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The Communist Party of Yugoslavia Stifling the Opposition in 1945*

The communist takeover of power in Yugoslavia after 1945 differed significantly from how communists rose to power in the other East European countries, where the liberation from Nazi Germany and its allies had been achieved by the Soviet Red Army. With the Soviet Army, communist politicians schooled in the Soviet Union also arrived in these countries and, in the following few years, took over power with ample Soviet assistance. The Yugoslav situation was different. The Red Army only participated in the liberation of a part of the state, while the Communist Party of Yugoslavia controlled all the mechanisms of power as early as in 1945. The present contribution attempts to explain the political processes that allowed a political party that had been relatively small and illegal before the war to accumulate such political influence, as well as to explore the reasons why the strongest pre-war political parties became too weak even to prepare for the first post--war election.

The simplified explanation – already advocated at the time as well as later by some of the most important pre-war politicians who had by then emigrated – was that the pre-war parties had been completely stifled by the repression of the communist authorities. When the archives opened after the fall of the communist regimes, many researchers attempted to prove this thesis. However, in their efforts, they forgot to ask themselves what the actual power of the opponents of the communist regime in the political arena was, and why their standpoints failed to garner sufficient support among the people. Therefore, this contribution does not concern itself with the terror of the political police and the post--war purges. Instead it examines the question of the degree to which the standpoints of the most important pre-war political parties in Yugoslavia were still relevant to what had once been their traditional electoral bases, which they had barely addressed as of 1941. Due to wartime experiences, in 1945, a significant part of the population subscribed

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to a completely different way of thinking than before. This was yet another reason why before the 1945 election, the formation of any political opposition was extremely difficult.

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Before World War II, Yugoslavia was an economically backward country with mounting social and national conflicts. The government was dominated by the leaders of the strongest Serbian parties, causing profound conflicts between the two most numerous nations in the state: Serbs and Croats. The country's leadership failed to address the internal tensions, which was one of the reasons why in April 1941, after the attack by Germany and its allies, Yugoslavia capitulated swiftly. The invaders divided its territory, and during the war, Yugoslavia was one of the most fragmented European countries. The new King Peter II Karađorđević and the Royal Government sought refuge with the British government, while many politicians that remained in Yugoslavia either accepted the given circumstances, became passive, or even started collaborating with the occupiers.

During the war, two political groups strived most actively for the restoration of Yugoslavia. One of these was under the auspices of the King's Government, yet initially still dominated by the Greater Serbian outlooks on the unified state. Furthermore, the Chetnik military detachments, which were supposed to protect the homeland against the occupiers, only managed to assert themselves in the territory populated by the Serbs. Meanwhile, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, headed by Josip Broz-Tito, managed to take advantage of the willingness of the population to fight against the occupiers across the entire territory of the divided Yugoslavia. The Party organised the strongest partisan resistance movement in the entire occupied territory of Europe, which controlled extensive liberated territories as well as established, as the liberation movement's supreme political body, the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) in November 1942. The liberation movement and its leadership included the representatives of all of the Yugoslav nations, various social strata, and, in terms of politics, the electoral bases of the very diverse pre-war political parties. At the end of the war, the liberation movement represented not only the strongest military force in the Yugoslav territory but also the only functioning and widespread network of political committees. In comparison with the membership of the pre-war political parties, which had been traditionally limited in terms of nationality or religion, this was yet another novelty in Yugoslav political development.

The greatest problem of any potential authorities in Yugoslavia was the question of how to appease the opposition between the Serbs and Croats, which culminated in the massacres during World War II and after it. Consequently, the authorities mostly paid attention to solving the mounting political difficulties in Serbia and Croatia and did not focus so much on the other parts of Yugoslavia. The mostly Serbian-populated parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, which had suffered due to the Ustasha terror and where a strong partisan movement had developed during the war, were deemed as favourably inclined by Tito and his associates. However, in the mountainous parts of Serbia, Bosnia, and Montenegro, where the armed groups of the Chetniks persisted even after the war, the new authority had to assert itself with violence. The same was true in

the areas where the mostly Albanian population had opposed the Partisans and their communist leadership during the war. In 1945, Macedonia gained its statehood for the first time, while Macedonian also became the official language in schools and public institutions. This was to ensure that the majority of the local population would support the new regime. Also in Slovenia, the recognition of this territory's federal status and the appointment of a Slovenian government were met with widespread approval. The communist authorities therefore had no reservations when it came to using violence against those who had openly collaborated with the occupiers during the war. A much more difficult problem was those renowned pre-war politicians and political parties that had, together with the King's Government, sought refuge with the Western Allies in Great Britain or the United States during the war, especially as some of them returned to their homeland after the war. Those who had spent the entire war in Yugoslavia and clearly joined the side that fought against the occupiers could also not be simply written off as collaborators by the communist authorities. Most of these politicians were among the Serbs and Croats in Belgrade and Zagreb, respectively. However, due to their wartime passivity, by the end of the war, a significant part of these politicians' pre-war electoral bases had started cooperating with the political organisations of the liberation movement and agreed to their political principles. These included national equality, a federal transformation of the state, gender equality, and a socially just society, which, by all means, represented extremely attractive principles for the majority of the people. Therefore, the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia did not base its post-war takeover of power on the communist ideology but rather avoided it, as it had to fulfil its promises to its allies in the anti-fascist coalition.

The democratic form of government, political pluralism, and the establishment of the conditions for the normal functioning of the political opposition were the requirements established by the victorious powers in World War II for the recognition of the new government and the new reality in Yugoslavia. The simple logic of Tito and his colleagues dictated that they should outwardly appear willing to comply with these requirements and refrain from introducing a new dictatorship. Behind the scenes, however, the change was to be carried out in such a way that the position the communists had secured for themselves within the wartime liberation movement would in no way be jeopardised.[1]

At the end of November 1943 the AVNOJ, as the supreme body of the liberation movement, also assumed legislative power. A government was appointed with Tito as its president. At the conference of the Big Three – Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill – which took place at the same time in Tehran, the Partisan Army under Tito's leadership was acknowledged as the only legitimate Allied military force in the territory of Yugoslavia. The British government exerted pressure against the Yugoslav King Peter II. The British insisted that Karađorđević and the Yugoslav Royal Government, which they had

[1] For more information about the political issues in 1945 in Yugoslavia, see B. Petranović, *Političke i pravne prilike za vreme privremene vlade DFJ* (Beograd, 1964); V. Koštunica, K. Čavoški, *Stranački pluralizam ili monizam: obnova i zatiranje posleratne opozicije* (Beograd, 1990); J. Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem oblasti 1944–1946* (Ljubljana, 1992); A. Gabrič, *V senci politike: opozicija komunistični oblasti v Sloveniji po letu 1945* (Ljubljana, 2019).

provided with asylum, engage in discussions with Tito's government about the creation of a unified anti-fascist bloc in the country. Ivan Šubašić, the Prime Minister of the new Royal Government, in fact met with Tito and signed the first treaty on the island of Vis on 16 June 1944, according to which the Royal Government undertook to support the Partisan units and eliminate from their circles everyone who collaborated with the occupiers. Tito's government, however, pledged not to address the issue of the state's post--war regime – that is, whether it would be a monarchy or a republic – during the war. At the second meeting, which took place in already liberated Belgrade on 2 November 1944, the Prime Minister of the liberation movement's government and that of the Royal Government agreed on the formation of a joint government. This took place on 7 March 1945, when Josip Broz-Tito became the president of the joint government of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (*Demokratska federativna Jugoslavija*, DFJ), while Ivan Šubašić was appointed as foreign minister.[2]

However, already during the war, the leaders of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*, KPJ) took control of the main mechanisms of power, while Tito assumed the most important state functions, as he himself acted as the prime minister, defence minister, and the supreme commander of the Army. After the People's Front of Yugoslavia (*Ljudski front Jugoslavije*, LFJ) was founded in August of 1945, Tito became its president and the leader of its general election candidate list. In public, however, he did not present himself as the Secretary-General of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, because the latter was still operating based on illegal principles and hiding behind the image of a broadly popular movement.

In a paper he wrote for a narrow circle of reliable Party associates in the summer of 1945, the leading Party ideologist Edvard Kardelj explained the tactic of how the communists could fulfil the international demands, yet at the same time not give up their power. He mentioned that they had to rely on the Soviet Union and oppose the attempts of the Western powers that supported the politicians from the Yugoslavian opposition. Although it did not appear that the Western powers would succeed in establishing strong connections among the opposition forces in Yugoslavia, Kardelj stressed the need to maintain a strict policy against external and internal opponents. He assessed the situation as favourable because, as he put it, "we are actually holding matters completely in our hands". The communists expected full support in Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and parts of Croatia, where no lenience was to be shown to those who thought differently, not even in the People's Front organisation. Kardelj added that the situation was expected to be different in those places where the communists would encounter stronger political opponents – that is, in Serbia and Croatia. It was agreed that in these areas, the People's Front of Yugoslavia (LFJ) "is not only a general and unique national liberation movement, but to a certain extent even a coalition allowing each individual party to operate to its full potential in the framework of the Liberation Front of Yugoslavia". Kardelj clearly stated that it would be better for these parties to "fulfil their full potential" under the auspices of a joint People's Front organisation, as

[2] More about this issue can be found in D. Šepić, *Vlada Ivana Šubašića* (Zagreb, 1983).

this way they would be easier to control and the communists would also be given the opportunity to influence the people who would bring these parties into a common organisation. As this organisation strengthened, the pressure against the leaders of the individual parties within the Front was also to be intensified. Therefore, Kardelj also mentioned the National Peasant Party (*Narodna seljačka stranka*, NSS), led by the most important non-communist politician in the leadership of the LFJ, Dragoljub Jovanović. The NSS had significant influence among the peasants in the Serbian countryside, where the liberation movement had been poorly developed during the war. Using Jovanović as an example, Kardelj indicated that his party was welcome in the joint People's Front, but that Jovanović should not be allowed to restore the old forms of this party's activities within the Front. Should he attempt to establish his own organisations within the Front in order to "challenge the Party's leadership and take advantage of its masses" Jovanović was to be attacked. According to Kardelj, "the electoral legislation allowed the large parties to generally have a more favourable position than the various tiny groups". For this reason, only one of the LFJ lists was expected to run in the election and stand against the opposition, which was most likely to be led by Milan Grol, the leader of the Democratic Party (*Demokratska stranka*, DS). It argued for fundamental liberal freedoms and, unlike the authorities, prioritised the rights of individuals rather than the rights of society. It also called for judicial independence. The party was influential among the intellectuals and the bourgeoisie, but mostly only Serbian, as it offered less with regard to federalism as the LFJ. In the Provisional Assembly, its deputies were among the loudest critics of the new regime. Kardelj therefore announced that the communists would be more lenient towards their allies in the LFJ at that stage, as they had to "keep the coalition together until the election". In some areas, they would include several candidates in their candidate list to present themselves as a democratic and inclusive movement and meet the coalition partners' demands as well as those of the great powers: "We will do this so that we can refer to our forces within in the nation in front of the entire world. Restricting them would complicate our position in the eyes of the outside world, and the external imperialists could once again raise the question of the recognition of Yugoslavia".[3]

Kardelj announced that subsequently the communists would adopt a different strategy in terms of the elections and the adoption of the Constitution. During the first stage, they were therefore still expected to be lenient, especially towards their coalition partners within the Front. Kardelj also observed that the communists "would face a reactionary opposition in the Constituent Assembly, which will oppose us and speak against what we establish". However, this modest "parliamentary fraction will by no means impede us". Since the communists held all the leading positions in the country, Kardelj believed that such leniency could not in any way jeopardise the envisioned communist path to full power in the country. He thus completed this part of his paper by stating that they

[3] Arhiv Republike Slovenije (Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, hereinafter: SI), Centralni komite Zveze komunistov Slovenije (Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia, hereinafter: AS 1589), III, t.e. 32, a.e. 873, Referat tovariša Kardelja, pp. 6–7.

could accept even more "reactionaries" in the LFJ and allow them to have "an illusion of decision-making".[4]

Of course, it would have been impossible to trace such a detailed presentation of the communist political plan in the media or at public political tribunes. There, the underlying emphasis on the unified People's Front's policy was pushed forward rather than answering how to use the Front to achieve the goals of only a single political party, which did not even represent itself in public as an independent political force. In his paper, Kardelj explained clearly that only in Serbia and Croatia, the politicians from the pre--war political parties were still strong enough that they would have to be tolerated for a period of a few months. Prior to the onset of the apparent implementation of the Tito–Šubašić Agreement, the KPJ first secured the leading role in its political bloc, the LFJ. Slovenia achieved this earlier than the rest of the country, as the Communist Party of Slovenia (*Komunistična partija Slovenije*, KPS) had already subordinated the other partners to the liberation movement during the war. At the first Congress of the Liberation Front of Slovenia (*Osvobodilna fronta Slovenije*, OF) in July 1945, it was merely confirmed that the development from a coalition of various groups to a unified organisation had already been achieved during the war.[5]

Such a politically unified organisation had yet to be created by the new Yugoslav leaders at the statewide level. This is why the communists also delayed the convening of the Provisional Assembly, so that the founding congress of the LFJ could be held in Belgrade from 5 to 7 August 1945. The communists wanted the LFJ leadership to have as many leaders from pre-war political parties on their side as possible before they presented themselves in front of the domestic and foreign public as the representatives of the majority of citizens. The non-communist personalities were also given prominent positions within the ruling and political structure. Dragoljub Jovanović thus became the Vice-President of the LFJ. According to Jovanović's testimony, Milan Grol, the most important opposition leader in Serbia, was also invited to join the LFJ in 1945. However, he allegedly told Tito that they could talk more easily should he be invited to the Communist Party because he knew what the Party was, but did not know what the People's Front was supposed to be.[6] The reactions to the Congress suggested that unity in the form in which it had already been achieved in Slovenia did not manifest itself at the Yugoslavian level. The critics observed that only fragments of the political parties were included in the LFJ, while some of the party leaders expected to have more influence in compiling the candidate lists for the elections and that political parties should not give up their former identities by becoming parts of the LFJ.

In August 1945, the Provisional People's Assembly (*Privremena narodna skupština*, PNS), in which the LFJ members held an absolute majority of seats, adopted legislation regarding the Constituent Assembly elections. This was followed by some attempts to

[4] *Ibidem*, t.e. 32, a.e. 873, Referat tovariša Kardelja, p. 8.

[5] A. Gabrič, "Opozicija v Sloveniji po letu 1945", *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 45 (2005), no. 2, pp. 101–106.

[6] D. Jovanović, *Ljudi, ljudi…: medaljoni 46 umrlih savremenika sa fotografijama* (Beograd, 1975), pp. 33–36, 114–115.

restore the activities of the political parties. The Democratic Party (*Demokratska stranka*, DS), the most important opposition party from 1945 led by Milan Grol, was among the first to declare and renew its operations. The Yugoslav Republican Party (*Jugoslovenska republikanska stranka*, JRS), which started publishing the *Republic* newspaper, soon drowned in the LFJ and ceased to exist as an autonomous political factor. In addition to the Democratic Party, the National Radical Party (*Narodna radikalna stranka*, NRS) – the most powerful pre-war Serbian party that had split into several factions – refused to join the LFJ. However, the LFJ was joined by both socialist-orientated registered parties: the Socialist Party (*Socijalistička stranka*, SSJ) and the Social Democratic Party (*Socijal-demokratska stranka*, SDS), as well as by the People's Peasant Party (*Narodna seljačka stranka*, NSS), led by Dragoljub Jovanović.[7]

During the war, the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*, HSS), the strongest Croatian party, had been invited to cooperate both by the Ustasha regime and the leaders of the resistance movement. However, the party had started to disintegrate even then. Those who collaborated with the Ustasha regime could not count on any leniency from the post-war regime, and even those who remained passive – among them the party leader Vladko Maček, who did not want to cooperate either with the Ustashas or the communists – lost their former power. Some of the leading party members had already joined the Partisans during the war, and in the autumn of 1943 they renewed the party's activities under the name of the Croatian Republican Peasant Party (*Hrvatska republikanska seljačka stranka*, HRSS), which joined the LFJ.[8] The position of the HSS immediately after the war was a unique demonstration of the dilemmas and ambivalence within the opposition. At the end of the war, the party leader Vladko Maček retreated to the West in fear of the communists. He informed Šubašić and Šutej that because they had joined Tito's unified government, he could not offer them any support. A part of the party's leadership in Yugoslavia was charged with collaborating with the Ustasha regime (which at least some of the politicians claimed was not true) and imprisoned by the Department for People's Protection (*Odjeljenje za zaštitu naroda*, OZNA) for a considerable period. August Košutić, the second in the party hierarchy after Maček, was among them. The attempts to merge the HSS and HRSS showed that the views of the former Partisans and senior politicians on the cooperation with the People's Front varied greatly, while the leadership aspirations of various individuals also took their toll.[9]

Tito's government strived to restrict the functioning of the opposition in various ways. The terror of OZNA was important, since numerous collaborators as well as opponents of the new regime were killed at the end of the war. With regard to data about the people who were executed, arrested, or imprisoned, the researchers of this issue have already

[7] M. Pavlović, "Politički programi Demokratske narodne radikalne, Jugoslovenske republikanske, Demokratske, Socijalističke i Socijal-demokratske stranke Jugoslavije iz 1945. godine", *Istorija 20. veka* 3 (1985), no. 1, pp. 120–124; M. Pavlović, *Za Tita ili za kralja: izbori za Ustavotvornu skupštinu 11. novembra 1945* (Beograd, 2007), pp. 101–132.

[8] Z. Radelić, *Hrvatska seljačka stranka 1941.–1950.* (Zagreb, 1996), pp. 21–35, 131–144.

[9] *Ibidem*, pp. 47–61; L. Boban, *Dr. Tomo Jančiković: HSS između zapadnih saveznika i jugoslavenskih komunista* (Zagreb, 1996), pp. 340–343.

underlined that it is difficult to ascertain the percentage of those who were punished merely for their political opposition to the communist authority.[10] By all means, the most visible non-communist politicians soon ended up under the constant surveillance of the OZNA. The scrutiny of the HSS leaders Ivan Šubašić and Juraj Šutej in Croatia has already been detailed in the relevant literature.[11] However, other politicians also complained about surveillance. Stasha, the daughter of a renowned Slovenian liberal Boris Furlan, who had also joined the liberation movement, described her first meeting with her father after the war, in June 1945 in Ljubljana. As soon as she spoke, her father "put a finger on his mouth and pointed at the chandelier with the other hand".[12]

However, the terror of the OZNA was certainly not the only way of settling the score with the communist's opponents. While the authorities tried to preserve the illusion of democracy and the broad national support of the People's Front, the fragmentation of the former parties was encouraged, so that some of their former leading members could be incorporated into the LFJ and the continuity of the pre-war parties could be incorporated into it. The tactic succeeded, also because merely the remains of the former major parties were preserved in Yugoslavia: many of them had already fallen apart or disintegrated into several factions before and during the war. When Grol's Democratic Party (DS) announced the restoration of its activities, a conference of the members who already participated in the LFJ was planned in order to promote their image as the true members of the pre-war Democratic Party in the media. The members of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) who had joined the liberation movement, however, had established the Croatian Republican Peasant Party (HRSS) already during the war, in 1943. In the pre-election period, the propaganda apparatus of the LFJ would present this party as the true advocate of the values of the biggest Croatian political party. At that time, Tito even visited Aco Stanojević, the elderly leader of the National Radical Party (the biggest Serbian pre-war party) and thus conveyed the impression that the LFJ was supported by the majority of the most important pre-war political parties.

The Head of the Democratic Party Milan Grol was considered the informal leader of the opposition by the authorities as well as by the majority of the political opposition. In political circles, he was respected as a highly educated and honest politician. Nevertheless, he was not regarded as a fighter who would be ready to put everything on the line but rather he was considered more of a cabinet man who spent more time writing articles than working in the field. Simultaneously, he was assessed as difficult and problematic in terms of cooperation, since harsh diction and critical remarks were not foreign to him.[13] Milan Grol (who was the vice-president of the united government under the leadership of Tito) soon realised how helpless the opposition was and that the communists were not

[10] S. Cvetković, "Politička represija u Srbiji i Jugoslaviji 1944–1985", *Istorija 20. veka* 26 (2008), no. 2, pp. 298–307.

[11] Z. Radelić, "Ivan Šubašić i Juraj Šutej pod paskom Ozne", *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 39 (2007), no. 2, pp. 343–357.

[12] S. Furlan Seaton, *Vojna vse spremeni: kako sta mlada Slovenska in njen oče preživela drugo svetovno vojno* (Ljubljana, 2016), p. 67.

[13] M. Radojević, *Milan Grol* (Beograd, 2014), pp. 21–22; D. Jovanović, *Ljudi, ljudi*, pp. 33–37.

willing to make compromises. Since all of his proposals were rejected by the provisional government and the opposition failed to persuade the Provisional People's Assembly to recognise any of its suggestions, Milan Grol sent a resignation statement to Prime Minister Josip Broz-Tito on 18 August 1945. He based his resignation on unfulfilled promises and the raw and uncompromising way in which the majority in the Provisional Assembly rejected all of the political opposition's proposals, which, according to Grol, contradicted the notion of constructive cooperation.[14]

One of the frequent comments coming from the opposition was that it had not been allowed to appear in the media on equal terms. The Democratic Party was given the opportunity to publish its party newspaper called *Demokratija* [Democracy] very late. The first issue came out on 27 September 1945. In the following weeks, its editor Milan Grol described how the youth would attack and burn the newspapers at the newsagents' in the streets of Belgrade. According to the words of the British ambassador, more than 110,000 copies of the newspaper were printed, most of which were distributed in Serbia, many in Croatia, and some in the other republics. The seventh issue of *Democracy*, which should have reached the readers shortly before the elections, was seized under a court order.[15]

Other critical newspapers were shut down even faster than *Democracy*. In Belgrade, the editor Dušan Baranin started publishing the *Novosti* [News] newspaper, but only three issues were released in October.[16] In Zagreb, Marija Radić, the widow of the late HSS leader Stjepan Radić, started publishing the *Narodni glas čovječnosti, pravice i slobode* [National Voice of Humanity, Rights, and Freedoms], which was edited by Ivan Bernardić. The first issue was released on 20 October 1945. The Public Prosecutor's Office issued a temporary ban on the distribution of the newspaper but this failed to deter the editorial office. However, when the second issue of the newspaper was ready for print, the trade union – the same one as in the case of *Democracy* – went on strike because the workers allegedly refused to print a newspaper that insulted the people and the achievements of the liberation struggle. The efforts to find another printing office were unsuccessful, while several attacks and then a bomb explosion in front of Radić's bookshop, where a circle of HSS members would meet, was the final warning to the publishers not to make any further attempts to print an independent newspaper.[17]

The newspapers of the parties that joined the People's Front were more fortunate, but those publications actually conformed to the political platform of the Front movement. The leading communists tolerated them because they created an illusion of freedom of the press and appearance of continuity between the old parties and their factions that joined the LFJ. The HRSS – a detached part of the HSS – continued to publish the *Slobodni dom* [Free Home] newspaper until 1963, while its committee for Bosnia and Herzegovina kept releasing the *Hrvatsko glasilo* [Croatian Journal] publication. Until 1956, the Republican Party issued the *Republika* [Republic].[18]

[14] M. Pavlović, *Istorija Demokratske stranke: 1941–1952* (Beograd, 2010), pp. 141–147.
[15] *Ibidem*, pp. 177–190.
[16] K. Čavoški, "Spaljivanje nije odgovor" [in:] Đ. Martić, *Komunisti protiv "Demokratije"* (Beograd, 1990), p. 11.
[17] Z. Radelić, *Hrvatska seljačka stranka 1941.–1950.*, pp. 75–78.
[18] V. Koštunica, K. Čavoški, *Stranački pluralizam ili monizam*, pp. 109–114.

When the opposition realised that the ruling communists had not allowed it to join the pre-election battle on equal terms, they decided not to participate in it. The statement of the united opposition political parties, adopted on 20 September 1945, indicated that they would not participate in an election that failed to observe the normal standards of political activities. According to the opposition, a negative political atmosphere prevailed in the country, while the electoral law favoured the Party in power and did not ensure fair elections. The electoral race started with a ban on the voting rights of hundreds of thousands of citizens. Many people felt oppressed and robbed of their fundamental freedoms, and in such an atmosphere, it was difficult to expect fair elections and conditions for the normal work of the Constitutional Assembly. "For these reasons, the united opposition parties – the Democrats, the Radicals, and the Agrarians – will not participate with their electoral lists", read the statement published on the first page of the first issue of *Democracy*.[19]

The control over the media allowed the complete domination of the ruling People's Front (or, more precisely, the Communist Party that was hiding behind it). The activities of the political parties during the pre-election struggle were unequal, as one side, the communists, had full control over the police, the army, the OZNA, and the media so that the actual opposition in Belgrade and Zagreb did not have any real possibility of success. In the *Democracy* newspaper, Milan Grol questioned the equality in the political competition that had been promised by Tito's government, as the People's Front had 130 publications at its disposal, while the opposition only had a single one.[20] Even Belgrade's *Democracy* (the only newspaper standing against 130 opposing publications) was short-lived, as the seventh and last issue was released on 8 November 1945, shortly before the election. The abolition of the opposition media, including *Democracy*, was carried out in the manner often employed by the communist authorities to prevent the undesired media from acting. The trade unions would organise (spontaneous) boycotts of print workers, who would "voluntarily" decide to go on strike and not print the newspapers that were allegedly spreading false news about the country and its rulers.[21]

In public statements, the communist leaders would simply label the opposition opponents as heirs of wartime collaborators and anti-national pre-war regimes. On 11 November 1945, during the preparations for the election, the state leader Josip Broz-Tito mentioned the opposition several times, always repeating the same pattern. In his long pre-election speech on the Belgrade radio, he emphasised that the People's Front was not only a "temporary, pre-election coalition – a coalition dedicated to achieving only certain goals". As the holder of the LFJ list at the election, he mentioned that the Front consisted of "workers, peasants, and honest intelligentsia, namely communists, supporters of the peasant parties, most of the Democratic Party's supporters, the Independent Democratic Party's supporters, the Republican Party's supporters, the former HSS's (today HRSS) supporters, the Muslim Party's supporters, plus supporters of almost all of the other parties

[19] "Saopštenje udruženih opozicionih stranaka", *Demokratija* 27 IX 1945, p. 1. "The Agrarians" referred to the members of the Agrarian Party (*Zemljoradnička stranka*), which brought together a part of the Serbian peasant population.

[20] M. Grol, "Silom ili razlogom?", *Demokratija* 25 X 1945, p. 1.

[21] K. Čavoški, "Spaljivanje nije odgovor", pp. 9–13.

in Slovenia".[22] The majority of citizens/voters had supposedly been united in this popular movement, and the People's Front had allegedly brought together all of the progressive thinkers in Yugoslavia. On the other hand, Tito failed to find a single kind word for the opposition. "In the short time since the opposition was given the opportunity to act freely, its every step has contradicted the interests of the people".[23] The state leader described the opposition's functioning conditions in an idealised way: he noted that its claims that it could not publish newspapers were pointless and, contrary to such beliefs, claimed that newspaper publishing had been possible for the opposition even before the adoption of the new press media law. The opposition's standpoint that, allegedly, no conditions existed for the free activities of the parties was rejected by Tito as well. He gave the assessment that the legislation provided for free party activities and claimed that the opposition deliberately failed to act freely so that it might have an excuse for its lack of power.[24]

In public, the discourse of communist ideologists prevailed, stating that the opposition politicians only included those leading members of the old parties that allegedly wanted to reacquire their pre-war privileges, collaborators who had fought on the side of the occupiers during the war, and people who favoured a greater influence of foreign (which, of course, meant Western) countries in Yugoslavia. Whenever they could, the communist leaders avoided using the expression "the opposition" and only resorted to it when it was absolutely necessary. When, in October 1945, foreign journalists asked Prime Minister Josip Broz-Tito about the opposition in Yugoslavia, he replied: "I do not call this opposition of ours an opposition at all. Normally, an opposition in a country is not content with certain tactical issues, it wants to improve some things, and it takes an opposing stand when it comes to a regime or government. The opposition in our country is not like that", and made a black-and-white remark in passing, claiming that the opposition had never proposed anything beneficial.[25] The only opposition leader that Tito mentioned by name was Milan Grol, the leader of the Democratic Party. But even regarding Grol he stated that members of his party had left him and joined the People's Front, while the opposition in Yugoslavia allegedly existed only because of foreign interests: "Grol's 'opposition' can only exist for as long as it is supported from abroad. As soon as foreign help is withdrawn, it will automatically disappear. This 'opposition' is therefore not a problem for us",[26] as such Tito simply concluded the conversation about the subject with the journalists.

Other leading communists would also make statements similar to Tito's. Milovan Djilas, the leader of Agitprop, the Department of Censorship and Propaganda of the KPJ, was in the lead when it came to insulting statements regarding the opposition. He called Grol the "emigrant source of intrigues, betrayal, espionage, crime, careerism, and corruption". He put the term "opposition" in quotation marks since it was supposed to "conceal the monsters of betrayal and crime".[27] In the months before the election,

[22] J. Broz-Tito, *Graditev nove Jugoslavije: prva knjiga* (Ljubljana, 1948), pp. 146–147.
[23] *Ibidem*, p. 153.
[24] *Ibidem*, p. 156.
[25] *Ibidem*, p. 169.
[26] *Ibidem*, p. 170.
[27] V. Koštunica, K. Čavoški, *Stranački pluralizam ili monizam*, p. 73.

Djilas would repeatedly mention his political opponents during public speeches in an undignified manner. His public speeches sounded almost like declarations of war, as he threatened those who would follow the policies of the opposition leaders, telling them not to count on the people being indifferent and watching such behaviour with their arms crossed. With a very undemocratic tone, he stated that this would not be the first time that the opposition was defeated, but this time it would be defeated with electoral ballots. The opposition had already been defeated during the war, though at that time the they were using real steel "ballots" made of lead, said Djilas threateningly.[28]

Consequently, the circumstances surrounding the elections did not give rise to any doubts as to their outcome. At the Constitutional Assembly elections on 11 November 1945, more than 88 per cent of eligible voters voted, of which over 90 per cent voted for the candidates of the People's Front. The media presented the elections as a referendum in support of Tito's regime. Naturally, the undemocratic circumstances in which the elections took place raised questions about the price of victory. Nevertheless, there was no doubt about what the new order in Yugoslavia with Tito in charge would be. The new Yugoslav leaders emphasised to the domestic and foreign public that the election had fulfilled the promises made to the Western powers with the signing of the Tito–Šubašić agreement. According to them, the opposition had suffered such a thorough defeat due to its pre--war and especially wartime policies, which they argued was something that the people punished appropriately and thus supported the LFJ instead of the old political parties.

Irrespective of the way in which it was achieved, the result of the elections provided the authorities with the legitimacy they needed to reorganise society according to their own design. The opposition leaders did not have to wait long to see the communists make moves completely opposite to what they had presented to the public a few months earlier. The state leader Josip Broz-Tito was pleased with the great victory, also because he found the "various voices at home and beyond our borders regarding the violence and terror which the state organs and the People's Front allegedly employed against the opposition" to be untruthful and vicious. He was also satisfied with the election turnout that supposedly eliminated any aspirations for abstinence, which was something that the "opposition in Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia" strived for. Immediately after this, Tito directly compared the political opposition with the armed opponents of the regime, calling them gangs or small groups of Chetniks and Ustashas, and thus indirectly attempted to blame the opposition for their actions. "I am happy to say that there will be no actions taken against the opposition insofar as its operations remain within the limits of legality", promised Tito. However, simultaneously yet without naming anyone in particular, he once again linked the activities of the opposition to those of the fascist elements, which had compromised themselves during the war by collaborating with the occupier.[29]

After the election, the word "opposition" all but disappeared from Tito's vocabulary. Unlike their propagandistic public appearances, during private conversations in a narrow circle or during their contacts with certain diplomats, the Yugoslav politicians expressed

[28] Đ. Martić, *Komunisti protiv "Demokratije"*, pp. 36–38, 52–53.
[29] J. Broz-Tito, *Graditev nove Jugoslavije: prva knjiga*, pp. 246–249.

their views much more directly, frankly, and without embellishments. The representative of the world's leading communist power in Belgrade, the Soviet ambassador Ivan Sadchikov, was very pleased with what he heard from his interlocutors. In mid-December 1945, he reported to Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov about the talks he had held with the Yugoslav politicians after the elections. He assessed the LFJ's victory at the election as a triumph for the Soviets and a defeat for the Anglo-American policy towards Yugoslavia. In a conversation with him, Milovan Djilas mentioned that Grol and his colleagues allegedly represented the aspirations of the Western powers that were not satisfied with the changes that were taking place in Yugoslavia. Grudgingly, the West nevertheless accepted the changes and acknowledged the new Yugoslavian reality. "The Victory of the People's Front paralysed the activities of the opposition", Sadchikov reported and listed some of the information that he had acquired.[30]

A British diplomat reported to London that the election was not like those in Western Europe. Because the opposition did not participate, it was more of a plebiscite deciding either in favour or against the government. The opposition had options only on paper, but in reality, the regime's opponents were subjected to severe pressure. However, the British diplomat concluded that the results of the election did, in fact, reflect the will of the people. In Central and Eastern Europe, where the trend of establishing dictatorial regimes was gaining momentum, this did not enjoy the support amongst the people due to their faith in communism, but rather because of their past experience. The British representative in the Yugoslav capital gave his assessment that after what they had survived during the war, they simply supported those who could guarantee order and security, even if they had to partly renounce their political freedoms.[31] At the beginning of a Constituent Assembly session, Dragoljub Jovanović caused an outrage among the communist ideologists by criticising the principles of the new constitutional concept that abolished the division of power into three branches as well as the privileged position of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the country.[32] Jovanović did not stop at words, however: instead, he began to directly urge the politicians from certain other parties to form an autonomous parliamentary group and sought allies primarily in the parties whose electoral base was found among the peasant population. Engineer Franjo Gaži reported the talks to the members of the HSS leadership in Zagreb during the Christmas holidays of 1945. At least in the beginning, there was no clear picture of the peasant parties coming together, as the initial plan was that they would operate within the LFJ. Different proposals of how the opposition forces could integrate emerged, involving the politicians of those parties that did not have any representatives in the Constitutional Assembly after the elections. The proposals thus took into consideration the parties that participated in the People's Front, registered parties that were not included in the LFJ, as well as those that had not yet registered their activities.[33] Among them, Milan Grol's name appeared several times,

[30] *Vostočnaja Evropa v dokumentah rossijskih arhivov: 1944–1954*, vol. 1: *1944–1948 gg*, ed. G.P. Muraško (Moskva–Novosibirsk, 1997), pp. 330–332.

[31] Z. Radelić, *Hrvatska seljačka stranka 1941.–1950.*, p. 91.

[32] *Zasedanje Ustavodajne skupščine, (29. novembra 1945 – 1. februarja 1946)* (Ljubljana, 1977), pp. 115–125.

[33] Z. Radelić, *Hrvatska seljačka stranka 1941.–1950*, pp. 91–101.

but it remains unclear whether or not he himself actually participated in any campaigns. At the time when the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FLRJ) Constitution was adopted on 31 January 1946, Grol as the President of the Democratic Party invited domestic and foreign journalists to a meeting and gave his assessment of the political situation in the country. On the same day, he wrote to Tito, underlining that the political opposition had not participated in the elections for the Constitutional Assembly and that the Constitution had been adopted without its participation. He reiterated that the Democratic Party continued to insist on the principles of personal freedoms, including the freedom of the press. For this reason, he sent a copy of the letter addressed to Prime Minister Josip Broz-Tito to the press to be published. When his letter was ignored and the domestic press did not publish anything about his position or statement, Grol realised what the opposition, which disagreed with the KPJ's policy, could in fact expect.[34]

The opposition's activities were closely monitored by the secret police OZNA, and after the Constituent Assembly election on 11 November 1945, the pressure against the opponents further mounted. Almost simultaneously with the last issue of *Democracy* being banned in Belgrade, Ivan Bernardić, the editor of the only printed edition of the Zagreb-based *National Voice*, was arrested and sentenced to a long-term prison term in January 1946. In December 1945, what was known as the Christmas Process took place in Ljubljana. This was the first in a series of proceedings condemning those who were accused of collaboration with the occupiers during the war. Threats to the regime's opponents were also increasingly apparent in the legislative body. Speeches delivered by certain Members of Parliament proved that they did not even understand that they were adopting a Constitution that formally allowed the freedom of political association.

In the Belgrade diplomatic corps, the Soviet ambassador, who was regularly informed about the state of affairs by his Yugoslav friends, was most satisfied with the political developments in Yugoslavia. After the Constituent Assembly started operating, Sadchikov reported to Moscow that after the election, two opposition campaigns attracted major attention. One was the HSS's activity led by Šubašić, Šutej and Jančiković; while the other was the work of Dragoljub Jovanović, who was looking for like-minded people among members of the peasant parties within the LFJ. "The peasant opposition will be stronger than the Grolovian opposition", Sadchikov announced. However, he added that Grol would only have a modest influence in the Assembly and in the country. Kardelj told Sadchikov that there were only about ten members of parliament from Jovanović's party on the lists, and four of them were already communists, so that in the parliament, Jovanović could at best count on the support from about five members of his party, three to four from the Republican Party, as well as on the support of a certain individuals from the other parties. "This way, he will have an insignificant minority in the parliament", Sadchikov reported. After talks with certain Yugoslav leaders, he added that the leading communists would try to isolate Jovanović. They wanted to prevent Jovanović's attempts to rally the representatives of the peasant parties as well as to exclude him from his own

[34] M. Pavlović, *Istorija Demokratske stranke: 1941–1952*, pp. 303–309.

party. Sadchikov concluded that the final scenario could not yet be predicted, but that the initial success of these efforts was already visible.[35]

The public discourse with the potential opposition changed considerably compared to the period before the November 1945 election, when the leading communists, at least declaratively, recognised the right of the opposition to engage in political activities. In explaining the new type of democracy – the so-called people's democracy – they legitimised their own authority by highlighting the unity during the time of the armed conflict against the occupiers and their domestic aides. Western democracy was given a non-democratic label or the label of a capitalist dictatorship exercised over the people. The accusations that a single-party system had been established in Yugoslavia were answered with the argument that several parties were involved in the LFJ, while the fact that registered political parties also existed outside of this framework was ignored. Instead of the term "opposition", the terms "reactionaries", "enemies of the state" and "defenders" or "mercenaries of foreign interests and foreign capital in Yugoslavia" came into use. Only foreign representatives or correspondents in Yugoslavia would occasionally use the word "opposition" in public articles. On 14 October 1946, Tito received Cyrus Leo Sulzberger, an American journalist, thereby making an exception "because he knows that I am an old friend of Yugoslavia",[36] as Sulzberger put it. However, Tito probably did not expect to be asked so many unpleasant questions as on that occasion, after he and Sulzberger had already relaxed over a few shots of *slivovitz* schnapps. To the question "what does the Marshal think about the opposition", Tito replied that the opposition "does not represent an important element", that it did not jeopardise the implementation of the LFJ programme, and "that this opposition will never be stronger, but will become increasingly weaker". It was clear from Tito's answer that the functioning of the opposition in a way typical of the Western democracies would no longer be possible: "This does not mean that we are a priori against the opposition – that is, against an opposition willing to help make the implementation of the People's Front's programme faster and easier".[37] Only those non-communist politicians and groups that were completely loyal to the focus of the People's Front programme and that quietly clung to the primacy of the communists in the People's Front and in the country were allowed.

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The Communist Party of Yugoslavia Stifling the Opposition in 1945

Yugoslavia was the first country behind the Iron Curtain where the communists assumed total power. By 1945, they had already mostly taken over the mechanisms of power, the police apparatus and the military; furthermore they were supervising the majority of the media in preparation for the 11 November 1945 elections, where the total domination of communists in the state was confirmed. The present paper presents the attitude of the leading communists towards the political parties and leaders of the opposition over

the course of six months after the end of World War II. The influence of the opposition was different in the various parts of Yugoslavia. It was the strongest in Serbia and in Croatia, while it barely had any influence in Slovenia. In their public appearances, the leading Communists derided and despised the opposition, associating it with those who had collaborated with the occupation forces during the war. They had already started avoiding the term "opposition" before the elections, while afterwards this word almost vanished from their vocabulary: instead, they would refer to "reactionary forces" or "national traitors".

KEYWORDS
Yugoslavia, opposition, political parties, political vocabulary, 1945, elections

Dławienie opozycji przez Komunistyczną Partię Jugosławii w 1945 roku

Jugosławia była pierwszym krajem za żelazną kurtyną, w którym komuniści zdobyli pełnię władzy. Do 1945 r. zdążyli przejąć większość mechanizmów władzy, aparat policyjny oraz wojsko, nadzorowali większość mediów, a także przygotowali się na wybory 11 listopada 1945 r., które potwierdziły całkowitą dominację komunistów w państwie. Artykuł przedstawia postawę najważniejszych komunistów wobec partii politycznych i przywódców opozycyjnych w ciągu sześciu miesięcy od zakończenia II wojny światowej. Wpływy opozycji różniły się w poszczególnych częściach Jugosławii. Najsilniejsze były w Serbii i Chorwacji, a bardzo znikome w Słowenii. W wystąpieniach publicznych czołowi komuniści szydzili z opozycji i wypowiadali się o niej pogardliwie, usiłując powiązać ją z kolaborantami współpracującymi z siłami okupacyjnymi podczas wojny. Już przed wyborami zaczęli unikać wyrazu „opozycja", który potem niemal całkowicie zniknął z ich słownictwa, zastąpiony zwrotami „siły reakcyjne" lub „zdrajcy narodu".

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE
Jugosławia, opozycja, partie polityczne, słownictwo polityczne, 1945, wybory

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