

THE BALKANS IN THE COLD WAR

EDITED BY
VOJISLAV G. PAVLOVIĆ



BELGRADE
2011

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BALKAN FEDERATIONS, COMINFORM,
YUGOSLAV-SOVIET CONFLICT

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PREFACE

The history of the Balkans in the Cold War has too often and too exclusively been looked at in the light of the Tito-Stalin split. Tito's break with Stalin undoubtedly was a momentous event in the history of the region, but the Cold War in the Balkans cannot be reduced to it. It was as early as March 1946 that Churchill, in his famous Fulton speech, had spoken of an iron curtain descending across Europe, from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic. In the British statesman's view, one of the loci of the emerging Cold War was in the Balkans, where Tito's Yugoslavia was in the forefront of the Communist offensive. It would seem, therefore, that Cold War types of conflicts started in the Balkans earlier than anywhere else. Tito's Partisans had clearly anticipated the logic of the Cold War even before they established contacts with the Anglo-Saxon allies. In March 1943, Tito tried to establish a truce with the Germans in order to be able to focus on destroying Mihailović's troops and thwart Allied landing on the Adriatic coast. When, from May 1943, instead of a massive landing, only a few officers were parachuted into his units, they were received with circumspection and kept under close watch. Behind Tito's distrust of British and American troops lay his fear that they might extend support to his adversary in the civil war, the royalist movement of General Mihailović. This kind of scenario was to take place in Greece, escalating, in 1946, into a civil war which went on until 1949.

This collection of papers, written by Serbian and Russian historians, makes an attempt to demonstrate how complex the Cold War in the Balkans was. Not only the Cold war logic was present in the Balkans already during the War but it was also hugely influenced by the inherent issues of the region such as, national relations, frontier making, and difficult regional cooperation. Geostrategic position of the Balkans gave particular importance to the local conflicts on the frontier of the two blocs in the making. The outcome of the Yugoslav-Soviet conflict was made even more important by Yugoslavia geographic

position. The Communist parties in the Balkans, and the people's democracies they had created with decisive Soviet assistance, had to address the increasingly pressing national question. This issue put the brotherly relations of the neighbouring parties and countries to a serious test, since the borders were anything but ethnic. Hence, an old concept was brought into play again, that of federations. The concept, however, meant different things to different parties. To Tito, in order to resolve the question of Kosovo and Macedonia, it meant that the Yugoslav federation should be enlarged by the inclusion of Bulgaria, and even Albania. Tito had sought to put the concept of a Balkan communist federation in practice even during the war. The issue of Macedonia lay at its core from the very beginning, since it was a region divided among Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece. After the Tito-Stalin split, and in the context of the civil war in Greece, there arose in Soviet circles the idea of creating an independent Macedonia as a solution to the problem. They believed that it would be a solution for the civil war in Greece, because the presence of British troops there rendered a victory unlikely. Moreover, an independent Macedonia would have driven Tito's Yugoslavia further into isolation. From the 1920s, Kosovo posed a tormenting problem to the Yugoslav communists. The Comintern's strategy envisaged the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and was based on the concept of self-determination, conferring the right to secede from Yugoslavia upon the Kosovo Albanians. In the period of the Popular Front strategy, beginning in 1935, the Comintern's solution for Kosovo was that it should be a constituent part of the Yugoslav federation. Whichever solution the Comintern advocated, it never took into account the interests and desires of the Serbian community in Kosovo.

From 1947, the Communist parties in the Balkans and elsewhere had an organization within which they discussed their relations and the issues of their movement. The creation of the Cominform was initiated by the Soviets as an instrument of control and pressure on other parties to comply with the Soviet line. Historical study of the Cominform has been slow to develop, the relevant documentary sources being virtually inaccessible until the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. It was only then that a serious study of the functioning of the Cominform could start, first of all by publishing its documents and meeting records. The organization, however, was not a long-lived one. Soon after Stalin's death, Nikita Khrushchev and the new leadership of the Soviet Union took the decision to dissolve it, but delayed implementing it while trying to work out new forms of organization to replace it. Eventually, they came to the conclusion that formal organizations such as the Comintern or the Cominform were not a suitable form of inter-party relations in a post-Stalinist era. It was the Stalinist nature of the Cominform that had prompted the Yugoslav communists to look for different foreign policy strategies. The containment strategy had an altogether new meaning in the case of Yugoslavia. The coun-

try turned to the West for help. NATO countries decided to help Communist Yugoslavia to withhold the Soviet pressure. The outcome of this peculiar economic and military cooperation was that Yugoslavia succeeded in defending itself, but did not join NATO. Instead, in 1953, it concluded a regional alliance with two of its members, Greece and Turkey.

Yugoslav-Soviet relations, however, greatly influenced the outcome of the Cold War in the Balkans. As they cannot be reduced to the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, it has been essential to study their evolution from the creation of the Partisan movement in Yugoslavia in 1941 to the signing of the Moscow Declaration in 1956. The autonomous evolution of the resistance movement of Yugoslav Partisans was in itself one of the main causes of the Yugoslav-Soviet conflict of 1948. The Anglo-Saxon, particularly British, tendency to look at the Yugoslav Communists only from the perspective of East-West relations did not take into account the real nature of relations between Belgrade and Moscow. Their consistent effort to have issues in Yugoslavia resolved via Moscow had proved unsuccessful even before 1948. Tito's Yugoslavia was much more independent than the British were aware. But, however independent Yugoslavia was, it was at the same time hugely dependent on Soviet military aid. From the Belgrade operations of 1944 until 1948, the Soviets had been lending a helping hand to Tito's troops, at first on the battlefield, then by supplying his divisions with armament and by training his officers.

The tension in Yugoslav-Soviet relations was not only an affair of state. For many, it also posed a personal dilemma. One of the most prominent figures in bilateral relations was Milovan Djilas. He was the first member of Tito's inner circle to go to Moscow in 1944. He was also the most outspoken member of the Yugoslav leadership, both by virtue of his post as head of Propaganda Department, and his character and temperament. Thus, he was both a staunch defender of close ties with the USSR and an unrelenting critic of abuses committed by members of the Soviet personnel in Yugoslavia up to 1948. The split itself did not pose any dilemma for Djilas, but the subsequent quest for a new kind of Communism did. His articles in 1953 caused upheaval in Tito's Stalinism-without-Stalin system, and drew attention of the Soviets. His punishment by being removed from all posts satisfied the Soviets and brought ideological peace to Tito's Yugoslavia. The fate of Djilas demonstrated that ideological similarities between Yugoslavia and the USSR outlasted the Tito-Stalin split. If Yugoslavia had formally been a Stalinist state before the conflict with the USSR, little changed in its aftermath. In its nature, the conflict was a matter of state rather than ideology. Both before and after the split, Yugoslavia accorded special attention to its relations with Albania, an area in which the Yugoslav leadership hoped to benefit from the normalization of relations with the USSR.

The collection of papers that is now submitted to the public is the result of two joint projects of the Serbian and Russian Academies of Sciences: “The projects of federations in the Balkans and in international relations during the Second World War and at the beginning of the Cold War” and “The Cominform of communist parties, Yugoslavia, Balkans, 1947–1956”. The projects were carried out jointly by the Institute for Balkan Studies on behalf of the Serbian Academy and the Institute for Slavonic Studies on behalf of the Russian Academy. The projects were directed by Leonid Gibianskii of the Institute for Slavonic Studies and Vojislav G. Pavlović of the Institute for Balkan Studies. The participation of the Institute for Balkan Studies in these projects was made possible as part of the project funded by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia, “History of Political Ideas and Institutions in the Balkans in the nineteenth and twentieth century” (№ 177011).

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STALINISM WITHOUT STALIN THE SOVIET ORIGINS OF TITO'S YUGOSLAVIA 1937-1948

Abstract: The explanations of the origins of Tito-Stalin split are to be found in the evolution of the CPY from 1937 onwards, and are intrinsically linked with the actions of Josip Broz, better known as Tito. He became a member of the Central Committee in 1934 and as such went to Moscow, only to inherit the actual leadership of the Party during the purges. He proved to be a true Stalinist leader since he never questioned any instructions he got from Moscow. If anything, he showed himself to be overzealous. On several occasions, Georgi Dimitrov had to explain to him that there was no chance a social revolution could successfully be carried out in Yugoslavia before the War. The German attack on Yugoslavia did not incite Tito to act, but Hitler's attack on the USSR did. Once they joined the war, Tito and the CPY started pursuing their own agenda – social revolution as a consequence of the victory in the Civil War they had waged against the Yugoslav King, the Royal Government, and their Minister of War in Yugoslavia – general Dragoljub, Draža, Mihailović. For Dimitrov and the Soviet authorities, Tito's actions risked to provoke problems within the Allied coalition. Therefore he was reprimanded on several occasions, until the Partisan units under his command were recognized also by the Western Allies. The Partisan Army, and the state institutions that were created during the war gave his movement enough potential to be at the forefront of the conflicts in Trieste and in Greece which heralded in the Cold War. The conflict with Stalin was provoked by the same tendency of Tito's to advance his own interests without consulting Moscow. The causes of the conflict were not ideological since Yugoslavia was the most faithful disciple of the USSR. They were in fact geostrategic; the conflict was about the discipline within the Soviet bloc. The importance and solidity of Partisans and their institutions allowed Tito and the CPY to withstand the pressure of the Cominform countries.

Keywords: *Tito, Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Stalinism, Popular front, Second World War.*

The Tito-Stalin split of 1948 was an event of crucial importance for the history of the second, communist Yugoslavia. It gave Yugoslavia an exceptional importance during the Cold War. After being expelled from the Eastern

Bloc, Yugoslavia's communist leadership had the strength to forge itself a sovereign position on the world stage. The utmost importance of the event has made it virtually impossible to imagine the history of communist Yugoslavia without it. Moreover, the official historiography of Tito's Yugoslavia has formulated a theory of the natural evolution of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (hereinafter CPY), that has led it inexorably from its clandestine days through the war years towards the conflict with the USSR and Stalin. The split itself was explained by ideological differences that had detached the CPY from VKPb¹, if not before, then surely from 1937, when Tito took over the reins of the CPY. The conclusion of the theory was unequivocal: Tito and the CPY were never Stalinists, since they were the only ones that had stood up to Stalin, albeit only on one occasion, in 1948. This kind of *post factum* wisdom was not the exclusive domain of official Yugoslav historiography. Numerous books have been written in this vein, for example, those written by the British officers who had met Tito during the war, and later, when the Cold War broke out, felt the need to explain their support to the Partisans. For example, brigadier Fitzroy Maclean, the highest ranking British officer who had been parachuted to Tito's headquarters in occupied Yugoslavia, wrote in his memoirs that he knew that Tito was a different kind of communist. The uniqueness of its authentic resistance movement and its capacity to survive in a bipolar world incited other authors to dedicate hundreds of pages to the origins of the first communist state that broke off with Stalin.²

Whatever the explanation, there is no doubt that Tito and CPY had accomplished a remarkable feat. From the brink of dissolution in 1937³ they rose to become an equal partner of the CPSU⁴ in the Moscow declaration of 1956 that spoke of: "... cooperation that should be based on free will and absolute equality..."⁵ An autonomous resistance movement that grew into a fiercely independent communist state, which broke off from Stalin, could not have been Stalinist. Nevertheless, in our opinion, not only was that the case, but the CPY was the most faithful disciple of the USSR.

In order to demonstrate the validity of our hypothesis, it is necessary to find out whether the evolution of the CPY announced the forthcoming break with Stalin, as the official historiography of communist Yugoslavia has claimed. Therefore it is necessary to perceive the history of the CPY from 1937 to 1948

¹ All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks), with Russian abbreviation – VKP (b).

² On the historiography of the Tito-Stalin split see Leonid Gibianskii's paper: "Soviet-Yugoslav Relations, the Cominform and Balkan Communist Parties: Documentary sources and some aspects of its research" in this volume.

³ During the Stalinist's purges in Moscow this option was seriously considered by Comintern.

⁴ In October 1952, the Soviet party changed its name from VKPb to the Communist Party of the USSR, hereinafter CPSU.

⁵ *Jugoslovensko-sovjetski odnosi 1945-1956* (Belgrade: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, 2010), 917.

in a chronological perspective, instead of considering it exclusively in light of the Tito-Stalin split. During this period Josip Broz, better known as Tito, was the undisputed leader of the CPY. Tito became an acting head of a small clandestine communist party on the brink of dissolution in 1937; a mere ten years later he would stand up to Stalin. This exploit had been the consequence of a continuous shift in the relations between the CPY and the Soviet party leadership. The main architect of this shift had been Tito himself, so this essay will follow his personal history during this period.⁶

The history of the CPY can be divided into two clearly distinct periods: before and after the appointment of Josip ižinski alias Milan Gorkić, as its leader in 1932. Prior to his arrival, the CPY had been governed by communists who had started their political life in the short but intense period of CPY parliamentary life. In the first parliamentary elections in 1920, the CPY won 58 seats in the Assembly of the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. It was therefore the third strongest political party in the country. Its leaders, such as Sima Marković, a professor of mathematics at Belgrade University, were intellectuals who continued the tradition of the pre-war Serbian Social Democratic Party. They took part in the work of the National Assembly and followed a clearly and democratically defined party line that expressed the political will of its electorate. Although communists, they participated in the political life of the Kingdom. After the CPY was outlawed in 1921, and was thus forced to convert itself into a clandestine party, a long process of transforming the party and its leadership began. Clandestine work brought forward new leaders and new imperatives. Unable to finance its activity, the CPY came to depend on the subsidies from Moscow. With the money came also ideology and new type of leaders that excelled in applying Moscow's directives. Those that continued to think independently and interpret the political situation in Yugoslavia from a local point of view were gradually put aside. The new Moscow line – a sort of universal communist credo – gradually widened the gap between the communists and the political realities of the Kingdom. The Moscow line proved completely inappropriate during the personal rule of King Alexander, who in 1929 proclaimed the birth of Yugoslavia and abolished the Constitution, along with all political parties.

⁶ The biographies of Tito are not very numerous. The hagiographic work of Vladimir Dedijer: Vladimir Dedijer, *Tito* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953) reflects the CPY of cial propaganda. On the other hand the testimony of once Tito's close collaborator, Milovan Djilas, is of particular interest: Milovan Djilas, *Tito: the story from inside* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980). The War in ex-Yugoslavia provoked a regain of interest in Tito's personal history: Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Tito-Yugoslavia's great dictator: a reassessment* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992); Jasper Ridley, *Tito* (London: Constable, 1994); Richard West, *Tito and the rise and fall of Yugoslavia* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1994). Several Tito's biographies were published in last few years: Geoffrey Swain, *Tito: a biography* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Pero Simić, *Tito: fenomen 20. veka* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2011); Jože Pirjevec: *Tito in tovariši* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2011).

The CPY followed the Moscow scenario of armed uprising that was supposed to bring them into power, thus positioning itself as the principal adversary of the new regime. As it was to be expected, the Royal police eliminated and imprisoned the bulk of the Yugoslav communists and decapitated its leadership. The decimated CPY was in no condition to continue its activity in Yugoslavia; therefore its leadership moved to Moscow and became completely dependent on the Comintern.

Tito, Gorkić's second-in-command

In 1932, after several *ad hoc* leaderships, the Comintern appointed Milan Gorkić as the acting head of the CPY. Gorkić was very young when he left Yugoslavia in 1924. In Moscow, he was first integrated into the higher ranks of the Youth International, and then those of the III-rd International or Comintern. During the years he spent in Moscow Gorkić made powerful friends and protectors, such as Dmitri Manouïlski, the VKPb representative in Comintern and Nikolai Boukharine, who had already become a leader of the VKPb by Lenin's time and would later go on to become one of the leading figures of Comintern. He became an integral part of the Soviet party apparatus and was as such sent to put some order in the Yugoslav party. His first and foremost duty was to finally transform the CPY into a section of the Comintern, marginalising all those who tried to think autonomously about the situation in Yugoslavia. Gorkić accomplished the Stalinisation of the CPY, subordinating it completely to his friends and protectors in Moscow.⁷ In 1934, Gorkić co-opted comrade Josip Broz, later known under the pseudonym Tito, into his Stalinist leadership of CPY.

Comrade Broz was a late recruit of the CPY. A native of Kumrovec in Croatia, during the First World War, he fought in the ranks of the Austro-Hungarian Army on the Eastern front and was taken prisoner by the Russian army in 1915. He spent the next five years in Russia and the Soviet Union, first as a Prisoner of War, and then as a free man, without becoming a communist. Only after he had returned to his homeland in 1920 did he become a member of the CPY in Zagreb. Since the CPY was soon banned, his membership did not become effective until the mid-twenties. Only then did his active political engagement begin; in 1928, it landed him in prison after the police caught him in possession of arms and communist material. His only theoretical background in communism was acquired in the prison cells of Royalist Yugoslavia by studying with his fellow prisoners, members of the CPY. He was released six years later, when he met Gorkić who co-opted him into the Central Committee and then sent him to Moscow to continue his education.

⁷ Branislav Gligorijević, *Komintern i jugoslovensko pitanje* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1992), 252, 253.

In his capacity of the leader of CPY, Gorkić chose Broz amongst other candidates by following Stalinist criteria. Broz was a worker by profession and the Yugoslav party leadership was full of intellectuals but there were only a few workers. He was also a comparatively new member of CPY, so he had no links with the previous leadership of the CPY that represented internal opposition to Gorkić. When he arrived in Moscow in February 1935, Tito proved to be an excellent choice. He spoke Russian fluently and he quickly found his way in the couloirs of the Comintern. Most importantly, he was screened and passed with honours the test of the Cadres Department. The Department was a sort of interior control of the International Communist Movement run by the officers of the Soviet security services. Tito was found to be a promising recruit, the sort of confidant the Department had in every communist party, since it needed to have insight into their work. Therefore a member of the Department, the Bulgarian communist Ivan Genčev alias Ivan Karaivanov, established close and lasting working relations with Tito during his stay in Moscow. Tito was thus trained to take care of the cadre's issues within the CPY. This was a strategic position since in a Stalinist party the knowledge of the staff, its movements and promotions gave considerable powers. No position could be filled without the approval of the Cadres Department. When he was sent back to Yugoslavia in October 1936, Tito's main task was to look after the cadre's issues of the CPY, but the overall leadership remained firmly in the hands of Gorkić.

Both Tito and Gorkić, when they left Moscow in October and December 1936 respectively, were given written imperative instructions. The leadership of the CPY was just supposed to follow them. No one even thought to question this *modus operandi* of the CPY. It was a branch of the International Communist Movement, and as such it was governed by the Comintern. Tito was second in command in a Stalinist party and had no issues with his position. On the contrary, Tito had no problems in explaining the concept of Popular Front to comrade Božidar Adžija. The latter had a PhD in Law from the Prague University, while Tito had only four years of elementary school. But their respective education was irrelevant, since they were not supposed to think about the concept but to understand it and apply it. In that respect Tito had an enormous advantage: he spoke in the name of the Comintern, and was therefore an undisputed authority for his comrades in Yugoslavia.⁸ The authority of the Comintern was so great that no order or directive was ever questioned. Thus the political action of the CPY was governed exclusively by the directives of the Comintern. Tito's work in the field provides the best illustration of the way in which the CPY operated.

Before leaving Moscow, Tito received written instructions from the German communist Wilhelm Pieck who was responsible for the Balkans in

⁸ Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. III, (Belgrade: Komunist, 1983), 40, Broz to Gržetić, Vienna, November 5th 1936.

the Executive Committee of the Comintern. His two main tasks were the establishment of the Popular Front and the sending of volunteers to the Republican government of Spain, which was at the time engaged in a Civil War. The concept of a Popular Front had a lasting influence on the CPY. It remained its principal political credo prior to and during the Second World War. The origins of the concept are quite clear. After Hitler came to power, it became necessary to find allies for the USSR. All over Europe Communist parties tried to foster large alliances which would reinforce the country's capacity to withstand German pressure and in the case of war may prove to be valuable allies for the Soviet Union. In the case of Yugoslavia, the policy of Popular Front meant a change of the general strategy. Until then the official strategy of the Comintern was that Yugoslavia, as a dictatorship of the Serbian bourgeoisie over other nations living in Yugoslavia, should disintegrate by allowing Croats and Slovenes to exercise their right to self-determination. Now, Yugoslavia as a potential ally was not supposed to disappear but to reform itself into a federation that could satisfy the claims of Croats and Slovenes, relieving them of the necessity to exercise their right of self-determination. By becoming a free union of all Yugoslav nations, Yugoslavia could survive and organise a large Popular front to withstand German invasion. As Tito explained to Božidar Adžija in Graz in October 1936, the Popular front was not a new political party, but the largest political movement possible, which would unite parties from all sides of the political spectre around a common antifascist policy. It was understood that such a movement would give enormous political influence to the communists, since up until then they practically had none – and that they were supposed at the end of the day to lead this movement. Those were the instructions given to Tito in October 1936, and they proved to be the essence of his political strategy up to 1945, when he officially came to power in Yugoslavia.

The fate of Yugoslavia in the eyes of Moscow depended exclusively on the interests of the Soviet Union, since the fate of the Communist movement as a whole depended on the survival of its homeland: Yugoslavia should survive because it may become a useful ally of the USSR. The CPY had no say in the matter. Yugoslav comrades had fought for years for its downfall as vigorously as they fought for its survival when they were told to do so, while receiving further imperative directions from Moscow.

Tito, the acting head of the CPY

In the summer of 1937, Gorkić was recalled to Moscow, and subsequently perished as one of the victims of Stalinist processes. Tito, became the acting head of the CPY, but the everyday life of CPY was paralysed since Gorkić's departure, because no money and no directives came from Moscow. Tito was staying in Paris where the Headquarters of the Party were, and he awaited instructions from Moscow. Only in January 1938 was he officially notified that Gorkić had

been removed and that all activities of the CPY had been suspended. The end of Gorkić's era gave new possibilities to his opposition and Tito, as Gorkić's man, became an object of contestation, since new candidates for the leadership of CPY had come forward. That's when Tito decided to go back to Yugoslavia, where he had, in 1936 and 1937, created the nucleus of his future Central Committee. He left Paris without Moscow's permission, convinced that the fate of the CPY would be decided in the country. There he could count on the support of Edvard Kardelj in Slovenia, Milovan Djilas and Aleksandar Ranković in Serbia, and Ivo Lola Ribar as the leader of Communist youth. He did not choose them; they were presented to him as the leaders of regional party organisations. Nevertheless, he accepted them and they acknowledged his overall leadership because for them he embodied the unquestionable authority of the Comintern. On his personal initiative this informal group constituted itself as the temporary leadership of the CPY, which was supposed to replace Gorkić's Central Committee, and give much needed credibility to Tito as its new leader. But this new leadership had no real legitimacy without the Comintern's approval. Tito wrote several times to Georgi Dimitrov, the head of the Comintern, trying to get permission to go to Moscow and explain his actions. Finally, the coveted invitation came and in August 1938 he arrived in Moscow.

Upon his arrival, he first had to justify his actions, and those of the CPY. In the meantime, a whole generation of previous leaders of the CPY had perished in Stalinist purges. Gorkić and his adversaries were eliminated in the same way. They perished in a process of security-inspired folly, supposed to rid the Soviet Union of all unwelcome foreigners, and everything that presented any kind of risk to the survival of the homeland of communism. During his stay in Moscow, from August 1938 to January 1939, Tito managed to obtain approval for his new leadership, and more importantly, for his actions in Gorkić's era and afterwards. When he left Moscow, he was once again supplied with imperative orders. He was supposed to organise a sort of conference of the CPY which would approve of the elimination of the previous generation of leaders of the CPY and would *post factum* exclude them from the party. That's exactly what Tito did as soon as he returned to Yugoslavia. He reunited his temporary leadership on the lake of Bohinj from 15 to 19 March 1939. There they promoted themselves into the Central Committee of the CPY. In this capacity, they excluded all those that had perished in the Stalinist purges from the CPY. Thus Tito and his newly formed Central Committee gave their full approval to the purges that had taken place in Moscow. Tito on the occasion expelled from the CPY all his rivals that have come forward after the disappearance of Gorkić.⁹ After he had faithfully fulfilled given instructions,

⁹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, Vol. IV, 173,174.

Tito awaited summons to Moscow to give his report. Eventually he arrived in Moscow in September 1939.

Once again Tito had to go through the same process of verification in Moscow. He wrote his report on the actions of the CPY and presented it to the Executive Committee of the Comintern. While he was in Moscow, waiting for the situation of the CPY to be put on the agenda of the Executive Committee, he participated in the discussion on the situation in Europe after the outbreak of the War. The main issue was how to reconcile the antifascist policy advocated by Moscow with the conclusion of the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939. Manouïlski was impressed by Tito's solution: he proposed simply ignoring it as if it did not exist.¹⁰ But even though the VKPb and Comintern did their best not to publicize the Pact, it became the cornerstone of their policy. The Alliance with Hitler's Germany made the strategy of the Popular Front obsolete since the peril of Nazi attack had disappeared. If there was no need for a common front with bourgeois parties, the VKPb and Comintern could revert to their previous strategy of fighting the left-wing parties such as Social Democrats for dominance amongst the working class. This was the strategy known as "The Popular Front created from below", that is to say by the exclusive communist influence amongst the peasants and workers. The Popular Front was to be created by surpassing and ultimately destroying all other political influence among workers and peasants. The period of political alliances was over and the CPY could go back to the policy it was most comfortable with – the uncompromising fight against all democratic political options.

The new strategy was presented to the CPY in the Instruction of the Executive Committee of Comintern, dated 29 October 1939, which Tito took with him when he left Moscow on 26 November 1939. The Instruction was partly based on the information he brought from Yugoslavia. He was present at the sitting of the Committee. The Instruction was in fact a precise agenda for the CPY that gave answers to very important issues, such as how to address the situation created by the outbreak of the War. The CPY was told that it should in the first place explain to its members and sympathisers that the War had an imperialist character and that all three major participants – England, France and Germany – were capitalistic powers with imperialist objectives. Therefore there were no differences between them, no aggressors and no victims; consequently, the USSR had the right to conclude the Pact in order to safeguard its interests. Furthermore, the USSR was the only power that followed a peaceful policy of aiding the nations that were fighting for their independence. England and France were spreading false propaganda by saying that they were fighting for peace and freedom of nations, or they were trying to spread the War by dragging other countries into it. Therefore, the CPY must oppose any attempt of the ruling

¹⁰ Archives of Yugoslavia, (hereinafter AJ), 837, IV-5-a, box 43, Tito's interview of 29 December 1979.

bourgeoisie to draw Yugoslavia in the War. Instead, the CPY must fight for the conclusion of a treaty on friendship and mutual aid with the USSR, which is the best guarantee of the freedom and independence of Yugoslav nations. Finally, the conclusion was that the general crisis of capitalism would certainly become even more acute during the war, thus creating favourable conditions for the elimination of capitalism altogether during the imperialist war.¹¹

These were the final instructions that Tito brought with him when he left Moscow for the third and last time in November 1939. On three occasions, during his stays in Moscow, Tito received written instructions which represented the essence of his domestic and foreign policy. The main points were: the Yugoslav federation, the Popular Front as the essence of the political strategy from either above or below, the Treaty on friendship with the USSR, keeping Yugoslavia out of the War, and last but not the least, the prospect of the downfall of capitalism during the imperialist War. These instructions, on each of the three occasions, were created during a process of consultation among the members of the Executive Committee. Tito was consulted by the Executive Committee as the principal source of information on the situation in Yugoslavia. He had an insight into the decision-making process, so therefore the conclusions were to him more than written directives. They were the essence of a policy that he had witnessed being made and that is the reason it remained a clear-cut guideline for him throughout the years he spent away from Moscow. It was not until the summer of 1944 that he again managed to establish direct personal contact with Moscow, when he flew from the island of Vis first to Romania and then to Moscow.

For a party leader with a limited educational background such as Tito, these rather simple concepts, contained in the series of instructions he got in Moscow, represented the sum total of his political ideas. He learned his Moscow lessons well and was never troubled by any kind of intellectual doubt. His political skill and acumen consisted of finding ways to put in practice the strategy that Moscow decided upon in any given moment. He gladly explained to Božidar Adžija the concept of "Popular front from above", that is to say the need to cooperate with the bourgeois parties in order to create a large antifascist political movement, in accordance with the strategy established during the VIIth Congress of the Comintern. With the same vigour and conviction he subscribed to the Molotov - Ribbentrop Pact that rendered the Popular Front as he had described it to Adžija useless. The communist discipline, or opportunism, whatever it was that governed Tito's reactions, was never troubled by any moral dilemmas, since the best interests of the Soviet Union were always an imperative for him. Following his Soviet role model, he saw no issue with the change of strategy, which after the conclusion of the Pact called for virulent attacks on

¹¹ Russian State Archives for Social and Political History (Russian abbreviation is RGASPI), F. 495, Op. 11, d. 368, 60-65.

the bourgeois parties, Social Democrats especially, the allies of yesterday. Therefore, after a long journey from Moscow to Yugoslavia that took several months because he had been held up in Istanbul while awaiting his visa, he arrived in Zagreb on the 15th of March 1940 and started a virulent campaign in the Party journal, *Proleter*, against imperialist powers such as Great Britain and France,¹² and at the same time heartily saluted the victory of the USSR over Finland.¹³ For Tito, the succession of defeats of Norway, Holland and Belgium was a clear confirmation of his political logic. Small states that were driven into the War by the imperialist powers were subsequently abandoned and succumbed to Nazi invasion. The only way out was the one he had advocated: to stay out of the War and establish the closest possible economic and political ties with the USSR. That was the solution he advocated for Yugoslavia in *Proleter*.¹⁴ In the same time he started purging the Party from all who were still in favour of a “Popular front from above”, that is to say for collaborating with other left-wing parties. The title of Tito’s article announced his strategy and his intentions: *For the purity and the bolshevisation of the Party*.¹⁵ As for his attitude towards the Social Democrats, the titles of his articles speak for themselves: *Counter revolutionary leaders of the Social Democrats as warmongers and leaders of the anti-Soviet campaign*, written in June 1940;¹⁶ and *The Unity of Bosses, Police, and Social democrat traitors in the struggle against the workers*, written in July 1940.¹⁷ The radicalisation of his strategy reached its peak after the defeat of France, when he declared himself in favour of replacing the coalition government of Dragiša Cvetković and Vlatko Maček by a government composed of workers and peasants under the guidance of the CPY. He wrote in July 1940:

“The united working class in alliance with the peasantry and with the rest of the working population of Yugoslavia should prepare itself, under the guidance of the CPY, to carry out a struggle against the merciless exploitation of the workers by the capitalists and to lead a decisive battle to preserve the independence of Yugoslavia. The necessary condition for achieving these goals is to overthrow the existing regime and to create a real people’s government; a government of workers and peasants which will rule in the interest of working class, give the people their rights, and ensure the independence of the country by cooperation with the USSR, the country of workers and peasants, a state of gigantic progress and wellbeing, the protector of small nations and the most consistent partisan of peace”.¹⁸

¹² Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. V, 56-60, “Radnom Narodu Jugoslavije”, *Proleter*, 3-4, 1940.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 64-66.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 69-71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 80-84.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 93-96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 108-110.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 119,120.

Moscow did not approve of this radical strategy of the CPY. On September 28th Tito was told that the call for the creation of a people's republic in Yugoslavia was premature. The kind of political action the CPY should engage in was propaganda, writing of statements, resolutions etc.¹⁹

Tito, the Secretary-General of the CPY

The culmination of Tito's radical rhetoric was reached during his introductory speech on the 5th Conference of the CPY, which was secretly organized in October 1940 in Zagreb. The Conference was a very important one for Tito personally. He was still just the acting head of the CPY, and the Comintern treated him as such, since only the Congress of the CPY could appoint a new Secretary-General. Therefore he wanted to organize a Party congress in Zagreb in the fall of 1940. Moscow did not approve of organizing the Congress because there was a risk that the confidentiality of the Congress could be breached and the Party leadership might end up in Yugoslav prisons. Thus Tito was forced to rename the meeting of 108 delegates from all regional organizations of the CPY as the 5th Conference of the CPY. The Conference was opened by Tito's extensive report in his capacity of the acting head of CPY. He explicitly said that the CPY opposed the mobilisation of the Yugoslav Army in the summer of 1940. The CPY thus prevented Yugoslavia from being drawn into the war by the Royal government. He clearly defined the line the CPY should follow during the war which was raging in Europe:

“All activity and efforts of the Party should have an exclusively class basis. We have to put an end to all projects and agreements with the leaderships of various bourgeois, so-called “democratic” parties, which have become more reactionary, genuine agencies of the secret services of French and British instigators of the War. Our Party and all sections of the Comintern must undertake the following tasks: the struggle to win over the working class for the creation of a Popular front from below, by organising and leading everyday struggle for satisfying everyday needs of the working class, such as the struggle against the costs of everyday existence, the struggle against the war, struggle for the freedom and democratic and national rights of the nationally oppressed working class of Yugoslavia.”²⁰

Needless to say, Tito's introductory report became the basis of the conclusion of the Conference and he himself became the Secretary-General of the CPY. Under his guidance, the struggle for the interests of the working class was the CPY's overall priority. But when it seemed that the CPY was finally in battle order, with an official leader and a unanimously chosen strategy of the “Popular front from below”, Moscow intervened again. In September 1940, Tito sent his

¹⁹ Ubavka Vujošević, “Preписка (radiogrami) CK KPJ – IK KI”, *Vojnoistorijski glasnik*, XLIII, 1-3, 1992, 323.

²⁰ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol.VI, 20, 21.

personal envoy Nikola Petrović, a Belgrade engineer, to Moscow. Even though Petrović did not take with him any written report, he was **briefed personally** by Tito before his departure. Thus, when in October he arrived in Moscow, he was able to make an oral presentation on the situation in Yugoslavia and in the CPY before the Executive Committee of Comintern. After a discussion the Executive Committee reached a conclusion, the essence of which was communicated to Tito by telegram signed by Pieck and dated 25 October 1940.

Pieck advised caution, repeating that the creation of a people's government was impossible in the actual situation in the Balkans. Instead he pressed Tito to create a large movement capable of defending the independence of Yugoslavia and the right to self-determination of Yugoslav nations. On the other hand, the CPY should not advocate the defense of the **present borders of Yugoslavia**. Pieck suggested that Tito try to reach an agreement with bourgeois groups such as the Agrarian Party led by Dragoljub Jovanović. He encouraged Tito to think about creating a large political movement against the war, for the defense of the independence of Yugoslavia and for good relations with the USSR.²¹ **The full text of the conclusion of the Executive committee was sent to the CPY in the form of Instructions, signed by Manouilski, Pieck, Ercoli alias Palmiro Togliati, and Klement Gottwald. Petrović brought them back to Yugoslavia and in December he delivered them to Tito. These new imperative instructions altered the conclusions of its 5th Conference and the overall strategy of the CPY in 1940. First of all, the Executive Committee addressed the issue of creating a people's government:**

“In the present situation, the demand to overthrow the government and install a genuine workers' and peasants' government would as an action slogan, in the present situation, amount to the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat. The situation in Yugoslavia is not ripe for this kind of action.... The party should decisively deny any speculation that the Red Army could support such a venture.”²²

As for the strategy regarding the war in Europe, the position of the Comintern was rather ambiguous:

“Under the action slogan of independence for the peoples of Yugoslavia, their right of self-determination and their mutual aid against any violence, the Party should develop propaganda in the masses and among citizens against the readiness of the bourgeoisie and the government to capitulate before the projects of German and Italian imperialism to dismantle Yugoslavia. Yet, the Party should not put forward the slogan on the defence of the frontiers of the actual Yugoslav state, nor should it as an isolated political force, advocate armed resistance in the case of attack of the imperialist powers. Nevertheless, the Party should sustain and aid all tendencies among citizens and in the Army to organize

²¹ Vujošević, “Prepiska”, 324.

²² Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. VI, 202-204.

armed resistance in order to strengthen the opposition to capitulation and increase the potential for defending the country.²³

The Comintern position on the issue of the Popular Front strategy was rather more precise:

“The Party must make use of all occasions for cooperation with the elements of opposition and groups of opposition in the small bourgeois parties and with the forces inside the Social Democratic parties in order to widen, temporarily at least, the unified front against the reaction and for respecting the demands of the masses, as well as for the defence of the independence of Yugoslavia.”²⁴

After the defeat of France, and Hitler’s victory in Western Europe, the Nazi peril became real once again. Therefore the “Popular front from above”, conceived as an antifascist alliance with bourgeois and especially left-wing parties, was again needed to protect the USSR. With the same conviction and zeal as before, the new Secretary-General of the CPY, immediately started working on a large coalition capable of strengthening the defences of the country. Already on 25 December 1940, he informed Moscow that he had followed Pieck’s suggestion and had reached an agreement with the Agrarian Party of Dragoljub Jovanović on the basis of a common programme that consisted of: the signing of a treaty of alliance with the USSR, democratization, and efforts to ensure the independence of the country.²⁵

Petrović was the last member of the CPY who went to Moscow to present the situation in Yugoslavia and subsequently bring back from Moscow instructions for the CPY. In the spring of 1944, Milovan Djilas was at last given the opportunity to travel to Moscow and establish direct contact with the Soviet leadership. In the meantime, the communication was ensured via radio operated by Tito’s friend Josip Kopinič, a Slovene communist and a hero of the Spanish Civil War. He was sent from Moscow to ensure contact with the CPY and with another eight Balkan and Central European parties. The radio centre was operational from July 1940.²⁶ While Tito was in Zagreb, that is to say until May 1941, it was relatively easy for him to establish contact with Moscow. Nevertheless, the nature of radio contact did not permit anything more than the exchange of rather succinct telegrams. There was no way for Tito to receive comprehensive instructions on the strategy he was supposed to follow. Therefore he was left on his own to decide the course of action for the CPY. Until the outbreak of the war, Tito followed the instructions brought by Petrović. In early 1941, Tito defined the strategy of the CPY as follows:

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Vujošević, “Prepiska”, 291

²⁶ Vjenceslav Cenčević, *Enigma Kopinič*, vol. I (Belgrade: Rad, 1983), 128-130.

“The preservation of peace, the defense of national liberty and independence of Yugoslav peoples against the entrance of the said peoples in the war on the side of any belligerent imperialist party, because any link with any of the imperialist groups meant abandoning Yugoslavia’s independence. The only way to effectively defend its independence and keep the country out of the imperialist war is to rely on the USSR and to conclude with it an alliance on mutual aid.”²⁷

Therefore the CPY was just a spectator when officers’ coup overthrew the Cvetković-Maček government after it had joined the Tripartite Pact. The great demonstrations of March 27th in support of the coup were organized without any knowledge of the CPY. When late in the day its members joined the movement, the only slogan they put forth called for an alliance with the USSR. Not even the mass demonstrations provoked any changes in Tito’s strategy. On the following day he wrote to the Comintern that the CPY would organize the people to resist German and Italian armed attack but would also fight against any British action that could induce Yugoslavia to join the war on its side. The CPY wanted the new government led by General Dušan Simović to quit the Pact and to conclude an alliance with the USSR.²⁸ Even this rather passive attitude of the CPY was considered too risky by the Comintern. In response to the events of March 27th, Georgi Dimitrov, the Secretary General of the Comintern, ordered Tito not to take part in any overt action, since the moment was not ripe. All the CPY should do was to continue explaining its strategy to the working class and the Army.²⁹

After the coup, the German attack became just a matter of days, during which Simović’s government did comply with one of the most important demands of the CPY by concluding an alliance with USSR.³⁰ The CPY decided that its members should respond to calls for mobilization, but not the members of the Central Committee.³¹ The German attack on Yugoslavia started on 6th April and the War ended on 17th April with the capitulation of Yugoslav Army. The country was partitioned by its neighbors, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania. In Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina the Nazi’s established a puppet genocidal regime under the guidance of Ante Pavelić and his Ustaša followers, called the Independent state of Croatia. These were the issues which the Politbureau of the CPY addressed during its May meeting in Zagreb. After the meeting Tito moved to Belgrade, where he transmitted the conclusion to a Soviet diplomat. The Soviet legation was opened in Belgrade after the establishment of diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia in June 1940, and the last

²⁷ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. VI, 207.

²⁸ Vujošević, “Prepiska”, 300.

²⁹ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. VI, 215.

³⁰ *Odnosi Jugoslavije i Rusije (SSSR) 1941-1945* (Belgrade: Savezno Ministarstvo za inostrane poslove, 1996), 45,46.

³¹ Vujošević, “Prepiska”, 302.

Soviet diplomats left the country as late as June 1941. The conclusions Tito transmitted were supposed to represent the CPY strategy for its actions under the foreign occupation. First of all, the conclusions stated that even though the country was divided into several occupation zones that were incorporated into the neighboring countries, the CPY had remained united and had continued its action on the territory of pre-war Yugoslavia. Before the outbreak of the war, the Party had 8000 members and 30 000 members in the Communist Youth. One of the major elements of the CPY strategy in the preceding months was presented as follows:

“The struggle against reactionary governments which refused to grant the people their democratic rights and liberties and for the creation of a peoples’ government that would give democratic rights and liberties to citizens of Yugoslavia and would reestablish national rights to the oppressed nations”³²

In his article written in June 1941, Tito said that at the May meeting it was concluded that in the country existed a “revolutionary energy of the masses”; that was provoked by:

“Brutal occupation regime and the spoliation of the people; even more brutal oppression of certain nations and the hatred it provoked against its perpetrators; the treason of the ex-governing circles recruited from the bourgeoisie; the evidence of the criminal national and social policy of the defunct regime..”³³

The evocation of the need for a people’s government and of the existence of revolutionary energy showed that Tito began to think that the occupation may present an opportunity to use the imperialist war for starting a revolutionary movement that could bring about a people’s government. He made no reference to this possibility in his telegrams to Moscow. Kopini transmitted only his assurance that the CPY was preparing for the war in the case of German attack on the USSR. That was also the content of the messages Tito transmitted to the Soviet diplomat when he met him in May in Belgrade.³⁴ The fact that his homeland was under foreign occupation could not incite him to engage on his own in any warlike activity. His instructions were clear and confirmed by Dimitrov’s telegram in March. The CPY should limit its activity on explaining its strategy and gaining as much influence as possible among the working class of Yugoslavia. Everything changed after 22 June 1941 and Hitler’s attack on the USSR.

The message that came from Moscow on the same day was urgent and perfectly clear. The CPY as well as other communist parties should create a single national Popular front and a common international Front to fight against

³² Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. VII, 18-25.

³³ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁴ Vujošević, “Prepiska”, 305.

German and Italian invaders since the attack on the USSR was not only a blow to the first Socialist country, but also an attack on the liberty and independence of all nations. The priorities were also clearly defined. During this stage of combat the CPY should fight for the liberation from foreign occupation and not try to realize a socialist revolution.³⁵ Soviet party authorities transmitted via the Comintern the essence of the so-called theory of “two phases” to the CPY. First, the creation of the “Popular front from above”, and only afterwards, when the situation was more favourable, should the CPY engage in a social revolution. The theory was dictated by the interests of the USSR which needed a large alliance with the United Kingdom, and afterwards with the United States too, to win the war against Hitler. Social revolutions during the war would have surely made such an alliance impossible. Therefore, the CPY as well as all other communist parties and sections of the Comintern were told to concentrate on the creation of a large Popular front capable of resisting and fighting Hitler’s Germany. Moscow had to repeat its message to Tito and the CPY once again on 1st of July, asking them explicitly to start creating partisan units in order to fight the Germans.³⁶

Tito, the Commander in Chief of the Partisans

Tito’s actions from the moment he became the acting head of CPY in 1937 until June 1941 demonstrated that he was a conscientious and obedient representative of the Comintern in Yugoslavia. Under his guidance, the CPY fulfilled all instructions Moscow sent without even once questioning them. The interest of Yugoslavia, its working class and its independence were manifestly less important to him than those of the USSR. Tito did not decide to start an armed uprising when Yugoslavia was attacked and occupied but when he was told to do so by Moscow, after the USSR was attacked by Hitler. The CPY was a section of the Comintern and acted as such as long as contact with Moscow existed. The only issue on which Tito and the CPY demonstrated a tendency to take initiative was the creation of a people’s government, that is to say an armed uprising against the Constitutional government of Yugoslavia. The will to take the power by arms was omnipresent in Tito’s thoughts even though he abandoned his plans each time Moscow told him to do so. Hitler’s attack and a series of defeats of the Red Army forced the Soviet government and the Comintern to pay less attention to the situation in Yugoslavia. Tito and the CPY were more or less left on their own from July 1941. It was only natural that they should revert to their strategy of seizing the power in Yugoslavia. It is important to note that this strategy was not imposed by the CPY leadership since it was spontaneously followed by the rank and file of the party.

³⁵ Reneo Lukić, *Les relations soviéto-yugoslaves de 1935 à 1945* (Bern : Peter Lang, 1996), 76.

³⁶ Vujošević, “Prepiska”, 302.

Tito and the rank and file of the CPY were both convinced that the issue of the war would be solved by a victorious advance of the Red Army, which would triumphantly march into Yugoslavia. Therefore the real task of the CPY was to solve the issue of power and social revolution before its arrival. The war against Germany could not be won without the help of the Red Army, but the CPY had to win the fight for power in Yugoslavia on its own. Therefore, when in July the first partisan squads started operating in Serbia, their goal was to fight the occupying German troops and the local Serbian gendarmerie, but most of all to demonstrate that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had disappeared once for all. When eventually they entered small provincial towns in Serbia, the local partisan commanders started destroying all institutions of royal Yugoslavia. The mayors were imprisoned if not shot, the cadastres, the court and police archives, and the lists of conscripts were burnt, all pictures and emblems of the royal government removed. A new era commenced for Yugoslavia, and the CPY wanted this fact to be seen and understood by the ordinary citizens.³⁷ Tito informed the Comintern of this campaign in the second half of August saying that: "Partisans are replacing the municipal authorities; they are burning the list of conscripts, the tax lists and other types of archives, and creating people's committees as new forms of local government".³⁸ The purpose of this campaign was in fact to create people's councils on the local level. Edward Kardelj, a Slovene communist and Tito's second, explained in October 1941 that the Partisans had to replace the existing local administration because it served as loyal transmission of the occupation authorities. New forms of local administration were needed to mobilise the population for the fight against the Germans. The tasks of people's councils were to provide food and material aid to partisans units, to maintain order, and to organise the food supply of the population.³⁹ The new forms of local administration were not united in any sort of Partisans' pyramid of power in 1941. Long after the end of the War, Tito explained that he had abstained from organising local people's councils into any sort of representative body on national level to avoid making problems for the USSR. In September 1941, he was informed that Moscow had re-established diplomatic relations with the Yugoslav government which had been exiled to London. Thus he abstained from forming a representative body, a sort of people's government in Yugoslavia.⁴⁰

Tito was aware that Moscow had in mind another policy when the Comintern invited the CPY to organise an armed uprising in Yugoslavia. The

³⁷ AJ, 507, CK SKJ, II/3-8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 24, 25, 28, 32. Reports of the local commanders from Valjevo, Šabac, Požarevac, Užice, Niš, Leskovac, July-August 1941.

³⁸ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. VII, 93, 94.

³⁹ Branko Petranović, *AVNOJ i revolucija. Tematska zbirka dokumenata* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1983), 115, 116.

⁴⁰ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. VII, 82.

theory of two phases called for an urgent alliance with all resistance groups and in the case of Serbia it meant cooperation with the Tchetnik units of Colonel Dragoljub, Draža Mihailović. The situation in Serbia was peculiar, because it was under direct German occupation. Or, soon after the end of hostilities the larger part of German troops left for the Eastern front, leaving only two incomplete divisions in Serbia. The scarce presence of German troops in the interior of Serbia permitted Colonel Mihailović to organise a resistance movement already in May 1941. The ranks of his movement consisted of Serbian officers and soldiers driven by the shame of the defeat and the willingness to fight for the independence and liberty of Serbia. Therefore, when in July Tito's partisans started their actions, they had to compete with the existing units under Mihailović's command. The two resistance movements had opposing political strategies. The Colonel Mihailović was firmly in favour of restoring pre-war Yugoslavia with all its institutions. As we have seen, the Partisans started replacing by force all its local institutions.

Mihailović could rely on the prestige of his rank and could benefit from the network of his fellow officers that had remained in Serbia. Naturally he represented an authority for the whole remaining local administration as the only alternative to a Collaborationist authority which was put in place by the Germans from May 1941 onwards and strengthened by the creation of the government of General Milan Nedić in August. His strategy was mostly a defensive one. Mihailović relied on the overall victory of the Allies to liberate the country. He saw the role of his movement as a sort of organisation that should mobilise its followers to help the Allies when they eventually disembark in the Balkans. He did not have to fight for the legitimacy of his movement; he got it as soon as the Royal Government in exile give him its support.

On the other hand, Tito's partisans had virtually no political legitimacy because the presence of the CPY in the political life of Yugoslavia had been more than limited before the war. The only way Tito's Partisans could gain credibility and political legitimacy was to be at the forefront of the battle with Germans. That was also what Moscow expected them to do. One could even say that the battle against the German occupation served as a sort of political propaganda for the CPY. Only by fighting the Germans, but primarily the entire local administration that was incorporated in the occupation regime, the CPY could put in place its campaign for destroying the remnants of pre-war Yugoslav institutions. The political gap between the two movements was immense; nevertheless, Moscow demanded the creation of a single national Popular front to fight against the German and Italian invaders. Tito had to cooperate with Mihailović, his political opponent.

Before they met for the first time in September 1941, Tito intentionally ignored all activity of Mihailović's units in his reports to Moscow. He related only the operations of his troops, and stigmatized the collaboration of the volunteer units of Kosta Pećanac, who signed an agreement with local occupation



Partitioned wartime Yugoslavia

authority.⁴¹ The first time Tito informed Moscow that Mihailović's units were fighting the Germans was on 28 September, but he called them military Tchetniks without naming Mihailović.⁴² Tito in fact mentioned Mihailović's units only after he had met Colonel Mihailović and reached an agreement with him on 19 September 1941. The first time Tito mentioned Mihailović by name was on 25 November after the two movements had already started fighting against each other.⁴³ From then on, he denounced Mihailović in his telegrams to Moscow for collaborating with the Germans as often as he could. Tito did his best to present the Partisans as the only resistance in Yugoslavia from July 1941. He deliberately omitted to refer to any actions that were taken by Mihailović's

⁴¹ Vujošević, "Prepiska", 311, 314.

⁴² *Odnosi Jugoslavije i Rusije*, 103.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 135, 136.

units in order to create an impression in Moscow that he was the leader of the only resistance movement in Yugoslavia. But the Royal Government in exile started promoting Mihailović as the head of resistance in Yugoslavia. Therefore Tito's accusations incited Dimitrov to ask him what he meant when he spoke about military Tchetniks, and afterwards to explain the nature of his relations Mihailović. Finally Dimitrov wanted to know what was Tito doing to set up a united command of resistance in Yugoslavia.⁴⁴

Dimitrov's demand for clarification arrived in December 1941 at the time when the German of ensive in Serbia had wiped out both Partisan and Tchetnik units in Serbia. Tito had to withdraw to Sandžak with less than a thousand men. Mihailović ordered his units to disperse and he withdrew to Montenegro. Their collaboration was not possible any more, since they had started fighting each other in early November, and their forces were practically annihilated. Moscow's idea of a grand coalition was therefore impossible to realize in Serbia, as well as in Yugoslavia. Moreover, Tito's pressing demand for help in armaments, equipment, and ammunition was not answered. Not only was Moscow unable to liberate Yugoslavia, as Yugoslav communists had imagined in the summer of 1941, but the USSR was also unable to send them any help. They were left on their own, and in these difficult circumstances, Tito decided to follow his own strategy, as he had already done after the disappearance of Gorkić in early 1938.

Tito's strategy

The incapacity of Moscow to lend any help to Tito's Partisans and the difficult circumstances in which the USSR had found itself, incited Tito to try to find his own solutions for the problems of his movement. The theoretical background was the one he brought back from his trips to Moscow, but he was now for the first time free to use it as he saw fit. After crossing over to Sandžak and later to Bosnia, he found himself on the territory that was governed by Pavelić's Ustaša regime. He was thus confronted with a completely new situation. Hundreds of thousands of Serbian peasants went into hiding in the woods of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, trying to escape the genocide Pavelić's regime perpetrated against the Serbs, as well as Jews and Roma. In some cases they were organized into some sort of makeshift village militias, sometimes they joined the local partisan units, and some were under the command of local Tchetnik commanders who only nominally acknowledged Mihailović's overall command. The Serbs which were forced into hiding presented an ideal recruiting possibility for Tito and his Partisan units, since they could never find a place for themselves in Pavelić's Croatia. The latter regime pursued the following policy: a third of the Serbs living in the Independent State of Croatia should be killed; another third should be expelled; and the remaining third would be al-

⁴⁴ Vujošević, "Prepiska", 333.

lowed to stay but under the condition they convert to Catholicism. In order to win them over and have them join his Partisans units, Tito needed more than slogans about the common struggle against foreign occupation. He needed a comprehensive political and military strategy that could only be based on the concepts he had learned in Moscow. His strategy was based on the concepts of: Yugoslavia as a federation of nations; “popular front from bellow”; and the creation of a people’s government. His ultimate objective was to take over the power in Yugoslavia and carry out a social revolution.

Already on 21st December 1941, highly symbolic date since it was Stalin’s birthday, he created the First Proletarian brigade – a mobile unit of battle-hardened partisans that were ready to operate in every part of Yugoslavia. More often than not, the arrival of this kind of units in a region populated by Serbian peasants resulted in them joining the Partisan movement en masse. These units were more battle worthy than their Tchetnik counterparts, thus offering more effective protection against Ustaša crimes. The Partisans had an ideological advantage, since they fought not only against foreign occupation, but also for establishing a new political and social order. Everywhere the Partisans went they established people’s councils, or – as they were called from 1942 – Councils of People’s Liberation (in Serbian the abbreviation is NOO). Their organization was explained in the Instructions drawn up in February 1942. They were conceived as the base of a new political system the Partisans were establishing with the task of furnishing food and equipment to the Partisans’ units on the front. The NOO’s were a part of the Partisans’ battle order as they had the control at the rear of the front. Most importantly, members from all political parties could become part of NOO, but not as exponents of their parties.⁴⁵ Therefore they were formed according to the concept of “popular front from bellow”, that is to say under the supervision of the CPY which hand-picked the members of other political parties.

Tito’s new strategy was conceived during the period when he had few contacts with Moscow. After he was forced to leave Serbia, it became even more difficult for him to send and receive messages via Kopini in Zagreb. While in Serbia, Tito acquired the radio station which the Soviet services had left to the journalist Miša Brašić, before they left with the rest of the Soviet diplomatic personnel. Brašić was supposed to operate it on his own, but he was incapable of doing it, so he gave it, along with the codes to the Partisans, who brought it to Tito. The codes were not right and Tito could not establish a radio connection. Direct radio contact with Moscow was established only when Kopini came from Zagreb to Foča and brought his codes in February 1942. Tito failed to inform Moscow of his new strategy but the Yugoslav government in exile notified the Soviet government that the CPY was pursuing its own agenda in Yugoslavia. The proletarian brigades wore a distinctive sign on their berets

⁴⁵ Petranović, *AVNOJ*, 173-179.

– a red star which without any doubt defined them as communists. Therefore Moscow wanted to know whether the formation of these units had been necessary and whether the partisans units had a communist character. Most of all Moscow wanted to know whether Tito wanted to establish a Soviet political system in Yugoslavia. He was reminded that his primary objective should be the establishing of a large antifascist front that should include Mihailović. Instead Tito's messages spoke about the latter's treason, which seemed highly unlikely to Moscow since he had been serving as the Minister of War in the Yugoslav Government in exile from January 1942.⁴⁶

The fundamental disagreement between Tito and his superiors in Moscow thus came to light. Tito refused to follow the strategy of "two phases", since he broke off with Mihailović and started building his own political system that was shaped after the Soviet model. But the situation had changed because Moscow had no means of putting pressure to Tito. Their correspondence was filled with Moscow's instructions to make peace with Mihailović so that the situation in Yugoslavia would not become an issue within the alliance with the US and UK. Tito, however, continued his own agenda of denouncing Mihailović to Moscow and fighting his units in what would become a fully fledged civil war. Nevertheless, the communication with Moscow went on uninterrupted and the interests and exploits of partisans were publicized and broadcasted by the Soviet media. Gradually Tito succeeded in obtaining Moscow's tacit support for his vision of war in Yugoslavia. Soviet diplomatic envoys commenced echoing Tito's accusation against complaints in their contacts with the Yugoslav government in exile.⁴⁷

However, Tito's refusal to follow the strategy of "two phases" remained an unresolved issue in Tito's relations with Moscow. On 12 November 1942, Tito sent the following message to Moscow:

"We are now creating something like a government, and it will be called the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (NKOJ). All Yugoslav nationalities and various ex-parties will take part in the Committee".⁴⁸

Dimitrov's response underlined the existing disagreements. He agreed with the creation of NKOJ, but he didn't see it as a government but as a political body of the Partisan movement. He added:

"Do not confront it (NKOJ) with the Yugoslav government in London. At the present phase, you should not talk about abolishing the Monarchy. You should not put forward the slogan of creating a Republic. The issue of the political system in Yugoslavia, as you yourself understand, will be solved after the defeat of the Italo-German coalition and after the liberation of the country from occupation.... You should keep in

⁴⁶ Tito, *Sabrana djela*, vol. IX, 224.

⁴⁷ *Odnosi Jugoslavije i Rusije*, 214, 215.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 248.

mind that the USSR has established relations with the Yugoslav King and Government. Thus open confrontation with them would create difficulties for the common war effort of the USSR on one side and of the UK and US on the other side. You should consider the issue of your fight not only from the standpoint of your own national interest, but also in regard to the international Anglo-Soviet and American coalition".⁴⁹

Dimitrov's evocation of the "present phase" was an explicit reference to the theory of "two phases", which Tito had thus far deliberately refused to follow. Nevertheless, when Dimitrov instructed him to do so, he obliged. The first reunion of the institution called the Antifascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (Serbian abbreviation was AVNOJ), which Tito had envisaged as the Partisans' assembly, was held in Bihać on 26 and 27 November 1942, but no Partisan government was formed during this session. On Moscow's explicit demand Tito had to abandon the project of creating the peoples' government. AVNOJ did create an Executive Council but its position was not defined. As Tito informed Moscow, the Partisans did not consider it their government, even though its task was to look after all issues of state interest relying on the network of NOO. Without calling it a government, the Partisans did create their pyramid of power, with NOO at the base, AVNOJ as their Assembly and the Executive Council as the governing body.⁵⁰ The democratic character of these institutions posed a problem even for the Partisans since they envisaged organising free elections for AVNOJ when the circumstances allowed it.⁵¹ In the meantime, the AVNOJ remained a creation of the CPY, who chose each and every one of the participants of the Bihać meeting. They granted their support to the CPY actions in the Civil War in Yugoslavia. AVNOJ denounced Pavelić and Nedić as Quislings and collaborators, as well as Mihailović.

The issue of collaboration with the Germans took an unprecedented importance for Tito's Partisans in the March of 1943. The spring of 1943 was a period in which both Tito's partisans and the German Command in Yugoslavia were under the impression that the Allies, after they had successfully completed their operation in North Africa, might organize a landing in the Balkans. Tito thought that the presumed Allied landing would bring decisive aid to Mihailović's units in the Civil War in Yugoslavia. As Vladimir Dedijer, the semi-official chronicler of the Partisan war noted, the objective of an Allied landing would be to preserve capitalism, centralism and monarchy in Yugoslavia.⁵² Tito even thought that the concentration of Mihailović's units in Montenegro in the spring of 1943 could be explained by the presumed Allied landing. His intention was thus to go back to Montenegro to destroy Mihailović's units

⁴⁹ Ibid., 254.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 256, 257.

⁵¹ Petranović, *AVNOJ*, 270.

⁵² Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozii za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, vol. II (Rijeka: Liburnija, 1981), 803.

before the Allies landed and afterwards to continue to Serbia in order to welcome the advancing Red Army when it arrived to the borders of Yugoslavia.⁵³ It is evident that Tito's main objective was to win the civil war in Yugoslavia. In order to do so, he was even prepared to sign a truce with the Germans so that he could focus on destroying Mihailović troops and fight of an Allied landing on the Adriatic coast.

Before Tito could commence his move from Bihać to Montenegro, the German Command organized an offensive precisely to annihilate all resistance forces in the hinterland of the Adriatic coast, thus preventing them from welcoming the Allied forces if they landed in the Balkans. The first phase of the operation *Weiss*, which was begun in March 1943, was supposed to wipe out Partisans in north-western Bosnia, while the second phase was supposed to destroy Mihailović's units stationed in Herzegovina and Montenegro.⁵⁴ Pressed hard by several German divisions, Tito was obliged to withdraw in the direction of the coast and the main body of his troops was in the valley of the river Neretva, when he was informed that his units had captured a German Major, the commander of a battalion, in the German 717 division. Tito then decided to propose to the German Command an exchange of prisoners, since the Partisans had already made use of this procedure on several occasions starting from August 1942. Not only were the prisoners exchanged but a Partisan commander Marijan Stilinović went to Zagreb in August to help the Germans find the CPY members due to be exchanged. During his stay, he was received by Glaise von Horstenau, the representative of the German Army in Zagreb, who made him an astonishing proposal. He invited the Partisans to withdraw all their units in Sandžak, a region far away from principal communications routes, and a zone under Italian responsibility.⁵⁵ During a meeting with Djilas and Ranković held on 4th March 1943 Tito decided to actualize the proposal of Horstenau. He thought that the Germans could accept the retreat of Partisans in Sandžak since there they would not present any danger for immediate German interests. The Partisans could in this way focus on fighting the Mihailović's units and even Allies if they land.⁵⁶ Thus, he sent Milovan Djilas, Ko a Popović, the Commander of the First Proletarian division, and Vladimir Velebit, his man for special missions, to talk with the Commander of 717 German division. They proposed an exchange of prisoners, but they also proposed, following Tito's explicit orders, a cessation of hostilities between the Partisans and the Germans, and wanted to discuss the creation of a safe zone in which the Partisans could retreat unmolested by the Germans. The Partisan delegation explicitly said that they see no reason for the continuation of

⁵³ Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder. The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst, 2008), 155.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Mira Šuvar, *Vladimir Velebit, Svjedok istorije* (Zagreb: Razlog, 2001), 280.

⁵⁶ Mišo Leković, *Martovski pregovori 1943* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1985), 50, 51.

hostilities, since their main enemies are Mihailović's units. They declared that the Partisans were decided to fight of Western Allies if they land on Adriatic coast.⁵⁷ The delegation put her proposals in writing and gave them to Commander of 717 German division in order that he could transmit it to his superiors.⁵⁸

Popović did not want to wait the response of German Command and returned to his unit. Djilas and Velebit eventually went first to Sarajevo and then Zagreb to continue the negotiations. When they were received in Zagreb by Horstenau, he told them that the Partisans should first stop attacking the railway line Belgrade-Zagreb as a precondition for the continuation of the negotiations. Djilas and Velebit went back and transmitted the message to Tito, who sent the appropriate orders to the Partisan units in Bosnia. He also sent Velebit back to Zagreb so that he could, in the company of German officers, transmit the message to Croatian Partisans. Thus Velebit accompanied by the German officers went to see the Croatian Partisans. The ceasefire might not have been official but it was certainly effective in view of Velebit's mission. Finally the talks had to be abandoned since Hitler refused to negotiate with what he called „bandits”.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, these negotiations revealed the real nature of the civil war in Yugoslavia. Under attack from German divisions and convinced that Allied landing was imminent, Tito had no qualms in proposing some sort of cooperation – if not collaboration – to the Germans. His envoys on various occasions explicitly proposed a cease fire to Germans in order to fight against Mihailović's units and even against Allied forces if they land in the Adriatic. Hitler's intransigence prevented any agreement but Tito's priorities nevertheless became clear. Not only did he refuse to follow Moscow strategy of “two phases” but he in fact inverted them. His main priority was the political takeover in Yugoslavia and his main adversary Mihailović, as he explicitly stated in his instructions to Partisan units in Bosnia.⁶⁰ Moreover, he used the time which the negotiations with the Germans had bought him to pursue his advancement towards Herzegovina and Montenegro.⁶¹ When Tito eventually informed his superiors in Moscow about the negotiations with the Germans, he downplayed the whole event. In his message he simply stated that some Partisan delegates were in Zagreb to negotiate an exchange of prisoners with the Germans. It is interesting to note that, due to London's support to the Yugoslav government and Mihailović, Tito did not hide his animosity towards His Majesty's Government. He expressed it in a way he considered acceptable to Moscow. He said

⁵⁷ Ibid. 87.

⁵⁸ Dedijer, *Novi prilozi*, vol. II, 805.

⁵⁹ Šuvar, *Vladimir Velebit*, 284, 285 ; Dedijer, *Novi prilozi*, vol. II, 808-810.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Mladenko Colić, *Pregled operacija na jugoslovenskom ratištu 1941-1945* (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1988), 104, 105.

that the Partisans and the Yugoslav nations were developing a genuine hatred towards England because of its refusal to open a second front in Europe.⁶² Dimitrov did not condone the talks and considered the animosity towards the UK counterproductive. He was astonished to learn that the Partisans were exchanging prisoners and conducting negotiations with the Germans.⁶³ Tito's explanations did not change the fact that there rose a fundamental disagreement in strategy between him and Moscow.

The scope of differences between Tito and the Soviet government was demonstrated by Moscow's decision to dissolve the Comintern. In order to preserve the Alliance with Western powers, the Soviet government had put an end to the institution that governed the international communist movement. Nevertheless, Tito's agenda remained the same, he still accorded overall priority to the communist conquest of power in Yugoslavia by fighting against Mihailović's units. However, he managed to find another way of setting up a large antifascist front by establishing direct contact with the British Army. The first British liaison officers were parachuted to his Headquarters in May 1943. Tito regularly informed Dimitrov about his contacts with the British and later with American liaison officers too. Their reports heavily influenced the change of Allied strategy towards the Partisan movement.

Among the reports of Allied officers, those of British Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean and American Major Lynn Farish were the most important. Both arrived to Tito's Headquarters on 19 September 1943. Maclean, who had spent several years in the British embassy in Moscow, was ideally suited for the job. He was promoted to the rank of brigadier, and was given direct access to Churchill.⁶¹ Farish was much less prepared to evaluate the situation in Yugoslavia, but his report nevertheless proved to be of utmost importance because Roosevelt had read it before he came to the Allied Conference in Tehran.

MacLean – the highest ranking Allied officer in Tito's Headquarters and Churchill's personal envoy – submitted his report on 6 November. He acknowledged that all key posts in the Partisan units and administration were in the hands of communists, and that all activities were conducted along strict party lines. He noted that the Partisans had built a "common anti-fascist front". He went on to say that if victorious the Partisans would establish a federal system in Yugoslavia. He considered them more apt than Mihailović's units to help the Allied war effort.⁶⁴ Farish, was in Yugoslavia as member of British mission, thus he was MacLean's subordinate. He wrote his report based on the experience he acquired while trying to build an airport in Livno. Maclean had sent him there to get him out of the Partisans Headquarters. Since he did not

⁶² *Odnosi Jugoslavije i Rusije*, 301, 302.

⁶³ *Odnosi Jugoslavije i Rusije*, 302.

⁶⁴ The National Archives, London, FO, 371, 37615, R11589/143/92, Rapport by Brigadier MacLean 6 November 1943.

speak the local language and he had no one to translate for him, he could not learn much about his hosts. Nevertheless, after only forty days he wrote his report which firmly stated that the future of Yugoslavia undoubtedly belongs to the Partisans. He insisted that the Partisans were more numerous and better organized than it was generally known outside Yugoslavia. The movement was started and led by communists but it did not have a communist character. However, the communists in their ranks tried to influence the post-war future of Yugoslavia. Its greatest quality was its continuous struggle against the Axis.⁶⁸

Both reports proved crucial for the talks on Yugoslavia at the Tehran Conference. Influenced by the Farish report, in an effort to build a climate of confidence with Stalin, on the first day of the Tehran Conference Roosevelt proposed a joint Allied operation with the Partisans in northern Yugoslavia, with the goal of helping the Soviet offensive in Romania. Churchill agreed, but Stalin was against it. The Soviet Union wanted the second front to be opened in France not in the Balkans. The Soviets considered all operations which were not tied to the landing in Northern France as a waste of troops and of valuable time.⁷² The fate of Yugoslavia was sealed when Stalin and Roosevelt agreed that there would be no Allied landing in Yugoslavia. Their agreement was based on the assumption that Yugoslavia would become a part of the Soviet zone of influence. Roosevelt was prepared to accept the creation of Soviet zone of influence, if that was the price to pay for a general agreement with the Soviets. Consequently it was natural that only the Soviet protégés were considered as Allies in Yugoslavia. All further decisions about Yugoslavia would first have to take into consideration Soviet interests. The final decisions of the Tehran Conference confirmed the Partisans as the only resistance movement in Yugoslavia which would receive Allied help.

Therefore Tito resolved the issue of anti-fascist front due to an US-Soviet agreement, and officially became the Allied Commander in Yugoslavia. Even before the decisions of the Tehran Conference reached Yugoslavia, he was confident enough to realize his project of creating of a people's government. The second session of the AVNOJ, held in the town of Jajce on the night of 29/30 November 1943, proclaimed the NKOJ as the government, annulled all rights of the Royal Government in exile to represent Yugoslavia, prohibited the King from returning to Yugoslavia, declared that Yugoslavia will be organized as a federation, and promoted Tito to the rank of Marshal of Yugoslavia.⁶⁵ The three main concepts of Tito's strategy, established in spring of 1941, were thus realized: a Yugoslav Federation, "Popular Front from below" and a "people's government". He managed to achieve all three without Soviet aid, and when finally it came, along with the Soviet military mission, he was already recog-

⁶⁵ Petranović, *AVNOJ*, 445-454.

nized as the overall Commander of Allied forces in Yugoslavia and had under his command a considerable number of troops.

The mission of general Kornyev arrived at Tito's Headquarters on 24 of February 1944. Just a few days later on 27 February 1944, the first American mission headed by Lieutenant Colonel Richard Weill arrived. Weill was the first American intelligence officer to come to Yugoslavia. His conclusions about the military organization of the Partisans were completely different from those of his predecessors. First he stated that the war in Yugoslavia had the character of guerilla warfare. Hence all claims about „free Partisan territory” were untrue. There were parts of Yugoslavia where there were no enemy troops, but they could enter them whenever they liked. He concluded that there were no established lines of front, and no free territories behind those lines. Weill believed that the Partisans had succeeded in disrupting the enemy's lines of communication. They had even forced the enemy to concentrate its forces in the cities and venture outside only in heavily armed convoys. However, he considered the Partisans' statements that they had single-handedly tied down more than 17 enemy divisions and over 500,000 enemy soldiers in Yugoslavia to be completely false. Weill firmly said that the Partisans were unable to: 1) drive the enemy out of the country; 2) prevent the enemy from withdrawing its troops from the country; 3) destroy enemy forces in their country. They were capable only of annoying them; preventing them from exploiting the country's natural resources; obstructing the transport of their troops and disrupting their lines of supply; and of weakening the moral of their troops by creating an atmosphere of general insecurity in the country. Weill considered the Partisans incapable of organizing a modern army with tanks and heavy artillery. He concluded that Tito had approximately 300 000 men under his command.⁶⁶

Weill's assessment of the Partisans' strength, tactics, and achievements was an impartial testimony of what Tito had achieved before he renewed contact with Moscow. His estimation of the number of troops Tito had was just that – an estimate, since he had no means of verifying the information he got from the Partisans. Nevertheless, their number was quite important and was perhaps the greatest achievement of Tito's strategy. At the beginning of the conflict, he had had 8000 members of the CPY and 30 000 members of the Communist Youth at his disposal. Three years later, he was commanding an army of a couple hundred thousand men which possessed – albeit in a rudimentary form – all necessary services: intelligence, police, propaganda, medical services, and most importantly was run by the CPY. For three years, this numerous following was exposed to assiduous propaganda about the importance of Tito's leadership, the authentic values of Yugoslav revolution, the solution of national issues in Federal Yugoslavia, the leading role of the CPY etc. Tito's Partisans

⁶⁶ National Archives Washington, RG 226, RG 226, microfilm 1642, roll 131, Weills' report, 27 March 1944.

consisted mainly of Serbs from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, who had invested everything they had in the movement and saw their future inextricably linked to the success of the Partisan movement. The concepts on which Tito built his wartime strategy were those he learnt in Moscow. There were no ideological differences between him and the Soviet authorities. He only applied them as he saw fit without paying attention to the interests of USSR. If anything, he was more of a Stalinist than Stalin himself, since he immediately proceeded to the phase of social revolution, without waiting for “favorable circumstances” as Moscow had demanded.

What may lie in the future for Yugoslavia under Tito’s rule Weill tried to anticipate. For example, When Tito told him that the Partisans would respect the political will of the people after the war, Weill concluded:

“The Partisan party presumably continuing in control as the means of expressing the people’s will in national affairs.”⁸⁵

Weill understood quite well the Partisans way of thinking. Tito told him that the King must first dismiss Mihailović as his minister before he could start negotiating with him. Even then Tito felt bound by the decisions of the AVNOJ, that forbade the return of the King, before a plebiscite could be organized to decide the form of political order. Weill concluded that:

“Tito’s political philosophy seemed to be that he would compromise, for the sake of valuable political support outside of Yugoslavia, with unimportant details of his political plans for the country, but that he would stand firm in support of his plan main outline - an outline which is, in his mind, clear and unequivocal.”⁸⁶

The nature of Partisans political plan was clear for Weill. The Partisans wanted to take the power in Yugoslavia, and they used the fight against the Axis as the means to achieve it. Weill described the Partisans plans as follows:

- “1) The Partisans will increase their quantitative and qualitative strength in the country, military and politically.
- 2) The strength of opposing factions will decline, although these factions may never be totally obliterated.
- 3) At the close of Axis hostilities with Yugoslavia, the Partisans will control the entire country, even if it involves the internal strife and bloodshed to assert and maintain this control.
- 4) The Partisans will remain in control for at least one year after the close of hostilities.
- 5) There is a good possibility that they will remain in control for several years.
- 6) They will fulfill their campaign promises: there will be plebiscites, local committees in an ascending pyramid from villages, to provinces, and regions, to the national Committee. In other words, there will be a representative form of government.”⁸⁷

The only issue the Partisans had yet to solve, before they could realize the program anticipated by Weill, was political recognition of their movement. Tito has been accepted as the Commander in Chief of Allied forces in Yugoslavia, but the Royal Government in exile and the King still had the support of United Kingdom and of the United States.

Tito, the political leader in Yugoslavia

Tito's victory in the civil war in Yugoslavia had to be confirmed by replacement of the Royal Government in exile with NKOJ. That was the imperative condition for gaining international recognition for NKOJ and other institutions within the Partisan pyramid of power. During this process, the Soviet aid and counsel were of outmost importance, but Moscow was no longer in a position to give out orders. Nore could Moscow extend openly its political and diplomatic support to Partisans without provoking dissentions inside the Allied coalition. Nevertheless, the of cial Soviet propaganda and the Communist press in UK and US were openly militating in favour of Partisans. The issue of the political solution for the civil war in Yugoslavia had to be solved in direct contact between Tito and the UK and US governments.

Maclean and Farish arrived again in Tito's Headquarters in January 1944 carrying letters for Tito from their governments. Their respective strategies were dif erent; Churchill opted for a personal approach. He wrote a personal letter to Tito in January 1944, that Maclean brought with him. In his letter the British Prime Minister said that his government would end its support to Mihailović, hoping that in return Tito would understand the moral obligation it had towards the young King of Yugoslavia.⁶⁷ The implicit proposal of a sort of barter, that should have been underlined by the fact that it came from the British Prime Minister in person, did not make any ef ect on Tito. Churchill persevered and in his second letter in February directly asked whether the King could be received in Tito's headquarters if he removes Mihailović from his government. Tito was not impressed by the contact on the highest level and repeated that the decisions of the Second meeting of Avnoj: the King cannot return in the country, the government in exile should be dissolved since NKOJ was the only legitimate government of Yugoslavia. Tito's refusal to accept Churchill's proposal was due to the instructions he received from Moscow. His letter to Churchill was written on the same day he got instructions from Dimitrov saying that the Royal Government should be got rid of along with its Minister of War Mihailović.⁶⁸ This kind of political solution of the Yugoslavia civil war was unacceptable for British government. The only solution possible was, as Anthony Eden, British Minister of Foreign Af airs explained to Tito, a

⁶⁷ Vojislav Pavlović, *Od monarhije do republike* (Belgrade: Clio, 1998), 321.

⁶⁸ *Odnosi Jugoslavije i Rusije*, 364, 365.

sort of transition government, before the issue could be definitely settled by the free elections to be held in Yugoslavia after the War.⁶⁹

The stalemate was broken by the American proposal brought by Farish to Tito. The American intelligence service, OSS (Office of Secret Services) proposed the arrival of the Viceroy of Croatia, Ivan Šubašić, in Yugoslavia. He was supposed to facilitate the transfer of the majority of the members of the biggest Croatian pre-war party, Croatian Peasant party, to the Partisan side. This was the plan that Šubašić in the summer of 1943 proposed to OSS. It was now officially proposed to Tito, who made use of it in order to find a way out in his talks with British government. Tito already had information that Šubašić had approved of, on several occasions, the struggle of Partisans. This was the information that he got via Moscow from United States where Šubašić was living after the fall of Yugoslavia. Therefore Tito proposed to MacLean the creation of a transition government composed from Partisans representatives and some pre-war Yugoslav politicians, amongst which he proposed in the first place Šubašić.⁷⁰ Therefore, in the beginning of 1944 in direct contacts with Western Allies Tito imposed his solution for the political solution of the civil war in Yugoslavia. The Tito – Šubašić agreement was the base for the gradual transfer of power from Royal government to the Partisans' one, that commenced by the arrival of Šubašić in Tito's headquarters on island of Vis in June 1944. The Western Allies supported the process even though they hoped that it would not end in a complete communist domination of Yugoslavia. However, they abstained from intervening directly since the country from Tehran onwards was in Soviet zone of influence. The Partisans's takeover went on without visible Soviet help, since the Soviet government officially stated that had no inside knowledge and no influence on the situation in Yugoslavia. However, Tito was diligently informing Moscow of every move he took. The situation changed after his voyage to Romania and USSR, in September and October of 1944, and the consequent arrival of the Red Army in Yugoslavia.

The Tehran decisions thus were realised and the decisive Partisan victory in Serbia in the fall of 1944 was achieved due to the presence of the Red Army. Therefore Tito could impose on the population of Serbia, composed of peasants and small entrepreneurs that throughout the war remained faithful to the Monarchy and free market economy, a communist dictatorship. Soviet military aid was crucial in transforming the guerrilla movement, as described by Weill, into a modern army capable of defeating the retreating German troops in Yugoslavia. Soviet political caution was indispensable for organising the elections for AVNOJ in November 1945 that legitimised the Partisan takeover in Yugoslavia. Amongst all people's democracies, Yugoslavia was the first to create an exclusively communist government. Tito stood at the fore-

⁶⁹ Ibid., 323.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 324.

front of the conflicts which heralded in the Cold War. Tito's Yugoslavia almost singlehandedly defied the West on the issue of Trieste and Venezia-Guilia. The USSR did not support Yugoslav claims concerning the north-eastern province of Italy. In 1946, the Yugoslav Air Force shot down American planes over Slovenia. The communist movement in Greece relied principally on Yugoslav aid during the Civil War. On every possible occasion and in every possible way Tito's Yugoslavia tried its best to demonstrate that it was the spearhead of the international communist movement. Yet the 1948 Tito-Stalin split put an end to this vigorous campaign, and the CPY was accused of ideological deviations and outright treason of the communist ideal.

The Yugoslav-Soviet conflict was not provoked by ideological differences. It was purely a matter of state interests. As was the case during the war, Tito followed his own agenda and Yugoslav interests as he saw them. Regional cooperation, Balkan federation, Yugoslav military presence in Albania – all these issues demonstrated that he considered himself to be in a position to develop his own foreign policy and to articulate the interests of communism in the Balkans as he saw fit. This kind of independent conduct was the real cause of his conflict with Stalin. From the ideological point of view, Tito's Yugoslavia was, if anything, the most accomplished copy of the USSR. Tito was able to stand up to Stalin not because he and the CPY were not Stalinists, but precisely because they were. Only a Stalinist firm and monolithic structure, based on the Partisan organisation created during the war could have withstood the pressure which Yugoslavia was exposed to after 1948.