tito, and became some of the crucial supporters of – and informants for – the Temporary Leadership.

What united the Parallel Center was not so much a clear set of ideas as opposition to Gorkić and his real or perceived supporters. They therefore formed broad and unlikely alliances, from the ultra-leftists gathered around Miletić to the regional party organization in Dalmatia, which was moving increasingly to the right. As a consequence, Marić's policy prescriptions were far less coherent than Tito's, and they might have been detrimental to his

²⁷⁵ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 29.

²⁷⁶ AJ, 507 CK KPJ (France), I/9, Letter from Labud Kusovac to Hudomalj, May 29, 1939, 1. Marić and Kristina Kusovac both later claimed that they were not informed of Gorkić's arrest until January 1938. AJ, 516 MG, Box 58, 2231/2, "Razgovor sa drugom Ivom Marićem," 44, and AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/29, Kristina Kusovac, "Centralnom komitetu KP Jugoslavije," 1.

²⁷⁷ RGASPI, 495-20-647, "тов. Димитрову," March 29, 1938, 2.

attempted takeover of the party. Miletić essentially repudiated popular front policy and continued supporting the line of the Third Period throughout the 1930s.²⁷⁸ The position of the Dalmatian allies was the polar opposite of Miletić. Accused of rightist deviations and liquidationism by Ribar, they were defended by Marić for their tactical cooperation with the Croatian Peasant Party. The Dalmatian communists prescribed united action in areas where the danger of pro-government parties winning persisted, but competing independently in areas where they were stronger than the Croatian Peasant Party.²⁷⁹ Eventually, they would be accused of completely abandoning the KPJ, instead acting through the legal Party of the Working People (Stranka radnog naroda, SRN).²⁸⁰ This unlikely coalition of the party's leftmost and rightmost wings was unlikely to last, even if Marić had succeeded in receiving the Comintern mandate.

Marić's proposed leadership, much like Tito's, was made to seem like a compromise solution, albeit one that excluded *gorkičevci*. It was to be composed of Tito, Kuhar, Dragutin Marušić (an obligatory "neutral" individual), Kusovac, and himself.²⁸¹ It is important to note that he expected to sway Kuhar to his side, as Kuhar also expressed sympathy towards Miletić's Prison Committee.²⁸² All other responsible posts in the party outside of the Politburo were to be filled by people who he considered personally close to him, including Hudomalj, the former prominent leftist Rajko Jovanović,²⁸³ and Kristina Kusovac.²⁸⁴ The Comintern could not have missed a clear bias towards certain party cadres from the left. The Parallel Center, therefore, was composed largely of former left factionalists, while the Temporary Leadership comprised a group of people formerly close to Gorkić. Neither looked good in the

²⁷⁸ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 66.

²⁷⁹ RGASPI, 495-20-647, "тов. Димитрову," March 29, 1938, 2-4.

²⁸⁰ Kvesić, *Dalmacija u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi*, 8.

²⁸¹ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/8, "Izjava Željezara broj 2," 3.

²⁸² RGASPI, 495-20-647, "тов. Димитрову," March 29, 1938, 4.

²⁸³ Jovanović, however, remained unimpressed by Marić in spite of his efforts, and became a supporter of the Temporary Leadership. Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 3, 431.

²⁸⁴ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/8, "Izjava Željezara broj 2," 3.

atmosphere of watchfulness against spies and traitors. Furthermore, for both groups, the commitment to moving the leadership back into Yugoslavia was, at the time, still verbal.

Marić, however, was much more focused on vigilance than Tito. His obsession with finding Gorkić's alleged partners in crime attests to this, and the theme of vigilance persists throughout his writings. One particularly negative consequence of this was that Marić interpreted Tito's efforts to infiltrate Yugoslav government organizations as a sign that people in the Temporary Leadership were police informants,²⁸⁵ further widening the gap between the two. Tito, for his part, widened the gap by increasingly cutting off communication with the Parallel Center, and playing up their paranoia by keeping *gorkičevci* close to him. Marić's biggest mistake was overly focusing on vigilance rather than policy. While he was hunting for enemies, both real and imagined, Tito was taking concrete steps to implement the policies which he considered necessary for the transformation of the KPJ.

What Marić lacked in ideas, he made up for in connections. He was impressively proactive in his syncretistic alliance-building. For somebody who had less access to official channels than Tito, and also had less experience with the Comintern apparatus,²⁸⁶ he was surprisingly good at utilizing connections among the rank and file from all sides. Aside from the party ultra-left of Mitrovica and the right from Dalmatia, he managed to bring into his fold such diverse individuals as Gorkić's former associate Alfred Bergman,²⁸⁷ and the Dalmatian Ivo Baljkas, who was under investigation for Trotskyism in 1936.²⁸⁸

Far more significant was the support Marić enjoyed in the PCF. This was most likely the work of Kusovac, who headed the Yugoslav Committee for Aid to Republican Spain. Kusovac had ties to two key figures in the PCF: one was André Heussler, a CC member who

²⁸⁵ RGASPI, 495-20-647, "Тов. Димитрову," March 29, 1938, 6-7.

²⁸⁶ Marić's time in Moscow was limited to several months around the Seventh Congress, whereas Tito had spent two years there, working in the Balkan Secretariat and in the KPJ representative office, closely collaborating with Dimitrov, among others.

²⁸⁷ AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/6, Letter from Kristina Kusovac to Hudomalj, May 3, 1939, 4.

²⁸⁸ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1936/474, "Izjava Živka 29.VI.1936."

was working in the International Committee for the Coordination of Aid to the Spanish Republic; the other was René Arrachart, a PCF Politburo member and a leading French trade unionist.²⁸⁹ The latter could have worked very closely with the Parallel Center, as he knew Kusovac through his earlier work in the Profintern,²⁹⁰ and Marić through his work in the trade unions of the Yugoslav émigrés in France. The full extent of these connections, however, remains unknown, as none of the correspondence between the PCF and Kusovac is currently available. Given that the PCF had replaced the decimated Communist Party of Germany as the model party of the international communist movement, such support was very significant. The PCF considered the Parallel Center to be the legitimate leadership of the KPJ, which probably means that they supported them in the Comintern, and that they encouraged all Yugoslav émigrés to accept Marić and Kusovac as party leaders.²⁹¹

To top it all off, the duo had ties to an individual who greatly outshone Heussler and Arrachart in importance. This was Maurice Tréand, who was a CC member, head of the PCF cadre commission, head of the party's underground operations, and an ECCI operative in Western Europe.²⁹² In a meeting in January 1938, Tréand explicitly told Marić, Kusovac, and Tito that the PCF considered the KPJ leadership non-existent until the Comintern clarified the situation.²⁹³ He would remain in touch with the Parallel Center, providing them with aid and support until at least the end of 1939. A similar role was played by Bulgarian communists in Moscow, whose support for the Parallel Center in the ECCI is much better documented than that of the French. As mentioned earlier, the main proponents of an alternative party leadership in the ECCI and the Cadres' Department were Georgi Damyanov and his associate

²⁸⁹ AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/29, Kristina Kusovac, “Centralnom komitetu KP Jugoslavije,” 1.

²⁹⁰ Marić goes as far as to state that Arrachart and Kusovac were close friends. AJ, 516 MG, Box 58, 2231/2, “Razgovor sa drugom Ivom Marićem,” 56.

²⁹¹ AJ, 507 CK KPJ, 1944/583, “Izjava dr. Radivoja Uvalića Centralnom komitetu Komunističke partije Jugoslavije,” 2.

²⁹² Banac (ed.), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, 109.

²⁹³ AJ, 516 MG, Box 58, 2231/2, “Razgovor sa drugom Ivom Marićem,” 47.

Anton Ivanov, both of whom actively worked against the Temporary Leadership: the former in Moscow, the latter in France and Spain.

In addition to the PCF, more crucial support came from Mustafa Golubić, who worked in the Red Army Intelligence Directorate, the Soviet military intelligence service. A friend of Kusovac since the late 1920s, Golubić is one of the most intriguing figures in the Yugoslav communist movement. Prior to World War I, he was a national revolutionary from Bosnia who joined the secret Serbian army organization Crna ruka (Black Hand), which was involved in the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in 1914. He fought in the Serbian army during World War I, and was imprisoned following the king's crackdown on Crna ruka. After the war, he became a communist, and was soon involved with Soviet intelligence structures. There are abundant theories regarding his intelligence work, most of them bordering on conspiracy, and I do not intend to engage with them here.²⁹⁴ What is certain is that Golubić was deeply involved in Yugoslav party affairs, and that he supported the Parallel Center over the Temporary Leadership. Golubić had been in touch with Kusovac since at least October 1937, and it was Golubić who kept him informed about the perceived illegitimacy of the Temporary Leadership in the Comintern.²⁹⁵ He was providing both intelligence information, and advice on how to proceed further in order to win the leadership contest. According to Marić's memoirs, there was an ongoing dispute between Golubić and Kralj, the NKVD operative whom Tito was meeting at the same time, which deepened the suspicions they had about the Temporary Leadership.²⁹⁶ Aside from his own network of Soviet intelligence operatives, Golubić established a connection with Yugoslav student émigrés in Paris, whom he recruited

²⁹⁴ Two dated but unusually sober sources on the topic are Borivoje Nešković, *Mustafa Golubić* (Belgrade: self-published, 1985) and Ubavka Vujošević, "Prilozi za biografiju Mustafe Golubića: (nepoznati dokumenti iz arhiva Kominterne)," *Istorija 20. veka*, 1–2/1993: 217–230.

²⁹⁵ AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/9, Letter from Labud Kusovac to Hudomalj, May 29, 1939, 1.

²⁹⁶ AJ, 516 MG, Box 58, 2231/2, "Razgovor sa drugom Ivom Marićem," 45-46.

to work for him.²⁹⁷ Kusovac was also close to the Croat Ivan Srebrenjak – Antonov, a Soviet military intelligence operative who led the Red Army intelligence center in Zagreb during World War II before he was murdered by the Ustasha in 1942.²⁹⁸ It was he who prepared intelligence reports against Tito for the Cadres' Department.²⁹⁹ All of these individuals undoubtedly worked for the Parallel Center, although the exact extent of their activity remains unknown.

At the same time, an equally significant gatherer of information about the KPJ rank and file was sitting in Moscow. Unlike the Temporary Leadership and the Parallel Center, whose various pleas and grievances were still being ignored by the Balkan Secretariat, he enjoyed Wilhelm Pieck's undivided attention and utmost trust between July 1937 and February 1938. This was Kamilo Horvatin, the final remaining KPJ representative to the Comintern, who turned from being one of Gorkić's key supporters to his harshest critic. According to the available sources, Horvatin never formed a faction in the proper sense, but he was the one party member that the Comintern listened to after the fall of Gorkić, and was notably singled out as the only former factionalist in Moscow who was seen as a potential member of the new leadership. His case, therefore, warrants particular attention.

The Moscow Challenger

Kamilo Horvatin was a veteran revolutionary. In his high school years, he became involved in a secret revolutionary South Slavic organization, which he later described as “half national revolutionary and half anarchist in character.”³⁰⁰ Through this group, Horvatin became friends with the future great Croatian writers Miroslav Krleža and August Cesarec, as

²⁹⁷ AJ, 507 CK KPJ, 1944/583, “Izjava dr. Radivoja Uvalića,” 2-3. They were all later deemed suspicious by the party, and one of them, Čeda Kruševac, was even shot in 1942 as a “Trotskyist.”

²⁹⁸ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 67.

²⁹⁹ Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 86.

³⁰⁰ AJ, 790/13 Yugoslavs working and studying in the USSR, H/10, “Autobiografija Petrovskog Borisa Nikolajevića, 7. februar 1936,” 1.

well as the young journalist Đuro Cvijić.³⁰¹ All four would become communists in the aftermath of World War I. Horvatin was imprisoned for two years in 1912, following a failed assassination attempt against the viceroy of Croatia-Slavonia, Slavko Cuvaj. He spent most of the war either in prison or trying to avoid the draft. According to his own account, it was the war that radicalized him and turned him into a Marxist.³⁰² He became one of the founding members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in 1919, and in 1920, he was elected to the Zagreb City Council.

After the KPJ was banned by the royal government in 1921, he devoted himself to underground work. To former national revolutionaries turned communists, “the ideal of a messianic South Slavic state was betrayed by the bourgeoisie,”³⁰³ which first turned them to communism, and then specifically to the party’s leftist faction. Horvatin, an ethnic Croat, was no exception. However, by 1936, he felt it necessary to emphasize that he had ceased all factional activity in 1928, and that even before then, he never publicly spoke out against the decisions of the Comintern.³⁰⁴

Like many other Yugoslavs, Horvatin was forced to emigrate in 1929. He arrived in the USSR in 1930, taking the name Boris Nikolayevich Petrovskij. He became a member of the All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks) that same year. Over the following six years, he worked as an associate of the International Agrarian Institute, later becoming a member of the Central Committee in 1934. After the Moscow meeting in 1936, he remained one of the party representatives to the Comintern, and was considered close to Gorkić. He was still working there in the late spring of 1937, when the purge of the Comintern began in earnest, and, unbeknownst to Gorkić, had become his primary nemesis within the KPJ.

³⁰¹ Ivan Očak, s.v. “Horvatin, Kamilo,” *Krležijana Online*. (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 1993). <http://krlezijana.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=1598> (accessed December 7, 2017).

³⁰² AJ, 790/13, H/10, *Autobiografija*, 1.

³⁰³ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 47.

³⁰⁴ AJ, 790/13, H/10, *Autobiografija*, 2.

Horvatin's activity as the most prolific denouncer of his fellow comrades in the KPJ had been largely absent from historiography until my discovery of documents from the Comintern Fond in RGASPI. The only biography of Horvatin in existence, written by his comrade Marko Zovko in 1980,³⁰⁵ makes no mention of the role he played in the purge of the KPJ. The only author to notice the significant role played by Horvatin so far is the Russian historian Nikita Bondarev.³⁰⁶ Looking at the available reports, Horvatin appears to have had the habit of reinterpreting certain well-known events from the party's history and twisting them in such a way as to prove certain individuals' alleged treason against the party. This retroactive condemnation is akin to the retrospective legitimacy given to the Stalinist show trials described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: once the "correct" party line prevailed (and, of course, it is correct because it prevailed), those who were against it turned out to have been traitors all along.³⁰⁷ Here, Horvatin set a dangerous precedent within the KPJ. He was the first person to allege that mass arrests in the country were not merely a consequence of flaws in conspiratorial work, but also of the fact that provocateurs were sought "only in the lowest party organs."³⁰⁸ This would open a Pandora's Box of accusations at a time when the Comintern observed communist oppositionists as enemies in disguise.

Horvatin's Bolshevik vigilance far exceeded that of Marić, and of anyone else in the KPJ. Pretty much every single prominent individual from the Yugoslav community in Moscow became a target of his accusations. Any prior activity in the party opposition, either to the left or to the right, effectively became anti-party treason, identical to Trotskyism. This

³⁰⁵ Marko Zovko, *Kamilo Horvatin: nestao u staljinskim čistkama* (Zagreb: Spektar, 1980). Ironically, Horvatin's reports single out Zovko as one of the *gorkičevci* and a potential provocateur within the KPJ. RGASPI, 495-11-335, Petrowski's Report Dated August 5, 1937, 11-12.

³⁰⁶ In a recent article on the Moscow years of the Yugoslav communist Sima Marković, who was also executed during the Great Purge, Bondarev discovered that Horvatin's eight-page testimony, which called Marković "the Trotsky of the KPJ," formed the basis for Marković's arrest. Bondarev "Sima Marković – moskovske godine (1935–1938)," 54-55.

³⁰⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*, 42-43. For example, the earlier support of (the already expelled) Kun and Walecki for Gorkić gave rise to suggestions of Gorkić's own treason. RGASPI, 495-11- 335, Petrowski's Report Dated August 5, 1937, 7.

³⁰⁸ RGASPI, 495-11-335, Petrowski's Report Dated August 5, 1937, 3.

was all the worse because Trotskyists were not seen as a current in the international communist movement, but rather as a group of traitors and criminals who clandestinely worked for the capitalist powers.³⁰⁹ Horvatin went on to say that, aside from Trotsky, the left and the right opposition fully served the interests of Gorkić, as the factionalists enabled him to present himself as the “center” and thus strengthen his own position.³¹⁰ This view was perfectly in line with the Stalinist assertion that the boundary between political disagreement and objective treason is virtually nonexistent “in a period of revolutionary tension or external threat.”³¹¹ Throughout his reports, Horvatin emphasized his watchfulness and allegiance to the party line, while his own leftist past was conveniently ignored. He notes how his work was obstructed by those purged, thereby confirming his own credentials.³¹² Even at times when he accepts that he too committed errors, they were merely a consequence of the influence of traitors.³¹³ Therefore, while he fully internalized the Bolshevik ethos of vigilance, an equally important part of the communist character, self-criticism, is strangely lacking.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of my work, his opinion on the émigrés in Paris is far more important than his watchfulness in Moscow. As far as the ECCI was concerned, Horvatin was the primary, and, according to Pieck, most objective source of information, as he personally requested Horvatin to report on Yugoslavia for a special commission of the ECCI.³¹⁴ It remains unclear what channels Horvatin used to gather the information, but he viewed the post-Gorkić Temporary Leadership in a very negative light. Some of the information he presented was patently incorrect, such as his claim that Čolaković was the new

³⁰⁹ This is something that Gorkić failed to understand, and which Horvatin explicitly criticized: he points out that the party newspaper under Gorkić polemicized with the Trotskyists, rather than simply uncovering them as traitors and murderers. RGASPI, 495-11-357, Б.Н.Петровский, “О задачах борьбы с троцкизмом в Югославии,” October 17, 1937, 2.

³¹⁰ RGASPI, 495-11-357, Б.Н.Петровский, “О задачах борьбы с троцкизмом в Югославии,” October 17, 1937, 8.

³¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*, 34.

³¹² RGASPI, 495-11-335, Petrowski’s Report Dated August 5, 1937, 7.

³¹³ RGASPI, 495-11-335, Petrowski’s Report Dated August 5, 1937, 11.

³¹⁴ RGASPI, 495-20-647, Wilhelm Pieck, “An die Genossen Manuilski und Kolarow,” January 28, 1938.

“central figure” in the leadership.³¹⁵ His description of Čolaković is by far the harshest, as he explicitly accuses him of Trotskyism.³¹⁶ The rest of the Temporary Leadership is not portrayed in a much better light. Of particular interest, however, is his description of Tito. Horvatin was unaware of Tito’s position, and saw him merely as the third highest ranking person in the Temporary Leadership. He pointed out that Tito has managed to mitigate several mistakes committed by Gorkić, but simultaneously expressed significant doubts about him.³¹⁷ Tito had, according to him, actively covered up the errors committed by Gorkić, had been too close to Walecki, and had failed to account for his whereabouts in Siberia during the Russian Civil War, suggesting that he might have been connected to Alexander Kolchak’s anticommunist forces.³¹⁸ Tito’s past was completely reinterpreted through the lens of his potentially traitorous present, and not only through his association with Gorkić. Horvatin’s conclusion was that “one cannot have any political trust in the remaining part of the current leadership.”³¹⁹

This negative view of the Paris émigrés would only intensify in his later reports, as he received more information on the situation in France. However, it is important to note that he did not distinguish between the Temporary Leadership and the Parallel Center.³²⁰ This works in favor of my hypothesis that he acted alone: if he had been close to either of the groups, they would have been informed of his work, and would therefore have asked for his support in the Comintern. By January 1938, Horvatin reported that the negative liquidationist practices of

³¹⁵ RGASPI, 495-11-343, Petrowski’s Report Dated October 2, 1937, 1. This information was most likely based on a report by Karlo Hudomalj, who claimed that Gorkić told him, before his departure to Moscow, that if he was arrested, Čolaković was to act as leader and Žujović as organizational secretary. RGASPI, 495-11-343, “Erklärung Oskar für PB über Gespräch Oskars mit Som (Gorkic).” It remains unclear whether this is indicative of collaboration between Hudomalj and Horvatin, but it is unlikely, as this report would have been easily available to a party representative in the Comintern.

³¹⁶ RGASPI, 495-11- 343, Petrowski’s Report Dated October 2, 1937, 1-2.

³¹⁷ RGASPI, 495-11- 343, Petrowski’s Report Dated October 2, 1937, 1.

³¹⁸ RGASPI, 495-11- 343, Petrowski’s Report Dated October 2, 1937, 2.

³¹⁹ RGASPI, 495-11- 343, Petrowski’s Report Dated October 2, 1937, 1.

³²⁰ RGASPI, 495-11- 343, Petrowski’s Report Dated January 2, 1938, 2-3.

Gorkić were continuing.³²¹ Several decisions of the Comintern, such as the order that Tito had to suspend Čolaković and Žujović from all party activity, suggest that Horvatin's reports may have had a significant practical impact, although it remains unclear whether it was specifically his information that played a crucial role. However, it is certain that he was, by then, a serious contender for the post of general secretary. His highly prescriptive reports and advice on party cadres, both submitted to the Balkan Secretariat, attest to this.

Horvatin's vigilance, unlike that of Marić and Kusovac, was accompanied by concrete policy proposals. Measures against Trotskyism feature prominently,³²² though they were not his only focus. In October 1937, he made a report on individuals whom he considered fit to take over the party leadership. Every single one of them, aside from Edvard Kardelj, was a trade unionist of working class origin, they were all based in the country, and they were all, broadly speaking, on the party's left.³²³ This already gives a clear sign of Horvatin's political preferences. His unabashed favoritism toward the left is striking, as he was the only major contender who did not attempt to present himself as a compromise figure who gathered various party factions around himself. Furthermore, his intentional exclusion of the Paris-based comrades further confirms his detachment from their own internal disagreements. Horvatin never openly nominated himself for any position within the new leadership; it was not common practice to do so, and he probably expected to receive a mandate from the Comintern regardless. He recommended that the individuals he handpicked should travel to Paris and hold a meeting at which they would ensure that the party takes the proper political course. He further stated that it would be a good idea to send a Yugoslav and a Bulgarian comrade "who [have] the trust of the Secretariat of the ECCP" from Moscow to this meeting

³²¹ RGASPI, 495-11-343, Petrowski's Report Dated January 2, 1938, 3.

³²² RGASPI, 495-11-357, Б.Н.Петровский, "О задачах борьбы с троцкизмом в Югославии," October 17, 1937, 25-26.

³²³ His leadership would have consisted of old Serbian leftists Pavle Pavlović and Nikola Grulović, experienced Zagreb-based union leaders Josip Kraš and Miroslav Pintar, Gorkić's Politburo member Franc Leskošek, Kardelj from Slovenia, and the Dalmatian party leader Jelaska. RGASPI, 495-11-343, Petrowski's Report Dated October 2, 1937, 3. None of these individuals ever appear to have been informed of Horvatin's plan.

as well.³²⁴ This was a tacit self-nomination, as he was the only Yugoslav in Moscow at the time who kept in contact with the ECCI Secretariat. He was never sent to Paris, either due to a lack of trust or to the Comintern's own confusion about the situation.

As his cadre preferences demonstrate, Horvatin was also on the party's left, and his primary focus was on returning the party leadership back to the country. He saw the "line" of the Paris-based émigrés as "constantly oscillating from sectarianism to the greatest of opportunisms."³²⁵ He considered the newly founded Communist Party of Croatia (KPH) to be too nationalistic, as they still considered support for Yugoslav unity to be conditional on the achievement of Croatian autonomy.³²⁶ Moreover, Horvatin explicitly criticized Tito for his attempts to unify the communist and reformist trade unions and form a united workers' party, which he saw as a failure because of resistance from the social democrats.³²⁷ He also disliked Tito's work on the legal SRN, as he saw signs of open discord between the legal and illegal party structures.³²⁸ All three assertions were correct. In the end, however, Tito would resolve all three of these issues on his own during 1938.

In January 1938, the ECCI finally met to discuss the Yugoslav question. They formed a special commission consisting of Pieck, Manuilsky, and Dimitrov's close ally Vasil Kolarov, which was to "examine the situation of the KPJ, examine the existing cadres, and prepare concrete proposals for restoring the leadership and work of the party in the country."³²⁹ Yugoslav historiography and eyewitnesses usually claimed that the Comintern was on the verge of dissolving the KPJ,³³⁰ which further cemented Tito's legitimacy as the

³²⁴ RGASPI, 495-11- 343, Petrowski's Report Dated October 2, 1937, 2-3.

³²⁵ RGASPI, 495-11- 343, Petrowski's Report Dated January 2, 1938, 3.

³²⁶ RGASPI, 495-11- 343, Petrowski's Report Dated January 2, 1938, 1-2.

³²⁷ RGASPI, 495-11- 343, Petrowski's Report Dated January 2, 1938, 2.

³²⁸ RGASPI, 495-11- 343, Petrowski's Report Dated January 2, 1938, 3.

³²⁹ RGASPI, 495-18-1232, "Protokoll (A) Nr. 232 des Sekretariats des EKKI, zusammengestellt auf Grund fliegenden Abstimmung unter den Mitgliedern des Sekretariats des EKKI vom 3.I.1937."

³³⁰ See, for example, Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 94.

savior of the party. However, this document shows that, even if that had been the case earlier, the Comintern's main concern by January 1938 was to establish a stable party leadership.

The commission, which met throughout January 1938, relied exclusively on Horvatin's reports. These reports largely repeat his earlier policy proposals. According to one of them, the immediate tasks of the KPJ were: restoring the party's political unity; increasing vigilance; ridding the party of *gorkićevci*; and bringing older, experienced party members into the leadership, provided that they did not partake in earlier factional struggles.³³¹ He correctly identified Gorkić's actions as liquidationist and condemned his procrastination in moving the party leadership to Yugoslavia,³³² and he saw Tito as Gorkić's direct political successor. Furthermore, he expressed concern that the KPJ in Yugoslavia was deteriorating into national sections, with each pursuing policies independently of the party center and one another.³³³ Overall, his identification of problems within the party was accurate, aside from his belief that mass arrests were a consequence of high-level police infiltration. Even more interestingly, his proposals for fixing the party were virtually identical to those of Tito. Any disagreements Horvatin might have had with him were a consequence of excessive vigilance, a lack of communication, and Tito's own (understandable) hesitation to act more rapidly at the end of 1937.

Horvatin would never live to see the constitution of a new party leadership. He was arrested by the NKVD soon after the work of the ECCI commission ended, for reasons which remain largely unclear. His position probably began to worsen in November 1937, when his wife Jovanka was expelled from the party.³³⁴ However, unlike Gorkić, he became a victim because of the purge of the KPJ, and not because of the perceived treason of his wife. He was arrested on February 7, 1938, in the second major wave of arrests of prominent Yugoslavs.

³³¹ RGASPI, 495-20-647, "Основные выводы," January 15, 1938.

³³² RGASPI, 495-20-647, "Состояние и работа партии и ее руководства," January 28, 1938, 12.

³³³ RGASPI, 495-20-647, "Состояние и работа партии и ее руководства," January 28, 1938, 8.

³³⁴ RGASPI, 495-11-343, С.А. Грабер [Jovanka Horvatin], "В секретариат ЕККИ, в президиум ИКК," December 25, 1937.

His arrest, as well as those of his fellow comrades, was a direct consequence of the interrogations of Gorkić and Fleischer.³³⁵ It remains unknown whether Pieck, or somebody else close to Horvatin, attempted to save him. His tragic case further demonstrates that proper adherence to the party line and constant vigilance were not enough to ensure survival during the Great Purge. Denunciations, personal rivalries, and simple contingency were often crucial. He was executed on March 15, 1938 as a member of a “counter-revolutionary Trotskyist organization,” with a simple conclusion: “exposed through the testimonies of GORKICH M.I., and FLEISCHER.”³³⁶ As he was “exposed” by the same people he had himself “exposed” half a year earlier, the first circle of accusations among the Moscow émigrés was closed.

The Wahhabis

In some ways, the brutality of the struggle in Sremska Mitrovica prison exceeded that of Moscow, as the communists in Mitrovica quite literally served as one another’s judge and jury (and almost executioners). The Prison Committee, dominated by the veteran communist Petko Miletić, relied on a personality cult and a policy of ultra-leftism in equal measure. For this, they were named “the Wahhabis,” after the adherents of an eighteenth-century Islamic fundamentalist movement.³³⁷ If one was to look for similarities within the international communist movement itself, it would be more appropriate to describe Miletić as the Béla Kun of the Yugoslav communist movement. His political views, personality, and even downfall were all similar to that of the Hungarian communist leader.

The only major difference between the two was their social origin. Miletić was born into a peasant family in the mountains of Montenegro, and left the family home at the age of

³³⁵ See chapter “The Peak and Fall of Milan Gorkić,” note 216.

³³⁶ “ПЕТРОВСКИЙ Борис Николаевич, он же ХОРВАТИН Камило,” in “Сталинские списки,” MEMORIAL, accessed December 25, 2017, <http://stalin.memo.ru/spravki/7-7.htm>.

³³⁷ The origin of the label “Wahhabis” came either from the ultra-leftist Ognjen Prica, who considered it something to be proud of (Đilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, 163), or from their opponent Moša Pijade, who used it to mock them (Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 66).

sixteen to become a carpenter. He settled in the southern Hungarian city of Pécs, where he soon became involved with the social democratic party. In November 1918, while in Budapest, he joined the newly founded Communist Party of Hungary, and fought in the Hungarian Revolution the following year.

After his return to Yugoslavia, he was arrested for communist activity and attempting to incite an armed uprising. He spent several years in the mountains of Montenegro as part of an armed insurrection against the Yugoslav government before an armistice was reached in 1924. He then moved to Belgrade in 1926, but soon left for Moscow, where he studied at KUNMZ. His inevitable rise in the KPJ began after the Fourth Congress in 1928. By 1930, the Comintern had made him a member of the Politburo, and he remained a member of the party leadership until 1932. That year, he was arrested while trying to illegally cross the Hungarian-Yugoslav border.³³⁸ His arrest coincided with the early signs of the KPJ's turn away from the ultra-left; as such, his problems with the party leadership began after his imprisonment. Milovan Đilas, his one-time supporter, later left a critical yet sympathetic account of Miletić:

He was a rebellious peasant who had not thoroughly digested proletarian revolutionary learning. His political education in Moscow, in which he had not distinguished himself in any field, further reinforced his impatient, tough, and rebellious spirit by oversimplified dogmatism. He had also learned the importance of intrigue in political struggle and thus freed himself of any idealized notion of the Communist movement. But none of this changed him fundamentally. He remained a Montenegrin who verged between adventurism and heroism, a typical product of a culture rich in extremes. Below his gloomy brow was a pair of dull green eyes. But when he spoke, one sensed a man of action, a man who had seen the world. In spite of his oversimplified picture of it, he had a great knack for maneuvering and plotting, particularly on the smallest issues of everyday party life.³³⁹

This fiery temper made Miletić a hero among the communists. His proud attitude in court and his refusal to confess anything to the police were vividly reported in the communist press at the time.³⁴⁰ In fact, Miletić had initially confessed, and then recanted his testimony.³⁴¹

³³⁸ For a detailed academic biography of Miletić, see Kovačević, "Petko Miletić." A less professional, but still well-written, biography is available in Požar, *Jugosloveni žrtve staljinskih čistki*, 275-282.

³³⁹ Đilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, 182.

³⁴⁰ Kovačević, "Petko Miletić," 53-54.

³⁴¹ Kovačević, "Petko Miletić," 53.

This would come to haunt him later, when he attempted to become general secretary of the KPJ.

In the Mitrovica prison, Miletić encountered Moše Pijade, a Jewish journalist and painter who was among the most famous Yugoslav political prisoners. In prison, Pijade was close to Andrija Hebrang, the Croatian communist who – alongside Tito – played a key role in inciting the Comintern to write the Open Letter of 1928 which condemned factionalism. Pijade and Hebrang, who argued for a more measured attitude toward the prison authorities, soon clashed with Miletić, who accused them of being “rightist.”³⁴² The relations between the two groups were never good, but they truly escalated after the Wahhabis attempted to murder Hebrang in August 1937.³⁴³ Soon after, the Central Committee condemned Miletić and his group. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Miletić, in spite of the trouble he was making, enjoyed the trust of both Gorkić and Tito. After the August incident, Tito was at first informed that Hebrang had been the one who tried to murder Miletić, and personally wrote to his old friend, expressing disbelief that he could engage in acts as vile as physical assault of a fellow party member.³⁴⁴ Tito’s attitude to Miletić began to shift only following Hebrang’s reply and Ribar’s report later that year, which confirmed that Hebrang, and not Miletić, was the victim.

Miletić’s dominance over the Prison Committee in Sremska Mitrovica was marked by a confrontational approach to the authorities.³⁴⁵ While this was acceptable during the Third Period, the popular front instigated a change in attitude: the communists were to be less confrontational in prison, and were instead supposed to devote themselves to political education and building alliances with the imprisoned members of the opposition. While the

³⁴² Đilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, 181.

³⁴³ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 67. The Wahhabis persistently claimed the opposite: that supporters of Hebrang attempted to take the life of Miletić. Jelena Kovačević, “Frakcijske borbe među članovima KPJ u Sremskomitrovačkoj kaznionici 1937–39,” *Arhiv* 1-2/2015, 109.

³⁴⁴ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 115-116.

³⁴⁵ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 89.

latter approach certainly appealed to older and more experienced communists like Hebrang and Pijade, the former was the preference of younger leftists whose political leanings were molded by the 1929 dictatorship.³⁴⁶ As a consequence, Miletić was first and foremost a champion of the young communists. His groups fostered “self-sacrifice and anti-intellectualism.”³⁴⁷ He was not opposed to education in prisons, but his vision of education essentially came down to learning how to fight. His view of the national question was equally anachronistic: one of his main allies in prison was the fascist Ustasha leader Juco Rukavina, as Miletić still argued for the pre-1935 position on the necessity of breaking up Yugoslavia.³⁴⁸

Long before its collision with the Temporary Leadership, the Prison Committee was establishing direct connections with several party organizations in Yugoslavia and sending them instructions independently of the party leadership.³⁴⁹ Even with Gorkić’s rapidly declining legitimacy in mind, this presented a serious breach of party discipline. Miletić’s stronghold was his native Montenegro, where he enjoyed significant support,³⁵⁰ as well as Kosovo, where his brother dominated the regional party organization.³⁵¹ Aside from Milovan Đilas,³⁵² Miletić was supported by ultra-left radicals such as Ivan Milutinović, who would later become one of Tito’s finest and most trusted military commanders. His statement in support of Miletić was used as the basis for Marić’s report to the Comintern in early 1938; Milutinović later denied that he wrote it, and claimed it to be a forgery.³⁵³ Miletić was also close to Radonja Golubović, who would become the leader of Yugoslav Cominformist

³⁴⁶ Đilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, 180-181.

³⁴⁷ Kovačević, “Petko Miletić,” 56.

³⁴⁸ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 68. In the pre-1935 period, the only political allies were “national revolutionaries” who were as militant as the communist ultra-left. As such, the communists briefly “flirted” with the Ustasha, who were yet to become a fully-fledged fascist movement. See Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 31-33.

³⁴⁹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 126.

³⁵⁰ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 165.

³⁵¹ Kovačević, “Petko Miletić,” 64-65.

³⁵² Đilas later denied that he was involved in the struggle between the Wahhabis and the Rightists. Đilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, 193. However, the primary sources which I will discuss later in the text show that he was certainly allied with Miletić before his release in 1936, and remained sympathetic to him at least until 1938.

³⁵³ Cencić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 111.

émigrés after the Tito-Stalin Split.³⁵⁴ His most bizarre and damaging political liaison was with Antun Franović, the Dalmatian who organized the failed attempt to transport five hundred Yugoslav volunteers to Spain with Adolf Muk in March 1937.³⁵⁵ Like Muk, Franović betrayed the entire party organization (in his case, the Dalmatian regional committee) and caused further mass arrests. The most likely explanation for Miletić's collaboration with Franović was that the two saw each other as natural allies once the Temporary Leadership condemned them both.

Aside from Franović, who was among the people handpicked by Gorkić, Miletić held a great disdain for *gorkićevci*, much like his comrades from the Parallel Center. Đilas' report to the Temporary Leadership in early 1938 stated that Miletić disliked Gorkić, and therefore supported the April Plenum.³⁵⁶ Gorkić, on the other hand, supported Miletić, and even managed to persuade Pijade to accept the preeminence of the Prison Committee for the sake of party discipline.³⁵⁷ Gorkić's attitude was a consequence of his respect for the immense support that Miletić enjoyed in prison, rather than of his political stance. When Gorkić urged the Prison Committee to respect the decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress in a letter in June 1936, the Prison Committee went so far as to call the new KPJ line "opportunist."³⁵⁸

Both Gorkić and, initially, Tito, tolerated this extremely confrontational attitude. This shows how respected and influential Miletić was, as the KPJ at the time failed to tolerate far less severe violations of party discipline.³⁵⁹ The first noticeable changes in attitude came in November 1937 when, following Hebrang's letter, Tito warned of "alarming news" about the

³⁵⁴ Swain, *Tito*, 96.

³⁵⁵ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 115-116.

³⁵⁶ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/16, "Izveštaj Veljka CK KPJ iz kaznionice," March 23, 1938, 2.

³⁵⁷ RGASPI, 495-11-334, Letter of Gorkić to Fleischer no. 10, February 9, 1937. According to Đilas, Pijade's support for Miletić lasted right up to November 1937, whereas Hebrang was unrepentant and openly confrontational. AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/16, "Izveštaj Veljka CK KPJ iz kaznionice," March 23, 1938, 2.

³⁵⁸ Kovačević, "Frakcijske borbe među članovima KPJ u Sremskomitrovačkoj kaznionici," 108-109.

³⁵⁹ An interesting note on the cult of Miletić is the fact that a Yugoslav anti-tank battery in the International Brigades was named after him.

situation in the prison.³⁶⁰ The breaking points were Lolo Ribar's aforementioned report and the heated KPJ meeting at which it was presented. By the end of December, the prisoners received a letter explicitly accusing Miletić and the Prison Committee of trying to take over the KPJ, and engaging in factionalism, ultra-leftism, and sectarianism.³⁶¹ The letter, signed as "The Central Committee," named Pijade the new head of the Prison Committee. Pijade was a compromise choice, as opposed to the much more controversial Hebrang. Furthermore, Pijade could always gain legitimacy by pointing out that he had repented and stopped engaging in factionalism in the spring of 1937, despite his disagreements with Miletić. This presented him as a prescient, but ultimately disciplined, member of the party.

Nevertheless, this did not make the work of the Temporary Leadership much easier. The letter was met with disbelief and outright refusal to follow the orders from the self-proclaimed Central Committee. About forty of the 120 imprisoned party members refused to accept the December letter.³⁶² Meanwhile, the Comintern was skeptical of both the Temporary Leadership's actions and the opposition coming from the Parallel Center. The Cadres Department informed Dimitrov that both Pijade and Miletić were former members of the leftist faction,³⁶³ meaning that they should be treated with suspicion. The most outrageous claim in the eyes of the rank and file in prison was that Miletić was trying to escape prison and call a party congress, independently of the Temporary Leadership, in order to take over the party. The existence of such a plan was later confirmed by Miletić's allies.³⁶⁴ Đilas allegedly ended his support for Miletić when he was informed of this plan;³⁶⁵ nevertheless, he kept trying to broker a compromise between Tito and Miletić until at least March 1938.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁰ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 3, 126.

³⁶¹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 6-10.

³⁶² Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 250.

³⁶³ RGASPI, 495-20-647, "тов. Димитрову," March 29, 1938, 5.

³⁶⁴ Kovačević, "Petko Miletić," 62.

³⁶⁵ Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 3, 344.

³⁶⁶ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/16, "Izveštaj Veljka CK KPJ iz kaznione," March 23, 1938, 4.

Any hope of compromise became virtually impossible once Miletić had received information from Paris about the illegitimacy of the Temporary Leadership. Marić and Kusovac told him to persist, and kept in touch with him throughout. Miletić therefore formed an alternative Prison Committee with his allies Boris Vojnilović and Ivan Korski.³⁶⁷ Like other supporters of Miletić, they were young ultra-leftists. The self-sacrificing, romantic ethos of the Wahhabis is perhaps best captured in the story of Vojnilović's eventual execution. In 1941, he joined the partisans and fought in Central Serbia at the beginning of the uprising. After being captured by the Chetniks, he was shot for his stubborn refusal to remove the five-pointed red star from his cap.³⁶⁸ Ultimately, it was a group that valued meaningless, melodramatic sacrifice over patient long-term struggle, and as such, it was bound to fail. By the end of 1938, the imprisoned Miletić faction was reduced to half a dozen hardliners.

Miletić wrote to the Temporary Leadership through Đilas in March 1938, apologizing for his sectarian mistakes and efforts to establish contact with other party organizations outside of prison. However, he continued to protest the appointment of Pijade, and accused those close to him of being spies.³⁶⁹ It appears, therefore, that his continued conflict with the Temporary Leadership was a matter of vanity more than anything else. Miletić was marginalized, but he was not out of the game yet. Instead, he was waiting for his release from prison. However, his temper continued to be his biggest obstacle, as he got into a dispute with his former lawyer, Bora Prodanović, whom he accused of being a police spy.³⁷⁰ This was an extremely clumsy move, given that Prodanović, unlike the other communists, knew of Miletić's less than heroic actions in custody in 1932.

³⁶⁷ Kovačević, "Frakcijske borbe među članovima KPJ u Sremskomitrovačkoj kaznioni," 112.

³⁶⁸ Milenko Karan, *Njima nije oprošteno* (Subotica: Minerva, 1991), 164-165.

³⁶⁹ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/16, "Izveštaj Veljka CK KPJ iz kaznionice," March 23, 1938, 3.

³⁷⁰ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 232.

Conclusions

The period from August 1937 to February 1938 was a time of political realignment within the KPJ. The main cleavage was the attitude to Gorkić and his real or perceived collaborators. Nevertheless, the seemingly new standpoints were greatly influenced by old factional struggles. Those who disliked Gorkić now considered their suspicions to have been confirmed, while those who were close to him tried to persuade the Comintern that they would correct earlier errors. The only member of the latter group who succeeded was Tito himself, together with a few close associates like Kardelj and Ribar, who were latecomers to the Gorkić-era leadership. One common trait that the four competing factions shared was that they were all on the left; there was not a single group formed from the remnants of the former rightist faction. Although they were leftists, the differences between them were insurmountable due to their mutual mistrust and constant scheming. Among them, Tito and Horvatin were the only two individuals with clear ideas on how to resolve the crisis in the party. Their ideas were quite similar, although they were unaware of it, and Horvatin was openly hostile to Tito. Horvatin's subsequent arrest, contrasted with Tito's success, amply illustrates that proper adherence to the party line imposed by the Comintern was not enough to ensure survival during the Great Purge. Marić, Kusovac, and even Miletić were primarily motivated by their disagreement with Tito's proposals. Marić and Kusovac offered little, aside from the suggestion that the Comintern should resolve the situation. They made up for their lack of policy with an extraordinarily vast transnational network of contacts. Miletić, on the other hand, would come to establish himself as the candidate of Marić and Kusovac, as he was the only figure who showed any kind of willingness to make concrete proposals on party policy. Unfortunately for all three, Miletić's proposals were anachronistic and unrealistic. They were a mixture of ultra-leftism, revolutionary romanticism, and a personality cult. His political career was doomed long before he left prison. Nevertheless, for almost two more years, Marić, Kusovac, and Miletić would pose a major challenge to Tito's attempted

takeover of the party, primarily through their skilled usage of patronage networks within the Comintern. Tito had connections too, but was also actively taking practical steps towards reviving the work of the KPJ and enforcing a coherent party line.

The Struggle

“At the top of the KPJ everybody is a factionalist, and you, too, are a factionalist.”

Georgi Dimitrov to Josip Broz Tito,
December 30, 1938³⁷¹

The ECCI first met to discuss the issue of the KPJ on January 3, 1938, almost five months after Gorkić's arrest. This might initially seem like a blatant lack of regard for the Yugoslav communists, which greatly facilitated the atmosphere of mutual suspicion and accusation within the party. Silence from Moscow meant confusion, and confusion meant individuals were free to jump to conclusions. With party democracy virtually extinguished, and with the communists' status abroad being semi-legal at best, this situation could not result in an open, critical discussion on the future of the KPJ. Instead, it bred mutual hostility and very serious charges of espionage, treason and wrecking. On the other hand, it allowed the Comintern, now more wary than ever, to carefully survey the Yugoslavs from the sidelines. The Comintern was silent, but it was not unobservant or disinterested. By early 1938, various political currents within the KPJ were laid bare. The next step was deciding which one was correct, or at least which one was wrong, in its political proposals. With Horvatin arrested by the NKVD and Miletić marginalized in prison, most of the disputes in 1938 and 1939 were between the Temporary Leadership and the Parallel Center. By 1939, the Parallel Center was all but defeated. However, Miletić, who had been released from prison in the late spring of that year, was on his way to Moscow, ready to pose one final challenge to Tito, then already the acting general secretary.

In this chapter, I will examine the course of the factional struggle from the beginning of 1938 until the beginning of 1940. In these two years, the KPJ was transformed and turned decisively to the left, with most of its World War II-era policies easily traceable to the late 1930s. Its leadership, too, was fully formed in this period. Tito successfully presented a

³⁷¹ Simić, *Tito: svetac i magle*, 97.

political program that the Comintern eventually found acceptable, defeating all of his key rivals and becoming the undisputed leader of the KPJ. All of these things, however, occurred against a backdrop of major turmoil and confusion, with Tito's triumph being a consequence not only of skill and intelligence, but also of chance.

I will begin this chapter by examining the factional conflict between the Temporary Leadership and the Parallel Center until the summer of 1938, when Marić and Kusovac were deported from France, and Tito was summoned to Moscow. I will present the struggle for the support of both the party rank and file and the Comintern leadership, with a particular focus on Tito's practical steps toward reorganizing the party in Yugoslavia, which earned him the attention of the ECCI. From there, I will examine two particular issues which caused a significant amount of friction within the party, reaching the rank and file itself, and fully uncovering the crisis of authority which the KPJ was undergoing. The issues were the ongoing attempts to enforce the party line among the International Brigadists in Spain, as well as among the Croatian communists, who refused to run independently in the December 1938 election. These two incidents seriously undermined Tito's claim to party leadership, although he eventually overcame both successfully. After that, I will focus on Tito's time in Moscow in late 1938, when he finally received the Comintern's mandate. I will pay special attention to the final purge of the Old Guard of the KPJ, which took place from November 1938 until April 1939, and came close to claiming Tito's life as well. I will then move to Tito's enforcement of party unity throughout 1939, before finally examining Miletić's last leadership challenge, presented on his trip to Moscow in the second half of the year. The chapter will end with an examination of Miletić's failure and his arrest.

Comrades in Paris

Tréand's claim that the KPJ Central Committee was considered effectively nonexistent, and that the Yugoslavs in Paris were to put themselves under the control of the

PCF, was taken very seriously by the members of the Parallel Center. It could, to a large degree, have contributed to their inertia regarding internal party affairs in 1938.³⁷² Although they were active on several fronts, they failed to take any practical steps regarding the situation in Yugoslavia itself. On this matter, Tito would make crucial advances in the spring of 1938. The Parallel Center, on the other hand, made only one major proposal regarding the internal organization of the party at the time. This was Marić's suggestion that, due to a lack of financial resources caused by the Comintern's refusal to send money, the funds previously allocated as aid to the Spanish Republic should be used to cover the living expenses of communist émigrés in Paris. This outrageous proposal, which the Comintern quickly discovered,³⁷³ would not help his standing in the leadership struggle. Nevertheless, for the time being, Marić and Kusovac were the only Yugoslavs in Paris with whom the PCF leaders were willing to talk, giving them an apparent advantage. For his part, Tito gained a crucial ally in these early months: Lovro Kuhar introduced him to Josip Kopinič, a young Comintern intelligence operative who had just returned from Spain.³⁷⁴ Kopinič would become one of Tito's crucial allies in Moscow over the next two years, submitting intelligence reports supportive of Tito and hostile to his rivals.

The provisional, self-appointed Central Committee continued to meet, without Marić and Kusovac. On February 15, Marić was sacked from his post as organizer of Yugoslav émigrés in France.³⁷⁵ This prompted him to act, and he decided to take the issue to Dimitrov himself. He wrote to Dimitrov in February 1938, a full month before Tito, who originally addressed letters only to Pieck. This raises interesting questions about his choice to do so, especially considering the well-established opinion among scholars that Dimitrov effectively

³⁷² AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/29, Kristina Kusovac, “Centralnom komitetu KP Jugoslavije,” 1, and AJ, MG 516, 2899, Vicko Jelaska, *Autobiografija*, 17-18.

³⁷³ RGASPI, 495-20-647, “тов. Димитрову,” March 29, 1938, 2.

³⁷⁴ Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 74-76.

³⁷⁵ Swain, *Tito*, 21.

acted as Tito's patron.³⁷⁶ In light of these letters, it appears highly likely that Tito only wrote to Dimitrov in response to Marić's initiative towards the Comintern, hoping to defend himself. Indeed, Tito's subsequent first letter to Dimitrov did contain two full paragraphs in which he openly criticized Marić and Kusovac,³⁷⁷ although he was previously very hesitant to do this, even with Pieck.

The letters which Marić sent to Dimitrov in February 1938 begin by pointing out the shortcomings of the party's choice of cadres. He first talks about the April Plenum and its consequences, stating that he abided by the decisions of the Comintern, although he personally did not agree with them. More specifically, he was against the entry of Gorkić and Adolf Muk into the Politburo, while arguing that he still accepted the appointment of Tito and Čolaković at the time.³⁷⁸ Marić was portraying himself as prescient and watchful, somebody whose political setbacks in the preceding period were a consequence of Gorkić's treason. He continued to criticize the potential *gorkićeveci*, allegedly unmasking their ties to the former general secretary. He pointed out that from August 1937 to February 1938, the party was completely in the hands of these people. Furthermore, he suggested Tito's attitude showed that he was their patron and that he willingly continued the previous, flawed policies of the party.³⁷⁹ Thus, Marić established the overarching theme of vigilance that would persist in his letters to the Comintern. His entire second letter concerned the causes of the mass arrests in 1936 (including his own), and his belief that the primary responsibility for them lay with Gorkić.³⁸⁰ He then continued to explain his support for Petko Miletić, and proposed a new leadership with himself and Kusovac at the helm, as outlined in the previous chapter. Marić reiterated his willingness to continue working with Tito.³⁸¹ He also claimed that Tito, by his

³⁷⁶ See, for example, Swain, *Tito*, 19, and Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 47.

³⁷⁷ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 37.

³⁷⁸ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/6, "Rozjenko, Bistri," February 18, 1938, 3.

³⁷⁹ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/8, "Izjava Željezara broj 2," 2-4.

³⁸⁰ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/7, "Kako sam se upoznao sa Nikolom Červencićem."

³⁸¹ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/8, "Izjava Željezara broj 2," 2-3.

own admission, had received orders from Pieck to continue acting as if Gorkić was still the general secretary.³⁸² Comparing this to Tréand's aforementioned instructions to the Parallel Center helps illustrate the contradictory information coming from within the Comintern, and the degree to which it fomented discord within the KPJ.

Although Tito was probably aware of Marić's letters to Dimitrov, they still did not prompt him to write directly to the Comintern general secretary. Instead, he wrote to Pieck again, reiterating his support for moving the KPJ leadership to Yugoslavia and informing him of advances made in the country, in particular regarding the popular front and work in the trade unions.³⁸³ He still received no response on whether he should return to Yugoslavia, as he desired, or not. The most interesting section of the letter speaks of "middlemen" who informed him of elements in the army plotting a coup against the ruling Karađorđević dynasty.³⁸⁴ These "middlemen" made numerous promises, including: democratization (which could have meant abolition of the monarchy); recognition of, and alliance with, the USSR; an alliance with France; and the legalization of the KPJ. This was Tito's first expression of radical revolutionary plans, which were still too outrageously leftist at the time. However, this would become the official attitude of the KPJ towards Yugoslavia by the time he was appointed general secretary in 1939.

The following month, Anton Ivanov – Bogdanov, a Bulgarian communist personally appointed by Dimitrov to go to Spain as a Comintern representative,³⁸⁵ found himself in Paris. There, he met with Ivo Marić, along with Labud and Kristina Kusovac. He met separately with Kuhar, but did not look for Tito or anyone more explicitly connected to his inner circle. According to Marić, Ivanov merely confirmed the information that they originally received

³⁸² AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/8, "Izjava Željezara broj 2," 3.

³⁸³ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 26-27.

³⁸⁴ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 26.

³⁸⁵ Lazitch and Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 195.

from Tréand, further instructing them to remain in Paris and not to go anywhere.³⁸⁶ This meeting took place just as Tito was planning to leave Paris of his own accord, in order to personally take care of party affairs in Yugoslavia. According to Čolaković, Tito was prompted to act precisely because a Comintern representative met with leaders of the Parallel Center, but ignored him.³⁸⁷

Tito's actions were simultaneously independent and cautious, as he began to largely act on his own, while keeping the Comintern informed of everything he was doing.³⁸⁸ Before his departure to Yugoslavia, he finally wrote to Dimitrov. Notably, he addressed him as a "friend," and always wrote to him on a first name basis.³⁸⁹ In the letter, he reiterated the successes of the KPJ in Yugoslavia, which he told Pieck about the month before. He also explicitly emphasized that individuals in Paris do not represent the leadership of the KPJ, and that he is going to form a new leadership team in Yugoslavia.³⁹⁰ Clearly, he did not want to run the risk of being accused once again of harboring *gorikičevci*. Yet, in a much more controversial act, he showed that he was no longer waiting for clearance to leave Paris. Finally, he informed Dimitrov of the "anti-party" activities of the Parallel Center, and the support they enjoyed from the PCF.³⁹¹ Soon after, he departed to Yugoslavia.

April and May of 1938 were extremely successful months for the KPJ. In April, seven communists were elected to the fifteen-member Central Committee of the United Workers' Trade Union Federation of Yugoslavia.³⁹² The following month, Tito formally established the new Temporary Leadership, which was composed of nine members: three Slovenes (Edvard Kardelj, Miha Marinko, Franc Leskošek), three Croats (Josip Kraš, Andrija Žaja, Drago

³⁸⁶ AJ, 516 MG, Box 58, 2231/2, "Razgovor sa drugom Ivom Marićem," 53. There are no additional sources to corroborate Marić's claim, and he might have only said this to discredit Tito.

³⁸⁷ Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, vol. 3, 434.

³⁸⁸ Swain, *Tito*, 22.

³⁸⁹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 36-38.

³⁹⁰ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 36.

³⁹¹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 37.

³⁹² Swain, *Tito*, 23.

Petrović), and three Serbs (Aleksandar Ranković, Milovan Đilas, and Ivo Lolo Ribar, who was also the general secretary of SKOJ).³⁹³ Tito informed Dimitrov of his progress, saying that the party cadres had achieved unity in the trade union movement, shedding their earlier sectarianism, and that the rank and file was well connected with “democratic groups and parties.”³⁹⁴ The latter point was related to his vision of a party whose members form cells within legal organizations, consequently moving these organizations towards the left. Clearly distinguishing himself from his opponents, Tito dismissed the danger of “Gorkić’s ideas” infecting the rank and file in Yugoslavia, and criticized the “perestrahovshchiki,” that is, the excessively vigilant party members who see enemies everywhere.³⁹⁵ He expressed his willingness to work with both Marić and Hudomalj, subjecting only Kusovac to harsh criticism.³⁹⁶

By June, Tito’s letters and practical achievements had attracted the attention of Dimitrov, who summoned him to Moscow.³⁹⁷ The following month, Marić and Kusovac were arrested in Paris by the French police and deported to Spain,³⁹⁸ for reasons which remain unclear. The process of granting a visa to Tito was prolonged until late August, mainly because of the accusations levelled against him by the Parallel Center. Eventually, he managed to receive the visa thanks to the efforts of Kopinič. Tito finally arrived in Moscow on August 24, 1938. This in itself was a bold move, given the very real possibility that he might never return. Marić and Kusovac apparently did not attempt anything similar, although they seem to have had a lot more faith in the infallibility of the Soviet security apparatus than Tito. Over the next five months, after a series of long and excruciating meetings with the

³⁹³ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 259. This team remained more or less unchanged until the beginning of World War II. Only Žaja and Petrović were replaced, with Ivan Milutinović and Rade Končar taking their places. Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 68.

³⁹⁴ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 39.

³⁹⁵ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 40.

³⁹⁶ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 41-42.

³⁹⁷ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 55.

³⁹⁸ AJ, 507 CK KPJ, 1944/583, “Izjava dr. Radivoja Uvalića,” 3.

Comintern Executive, and in an atmosphere in which some proposed leadership members simply disappeared overnight, the Comintern eventually decided to confirm the Temporary Leadership's status as the Central Committee-in-waiting.³⁹⁹ Marić and Miletić both continued their oppositionist activities for at least another year, but the battle was already lost.

The Spanish Inquisition

The spillover of the factional struggle into Spain – where over 1700 Yugoslav volunteers fought for the Republic – was virtually inevitable, considering that Paris was a city through which an overwhelming majority of Yugoslavs had to pass in order to reach the frontline. Although the situation within the party was very precarious in the late summer of 1937, Tito took his first cautious steps with regard to the Spanish volunteers less than a month after the arrest of Gorkić. In September 1937, he sent Rodoljub Čolaković to Spain with a clear and modest set of tasks: to accelerate the reassignment of Božidar Maslarić; to meet Yugoslav volunteers at the front to better grasp the situation; and to see how to help the volunteers away from the frontlines, primarily the sick and wounded. Čolaković worked closely with Maslarić in the two-month period that followed, overseeing his appointment as the new CC representative in Spain. A schoolteacher from Osijek and a member of the KPJ since 1920, Maslarić would go on to become Tito's right-hand man among the Yugoslav volunteers, ultimately playing a crucial role in enforcing the line of the Temporary Leadership. This would prove to be a daunting task. Maslarić and his superiors were accused of being *gorkićevci* soon after the news of Gorkić's arrest began to spread.⁴⁰⁰

Maslarić's twenty-two-page long report written for the Comintern in August 1939 sheds light on both his personal conflicts with various commanders and fighters, and on his

³⁹⁹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 328.

⁴⁰⁰ Vladan Vukliš, *Sjećanje na Španiju: Španski građanski rat u jugoslovenskoj istoriografiji i memoaristici 1945–1991* (Banja Luka: Arhiv Republike Srpske, 2013), 25.

struggle with a group led by Roman Filipčev⁴⁰¹ that questioned both his authority and the authority of the Temporary Leadership. Filipčev was an extremely powerful individual, as he was the head of the International Brigades' intelligence department (SIM) in Albacete.⁴⁰² Maslarić claims that his showdown with the Filipčev-led group began in April 1938 when he arrived in Barcelona, although he had heard that this group was forming behind the frontlines even before September 1937.⁴⁰³ Although the arrest of Gorkić probably did contribute to the worsening of relations among the Yugoslav volunteers, it was not the primary point of contention. The problem is establishing what exactly was.

The political nature of this particular clique, which Maslarić termed the “Counterrevolutionary Yugoslav Group” in his report,⁴⁰⁴ remains somewhat unclear. They were a group of Yugoslav political émigrés from the Soviet Union fighting in Spain, who questioned the authority of the party leadership and its representatives on the frontlines. They seem to have been very vocal in their unwillingness to fight and their attempts to return to the USSR, where they hoped to wait for the Comintern to resolve the issue of the new KPJ leadership's appointment.⁴⁰⁵ As a result of this attitude, they were dubbed the “Returnees.”⁴⁰⁶ Eventually, they developed the same doubts about the Temporary Leadership that the Parallel Center already had. The three preserved letters from Maslarić to Tito, sent in early 1938, show this very clearly. Maslarić wrote to Tito that he was struggling to enforce the party line because the new leadership was generally seen by the volunteers as illegitimate.⁴⁰⁷ Even worse, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) was not convinced of

⁴⁰¹ Roman Filipčev (1895–1941), a craftsman from Vojvodina, was a participant in both the Russian and Hungarian revolutions, and a founding member of the KPJ. He spent most of his career in the Soviet Union, teaching history at KUNMZ. He was killed in the Battle of Moscow in 1941.

⁴⁰² Ivan Očak, “Jugoslavenski sudionici Oktobarske revolucije u borbi protiv fašizma, 1936–1945,” *Radovi* 18 (1985), 218.

⁴⁰³ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1939/33, “Izveštaj o radu u Španiji,” 10.

⁴⁰⁴ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1939/33, “Izveštaj,” 10. Although Maslarić had deeply vested interests, and his report is laden with typical Stalinist accusations, there is no reason to doubt that the main points which he makes – and which the Comintern could have easily checked – are correct.

⁴⁰⁵ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1939/33, “Izveštaj,” 10-11.

⁴⁰⁶ Simić, *Tito: svetac i magle*, 104-105.

⁴⁰⁷ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/12, “Pismo br. 3 za Ota 5.III.1938.”

their legitimacy either, and worried that the Temporary Leadership was full of *gorkićeveci*. Maslarić was even accused of being a *gorkićevac* himself.⁴⁰⁸ He was therefore in the same situation that the Temporary Leadership found itself in relation to the PCF, several hundred kilometers north of the frontline.

The Returnees soon began actively working together with Ivo Marić's Parallel Center. This cooperation came naturally, due to their shared doubts about the Temporary Leadership, and mutual agreement on the need for Comintern intervention in the KPJ. The latter factor might also explain their shared passivity with regard to enforcing party policies. The correspondence of Hudomalj recovered after the war helped shed light on the relations between the Returnees and the Parallel Center. The link between the two groups was the commander of the Washington Battalion, Mirko Marković.⁴⁰⁹ A letter from Kristina Kusovac to Hudomalj dated April 13, 1939, in which she complains of "*maslarićeveci*" arriving in the Soviet Union from Spain,⁴¹⁰ shows that the Parallel Center was well-informed of their disagreements, and kept in touch with the Returnees well into 1939.

There is no evidence that the Returnees ever tried to seriously agitate and gain more followers. Maslarić mentions only eleven of them by name,⁴¹¹ and it seems that they did not have more than a handful of sympathizers. Only one of them ever dared to raise the issue of the party leadership while in Spain. In general, their behavior left the impression of vigilant

⁴⁰⁸ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/12, "Pismo br. 3 za Ota 5.III.1938."

⁴⁰⁹ AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/4, Letter of Marković to Hudomalj, February 18, 1939. Mirko Marković (1907–1988) was one of the most colorful figures in the Yugoslav communist movement. A nephew of Lenin's personal friend Vukašin Marković, he organized armed uprisings with his uncle in Montenegro in the early 1920s in the hopes of sparking a communist revolution. After their failure, he immigrated to the Soviet Union and finished studying at KUNMZ. The Comintern sent him to the United States, where he worked as an organizer of the Yugoslav diaspora. After returning to Moscow for a short time in 1936, he went to Spain, where he became commander of the Washington Battalion, later befriending Ernest Hemingway, who hosted him in Cuba after the fall of the Spanish Republic. After being allowed to reenter the United States, he returned to organizing the Yugoslav diaspora and mobilizing them for the war effort. In 1945, he returned to Yugoslavia and became the first dean of the School of Economics at the University of Belgrade. In 1948, he was arrested as a Cominformist and sent to the Goli otok prison camp. After his release, he dedicated himself to scientific work and became one of the pioneers of cybernetics in Yugoslavia.

⁴¹⁰ AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/5, Letter of Kristina Kusovac to Hudomalj, April 13, 1939, 2.

⁴¹¹ Ten are mentioned, with brief summaries of their "anti-party work," in the August 1939 report. The eleventh, Milovan Četković, is mentioned in a letter to Tito from February 1938. AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/12, Pismo br. 1 za Ota.

Bolsheviks who were confident that the Comintern would eventually resolve the situation and make the right decision, although they did knowingly side with Marić and Kusovac. Their belief in the need to preserve party cadres for a future Yugoslav revolution was probably genuine, although it is easy to see how it would lead their opponents to think of them as mere cowards.

Like the Parallel Center, they posed a problem primarily because of their extensive ties: in this case not only with the Comintern, but also with the Cadres Department of the International Brigades. Maslarić names two members of the PCE Central Committee, under the pseudonyms Edo and Yakov, and the head of the Cadres Department, Georgi Dobrev – Zhelezov, as their main patrons.⁴¹² Edo was Edoardo D’Onofrio, an Italian communist who was a member of the PCE and served on the party’s Foreigners Commission.⁴¹³ Yakov was most likely Palmiro Togliatti, who worked as a Comintern representative in the CC of the PCE in Barcelona under that pseudonym.⁴¹⁴ Additionally, Maslarić claims that the Returnees had connections with the Soviet Embassy in Spain.⁴¹⁵ All of this helped them gain a significant victory against Maslarić and the party faction that he was representing in the summer of 1938.

The main showdown between Maslarić and the Returnees occurred during the so-called Barcelona Conference, which took place on August 3, 1938. The main discussant at the conference was Vladimir Čopić. According to the proceedings from the meeting, almost all of the KPJ members gathered were against Maslarić, and the evaluation of his work was extremely negative. Aside from being called a *gorkićevac* several times, he was also accused

⁴¹² AJ, 790/1 KI, 1939/33, “Izveštaj,” 15.

⁴¹³ Francesco M. Biscione, s.v. “D’ONOFRIO, Edoardo,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 41 (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 1992). [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/edoardo-d-onofrio_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/edoardo-d-onofrio_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (accessed September 3, 2017).

⁴¹⁴ Lazitch and Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, 471.

⁴¹⁵ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1939/33, “Izveštaj,” 11.

of harboring Trotskyists.⁴¹⁶ Maslarić fought back, accusing the Returnees of cowardice and pointing out their inability to perform tasks they had been ordered to undertake.⁴¹⁷ His response, however, was comparatively meek, given the weight of the accusations against him. Ćopić, as the main speaker, took a more moderate stance, trying to reconcile the two groups. He dismissed the dispute as a personal feud between Maslarić and Filipčev, but claimed that their personal disagreements were nevertheless leading to a formation of factions around them.⁴¹⁸ D’Onofrio and Togliatti took a position similar to Ćopić,⁴¹⁹ in spite of Maslarić’s claims that they were all against him and the Temporary Leadership. Overall, the three authority figures present at the meeting seemed uninterested in taking sides. As such, Maslarić’s claim that Togliatti and D’Onofrio worked against the Temporary Leadership is unsubstantiated. Those who did undoubtedly work with the Returnees were, once again, the Bulgarian communists. Aside from the aforementioned Zhelezov, Anton Ivanov was also mentioned at the meeting, where one of the Returnees claimed it was Ivanov who informed them that Maslarić was a *gorkičevac*.⁴²⁰

The situation was not fully resolved with the Barcelona Conference, but it did not escalate either; the conflict remained confined to about a dozen individuals. Soon after the meeting, Ćopić embarked on a trip to Moscow and Maslarić was arrested on an unrelated issue, spending half a year in prison before being cleared of all charges.⁴²¹ This meant that Tito’s most trusted associate in Spain was sidelined for the entire second half of 1938. A more proactive group would have taken the opportunity to weaken the authority of the Temporary Leadership among the Yugoslav volunteers. However, there are no sources which would suggest that the Returnees did such a thing. If they had, they could have caused a great deal of

⁴¹⁶ RGASPI, 545-2-79. “Протокол собрания от 3.VIII. по вопросу взаимоотношений среди тов. из Югославии членов И.К.П.,” 4.

⁴¹⁷ RGASPI, 545-2-79. “Протокол собрания от 3.VIII.,” 3.

⁴¹⁸ RGASPI, 545-2-79. “Протокол собрания от 3.VIII.,” 7.

⁴¹⁹ RGASPI, 545-2-79. “Протокол собрания от 3.VIII.,” 5-8.

⁴²⁰ RGASPI, 545-2-79. “Протокол собрания от 3.VIII.,” 3.

⁴²¹ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1939/33, “Izveštaj,” 19-21.

trouble for Tito and his Temporary Leadership. The fact that they had not done so probably accounts for their lenient treatment in the immediate aftermath of Tito's takeover of the KPJ. He attempted to obstruct their careers in the Soviet Union due to their lack of party discipline,⁴²² but he did not accuse them of treason or expel them from the party. The Spanish episode, therefore, was not a crucial moment in the factional struggle. However, it shows similarities to the situation in Paris, laying bare the powerful transnational networks that influenced intraparty relations at the time. Additionally, it illustrates Tito's relatively conciliatory attitude towards defeated intraparty rivals, which was much milder than the criticisms levelled by Horvatin, Marić, and Miletić.

Liquidationism and the Croat Question

The events in Croatia in 1938 and 1939 had a far greater significance than the disputes in Spain. They represented a major blow for the Temporary Leadership, and, had they taken advantage, could have led to the victory of the Parallel Center. They also illustrate well the discord and lack of communication between various levels of the party leadership and the mutually competing groups within the KPJ. The conflict was directly tied to questions of liquidationism and nationalism. The former related to the proper application of popular front policy, while the latter concerned the defense of Yugoslavia in the case of fascist threat. Both were burning issues at the time. The disputes conducted in the language of Bolshevism were, in this case, inextricably linked to nationalism, as they were justified by an alleged uniqueness of the Croatian nation's position within Yugoslavia.

While Gorkić was writing his party autobiography in Moscow, hopelessly trying to save his life, Croatian communists under Tito's leadership met clandestinely in the dead of night, in a forest west of Zagreb, to form the Communist Party of Croatia (KPH). The communist parties of Slovenia (KPS) and Croatia were founded as part of the popular front

⁴²² Pero Simić, *Tito: svetac i magle*, 105.

strategy, in an attempt to better accommodate the local conditions and different political alignments in these parts of the country.⁴²³ The KPH and KPS were intended to operate as regional subsections of the KPJ, not as separate parties, and the leadership explicitly stated that this move was not intended to federalize the party, which was to remain centralized.⁴²⁴ Within a year, the communists had also founded the Party of the Working People (SRN), a communist front organization subordinate to the KPJ.⁴²⁵ It was supposed to operate in the same way as all other fronts envisioned by the Temporary Leadership: thus, a high-ranking member of the legal SRN would have to comply fully with the decisions of the underground KPJ organization.⁴²⁶ However, this organizational hierarchy was not always respected, as a consequence of both earlier liquidationist practices and a lack of faith in the new leadership, which still lacked a mandate from the Comintern. This would lead to a major dispute between the Temporary Leadership and the KPH over the course of 1938.

Following the KPJ's failure to form a popular front for the 1935 election, and its change of course after the fall of Gorkić, the Temporary Leadership under Tito did not throw its weight behind the United Opposition. Instead, the party planned to present a separate list of candidates for the 1938 election, guided by the Leninist belief that the workers' opposition to the dictatorship should not merge itself with the bourgeois opposition. Many in the KPH, however, disagreed, calling for stronger cooperation with the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS). This call was echoed by the Parallel Center, as Marić considered that an electoral confrontation with the HSS would alienate the Croatian masses, and that tactical accommodation was necessary.⁴²⁷ Tito's appeals for party unity were not always successful,

⁴²³ Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 51.

⁴²⁴ Jelić, *Komunistička partija Hrvatske*, vol. 1, 66.

⁴²⁵ Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 52.

⁴²⁶ Swain, *Tito*, 22-23.

⁴²⁷ RGASPI, 495-20-647, "тов. Димитрову," March 29, 1938, 2-4; For examples of this tactical accommodation in Dalmatia, see AJ, MG 516, 2246, Josip Rosić, "Prilog za istoriju KPJ," 80-81.

primarily because he was merely the acting leader of the party throughout the course of the year.

The first disputes began in March 1938, after the Anschluss of Austria. This event brought Nazi Germany's troops to Yugoslavia's doorstep, making the threat of war more imminent than ever before. In response, the KPJ leadership issued a proclamation calling for cooperation not only with the United Opposition, but also with the Yugoslav monarchist centralists and nationalists who opposed the government, in order to defend the Yugoslav state.⁴²⁸ This proclamation drew sharp criticism from the KPH, whose leadership stated that such an alliance was out of the question. Some Croatian communists posited the solution of the Croatian national question as a prerequisite for Croatian support for a united Yugoslavia. Tito harshly criticized such a view as sectarian in his letters to Dimitrov.⁴²⁹ Although the Croatian question would escalate in a different way later in the year, this particular incident is notable for revealing an important feature of the Temporary Leadership's strategy. Although liquidationism was the most frequent accusation employed by Tito against the opponents of his party line, the KPJ did not really shy away from liquidationist tactics if the unity of Yugoslavia was at stake. In this particular incident, therefore, the Temporary Leadership of the KPJ was significantly further to the right than the KPH leadership. Moreover, it remains unclear how this call for cooperation with forces of the right correlates with Tito's contemporaneous suggestion to Pieck that the KPJ should support the overthrow of the Yugoslav government and the establishment of a new, more democratic regime. In the following years, the line of the KPJ would evolve into a consistent attitude that only the proletarian left can preserve the unity of the nation, while the bourgeois forces would inevitably betray it to fascism. This line clearly distinguished the KPJ from both the Croatian and Serbian nationalists, while affirming their commitment to a federal Yugoslav state.

⁴²⁸ Jelić, *Komunistička partija Hrvatske*, vol. 1, 224.

⁴²⁹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 63.

The Croatian national question took center stage in the run-up to the December 1938 election. The worsening international situation made it impossible to further postpone resolving the issue which the Kingdom had avoided confronting for two decades. The socialists started approaching the United Opposition again, sensing that the government's position was significantly weakened, and that the time had come for some substantial changes in the internal organization of the country. Many communists shared the sentiment, although the Temporary Leadership remained unconvinced.⁴³⁰ The conflict was publicly played out through the Party of the Working People, which was expected to contest the election outside of the HSS-led United Opposition. It profoundly divided the KPJ and exposed intraparty disagreements to the general public. The dispute was detrimental to the party's electoral performance and reputation. Croatia was one of the communist strongholds in the only free and fair election in Yugoslavia in 1920, and the party was hoping to repeat its earlier success.⁴³¹ The disagreement between the KPH and the KPJ, however, sabotaged this effort.

As already mentioned, the entirety of the KPJ, including its subsection, the KPH, was expected to present separate candidates for the election, unconnected to the United Opposition, through the SRN. While this did indeed occur in all other parts of the country, the KPH refused to comply. It did not propose any of its own candidates, instead fully supporting the United Opposition in all regions.⁴³² This angered the central party leadership, with Tito once again bringing up accusations of liquidationism against his rivals.⁴³³ While the accusation itself was not mere slander, Tito's particular brand of leftism was weak in Croatia, and his opponents had strong counterarguments to present. The KPH leadership rightly saw the mass support for the HSS as a sign of its popular perception as the only legitimate

⁴³⁰ Swain, *Tito*, 26.

⁴³¹ Jelić, *Komunistička partija Hrvatske*, vol. 1, 225.

⁴³² Jelić, *Komunistička partija Hrvatske*, vol. 1, 225.

⁴³³ Swain, *Tito*, 24.

defender of Croatian national interests.⁴³⁴ Therefore, the communists were afraid that open confrontation would be detrimental, further weakening their support among the Croats. They considered that the only proper application of the popular front was to understand these circumstances and act in line with the main representative party of the Croatian nation, which considered Croatia to be oppressed in Yugoslavia. The notion that Croatia was a special case was constantly emphasized.⁴³⁵

To Tito and the Temporary Leadership, this sounded a lot like nationalism. While the KPH began infiltrating the HSS and other legal organizations which operated within the United Opposition,⁴³⁶ attempting to push them further to the left, the Temporary Leadership accused them of pandering to reactionary elements within the Croatian national movement.⁴³⁷ Furthermore, the focus on legal organizations was presented as another deviation from the proper party line, as work in non-communist trade unions and peasant organizations was described as liquidationist.⁴³⁸ The question of whether it was truly so requires in-depth microhistorical research of Croatian communist politics on the ground, which is beyond the scope of my work.

Nonetheless, the accusations coming from the Temporary Leadership were not entirely unfounded. The KPH did constantly shy away from criticizing the HSS, fearing that any and all such criticism would weaken the communists' position.⁴³⁹ The same was the case with the legal SRN, led by Božidar Adžija and Mladen Iveković. In reality, such an attitude merely served to make the SRN indistinguishable from the rest of the opposition. Moreover, the fact that the communists mostly engaged in politics through the SRN and the trade unions further

⁴³⁴ Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 53.

⁴³⁵ Swain, *Tito*, 24.

⁴³⁶ Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 52.

⁴³⁷ Jelić, *Komunistička partija Hrvatske*, vol. 1, 225.

⁴³⁸ Jelić, *Komunistička partija Hrvatske*, vol. 1, 226-227.

⁴³⁹ Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 52-53.

vindicated the view that the KPH line was liquidationist. Like Gorkić before them,⁴⁴⁰ the KPH leadership hoped that such activity would be the best bulwark against future mass arrests of communists. Tito, on the other hand, saw the establishment of secret and independent party cells within legal organizations as the way forward, rather than the full absorption of the communist rank and file into non-communist organizations.

The profoundly entangled conflicts of interest escalated the most in Dalmatia. For their part, the Dalmatian communists led by Jelaska and supported by the Parallel Center always insisted that they worked hard to ensure the leading role of the KPH in legal organizations, in line with the proposals of the Temporary Leadership.⁴⁴¹ Moreover, the Dalmatians, like the Temporary Leadership, eventually developed the view that the SRN should contest elections independently, and not as part of the HSS.⁴⁴² This was all the more significant because Jelaska had been elected president of the SRN and thus enjoyed a high degree of authority. Tito therefore found himself in a situation where those ostensibly supported by the Temporary Leadership (the KPH leaders) were pursuing an incorrect line, while those explicitly connected to the Parallel Center were enforcing correct policies, even though the Parallel Center itself was a proponent of collaboration with the HSS. This extremely convoluted situation was a serious challenge to Tito's newly established authority. Ultimately, personal friendships and rivalries prevailed over policy considerations. Rather than turning his back on the Central Committees of the KPH and the SRN in support for Jelaska and the Dalmatians, Tito focused on bringing the KPH and SRN into line while punishing the Dalmatian communists, whose views were much closer to his own.

⁴⁴⁰ Swain, *Tito*, 19.

⁴⁴¹ RGASPI, 495-20-647, "тов. Димитрову," March 29, 1938, 4.

⁴⁴² AJ, MG 516, 2899, Vicko Jelaska, *Autobiografija*, 18.

Factions in the KPH, 1938-1939

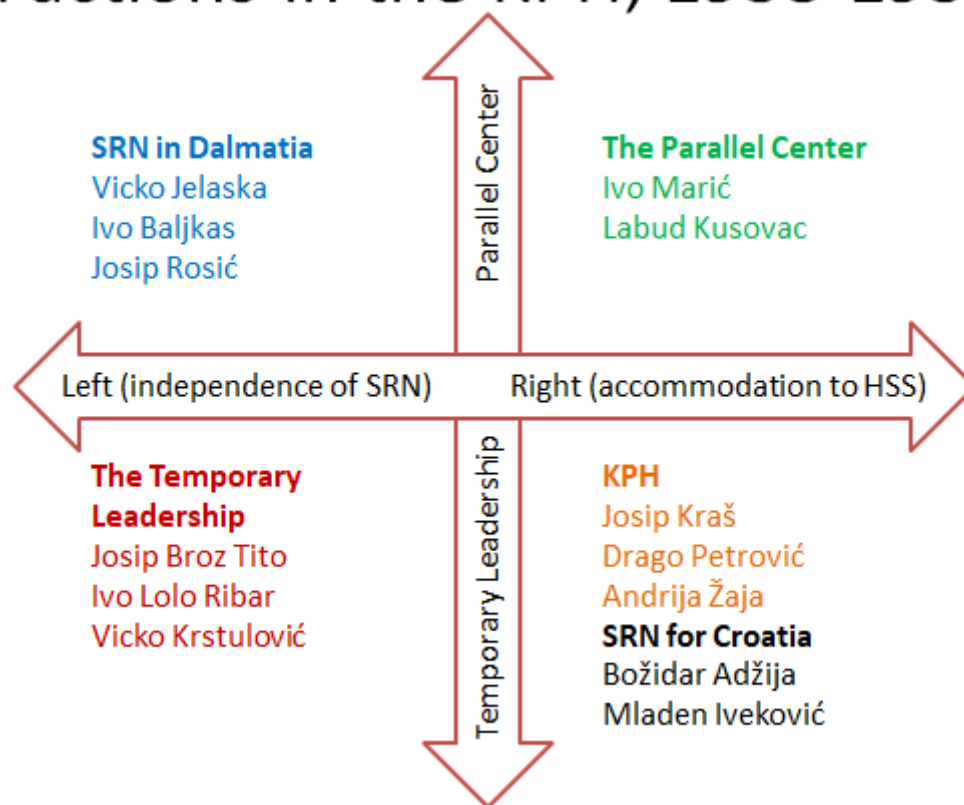


Figure 3. Factions in Croatia from the Anschluss until the expulsion of Jelaska, Marić, and Kusovac.

A special party committee was set up to investigate the case. Once again Lolo Ribar, as Tito's most trusted lieutenant, was given the task of investigating and reporting on the situation in Dalmatia.⁴⁴³ The Temporary Leadership eventually decided to punish the highest-ranking figures in the SRN (Adžija, Iveković and others), as well as three leading KPH members, Josip Kraš, Đuro Špoljarić, and Andrija Žaja.⁴⁴⁴ All were reprimanded, although none were expelled. The expulsions were reserved for the party leadership in Dalmatia, which was accused of "liquidating" party work to the point of dissolving several local communist branches, and focusing on the SRN at the expense of the KPJ.⁴⁴⁵ Jelaska, an old party member who had never been involved in any factional struggles before, would deny these allegations

⁴⁴³ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1938/34, Letter of Ilija [Lolo Ribar] to Oto [Tito], mid-November 1938.

⁴⁴⁴ Jelić, *Komunistička partija Hrvatske*, vol. 1, 226.

⁴⁴⁵ Jelić, *Komunistička partija Hrvatske*, vol. 1, 235-236.

until the end of his life. He decided that he would not go down without a fight. In 1939, Jelaska mobilized the popular support he enjoyed in Dalmatia. When the SRN expelled him on the orders of the KPH, the SRN members in Split voted against the decision, thus directly contradicting the supposed subordination of the SRN to the communist party.⁴⁴⁶ This appears to have been as far as Jelaska's alleged liquidationism went.⁴⁴⁷ Moreover, the rank and file in Split completely rejected collaboration with Tito's newly appointed head of party organization in Dalmatia, Vicko Krstulović, who was booed at all the mass meetings he attended, as the members insisted on rejecting the CC's decision to expel Jelaska.⁴⁴⁸ Although already formally expelled, Jelaska was defeated only after repeated interventions from the Central Committee of the KPJ throughout 1939 and 1940.

Even though Tito's main rivals were all marginalized by mid-1939, the change in political situation seemed to vindicate the views of the Croatian "liquidationists." The dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 raised concerns over whether Tito's leftist attitude to the popular front could push segments of the Croatian people into the collaborationist camp, as had happened in Slovakia. Even if the dispute was a matter of Croatian national sentiment, and thus was problematic from a Marxist point of view, it was now inextricably linked to the struggle against fascism. It seemed that the leftism of the KPJ had subverted this struggle. As a consequence, Tito would soon face charges of Trotskyism in Moscow, pressed by Marić's ally Petko Miletić and his supporters in the Comintern. Tito cleverly procrastinated, only arriving in Moscow in the wake of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact,

⁴⁴⁶ Kvesić, *Dalmacija u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi*, 22.

⁴⁴⁷ According to Ivan Jelić, the charges of liquidationism were also a consequence of the fact that Jelaska simply used the SRN due to the lack of a formal party organization in Dalmatia, which was a consequence of frequent mass arrests. Jelić, *Komunistička partija Hrvatske*, vol. 1, 228-230. Tito's first attack on Jelaska, in a report to the Comintern in September 1938, was not focused on liquidationism but on his "refusal to let young cadres take up leading positions," and his comrade Ivo Baljkas' alleged relations with Trotskyists. Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 92.

⁴⁴⁸ Vicko Krstulović, *Memoari jugoslavenskog revolucionera*, vol 1. (Belgrade: Mostart, 2012), 105.

when the Comintern once again took a leftward shift. The charges were eventually dismissed and his error forgiven.⁴⁴⁹

Tito's thesis on the reactionary role of the bourgeoisie in underdeveloped countries was, in fact, fundamentally Trotskyist, as this view was developed by Trotsky and the Left Opposition in relation to the Chinese Revolution in 1925.⁴⁵⁰ It was certainly in contradiction to the Comintern's vision of the popular front dominant until the tacit abandonment of the policy in 1939. However, this does not mean that Tito was himself a Trotskyist. Rather, his view on the revolution was partly in the Leninist tradition which Trotsky claimed to continue. Geoffrey Swain claims that, writing in 1940, Tito merited Stalin for "constructing socialism," but added that "the revolutionary struggle in capitalist countries is mainly led by Lenin's thought."⁴⁵¹ Therefore, Tito's policy was a hybrid of revolutionary Leninism and what Fitzpatrick has called Stalin's "revolution from above." His subsequent implementation of the revolutionary struggle, which was consistently criticized by the Comintern for being too leftist, and the establishment of the postwar regime, which was fundamentally Stalinist in spite of some minor divergences, both attest to this. When the revolution came, it took the form of a party-guided peasant revolt and an antifascist liberation war, not of mass worker takeovers of factories and formation of the soviets.

The only major political casualties of the anti-liquidationist struggle from Tito's inner circle were Croatian compromisers with the HSS. By 1940, Andrija Žaja and Drago Petrović were no longer in the party leadership, replaced by ardent leftists Rade Končar and Ivan Milutinović. The only one of the three Croatian "rightists" who kept his position at the head of the party was Josip Kraš. The Croatian case illustrates both Tito's flexible attitude to

⁴⁴⁹ Swain, *Tito*, 25.

⁴⁵⁰ Alex Callinicos, *Trotskyism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1990), 10.

⁴⁵¹ Geoffrey Swain, "Tito: The Formation of a Disloyal Bolshevik," *International Review of Social History* XXXIV (1989), 262. Swain cites a single source – a note handwritten by Tito on the margins of *Proleter* and kept in the Archive of Yugoslavia – to support his claim. However, this observation is consistent with Tito's overall ideological outlook and practical policies, and is therefore not without merit.

intraparty dissenters with whom he enjoyed close personal ties, and his irreconcilable harshness toward rivals with whom he might have shared political views while having opposing political ambitions. Furthermore, Jelaska's expulsion in spite of his immense popularity serves as an example of how democracy was extinguished in the Stalinized party, with democratic centralism now meaning that the rank and file was to obey the decisions already reached by the leadership. Finally, the KPH controversy showed a latent potential for factionalism along national lines, which would persist in the party after 1940,⁴⁵² as well as for divergences from Stalinism which would intensify after the communist takeover of power.

Tito in Moscow

When Tito arrived in Moscow on August 25, 1938, the Yugoslav community of the famous Hotel Lux, in which foreign communists resided, was reduced to four individuals, himself included. The remaining three were primarily alive because they had spent most of the Great Purge abroad, namely in Spain: Josip Kopinič as a Comintern operative, Vladimir Čopić and Janko Jovanović as commanders in the International Brigades. By August, the *Yezhovshchina* was gradually subsiding, although the situation was far from secure for anybody. Two of these three Yugoslav comrades in the Hotel Lux would be dead by the spring of 1939. Throughout his time in Moscow, Tito was close to Kopinič and Čopić, frequently meeting them for coffee and political discussions.⁴⁵³ No information exists about the relationship of this group to Jovanović, who returned to the USSR in May 1937, after having lost his right arm in battle, to work for the International Control Commission. Tito also enjoyed the support of Mita Despotović, a Yugoslav who worked for the Cadres Department of the Comintern.⁴⁵⁴ However, Tito's most significant ally was the Bulgarian communist Ivan

⁴⁵² A dated – yet still relevant – overview of factionalism along national lines, particularly in the KPH, is available in Banac's *With Stalin against Tito*. A more recent summary of the topic is Hilde Haug's *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*.

⁴⁵³ Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 89.

⁴⁵⁴ Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 107.

Karaivanov (Spinner), a close comrade of Dimitrov and Kolarov, who worked in the Cadres Department. Most authors agree that Karaivanov was Tito's vital supporter in the Comintern at the time, and allege that he had close ties to the NKVD;⁴⁵⁵ Kopinič himself shared this view.⁴⁵⁶ However, specific details of his relationship to Tito at the time are largely unknown, and neither man ever spoke about it in much detail. The two were so close that Karaivanov immigrated to Yugoslavia already in May 1945, eventually supporting Tito after the Cominform Resolution in 1948, and remained in Belgrade until his death in 1960. He was even an MP in the Yugoslav Federal Assembly and a member of the party Central Committee.

In spite of these connections, Tito's situation was far from secure. His contact in the NKVD, Ivan Kralj, was arrested just three weeks before his arrival in Moscow.⁴⁵⁷ The biggest problems came from accusations by the Red Army officer Ivan Srebrenjak, and the ECCI member, and head of the Cadres Department, Georgy Damyanov – Belov. Both were supportive of the Parallel Center. In March, Damyanov wrote that Tito had attempted to desert the Red Army during the Russian Civil War, that he was unable to account for his whereabouts for several months at the time (implying he might have worked with the Whites), alleged that he might have had contacts with the Yugoslav police, exposing his close links to Gorkić, and pointed out that his wife, Lucia Bauer, had been arrested by the NKVD.⁴⁵⁸ Srebrenjak was even harsher in his accusations. Kopinič claims he found out about these when meeting Manuilsky's deputy, Andrey Andreyev, in the summer of 1938. Srebrenjak was trying to prove Tito's spy links by pointing out that his closest associates from SKOJ, Lolo Ribar and Boris Kidrič, were both the sons of wealthy Yugoslav capitalists, that his current

⁴⁵⁵ Pirjevec, *Tito i drugovi*, vol. 1, 91; Goldstein, *Tito*, 163; Bondarev does not examine the allegation that Karaivanov worked for the NKVD, but focuses on his work in the Comintern and posits that he was the person in charge of Balkan affairs in the Cadres Department. Bondarev, *Misterija Tito*, 102.

⁴⁵⁶ Kopinič said that Karaivanov delivered his positive reports on Tito "to a special group within the NKVD." Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 95.

⁴⁵⁷ "Красль Иван Иванович," in "Списки жертв," *MEMORIAL*, accessed May 5, 2018, <http://lists.memo.ru/d18/f152.htm>.

⁴⁵⁸ Simić, *Svetac i magle*, 91.

lover Herta Haas was a Gestapo agent, and that the increase in party press circulation at a time when the Comintern was not sending any money meant he must be receiving funding from the police.⁴⁵⁹ Kopinič refuted all the accusations. However, he had to personally speak and write to Dimitrov several times before Tito, invited in June, was actually granted an entrance visa in late August.

Soon after his arrival, Tito was obliged to write reports on arrested individuals with whom he had connections to the Cadres Department. Among others, he wrote about Horvatin, Đuro Cvijić, Fleischer, Gorkić, Filipović, and the recently deceased Stjepan Cvijić,⁴⁶⁰ as well as his wife Lucia Bauer.⁴⁶¹ Predictably, these reports contained a mixture of accusation and criticism for his own lack of watchfulness, without a fundamental questioning of the decisions of the NKVD. It is highly unlikely that Tito was aware that some individuals, like Sima Marković and Sima Miljuš, were still alive, or that his reports contributed to their subsequent execution, as alleged by Pero Simić.⁴⁶² Tito was still not cleared of all suspicion, but he had the attention of the Comintern. He first appeared before the ECCI Secretariat on September 17, 1938.

The only other Yugoslav attending the meeting was Vladimir Čopić. Tito presented his lengthy report on the conditions in Yugoslavia and within the KPJ. In the weeks prior to that, he also wrote reports on his own activity since April 1936, the conditions in the trade unions, the popular front, the SRN, and the communist party itself.⁴⁶³ Presumably, the members of the ECCI familiarized themselves with these reports in the weeks preceding the meeting. The discussants were Čopić, Manuilsky, Otto Kuusinen, and Mikhail Trilisser. These discussants later constituted a special commission (with Tito instead of Čopić), which

⁴⁵⁹ Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 85-87.

⁴⁶⁰ Simić and Despot, *Tito – strogo poverljivo*, 86-90.

⁴⁶¹ Simić, *Tito*, 407-409.

⁴⁶² Simić and Despot, *Tito – strogo poverljivo*, 89.

⁴⁶³ The reports are available in Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 74-119.

was tasked with drafting a resolution based on the decisions from the meeting.⁴⁶⁴ Tito's political proposals were the same as those he had made earlier in 1938: returning the party leadership to the country, ridding the KPJ of factionalists, and building up the popular front in Yugoslavia without bourgeois parties.⁴⁶⁵ It appeared as if a new leadership, composed of Tito and Čopić as the only remaining reputable Yugoslavs in Moscow, was looming on the horizon.

Čopić and Tito were very close at the time, and all sources seem to suggest that he was seriously considered for a leading post in the KPJ (although his earlier factionalism was probably an obstacle to him being appointed general secretary). Even before Čopić's arrival in Moscow, in April 1938, Tito recommended him as the only one of two intellectuals who should be considered for one of the leading positions in the KPJ (the other being Maslarić).⁴⁶⁶ Consolidation of the Yugoslav party was most likely one of the main reasons for his recall from Spain. His demeanor in the summer of 1938 testifies that he was aware of his candidacy for a leading position in the KPJ. At the Barcelona Conference of Yugoslav volunteers, he took a "centrist" position, criticizing both sides of the conflict, in a manner typical of aspiring party leaders during Stalinism. He took the same attitude during his brief stay in Paris, where he met both Čolaković and Kusovac in an attempt to make sense of the dispute between the Temporary Leadership and the Parallel Center.⁴⁶⁷ It does not seem that he was interested in taking sides in Paris, but he clearly aligned with Tito as soon as he reached Moscow.

Just as it seemed that the issue of the KPJ leadership was nearing its resolution, Tito and Čopić were left to wait again. Instead of receiving a response on the fate of their party, they were given the rather menial task of translating Stalin's book *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course* into Serbo-Croatian. The third translator was

⁴⁶⁴ RGASPI, 495-18-1112, "Protokoll (A) Nr. 339 der Sitzung des Sekretariats des EKKI vom 17.9.38."

⁴⁶⁵ Goldstein, *Tito*, 162.

⁴⁶⁶ Očak, *Vojnik revolucije*, 350.

⁴⁶⁷ Očak, *Vojnik revolucije*, 355.

most likely Janko Jovanović.⁴⁶⁸ During this time, Tito wrote to Dimitrov twice, claiming that the impending December elections in Yugoslavia meant they should meet as soon as possible, and that he should leave the Soviet Union.⁴⁶⁹ He received no reply. According to Kopinič, he even tried to convince Dimitrov to take Čopić under his protection in mid-October, after hearing that Čopić was facing accusations from the NKVD.⁴⁷⁰ If this plea existed, it also went unanswered. Exactly two months after his return to Moscow, on November 3, 1938, Čopić was arrested by the NKVD in the Hotel Lux, together with Jovanović. A participant of the October Revolution, a founder and one-time leader of the KPJ, and the former commander of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Vladimir Čopić was shot half a year later.⁴⁷¹

It remains unclear why Tito was the only one of the three who was not taken away by the NKVD. Kopinič says that he only narrowly escaped arrest, but does not share anything beyond that.⁴⁷² A couple of weeks later, Trilisser – who was part of the special commission for Yugoslavia and had links with the NKVD – was also arrested, just two days before Yezhov himself.⁴⁷³ At this point, Tito's last remaining allies in Moscow were Kopinič and Karaivanov. Despite claims to the contrary by many historians, Dimitrov does not seem to have been particularly sympathetic to Tito or the KPJ in general. He did, however, appoint Kolarov to replace Trilisser,⁴⁷⁴ and Kolarov had a much more favorable view of Tito than the rest of the commission. By the end of December, Kolarov was insisting that the Temporary

⁴⁶⁸ Ridley, *Tito*, 139. Several authors, including those who edited Tito's collected works, say that the third translator was Horvatin, which is impossible because he had been dead for over half a year by this point. The fact that it was actually Jovanović is corroborated by William J. Chase, since a report printed in his book mentions Jovanović as an employee of the International Publishing House. Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates?*, 354.

⁴⁶⁹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 124, 130.

⁴⁷⁰ Venceslav Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: Rad, 1983), 97-98. Allegedly, after Čopić was arrested, Tito tearfully protested in the company of Kopinič. Kopinič is a deeply unreliable narrator who frequently attempted to embellish his own role in events, and it is not too far-fetched that he did the same for his friend and comrade. As such, this claim should be taken with a grain of salt, as the relationship between Tito and those executed requires further research.

⁴⁷¹ “Чопыч-Сенько Владимир Иванович,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d36/f66.htm>.

⁴⁷² Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 93.

⁴⁷³ Goldstein, *Tito*, 165.

⁴⁷⁴ Goldstein, *Tito*, 166.

Leadership should be recognized as the new ruling body of the KPJ, granted the financial funds they requested, and given full control over the party newspaper.⁴⁷⁵

Dimitrov was still unconvinced. On December 30, he met Tito in the presence of Damyanov and Stela Blagoeva.⁴⁷⁶ Tito repeated the need to return the leadership to the country, reported on the work of the SRN, and tried to discredit the Parallel Center. Dimitrov called both him and Marić factionalists, proclaimed his work to be “worthless,” and stated that his leadership was considered only temporary by the ECCI. He also accentuated the need for communists to take a leading role in legal organizations as the basis of the popular front.⁴⁷⁷ Tito was explicitly told that the ECCI did not trust him, and that he was not to present himself as the secretary of the KPJ.⁴⁷⁸ A decision about the leadership was to be reached by a party “consultation” in the country.⁴⁷⁹ However, the resolution on party work that Tito penned with Kolarov was accepted by the ECCI on January 5, 1939.⁴⁸⁰ Two days later, Manuilsky wrote to Dimitrov insisting on Tito’s removal, due to his involvement in the failed mission of sending Yugoslav volunteers to Spain in the spring of 1937.⁴⁸¹ This once again slowed down the procedure, and it took two more weeks for Tito to once again be granted a permit to leave the Soviet Union and continue sorting out party affairs.

Before returning to Yugoslavia, Tito spent a couple of days in Paris. He informed Marić and Kusovac that they did not have a mandate from the Comintern.⁴⁸² He then met with Srebrenjak, their intelligence contact, and Raymond Guyot, a member of the PCF central committee,⁴⁸³ presumably to give them the same information. On March 15, the Temporary

⁴⁷⁵ Pirjevec, *Tito i drugovi*, vol. 1, 94.

⁴⁷⁶ Simić, *Tito: Svetac i magle*, 95. Stela Blagoeva, a worker in the ECCI apparatus, was the daughter of the founder of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Dimitar Blagoev.

⁴⁷⁷ Simić, *Tito: Svetac i magle*, 97-98.

⁴⁷⁸ Simić, *Tito: Svetac i magle*, 98.

⁴⁷⁹ Simić, *Tito: Svetac i magle*, 99.

⁴⁸⁰ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 229.

⁴⁸¹ Simić and Despot, *Tito – strogo poverljivo*, 93. Manuilsky, formerly close to Trotsky and a patron of Gorkić, was probably excessively vigilant due to fears for his own life.

⁴⁸² Goldstein, *Tito*, 169.

⁴⁸³ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 329.

Leadership met for the first time in the Slovene town of Bohinjska Bistrica. There, they heard Tito's report on the crisis in the party and the instructions of the Comintern. They expelled all the "factionalists" (including Kusovac, Marić, and Miletić), punished the Croatian party leadership for liquidationism, and agreed on a detailed plan for the reorganization of the national, provincial and local branches of the KPJ.⁴⁸⁴ Notably, the minutes from the meeting explicitly refer to the group as the Temporary Leadership, and acknowledge that the Yugoslav question in the Comintern had not been formally resolved. The promised "party consultation" took place on June 9 and 10, in a village outside of Ljubljana, and the Temporary Leadership was now formally confirmed as the Central Committee of the KPJ.⁴⁸⁵ The newly appointed "overseer" of the KPJ, Vladimir Poptomov (Gromov), submitted a favorable report to the ECCI, saying that Tito had revived the work of the party in Yugoslavia.⁴⁸⁶

Given that the first, and subsequently most controversial, decision of the Temporary Leadership in March was to expel party members who had been arrested in the USSR, I would like to briefly reflect on that issue as well. Some authors, most notably Pero Simić and Zvonimir Despot, allege that those arrested communists who were still alive at the time of their expulsion were shot on the orders of the Temporary Leadership.⁴⁸⁷ Eleven prominent Yugoslav communists were shot in Moscow one month after the Temporary Leadership expelled them from the KPJ, on April 19, 1939. Of those individuals already mentioned, the executed were Vladimir Čopić,⁴⁸⁸ Janko Jovanović,⁴⁸⁹ Sima Marković,⁴⁹⁰ Kosta Novaković,⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁴ Simić and Despot, *Tito – strogo poverljivo*, 95-98.

⁴⁸⁵ Goldstein, *Tito*, 172.

⁴⁸⁶ Another Bulgarian communist working in the Cadres Department, Poptomov later became the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and a staunch opponent of Tito after 1948. RGASPI, 495-18-1306a, Громов, "Информация о работе КП Югославии за последние месяцы по материалам полученным из страны," June 4, 1939, 1.

⁴⁸⁷ Simić and Despot, *Tito – strogo poverljivo*, 95-96.

⁴⁸⁸ "Чопыч-Сенько Владимир Иванович," in "Списки жертв," *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d36/f66.htm>.

⁴⁸⁹ "Дреновский Душан Павлович," in "Списки жертв," *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d11/f319.htm>.

⁴⁹⁰ "Маркович Сима Милашевич," in "Списки жертв," *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d21/f458.htm>.

Simo Miljuš,⁴⁹² Jovan Martinović-Mališić,⁴⁹³ and Radomir Vujović.⁴⁹⁴ The additional four murdered Yugoslavs were no less important: Vilim Horvaj⁴⁹⁵ was a prominent former leader of the SKOJ and the Young Communist International, as well as the head of the Yugoslav section of the International Lenin School; Akif Šeremet⁴⁹⁶ was another former leader of SKOJ and a Comintern worker, who was exiled for Trotskyism in 1932; Robert Valdgoni⁴⁹⁷ was a prominent Yugoslav veteran of the Russian Civil War; and Ernest Ambruš – Richter⁴⁹⁸ was a Slovene communist who organized Yugoslav political émigrés in France and Czechoslovakia.

It is absurd to presume that a temporary leadership of a communist party, which the Comintern barely trusted enough to give a provisional mandate, enjoyed the necessary authority to order the NKVD to execute somebody. The most likely explanation is that the Temporary Leadership possessed no exact information about the fate of these individuals,⁴⁹⁹ although they could have presumed that they were, at best, sent to a gulag. The most likely explanation is that these reputable Yugoslav communists were shot following a joint decision of the VKP(b) Politburo, the NKVD, and the state prosecutor to execute 198 members of a “counterrevolutionary right-Trotskyist conspiratorial organization” on April 9, 1939.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹¹ “Драгачевац Петр Петрович,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d11/f308.htm>.

⁴⁹² “Кубурич Илья Георгиевич,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d18/f349.htm>.

⁴⁹³ “Мартьянович-Малишич Иван Павлович,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d22/f2.htm>.

⁴⁹⁴ “Лихт Франц Дмитриевич,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d20/f252.htm>.

⁴⁹⁵ “Белич Милан,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d4/f45.htm>.

⁴⁹⁶ “Бергер Карл Иосифович,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d4/f183.htm>.

⁴⁹⁷ “Булыгин Алексей Михайлович,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d5/f401.htm>.

⁴⁹⁸ “Рихтер Амбруц-Эрнест,” in “Списки жертв,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/d28/f144.htm>.

⁴⁹⁹ A good example of the prevalent lack of information is the aforementioned report on Janko Jovanović discovered by William J. Chase (see note 468). This report was drawn up at the request of Dimitrov in February 1941 in order to release Jovanović from the gulag. Even Dimitrov, as the general secretary of the Comintern, was completely unaware of the fact that Jovanović had already been dead for two years when his request was made.

⁵⁰⁰ S.A. Melchin, A.S. Stepanov, V.N. Yakushev, “Сталинские списки - введение,” *MEMORIAL*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://stalin.memo.ru/images/intro.htm>.

However, the exact reasons for their execution, as well as the question of why it was ordered by the highest organs of the Soviet state – including individuals such as Stalin, Beria, and Vyshinsky – remain a mystery. Even if the Temporary Leadership did not cause these people’s deaths, there is little reason to suspect that any of the leading communists ever doubted that those arrested in the USSR were indeed guilty.⁵⁰¹ Nevertheless, an interesting incident involving Tito is worth mentioning. In June 1939, Miroslav Krleža, a leading communist writer who was at the time being denounced as a Trotskyist for his opposition to the Purge, secretly met with Tito, as the two had been close friends for over a decade. He inquired about “our Siberian graves,” as many of the executed were his close friends. According to Krleža, Tito admitted that these executions were indeed “a problem,” but added that the threat of fascism was a much bigger problem, and therefore the executions should not be critically discussed at this point.⁵⁰²

Miletić in Moscow

The Parallel Center was not lying idle during Tito’s takeover of the party. During the course of 1939, Kusovac and Marić returned to Paris, while Miletić was released from prison and headed to Moscow. It appears that, during this time, Kusovac and Marić had become aware of the fact that their own leadership bid would come to naught, so they threw their weight behind Miletić as their long-time associate, and the most reputable opponent of Tito. The expulsions did not discourage them or their supporters, who believed now more than ever that a showdown with the usurpers from the Temporary Leadership was fundamental to the survival of the party. Mirko Marković, one of the most prominent Returnees in Spain, who was in Havana with his friend Ernest Hemingway at the time, wrote to Hudomalj in February 1939. He expressed his dismay that the party had been taken over by “Trotskyists” and “other

⁵⁰¹ Đilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, 271-272, 303.

⁵⁰² Goldstein, *Tito*, 176.

anti-party shiteheads,” and explicitly told Hudomalj that he considered his letters to be official party letters.⁵⁰³ Moreover, he informed Hudomalj that he was keeping in touch with Tito and that he could effectively act as a double agent, as Tito had trust in him.⁵⁰⁴

Their main source of information remained Golubić. He appears to have realized that the battle was lost and set about attempting to mitigate the damage. In May, he informed Kristina Kusovac of the victory of the Temporary Leadership, adding that he tried to save at least her and Labud from expulsion. In his view, the organizations in the country kept running throughout the period, and Tito’s connections at the local level ensured his victory in the factional struggle.⁵⁰⁵ Most of them were not discouraged, although they were becoming increasingly desperate. Kristina and Labud Kusovac insisted several times that all supporters of the Parallel Center should personally petition Dimitrov, Thorez, and Guyot, informing them of the situation in the Yugoslav party.⁵⁰⁶ While the contents of these letters remain unknown, the very choice of figures they wrote to is quite telling. They addressed the leading members of the ECCI, rather than the ICC, which was in charge of the issue of expelled party cadres. This suggests that their goal was still not merely to overturn their expulsions, but to generate a fundamental change of party leadership. Marić later claimed that he was still treated as a “temporary representative” of the KPJ by the French comrades.⁵⁰⁷

The primary sources corroborate this claim, although it was becoming increasingly obvious that the French comrades were turning away from the Parallel Center. The PCF was forced to accept Kuhar as the party representative in Paris after the ECCI informed them that Tito had been given a mandate from the Comintern.⁵⁰⁸ The Temporary Leadership used the

⁵⁰³ AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/4, Letter of Marković to Hudomalj, February 18, 1939.

⁵⁰⁴ AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/4, Letter of Marković to Hudomalj, February 18, 1939.

⁵⁰⁵ AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/8, Letter of Kristina Kusovac to Hudomalj, May 17, 1939, 2.

⁵⁰⁶ AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/8, Letter of Kristina Kusovac to Hudomalj, May 17, 1939, 1; AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/9, Letter of Labud Kusovac to Hudomalj, May 29, 1939, 2.

⁵⁰⁷ AJ, 516 MG, Box 58, 2231/2, “Razgovor sa drugom Ivom Marićem,” 53.

⁵⁰⁸ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 230. The Parallel Center soon found out, as their one-time supporter André Heussler began sending all Yugoslavs in Paris to Kuhar. Kuhar was probably the most hated member of the

opportunity to raise the issue of the Parallel Center's suspicious use of party funds, something that the Comintern had been aware of for over a year. A special commission was set up, concluding that Marić and Kusovac were unable to account for most of the money spent by the Yugoslav Committee for Aid to Republican Spain between October 1937 and September 1938.⁵⁰⁹

Nevertheless, certain parts of the PCF still trusted the Parallel Center. As late as August of 1939, Tréand refused to meet Tito.⁵¹⁰ At the same time, Marić was still the de facto representative of Yugoslavs in France. In order to put an end to this, the new Central Committee applied the same strategy that was successfully implemented in the Mitrovica prison a year and a half earlier: they tried to win over the key supporters of the Parallel Center. The most serious and successful attempt at "conversion" concerned Hudomalj; as a friend and close associate of Kuhar since the early 1930s,⁵¹¹ he was the logical choice. By the summer of 1939, Tito was openly courting him. In March, he had already made Hudomalj the editor of the Slovenian émigrés' newspaper in France, and in July, he suggested that Hudomalj replace Marić as the organizer of Yugoslavs in France.⁵¹² The Central Committee thus managed to kill two birds with one stone: a key supporter of the Parallel Center was won over, while the PCF was swayed by the nomination of a candidate whom they trusted much more than anybody from Tito's circle. The Parallel Center was dismayed, but powerless, as

Temporary Leadership, as Marić had originally hoped to sway him to their side, but ultimately failed. In their internal correspondence, Kuhar was referred to as "Korošec," a pejorative nickname which referred to the leader of the clerical-conservative Slovene People's Party leader, Anton Korošec. Kuhar's brother Alojzj was a Catholic priest and a member of Korošec's party, which caused the Parallel Center to both ridicule and suspect Kuhar. AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/5, Letter of Kristina Kusovac to Hudomalj, April 13, 1939, 1.

⁵⁰⁹ AJ, 790/1 KI, 1939/14, "Zapisnik o pregledu blagajne Nac. komiteta za pomoć Rep. Španiji," March 10, 1939.

⁵¹⁰ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 335.

⁵¹¹ Ervin Dolenc, "Kuharjeva skupina v vodstvu Komunistične partije Jugoslavije," in *Prežihov Voranc – Lovro Kuhar: pisatelj, politik, patriot*, ed. Aleš Gabrič (Ljubljana and Vienna: Inštitut za novejšo and Slovenski znanstveni inštitut, 2010), 80.

⁵¹² Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 61.

Hudomalj informed them of his conviction that the Temporary Leadership obviously had a mandate from the Comintern, and that this must be respected.⁵¹³

Things were not much better in Yugoslavia. Jelaska was still fighting, but Miletić was defeated in Sremska Mitrovica. The new Prison Committee, elected in January 1939, was composed entirely of Tito's prominent supporters.⁵¹⁴ Upon his release in June 1939, Miletić met with Lolo Ribar, as he had demanded to meet someone from the newly formed leadership.⁵¹⁵ However, Ribar was the worst possible choice. A son of a bourgeois and an intellectual, he had no chance of convincing Miletić that he was wrong about the new Central Committee. Therefore, this last-ditch attempt to pacify him was either clumsily botched or intentionally sabotaged. Miletić was now determined to do something which Marić and Kusovac had both failed to do: get to Moscow. He succeeded. Traveling via Bulgaria and Istanbul, he arrived on September 25, 1939. Again, the support of Bulgarians was instrumental: according to Kopinič, Damyanov personally arranged Miletić's arrival, still hoping that he would replace Tito as general secretary.⁵¹⁶ It is highly likely that he also enjoyed the support of Anton Ivanov. Ivanov had already worked with the Parallel Center against Tito in the spring of 1938, and he was a member of the Central Committee of the International Red Aid, which gave him access to the funds necessary to ensure the emigration of a former political prisoner like Miletić.

Tito had been in Moscow since September 2, and Miletić therefore began his offensive as soon as he arrived. Luckily for Tito, his prior call for the overthrow of the royal government was no longer seen as an act of ultra-leftism, given that the Comintern had once

⁵¹³ For the correspondence between Kusovac and Hudomalj, see AJ, 507 CK KPJ – France, I/9-I/13.

⁵¹⁴ It was led by Stanko Paunović, Ivan Maček, Mihael Servo, Paško Romac, and Bane Andrejev. They were, respectively, a Serb, a Slovene, a German, a Croat, and a Macedonian. This committee was an overt way to affirm the pro-Yugoslav and popular frontist orientation, as opposed to the anti-Yugoslav ultra-leftism of the Wahhabis. Pijade was not elected, as he had only three more months left in prison. AJ, 513 Moša Pijade, Box, 17, III-2/56, "Kaznionički komitet izabran u Mitrovici posle likvidacije frakcije Petka Miletića," January 1939.

⁵¹⁵ Kovačević, "Petko Miletić," 64.

⁵¹⁶ Cenčić, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. 1, 111.

again turned to the left after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. He seemed, therefore, to have avoided the gravest accusation of all: that of Trotskyism. However, his troubles were not over yet. Vladimir Poptomov was gathering information from both sides of the factional conflict, and accusations against the Temporary Leadership and its supporters continued to pour in.⁵¹⁷ The most controversial case concerns Tito's relationship with Dragan Miler-Ozren, a Yugoslav of Czech origin who, from 1938, ran the German section of the International Publishing House, a post to which he was appointed after almost all of his German colleagues were arrested and shot.⁵¹⁸ Several authors allege that he accused Tito of inserting "Trotskyist formulations" into the Serbo-Croat translation of Stalin's *Short Course*.⁵¹⁹ On the other hand, Ozren's wife, Ida Radvolina, insisted that he did not attack Tito, but that Tito attacked Ozren, falsely believing him to have been involved in the factional struggles of the 1920s.⁵²⁰ The only documents thus far discovered in the Archive of the Comintern confirm that Ozren did criticize grammatical errors in the translation, but mention nothing of allegations of Trotskyism, or of Tito personally.⁵²¹ Jože Pirjevec claims that the accusations actually came from the German communists, who wanted to demonstrate their vigilance to the Cadres

⁵¹⁷ RGASPI, 495-11-360, Громов, "В Отдел кадров ИККИ," April 14, 1939.

⁵¹⁸ Mary M. Leder, *My Life in Stalinist Russia: An American Woman Looks Back* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 147. Dragan Ozren (1908–1951) was one of the most fascinating forgotten figures in Yugoslav communism. Born Dragan Miler in Travnik to a mixed Czech-Croat family and raised in Osijek, he became a Marxist while attending a Jesuit Lyceum. He studied architecture in Prague, where he was involved with the Czechoslovak avantgarde and the communist youth. He had to leave Prague because of his communist activity, moving first to Berlin and then to Moscow in 1931, where he took the name Dragan Antonovich Ozren. Due to his extensive linguistic knowledge (he spoke eight languages by this time), he began working for the Comintern's International Publishing House. During this period, he befriended many leading leftist intellectuals, such as György Lukács, André Breton, Julius Fučík, Mikhail Sholokhov, and Sergey Tretyakov. He worked as a propagandist during the Spanish Civil War and World War II. In 1943, Ozren finally joined the Red Army, becoming a part of the First Yugoslav Brigade. According to the account of his wife, despite being a Soviet citizen, he was arrested by the Yugoslav secret police and interrogated for several months after the liberation of Belgrade. However, other sources claim that Tito personally saved him from interrogations for anti-party activity. After his release, he worked in publishing again, collaborating with leading Yugoslav intellectuals such as Ivo Andrić, Desanka Maksimović, Oskar Davičo, and Moša Pijade. Arrested again in August 1948, Ozren was sent to the Goli otok prison camp, where he died in 1951.

⁵¹⁹ Pirjevec, *Tito i drugovi*, vol. 1, 93; Goldstein, *Tito*, 364.

⁵²⁰ Ida Markovna Radvoljina, *Dugačko pismo koje nije stiglo do primaoca* (Sremski Karlovci and Novi Sad: Izdavačka knjižarnica Zorana Stojanovića, 2011), 277-278.

⁵²¹ RGASPI, 495-18-1311, "Генеральному секретарю ИККИ тов. Г.М.Димитрову. Секретарю ИККИ тов. Д.З.Мануильскому," December 22, 1939, 6.

Department.⁵²² However, the most probable theory comes from Tito's collected works, according to which the supporters of Miletić fabricated these charges.⁵²³ The most likely explanation regarding Ozren is that his benign report was simply used for much more menacing purposes than its author had intended. Radvolina's claim of Tito's unprovoked attacks on her husband is not implausible, although it does not fit into the general pattern of Tito's known actions at the time.

Either way, the charges against Tito were dismissed. The head of the ICC, Wilhelm Florin, was allegedly sympathetic to Tito and decided to help him.⁵²⁴ Aside from Florin, Tito enjoyed the continued support of Karaivanov, Kopinič and Despotović, as well as Dimitrov,⁵²⁵ who had finally become more sympathetic to him. In April 1939, Despotović was employed as a "reserve" in the Pieck Secretariat,⁵²⁶ the first Yugoslav to work there since the arrest of Horvatin in February 1938. Although the Bulgarians remained dominant in the Balkan Section, this was a sign of a gradual improvement of the stature of the KPJ, and particularly of Tito's allies, in the Comintern. Moreover, he was given room to defend his more controversial policies, such as the choice of cadres, and he made a compelling case in support of the appointment of Ribar as the secretary of SKOJ.⁵²⁷ Tito presented his report on the party to the ECCI on October 23, 1939. It was received favorably,⁵²⁸ and Tito was by now clearly treated as the de facto leader of the KPJ.

Encouraged by this development, Tito set out to discredit his final opponent. Given Miletić's ultra-leftism and tendency to surround himself with suspicious characters, this task was not too difficult. Aside from Antun Franović, who had betrayed the Dalmatian party organization to the police in 1937, Miletić also collaborated with Ljudevit Trilnik, a technical

⁵²² Pirjevec, *Tito i drugovi*, vol. 1, 93.

⁵²³ Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela*, ed. Pero Damjanović, vol. 5 (Belgrade: Komunist, 1981), 264.

⁵²⁴ Goldstein, *Tito*, 179.

⁵²⁵ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 5, 264.

⁵²⁶ RGASPI, 495-18-1275, "Изменение в штатном расписании на 14-е апреля."

⁵²⁷ Petričević, *Lolo*, 122.

⁵²⁸ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 265.

university student from Prague, who became a police informant and might have been the main culprit for the failed attempt to send volunteers to Spain in the spring of 1937.⁵²⁹ Moreover, Tito pointed out that, upon his release, Miletić was allegedly allowed to travel freely through Yugoslavia, something that was unthinkable for released communists.⁵³⁰ Before his arrival in Moscow, he is said to have visited several party organizations in Montenegro, Kosovo, and Macedonia, gathering support against the new Central Committee. Most damningly, however, Tito got a hold of the interrogation documents from 1932, which proved that – despite claims of heroism – Miletić had actually confessed to many of the accusations against him, revealing a great deal about the inner workings of the party. The documents were provided through Đilas by Miletić’s lawyer Bora Prodanović, whom Miletić angered by accusing him of being a police spy. Đilas would later claim that Miletić did not give away the real identity of any of his comrades, and that much of what he confessed was merely what the police already had proof of.⁵³¹

Although Đilas’ claim appears to have been correct, the interrogation file was only one aspect of Miletić’s work that aroused suspicion. Kopinič translated Miletić’s earlier resolution of the Prison Committee, thus demonstrating a series of ultra-left errors, such as continued cooperation with Croatian and Macedonian separatists in prison, calling the methods of the Yugoslav regime “fascist,” and identifying all those willing to take a more conciliatory attitude towards the prison authorities as Trotskyists.⁵³² Miletić attempted to counter these accusations. Two years prior, Béla Kun attempted to clear himself of the charges against him in an equally stubborn way. Rather than accepting the new line of the Comintern and engaging in self-criticism, his defense was to stick to ultra-leftism and sabotaging of the party

⁵²⁹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 4, 257, 374.

⁵³⁰ Simić, *Tito: Svetac i magle*, 103.

⁵³¹ Đilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, 179. Jelena Kovačević corroborated this claim by examining the court records and concluding that every single one of over fifty communists implicated in the Miletić case was subsequently cleared of all charges due to a lack of evidence. Kovačević, “Petko Miletić,” 67.

⁵³² RGASPI, 495-11-343, Перевод с сербского Вокшин, “Из тюрмы Митровицы, Резолюция общего собрания коллектива,” January 16, 1940, 3-4.

line.⁵³³ Both before and during that process, he collided with many of his fellow comrades, alienating them and strengthening their belief that he might be intentionally sabotaging the Comintern in the service of a foreign power. Miletić essentially did the same. Even his forty-page defense letter written to the ECCI represented an affirmation of the “class against class” policy, painting any cooperation with the non-communist left as “anti-communist,” and declaring that the Central Committee of the KPJ was full of traitors.⁵³⁴ Such recklessness naturally appeared to be another act of sabotage, giving weight to the otherwise flimsy allegations of treason presented by the Temporary Leadership and its supporters. Miletić was arrested on January 5, 1940, before even getting a chance to personally present his grievances to the ECCI. In September of that year, he was sentenced to eight years in the gulag, where he died on January 27, 1943.⁵³⁵

At the time of Miletić’s arrest, Tito had been gone from Moscow for over a month. He was in Istanbul, where he was held up due to visa issues. He finally arrived in Yugoslavia on March 15, 1940,⁵³⁶ and began preparations for a party congress which was intended to formally confirm his primacy over the KPJ. Although he did not receive permission from the Comintern to hold a party congress due to safety concerns, he organized the Fifth Land Conference in October 1940, in a house on the outskirts of Zagreb, found for him by Kopinič. The 110-strong conference was a party congress in all but name. It was much bigger than the Fourth Congress, organized in 1928, and it confirmed the appointment of Tito as general secretary of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

Conclusions

There were two major reasons for Tito’s success in the final stages of the struggle. The first concerns his proper understanding of the Comintern line. Both the Parallel Center and

⁵³³ Chase, “Microhistory and Mass Repression,” 472.

⁵³⁴ Kovačević, “Petko Miletić,” 69.

⁵³⁵ Kovačević, “Petko Miletić,” 69.

⁵³⁶ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 5, 268.

Miletić were fixated on their personal rivalries, and essentially engaged in a witch hunt against everybody who they perceived as supporters of their rivals. Tito, on the other hand, largely avoided the issue, proceeding with business as usual, and proposing a very clear set of policies. In particular, his success at returning the party leadership to the country, and his break with Gorkić's liquidationist policies, coincided with what the Comintern expected. Even when he disobeyed the Comintern line by going too far in his leftism, he saved himself through what Swain has called "the tried tactic of disingenuity and procrastination."⁵³⁷ Miletić, on the other hand, was not able to understand when he was going too far. When Tito's actions caused suspicion in the Comintern, he proceeded with caution; when Miletić's work raised eyebrows, he persisted to his own detriment. Even if Tito had been snatched by the NKVD during his stay in Moscow as Horvatin had (which almost happened in November 1938), somebody with views similar to Tito's would have been more likely to take over than Miletić. The Comintern required "Bolshevization" as understood in the context of the Popular Front period, not in the form of Miletić's outdated sectarianism.

The second major reason was Tito's proactive approach to internal party affairs. He prevailed because he showed more initiative, demonstrating that the communist parties were not expected to just blindly wait for orders. There has been a general tendency to reduce the KPJ to a mere puppet of the Comintern in the interwar period. However, Tito's success shows that agency was both required and helpful for an ambitious party cadre like himself. Marić, and particularly Kusovac, proved to be much more skilled when it came to mobilizing the transnational networks of power and influence within the Comintern: they had supporters on the ECCI, in the ICC, in the Cadres Department, in Soviet military intelligence, in the NKVD, and in the French, Spanish, and Bulgarian communist parties. However, they never presented

⁵³⁷ Swain, *Tito*, 25.

a viable vision of the post-Gorkić KPJ. They knew that Gorkić was a problem, but they lacked a solution. The Comintern noticed this, and it effectively disarmed Tito's opponents.

The most obvious example of the crucial distinctions between Tito and his opponents is the Croatian question. Largely caused by the crisis of legitimacy experienced by the Temporary Leadership, this was the most serious spillover of the factional struggle into Yugoslavia and among the party rank and file, as Tito's faithful supporters abandoned him to pursue a different line. A more skilled politician would have used this to undermine Tito, but it appears that Marić and Kusovac did not even try. They and Miletić were masterful at obstructing Tito's attempts to enforce a unified party line, but they failed to take advantage of disunity once it appeared. Instead of being the beginning of the end of Tito's leadership bid, the Croatian question showcased two important traits of his leadership style. The first was the affirmation of his leftism: giving any primacy to the Croatian question over the Yugoslav question was seen as a concession to the bourgeoisie. This neutralized both Serbian hegemonistic nationalism and Croatian separatist nationalism through the establishment of a consistently pro-Yugoslav line and an insistence on the political independence of the working class from the bourgeois opposition. The second trait was Tito's adaptability when dealing with intraparty dissenters whose personal favor he enjoyed, in direct contrast to the severe approach he took against ambitious rivals, even if he shared their political positions. Jelaska was an ally on the party left, but his ties to Marić made it impossible to integrate him into the new leadership. Kraš, on the other hand, was a moderate who would have worked better with Gorkić than with Tito, but personal loyalty ensured his ascent to the Politburo. These traits made him both a consistent internationalist and the logical candidate for a general secretary of a Stalinist party.

Conclusion: Tito Triumphant

*“You, who will emerge from the flood
In which we have perished
Remember also
When you speak of our weaknesses
The black times
You have escaped.”*

Bertolt Brecht, “To Those Who Follow in Our Wake”⁵³⁸

In his closing speech to the Fifth Land Conference, Tito vowed to hold the next one “in a country free from both foreign invaders and capitalists.”⁵³⁹ While this might have seemed overly optimistic to the outside observer, it was not at all so to the communists, who saw in the future not only the final showdown but also, in the words of Eric Hobsbawm, a victory “already inscribed in the text of the history books of the future.”⁵⁴⁰ The next “conference,” however, took place at a time that those present in the suburban house in Zagreb in October 1940 could not even have dreamed of. It was July 1948, and it was the Fifth Congress of the KPJ, the first in twenty years. At this point, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was no more, and the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, ruled by the communists and with a command economy, took its place. This was well within a 1930s communist’s horizon of expectations. What nobody could have predicted was that this Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia would be, at the time of its ruling party’s Fifth Congress, completely cut off from the rest of the socialist world. Less than a month before, the Communist Information Bureau, the de facto successor to the dissolved Communist International, expelled the KPJ. The story of the factional struggle in the KPJ during the Great Purge is the prehistory of the causes of this expulsion.

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia was, by and large, a party on the left of the international communist movement. Tito’s closing sentence at the Fifth Land Conference is

⁵³⁸ Quoted in Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 139.

⁵³⁹ Goldstein, *Tito*, 187.

⁵⁴⁰ Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 73.

an excellent illustration of this, and it would have rang true for most of his comrades even before the Comintern's change of policy in 1939. The Yugoslavs were not hoping merely to fight fascism; they wanted to use the war to bring about a socialist revolution. Generally speaking, leftism resonated well in Yugoslavia. Its vast socioeconomic and national inequalities resulted in mass discontent, and a prevalent desire for systemic change. By the late 1930s, the persistence of Yugoslavia's problems made the most radical solutions – those of the communists – also seem to be the most viable. This leftism was one of the causes of the Yugoslav communists' revolutionary radicalism in 1945, which put Yugoslavia on a collision course with the Soviet Union.

In general, Stalin was more fearful of the left than of the right in the communist movement, because of both their adventurist tendencies and their potential ideological proximity to Trotskyism. This attitude was reflected in the Comintern of the popular front era. Ironically, it was an act of adventurism, the failure of the Spanish expedition in the spring of 1937, which sealed the fate of the KPJ's quintessential rightist leader, Milan Gorkić. His political views, so despised by his comrades on the left, were perfect for the era of the popular front, and truly helped rejuvenate the party from 1932. However, he went too far, discrediting the KPJ both in the country and in the Comintern with his fundamentally liquidationist policies. Following his fall, there was no viable middle-of-the-road candidate for general secretary. The only remaining rightism within the KPJ was the remnant of the moderate wing of Serbian social democracy, represented by Sima Marković. However, he was already completely politically marginalized by the time of his forced emigration to Moscow in 1935. The other rightists surrounding him lacked both the reputation and the initiative required to significantly influence the party in the late 1930s.

Of all the leftists, Josip Broz Tito eventually managed to persuade the Comintern that he was the most viable candidate. Interestingly, he was still the least leftist of all the potential leadership candidates. He carefully balanced moderation and radicalism, and survived the

various U-turns of popular front policy between 1936 and 1939. Geoffrey Swain goes so far as to characterize him as a “disloyal Bolshevik,”⁵⁴¹ arguing that his distinction between Lenin and Stalin already indicated a critical distance from the latter.⁵⁴² Although Swain’s general argument is very convincing, and he presents several instances of Tito disobeying the Comintern to support his view, I argue that this assertion of Tito’s alleged disloyalty is somewhat exaggerated. His transgressions were, at the time, much more modest than Swain claims. Nevertheless, they did represent a faithful following of Lenin’s revolutionary thought, as interpreted in the late 1930s. Before examining Tito in greater depth, I would like to look at the broader relationship between the KPJ and the Comintern.

In my view, Tito’s misbehavior always remained within the boundaries of what was permissible in the eyes of the Comintern. To understand this, it is important to focus more on the perspective of the ECCI, and less on the views of the KPJ members in Moscow and Paris. Although they were certainly ultimately subject to the Comintern, the Yugoslav communists had much more autonomy than Yugoslav historiography acknowledges. As I have argued, in spite of the fact that historians since Vladimir Dedijer have presented the events of the late 1930s as Tito’s ongoing struggle to save the KPJ from the fate of the Polish party, there is nothing in the Comintern sources that would suggest Dimitrov and Pieck ever considered the dissolution of the KPJ. Although the leading émigrés were massacred between 1937 and 1939, most of them were already politically marginalized long before the Great Purge began. At the same time, the party organization in the country was largely intact, and the popular front era was its most successful period since the early 1920s.

The KPJ enjoyed a relative degree of freedom throughout. Far from wanting to control and micromanage all aspects of Yugoslav party affairs, the Comintern expected that the KPJ members themselves, in particular those untainted by the stigma of factionalism, would take

⁵⁴¹ Swain, “Tito: The Formation of a Disloyal Bolshevik,” 248-271.

⁵⁴² Swain, “Tito,” 262.

the initiative and sort out the party's problems on their own. It was Tito's understanding of this expectation that played a crucial role in his appointment as general secretary. The Parallel Center left the resolution of the Yugoslav question to the Comintern, essentially disarming themselves before the Temporary Leadership.

Moreover, the case of the Parallel Center and its vast intelligence network abundantly illustrates that, even though the USSR was a police state, the ultimate decision-making power did not always lie exclusively with the intelligence apparatus. The secret police was merely one of several extremely powerful institutions, and its decisions could be ignored – or at times even overridden – by organizations such as the Comintern. This insight also goes against the journalistic and non-academic descriptions of Tito as a Machiavellian mastermind rising to the top through intrigue and manipulation, as argued by individuals such as Simić and Despot. Marić, Kusovac, Miletić, Horvatin, and Tito all acted with the intention of helping their party. Although we should not always take their statements at face value, their confusion and disorganization show that they were not individuals who fully understood the inner workings of the system and tried to manipulate it to their advantage.

Despite the relative freedom from the Comintern, the factional struggle shows the death of intraparty democracy. The case of Marić's ally Jelaska is the best illustration of this: regardless of his mass support among Dalmatian communists, he was sacked from all posts and expelled from the party just because he disagreed with the newly formed Central Committee. Aside from Stalinization, this development was facilitated by the party's illegality, which often necessitated rapid top-down decision making. The semblance of party democracy was still maintained, but it was largely a sham. Ivo and Slavko Goldstein naively praise the fact that, in 1940, Tito was the first party leader since 1921 to have been elected by party members, rather than by the Comintern.⁵⁴³ This election, however, was purely formal,

⁵⁴³ Goldstein, *Tito*, 187.

and his position was confirmed by the Third International much earlier. Without it, he would have never become general secretary.

The issue of the exact date of Tito's appointment as general secretary has also puzzled Yugoslav historians. Based on my research, Tito had effectively started behaving as the acting general secretary from August of 1937, although his actions were initially quite cautious (Yugoslav historiography has generally taken this period as the moment of Tito's appointment). He became the de facto general secretary following the ECCI meeting on January 5, 1939, and this decision was formally confirmed by the KPJ at the Fifth Land Conference. This brings me to the question of why exactly Tito won over all the other candidates. I argue that there are several reasons for Tito's victory, the main one being a proper understanding of Leninism as defined by the Comintern in the 1930s. In short, Tito was the best at understanding the Comintern's demands and the ways to implement them.

Horvatin, Miletić, Marić, and Kusovac primarily focused on accusations. Their writings betray an omnipresent fear of enemies, spies, and Trotskyists in the communist ranks. In some cases, this led them to fully disregard party work. Marić and Kusovac were particularly notable for this: they were masters of intrigue, but they were not good political organizers. Miletić did have a semblance of policy, but it all came down to the aggressively anti-intellectual ultra-leftism of 1928, alongside a personality cult. Horvatin, in spite of his overzealous accusations, had a coherent popular front policy that was the closest to Tito's, but he was arrested by the NKVD. His case, in particular, illustrates the importance of sheer luck in the factional struggle. Committed adherence to the party line, and constant vigilance against political enemies, remained insufficient to ensure survival during the Great Purge.

Equally important was Tito's readiness to take initiative. Among his opponents, Marić and Kusovac were active in forging political alliances; Horvatin was active in Moscow, temporarily gaining the attention of the Comintern; and Miletić was active in turning the prison organization in Sremska Mitrovica into a sect revolving around his personality cult.

Tito, however, focused on practical changes to the internal organization of the party. Cautious at first, he began to take concrete steps at improving the state of the party in late 1937. He transformed the KPJ from an outdated leftist group based on conspiratorial cells into a growing mass organization capable of exercising disproportionate influence on the political affairs of the country. Moreover, he did so without endangering the party and exposing it to mass arrests, as Gorkić had before him.

His flexibility in terms of party cadres was also significant. When the factional struggle first broke out in Paris, both Marić and Tito were rather intolerant to one another, despite claims to the contrary in their official correspondence with the Comintern. Eventually, however, Tito would prove much more efficient at coaxing opponents to his side. His brand of leftism successfully unified all strands of the party, bringing individuals such as Đilas, Kidrič, and Hudomalj into his fold. Marić's and Miletić's leftism did not. The question of why this was so requires further scrutiny. What is certain, however, is that Tito showed a willingness to cooperate with opponents, but did not shy away from politically destroying them if, like Miletić and Marić, they went too far. The aforementioned Dalmatian case also shows that he did not always prefer ideological connections to personal connections. Jelaska was ideologically much closer to him than the leaders of the KPH, but he was too personally close to Marić to be trusted. Moreover, the choice of Krstulović over Jelaska as Dalmatian party leader was consistent with Tito's broader tendency of choosing younger party cadres, untainted by factionalism. People like Čopić, Pijade, and Maslarić were rare exceptions to this rule. The afterlife of factionalists, and the fact that most of those who survived the war ended up in the Goli otok prison camp in 1948, show that these rivalries persisted.⁵⁴⁴ However, while Ivo Banac argues that their persecution was a case of strengthening state power, new

⁵⁴⁴ Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 115.

archival sources, such as interrogations of the Kusovac couple in 1948,⁵⁴⁵ show that Tito's crackdown was not unprovoked. Rather, it was a reaction to renewed oppositional work by these individuals, who had seen Tito as illegitimate since the late 1930s, and whose hopes for change were given a new life with Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform.

Finally, my thesis leaves open several questions which require further research in the future. One is certainly the issue of the involvement of Soviet intelligence services and Yugoslav émigrés in Moscow in the process of purging the KPJ. The role of "secondary" individuals, such as Karaivanov and Golubić, although potentially crucial, is still largely shrouded in mystery. The political repression of the rest of the Yugoslav community in the USSR and those who were not involved in factional struggles (such as economic émigrés), is still largely unexplored, as is the broader relationship of the Yugoslavs with the Soviet society they inhabited and were a part of. Most interestingly, my work raises the issue of transnational networks of power within the Comintern and their impact on politics and repression in the Soviet Union of the 1930s. Individuals like Marić and Kusovac were extraordinarily well-connected with French, Spanish, and Bulgarian communists. Tito and Horvatin, on the other hand, had the attention of certain other Bulgarians, as well as Germans such as Pieck and Florin. The perceived interests of the Comintern gave rise to a transnational solidarity which transcended the confines of national communist parties, but also led to important political disagreements at the highest echelons of the Third International. Directly related to this is the informal hierarchy of communist parties in the Comintern, exposed by the subordinate relationship of the KPJ to the Bulgarian Communist Party. Although this hierarchy has been recognized in literature on the French and German communist parties, it leaves open another

⁵⁴⁵ I have used these interrogations in chapters four and five to recreate the actions of the Parallel Center in the late 1930s. However, most of these documents focused not on the 1930s, but on their continued oppositional work after 1945. A more thorough examination of this and similar cases exists in Milan Radanović's thesis "Jugoslovenski interbrigadisti pred Kontrolnom komisijom CK KPJ 1945–1949."

potential avenue for research, which would greatly broaden our understanding of international communism in the interwar period.

The period between 1936 and 1940 was the key formative period of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia as we know it from the 1940s. The old KPJ was, quite literally, dead. All the leading figures of the party from the 1920s and 1930s were either expelled, or more commonly, murdered, by 1939. In their place, Tito assembled a young team composed of workers and a few intellectuals, most of whom had been relatively unknown in the movement, but were untainted by factional struggles. Although Tito's appointments were to a large degree based on personal ties and close friendships, the new leadership was by no means comprised of incompetent characters distinguished only by their obedience to the general secretary. In fact, Tito's Central Committee was composed of people who, despite their youth, generally paralleled or exceeded in skill those who led the KPJ before 1937. Their ability and practical success would give them the power and the legitimacy necessary for all their political actions in the 1940s. In that decade, they led the party through a world war, a civil war, and a revolution, culminating in a split that changed the international communist movement in the twentieth century. And it all began with the arrest of a competent, yet tragically unsuccessful party leader under false accusations of espionage in the summer of 1937.

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