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THE POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF YUGOSLAV COMMUNIST STUDENTS IN PRAGUE FROM 1927 UNTIL 1937

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree, or qualification thereof, or for any other university or institute of learning.

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May 2nd, 2016

Stefan Gužvica

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GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

Cominformist – A person who supported the 1948 Cominform Resolution against the Communist Party of Yugoslavia

ČVUT – Czech Technical University

DJAT – Society of Yugoslav Agricultural Technicians

DJT – The Society of Yugoslav Technical School Students in Prague

HSS – Croatian Peasant Party

JNO – Yugoslav Nationalist Youth, a monarchist and nationalist organization founded in Prague by the Yugoslav Embassy in 1932

KPH – Communist Party of Croatia

KPJ – Communist Party of Yugoslavia

KSČ – Communist Party of Czechoslovakia

KUNMZ – Communist University of the National Minorities of the West

Sabor – The National Assembly of Croatia

SDZ – Slovenian Students' Collective

SKOJ – League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia

Tanjug – The official news agency of Socialist Yugoslavia

URO – United Revolutionary Youth, a moderate left-wing republican organization formed in Yugoslavia in 1931

ZAS – Collective of Students from Serbia, Montenegro and Bay of Kotor

ZHA – Collective of Croatian Students

ABSTRACT

The Political Activity of Yugoslav Communist Students in Prague between 1927 and 1937

by

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The Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the Interwar period was a very dysfunctional state. Torn apart by ethnic and social conflict, it was never able to conclusively deal with the issues that it faced. This led to political mobilization from the radical left, which sought to overcome both the problems that the state inherited from pre-World War I era and the ones it had created after 1918. Although dissent was often violently suppressed, it was constantly on the rise in the wake of the 1929 Dictatorship.

Some Yugoslav students found refuge from the regime in Prague, one of the last bastions of democracy in Europe. Czechoslovakia was an ally and a Slavic nation, which made it appealing to study there, given the developed cooperation and rich offer of scholarships. Many students saw that they could use the democratic atmosphere in Prague to propagate views which were illegal in their country. While in Prague, the Yugoslav communist students had to adapt to a constantly changing political climate, in accordance with the views of the Comintern. They were present from the very beginnings of the Czechoslovak state, but their activity truly intensified in 1927. In that year, a particularly active and dedicated group of students and older émigrés formed a Party cell and a student organization which operated until 1937. During this period, many students took an active role in the communist movement, which gained a mass character within the confines of the small Yugoslav community. Some were already Marxists before they

arrived, while others were converted by their comrades upon arrival. Most of these people went on to be the political, military and intellectual elite that shaped the postwar Yugoslav state. An incredibly large number of significant figures of 20th century Yugoslav history were gathered in the same place and at the same time in the 1930s.

Even more extraordinary than their personalities was their political work. Although they always sought to take over non-communist student organizations, they succeeded in cooperating with some of them very successfully, thus becoming a popular movement rather than an isolated political sect. The Popular Front strategy introduced in 1935 was their natural environment, and they applied Popular Front tactics even during the ultra-left Third Period. On the other hand, their attitude towards the Yugoslav state and identity did faithfully reflect the stance of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, leading to a strong anti-Yugoslav attitude between 1928 and 1935.

They created a democratic atmosphere in which they lived and worked in. As a consequence, they were all very open-minded. Although they were far from monolithic, there was a general tendency to end up on the reformist side of the Party after the Tito-Stalin Split, meaning that they actively shaped the policies that Yugoslavia adopted and which made the Yugoslav communist project unique, such as workers' self-management and non-alignment. They were devoted internationalists and socialists who remained true to their ideas even after the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991. This thesis aims to demonstrate how their experience as revolutionaries in the 1930s contributed to their ideological formation and thus, in part, the shaping of postwar Yugoslavia as a whole.

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1. Introduction

In the morning of the 27th January 1937, a group of fifteen foreign students departed from Prague's Wilson Train Station to Paris, apparently on a self-organized excursion. Crossing the Czechoslovak-German border was not a problem; they were Yugoslav citizens and, unlike Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia had good relations with the German Reich. The passport of one student, with curly black hair, a curved nose, and a suspicious sounding last name – Engel, had caused the German border policemen to frown. Apart from that, everything appeared to be in order. Late at night, they arrived at the Franco-German border, routinely reiterating that they are going to a week-long excursion to Paris. After a long delay, the train entered France, and the students fell asleep. They woke up in Paris next day, left the train station and, as they were crossing the Seine, threw the keys to their Prague dormitories into the river. They would not need them anymore.[1]

Four days earlier, the Prague Police Directory had received a report from the Royal Yugoslav Embassy in Prague, providing them with further information about the disappearance of the student Ratko Belović and his wife Olga, who had been reported missing two weeks earlier.[2] The Yugoslav Embassy wrote that Ratko and Olga Belović had been to a field trip in Krkonoše Mountians in late December, organized by the "Jugoslavija" Academic Society, the umbrella organization of Yugoslav students in Prague. They were accompanied by Branko Krsmanović, Lazar Udovički, and Ratko Pavlović, all newly-elected members of the Executive Committee of "Jugoslavija." When the representatives of the Yugoslav Embassy came to investigate in the student dormitory at the request of Belović's parents on the 26th January,

[1] Lazar Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti: pismo mojoj deci* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 1997), 88-89.
[2] Zora Gavrić, "Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga," in Čedo Kapor, ed. *Španija 1936-1939: Zbornik sećanja jugoslovenskih dobrovoljaca u Španskom građanskom ratu*, Vol. 5 (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1971), 352-353.

Krsmanović, Udovički, and Pavlović were already gone. After further investigation, they discovered a letter by Belović to Krsmanović in which he espoused a leftist ideology and declared his intention to go to Spain as a volunteer. By the 1st February, the Prague Police could only confirm that virtually the entire Executive Committee of "Jugoslavija" had gone to Spain to fight in the Civil War. Fifteen left-wing students left Prague on the 27th; Belović, his wife, and three other students had left already during Christmas time.[3]

Of the twenty Yugoslav students who left Prague in late 1936 and early 1937, three died in Spain and six died in WW2; one ended his revolutionary activities after returning from Spain, and one was imprisoned by the Yugoslav communist government after the Tito-Stalin split. The rest of them would become some of the most respected and influential Yugoslav diplomats, legislators and ideologues in the post-WW2 period. In total, seven out of twenty would receive the title of the People's Hero of Yugoslavia, which was the highest and most honorable order of the socialist state – if not according to rank, then certainly in terms of public perception. The most famous of them was Veljko Vlahović, who lost his leg in Spain, spent World War II in the Soviet Union and afterwards became one of the key figures in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. These nineteen men and one woman were just a part of a vast Yugoslav communist student community in Prague in the Interwar period. Other notable figures who studied there include left-wing composer Oskar Danon; diplomat Ivo Vejvoda; and general of the Yugoslav People's Army Gojko Nikoliš.

What is remarkable is that these people, almost without exception, found themselves on the reform wing of the Party after the split with the Soviet Union, and that those who lived into the 1990s remained true to the socialist and internationalist ideas of their youth when the state they had participated in creating had started to collapse. Given how common left-wing

[3] Gavrić, "Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga," 353.

nationalism was within the Yugoslav communist movement, which forged itself through a national struggle against foreign occupiers, the internationalist lessons which these people drew from their prewar experience are remarkable. Many of them have acknowledged the crucial role of Prague in the formation of their communist beliefs (and, indeed, most became communists only after they arrived to Prague). The democratic atmosphere of Czechoslovakia helped them reimagine their own country and the world, while the ethnically mixed group they were in made them into Yugoslavs. This thesis will attempt to present the political actions and ideas that developed in their movement through the course of their actions in the late 1920s and 1930s and examine the impact this had on their postwar political beliefs. It will not look exclusively into the impact of the social circumstances in Prague, but also, more importantly, the role played by these extraordinary individuals' choices and their organization of political life of Yugoslav students.

The young Yugoslav communists were active in Prague at a momentous time. The 1930s were the crucial formative period for the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Two parallel processes of the time – the formation of the Popular Front policy and the Stalinist purges – would lead to a creation of the kind of disciplined antifascist and revolutionary party that would take power in 1945. Like many Yugoslav communists, they had spent this crucial period abroad because of state persecution. More importantly, they were in a relatively left-wing and democratic country, which had a profound impact on many of them. It is important to note, however, that their experiences were far too diverse for all of them to be categorized uniformly as radically democratic socialists. There were always many disagreements and opposing views within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the situation among the students in Prague reflected this. While reading this work, it is important to keep in mind the assessment of the Croatian historian Ivo Banac:

> "My own research convinces me that the Yugoslav Communist movement was always very diverse, as diverse as Yugoslavia itself. We err when we see a monolith even in the late 1930s and especially during the war."[4]

The Yugoslav communist students of Prague were not a monolith. Although a large majority of them were very democratic-minded and consciously worked towards a more humane socialism, a significant number of them found it hard to renounce their loyalty to Moscow, and some even sided with Stalin in the 1948 split between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Even the reformers, with very few exceptions, started distancing themselves from dogmatic Stalinism only after 1948, which means that many democratic lessons of Prague were learned retroactively and through engagement with real issues of the construction of a socialist system in Yugoslavia. Although the mentality of young Yugoslav communists in Prague was, more often than not, far from Stalinist, the gap between their beliefs and Stalinist practice rarely became apparent before the Tito-Stalin split.

The thesis will focus on the political activity of the Yugoslav communist students in Prague from the establishment of Party organization in Prague in 1927 until the students' departure for Spain in 1937. The work will be based primarily on accounts written by the Yugoslav communist students after the war, namely their biographies and memoirs, as well as documents from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. It will also draw from the archival fonds of the Registry of Associations of the Prague City Archive, the All-Students' Archive from the Charles University Archive, and the Prague Police Directory Archive in the National Archive of the Czech Republic in order to better understand the details of their political activity in Prague. Secondary sources providing an overview of the Yugoslav society in the Interwar period, as well as the policies of the Comintern

[4] Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 256.

and the Yugoslav Communist Party, will also be analyzed. This thesis aims to be a contribution to better understanding the often-neglected experience of living and working abroad that many of the Yugoslav communists had been through before World War II, and how this affected the unique Yugoslav postwar communist project.

2. Yugoslavia in the Interbellum Period

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, established on 1st December 1918, was a troubled state from the very beginning. It was led by the ethnically Serbian Karađorđević dynasty, whose country found itself on the victorious side in World War One. The Serbs already had their independent nation-state before the war, while Croats, Slovenes and a significant portion of the Serbs populated the southern parts of Austria-Hungary (in which Croatia enjoyed a certain level of political autonomy). Nonetheless, the three sides found common ground and a common interest for their unification.

The most important reason for unification was the concern regarding the territorial aspirations of the country's neighbors.[5] On the one hand, by not entering Yugoslavia, the Serbs would not be able to achieve the nationalist goal of uniting all Serbs in a single state, as many Serbian people lived in ethnically mixed areas. On the other, the Croats and Slovenes risked losing vast parts of their territory to Italy, which had been promised Istria and most of Carniola and Dalmatia by the Treaty of London in 1915. At the same time, the success of the Yugoslav idea, which had undermined the Habsburg state even before its collapse, successfully facilitated the unification.[6]

However, the ethnicities of the new state would soon find their interests to be quite distinct. The nation was comprised of many more ethnic groups than just Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The national particularity of Montenegrins, Macedonians and Bosnian Muslims was not recognized, and the state also had significant non-Slavic minorities, most notably Germans,

[5] Branko Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1988), 3.
[6] Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkley: UC Press, 2001), 169-170.

Hungarians and Albanians, each numbering roughly half a million people according to the 1921 population census.[7]

The Constitution created a centralized state that was unitarist, presupposing that Southern Slavs are one nation with three names, that the differences between them are minimal and would eventually fade away in the new state.[8] However, the limitations of such a model became apparent already during the Constitutional Assembly. The process of the formation of distinct ethnic identities of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was mostly over by 1918. The attempt to bridge the differences through a supra-national identity was limited to small groups of intellectuals, and a mass political movement of Yugoslavs was not possible due to the fact that an overwhelming majority of the population were peasants, who had been kept separate on a confessional basis even before the formation of their nationhood.[9]

What made matters worse was the fact that the unitarist Yugoslav model in practice proved to be a tool for achieving Serbian political hegemony. Apart from the ethnically Serbian dynasty, many other factors also contributed to making the unitarist and centralist model particularly advantageous for the Serbs. First of all, there was an overwhelming numerical advantage of the Serbian political elites: for example, twenty-three out of twenty-four governments were headed by Serbs, most of them from "Serbia proper" (the part of the country which existed as Kingdom of Serbia before the unification in 1918). This hegemonic and centralist conception of Yugoslavia was rooted in the nationalist ideology of the People's Radical Party and its leader Nikola Pašić,[10] who ruled the country more or less constantly since 1903. Their aim was never anything other than Greater Serbia, and Yugoslavia became merely a

[7] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 33.
[8] Branislav Gligorijević, "Jugoslovenstvo između dva svetska rata," *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis* 21, no. 1 (1986), 79-80.
[9] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 4.
[10] Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 170.

means of achieving this. Second, the dominance of ethnic Serbs in the army was almost absolute: in a country where a palace coup was organized by the army in 1903 and which was in virtually a perpetual state of war between 1912 and 1918, the King relied heavily on the army to keep himself in power.[11]

By the time of the Constitutional Assembly (1920-1921), a division was effectively established between the centralist Serb parties supported by the Muslims on one side, and the federalist Croat and Slovene parties, the republicans and the communists, on the other. However, the centralist policies of the government in Belgrade quickly antagonized even the Serbs who lived under Austria-Hungary until 1918 and most of them soon turned towards federalism.[12] The centralist model was met with the most opposition from the Croats, who enjoyed significant rights under the Habsburg state. The Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia, formed in 1868 and perceived by many Croats as having continuity with the first Kingdom of Croatia founded in 925, had an elected Parliament (*Sabor*) and a ruler, *Ban*, appointed by the Habsburg King. After Sabor voted to secede from Austria-Hungary and become part of the Southern Slav state, it ceased to exist as a body in the new country. As a consequence, the centralization of the new state meant a loss of statehood for Croats. The Croatian opposition was quickly united under the Croatian Republican Peasant Party led by Stjepan Radić (the term "Republican" was removed in 1925 so that it could operate legally), which opposed the attempts to create a unified Yugoslav nation and encouraged the uniqueness of Croatians.[13] However, in spite of being the strongest opposition force in the Kingdom, it was not the only one. The main weakness of the federalist

[11] Gligorijević, "Jugoslovenstvo između dva svetska rata," 84-85.
[12] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 128.
[13] Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 172-173.

opposition was its heterogeneity.[14] Slovene federalists were still clerical nationalists; Serbian federalists struggled to combine the right to self-determination with the ideology of "all Serbs in one state"; the Montenegrin federalists still identified as ethnically Serbian; the Bosnian Muslim desire for an autonomous Bosnia was paired with their attachment to the Yugoslav ideal, which for them served as protection from the nationalism of both Serbs and Croats. The only common ground for the federalist opposition was the preservation of the Southern Slavic state, but with acknowledgement of historical differences, and a preservation of regional political and economic interests.[15] Given that the former was too vague and the latter often conflicting, there was little chance for success.

The deadlock in which the centralists and the federalists found themselves was a constant source of tension throughout the 1920s. The centralists had no desire to compromise and give up power. On the other hand, the inability of the federalist camp to reach an agreement meant that even if concessions were granted to them, no one knew what federalization would look like. Secession was not an option, as Croats always insisted on true federalism which would protect them best from Hungarian and Italian irredentism.[16] Although the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) formed a coalition with the Radicals of Pašić in 1925, it quickly collapsed due to both the Radicals' rejection of compromise, and the playing up of anti-Serbian nationalism by the HSS.[17]

The nationalist tension culminated on 20th June 1928, when a Serbian representative from People's Radical Party shot and killed two HSS representatives in the National Assembly. Three more were wounded, including the HSS president Stjepan Radić, who died from the wounds six weeks later. King Alexander tried to end the political crisis that followed by suspending the

[14] Desanka Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje* (Belgrade: Izdavačka radna organizacija "Rad," 1983), 24.
[15] Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 24-25.
[16] Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 194.
[17] Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 192-193.

Assembly and the Constitution and establishing a personal dictatorship on 6th January 1929. In October of 1929, the country was officially renamed to Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and divided into nine administrative units called "banovine," divided along geographical rather than ethnic lines. The King essentially tried to reinforce the unitarist idea of a single Yugoslav nation, reinforcing centralism and suppressing all claims to national distinctiveness of Serbs, Croats or Slovenes. In the long run, however, such a move only deepened the national divide. Pešić writes that "temporary popular satisfaction with termination of inter-party conflicts was soon followed by an intensification of national contradictions,"[18] and Petranović calls this unsuccessful attempt at resolving national differences "Yugoslavism by decree."[19]

Economically and socially, the country did not fare any better. It was marked by uneven industrial development, as most factories were concentrated in Slovenia, Croatia, Vojvodina and Belgrade.[20] Although industrial output was increased by 40 percent in the 1920s,[21] most new factories were opened in those areas that were already industrialized. This uneven position of developed regions caused almost as much tension as the national question. In the countryside, agrarian reform was used to both pacify the poor peasantry and strengthen the presence of Serbs in areas where they did not have a majority,[22] as land in non-Serb villages was given to volunteers and veterans from the First World War. Like elsewhere in Europe, the dominant attitude to international trade was protectionist, which meant that unnecessary tariffs and restrictions severed many of the previously existing economic ties, especially with the successor states of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.[23] Meanwhile, the parliamentarians were "far

[18] Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 247.
[19] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 180.
[20] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 60.
[21] Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 243.
[22] Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 289.
[23] Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 242.

more concerned with politics than the socio-economic development of the state."[24] The few parliamentary debates about the economy revolved, more or less, around the conflict of interests between the Croatian bourgeoisie (which was the wealthiest segment of the country[25]) and the Serbian political class, which favored the still-developing but increasingly more powerful Serbian bourgeoisie. The self-perpetuating state bureaucracy was bloated, inefficient and corrupt. The Kingdom thus became the second most indebted country in Europe after Greece,[26] and the per capita GDP was only 70 US dollars in 1938.[27] Influx of foreign capital, if anything, contributed to widening inequalities and perpetuation of the status quo, as it could only expand under the watchful eye of the corrupt government.

Faced with such dismal conditions, many Yugoslav citizens went down the road of political radicalization. The country hardly had either a capitalist class or the working class, but it was not short of people seeking social justice: there was about half a million landless peasants, and roughly three million workers were in a precarious position of performing seasonal jobs.[28] As a consequence, the communist movement could only be stopped by large-scale state oppression, even though most of their supporters probably were not part of the proletariat in the Marxist sense. Compared to Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union seemed like a land of hope: it was a multiethnic state which, unlike Yugoslavia, enabled a life in peace for all its nations; it was on the road to achieving industrial progress and economic equality; its culture was blossoming; and reports of happy and optimistic citizens creating a world without exploitation and class oppression kept pouring in, sometimes even from the bourgeois media.

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[24] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 69.
[25] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 76.
[26] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 61.
[27] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 72.
[28] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 64.

3. The Ideological Development of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ), founded in 1919 and dissolved in 1990, was one of the most diverse and fascinating parties in the communist world. Its U-turns in policy were even more common than those of other communist parties, and the abundance and diversity of factions made for a dynamic political life within the Party, although not always to its advantage. Most of the factional struggles in the KPJ in the Interwar period were fought over the national question.[29] Indeed, it was the crucial political issue in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and more attention was given to it by the communists than any other aspect of the Party's policy, including the question of the revolution itself, although it is important to note that "[the national question] was not always considered to be the strategic problem for the revolutionary movement."[30] As a consequence of the emphasis on nationality, and the fact that these national issues were not resolved in Yugoslavia, Party factions were usually stable and long-lasting.[31] Even after the Party was thoroughly Stalinized in the late 1930s, new factions arose, albeit much more loosely organized.

Federalism was a long-term project of the Yugoslav labor movement. The idea of a socialist Balkan Federation of equal peoples, independent from imperialist powers, had dominated Serbian Marxist thought since the second half of the 19th century, and it was supported by thinkers such as Svetozar Marković (1846-1875) and Dimitrije Tucović (1881-1914). The Balkan Federation was included in the program of both the Serbian and the Bosnian social democratic parties before World War One.[32] The Croat and the Slovene social democrats influenced by Austro-Marxism were primarily federalists too, though of course within the

[29] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 45-46.
[30] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 115.
[31] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 46.
[32] Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 7.

confines of the Dual Monarchy, while the "rightist" comrades within their respective parties had already embraced the Yugoslav idea before the war, having lost faith in the reformability of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[33] Regardless of where they stood, the Southern Slav Marxists abided by the ideals of internationalism during the war. However, towards its end, the rightists in Austria-Hungary started to conflate internationalism with Entente's desire for a unified South Slav state under Serbian guidance. They eventually entered the government, which caused a split with the leftists and the rightists' eventual political marginalization.[34] The leftists then went on to form the Socialist Labor Party of Yugoslavia (Communists) in April 1919. The name was changed to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia at the Vukovar Congress a year later.

At the very beginning, the communists of Yugoslavia did not seem to care much about the national question. Like many Marxist groups, they tended to diminish its importance. It was considered to have been solved by the "National Revolution," that is, the unification of 1918, and that the next logical step would be the Proletarian Revolution. At first, it certainly seemed like events were unfolding in that direction. The KPJ emerged as the fourth largest party in the Constitutional Assembly election, and also won local elections in Belgrade and Zagreb. Only after the intervention of the Royal Government were they prevented from taking power in the country's two largest cities.[35] This success, paired with the enthusiasm brought about by the October Revolution, led many to believe that a Yugoslav Revolution was imminent. These hopes were quickly shattered. Following the assassination of the Minister of Interior in 1921 by young communist radicals, the Party was banned and mostly sidelined for the rest of the Interwar period. The marginalization was a consequence of the Party's factional struggles and failure to properly understand the importance of the national question as much as it was a consequence of

[33] Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 6-7.
[34] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 47-48.
[35] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 108.

state repression.[36] Instead of trying to address the issue of nationality and approach the oppressed, the communists simply bickered amongst each other on the Congresses and on the pages of the Party newspaper.

In spite of all the fluctuations in KPJ's policy towards the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, one constant in this period was the overwhelming influence of the Comintern:

> "The Comintern offered help to organise revolutionary activities and to promote socialist revolution in countries where the 'objective' conditions for revolution existed, but the Comintern's interpretation of when and where such conditions existed were largely defined according to Soviet Union foreign policy interests. In return, communist parties from countries outside the Soviet Union were expected to give their full allegiance to the Comintern, and their full commitment to Comintern policies. Comintern interference has frequently been highlighted as a crucial contributing factor to the KPJ's inability to get to grips with the national question in Yugoslavia. The Comintern showed a lack of understanding of the nature of the sometimes conflicting relationships between the Yugoslav nations, and its frequent interference in Yugoslav affairs clearly complicated the disputes surrounding the KPJ approach to the national question."[37]

Before major interference from the Comintern, the communists viewed Yugoslav unification as a positive event. It is important to note that the KPJ insisted on the name "Yugoslavia" from its very foundation, even though the state itself was called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes until 1929. For Yugoslav Marxists, the unification was the fulfillment of the historical role of the bourgeoisie, and their successful national revolution was a precondition for a future social revolution which was soon to come.[38] The initial support for Yugoslav unitarism came not as a form of nationalism, but foremost as an expression of Marxist

[36] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 51.
[37] Hilde Katrine Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia: Tito, Communist Leadership and the National Question* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 19, ProQuest ebrary.
[38] Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 21-22.

internationalism.[39] Although the communists pointed at potential problems with monarchist centralism already at the Constitutional Assembly,[40] they remained insistent on unitarism. The Croatian communists at first minimized the importance of the Croat national question and reduced it to a struggle between Serb and Croat bourgeoisie.[41] At a time when virtually all Croat voters rallied behind the struggle of the Croatian Peasant Party for decentralization and Croatian autonomy, this was a rather unwise move which only served to further marginalize the now banned Party. This faulty view was a consequence of the fact that the leading Croat communists, Đuro Cvijić (1896-1938) and Kamilo Horvatin (1896-1938), were disillusioned Yugoslav nationalists who were disappointed by the failure of the bourgeoisie to achieve true national liberation.[42] This view, combined with the indifferentism of the Serb communist leaders Filip Filipović (1878-1938) and Sima Marković (1888-1939), proved disastrous for the popularity of the KPJ.

After the KPJ was banned, it saw an emergence of a factional struggle between the left, which considered that the revolution in Yugoslavia is imminent, and the right, which was skeptical of this idea. The two also had significant disagreements on the national question. The rightists, led by Sima Marković, observed the national conflict purely in terms of class, while the leftists, most notably Ante Ciliga (1898-1992) and Kosta Novaković (1886-1939), considered the national and class oppression to be intertwined, eventually adopting the opinion that the Serbian bourgeoisie oppressed both the Croat and the Slovene bourgeoisie.[43] The two factions then engaged in a drawn-out doctrinal struggle. This struggle led to over-intellectualization of the contemporary political issues at the cost of actual active engagement with the working class. The

[39] Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 23.
[40] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 121.
[41] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 53.
[42] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 47.
[43] Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 25-30.

ideological solipsism further cemented the isolation of the KPJ. In February 1928, two leftists from Zagreb, Josip Broz (1892-1980) and Andrija Hebrang (1899-1949), influenced the city's KPJ organization to adopt a resolution against factionalism and appeal to the Comintern to end the factional struggles within the Party.[44]

The "Zagreb Line," as it came to be known, managed to seemingly put an end to factionalism (although, as already stated, the factions always existed in one form or another within the KPJ). The leftist faction prevailed, thanks to Comintern support. At the Fourth Congress of the KPJ in Dresden in November 1928, Đuro Đaković was named the *de facto* leader of the Party, after the Comintern dissolved the Central Committee because of factionalism, being equally ruthless to the old rightists and leftists. At the Congress, the Party adopted a new line in regards to the national question: dissolution of the Yugoslav state through armed struggle and cooperation with secessionist organizations.[45] Given that this was the beginning of the Comintern's Third Period, the KPJ also renounced all cooperation with the forces of the democratic left, who were now seen as "social fascists" (in the case of the KPJ, this cooperation was never good to begin with). Reformism of all sorts was replaced by a desire for social radicalization and the expectation that this would hasten the revolution. It was a period of extreme sectarianism which only further weakened the position of the KPJ. Just two months after the Dresden Congress, King Alexander imposed his personal dictatorship, which brutally cracked down on the remaining communists. In April 1929, Đuro Đaković was killed by the Yugoslav police. By 1930, the surviving Party leadership fled to Vienna. They would not return

[44] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 59.
[45] Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 32.

to the country until 1934. The decimated national Party organization would only start to recover in 1932.[46]

The opinions on the causes for such a radical change of stance in the KPJ are divided. Some historians see it as primarily a consequence of the stance of the Comintern, namely its hostility to the post-Versailles world order and the perceived greater likelihood for revolutions in the Balkans than in Western Europe.[47] According to them, Comintern's directives in this period, which claimed that Yugoslavia was merely a hegemonic project of the Greater Serbian bourgeoisie, proved detrimental for the KPJ. Pešić points out that, unlike the Comintern, the KPJ failed to make a clear condemnation of nationalist ideology in the period after the Fourth Congress.[48] She questions KPJ's assumption that separatist nationalist policies opposing the unitarist Yugoslav nationalism and Greater Serbian hegemony were a good way to destabilize the country, arguing instead that a purely Marxist class struggle would have been a lot more efficient way of challenging the power of the state.[49] Other authors emphasize instead the vast national inequalities, saying that the unitarism adopted in 1919 seemed far more detrimental to the revolutionary cause than secessionism by 1928.[50] Haug recognizes both the Comintern pressures and the influence of Yugoslav domestic politics on the Dresden Congress, pointing out that it happened in the wake of the assassination of Stjepan Radić, when the unitarist Yugoslav state appeared to be crumbling.[51] This is similar to the thinking of the German communists who rejected collaboration with the social democrats and saw the rise of fascism as the last stand of the bourgeoisie before the inevitable victory of the proletariat.

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[46] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 213.
[47] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 215-216.
[48] Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 262.
[49] Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 254.
[50] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 55.
[51] Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 31.

In spite of the official support of breakup of Yugoslavia between 1928 and 1934, many authors argue that this stance was not "natural" for the KPJ. Haug states that "not all communists had felt entirely at ease with this policy, which in essence was imposed upon them by the Comintern,"[52] while Banac points out that the KPJ would often "sabotage" the Comintern line in the Third Period, and that Milan Gorkić (1904-1937), who became the *de facto* leader in 1934 and general secretary in 1936, actively argued for an alliance with social democratic, Christian socialist and peasant parties throughout the period.[53] As we will see, these "deviations" towards a Popular Front line were quite common among the Yugoslav communists in Prague too.

As a consequence, the KPJ became a sort of a cautious vanguard of the developments which would be sanctioned by the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in August 1935. The Congress marked the beginning of the Popular Front, a policy based on a broad coalition of left and liberal forces united against fascism. This period would finally see a renaissance of the organization destroyed in the early 1920s, the formation of the idea of Yugoslav federalism that would dominate Party policy for the next half a century, and the consolidation of the leadership which would lead the KPJ through World War II. Expectedly, this leadership was established under firm guidance from Moscow and through brutal murders of the veterans of the Yugoslav communist movement. It is estimated that out of some 900 Yugoslav communist exiles in the Soviet Union, at least 800 were arrested between 1936 and 1938.[54] Almost all of them were executed or died in the gulags.

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia started recuperating from the blow struck upon it by the Royal Government between 1932 and 1934. This was done spontaneously, without

[52] Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 41.
[53] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 64.
[54] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 67.

interference from the Comintern or the exiled Central Committee.[55] The Party's growth was facilitated by a new wave of political struggles that began around the period, and increased mobilization against the dictatorship. Such a development required the communists to put an end to their sectarianism and reaffirm their federalism. The Fourth Land Conference of KPJ in Ljubljana in late 1934 repeated the need for an armed uprising against the "fascist" Yugoslav dictatorship, without explicitly calling for dissolution of Yugoslavia.[56] This was a first, albeit rather shy, expression of the need for an antifascist front in the country. The same Conference decided to organize the Communist Parties of Croatia and Slovenia within KPJ, which was not finalized until 1937. Anticipating the changes in the Comintern, the KPJ explicitly called for a building of a "Popular Front" in April 1935.[57] The establishment of a Popular Front strategy was confirmed at a Central Committee Plenum in Split in June 1935, which explicitly stated that the KPJ, whilst supporting national self-determination, "does not insist on the break-up of Yugoslavia at any cost."[58] The Party opened itself to cooperation with bourgeois parties, a stance which was adopted by the Comintern itself two months later at the Seventh Congress. This was a radical shift in KPJ policy. The Party accepted national differences among Yugoslav peoples, and concluded that "national feelings are not alien to the proletariat."[59] From this point on, the KPJ would attempt to "outdo the bourgeoisie in national ideology."[60] Nevertheless, the Party always made a distinction between their Yugoslav nationalism and national chauvinism.[61] The communists accepted the necessity of solving the national question before the revolution, and finally opened themselves to cooperation with the Croatian Peasant Party as the main opposition

[55] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 214.
[56] Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 264-265.
[57] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 216.
[58] Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 40.
[59] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 216.
[60] Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 276.
[61] Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 277.

force in the country. The Resolution passed at the Split plenum acknowledged that it was wrong "to fill the heads of the masses with claims that their [national] leaders are traitors and compromisers. Such claims, however correct historically, today drive the masses away from us."[62]

Another important strategic shift that occurred in this period was the accentuation of the struggle of other marginalized groups within Yugoslavia, primarily women, students and peasants. Apart from cooperation with liberal, social democratic and peasant parties, the KPJ started infiltrating already existing legal organizations in order to "build a base of support for the communist cause from within."[63] The KPJ took part in strikes of legal reformist trade unions and successfully turned the University of Belgrade into an "antifascist fortress," with the largest communist youth organization in the country.[64] A lot of young people were militarized by the dictatorship, which was very slowly giving up its power, and this resulted in rapid growth of the communist youth movement. By the time of the Fifth Land Conference of the KPJ in October 1940, the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (SKOJ) was effectively the largest section of the communist movement. The KPJ itself had only 6,600 members, while the membership of SKOJ, at 17,800 members, was almost three times as high.[65] The communist student movement in Prague was, in a lot of ways, a training ground on which the Party practiced the strategy of the radicalization of youth and infiltration into students' organizations which started within Yugoslavia in 1932.

On the other hand, when it came to working within the mainstream political arena, the Popular Front policy of the KPJ was a failure. After being under constant attack from the

[62] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 63.
[63] Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 42.
[64] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 220.
[65] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 5.

communists for a decade and a half, the Croatian Peasant Party leadership had no intention of cooperating with the KPJ. They formed a coalition of parties opposed to the dictatorship called the United Opposition for the 1935 election. This coalition involved all democratic forces, regardless of ethnicity. However, they refused to grant any concessions to the KPJ, as the HSS leader Vladko Maček correctly calculated that the communist voters would support the United Opposition regardless.[66] In spite of this political failure, the Party continued its rise, and the struggle against fascism in Spain only furthered their prestige. Over 1700 Yugoslavs fought in Spain, and about a third of them died there. The organizational center for Yugoslav volunteers was run by the KPJ and had its headquarters in Prague.[67]

The period from the Split Plenum in 1935 until the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia was the most important stage in the history of the development of the KPJ. It resulted in the creation of a Party that would lead the country through World War Two, the Revolution, and the eventual opening of the society following the break with Stalin. Throughout the period, the KPJ denounced its own sectarianism of the Third Period and persistently widened the front of political struggle.[68] At the same time, it increasingly employed the language of "the nation" in its political propaganda.[69] While the KPJ did not finalize its vision of a federal organization of Yugoslavia yet, it accepted the basic tenets of national equality, fight for political freedoms and a creation of a Popular Front of all democratic (meaning anti-fascist) forces. Such a stance led to a development of a distinct left-wing Yugoslav nationalism, whose fullest expression would come during the war of Yugoslav peoples against fascism, in which the KPJ took a leading role. All of these trends can be observed in parallel among the communist students in Prague.

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[66] Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 43.
[67] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 232.
[68] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 249.
[69] Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988: knj. 1: Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 235.

4. Yugoslav Revolutionary Student Movement in Prague before 1927

The Yugoslav student movement in Prague reached its peak in the 1930s. However, it is important to understand its scope and impact in the 1920s, when the KPJ still struggled for support from the masses even within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Most of the Yugoslav student organizations in Prague which were instrumental in the struggles of the 1930s were formed in this period (although most of them were initially apolitical or pro-government). The work of the students and revolutionaries before 1927 set the stage for the events of the following decade – a setting which was not always positive for the communists.

In the wake of World War I, the Yugoslav student community in Prague was enormous and its socio-economic position was dismal. According to a report of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from mid-1919, the student population numbered over 1000 individuals, most of who "were condemned to starvation or even abandonment of their studies."[70] Such a situation seemed perfect for dissemination of communist ideas. Surprisingly enough, this was not the case. As we will see, communism only gained wide support among the students in Prague after the establishment of the dictatorship in Yugoslavia in 1929. The troubles with factionalism plagued SKOJ as much as its older counterpart, the KPJ. This, combined with the sectarianism of the Third Period and the insistence of the KPJ that the students should work primarily outside of universities, prevented a mass student movement from developing among Yugoslav students at home and abroad.[71] Additionally, the government soon started handing out scholarships in order to alleviate the hardships of some of the students, and those studying in

[70] Momčilo Mitrović, "Saradnja Beogradskog univerziteta sa univerzitetima u Čehoslovačkoj 1918-1939," *Studia Balcanica Bohemo-Slovaca* VI (2006), 299.
[71]Miodrag Žiko Avramović, "Prve demonstracije protiv vojno-monarhističke diktature pod rukovodstvom beogradskih studenata-komunista 1. aprila 1932. godine," in Dobrica Vulović, ed. *Beogradski univerzitet u predratnom periodu, narodnooslobodilačkom ratu i revoluciji*, Vol. 2 (Belgrade: Centar za marksizam Univerziteta u Beogradu, 1986), 169.

Czechoslovakia on a government scholarship had to sign a statement promising not to engage in any kind of anti-state activity.[72] In spite of the fact that these government measures affected only a small percentage of the students,[73] the communists failed to develop a mass movement. Their work was limited to a small group of individuals who apparently failed to reach out to the wider student population. It appears that the Yugoslav police had a tendency to overestimate their impact, and in 1921 wrote that Yugoslav students from Prague and Vienna returning to the country are all "infested with communist ideas."[74] The only visible consequence of this "infestation" was that a lot of communist literature from Czechoslovakia arrived during these years to Vojvodina and left some impact on the youth there, prompting appearance of several communist youth organizations in the region.[75]

Dr Miloš Aranicki, who studied medicine in Prague from 1919 until 1921, writes that on his arrival, there was already a Club of Yugoslav Marxist Students, which was founded by Živković, Dr Pavlović and Nikola Kotur.[76] He does not give much attention to either Živković or Pavlović, withholding even their first names, but he does say that Kotur was a "distinguished youth activist."[77] It is almost certain that he is talking about Nikola Kotur (1898-1938), who later became a Political Secretary of SKOJ and was killed during the Great Purge. Although his account of the Yugoslav communist movement in Prague is full of superlatives, he does not seem to remember much else from his two-year stay, and it appears that his role in the group was marginal. Another prominent communist student in the city at the time was Lazar Đurović (1893-1943), who was a KPJ activist in the Interwar period and who died in World War II in the

[72] Mitrović, "Saradnja Beogradskog univerziteta sa univerzitetima u Čehoslovačkoj 1918-1939," 300.
[73] Slavoljub Cvetković, "Jugoslovenski napredni studenti u Pragu posle Prvog svetskog rata," *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju* 22 (1980), 167.
[74] Cvetković, "Jugoslovenski napredni studenti u Pragu posle Prvog svetskog rata," 168.
[75] Cvetković, "Jugoslovenski napredni studenti u Pragu posle Prvog svetskog rata," 169.
[76] Miloš Aranicki, "Marksistički klubovi jugoslovenskih studenata u Beču i Pragu," in *Četrdeset godina: Zbornik sećanja aktivista jugoslovenskog revolucionarnog radničkog pokreta*, Vol. 1 (Belgrade: Kultura, 1960), 115.
[77] Aranicki, "Marksistički klubovi jugoslovenskih studenata u Beču i Pragu," 115.

Battle of Sutjeska. He arrived to Prague on a government scholarship, which was revoked at the request of the Ministry of Interior in November 1920 because he took part in organizing a communist rally in his home town of Danilovgrad.[78]

Roughly in the same period, from May 1920, Prague was the residence of a young and at the time still anonymous revolutionary from Bosnia called Rodoljub Čolaković.[79] After a brief time in Moravia, he settled in Prague and joined the Club of Yugoslav Marxist Students. He stayed in the city until December 1920, roughly around the time when the KPJ was banned. Soon after, Čolaković returned to his country and joined a Marxist terrorist organization called "Crvena pravda" with Alija Alijagić, which operated without Party approval. On 21st July 1921, the group carried out the assassination of the Yugoslav Minister of Interior Milorad Drašković because of his role in the banning of the KPJ. Alijagić, who carried out the assassination, was tried and hanged, while Čolaković was sentenced to 12 years in prison as an accomplice. Čolaković (1900-1983) would later become one of Tito's closest associates and serve as a Minister of Education and Vice-President of the Federal Government in postwar Yugoslavia. Another member of "Crvena pravda," Nebojša Marinković (1898-1938), was cleared of all charges and then immigrated to Prague, where he worked on connecting all Marxist organizations to the KPJ.[80] He remained in Prague until 1933, when he immigrated to the Soviet Union, only to become a victim of the Great Purge five years later.

The activity of Yugoslav communist students in Prague died down starting from around 1922, and would remain low for the next half a decade. An Embassy report from July 1923 stated that there are no known active Yugoslav communist organizations in Prague.[81] The

[78] Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), Ministarstvo prosvete (MP), 66-440-702, 9 November 1920. "Ministarstvo prosvete."
[79] Cvetković, "Jugoslovenski napredni studenti u Pragu posle Prvog svetskog rata," 167.
[80] Gavrić, "Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga," 350.
[81] Cvetković, "Jugoslovenski napredni studenti u Pragu posle Prvog svetskog rata," 169.

number of students from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes studying in Prague also dropped sharply, and from 1923, there was an average of 200 students per year.[82] Given that number of students on a government scholarship was 167 in both 1923 and 1925,[83] it is safe to assume that the government measures, apart from improving the socioeconomic situation of the students, also helped pacify them and ensured that most of the students who went to study in Czechoslovakia were loyal to the regime.

The only conflict with any political overtones in those years appears to have occurred in the spring of 1925 between the "Jugoslavija" Academic Society and Dragutin Prohaska,[84] who served as the School Inspector of the Ministry of Education, overseeing activities of Yugoslav students. The members of "Jugoslavija" accused Prohaska of unjustly persecuting lower class students, stripping them off their scholarships, and reporting them to the Czechoslovak police.[85] Before sending the letter to the Minister of Education asking him to intervene, the students organized a protest in the center of Prague in order to bring media attention to the issue and strengthen their position. The five signatories of the letter were not the elected leaders of "Jugoslavija," but were chosen to represent it by an assembly of students. At least two of the five signatories were communists: Josip Šarac and Dragiša Mišović.[86] Prohaska was in fact stripped off his duties several months later, but the reason was the significant reduction in number of

[82] Fazlija Alikalfić, "Agan Bostandžić," in *Sarajevo u revoluciji: Revolucionarni radnički pokret: 1937-1941*, Vol. 4 (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1981), 467.
[83] Mitrović, "Saradnja Beogradskog univerziteta sa univerzitetima u Čehoslovačkoj 1918-1939," 300.
[84] Dragutin Prohaska (1881-1964) was a well-known Croatian literary critic and historian of Czech origin. In 1934 he became an assistant professor at Prague's University of Economics. A staunch supporter of the Yugoslav monarchy, he remained in Prague after World War II and died there.
[85] AJ, MP, 66-441-702, 30 March 1925. Letter from AD "Jugoslavija" to Mr. Svetozar Pribičević, Minister of Education.
[86] Mišović (1898-1939), a medical student, became a communist already during his studies in France, which caused the Yugoslav government to revoke his scholarship. He then moved to Prague and became a doctor of medicine there. After finishing his studies in November 1925, he returned to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and continued his revolutionary activity for almost a decade and a half before he was murdered by the Yugoslav police in 1939.

scholarship holders, not the complaints of students.[87] We can conclude that the Ministry, being aware of Mišović's previous political activity, almost certainly ignored the students' letter, and the students were much more concerned with strengthening their position in the eyes of the Czechoslovak public than influencing the Ministry. The fact that the assembly of "Jugoslavija" was clearly influenced by the communists to such a degree in 1925 is even more remarkable when we consider that it was an officially apolitical society mostly dominated by the pro-government monarchists. Apart from this incident, however, communist activity appears to have been minimal.

[87] AJ, MP, 66-441-702, 30 July 1925. Decision of Ministry of Education concerning the recall of Dragutin Prohaska, the School Inspector in Prague.

5. Gaining a Foothold

In 1927, a group of communist students arrived in Prague and started a process of transforming communist revolutionary strategy into one of reaching out to the masses of students at the university. These students were Muhamed Kadić, Marijan Krajačić, Vlajko Begović, Miron Demić, Dragan Miler, Vaso Todorović, Zora Gavrić, Branko Popović and Adela Bohunicki. These students were guided by the older communists who had formed an illegal Party organization before their arrival. This organization consisted of Nebojša Marinković, the aforementioned member of "Crvena pravda" and an accomplice in the assassination of the Minister of Interior; Josip Šarac, an engineering student who was the signatory of the letter against Dragutin Prohaska in 1925; Zvonimir Kavurić, a student of architecture; and Pavao Koporčić, another engineering student. Vaso Todorović and Branko Popović appear to be the only people in this group who failed to leave a significant mark on the history of Yugoslavia in the subsequent period, and there is little to no biographical data available regarding their life and work. All the others became prominent Yugoslav revolutionaries and intellectuals whose fascinating biographies warrant mentioning here at least briefly.

Zvonimir Kavurić (1901-1944) studied architecture in Prague from 1921 until 1927, and became a communist during this period. He worked with the renowned Czech modernist architect Alois Dryák. From 1927, he worked for Le Corbusier, and partook in the creation of his famous project for the Palace of the League of Nations. In 1932, he returned to Zagreb where he worked as a city architect, designing public buildings and family houses. His most famous finished work is certainly the design of the dome of the Meštrović Pavilion, which is today one of the city's most prominent modern art galleries. While he retained his job under the Independent State of Croatia, he worked clandestinely for the Partisan movement. The Ustashe

arrested him during a Party meeting in June 1944 and he was hanged on 5th October that same year, after several months of torture.[88]

Pavao Koporčić (1902-1995) returned to Zagreb in 1932 after having finished his studies in Prague. He opened a private company manufacturing ventilation units. From 1939, with the help of his former comrade Marijan Krajačić, he opened an illegal Party printing office in the back rooms of his company. He financed many Party activities and used his connections with the high society to gather intelligence information for the Party before World War II. His house in Dubrava by Zagreb was the venue of the Fifth Land Conference of the KPJ in October 1940, the last and most significant Party meeting before the outbreak of World War II. He lost contact with the Party in August 1941 after the Italians executed Pavle Pap, the member of the KPJ Central Committee and the *de facto* leader of the Zagreb communists. During the war, he used his connections to help imprisoned communists, and continued his activities for the Party after they reestablished the connection with him in 1944.[89]

Vlajko Begović (1905-1989) became a member of SKOJ in 1927, and joined the KPJ in Prague in 1930. He was expelled from Czechoslovakia for communist activity in 1933. He left for France, and then moved to the Soviet Union in 1935. In Moscow, he attended the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West (KUNMZ). In 1936, he went to Spain as a volunteer in the International Brigades, and eventually became a Major in the Spanish Republican Army. After the fall of the Spanish Republic, he was detained in a French concentration camp, and then in a prison, following the German occupation of France. He escaped from prison in 1943 and spent the rest of the war fighting for the French Resistance.

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[88] Ivana Haničar Buljan, "Prilog za biografiju arhitekta Zvonimira Kavurića (1901.-1944.)," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 30 (2006), 281-297.
[89] Pavao Koporčić, "Radio sam za Partiju," in *Zagreb 1941-1945: Zbornik sjećanja*, Vol. 2 (Zagreb: Gradska konferencija SSRNH, 1983), 173-177.

Following World War II, he served in a variety of high-ranking positions, including being the President of the Federal Planning Committee, Director of the Institute for International Politics and Economy, and the Director of the Party newspaper *Borba*.

Miron Demić (1905-1936) was a Bosnian revolutionary from Foča. After finishing high school in Sarajevo, he came to study in Prague, where he became a member of the KPJ. He was expelled from Czechoslovakia because of communist activity, at the request of the Yugoslav Ministry of Interior. He then settled in France, from where he departed for Spain in October 1936 to join the International Brigades. He died in the Battle of Madrid, just over a month after his arrival to Spain.[90]

Zora Gavrić (1905-1985) was, according to Vlajko Begović, "the longest-standing member of our [revolutionary student] movement, partaking in all its areas of activity."[91] The daughter of a peasant family from Tuzla in Bosnia, Gavrić became a member of SKOJ in 1925, soon after graduating from the Gymnasium. In the fall of 1925 she went to study in Brno, from where she moved to Prague and earned a degree in Chemistry. In 1931, she became a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). She worked in the laboratory of the famous Prague German chemist Ernst Waldschmidt-Leitz until March 1932, when she was dissmissed because of a crackdown of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior on communists. She was arrested by the Gestapo in September 1940 and spent the next two and a half years in prison. After prison, both her and her husband Štěpán Plaček continued underground work for the KSČ. After the war, Zora Plačková worked as the official Prague correspondent of Tanjug, the Yugoslav news agency. In 1948, she was the person who translated and then sent to Belgrade the

[90] Vlajko Begović, "Učešće u pomoći Španskoj republici," in *Sarajevo u revoluciji: Revolucionarni radnički pokret: 1937-1941*, Vol. 1 (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1976), 202.
[91] Vlajko Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," in *Sarajevo u revoluciji: Revolucionarni radnički pokret: 1937-1941*, Vol. 1 (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1976), 583.

infamous Cominform Resolution, which made the Tito-Stalin Split official. In October 1949, both she and her husband were arrested as "Titoists" and she spent three and a half years in prison without trial. After her release, she worked as a chemist once again until her retirement in 1963. She spent her retirement years researching and writing about the activity of Yugoslav communists in Prague in the Interwar period. She died in Prague on 5th August 1985.[92]

Muhamed Kadić (1906-1983) was a student of architecture from Mostar. After his arrival to Prague in 1927, he joined the communist movement and in 1931 he was elected president of the communist-controlled "Matija Gubec" Society in Prague. After being deported from Czechoslovakia for communist activity, he went to France and Belgium. In 1935, he returned to Yugoslavia, settling in Sarajevo, where he would spend most of his career. Together with his brother Reuf, the designer of Sarajevo's first skyscraper, he designed many of today's icons of modern architecture in the city, such as the Building of the Pension Fund, inspired by Soviet constructivism. In 1942, fearing persecution by the Ustashe, the brothers fled the city and joined the Partisans. Kadić was ordered to leave the guerilla unit and join the construction department where his skills were much more useful. After the war, he returned to architecture, and started teaching at the newly-founded School of Architecture at the University of Sarajevo. From 1975 until his death he was a member of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina.[93]

Marijan Krajačić (1905-1942), like Kadić, was an architecture student and one of the leaders of "Matija Gubec," who was expelled from Czechoslovakia in the same year as Kadić. Unlike Kadić, however, his life was cut short by the war. Born in Velika Gorica by Zagreb, he

[92] Jan Kalous, *Štěpán Plaček: Život zpravodajského fanatika ve službách KSČ* (Prague: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2010), 29-37, 100, 188, 213.
[93] Ivan Štraus, "Muhamed Kadić, 100 godina rođenja," *a4a info portal*, June 23, 2006. http://www.a4a.info/ArticleView.asp?article_id=949 (accessed February 11, 2016).

came to Prague after graduating from high school. He lived in France in the mid-30s, and came to Spain in September 1936 to fight in the International Brigades. He was heavily wounded in battle and evacuated to Paris. After he recovered, he returned to Zagreb, where he became a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia. He was arrested by the Yugoslav authorities in August 1940. The Axis occupation of Yugoslavia meant that he found himself in an Ustasha-controlled prison in April 1941. [94] Following an unsuccessful attempt at escape in March 1942, he was transferred to Stara Gradiška concentration camp where he was murdered. He was the older brother of Ivan Krajačić – Stevo (1906-1986), the People's Hero of Yugoslavia and President of the Sabor the People's Republic of Croatia from 1963 until 1967.

Dragan Miler (1908-1951) appears to have been the most interesting and intriguing of all of these people, although he is not well-known. He was from Travnik in Bosnia, and lived as an émigré in the USSR after finishing his architecture studies in Prague. In Moscow, he was the editor-in-chief of the *Inostrannoe rabochee izdateljstvo* publishing house.[95] From his post, he accused the Yugoslav translator of Stalin's propagandist book *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)*, Josip Broz, of filling the chapter on dialectical materialism with "Trotskyist formulations." Broz narrowly escaped death (the only one of the three translators of the book in Serbo-Croatian to have done so), and he did not forget Miler's accusations: when Miler returned to Yugoslavia in 1944 with the advancing Red Army, he was immediately arrested. Although he was soon released, he was arrested again in 1948 after the Cominform Resolution and murdered at Goli Otok prison camp,[96] which the Yugoslav state created for its Stalinist opponents.

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[94] Ivan Jelić, *Tragedija u Kerestincu (Zagrebačko ljeto 1941.)* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986), 33.
[95] During the Cold War, this publishing house became well-known in the West under its new name, Progress Publishers.
[96] Jože Pirjevec, *Tito i drugovi, I deo*. (Belgrade: Laguna, 2013), 93-94.

The arrival of these people to Prague signaled the need for an overhaul of Party work. The new Party organization in Prague was now divided into youth sections and the main KPJ organization. The people in both were quite young, but differed in experience as revolutionaries. The main KPJ organization was effectively in charge, and it formed "Marxist groups" of students, usually containing four students and one member of the KPJ main section (most often also a student). All of these groups operated illegally and unofficially, trying to stay off the radar of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior, and thus also the Yugoslav police.[97] The KPJ in Prague then established continuous contact with the Party organization in Vienna through Vlajko Begović.[98] Given that the KPJ organization in Vienna had been very active throughout the 1920s, and that many leading Yugoslav communists were exiled there, this certainly helped maintain continuity of action in Prague, where almost all Yugoslav communists were mere short-term expatriates. Additionally, the KPJ section in Prague managed to establish itself as the main connection between the KPJ Central Committee with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the Communist parliamentary group in the Czechoslovak National Assembly, and the left-wing press.[99] Apart from working within the communist movement, they also started a strategy of infiltration in legal student organizations, in particular "Matija Gubec" and the Society of Yugoslav Technical School Students. This infiltration was not spontaneous, but was part of a plan to legalize some aspects of communist activity and attract more students to the cause.[100]

The first organization that the young communists tried to take over was the Society of Yugoslav Technical School Students (*Društvo jugoslovenskih tehničara, DJT*). It was the logical

[97] Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," 582.
[98] Adela Bohunicka, "Španska poznanstva u Pragu," in Čedo Kapor, ed. *Španija 1936-1939: Zbornik sećanja jugoslovenskih dobrovoljaca u Španskom građanskom ratu*, Vol. 1 (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1971), 412.
[99] Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," 583.
[100] Alikalfić, "Agan Bostandžić," 468.

choice, as it was the only student organization that showed any sign of class consciousness. This was a consequence of the economic situation of the technical school students. The law of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes barred those who completed their secondary education in technical secondary schools from entering university. This automatically excluded people from the lower classes from entering university, as they were the ones who would most often choose to send their children to technical schools, which were much easier to get into than gymnasiums. [101] The president of the DJT, Jože Rus, was a liberal, but sided with the communists on many questions out of necessity, given the poor social standing of the students he was representing. He was among the five signatories of the letter to the Ministry of Education in 1925.[102] In April 1927, presumably after some political agitation, the communists Vaso Todorović, Vlajko Begović and Marijan Krajačić were elected into the Executive Committee of the DJT, while Dalibor Miloš Krno (1901-1983), a Yugoslav-born Slovak pedagogue with communist sympathies, was elected its president.[103] We can assume with great certainty that this was the group of people who first presented the idea of going on an excursion to the Soviet Union, which was organized in the summer of 1927 and led by Dalibor Miloš Krno.[104] The communists remained influential until the liberal leadership expelled Pavao Koporčić, Marijan Krajačić and Dragan Miler from DJT in 1928.[105]

This move seems to have significantly weakened the impact of the communists on the society, as they failed to gain any significant posts in the Executive Committee after June

[101] Cvetković, "Jugoslovenski napredni studenti u Pragu posle Prvog svetskog rata," 168.
[102] AJ, MP, 66-441-702, 30 March 1925. Letter from AD "Jugoslavija" to Mr. Svetozar Pribičević, Minister of Education.
[103] Archiv hlavního města Prahy (AHMP), Spolkový katastr (SK), X/211, 2 April 1927. Report to the Associations Department of the Police Directory.
[104] AHMP, SK, X/211, 10 December 1927. Report to the Associations Department of the Police Directory.
[105] AHMP, SK, X/364, 1 April 1929. Report to the The Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior on communist agitation in "Matija Gubec" society.

1928.[106] They then turned to the "Matija Gubec" Academic Society. It was the most overtly political Yugoslav student group in Prague, although all societies had to be apolitical on paper. Named after a 16th century leader of a Croatian peasant revolt, it aptly gathered the supporters of the Croatian Peasant Party. The Society was founded on 25th January 1928. In March, the Party president Stjepan Radić, himself a former Prague student, visited the city and held a lecture for members of the Society. His agrarianism and his firm oppositionist standpoint garnered him sympathy from the leftists at a time when the official KPJ stance was identical to that of the Croatian Peasant Party – that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is stifled by the hegemony of the Greater Serbian bourgeoisie. This attitude was only strengthened by the decisions of the Dresden Congress of the KPJ in late 1928. Between the failure of the takeover of the DJT in mid-1928 and the establishment of a Dictatorship in Yugoslavia in January 1929, the ranks of "Matija Gubec" swelled with the increasingly successful communist agitators. Their strategy was twofold: raise class consciousness through personal work with students and legalize aspects of Party work through infiltrated student societies.

The class structure of the Yugoslav students changed significantly in this period, benefiting the KPJ. The overwhelming majority of the students in the late 1920s were studying at the Czech Technical University (ČVUT). About 150 out of 200 Yugoslav students at the time were technical school students.[107] Given their social class and the legal discrimination they faced in Yugoslavia, it is understandable why communist activity blossomed once they came to dominate the ranks of Yugoslavs. Communist literature and press, whether Soviet, Czechoslovak, German or Yugoslav, was widely available, exposing them to an ideology that seemed not only to explain their poverty and precarious social position, but also to offer them a

[106] AHMP, SK, X/211, 15 June 1928. Report to the Associations Department of the Police Directory.
[107] Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," 580.

way out of it. In Interbellum-era Yugoslavia, prisons were called "schools for communists," referencing the immensely successful activity of the imprisoned communists among the inmates. Everybody, however, underestimated the danger of actual schools that the youth of Yugoslavia attended, especially those studying abroad.

The communists now worked actively among the students, trying to get more of them to join the cause. This might have been the crucial difference between them and the students in Yugoslavia, whose strategy was to work exclusively outside of universities until 1931.[108] They seem to have adopted a very personal approach when trying to bring people of proletarian and peasant origin to their ranks. They would often debate and persuade individual students to join their cause. The most famous case of "conversion" to communism (and certainly the one they were most proud of) was that of Marijan Krajačić. Twenty-two-year-old Krajačić came to Prague as a nationalist and a supporter of the monarchy, which was not uncommon among the lower class students from peasant families. He became a communist thanks to the active work of Miron Demić (who later became a close friend of his) and Vlajko Begović, who debated politics with him on many occasions. Adela Bohunicki described how the process of conversion went:

> "It was a method of personal persuasion, which we practiced on students from the rival camp who impressed us with their personal qualities and abilities. The reorientation process would last for months with some students. Many of them told me later of their sleepless nights and their wavering. This is perfectly understandable when you consider that these were young people who mostly read pro-regime press and did not show much interest for the state of the country, nor did they have much contact with the working class."[109]

Krajačić was transformed into the most loyal of advocates and activists of the communist cause in the Yugoslav émigré community, eventually giving his own life for the revolution.

[108] Avramović, "Prve demonstracije protiv vojno-monarhističke diktature pod rukovodstvom beogradskih studenata-komunista 1. aprila 1932. godine," 170.
[109] Bohunicka, "Španska poznanstva u Pragu", 412.

The work within legal organizations was probably the most interesting and most fascinating aspect of the strategy of Yugoslav communists in Prague, as it went completely against the sectarianism of the Comintern's Third Period. They cooperated with the bourgeois democratic forces and tried to influence them, rather than alienate them. In the words of Vlajko Begović:

> "We carried out very pragmatic politics – on a wide democratic basis, trying to gather all oppositionist and democratic students around the communists. We created a united front which fought in the interest of the students, against the Yugoslav regime and its branch in Prague – the Yugoslav Embassy. There were, however, sectarian tendencies, especially concerning the call for an armed uprising. Our student Party organization in Prague followed such [sectarian] orientation by supporting the work of the KPJ in the country and abroad. However, by working among students and by using the Czechoslovak bourgeois democracy, we developed a movement with a wide political platform, which gathered all opposition students. It is true that certain attitudes and individual statements were a reflection of sectarian radicalism, but this was not typical of the student movement as a whole."[110]

This is quite a radical course for a disciplined Party group at this time. It is extraordinary that we can see signs of a democratic and pan-Yugoslav character of the revolutionary student movement in the late 1920s, very different from the official ultra-leftism of the KPJ. Such an approach would become the most interesting and most pronounced feature of the Yugoslav communist student movement in the 1930s. The strategy of infiltrating non-communist organizations, raising class consciousness among the poor pro-regime students, and getting into conflict with the representatives of Yugoslav state authorities in Prague all began in this period.

In effect, the group of students gathered by Marinković, Šarac, Kavurić and Koporčić managed to establish continuity (both ideological and strategic) in the Yugoslav communist

[110] Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," 584.

student movement in Prague which would last until the Spanish Civil War. They set the stage for all the student struggles in the 1930s, in which they took an active role, joined by many fresh faces. The main reason for their success was the insistence on open agitation among the students – something that Yugoslav communists at the universities in the country did not start doing until 1931. Many of the students came and went, but the organization remained, and its operations were increasingly successful. The repressive measures of the Yugoslav government after the establishment of the Dictatorship proved counterproductive very quickly, prompting the Yugoslav Embassy to soon confront the communists on their own turf – by supporting the anti-communist Yugoslav student organizations in Prague.

6. The Dictatorship and the Communist Offensive

As noted in Chapter 3, the KPJ was dealt a heavy blow by the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia when the Dictatorship was established in January 1929. However, while the Party organization in the country went on a defensive and started recuperating only in 1932, the Prague KPJ used the commotion caused by the establishment of the Dictatorship to go on an immediate offensive and strengthen its position among the Yugoslav students in Prague. The period that followed entrenched the communist organization, which eventually gained a crucial advantage over the government – a legal students' organization that they could not affect and that the Czech police could not easily ban.

The aforementioned core of the communist student group was strengthened in 1929 with the arrival of two young idealistic revolutionaries from Bosnia and Herzegovina, both of whom joined the communist movement already in their high school days: Fazlija Alikalfić and Agan Bostandžić. Fazlija Alikalfić (1910-2004) was from Mostar and he studied forestry in Prague, where he became an active Party member. He then worked in the forestry office in his home town until the outbreak of World War II. In 1941, he joined the Partisans, and fought in some of the most famous battles in Yugoslavia, at Neretva and Sutjeska. He was a member of the first postwar National Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the founder of the School of Forestry at the University of Sarajevo, whose Dean he was between 1965 and 1969. In his retirement years, he became a critic (albeit a marginalized one) of the new regime and the nationalist ideologies which divided Bosnia and Herzegovina. His friend Agan Bostandžić (1909-1943) became a communist while at the Sarajevo gymnasium. An excellent mathematician, he was admitted into the Charles University's School of Mathematics in the fall of 1928. He was well versed in dialectical materialism and Marxism-Leninism and often lectured

on these topics to other students in the "Matija Gubec" Society. After his graduation in 1934, he decided to get a second degree in actuarial studies while working for the Czechoslovak National Statistical Office in parallel. However, he returned to Yugoslavia in 1935 and was arrested as soon as he arrived to Belgrade. Bostandžić was released thanks to his uncles' connections, but was not allowed to return to Prague. In order to get away from police surveillance, he moved to Ljubljana and soon got a job in the "Slavia" Bank. He was active in the communist movement there, taking part in anti-fascist demonstrations and maintaining ties between the KPJ and pro-communist elements in the Royal Army. Soon after the occupation began, in May 1941, he moved to Sarajevo and joined the resistance there. He was in charge of forging documents for members of the Partisans and worked for the Partisan intelligence service. Arrested by the Gestapo in December 1943, he died in custody after brutal torture.[111]

This expanded group of communist organizers was quick to take over the formerly pro-HSS "Matija Gubec" Society as soon as the Dictatorship was established in Yugoslavia. By late March 1929, the assembly elected Marijan Krajačić as Vice-President of the society, while another communist Stanko Aranjoš was elected President in a new assembly that was convened just over a week later.[112] Two more communists, Koporčić and Viktor Kralik, were also elected into the Executive Committee. Communist fellow travellers from the DJT, like Rudolf Turk (1907-1984), the famous Slovene agronomist, followed them in joining the ranks of the Society.[113] The new assembly in early April 1929, at which Aranjoš became President, was intended to further strengthen the communist grip over "Matija Gubec," and the entire old pro-

[111] Alikalfić, "Agan Bostandžić," 464-484.
[112] AHMP, SK, X/364, 1 April 1929. Report to the Associations Department of the Police Directory.
[113] AHMP, SK, X/364, 1 April 1929. Report to the The Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior on communist agitation in "Matija Gubec" society.

HSS leadership resigned.[114] The most hotly debated topic at the new assembly was the crackdown of the Czechoslovak police that preceded it by a few days. Dragutin Prohaska, who was reinstated as the School Inspector and was now also in charge of the Yugoslav student dormitory at Letná, requested to look into the library that "Matija Gubec" acquired in March. He found a library full of communist books in Russian, which the students claimed to have received from Soviet exchange students for the purposes of learning the language and finding out more about the Soviet Union. The Czechoslovak police was sent the list and concluded that none of the books are illegal in the country, and that although some members of "Matija Gubec" are known communists, they did not perform any communist activities within the Society, so there is no basis to take immediate legal action against them.[115] Nevertheless, a further police investigation into the activities of the Society was launched two days later following a request from Prohaska.[116] The list of books they had was included in the report. It shows that the librarian of the Society, Vlajko Begović, managed to gather an impressive library of 156 communist books. Interestingly enough, this library even included the works of Leon Trotsky, who had been exiled from the Soviet Union just a month before. According to Begović, in the wake of this event, the HSS supporters became passive, allowing the communists to do whatever they wanted with the society.[117] A look at subsequent lists of the leadership confirms this.

Prohaska confiscated some of the books, leading the communists to hire a lawyer to help them, threatening to sue if he did not return them within eight days. The Ministry of Education in Belgrade responded by threatening to revoke scholarships and studying permits of those who

[114] Národní archiv (NA), Policejní ředitelství Praha II – prezidium (PP II), Š 114/1, 5 April 1929. Report to the Presidium of the Prague Police Directory on the Extraordinary Assembly of the "Matija Gubec" Society.
[115] AHMP, SK, X/364, 1 April 1929. Report to the The Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior on communist agitation in "Matija Gubec" society.
[116] AHMP, SK, X/364, 3 April 1929. Request of Dragutin Prohaska, Director of the Yugoslav student dormitory, to the The Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior.
[117] Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," 586.

disobey the School Inspector.[118] Just like Dragiša Mišović in the 1920s, the students tried to stave off their foes at the Embassy by writing letters to the Yugoslav Ministry of Education and accusing Dragutin Prohaska of personal attacks on the less affluent students. The strategy was identical to the one pursued in 1925, with a 100-strong protest taking place before notifying the Ministry in order to attract attention of the Czechoslovak media. They certainly succeeded, at least in the case of the communist press.[119] From then on, Prohaska was seen as their main rival, a police agent, and an organizer of pro-regime students.[120] Such accusations were not too far from the truth. In order to have better control of the students, he personally resided in the Yugoslav student dormitory at Letná.

The interventions from the Yugoslav Embassy and its contacts in the Yugoslav dormitory did not stop the students, who now had a legal organization through which they worked. Although links with the communist organization in Yugoslavia were severed following the establishment of a Dictatorship, the connections with the exiles and the Czechoslovak communists helped them remain strong and organized. Over the next five years, "Matija Gubec" would organize fairly regular bi-weekly lectures for Yugoslav students in Prague cafés Merkur and Metro. Café Metro on Národní třída was the main gathering place for the members of the Czech Interwar avant-garde, but was also a favorite of the Yugoslav communist students. "Matija Gubec" organized lectures there on Marxism, literature, philosophy, women's rights, the national question in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the rise of fascism, contemporary scientific and intellectual trends, agriculture, and industry. They even had famous guest lecturers from time to time, such as Karel Teige, the Czech communist art critic and founder of the avant-

[118] AJ, MP, 66-442-702, 19 April 1929. Letter of Minister of Education B. Maksimović to Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy in Pragu Grga Anđelinović
[119] AHMP, SK, X/364, 18 April 1929. Newspaper clipping "Diktatura v SHS a pražští studenti – *Právo lidu* z 18.4.1929. č. 92"
[120] Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," 581.

garde movement *Devětsil*. Among the students, Muhamed Kadić appears to have been the most prolific of lecturers. They were pleasantly surprised that they could discuss Czechoslovak politics at these meetings, and go as far as to criticize President Masaryk, especially when it came to his support for the Yugoslav dictatorship.[121] However, their lectures always had Czechoslovak police officers attending, and reporting to the Ministry of Interior, which in turn informed the Yugoslav Embassy of their activities.[122] Although they were isolated from their home country, they did not give shift their attention entirely to Prague. Instead, they slowly tried to revive communist agitation in Yugoslavia. They did so mostly in the summer, when returning home for the holidays. They would illegally transport communist literature to Yugoslavia and create illegal Party committees in places where they did not exist.[123]

One such agitator was Ivo Vejvoda (1911-1991), a Croat of Czech origin from Karlovac, who joined the student movement soon after his arrival to Prague in 1929. One of the finest intellectuals that the KPJ ever had, Vejvoda studied architecture at ČVUT and then fought in the Spanish Civil War as a volunteer. Throughout the Interwar period, he remained close friends with Miroslav Krleža, probably the greatest Croatian writer of the 20th century, even though Krleža was marginalized and attacked by the KPJ for his opposition to Stalin. After World War II, he briefly worked for Tanjug, and became a diplomat in 1947, serving as the Yugoslav ambassador to Brazil, Czechoslovakia, United Kingdom, Italy and France. Described as "an aristocrat of Tito's diplomacy," he remained a committed communist and internationalist until his death in December 1991, when Yugoslavia was already disintegrating.[124]

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[121] Jovan R. Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," in *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis* 4 (1964), 44.
[122] Gojko Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće: Sjećanja Ive Vejvode* (Zagreb: Profil, 2013), 51.
[123] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 53.
[124] Tvrtko Jakovina, "Ivo Vejvoda, aristokrat Titove diplomacije," in Gojko Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće: Sjećanja Ive Vejvode* (Zagreb: Profil, 2013), 7-22.

Vejvoda joined the communist movement in Prague in early 1930. He later said that he did so "not out of hunger, because I was not starving back in Karlovac, but out of my own intellectual and moral revelations and beliefs. For me, Prague played a crucial role in that development."[125] His entrance into the ranks of the communists was invaluable at a time when the communists intensified their revolutionary work. They organized new protests against the Yugoslav regime and against Prohaska, attracting attention from the Czechoslovak right-wing press, which warned against communist agitation amongst Yugoslav students.[126] After successfully taking over "Matija Gubec", but failing to infiltrate DJT where their class base was the strongest, the communists turned to "Jugoslavija" Academic Society, starting a political battle that would last for over half a decade. At the end of 1929, communist presence was marginal, with the only elected communist in the Society being Rade Ukropina, who held a rather unimportant position in the Executive Committee: he was the head of the sports section.[127] Throughout 1930 and 1931, Ukropina, Ivan Jakšić, and Nikola Petrović, managed to get elected, but they only held positions of alternate members of the Executive Committee or were in charge of the sports section.

Relatively unknown at the time, both Jakšić and Petrović later became prominent members of the Yugoslav communist movement. Ivan Jakšić (1911-1942) was the grandson of the famous Serbian 19th century poet and painter Đura Jakšić. He became close with the then-leader of the Party Milan Gorkić and joined the KPJ in 1932. He ran the Party press in Prague, and was deported to Vienna by the Czechoslovak authorities. After fighting in the Gottwald Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, he returned to Yugoslavia and joined the Partisans following

[125] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 49.
[126] AHMP, SK, X/364, 2 December 1930. Newspaper clipping "Jihoslovanské a bulharské studentstvo se orijentuje v Praze komunisticky! – *Polední list* z 2.XII.1930: 334."
[127] AHMP, SK, IX/304, 4 December 1929. Report to the Associations Department of the Police Directory.

the Axis invasion. He was killed by the Ustashe in Herzegovina in January 1942. Nikola Petrović (1910-1997) joined SKOJ in 1930 and the KPJ in 1932, while studying at ČVUT. He returned to the country in 1935 to work on revitalizing the Party cells destroyed in 1929. He worked in the agitprop of the Communist Party of Serbia, and helped hide KSČ Politburo member Jan Šverma in Belgrade after the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. He fought in the Partisans in World War II, eventually becoming the first postwar Yugoslav ambassador to Romania and the political commissar of the Military Government of Banat, Bačka and Baranja.[128] Then, he was the Yugoslav Minister for Foreign Trade, Energetics, and Mechanical Engineering. In 1951, he was expelled from the KPJ as a Cominformist, and spent the rest of his life working as a historian in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

After failing to take over "Jugoslavija," the communists constantly disrupted the work of the society, primarily by organizing protests and spreading anti-government flyers. They would boycott the activities of the Society, but partake in its assemblies, trying to promote their agenda and eventually take over "Jugoslavija." On International Workers' Day in 1931 the communists published a flyer calling for an overthrow of the Yugoslav dictatorship, in which they referred to King Alexander I as "Alexander the Last" and tried to disrupt a historical lecture about anti-Habsburg uprisings of Yugoslavs. The Yugoslav Embassy, supported by the monarchist students, took decisive action to stop the communist infiltration of the most important Yugoslav student society. Following the incident on 1st May, they persuaded the Yugoslav Ministry of Education to increase the funding of the "Jugoslavija" Academic Society from 8,000 to 10,000 Yugoslav dinars a year. Prohaska, who wrote the request, explicitly stated that

[128] The three regions in the northeast that made up the region of Vojvodina.

> "Jugoslavija in Prague should be considered, under these circumstances, to be a Society at the forefront of the struggle against our communists abroad and the state should thus offer it extraordinary protection and financial aid."[129]

He suggested that the same measures be taken for the Technical Students' Society, the DJT. Additionally, he suggested that the Ministry should give the jurisdiction over issuing studying permits for students abroad to the embassies' school inspectors, as they were better informed of students' "misdemeanors" than the authorities in the country.[130]

Although "Jugoslavija" did receive additional funding, most of these measures came too late. The communists seem to have operated much faster than the Embassy. Already in late 1930, they reestablished their presence in the Executive Committee of DJT, and by the fall of 1931, the communists took it over, with Fazlija Alikalfić becoming the new President of DJT.[131] At the same time, they managed to get support from sections of the Collective of Croatian Students (*Zadruga hrvatskih akademičara, ZHA*), who adopted a "national revolutionary platform," meaning a violent overthrow of the Yugoslav state and establishment of an independent Croat state.[132] This view was in line with the decisions of the 1928 Dresden Congress, making them natural allies of the communists.

In the fall of 1931, the Yugoslav émigré community was strengthened by the arrival of an internationally-renowned figure. Svetozar Pribićević (1875-1936) was the authoritarian Minister of Interior who persecuted communists and supported a unitarist Yugoslavia. However, by 1925, he became increasingly opposed to the centralism of the government and was pushed into the opposition. He was imprisoned by the King after the dictatorship began, and was finally allowed to leave the country after an internationally publicized two-week long hunger strike in the

[129] AJ, MP, 66-442-702, 13 May 1931. Letter of School Inspector Dragutin Prohaska to the Minstry of Education.
[130] AJ, MP, 66-442-702, 25 April 1931. Letter of School Inspector Dragutin Prohaska to the Minstry of Education.
[131] AHMP, SK, X/211, 12 November 1931. Report to the Associations Department of the Police Directory.
[132] Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," 40-41.

summer of 1931. He settled first in Paris and then in Prague. At the same time, his supporters in Yugoslavia and abroad, disillusioned with the reign of King Alexander, formed an organization called the United Revolutionary Youth (*Ujedinjena revolucionarna omladina, URO*). This was a quasi-socialist group arguing for the abolition of the dictatorship and the establishment of a parliamentary social democratic republic. Pribićević, formerly a mainstream politician, was forced into illegal activity following his political U-turn. The communist students started cooperating with him and the URO in Prague. Given that the communists were more experienced with underground work, they helped the URO establish connections with their supporters in Yugoslavia, taught them how to keep their correspondence secret, and how to send orders and receive reports from the country while avoiding detection from police.[133] It is interesting to note that the communist students were engaged in cooperation with the URO even in Yugoslavia at the time, even though the organization was essentially social-democratic.[134]

The increasingly militant communists engaged in many demonstrations throughout 1931. They were organized jointly by "Matija Gubec" and DJT. Most notably, they commemorated the second anniversary of the murder of Đuro Đaković in April,[135] and expressed solidarity with the protest of students at the University of Belgrade in November. They sent a letter to all the major Prague newspapers in which they protested the brutality of the Yugoslav police and announced a protest against it. The planned protest was banned by the Czechoslovak police at the urging of the Yugoslav Embassy, prompting the students to engage in direct action. On 24th November, around 25 communists, led by Krajačić and Demić, interrupted a literary evening organized by the "Jugoslavija" Academic Society, shouting "Down with the dictatorship!", "Down with Prime

[133] Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," 42.
[134] Avramović, "Prve demonstracije protiv vojno-monarhističke diktature pod rukovodstvom beogradskih studenata-komunista 1. aprila 1932. godine," 170-171.
[135] Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," 43.

Minister Živković!" and "Down with King Alexander!"[136] Although the Embassy successfully covered up the incident itself, the letter the students sent and the news of subsequent ban of their planned protest by the police in Czechoslovakia were published by many newspapers in Prague. The Yugoslav communists thus used the liberal-minded Czechoslovak public to put pressure on the repressive regime in Yugoslavia. They also distributed flyers against the dictatorship to Yugoslav scouting organizations which visited Prague in the summer, and vandalized the house of the Yugoslav Military Attaché Tešanović by writing "Down with the Yugoslav dictatorship!" on it.[137]

The incident that most successfully brought the attention of the Czechoslovak public to the conflict between communists and the Embassy occurred on 30th November 1931, a day before the Yugoslav Unification Day. A group of students came to the dormitory at night and ripped off the colors blue and white off the Yugoslav flag, leaving only red. The nationalist students who guarded the dormitory started a pursuit and caught Desimir Cvjetković. He was then arrested by the Czechoslovak police and named his accomplice as Miron Demić. Cvjetković stated that he is not a communist, but a supporter of Pribićević and the URO.[138] The police report found, with the help of Cvjetković and the monarchist students, that Zora Gavrić and Marijan Krajačić were acting together with Demić. Dragutin Prohaska suggested that they, together with Branko Popović, Franjo Huša,[139] Nikola Galić, and Stanko Aranjoš, be expelled from Czechoslovakia. They already had their studying permits revoked by the Yugoslav government for participating in a protest to liberate Vladko Maček in 1930. Prohaska believed that their

[136] AJ, Centralni presbiro (CPB), 38-32-77, 25 November 1931. Letter from the Yugoslav Embassy correspondent to the Press Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
[137] AJ, CPB, 38-32-77, 6 July 1931. Letter from the Yugoslav Embassy correspondent to the Press Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
[138] NA, PP II, S 112/2, 11 December 1931. Statement of Desimir Cvjetković to the Presidium of the Prague Police Directory.
[139] Franjo Huša (1909-1950), a one-time president of the DJT, was a Czech living in Bosnia who was imprisoned as a Cominformist at Goli Otok in 1949 and died there a year later.

expulsion, alongside with more scholarships for poor students, would weaken the communist movement in Prague.[140] In the letter in which he describes the incident, Prohaska also complains about the complacency of other Embassy officials who do not help him in the fight against communists and points out that the Czechoslovak police does not take seriously the pleas of a simple high school teacher. This could explain his inefficiency when confronting the students.

This time, however, he was at least partially successful. On 24th December, Desimir Cvjetković, his roommate Oskar Blum, Miron Demić and "his concubine" Luise Pichler were expelled from Czechoslovakia.[141] Demić's "concubine" Luise Pichler (1903-1989) was a medical student from Bosnia of German origin. She later took up the name "Borka Demić" to accentuate her self-identification as a Yugoslav. Borka Demić was a nurse in the Spanish Civil War (where her husband Miron was killed, just one day before her arrival) and in World War II. By the end of the war, she reached the rank of a major in the Yugoslav Army. After the war, she worked as a doctor.

There was an attempt to deport Zora Gavrić as well, but it failed because she married a Czechoslovak citizen. Prohaska also noted in his report that the incident was widely reported in the newspapers, but that most of them omitted the fact that the students were communists, which in his view meant that it gave the Czechoslovak public the wrong impression that supporters of the democratic opposition are being unjustly persecuted. He also writes that communists asked Pribićević for help, and that he pleaded for them with the President of the Czech National Social Party.[142] Although the Czechs refused to help, considering the tearing of the national flag to be

[140] AJ, MP, 66-442-702, 1 December 1931. Letter from the School Inspector Dragutin Prohaska to the Ministry of Education.
[141] AJ, MP, 66-442-702, 14 January 1932. Report on the expulsion of Yugoslav communist students by the School Inspector Dragutin Prohaska to the Ministry of Education.
[142] AJ, MP, 66-442-702, 14 January 1932. Report on the expulsion of Yugoslav communist students by the School Inspector Dragutin Prohaska to the Ministry of Education.

too grave of an offence, this event testifies to the closeness between communists and Pribićević, who, unlike the Czechs, clearly had no qualms about the tearing of his nation's flag.

One last open confrontation was an attempt by Krajačić and Aranjoš to disrupt Saint Sava's Day celebrations on 27th January 1932.[143] This largely abortive attempt seems to have discouraged the communists from taking similar actions in the future. Krajačić was expelled from the country soon after,[144] which suggests that these actions merely gave the authorities an excuse to rid themselves of some of the most active communists. After that, communists turned to more immediate issues concerning the everyday needs of students. On 11th April, a Students' Assembly convened by "Matija Gubec" stated, in a language akin to Popular Frontism of the late 1930s, that "All progressive student groups and organizations, regardless of their specific political views" should stand together.[145] Their goals included the betterment of economic conditions of the Yugoslav students, nostrification of diplomas in Yugoslavia free of charge, establishment of students' self-management, resignation of Dragutin Prohaska, freedom of action for all student societies regardless of political ideology, and an end to police control over studying permits.[146] Students' self-management was a particularly important demand, as it meant that the control over the policies of the dormitory would go to the students who lived there, rather than Prohaska. The KPJ's call for an armed uprising against the regime was tactfully avoided, which certainly helped get the approval of the more moderate students. By the end of the year, these struggles, along with the protests of students at the University of Belgrade which inspired them, were supported by the Society of Yugoslav Agricultural Technicians (*Društvo*

[143] AJ, MP, 66-442-702, 27 January 1932. Letter of the School Inspector Dragutin Prohaska to the Ministry of Education.
[144] Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," 590.
[145] Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," 43.
[146] Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," 43-44.

jugoslovenskih agrikulturnih tehničara, DJAT) as well,[147] suggesting another successful case of communist infiltration in a student society.

From then on, the communists remained very critical of the Yugoslav regime, but avoided open confrontations with the authorities. Even the creation of a nationalist and monarchist Yugoslav Nationalist Youth (*Jugoslovenska nacionalna omladina, JNO*) in early May resulted in a moderate boycott, rather than open confrontations with nationalist students. In spite of being funded by the Embassy, the communists easily and rapidly marginalized the organization,[148] which is a good illustration of the regime's troubles when it came to maintaining popularity among the students. The communists used the All-Sokol Slet in June to pass out around 2,000 flyers to Sokol members from Yugoslavia. The flyers, disguised as Serbo-Croatian-language fliers for visitors made by the hosts, called for an armed uprising against the regime, abolition of the monarchy, freedom of speech and assembly, release of political prisoners, and right to national self-determination, including the right to secession.[149] The action was a great success and once again caused a lot of concern for the Yugoslav Ministry of Education and their inspector Prohaska. At the same time, the communists continued their attacks on him, this time by writing a letter of complaint to "Gajret" Society, an influential Muslim charity organization that financed many Bosnian students. They accused him again of oppressing poor students and unjustly accusing them of being communists.[150] Meanwhile, the DJT fought to equalize the technical school graduates with those of gymnasiums, thus ending the discrimination they had endured since the establishment of the country.[151] Finally, the communist students formed a

[147] Mitrović, "Saradnja Beogradskog univerziteta sa univerzitetima u Čehoslovačkoj 1918-1939," 309.
[148] Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," 46.
[149] Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," 45.
[150] AJ, MP, 66-442-702, 31 August 1932. Letter of a group of students in Prague to the Executive Committee of the "Gajret" Society.
[151] AJ, MP, 66-442-702, 20 February 1932. Letter of DJT to the Minister of Education.

separate students' assembly after failing to takeover "Jugoslavija" in the fall of 1932.[152] For the next several years, these assemblies would convene after every failed communist takeover, as a way to express policies alternative to those of the monarchist leadership. They appear to have been very successful, and visited by up to half of the Yugoslav student population at times.

The early 1930s appear to have been a training period for the up-and-coming revolutionaries. Although they made some significant gains, they learned that they were only successful when they used the legal framework provided by the Czechoslovak liberal democracy. The illegal actions and open confrontations with the Yugoslav institutions often resulted in their expulsion from the country and the weakening of the communist movement. Thus, the roughness with which the Czechoslovak state treated them "cured" them of ultra-leftism. They adopted a quasi-Popular Frontist strategy, essentially cooperating with everyone but the organizations of "the Greater Serbian bourgeoisie" which they blamed for the dictatorship in Yugoslavia. Their call for political freedom in Yugoslavia garnered sympathies even from the non-communists. The lectures of "Matija Gubec" Society helped educate the students about Marxist ideology (both directly and indirectly), while infiltration and active work within student societies led them to create a sort of a revolutionary vanguard in each of them, and to finally start coordinating their work in the struggle against the Embassy and the School Inspector. As a consequence, the student societies, either completely taken over by communists or simply sympathizing with the left, could work together and fight for immediate interests of the students, thereby improving their economic position and conditions of study. The activity of "Matija Gubec" was clearly unparalleled in this regard, although DJT made significant advancements too. The only remaining major monarchist organization was "Jugoslavija." However, before "Jugoslavija"

[152] NA, PP II, S 115/29, 20 October 1932. Report to the Presidium of the Prague Police Directory on the meeting of Yugoslav students in Prague.

could be taken over, the communists focused on a more pressing demand that would give them a crucial tactical advantage – fighting for students' self-management in the dormitory.

7. 1933: New Leadership and the Fight for Self-Management

On 28th October 1933, the president of the Central Institute for Social Welfare Petr Zenkl opened a new student dormitory in Prague's Strešovice district. The three-story functionalist building, designed by the young Yugoslav architect Nikola Dobrović, himself once a student at Prague's ČVUT, bore the name of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia, indicating for whom the dormitory was intended. One of its first tenants, an agriculture student called Lazar Udovički, described it as follows:

> "It was a beautiful three-story concrete building in the shape of the letter 'H.' (…) everything was functional, clean, modern. 'Alexandrova kolej' was probably one of the finest student dormitories not only in the Czechoslovak Republic, but in all of Europe. (…) it was built on an empty space in the Strešovice neighborhood, in the near vicinity of the Presidential Palace at Hradčany."[153]

From then on, all the student struggles within the Yugoslav community in Prague would take place in and around the new dormitory. The most important goal of the communists was to ensure that the students would be in charge of the decision-making process – what they called "students' self-management," in order to stop Prohaska from exercising their power over them in their place of residence.

When he came to Prague, Udovički (1915-1997) was a monarchist. Within a year, he would become a communist, and would then go on to fight in the Spanish Civil War and the French Resistance. After the war, he was a Yugoslav diplomat in South America. Just before his death, he left an extraordinarily vivid account of his life as a revolutionary in Prague and in Spain. His memoirs provide a detailed insight into the formation of a new revolutionary

[153] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 57-58.

leadership that replaced the one around Demić, Krajačić and Begović, and dominated the political life of the Yugoslav students in Prague until the Spanish Civil War.

By early 1933, the old communist student core in Prague was decimated. Demić, Pichler, Krajačić, Begović, Kadić, Miler, and Slobodan Škerović[154] were all expelled from the country. Zora Gavrić was the last person remaining. Fortunately, the Party could still count on Huša, Ukropina, Petrović, Vejvoda, Jakšić, Alikalfić and Bostandžić. Zora Gavrić formed the new leadership around Vejvoda and Petrović.[155] This leadership was joined by Adela Bohunicki – Poca, who was sent to Prague on Party's orders in later 1932, and they collaborated with newly-arrived young communists Ljudevit Trilnik,[156] Vojislav Vučković,[157] and Bartol Petrović.[158] Adela Bohunicki (1905-1978) from Slavonski Brod in Croatia became involved in the revolutionary Marxist movement already during her high school days. She was a prominent member of the Club of Marxist Students at the University of Zagreb and became a member of the KPJ in 1925. As a consequence, she had to flee the country and finish her medical studies in Graz and Munich. The Party then ordered her to move to Prague, where she became a Czechoslovak citizen, and organize the movement there. In January 1937, she came to Spain, and spent the next two years as a doctor in the International Brigades. In May 1939, she was able to leave the French internment camp and go to Yugoslavia. The police, aware of her activities, arrested her and then deported her to Hungary, from where she got to Slovakia. She immediately

[154] Škerović (1913-1941) became a communist in Prague, but was quickly expelled and continued his activity iin Belgrade, where he studied law. By 1934, he entered the SKOJ Central Committee, but was arrested the same year and sentenced to four years in prison. He finished his studies after he was released, and remained an active SKOJ member. He was arrested and shot by the Nazis in July 1941.
[155] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 59.
[156] Trilnik was a member of the last Executive Committee of "Matija Gubec" and a leading member of the Party cell in Prague, but after his return to Yugoslavia he was arrested and became a police informant.
[157] Vojislav Vučković (1910-1942) was a student of the Prague Conservatory and a well-known Yugoslav left-wing composer and activist. He was arrested by the Serbian fascist police as a known communist and died in their custody.
[158] Bartol Petrović was an engineer, member of the District Party Committee for Karlovac in Croatia, a courier of two Communist Party of Croatia (KPH) leaders Josip Kraš and Rade Končar, and a Partisan.

established contact with the Slovak partisans, but spent the rest of the war as a pediatrician. In 1945, she returned to Yugoslavia. However, in 1949 Bohunicki was arrested as a Cominformist and spent 4 years at Goli Otok. After her release, she returned to pediatric practice until retirement, and published some memories of her revolutionary activity in the pre-World War II period.[159]

At the very beginning of 1933, when the new leadership was gradually establishing itself, the world was shaken by news from Germany: on 30th January 1933, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler as Chancellor. The next six months would see a consolidation of Nazi power and the destruction of once powerful German left. The strengthening of Nazism in Germany (and later of Austrofascism) within the next two years would lead to a steady but gradual shift of the KPJ and all of Comintern towards a Popular Front policy. As we have already seen, the Yugoslav Party in particular often diverted from the ultra-left course taken in 1928, so this change was not too dramatic. Nevertheless, it was felt, and the KPJ and its Prague section made some drastic changes in their politics.

Most significantly, they intensified their work within "bourgeois nationalist" student organizations. In May, the communist Jakov Brusić became the president of the ZHA, a society that was until then under control of the HSS members who resigned from "Matija Gubec" in 1929.[160] They tried to do the same with the Slovenian Students' Collective (*Slovenska dijaška zadruga, SDZ*) but were much less successful, and often lamented the society's support for the Yugoslav regime.[161] At the same time, the Collective of Students from Serbia, Montenegro and Bay of Kotor (*Zadruga akademičara iz Srbije, Crne Gore i Boke Kotorske, ZAS*) was ignored,

[159] Vojo Rajčević, s.v. "Bohunicki, Adela – Poca," *Hrvatski biografski leksikon*, 1st ed. (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 1989). http://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=2281 (accessed February 11, 2016).
[160] AHMP, SK, X/242, 10 May 1933. Report to the Associations Department of the Police Directory.
[161] Archiv Univerzity Karlovy (AUK), Všestudentský archiv (VA), IV/B 337, 10 March 1933. Proceedings from the All-Students' Assembly of A.K. "Matija Gubec", DJT, and ZHA.

and there were no attempts to take it over. This could be either because the organization was largely inactive between 1927 and 1933 or because the official view of Yugoslavia as a project of the Greater Serbian bourgeoisie made the communists less interested in this society. The nationalists were still active in all of these societies, and the presence of a communist president in ZHA did little to change that – as testified by the organization of lectures such as the one on the 19th century Croatian nationalist leader Eugen Kvaternik just a month after the election of Brusić.[162] In May, the nationalists attempted to retake DJT, managing to postpone the assembly of the society twice through threats and even physical assaults.[163] The fight that broke out appears to have been a three-way showdown between Croatian nationalists, pro-regime monarchists, and communists. In spite of this, Alikalfić was reelected president of the DJT two weeks later.

The real struggles began when the new Yugoslav student dormitory was opened in October. The students were dissatisfied with the regulations established by the leadership of the dormitory and the fact that so much power over their lives was again in the hands of the Yugoslav government. They protested through a magazine called *Pitomci – Chovanci*, which they published themselves. The title roughly translates to "Idiots – Inmates." The first part of the name was a pun, since "pitomci" simply means "alumni" in Serbo-Croatian, while the second was a comment on the state of the Yugoslav student dormitory imposed by the Yugoslav Embassy, which they compared to a prison or a military regime. The humorous magazine was an illegal publication, which poked fun at the situation in the dormitory by calling it "Alexander's Barracks" and attributing the authorship of the magazine to Mita Rackov, the most prominent

[162] AHMP, SK, X/242, 10 June 1933. Report to the Associations Department of the Police Directory.
[163] NA, PP II, S 115/29, 17 May 1933. Report to the Presidium of the Prague Police Directory on the Assembly of DJT.

monarchist student.[164] Given that it was an illegal publication, we do not know who exactly wrote the articles, but Adela Bohunicki writes that one of the main authors was Ivan Jakšić.[165] That same month, "Jugoslavija", "Matija Gubec", DJT and ZHA issued a joint resolution against the dormitory regulations, which they considered to be "the most reactionary of all dormitory regulations in Prague."[166] They called for students' self-management of the dormitory, re-stated their demands for an end to discrimination against technical school students in Yugoslavia, and introduced a new demand for abolition of tuition fees at all Yugoslav universities. This shows that the communists and their allies at ZHA could easily outvote the monarchist leadership of "Jugoslavija" as long as they held a joint all-students' assembly. They received significant help from the KSČ, and the young Czechoslovak communist students, led by Václav Sinkule,[167] helped them spread anti-government flyers at the dormitory.[168]

The communist had dealt another major blow to the nationalists that fall. At the yearly Assembly of "Jugoslavija", an entire group of former nationalists, disappointed with the situation in the country but not willing to support the communists, split and formed a separate group called *Centrumaši* – The Centrists. The group was infiltrated by the communists and had quite a lot of fellow travellers. The nationalist leadership responded by expelling 25 communist students from "Jugoslavija." The communists then blocked the Assembly, which led to the expulsion of five more members. When the Assembly was finally convened, only the centrist and the nationalist list were on the ballot, and the nationalists won with only three votes more than the

[164] NA, PP II, P-31/75, February 1934. The third issue of *Pitomci – Chovanci.*
[165] Bohunicka, "Španska poznanstva u Pragu", 413.
[166] AJ, MP, 66-441-702, 4 October 1933. Resolution of the All-Students' Assembly of A.D. "Jugoslavija", DJT, A.K. "Matija Gubec" and ZHA.
[167] Václav Sinkule (1905-1942) was one of the most prominent KSČ youth activists. He was a member of the Party from 1927, a leader of multiple revolutionary student organizations, and an editor of *Rudé právo* from 1935 until 1938. From 1938 until 1941, he was a member of the Central Committee of the illegal KSČ. In February 1941 he was arrested by the Gestapo. He was murdered in Mauthausen on 20th April 1942.
[168] NA, PP II, P-31/75, 6 March 1934. Report to the Presidium of the Prague Police Directory on communist agitation in King Alexander Dormitory.

centrists.[169] This was the beginning of the end of the nationalist and monarchist dominance of "Jugoslavija." The leader of *Centrumaši*, Marko Spahić (1910-1980), joined the communists soon after. He was wounded in Spain and became permanently disabled. He was transported to Moscow, where he spent the war as a newscaster of Radio Free Yugoslavia. After the war, he returned to his country and became the first director of *Jugoslavija Film* Production Company. In 1948, he sided with the Cominform resolution and was imprisoned for five and a half years. He was later pardoned and retired as a disabled war veteran.[170]

The cultural life of the students at this point was mostly organized by Ivo Vejvoda. He was the one who acquired new books and kept ties to left-wing intellectuals in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.[171] Through "Matija Gubec" he still organized lectures which attracted large numbers of students. Sometimes as much as half of all the Yugoslav students in Prague attended the lectures, but on average about fifty students attended, which was still roughly one in four students. Additionally, he took the students to exhibitions, theater plays and film screenings. Although the students maintained a great deal of openness about the intellectual and cultural trends of the time, there were opinions that were never questioned and the official Party line was not to be diverted from. Vejvoda recalls that he did not believe Vítězslav Nezval when he wrote about the beggars and prostitutes of Moscow following his visit to the Soviet Union. To him, the idea that there could be such things in the land of socialism was simply unimaginable.[172] Apart from providing a rich cultural life, the popularity of the communists also grew thanks to concrete achievements in the struggle for student rights. In 1934, they managed to persuade the Yugoslav

[169] Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," 48.
[170] Lazar Udovički, *O Španiji i španskim borcima: (članci, intervjui, pisma, govori, izveštaji)* (Belgrade: Stručna knjiga, 1991), 226-227.
[171] Bohunicka, "Španska poznanstva u Pragu", 413.
[172] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 209.

government to relieve the poor students from any additional schooling fees, enabling them to effectively study for free if they had already received a government scholarship.[173]

In 1934, Prague became incredibly important for the communists. With Berlin and Vienna both falling to the fascists, it was the last major European capital apart from Paris from which they could operate legally. Due to its proximity to Yugoslavia, more KPJ members opted for Prague. In these years, Prague provided shelter to many famous Yugoslav revolutionaries, including Mustafa Golubić, Vladimir Ćopić, Boris Kidrič, Prežihov Voranc,[174] Srđan Prica, Vukica Mitrović, Ivan Rukavina, Ružica Turković,[175] Josip Kopinić, Ivan Krajačić,[176] and Julio Varesko.[177] It appears that most of the time the students did not know about these arrivals, or were unaware of the identities of the high-ranking Party officials they were involved with.[178] Most importantly, the KPJ leader, Milan Gorkić, moved to Prague following the fascist takeover of Austria. He organized the transport of the Party press from Vienna to Prague. From 1934 until 1936, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the KPJ, *Proleter*, was printed in Prague. The print production managers were Prague students – first Rade Ukropina,[179] and then Ivan Jakšić.[180]

In the summer, two young Jewish students from Bosnia came to Prague, where they would study for the next several years. Oskar Danon (1913-2009) studied at the Prague Conservatory, where he obtained a PhD in musicology. He fought in the Yugoslav Partisans from 1941, and attained the rank of a major. He composed many famous Partisan songs. After the war, Danon was a conductor of the Belgrade Opera and the Slovenian Philharmonic

[173] Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," 48.
[174] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 27.
[175] Marko Perić Velimir, *Doživljaji jednog Španca* (Zagreb: Stvarnost, 1963), 39.
[176] Bohunicka, "Španska poznanstva u Pragu", 416-418.
[177] Bohunicka, "Španska poznanstva u Pragu", 415.
[178] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 79.
[179] Ivan Očak, *Gorkić: Život, rad i pogibija* (Zagreb: Globus, 1988), 183.
[180] Bohunicka, "Španska poznanstva u Pragu", 413.

Orchestra. He taught at the Belgrade Music Academy. In the 1990s, he became an antiwar activist. Ilija Engel (1912-1944) from Jajce studied at ČVUT, and was active in both "Matija Gubec" and DJT. He was a commander of a Republican anti-tank battery in the Spanish Civil War. He fought in the Partisans from 1941 and was the head of the 2nd department of the Main Operational Group of the People's Liberation Army in Croatia, which operated in and around Zagreb. He was killed in an enemy airstrike in 1944 and declared a People's Hero of Yugoslavia in 1953.

In the fall of 1934, the management of the dormitory, headed by Zenkl, decided to appease the students by allowing students' self-management. Most of the communists were expelled from the dormitory in the first part of the year, leaving only three communist sympathizers there.[181] This move certainly played a role in the decision to allow self-management, given that the communist threat seemed to be over. The election for Student President was supposed to be a sham, with the only candidate being Václav Dryák, a Czech and the son-in-law of the Yugoslav Ambassador in Prague. On Election Day, Lazar Udovički, a monarchist and a member of DJAT, announced his candidacy as well. He won four times more votes than Dryák, surprising everybody.[182] This can be explained as a protest of students who wanted an independent representative, even if they were not openly anti-government oriented. However, nobody knew that Udovički had approached Nikola Petrović the month before and professed to him that he became a communist.[183] He then successfully fought for an end to discrimination of anti-regime students by ensuring that admission to the dormitory was decided exclusively on the basis of economic status, much to the dismay of the monarchists in the Students' Committee. He even managed to pressure the conservative Director of the dormitory

[181] Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," 47.
[182] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 63.
[183] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 62-63.

into resigning. Soon after, he joined the KPJ.[184] Udovički, as a Student President of the dormitory, was actually also the person most actively involved in spreading communist propaganda there; no one knew that he was a member of the Party cell, and thus no one thought the President himself could have been the perpetrator. He was later forced to resign following a campaign by a Serbian student Branko Krsmanović, a supporter of the left-wing Agrarian Party.[185]

On 9th October 1934, the Yugoslav King Alexander was assassinated in Marseille together with the French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou. The assassin, Vlado Černozemski, was a member of pro-Bulgarian Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, who planned the murder together with the Croatian Ustashe. In the words of Udovički, the Party members in Prague did not "exactly shed many tears" over his death, although they did not approve of acts of individual terror.[186] However, the flyer that they circulated in Prague after the assassination tells us a lot about their views at the time. They spoke of a "so-called Yugoslavia" and reiterated their demands of a right to self-determination of nations oppressed by the Greater Serbian nationalists. They attacked the Little Entente, an alliance of Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia, as "an exponent of French imperialism."[187] This was the last time communists expressed such views, as the KPJ stopped explicitly calling for a breakup of Yugoslavia following the Fourth Land Conference in December 1934. It is very interesting that the rigidity on the national question remained unshaken throughout the period even though they did not adhere as strongly to the other official policies of the time, such as the need for militancy or the refusal to cooperate with non-communist left-wing parties. Fascism was already clearly seen as the biggest threat, as

[184] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 64.
[185] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 65.
[186] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 63.
[187] NA, PP II, S 112/2, October 1934. Flyer of the Revolutionary Students "for all progressive students from Yugoslavia."

testified by the statement of solidarity and financial donation of "Matija Gubec" to the World Student Congress in Brussels in December.[188] The fight against "Yugoslav fascism," meaning Yugoslavia itself, was still seen as a part of this struggle. The shift would only come during 1935.

Following a police crackdown on Yugoslav communists, the organization was decimated. The younger revolutionaries, most importantly Ivo Vejvoda, Nikola Petrović, Milan Jakšić and Rade Ukropina, took over the leadership of the student Party organization. Their work was overseen by older KPJ members. In this period, they managed to win the struggle for the self-management of the dormitory, which made it more difficult for the government to stop communist agitation. The victories of fascism and the increasing importance of Prague as the site of antifascist struggle helped fill their ranks with active new students. Their attitudes to Yugoslavia and to collaboration with other parties remained largely unchanged in the period. In the following year, the communists would undergo a great ideological shift, with a new strategy that would embrace Yugoslav unity rather than try to undermine it – albeit in a form significantly different from the pro-regime Yugoslavism. At the same time, they would be joined by extraordinary new members whose intellect and organizational skills resulted in the formation of a group that overshadowed all those that preceded it. Nonetheless, before that, the students were faced with a major setback that could have seriously undermined their work.

[188] NA, PP II, S 112/2, 29 December 1934. Statement of Solidarity of "Matija Gubec" with the World Student Congress against war and fascism.

8. The Takeover of "Jugoslavija" and the Popular Front

On 19th January 1935, Nikola Petrović, the President of "Matija Gubec" Academic Society, was served papers informing him that the society has been banned by the Ministry of Interior. The reason for the ban was that the society engaged in political activity, which was in violation of its statute. It turned out that the Czechoslovak police had been closely following the activities of "Matija Gubec" since October 1933. They provided a comprehensive list of their activities which are considered "political," including protest letters sent to embassies of Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania and (rather optimistically) Nazi Germany over their treatment of political prisoners. The police also pointed out the many flyers issued under the name of the society which commented on the political situation in Yugoslavia, and their support for the Congress in Brussels.[189] It remains unknown why they decided to crack down on"Matija Gubec" at this particular point, but it can be assumed it had to do with increased repression in the wake of the assassination of King Alexander. Nikola Petrović left Prague soon after and returned to Yugoslavia, where he became one of the most important Belgrade Party organizers.

This move by the Czech authorities was protested by Czechoslovak and Yugoslav student organizations.[190] In spite of the temporary setback, the communist group was too strong to be deterred at this point. The DJT easily took over all organizational matters that were in the hands of "Matija Gubec," the communist students were returning into the dormitory and new supporters arrived every semester. The increasingly unstable political situation, both in Yugoslavia and at a European level, only helped communist recruitment efforts. Thus, the Yugoslav communist student movement in Prague was at its strongest point in 1935.[191] The

[189] AHMP, SK, X/364, 1 January 1935. Proposal to the Presidium of the State Office of Prague to ban the "Matija Gubec" Academic Society.
[190] Bojović, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929-1935. godine," 49.
[191] Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," 585.

Popular Front policy, which included calls for an alliance of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, made it more difficult for the police to persecute communist students, thus enabling them to express their ideas more openly, and effectively bringing their policy more in tune with the official aims of the Czechoslovak government. At the same time, the KPJ reached the pinnacle of its relations with the Independent Democrats of Pribićević. They successfully negotiated a Popular Front of the communists and Independent Democrats which was to be led by Pribićević. They demanded an end to the monarchy, an alliance with France and the Soviet Union, and a new Constitutional Assembly. The negotiations in Prague were conducted by Politburo member Vladimir Ćopić (1891-1939), and those in Paris by Milan Gorkić.[192]

The students at the dormitory pushed ever further with their demands. They took up again the issue of systemic discrimination against technical school students in Yugoslavia. An All-Students' Assembly met on 18th April 1935 to discuss the topic. However, the Assembly immediately split along political lines. It was divided between those who wanted to accept the representatives of the Students' Self-Management (which at this point had become a separate student organ recognized by the Czechoslovak government) into the All-Students' Assembly and those who did not. The monarchists, led by "Jugoslavija," aware that they would probably not be in control of the Self-Management any time soon, decided to oppose the motion. They were joined by ZAS, the Serbian students' organization.[193] Nonetheless, the list of signatories shows that communists had made significant advancements in other national student societies. Both the Croatian ZHA and the Slovenian SDZ were decisively taken over by communists. ZHA was led by another prominent communist, Ivan Ropac (1912-1979). Ropac fought in Spain and with the

[192] Očak, *Gorkić*, 202-203.
[193] AUK, VA, IV/B 337, 3 May 1935. Invitation to Yugoslav students in Prague for an All-Student Assembly.

Partisans, but fell out with the Party during the Cominform period. He was not imprisoned, but his career was ruined. He committed suicide in 1979 due to family troubles.[194]

The Assembly was dissolved soon after it met, and the pro-communist organizations – the Students' Self-Management, DJT, ZHA, SDZ and DJAT – decided to organize a separate one. The new Assembly was much more radical in its demands. It was supposed to raise the issue of the representativeness (and hence also legitimacy) of the "Jugoslavija" Academic Society and address continued attempts to expel opponents of the regime living in the dormitory.[195] They invited members of "Jugoslavija" and ZAS, but they understandably refused to attend. A battle of words ensued as the monarchists adopted the communist strategy of circulating anonymous flyers. The monarchists accused those who organized a new student assembly of being "quasi-communists and separatists" and claimed that the organizers of the Assembly were responsible for the illegal magazine circulated in the dormitory.[196] These accusations were primarily directed at the DJT, which was also accused of hijacking the student assembly. The DJT leadership, led by Ivan Jakšić and Ranko Trifković, responded with a pamphlet which did not directly address the accusations of communism and separatism, but focused instead on emphasizing their struggle for improving the material position of Yugoslav technical school students. Their response was framed in Marxist terms, emphasizing the lower class origin of most of their students while pointing out again the refusal of the government to end legal discrimination of graduate students of technical schools, which they considered to be an "antisocial and reactionary measure."[197]

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[194] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 82.
[195] AHMP, SK, X/211, 5 August 1935. The decision of the State Office of Prague regarding the ban of the Yugoslav All-Students' Assembly.
[196] AUK, VA, IV/B 337, May 1935. Flyer to the Yugoslav students signed by "Watchful students."
[197] AUK, VA, IV/B 337, 18 May 1935. Flyer of the DJT to all the Yugoslav students in Prague.

As the atmosphere in the dormitory grew increasingly tense, the new assembly was eventually banned by the Czechoslovak police, as they feared a disturbance of peace.[198] "Jugoslavija" was to remain in the hands of the monarchists, but the Students' Self-Management was firmly in communist hands. After Krsmanović forced Udovički into resigning, another communist, Čedomir Milićević, took over as president. Another one in a series of extraordinary Yugoslavs to have studied in Prague in this period, Milićević was later the head of the National Electricity Company of Yugoslavia and a Supreme Court justice in communist Yugoslavia.[199] The next president of the Student Self-Management in the Alexander Dormitory would be Krsmanović (1915-1941) himself. In the summer of 1935, he started dating Vera Vejvoda (1917-2002), the sister of Ivo Vejvoda and later a distinguished Yugoslav archeologist and curator of the Archeological Museum in Zagreb. After having spent the holidays with her, Krsmanović switched his allegiance from the Agrarians to the KPJ.[200] He fought in Spain and distinguished himself with his bravery and command skills, for which he was sent to attend a Republican Officers' School. He returned from the war with the rank of a captain. When the communist uprising began in occupied Serbia in July 1941, Krsmanović was one of its main organizers, as a part of the Main Operational Group for Serbia. He was killed by the Germans on 8th August 1941, when his regiment was encircled on Mount Kosmaj.

Under the leadership of these people, the Dormitory became a center of student life and communist agitation.[201] Needless to say, the latter was greatly helped by the former. The fall of 1935 saw the arrival of openly communist students from Slovenia, Rudolf Janhuba (1914-1976)

[198] AHMP, SK, X/211, 5 August 1935. The decision of the State Office of Prague regarding the ban of the Yugoslav All-Students' Assembly.
[199] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 92.
[200] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 65.
[201] Gavrić, "Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga," 351.

and Sigbert Bastijančić (1915-1939),[202] both from Maribor, and Jože Breskvar (1913-1943) from Ljubljana. This is extraordinary simply due to the fact that communism had hitherto been weak among the Slovene student population in Prague, which is quite a contrast compared to the scope of the student revolts at the University of Ljubljana at the same time.

The most valuable new member of the group was a farmer's son from rural Southern Serbia called Ratko Pavlović (1913-1943). Known to his comrades as Ćićko, he was the most well-educated and most politically insightful of the Yugoslav students in Prague. Pavlović was already well-versed in literature, philosophy, history and political theory. A Party member since 1933, he was a prominent communist in the city of Leskovac, where he went to high school, and he even published a book of socially-engaged poems. According to Lazar Udovički's near-hagiographical account, he could recite the entire *Communist Manifesto* and the 19th century classic of Montenegrin literature, *The Mountain Wreath*.[203] He impressed his comrades with his knowledge of Marxism-Leninism and his skills as a public speaker and writer. His free-spirited personality and his moral code led him to publically speak out against Stalin's purges, which resulted in him being labeled a "Trotskyist."[204] In spite of the rumors surrounding his Trotskyism, he was extremely popular among his comrades, who elected him Secretary of the KPJ Committee in the Saint-Cyprien internment camp after the fall of the Republic. A special commission found him ideologically "pure" enough to be admitted into the Partisans in the late fall of 1941. His troops inflicted great losses on the Chetniks and Germans. Pavlović was killed by the Bulgarian troops on 26th April 1943. Some authors allege that he was murdered by the

[202] Bastijančić was the very last Yugoslav volunteer to die in Spain in January 1939 during a retreat on the Catalonian front. Veljko Vlahović wrote him a touching eulogy, which is kept in his personal fond in the Archive of Yugoslavia.
[203] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 72.
[204] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 72.

Partisans themselves and on Tito's orders.[205] However, there is no evidence to support this claim. The village of Ratkovo in Vojvodina was renamed in his honor after the war.

In October, when the new students arrived, the assemblies of student societies took place as usual. The communists proposed Čedomir Milićević for president of "Jugoslavija." Their flyer accused the old leadership of corruption, embezzlement and even pawning of student property. The communists pointed to the refusal of the leadership to address the pressing issues at an All-Students' Assembly, and stated that they are so incompetent that even many of their own old political allies resigned during the year, disappointed with the corruption and reactionary ideas that they hold. They insinuate government support for the current leadership of "Jugoslavija" and point to their reluctance to hold an election, knowing that they would lose. Instead, they proposed a two-fold program focused on improving the economic security and cultural life of the students. They promised free lunches, higher scholarships and a continued struggle for the rights of students in Yugoslavia. In the cultural sphere, they promised greater Czechoslovak-Yugoslav cooperation and an end to favoritism of Serbian holidays over others, as only the Serbian ones were commemorated by the old leadership.[206] Čedomir Milićević won the election, and the umbrella organization of Yugoslav students in Prague finally fell into communist hands. The organization of student life became the task of Milićević, Krsmanović, Udovički and Spahić, who had become a communist by this point. It appears that winning over the voters of Spahić's Centrist faction was crucial for the communist victory.[207]

At the same time, the communists issued political statements which were now explicitly calling for a Popular Front against war and fascism. They have gotten bolder with their new

[205] Pavluško Imširović, "Borba protiv trockizma u KP Jugoslavije," in Jean-Jacques Marie, *Trockizam i trockisti* (Belgrade: Polinom, 2011), 10.
[206] AUK, VA, IV/B 337, October 1935. Flyer announcing the candidacy of Čedomir Milićević for presidency of "Jugoslavija" Academic Society.
[207] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 79.

victories and the increasingly legal nature of their agitation in Czechoslovakia. A flyer issued on 25th October actually includes the names of the signatories.[208] In it, they commented on the current political situation in the country. A parliamentary election took place on 5th May, the first one since the 1929 Coup in which opposition candidates were actually allowed to run. Furthermore, the federalist and pro-democratic parties created a common platform, and went to the election as the United Opposition, with support of the KPJ.[209] The voting was public and intimidation was widespread, so the pro-regime coalition won a resounding victory. By June, a government was formed, led by the pro-German politician Milan Stojadinović. During his four-year reign, the state would make a significant turn to the right. A fascist youth loyal to Stojadinović was formed, and he started politically aligning Yugoslavia with Germany and Italy.[210] The communists were naturally opposed to his government, and in the flyer, the students wrote about the struggle of the United Opposition against an authoritarian, "anti-people and anti-democratic government."[211] They intentionally referred to the alleged last words of King Alexander in 1934, "Save Yugoslavia!" in order to emphasize that the government which claims to be preserving Yugoslavia is actually destroying it through its reckless dictatorial policies. They called on the government to strengthen their old ties with France and the Little Entente and to form new ones with the USSR.

Thus, the alliance that was attacked just a year ago was now presented as the best way to preserve the Yugoslav nation from fascism. Not only did the communist take away the power over "Jugoslavija" from the monarchist students, but they also took away their right to speak in the name of the nation. They actively partook in KPJ's development of a left-wing Yugoslav

[208] AUK, VA, IV/B 337, 25th October 1935. "A message for the democratically-minded students of Prague."
[209] Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 43.
[210] Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 330.
[211] AUK, VA, IV/B 337, 25th October 1935. "A message for the democratically-minded students of Prague."

nationalism. As Eric Hobsbawm argued, the left of the time had reclaimed nationalism for the first time since 1848. According to him, this was done through participation in an international ideological conflict, albeit one motivated primarily by individual national circumstances, and which ultimately tied together the idea of social and national conflict.[212] The Yugoslav communists in Prague are a textbook example of this: their proclamations connected ethnic and class oppression, reclaimed nationalism from the right and insisted on the need for a joint international and a national struggle against fascism.

The year 1936 was the most dynamic and interesting one of all. It was a year of rapidly unfolding events which further destabilized the situation in Europe: most notably, the officers' rebellion against the Popular Front government in Spain, which escalated into a civil war; and the First Moscow Trials, which marked the beginning of the Great Purge in the Soviet Union. Both left a profound impact on the communist student community in Prague. Such a significant year began with a significant event. In January, the Old Bolshevik and one of the most famous ideologues of the All-Union Communist Party, Nicolai Bukharin, came to Prague. His lecture in a theater was attended by all of the communist students, who wanted to see a living legend. It was at this meeting that Pavlović first distinguished himself among his peers. While others were far more interested in Bukharin's appearance and his mere presence, Pavlović was very critical of his speech, pointing out that Bukharin was still arguing for the same agricultural policies which he renounced in the Soviet Union.[213]

At the same time, student struggles in Yugoslavia were intensifying. The students in Belgrade protested against the new government and the fact that there was no real end to political repression. The elections were a sham and the state remained as repressive. A rally on 1st

[212] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality.* 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 146-147.
[213] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 71.

February which commemorated the anniversary of death of the student activist Mirko Srzentić grew into an anti-government riot. The university rector Vladimir Ćorović created a "student guard" in response. It was a pro-fascist organization which collaborated with the Yugoslav police in arresting (and sometimes murdering) students who supported the opposition. The Prague students tried to raise awareness of this in Czechoslovakia by organizing an all-students' meeting about it. The meeting gathered 98 people and took place on 14th February. A certain Ante Popović tried to raise the issue of abstention of the Serbian students from the assembly, but was prevented by Udovički. National conflict was to be avoided; instead, he said, the focus should on the currently ongoing struggles in Yugoslavia and standing united against them.[214] The speakers then spoke of the police repression, the history of student struggles in Yugoslavia, and the bad socioeconomic conditions of students. Among the speakers was Zdenko Štambuk (1912-1976), who was already a relatively prominent Croatian writer and poet at the time. In the end, Udovički read the resolution they prepared and then passed. It was to be sent to the all the rectors of universities in Yugoslavia, as well as translated into Czech and sent to all the major Prague newspapers. The resolution was published by the leading Czech liberal daily *Lidové noviny*.[215] By the summer, they managed to establish cooperation even with the Serbian students' organization, as testified by their attendance at the All-Students' Assembly against the War on 22nd June. The Assembly was also attended by many notable Czech liberal politicians, such as Beneš's advisor Hubert Ripka, the Protestant theologian Jan Blahoslav Kozák, the president of the Czechoslovak Women's Association Mrs. Hrdličková, and Petr Zenkl, the future Mayor of

[214] NA, Ministerstvo vnitra I – prezidium (PMV – AMV 225), Box 1263, Call Number 225-1263-9. Report to the Presidium of the Ministry of Interior on the Yugoslav students' assembly on university autonomy.
[215] NA, PP II, S 112/2, 19 February 1936. Newspaper clipping "Jugoslávští studenti na československých školách– *Lidové noviny* z 19.2.1396. č. 89"

Prague.[216] The attendance of Zenkl is particularly interesting, given that he was a former enemy of the communists, as he had supported the draconian measures of the Yugoslav government in the dormitory when he was the president of the Central Institute for Social Welfare.

In March and April, the communists faced one last major crackdown by the Czechoslovak police. The Central Committee planned to hold a Plenum in Prague on 9th April. However, the police found out about it, and they arrested Central Committee members Ivan Krndelj and Prežihov Voranc, as well as the organizers of the KPJ press, Ivo Rukavina and Ivan Jakšić.[217] Jakšić was then deported to Vienna, from where he would go to Spain, while Rukavina acquired Czech documents and stayed. Rukavina (1912-1992) would go on to become a general of the Yugoslav People's Army and deputy Minister of Defense. He participated in the Croatian Spring of 1971,[218] after which he was forcibly retired. In 1990, he was one of the founders of the liberal Croatian People's Party. In Prague, he was subordinate to Velimir Dreksler (1914-2000), who replaced Jakšić as the head of the Party press after his deportation.[219] Dreksler, who later lived under the pseudonym Marko Perić, was an electrician of Jewish origin from Osijek. He moved to Zagreb in 1929 and was one of the founders of the socialist Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair there. He then joined the Metal Workers' Union and became an organizer of the People's Theater in Zagreb. After joining the KPJ, he was sent to Prague, from where he went to fight in Spain. He fought in the Partisans from August 1941 as a member of the 6th Lika

[216] AHMP, SK, X/211, 19 June 1936. Report to the Associations Department of the Police Directory.
[217] Očak, *Gorkić*, 241.
[218] Croatian Spring was the name of a movement for political and economic reform of the Yugoslav system that appeared in 1970 and 1971. Due to its calls for decentralization and more rights of Croatia within Yugoslavia, the movement was denounced as nation alistic and suppressed.
[219] Perić, *Doživljaji jednog Španca* , 38.

Division and performed various jobs for the Party Agitprop.[220] After the war, he published memoirs of his revolutionary work in 1963. He died in Nanterre in France in 2000.

Dreksler was also the connection between the Yugoslav communists in Prague and the Central Committee. By the summer of 1936, as the communist presence in the Alexander Dormitory was consolidated, they organized into two Party cells. One was in the dormitory itself, and the other was composed of the older Party members and gathered at the Straka Academy, which was the headquarters of the Czechoslovak Students' Association. This was similar to the organizational structure established in 1927, except this time the students were full-fledged KPJ members as well. They remained in Czechoslovakia over the summer, which gave them plenty of time to organize work for the next school year. At the same time, it was a matter of expedience, as all of them were wanted by the Yugoslav authorities. The KPJ cell in the Alexander Dormitory was led by Ratko Pavlović Ćićko, who was the General Secretary. Other members were Lazar Udovički, Branko Krsmanović, Marko Spahić, and Veljko Vlahović. The cell in the Straka Academy consisted of Ilija Engel, Oskar Danon, Ivo Vejvoda, Adela Bohunicki, and Zora Gavrić.[221] The newest member of the group, Veljko Vlahović (1914-1975), was a friend of Ratko Pavlović and one of the most famous communist students at the University of Belgrade, where he studied law. He left Yugoslavia fleeing police persecution. From Prague, he went to Spain and lost a leg in the Battle of Jarama. He spent World War II in Moscow where he worked as the editor of Radio Free Yugoslavia. After the war, Vlahović was the editor of the Party newspaper, *Borba*, Minister of Education, deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and one of the main creators of the ideological program of the KPJ. Veljko Vlahović helped prepare the students for the World Youth Congress in Geneva that was to take place in September. They prepared a brochure called

[220] Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945: žrtve genocida i učesnici narodnooslobodilačkog rata* (Belgrade: Jevrejski Istorijski Muzej, Saveza jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1980), 354.
[221] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 77.

All for Peace – Peace for All! The brochure was a collection of speeches against war and fascism from the All-Students' Assembly in June. All speeches were written by Ratko Pavlović, except for the one of ZAS, the Serbian students' organization, which was written by Dragutin Paranos.[222] Two thousand copies of the brochure were circulated in Yugoslavia, while the students in Prague were kept busy preparing for the fall semester and partaking in discussions of the two KPJ cells.

There was plenty to talk about at Party meetings in the summer of 1936. The Spanish Civil War broke out in July, and in August, the so-called "Trial of the Sixteen" began in Moscow. On 25th August, Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, members of the first Politburo and Lenin's close associates, were executed on Stalin's orders following a brief show trial. The sensational news of their guilt spread quickly, and few in the international communist movement even dared to question the validity of the claims about a "Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Center." In the Alexander Dormitory in Prague, however, Ratko Pavlović Ćićko did just that. He criticized the trial and claimed that these people are indeed oppositionists, but not traitors of the Soviet Union. He even went as far as to point to inconsistencies between classical Marxist works and Stalin's interpretation of them, calling for a return to Lenin.[223] According to Udovički, he agreed with Pavlović's critique, and Krsmanović reacted angrily against Stalin, so Pavlović actually had to calm him down. Spahić and Vlahović were quiet. Pavlović believed that his friend Vlahović had doubts about Stalin too, since he did not dare to question his statements.[224] Adela Bohunicki was not so kind. She openly attacked him, saying that there is no reason to doubt and dispute Stalin. Soon after, rumors of Ratko Pavlović being a Trotskyist started to

[222] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 76.
[223] Miloje Grbović and Nikola Korbutovski, *Branko Krsmanović: životni put i revolucionarno delo* (Paraćin: Opštinski odbor SUBNOR-a, 1981), 74.
[224] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 77.

circulate. Udovički remembers that Bohunicki made many negative comments when they spoke about Pavlović shortly before her death in the 1970s, almost forty years later.[225]

At the end of the summer, Udovički travelled to Geneva. He was elected by the All-Students' Assembly to represent the Yugoslavs of Prague at the World Youth Congress. The leader of the delegation was the Secretary of SKOJ, Ivo Lola Ribar (1916-1943). Later, Udovički would claim that Pavlović would have been a better choice for a delegate at the Congress, since he actually spoke French, but the comrades in Prague chose him as a way of thanking him for his activities in the previous couple of years.[226] Thus, he spent the Congress in silence, not being able to understand much apart from the standing ovation given to the Spanish delegation.

Meanwhile in Prague, Svetozar Pribićević passed away on 15th September after a long illness. Before the funeral, the communists met with the representative of Independent Democrats Savo Kosanović and agreed that they will attend and hold a speech. The funeral took place in the Church of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in the New Town, and Ratko Pavlović Ćićko, as the finest orator among the communists, spoke in praise of Pribićević.[227] After the speech, a member of KSČ and an MP in the National Assembly came and placed a wreath before the coffin which said, in Serbo-Croatian: "*To the fighter for democracy from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.*"[228] Not being able to arrest an MP, the police immediately started arresting the students who were present. However, they were released by the evening because the Yugoslav opposition leaders who attended the funeral threatened not to attend the official dinner prepared by the Czechoslovak politicians if the students remained in custody.[229]

[225] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 93.
[226] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 76.
[227] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 79.
[228] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 67.
[229] Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," 589.

In October, several new communist students came to Prague from Yugoslavia: Lazar Latinović, Tahira Hadžihalilović, Mirko Kovačević, Ratko Vujović Čoče, and Mirko Horvat.[230] All of them except for Hadžihalilović would leave for Spain four months later. Lazar Latinović (1915-2006) reached the rank of a captain in the Spanish Republican Army in 1938 and joined the KPJ in the same year. He fought in the French resistance in and around Marseille and attended a pan-European conference in Geneva in 1944 as a Yugoslav representative. This conference passed the Manifesto of the European Resistance, one of the early documents that espoused the vision of a federal Europe.[231] After the war, he was the Yugoslav ambassador to Belgium, Japan, Argentina and Sweden. From 1999 until his death, he was the president of the Association of Spanish Civil War Veterans of Yugoslavia. Mirko Kovačević (1916-1941) had a similar path, joining the KPJ and becoming a captain in Spain. He organized the resistance in Dalmatia together with KPJ Central Committee member Pavle Pap. However, he fell in the very first days of the uprising in a battle with Italian and Croatian collaborationist forces. He was posthumously awarded the Order of the People's Hero of Yugoslavia.[232] Ratko Vujović (1916-1977) became a prominent Partisan commander and later rose to the rank of the colonel general in the Yugoslav People's Army. He was also the founder and first president of Football Club Partizan, one of the country's most popular football teams.

The arrivals had made the group stronger than ever, and communists thus secured every single spot on the new Executive Committee of "Jugoslavija" in early October. In spite of the controversy surrounding his views of the Great Purge, Pavlović remained a popular organizer

[230] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 79-80. Udovički mistakenly lists Bastijančić as well, although he arrived the year before.
[231] Veronika Heyde, *De l'esprit de la Résistance jusqu'à l'idée de l'Europe: projets européens et américains pour l'Europe de l'après-guerre (1940-1950)* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010), 138.
[232] Institut za savremenu istoriju, *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije*, 2nd ed. (Belgrade: Mladost, 1975), 253, znaci.net. Retreived. 28 March 2016.

and leader, as testified by his successful candidacy for president of the society. Vlahović and Spahić were his vice-presidents.[233] Udovički writes about an interesting incident that occurred during the election: the communists wanted to know where the loyalties of the new students lay, so they marked all the ballots with invisible ink, giving each voter a unique number. This gave them insight into who exactly supported them and who was against them. They were surprised to find out that the member of the KPJ cell from the Straka Academy, Ilija Engel, actually abstained in the election. He used his ballot to express disagreement with Pavlović's critique of Stalin and the Moscow Trials.[234] The new communist leadership of "Jugoslavija" immediately sent a letter to the Action Committee of Professional Student Associations of the University of Belgrade, the communist umbrella organization of Yugoslav students, in which they announced their willingness to cooperate.[235] However, this cooperation did not last for long, simply because they had different priorities. They turned to organizing a struggle far greater than any before, one that would change all of their lives.

The years 1935 and 1936 saw the peak of communist activity among the Yugoslav émigrés in Prague. They strengthened their grip on the student dormitory, effectively preventing the Embassy from cracking down on anti-regime activities; they took over the umbrella organization of Yugoslav students in Prague and politically marginalized the right; they received new, dedicated and extremely active members, such as Veljko Vlahović and Ratko Pavlović Ćićko. The two most important events for the long-term development of the revolutionary movement (and the postwar Yugoslav state) were the Popular Front strategy and the Great Purge. Popular Front made their antifascist orientation more explicit than ever, but it also led to them embracing a Yugoslav identity which had been shunned by the communists from KPJ for almost

[233] Grbović and Korbutovski, *Branko Krsmanović*, 68.
[234] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 84.
[235] Grbović and Korbutovski, *Branko Krsmanović*, 68.

a decade. Communists developed a distinct form of left-wing Yugoslav nationalism as a consequence. It was a nationalism with an internationalist Marxist background. National differences were acknowledged, but at the same time a need for a common pan-Yugoslav and international struggle against fascism was emphasized. They would consider it to be a form of loyalty to the state different from what they called "national chauvinism" of the right.[236] Such a view remained the official ideology of the socialist state until its collapse. The second important event was the Great Purge. Although no one but Pavlović appears to have dared question Stalin in front of others, the confusion caused by Stalin's actions among the communists pointed at what would become the second important ideological aspect of the post-war Yugoslav state: the split with Stalin and a break with Stalinism, which led to the opening of the Yugoslav socialist system. While there were both future "Titoists" and "Stalinists" among the Prague students, they all appeared to be unified on the surface in the 1930s. It is important to remember that, despite the occasional turbulences, they in fact *were* unified. The differences appeared minor until the later moments of rupture – namely, the Revolution, the reality of building socialism in practice, and the Cominform Resolution that followed a few years after. Disagreements were considered normal, which was certainly helped by the fact that these lower levels of the Party did not experience Stalinization and rigid Party hierarchy. Even if there was divergence from the Party line, it was rarely as drastic as the outbursts of Pavlović against Stalin. As a rule, however, in the case of everyone but Pavlović, there was no fundamental questioning of Marxism-Leninism (as defined by Stalin, of course) or the Soviet model of socialism. As Ivo Vejvoda put it, perhaps somewhat harshly, "we were all Stalinists until 1948."[237]

[236] Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 277.
[237] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 208.

9. The Spanish Civil War

In December of 1936, a group of thirty Yugoslav students in Prague went on a ski trip in the Krkonoše Mountains, organized by the "Jugoslavija" Academic Society. They rented a hut in the mountains in which they all stayed. They skied, cooked their own meals, and sang revolutionary songs in the evenings. The environment was perfect for conspiratorial work: they were isolated, far away from Prague and any Yugoslavs who worked against the revolutionary students. While there, Ratko Pavlović and Veljko Vlahović had individual conversations with every single one of the students present; a few were conducted by Udovički and Krsmanović. The matter they discussed was simple. It had been decided that the Yugoslav students were to leave from Prague for Spain and join the war against fascism there. It was up to these thirty people to decide whether they would go or not. They actually chose to go to Krkonoše in part because they wanted to get used to the harsh climate and prepare for crossing the Pyrenees.[238]

After talking to Pavlović and Vlahović, about half of them agreed, and were joined by half a dozen more from the dormitory later. Some, like Oskar Danon, were not allowed to go by the Party itself, as the leadership considered their schooling to be more important. Others, like Ivo Vejvoda and Safet Hadžić, refused to go for personal reasons – Vejvoda because of his parents, and Hadžić because of his girlfriend, Tahira Hadžihalilović, who was also a communist, but did not want him to go and get killed. Others like Zdenko Štambuk, for example, were not even invited due to lack of subtlety in previous conspiratorial work.[239]

[238] Vojo Kovačević, "Španija i Beogradski univerzitet" in Čedo Kapor, ed. *Španija 1936-1939: Zbornik sećanja jugoslovenskih dobrovoljaca u Španskom građanskom ratu*, Vol. 5 (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1971), 254.
[239] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 81-83.

The first initiative for joining the Spanish Republican Army was undertaken by the older communist émigrés. Ivan Krajačić[240] and Danilo Radušević sent a letter to the Central Committee in Vienna asking for the permission to go to Spain. Their contact was Velimir Dreksler, who asked to come along with them.[241] The request was granted and they left for Spain in October and November. Dreksler was to stay in Prague and organize other volunteers. He would become the link between émigrés in Prague and the Central Committee on one side, and the émigrés and the Party intermediaries in Paris on the other. Not long before the trip to Krkonoše, Veljko Vlahović had met with Adolf Muk,[242] the representative of the CC, who gave them the official permission to go to Spain.[243] The first group left just before New Year's, probably arriving to Spain on 31st December 1936. It was a group of only five people led by Marko Spahić. The others were Ivan Ropac, Olga Dragić-Belović, her husband Ratko Belović, and Gerhard Vajs – Braco.[244] They were the very first group of Yugoslav students to go and fight in Spain.[245]

The second group was to go a couple of weeks later. Their trip was postponed because an order came to stop sending volunteers to Spain. They had no intention of giving up, and they managed to eventually persuade their connection to send them the financial aid needed to get to Spain. Dreksler later claimed that the "precautionary measures" they took when postponing the

[240] According to Adela Bohunicki, the presence of this already prominent revolutionary in Prague was kept secret and only Dreksler was aware of him being there. See: Bohunicka, "Španska poznanstva u Pragu", 416.
[241] Perić, *Doživljaji jednog Španca* , 43.
[242] Adolf Muk (1893-1943) was a Montenegrin communist. By mid-1930s, he became a member of both the CC and the Politburo. Much like Pavlović, he criticized the First Moscow Trial in 1936, except Muk did it in front of the Central Committee. He was the main organizer of the transport of Yugoslav volunteers to Spain, but was arrested in Kotor in March 1937 after a police raid, along with about 400 potential Yugoslav volunteers. Because of his stance on the Moscow Trials, the Party believed that the raid was his fault and that he was a traitor. He was expelled from the KPJ while in prison. He remained imprisoned after the occupation of the country and was shot by the Italian fascists in 1943.
[243] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 81.
[244] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 82.
[245] Kovačević, "Španija i Beogradski univerzitet", 253.

trip were "quite useful," but did not elaborate further on what those measures were.[246] Given that the students were still leaders of "Jugoslavija," they organized the traditional Saint Sava's Day Ball, which was scheduled for +27th January. This was done to avoid suspicion and create the impression that everything was going on as usual. They finally left on the morning of Saint Sava's Day, while a scandal broke out in Prague in the evening after they failed to make an appearance at the Ball. The departure of Yugoslavs from Prague to Spain became a widely discussed topic in the Czechoslovak press in the next few weeks. The students arrived to Paris on the morning of the 28th. Vlahović wrote "An Appeal to All the Peoples of Yugoslavia from the Prague Student Volunteers" calling them all, "regardless of political, religious, or national affiliation," to join the struggle of the Spanish people against fascism.[247] They wrote letters to their families in Yugoslavia and continued to Spain the next day, having stayed in Paris for only 24 hours.

After they arrived to the Sant Ferran Castle in Figueres, they formed "The Prague Platoon," which was led by Mirko Horvat, as he was the only person among them with any actual military experience.[248] After they received some training, they became part of the newly-formed Dimitrov Battalion of the International Brigades. After less than two weeks of training, they were sent to the Jarama River, where they were to have their baptism of fire. Matija Šiprak, a law student, fell first, on the 14th of February. In the coming days, Marko Spahić and Veljko Vlahović were heavily wounded – Vlahović eventually lost a leg. Ahmet Fetahagić, Mirko Horvat and Ratko Pavlović were also wounded, albeit much more lightly. In the next few

[246] Perić, *Doživljaji jednog Španca* , 47.
[247] Kovačević, "Španija i Beogradski univerzitet", 253.
[248] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 95.

months, Vujović, Janhuba and Bastijančić were wounded too.[249] Their bravery and dedication did not go unnoticed. Vladimir Ćopić, who was first the political commissar and then the commander of the XV International Brigade "Lincoln", of which the Dimitrov Battalion was a part, wrote:

> "It is hard to pick the best in groups where everyone is at their finest. We will only mention the heroic bearing of the Prague students from Yugoslavia. They came to Spain to replace their books for rifles and machine guns in defense of culture, freedom, and progress."[250]

The Prague Platoon was quickly scattered throughout the country. They would not be reunited until they arrived at the French internment camps in 1939. Surprisingly enough, all but three of them survived the Spanish Civil War.

In the next few months, several other prominent communists from Prague came to Spain: Adela Bohunicki, who served as a nurse there, came in January; Ivo Vejvoda came in June, against his family's wishes, together with Slavko Čolić and Velimir Dreksler.[251] Čolić (1918-1993) fought in the Partisans and later lived to return to Spain as a representative of the Federal Chamber of Commerce following the fall of Franco's regime.[252] Dreksler was the last one to arrive in September 1937, after he finished the job assigned to him by the KPJ, which was sending off everyone from Prague to Spain.[253] With this, the communist activity among the Yugoslav community in Prague started to fade. Periodic outbursts of communist activity still occurred, and the student Danka Ekert kept the students at the University of Belgrade informed

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[249] Lazar Udovički, "U bataljonu "Dimitrov" na Harami" in Čedo Kapor, ed. *Španija 1936-1939: Zbornik sećanja jugoslovenskih dobrovoljaca u Španskom građanskom ratu*, Vol. 2 (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1971), 415-420.
[250] Čedo Kapor (ed.), *Krv i život za slobodu : slike iz života i borbe studenata iz Jugoslavije u Španiji* (Belgrade: Udruženje bivših jugoslovenskih dobrovoljaca Španske republikanske vojske, 1969), 99.
[251] Lazar Udovički, "Sa drugom grupom iz Praga" in Čedo Kapor, ed. *Španija 1936-1939: Zbornik sećanja jugoslovenskih dobrovoljaca u Španskom građanskom ratu*, Vol. 1 (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1971), 380.
[252] Udovički, *O Španiji i španskim borcima*, 81.
[253] Perić, *Doživljaji jednog Španca* , 49.

of the events in Prague and in Spain.[254] Veljko Vlahović played the same role, but he did it directly from behind the lines.[255] There were still plenty of supporters and fellow travelers left in Prague, but all those who had the dedication and organizational skills had left. Thus, the political activity of Yugoslav communist students in Czechoslovakia had mostly ceased by the end of 1937.

[254] Kovačević, "Španija i Beogradski univerzitet", 253.
[255] Kovačević, "Španija i Beogradski univerzitet", 256.

10. Yugoslav Communists in Their Own Words

For all those Yugoslav communists who studied in Prague in the decade before the Spanish Civil War, the experience had left a profound mark on their life and thoroughly influenced their future work. Some of them died before they could reach an age in which the old revolutionaries reflect on the experiences of their youth. Fortunately, many of those who had lived wrote extensively about it in the post-war years, and their memories were sought after, given that they now formed the elite of the new socialist state. Others, like Marko Spahić, Adela Bohunicki and Dragan Miler, ended up imprisoned at Goli Otok after 1948. Given that the imprisonment of Cominformists was a taboo topic in Yugoslavia for a very long time, there really aren't that many sources that can shed light on these people's version of events, whether it is their participation in the pre-war revolutionary movement or their (sometimes alleged) support for Stalin. Thus, the views of these people remain largely a mystery to us.

The only exception is a rather sympathetic second-hand account by Udovički of Adela Bohunicki. He says that she was in Paris with a delegation of Yugoslav doctors when the Cominform Resolution was announced. While some of them decided to stay, she chose to return to Yugoslavia and explain to her comrades that Stalin was right. Needless to say, the attempt was not very successful.[256] Nonetheless, Udovički attempts to portray her as somebody who did not have experience with the Soviet system and thus should not be judged too harshly. There is also a text that Spahić published in a 1938 book about being wounded in Spain, which was reprinted in Yugoslavia in 1969, and in which he mentions that he shouted "Long live Stalin!" in delirium after being wounded.[257] This is particularly fascinating for somebody who had hesitated joining the ranks of the communists for several years. Additionally, Udovički wrote on the

[256] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 93.
[257] Kapor (ed.), *Krv i život za slobodu*, 38.

aforementioned opposition that Pavlović faced when criticizing Stalin, especially coming from Engel and Bohunicki. Thus, it is beyond doubt that there existed a genuine faith in Stalin and Soviet socialism among the Yugoslav communists in Prague. Thus, it is safe to say that in the 1930s, they were far from apostates in the international communist movement that they later became. However, Vejvoda's reassurance that "they were all Stalinists" is as far-fetched as saying they were staunchly anti-Stalinist. Almost none of them had any first-hand experience of the Soviet Union. This lack of knowledge about "the first country of socialism" had at least as much of an impact as the direct knowledge of "bourgeois democracy" of Czechoslovakia.

Rather than calling them Stalinists, it would be far more appropriate to say that they were idealists who experienced both right-wing authoritarian and democratic regimes and fought for a system that would be better adapted to solving the issues of the time than both of the ones they lived in. They had an opportunity to enjoy the advantages of an open society that many in Yugoslavia did not get. Ivo Vejvoda spoke of the "emotional, intellectual, and political shock" he experienced in Prague:

> "From the provincial darkness of a small Croatian town, from the state of Yugoslavia which suspended its Constitution and introduced a police-led regime just several months before, I came to a country of parliamentary democracy in which the president of the Republic was a philosopher by profession. Prague attracted me because of the flourishing of life I had experienced there. You could see President Tomáš Masaryk shaking hands and talking to people in the streets or riding a horse in a park. To me, this world seemed unreal. The kiosks sold Soviet newspapers, including *Izvestia* and *Pravda*, alongside French, Austrian and German ones. It was not merely Golden Prague; it was also a free Prague. This immense difference in the social atmosphere and civilizational level between Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia had

> impressed me so much that I momentarily became ready to accept anything that seemed like an extreme left critique of the Yugoslav regime."[258]

Vejvoda was not alone in his judgment. Even Adela Bohunicki praised the possibilities opened by the Czechoslovak liberal democracy, although she first and foremost emphasized the high development of the Czechoslovak working class and the role of the KSČ in organizing them.[259] Udovički also emphasizes the role that the political freedoms and availability of information had on the recruitment into the communist movement. For him specifically, it was not so much the impression created by the Czechoslovak society as his newly-found awareness of the difficulties that the working people in Yugoslavia were going through – the difficulties that he was unaware of while living in the authoritarian state:

> "In spite of my ongoing belief in the goodness of our king, I felt a great pain because of the crisis in the country: I could not help but think of my father's laments for the hardships of peasant life, nor my discovery of the hardships in underdeveloped areas (like Lika and Montenegro), where people eat cornbread and children get a sugar cube only once a year, for Christmas; I thought of the complaints of the peasants about the big taxes and debts, usurious bills, the taking away of the last cow from the peasant who could not pay his taxes, and so on."[260]

At the same time, they were very well aware of the disadvantages of their adopted society too, such as the hypocrisy that they saw in Masaryk supporting a regime that oppressed their country, or the cooperation between the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav police forces, due to which they had to constantly be on guard.[261] Perhaps this is why the more pragmatic and disciplined older KPJ members like Begović saw Czechoslovak democracy as a way of gaining a tactical advantage over the Yugoslav government, rather than a model to be emulated.[262] Certainly this

[258] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 49.
[259] Bohunicka, "Španska poznanstva u Pragu", 410.
[260] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 59.
[261] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 51.
[262] Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," 584.

was consciously done every time when the communists attempted to draw attention of the Prague public to the oppression in Yugoslavia.

Perhaps the finest description of the situation that the Yugoslav communists found themselves in was given by somebody who was an outsider. Gojko Nikoliš (1911-1995) was a doctor of medicine and a communist who fought in both the Spanish Civil War and World War II. He reached the rank of the colonel-general in the Yugoslav Army and was the head of its sanitary administration, as well as the Yugoslav ambassador to India and a member of the Central Committee of both KPJ and KPH. He was a prominent public intellectual and a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and a sort of a moral conscience of the Party, as he was among the first revolutionaries who publically condemned the Goli Otok camp.[263] In the late 1980s, he became a prominent critic of the regime, and called for the Serbs of Croatia (he himself was one) to unite with democratically-minded Croats against both Milošević and Tuđman at their assembly in Belgrade in June 1990. He was booed off the stage.[264] Two years later, he left his country for France and died there in a self-imposed exile 1995. Nikoliš found himself in Prague for only several weeks during the summer break in 1934, but he had an opportunity to meet many of the Yugoslavs who studied there. His insightful analysis starts with his wonder at seeing books of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin sold freely in bookstores, and then points out at how different the intellectual outlook of those in Prague was from those who lived under the Yugoslav dictatorship:

> "Seeing people argue openly and in broad daylight, in apartments or cafes on Wenceslas Square, in favor of those political views which could get one imprisoned in Yugoslavia was an exciting novelty for me. I had the impression that our people in Prague have much to gain from the time

[263] Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, 253.
[264] Ilija T. Radaković, *Besmislena YU ratovanja 1991-1995* (Belgrade: Društvo za istinu o antifašističkoj narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945, 2003) , chap. 10, doc. 4, accessed 31 March 2016, http://www.znaci.net/00001/23_10_4.htm

> spent there. This city of such a high culture and democratic traditions which we lacked in Yugoslavia (yet nonetheless derided them as "bourgeois") had left a clear mark in the psyche of our Party comrades. I liked that. It was hard to understand why certain comrades in Belgrade insisted on closing themselves within the confines of "pure" politics, as if the revolutionary politics of the day did not need to be based on contemporary human achievements in the fields of science, philosophy, and art. As a matter of fact, there were those among us who thought that non-Marxist perspectives are detrimental for the purity of Marxist thought and could lead to an abandonment of working class positions. (…) Hence I was pleasantly surprised to hear our Prague comrades discuss not only the political situation in Yugoslavia and Germany, but also the latest developments in contemporary visual arts, the avant-garde Prague theaters of Burian, Voskovec and Werich, the articles in Šalda's *Zápisník* or Kučik's (sic) *Tvorba*.[265] I can say that I did not hear a single word about the evils happening high in our Party ranks at the time, even though the Prague circle was certainly aware of them too. I can only thank them for sparing me from having to listen about it."[266]

The assessment that Nikoliš made was very accurate. He was right about their attitude to arts, which was harbored by the "Matija Gubec" Academic Club. Although the Prague atmosphere was undoubtedly important, the professional orientation of those who studied must have played a role as well. Many of the communists in Prague were fine artists, and art of this era was the art of the radical left-wing avant-gardes. Most were architecture students: Vejvoda, Miler, Krajačić, Demić, Kavurić, and Kadić. Additionally, Vučković and Danon were composers, and Pavlović, although a student of law and later of economics, wrote poetry. It was a group full of creative and open-minded young people. Even those who were not artists themselves showed an interest in it. Udovički too wrote about going to Burian's theater, as well as watching Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, a theater adaptation of Sholokhov's novel *Virgin*

[265] He is thinking of Julius Fučík, who took over the editorship of *Tvorba* from Šalda in 1928.
[266] Gojko Nikoliš, *Korijen, stablo, pavetina (memoari)* (Zagreb: SN Liber, 1981), 89-90.

Soil Upturned, Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride*, and films of Chaplin, Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, and Gloria Swanson.[267] The socially-engaged nature of the interwar avant-gardes had a great impact on them: Vejvoda went as far as to say that the book *Sotsgorod* by the Soviet architect Nikolay Alexandrovich Milyutin was instrumental in awaking his initial interest in communism.[268]

The communists understood that art was not merely for consumption, and art inspired many of their own political engagements. Moreover, it left a mark on the culture of Yugoslavia. Ivo Vejvoda was a pioneer of film theory in Croatia. After familiarizing himself with modern films in the theaters of Prague, he started reading extensively on contemporary cinematographic trends. He was disappointed to learn that no one was actually writing about film in the Yugoslav cultural revues of the time, so he started publishing his own works in the Zagreb-based, communist-run magazine called *Glas Trešnjevke*. He later claimed that he did it not only to foster the cultural life of the country, but also in part to deter communist attacks on his friend Miroslav Krleža, which were pretty much the only topic of communist cultural magazines at the time.[269] Several years after Vejvoda's ground-breaking work, in 1939, Oskar Danon founded an artistic association in Sarajevo called *Collegium Artisticum*, a left-wing group which organized theater plays, musical concerts, exhibitions and lectures. It was essentially doing for Sarajevo the same job that "Matija Gubec" was doing for Prague. In it, Danon gathered his fellow Prague students: the architects Jahiel Finci and Emanuel Šamanek, as well as Šuica Salom.[270] In his last interview, ten months before his death, Oskar Danon spoke of the influence that the young

[267] Udovički, *Španija moje mladosti*, 70-71.
[268] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 50.
[269] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 185.
[270] Begović, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," 593.

intellectuals returning to Sarajevo from abroad had on the foundation of *Collegium Artisticum*.[271] Although this openness rarely meant a questioning of Stalinist policies, it did mean a disagreement in the cultural sphere, which was much more permissible. Vejvoda remembers his disagreement with Stalin's condemnation of Shostakovich, but he also says that he "did not draw any political conclusions" from this.[272]

While the democratic lessons of Prague helped broaden their political views, the Spanish Civil War turned them into staunch internationalists. If Czechoslovakia, surrounded by Germany, full of left-wing refugees, and with a hostile minority loyal to Nazis, taught them about the need to fight fascism, the Spanish Civil War taught them the need for this struggle to be international. They were the first Yugoslav students to go, and thus served as an inspiration for those at the universities in the country.[273] Udovički said that their motives were twofold:

> "One was the more encompassing, internationalist motive, because we understood that we as a nation cannot fight for democracy and freedom on our own, and the other was that the war in Spain was preparing us for a struggle in our own country and the establishment of a more just social order."[274]

Zora Gavrić echoes this by saying that "the fight of progressive forces against fascism abroad was considered merely an extension of the fight of their own [Yugoslav] people."[275] They both essentially repeat Hobsbawm's idea of the conflation of nationalism and internationalism on the left at the time:

> "*First*, antifascist *nationalism* emerged in the context of an *international* ideological civil war, in which a part of numerous national ruling classes appeared to opt for an international political alignment of the right, and for the states identified with it. (…) [This] could only too easily be

[271] Tamara Nikčević, "Jugoslavija je moja jedina domovina," *Dani*, issue 609, 13th February 2009.
[272] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 56.
[273] Kovačević, "Španija i Beogradski univerzitet", 253.
[274] Udovički, *O Španiji i španskim borcima*, 130.
[275] Gavrić, "Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga", 349.

> read as: rather a foreign country than our own. This made it easier for the left to take back the national flag from the now slackened grip of the right. (…) *Second*, both workers and intellectuals also made an international choice, but one which happened to reinforce national sentiment. (…) Issues which were essentially domestic in each country were, by the accidents of history, being fought out on battlefields in a country so remote and unknown to most workers that it had virtually no association for the average Briton other than those of the struggle which concerned them."[276]

As a consequence, consciously or not, the communists simultaneously took part in the formation of a new kind of Yugoslav identity, a left-wing nationalist one, which would come to be known as "Brotherhood and Unity" in postwar Yugoslavia. A good example of this is the eulogy of Veljko Vlahović at the grave of Matija Šiprak, the member of the Prague Platoon who fell at Jarama. Šiprak came to Prague in 1936 to study law. He was from a devoutly Catholic family which traditionally supported the Croatian Peasant Party.[277] However, he was also an anti-fascist, and was introduced to radical left ideas by his colleagues after his arrival to Prague.[278] In the eulogy, Vlahović reiterated the vision of a nation of antifascists, opposed to the nationalist and chauvinist ideas of the sympathizers of Franco. He intentionally referenced the fact that some Croatian fascists also went to Spain as volunteers to fight on the Nationalist side, and the speech was aimed at attacking them as much as glorifying a fallen comrade:

> "We are convinced that the entire Croatian nation together with us will solemnize and avenge your heroic death, helping us in our struggle against fascism and condemning that group of misguided children at the University of Zagreb, who think that politically and nationally they are closer to you, comrade Šiprak, than us – followers of other parties and sons of different nations – and who extended their hand across your grave to the murderer of the Spanish people, the enemy

[276] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 146-147.
[277] Vjeran Pavlaković, "Radicalization at the University of Zagreb during the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939," *Historical Journal* 62, no. 2 (July 2011): 500, accessed July 5, 2015, http://hrcak.srce.hr/70239?lang=en.
[278] Đuro Gajdek, *Španjolski borci Siska i Banije* (Sisak: Muzej Sisak, 1985), 145.

> of the Croatian people, General Franco. We are convinced that the entire younger generation of the Croatian people is not going to follow their example, but yours, comrade Matija. May your glory be everlasting, worthy son of the Croatian nation!"[279]

Although he is the "son of the Croatian nation", he is nevertheless closer to "followers of other parties and sons of different nations" – that is, his communist friends of other Yugoslav nationalities – than he is to the people who also consider themselves "sons of the Croatian nation" but fight for the fascists. This idea, according to which a fellow Yugoslav of a different ethnicity is closer than a member of the same ethnic group that fights alongside the fascists, would become the cornerstone of Yugoslav communist ideology in World War II.

Combined with their ideological development and cultural impact, there was also the fight for a revolution in Yugoslavia itself. As already stated, it had mostly consisted of renewing Party organizations in the country in the wake of the dictatorship and sending illegal books and flyers from Czechoslovakia. Those who returned to the country used the experience gained in Prague to help the communist cause. An interesting incident occurred in Belgrade in 1940, which illustrates how critical thinking and openness held on after their return to Yugoslavia. Vejvoda remembers that Nikola Petrović, who was Tito's connection with the Comintern at the time, began telling some comrades stories about innocent people disappearing in the USSR. Tito found out and forbade him from talking about it, although he did not punish him in any way.[280] Ironically, Petrović was among the people who were expelled from the KPJ as Cominformists in 1951.

Many years later, after World War Two, Oskar Danon told Ivo Vejvoda that he cried when he visited Prague again, watching the old spirit of the city destroyed by years of Stalinism.

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[279] Čedo Kapor, *Krv i život za slobodu*, 4th ed. (Belgrade: Unija-publik, 1978), 42, quoted in Pavlaković, "Radicalization at the University of Zagreb during the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939," 500.
[280] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 210.

Vejvoda himself found the city too depressing, which prompted him to ask to serve as an ambassador elsewhere, and he got transferred to London.[281] He remembered the city of Prague, Golden and free, that he studied in, and the contrast was too painful to bear.

[281] Berić, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, 139.

11. Conclusion

The activity of Yugoslav communist students in Prague in the 1920s and 1930s played a significant role in the development of the Yugoslav communist movement as a whole. The Party always understood that political agitation among the students was a key to success. The universities abroad were not neglected either, as many European countries had political systems significantly less authoritarian than the Yugoslav one, opening space for political agitation. Czechoslovakia was particularly important because of its political ties with the Yugoslav state, which meant financial support for those who decided to study there. Due to poor government policies, the social situation of these students was often very bad, which directly benefited the communists. The importance of Prague additionally rose with the end of democracy in Germany and Austria in the early 1930s, which made it one of the most important KPJ centers outside of Yugoslavia.

The communists led a constant battle with the representatives of the Yugoslav authorities in Prague, but the Yugoslav Embassy was unable to stop the spread of anti-regime sentiment due to both organizational failures and the political, social, and economic disarray that the country perpetually found itself in and of which the students were acutely aware. More and more of them joined the communist ranks each year. The legal framework set up by the Czechoslovak democratic constitution and the pressure of the liberal public often exacerbated the situation for the Embassy and its extended hand, the School Inspector. Even if parts of the public were not in favor of revolutionary Marxism, they still preferred the underdogs who fought for it over the oppressive Yugoslav royal government.

This attitude became even more pronounced in the mid-1930s, when the KPJ began implementing the Popular Front strategy, and entered an alliance with the liberal forces of

Czechoslovakia that was enthusiastically embraced by both sides. This alliance was much more successful than similar attempts in Yugoslavia itself, and it had a side-effect of educating young communists about the merits of an environment based on political cooperation of the left forces. The cooperation was already practiced in Prague long before it became official Party policy, even though it was against the ultra-leftist course of the Comintern. This openness would later become a significant factor in World War II, when forces such as the Christian Socialists in Slovenia, the left wing of the HSS in Croatia and the Left Agrarians in Serbia united with the communists against fascists and collaborationists. Indeed, the communists in Prague had already collaborated with some of these groups in the early 1930s.

At the same time, this approach helped foster a left-wing Yugoslav nationalism, which for them became inseparable from the Marxist internationalism. Although the Prague students were devoted to the anti-Yugoslav stance of the KPJ between 1928 and 1935, they became equally dedicated to the change of course after the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. Their Yugoslavism was strengthened by the fact that their organizations consisted of Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Muslims, Montenegrins and Jews, as well as a small number of non-Slavic minorities (Germans and Albanians).

The student leaders, all anonymous at the time, were extraordinary figures, and dozens of them left significant marks on the history of 20th century of Yugoslavia. They were the future Party intelligentsia – engineers, agronomists, artists, lawyers, and philosophers. Regardless of professional orientation, they were Renaissance men (and women) with a broad range of interests other than revolutionary politics. Some sacrificed their lives for the Revolution, while others lived through it and shaped the new state. A small, but not insignificant group sided with Stalin after the Cominform Resolution in 1948. Two were murdered, but all others were pardoned and

reintegrated into society, although they never held positions of power again. These figures serve as a testimony of the unrelenting belief in Stalin and the Soviet Union held by many.

Nevertheless, many more sided with Tito and took an active role in the reform of the state and the drift away from Stalinism. This was the case with the majority of the Prague students. They were cosmopolitans who often worked in diplomacy – which in itself was always the most open-minded part of the Yugoslav socialist state apparatus. Still, their open-mindedness did not mean an acceptance of capitalism or electoral reformism. They remained dedicated revolutionary socialists who did not shun the egalitarian ideals that had originally inspired them. If they lived long enough to see their country collapse, they were marginalized, ignored, or sometimes openly abused because of their refusal to bow to the newly-victorious nationalist hegemony. The same people who risked everything in the 1930s in order to build a better world sacrificed their own comfort and security in old age for the sake of the ideals of the world they had created and which had then crumbled before their eyes.

The dual experience of studying abroad and fighting for a revolution at home played an important, but underestimated, role in the development of the Yugoslav revolutionary left. The open society of Czechoslovakia and cooperation with all the anti-fascist forces in Prague contributed to a development of ideas which were able to fully express themselves only after the break between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Although the rupture was virtually invisible before 1948, it became a defining feature of the Yugoslav state once it happened. The role that the Yugoslav students in Prague had played in this rupture and the construction of the Yugoslav socialist experiment that followed can hardly be overstated.

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