

**Milovan Djilas and Vladimir Dedijer:
Power and Dissent in Communist
Yugoslavia**

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the careers of Milovan Djilas and Vladimir Dedijer - the only men in the communist world who, at the height of their power, repudiated the system they helped install. Taking a largely chronological approach, the thesis presents the roles of both men in establishing and then undermining communist rule in Yugoslavia. Fundamental change in any society does not occur without the introduction of new ideas. More than any other work in the field, this thesis emphasises the link between the changing ideologies of both men and political developments within Yugoslavia.

The study also represents the first effort at comprehensively analysing the roles of both men in power and dissent. Much of the existing literature has taken a hagiographical approach, focusing on their fall from power in 1954. By taking a more holistic and critical stance, the thesis cuts through some of the vague heroic aura that currently surrounds the figures of Djilas and Dedijer, instead seeing them as products of a particular web of personal, societal and cultural circumstances.

While the thesis is a historical case-study of both men, it makes contributions to other fields such as: dissidence in communist regimes, the role of ideas in driving societal change, politics in multi-ethnic societies, and the (mis)interpretation of history for ideological purposes. Using published memoirs and primary sources, the thesis reconstructs the lives of Djilas and Dedijer. Its main originality is in presenting new sources and offering new interpretations of the roles played by both men in the analysed period. It also corrects some misconceptions in the debate about how the Yugoslav communists dealt with their country's problematic past after 1945, and the extent to which 'liberal' pro-Yugoslav intellectuals undermined the communist state, paving the way for nationalists to emerge in the 1990s.

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Introduction

Aims and Justification

Communism has habitually been seen as something of a faceless ideology. It highlights the leading role of the party and the interests of the group over those of the individual. For this reason Western historians have focused on only the most prominent communist leaders. In regards to Yugoslavia this resulted in numerous biographies of Marshal Josip Broz Tito, while the rest of the party have often been dismissed as mere functionaries and cogs within the party machine.¹ Following in this pattern, the fascinating figures of Milovan Djilas and Vladimir Dedijer have been lost in the comprehensive accounts of communist party policy. While the policy and ideology of the party are important, they would mean little without the individuals who shaped the system and attempted, both successfully and unsuccessfully, to implement their visions.

Although Djilas and Dedijer were discarded from the communist movement after just nine years in power, they are among the most thought-provoking figures in the political history of Yugoslavia's troubled age. As Partisan fighters, communist politicians, writers, leading protagonists in the conflict with Stalin, and finally disgraced dissidents, their lives have been woven into the creation and subsequent destruction of Yugoslavia. Both men's political and literary activities, and the subsequent impact this had on the social events in Yugoslavia, leave many opportunities to analyse their actions and personalities.

¹ G. Swain, *Tito, a biography*, (London, 2010), p. 1

Twenty-five years since the destruction of communist Yugoslavia, general outlines of a historical analysis have emerged. The vast majority of these however treat the disintegration as a result of shifting power relations within the state. Thus we have been consumed with the failing economy, the 1974 Constitution, the death of Tito, the rise of Serbian nationalism and Slobodan Milošević, and the relations between Serbia and its fellow republics. By delving into the lives and careers of Milovan Djilas and Vladimir Dedijer – two influential (Serbian) intellectuals who played a key role in building the new state before attacking it in their disillusionment – it will be argued that as early as the 1950s the party was proving itself unable to build a democratic workers' state that the majority of Yugoslavs actively supported. In response the party discarded its visionaries and gave up on building a truly representative state. Instead the communists decided to maintain their grip on power at the expense of their link with the masses. This was a fateful decision. Djilas and Dedijer – two of the discarded visionaries – began to influence opinion outside of the party. They demonstrated that the party was now a lacklustre organisation made up of uninspiring bureaucrats who believed in nothing but their own power. Collectively these two figures provide a remarkable prism through which to view the slow disenchantment with the communist project in the post-war period. After all, by the late 1980s only a handful of Yugoslavs remained true believers. Yugoslav communism was not torn down but collapsed in on itself.

There are many different answers to the question of who deserves a biographical study: those who exercise power, those whose ideas transform society, those who add to human knowledge, and those whose lives illustrate the realities of the periods in which they lived. In this respect the lives of Djilas and Dedijer are significant for several reasons. First they held some of the highest positions in the Yugoslav

Communist Party. How they obtained these positions tells us about their talents, about the development of the party and the circumstances it faced. How they exercised that authority is significant given the fact that nearly all of their time in power was during periods of severe crisis - under royalist dictatorship, fascist occupation, and the threat of destruction by Stalin. Since the element of improvisation was key in all of these struggles, the qualities and skills of both men were revealed more sharply. Djilas's and Dedijer's next claim to attention is perhaps the most noteworthy. They were the highest officials in any communist state to challenge the central tenets and direction of the party while still holding positions of authority. Since this challenge raised the central questions of the accountability of state power in a single-party system, and the role of bureaucracy in a party committed to comprehensive social change, it was vitally significant. Subsequently, Djilas's imprisonment and Dedijer's exile was important not only for its causes, and as examples of how the most liberal communist regime disciplined its heretics, but also for its duration and how it was endured. Their enforced isolation was also important for the obduracy it provoked in them - giving them the determination to write several major works - and for the manner in which these works were adopted by ideological dissidents and nationalists in Yugoslavia.

Most of the recent literature on communist Yugoslavia and its collapse underestimates the role of individuals and their ideas (with the exception of Tito, Kardelj and Milošević). On the contrary, it tends to concentrate on macro-structural factors, such as economic problems and the non-functioning political system.² This study does not deny the importance of these issues. However, it argues that without

² D. Djokić, *New Perspectives on Yugoslavia*, (London, 2011), H.K. Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, (London, 2012), D. Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away*, (Indiana, 2009), J.R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, (Cambridge, 2007), S. P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, (Indiana, 2006)

the appreciation of the roles of Djilas and Dedijer and their ideas, a complete picture of how the Yugoslav state was created and then destroyed is not possible. After all, the fascinating figures of Djilas and Dedijer could not have emerged anywhere else but Yugoslavia, their lives explain as much about Yugoslavia as they do about their characters and personalities. They were an important phenomenon in the post-revolutionary politics of Yugoslav society.

Therefore a key focus of the study is the role of both men's ideas in the creation and destruction of communist Yugoslavia. After all, the introduction of new ideas tends to be the driving force in societal change. Successful political and social movements are not solely instigated by new ideas, but the desire for change and an aspiration to answer a complex set of problems often constitute the major conditions for mobilisation. Within this context, ideas play a crucial role - offering diagnoses as well as solutions. How important these ideas are in comparison with other factors in shaping political change is an inherently elusive question. However, more extensive questions, confining themselves to specific developments, can illuminate the ways in which ideas cause political change. They also highlight the conditions that determine whether political change is effective, as well as emphasising how new ideas can relate with other factors to cause social change. This study also demonstrates that the demand for new ideas, their supply and their impact, is not merely a closed-loop. Rather there is a complex interplay between all three phases that is shaped by the country's institutions, by the different interests at stake, and by the substance of the ideas being put forward.

Therefore the standard question seems suitable. What exactly was the relationship between the intellectual figures of Djilas and Dedijer and their ideas on the one hand, and their former comrades and their policies on the other? How far did they actually

influence the course of events? And, crucially, which events? There may be few concrete answers to these questions, but they still need to be asked. By approaching these questions and paying careful attention to the chronology of events, it will be possible to gauge how these figures developed over time. Djilas, Dedijer, their supporters, and their former comrades changed as they responded to events taking place in Yugoslavia and abroad, without the benefit of hindsight (and frequently without much foresight).

Although both men primarily identified as Serbs, they also interacted with their regional heritage – Djilas was a Montenegrin by birth and Dedijer a Herzegovinian by ancestry. Their regional identities did not omit them from being part of the larger Serb family. Likewise, being Serbs, they also felt themselves to be Yugoslavs. Depending on the political situation these identities could be very fluid.

Nonetheless, both men went through a transformation that affected many young idealistic communist revolutionaries. In the first stage they were aware of a growing inequality in both Belgrade and their mountainous ‘homelands’. Upon joining Belgrade University this awareness gradually crystallised into an intellectual and spiritual commitment to Marxism as a means to attain a better and fairer society. With the outbreak of the Second World War they threw themselves into the revolutionary liberation struggle with great fanaticism. Their belief in Marxism was so strong that no act was too ruthless and no sacrifice, personal or collective, was too great to achieve their goal. With victory in the war and revolution in 1945, both men’s standing was virtually untouchable. Their immense literary talents ensured that they were entrusted with control of the Agitprop (agitation and propaganda) apparatus. They worked determinedly for their vision of a new society in which all Yugoslavs would live together in peace and prosperity. This was difficult because in

essence the Second World War in Yugoslavia had been a civil war. It had been so bloody that no one could quite imagine the brutalising effect it would have on those who had managed to survive it. Therefore their vision required alterations not only in the political and economic structure of the country, but also in Yugoslavs' beliefs and values. In response they set about creating a narrative of the war that allowed for the reintegration of society. However, recalling the words of Sir Walter Raleigh, Dedijer would later concede: 'Whoever in writing modern history shall follow truth too near the heels, it may happily strike out his teeth.'³

With the Yugoslav communists' shocking break from the Soviet Union in 1948, Djilas and Dedijer became increasingly aware of the deficiencies of the society that they were creating. Therefore they sought to improve it; going back to Marx they put forward an alternative road to socialism that would avoid all of the previous pitfalls. They spent hours analysing and developing the new system, placing all their hopes in the new reforms. However, when a heresy takes a structured form, it becomes a new orthodoxy and subsequently develops its own heresies. It is this dialectic of heresy and dissent that summarises the intellectual transformations of Djilas and Dedijer. By 1954 they recognised that the new society was just as unfair as the old one, and equally resistant to change. This realisation evoked a deep sense of guilt. The men, their families, and their comrades' suffering now appeared to have been in vain. This led both men to break away from the party. This was very painful because of their long association with their comrades and their long dedication to Marxist-Leninism. The break was also dangerous because they did not know the consequences of their actions. These turned out to be expulsion, exile, political and social exclusion, and jail. The former leading revolutionaries fell into obscurity. This

³ V. Dedijer, 'Participants as Historians: Do War Memoirs Make Good History?', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 30th May 1968, p. 555

was a severe shock that led to a long period of deep reflection. The final stage of both men's development saw a quest for a new social change. Having settled accounts with his past, Dedijer sought mass reforms in the Yugoslav political and social system, Djilas meanwhile went further, seeking to bring down the very system he had helped to create.

While this pattern was common for many disillusioned revolutionaries, both men were also unique. Many communists became disillusioned with the revolution at an early stage and abandoned it before gaining power. Others who reached the pinnacle of power were disturbed, but compromised their principles for wealth, privilege, or sheer survival. Those who followed a similar path of romantic revolutionary to critic, such as Imre Nagy and Alexander Dubček, were either prevented, or forcibly silenced, from writing about their criticisms. Therefore they had no direct effect on the system they were rebelling against. Others who did criticise communism, like Leszek Kołakowski and Ignazio Silone, did not have the same standing or perspective as Djilas and Dedijer. They neither led a communist revolution nor did they build a new society.

Djilas and Dedijer were the only communist leaders who, at the height of their power, repudiated the system that they helped to install. They had little to gain personally from this opposition. If they had been content to conform to the principles of the Leninist type regime, they were guaranteed long and successful political careers. Djilas was led to his critical conclusions by his keen observations and lucid analysis of the realities of Yugoslav Communist society. Having convinced himself, he felt bound to express his opinion. Meanwhile, Dedijer felt bound to his close friend. He felt a strong solidarity and loyalty that meant he could not reconcile himself with his colleagues' demands that he condemn his comrade. There was

arrogance in both men's attitudes - it was contrary to the Leninist ethos of utter subordination to the party line. Yet, their independence of mind was something largely unparalleled in the history of Leninist regimes.

In addition, Djilas's and Dedijer's dissidence is interesting because it came in the most liberal of communist regimes. Lacking a large educated class, the political authorities in Eastern Europe traditionally utilised elements of the intelligentsia for the ideological endorsement of their regime. As well as collaborating with state, the intelligentsia could also act as the main critics of those in power. With the communist takeovers of 1945 this tradition ceased. Intellectuals across Eastern Europe were either consigned to a role 'building socialism' or they were forcibly silenced. Initially, the Yugoslav Communists conformed to this pattern. Just like their counterparts they sought to destroy any opposition – real or imaginary – that challenged their sole right to rule. They operated an oppressive police state, often disregarding Yugoslavs' human and civil rights. Those that challenged the party's monopoly of power could expect to be arrested, accused of hostile acts against the state, and sentenced to terms in prison or exile.

However, with Yugoslavia's split with Stalin and the Soviet Union in 1948, Tito introduced a number of liberalising reforms that meant that Yugoslav citizens acquired far greater freedoms than other Eastern Europeans. Although there was to be no relaxation of the communist monopoly over the political sphere, the subsequent liberalisation of the public sphere permitted intellectuals to adopt a more critical stance toward the state. Therefore the Yugoslav critical intelligentsia were largely protected from the terrible consequences that faced their counterparts in the Soviet Bloc.

Despite the unique position of Yugoslav dissidence, Mihajlo Mihajlov noted that it was the 'weakest in the world'. He reasoned that the openness of the country's borders and its relatively 'liberal' form of communism tended to channel any dissatisfaction.⁴ In comparison to the rest of the Eastern Bloc, Yugoslav dissidence was confined to a narrow layer of people, mostly nonconformist intellectuals. Sharon Zukin went as far as to describe Yugoslavia as a 'case of non-dissent'.⁵ After all, if dissent was taken to be opposition to communism, Yugoslavia could be said to have had only two prominent dissidents, Djilas and Mihajlov. However, if a wider definition of dissent is adopted, encompassing 'anyone politically at variance with official ideology', then Yugoslavia could have been, as Aleksa Djilas argued, 'the world champion in dissent.'⁶ This form of dissent was political in the sense that its advocates did not, for the most part, promote the overthrow of the regime. Rather they proclaimed their right to freely criticise party policies - which they disagreed with on moral grounds - and to demand the enactment of laws to protect basic human and civil rights.

Therefore, the party was willing to permit dissent as long as it did not challenge their sole right to rule. After all, following the break with the Soviet Union the role of the party had fundamentally altered. The party still played a leading role in society and retained its political monopoly, but it also accepted that socialism was capable of developing outside the party. With the decentralisation of the party structure there appeared to be an acknowledgement that socialism could be born and developed at the local level, through a critical analysis based on practise. These reforms

⁴ M. Mihajlov, 'Disidentstvo – stvarnost i legende', *Republika*, Vol. 10, No. 181, p. 9

⁵ S. Zukin, 'Sources of Dissent and Human Rights in Yugoslavia' in J. Curry, *Dissent in East Europe*, (New York, 1983), p. 117

⁶ A. Djilas, 'Dissent and Human Rights in Post-Tito Yugoslavia', *Review of the Study for Yugoslav Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 5, (1980) p. 497

recognised the right, if not the duty, of Yugoslav citizens to voice dissent, providing they did not endanger the party's monopoly on power.

The Yugoslavs therefore, were more willing than their counterparts to acknowledge the difference between dissent and opposition, believing that only the latter was truly damaging. The extent to which this dissent was permitted was set out in the 1963 Constitution. Article 40 of the Constitution 'guaranteed the rights of citizens in words or print.' However, if the party deemed that these rights were being used 'to overthrow the foundations of the socialist democratic order, to endanger peace or the independence of the country, to disseminate national, racial or religious hatred or intolerance, or to incite crime, or in any manner that offends public decency,' then this dissent would be controlled by administrative rather than judicial measures.⁷ Such qualifications have led the historian Predrag Marković to conclude that: 'although from the early 1950s the Yugoslav system acquired a "Westernised" facade and the trimmings ... it nevertheless remained an essentially "Eastern" construction whose foundations, pillars and beams were made of total political and economic power in the hands of one party, a dominant communist ideology and a charismatic leader.'⁸ While the regime recognised some pluralism within the party, it was never willing to permit the kind of political pluralism that might end up challenging the communists' monopoly on power. If dissent appeared to be taking the form of an opposition, those advocating such a position could expect to become the targets of repression. This explains why Dedijer was afforded much more room to air his grievances (he remained a committed socialist) while Djilas was effectively silenced once it became known that he favoured a multi-party system.

⁷ E. Kardelj, 'Notes on Social Criticism in Yugoslavia', *Socialist Thought and Practise*, No. 20, 1965, p. 6

⁸ P. Marković, *Beograd izmedju Istoka i Zapada 1948-1965*, (Belgrade, 1996), p. 245

Yugoslavia was the only one-party communist state that had broken out of a system that arbitrarily suppressed all dissenting opinions and criticism. Following their split with the rest of the Soviet Bloc, the Yugoslav Communists attempted to assimilate dissent into the policy of a communist one-party state, while at the same time protecting the primacy of the party against those who advocated overthrowing the existing order.

The 'semi-dissent' that was permitted by the party reached its peak in the late 1960s. Elements of the press, non-conformist intellectuals, student groupings, factory floor workers and even younger reform-minded party members began to criticise communist party policy. Despite the fact that all of these groups remained committed to socialism, Tito and his party were not willing to relax their grip on power. Worried by the rising tide of dissent, they reverted back to standard Marxist-Leninism. The Yugoslav communists now decided to suppress their critics rather than modifying their own conduct in response to criticism. However, their attempt to maintain strict control over opinion was negated by the parallel policy of decentralising power to the republican authorities. This removed any real authority from the central party which now relied on the republican parties to effectively police dissent.

Despite the varying degrees of repression that they faced following the events of 1954, Djilas and Dedijer continued to write, creating evidence of what they had experienced for their fellow Yugoslavs. Both men were perceptive enough to realise that it was not possible to build a viable state purely on a socialist base, or on filtered memories and a partial re-telling of a story concerning the struggle against a foreign enemy. In the years after their removal from power they sought to demonstrate this to their fellow Yugoslavs and the wider world, deploying the language of opposition.

In a communist system this resistance was difficult and arguably reckless. Nevertheless, as this study demonstrates, oppositional narratives were created by both men. Djilas became communist Yugoslavia's foremost and most persistent intellectual dissident. Dedijer meanwhile took up the career of an historian, knocking down one by one the pillars of legitimacy the communist government relied upon. In two very different ways they tore away the veil of morality that the communists had long wrapped around themselves. They helped to start a veritable deluge, probing the communists' unsavoury past, Tito's failures, Stalinism in the Yugoslav League of Communists, and the extent and limits of individual freedom and human rights within the country.

Therefore Yugoslav dissidence was nuanced in its character. While it can only be understood as part of the wider resistance to communist rule across Eastern Europe, it was also operating under unique conditions. In Yugoslavia there was a non-totalitarian spirit which was found side by side with totalitarian elements operating within the political machine.

Analytical Approach

In contrast to previous studies of communist dissidents, this will not be a hagiographical account. Both men were problematic contrary characters. Their decision to attack the party was not simply a moral one. There was also an element of preserving their image and fame. This is evidenced by what Djilas wrote in George Urban's copy of his autobiography *Rise and Fall*: 'Those who are seen by the world and the church to which they once belonged as heretics usually get better

billing in history than those who are not.⁹ While Dedijer once wrote, ‘big bureaucrats come and go, but martyrs live forever.’¹⁰ And in the West, with the backdrop of the Cold War, they did become martyrs.

For a certain generation in the West Djilas was something of a hero. He had stood up to Hitler, Stalin and then Tito. He was a hero of both the Second World War and the Cold War. This made his published books very popular in the West. He fitted into the Orwellian mould of a courageous former ‘insider’ who, having revealed the true nature of the communist system, had articulated a common general feeling on the left concerning disappointment with the form that the Marxist state had taken. Given the Cold War context, a number of hagiographical accounts of Djilas’s life emerged in the West. These included Stephen Clissold’s *Djilas: The Progress of a Revolutionary*, Dennis Reinhartz’s *Milovan Djilas: A Revolutionary as a Writer* and Cyrus Sulzberger’s *Paradise Regained: Memoir of a Rebel*.

All of these books focused on Djilas’s fall from power, glossing over his later career. Clissold’s book uncritically relies on Djilas’s own memoirs for his chief sources, and there is little probing beyond the biographical facts to give answers to some of the questions that arise when one considers the development of Djilas’s political philosophy. Reinhartz’s book is more analytical than descriptive, but the focus is confined to Djilas’s literary career. This leaves Reinhartz’s Djilas isolated from the Yugoslav political developments that were so crucial in his own development. Meanwhile, Sulzberger’s account of Djilas’s life is useful for its interviews with the dissident before his death, but, following in the pattern of most literature from the West, his analysis of Djilas is completely uncritical. This is understandable given the Cold War context. These writers had to appeal both to their

⁹ G. Urban, ‘Djilas on Gorbachov,’ *Encounter*, September 1988, p. 18

¹⁰ ‘C. Farley’s unpublished introduction to the proposed English version of *Veliki buntovnik*’, March 1989, *Arhiv Republike Slovenije* (AS) SI AS 1979, box 179

readers and to publishers who saw Djilas as a Cold War hero. As one review of Clissold's book praised:

this book is both a political biography and psychological study of an extremely interesting man, both as an individual and as a typical of certain aspects of the age in which he has lived. He fought with utmost courage and blind devotion for a political cause but, when that cause triumphed, could not tolerate the compromises, the lapses of political morality that followed.¹¹

With the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the decreasing threat of Marxism, Djilas quickly lost his utility and has subsequently been largely forgotten in the West. Whereas critical reassessments have emerged of Tito, with Nora Beloff's *Tito's Flawed Legacy*, Pavlowitch's *Tito: a Reassessment*, and Geoff Swain's *Tito: a biography*, arguably the second most famous Yugoslav in the West (between 1945 and 1990) has remained unexamined. This is all the more surprising given what happened to Yugoslavia in the 1990s. There has been little attempt to see how Djilas influenced the growing dissent in Yugoslavia and undermined the communist state. This study has the advantage of being written in a different political context to previous studies, and with access to new material that was not available to Djilas's contemporary writers.

While Djilas was a popular figure in the West who has subsequently been forgotten, Dedijer has remained completely marginalised. In the West he is best known for his works of Yugoslav history. His war diaries and 1953 biography of Tito are still the first port of call for anyone interested in Yugoslav communist

¹¹ E. Barker, 'Review: Djilas: The Progress of a Revolutionary By Stephen Clissold', *International Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 4, (1984), p. 712

history. However, while his work appears in numerous citations, Dedijer himself has never been the subject of a biographical study. This is especially surprising given his fascinating life. While he has often been remembered for his initial biography of Tito and for being the only person to side with Djilas in 1954, it was his later career as a historian that was perhaps more significant. His journalistic drive for sensational and controversial stories inadvertently began to unravel the delicate narrative of history that he had once been so involved in creating. In the last few years a number of historians have begun to delve into Dedijer's role in destabilising the communist state. This has included both Stevan Pavlowitch's and Tea Sindbaek's works concerning Yugoslav historiography, and Christian Axboe Nielsen study of the theme of genocide under the communists.¹² Yet, Dedijer is not the main focus of these studies. Only by understanding his political and ideological development can his turn to revisionist history in the 1970s and 1980s be fully understood.

Given the disintegration of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, and subsequently the country, a critical reassessment of Djilas's and Dedijer's dissent is vital. This study is the first major look at their careers with the benefit of hindsight of the collapse of the Yugoslav state. This is important because throughout the majority of communist rule individual nationalisms were largely suppressed. By the late 1980s however, competing nationalisms emerged, leading initially to the fragmentation of the League of Communists into distinct republican-based national(ist) communist parties in the late 1980s, and then to the election of brazenly nationalist parties in the 1990s.

¹² S.K. Pavlowitch, 'Dedijer as a Historian of the Yugoslav Civil War', *Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (1984), pp. 95-110, T. Sindbaek, *Usable History?*, (Aarhus, 2012), C. Axboe Nielsen, 'Surmounting the Myopic Focus on Genocide: the case of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 15, Issue 1, (2013), pp. 21-39

Numerous studies have explored the role played by the Belgrade intelligentsia in fostering Serb nationalism. These include Audrey Budding's *Serb Intellectuals and the National Question*, the numerous contributions in Nebojša Popov's edited volume *The Road to War in Serbia*, Jasna Dragović-Soso's, *Saviours of the Nation?*, Nick Miller's *The Nonconformists* and Nenad Stefanov's *Wissenschaft als nationaler Beruf*.¹³ In *The Nonconformists*, Nick Miller focuses on the intellectual milieu of three Serbian intellectuals as a way of confronting the bigger issue of Serbian nationalism. This study takes this methodology forward by focusing on the figures of Djilas and Dedijer as a means of adding to our knowledge about how the Yugoslav communist state was created and subsequently destroyed.

This study also aims to build upon the existing literature by demonstrating that both Djilas and Dedijer were a vital part of the critical intelligentsia undermining the communists' legitimacy. After all, the political climate of the late 1980s was very different to the previous decades. It was much more conducive to nationalist ferment. The Serbian nationalist intellectuals explored by the aforementioned authors were operating in a very different socio-political climate to their predecessors, largely due to the dissident revisionism of Djilas and Dedijer. Only by understanding and exploring the earlier dissidence of the two men in the preceding decades, can the nationalist dissidence of the mid to late 1980s be understood.

Moreover, the dissidence of the 1970s and early 1980s was not overtly nationalist in character. Instead both men attempted to protect freedom of thought and promote fundamental human rights and civil liberties. They also hoped to expose the

¹³ A. Budding, *Serb Intellectuals and the National Question*, (Cambridge, 2008), N. Popov, *The Road to War in Serbia*, (Budapest, 2000), J. Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, (London, 2002), N. Miller, *The Nonconformists*, (New York, 2007), N. Stefanov, *Wissenschaft als nationaler Beruf*, (Leipzig, 2011)

oppressive past of the communist party and to portray a more accurate picture of the Yugoslav liberation war.

Djilas's and Dedijer's fledging efforts to weaken the hegemonic position of the party, and the narratives that it relied upon, were quite different to the later dissidence and subversion that wished to legitimise the new nationalisms in each republic. The initial challenges to the legitimacy and morality of the party were aimed at weakening the totalising communist state in an effort to build a more democratic, pluralistic alternative. The latter dissidents, by contrast, utilised the earlier criticisms and revelations to sanction the dismemberment of Yugoslavia into separate nation-states. Since the second process, which has been detailed in much of the existing literature, was dependent on the early challenges to the hegemonic communist state, the careers of Djilas and Dedijer are of significant importance.

By understanding the effects of both men's very different forms of dissidence, it is possible to comprehend how nationalist leaders, such as Slobodan Milošević, were able to lure the vast majority of what had once been the primary opposition to communist rule - the dissident intellectuals committed to defending human and civil rights. After all, the nationalisms of the late 1980s were not merely a collection of political dogmas, they were forms of culture created out of a distinctive ideology, mythology and language. Djilas and Dedijer played a crucial role, inadvertently formulating these images, myths and symbols. These would later be embellished by the nationalists who were formulating a new collective identity branded as 'the nation'. The nationalisms of the late 1980s were built on the narratives of victimisation that both men put back on the political agenda in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Serbian intellectuals, like their counterparts in other republics, fashioned their new nationalist identity on the feelings of resentment and beliefs of

national subjugation. Both Miller and Dragović-Soso have shown how the intelligentsia's nationalism was intrinsically incompatible with their declared commitment to democracy. By appreciating the careers of Djilas and Dedijer it is possible to see why this was the case. Although the intellectuals proposed solutions to the problems facing Yugoslavia, these tended to be based around a discourse of conspiracy theories, accusations of genocide, and other extreme notions of victimisation. Therefore their solutions precluded the compromise and conciliation that would have been vital in any move towards democracy. In addition, the narratives of victimhood that Djilas and Dedijer put on the table increased the longing for a saviour figure and affords some insight into both men's initial support of Milošević. It also made the violent collapse of Yugoslavia more acceptable to the intellectuals, even if this was not their original desire.

This study aims to take forward the existing literature by showing that the rise of nationalism was a two-part process. The emergence of nationalist politics in the 1980s was a product of intellectuals, who while pro-Yugoslav, wanted to weaken the hegemonic communist party. Djilas sought to demonstrate the party's human rights abuses by taking up contentious issues such as the party's perceived disregard of the Serbs in Kosovo, and in doing so often aligned himself with more nationalistic dissidents (such as Dobrica Ćosić, Borislav Mihajlović-Mihiz and Matija Bećković). Meanwhile, Dedijer concerned himself with re-writing history. His doing so was part of an effort to force the League of Communists into reform - it was subversion rather than open resistance. However, his bulldozing of his own established historiography cleared the way, unintentionally, for more dangerous nationalist historiographies. He had opened and illuminated certain falsehoods and problems that the Yugoslav government felt it had buried. At this stage both men's activism was in line with

much of the Serbian intelligentsia - they were in the vanguard of resistance to the ideology and control of the communist regime. It was not until the events of 1987 that sections of the Serbian intelligentsia began to betray the humanist values that had previously been the core of their activism.

As Eric Hobsbawm has noted, historians and intellectuals are to national movements what 'poppy-growers in Pakistan are to heroin addicts – the suppliers of the raw material for the market.'¹⁴ If Serbian nationalism is defined as conceptualising and advocating for a Greater Serbian state that encompasses all the Serbian people, then Djilas and Dedijer were not nationalist intellectuals in the mould of Ćosić, Bećković and Mihiz. They did not demand the eradication of Serbia's autonomous provinces and a redrawing of the borders of the republics. Yet in their disillusionment with Yugoslav communism, they too played a part in undermining the state, opening the door for the nationalists. Unlike the nationalist intellectuals, they hoped to criticise the party and create a more pluralistic society. Despite the regime's Western trappings and greater tolerance of dissent (as both men's careers attested), their main attacks concerned the party's illiberal nature and that it regularly breached human and civil rights. In the 1970s and 80s these attacks appeared to align with the nationalists who felt that their own groups were being mistreated by the party. Without publicly controlled institutions to investigate grievances and enforce human rights, exaggeration and hearsay became widespread as they were easily integrated into the emerging vision of national victimisation.¹⁵ In this respect, it is necessary to cut through the heroic images that are still attached to Djilas and Dedijer in the West. Instead they need to be seen throughout their lives as

¹⁴ E. J. Hobsbawm, 'Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today', *Anthropology Today*, VIII/1, February 1992, p. 1

¹⁵ Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, p. 256

the product of a particular combination of personal, societal and cultural circumstances.

An equally artificial image of Yugoslavia's premier dissidents has emerged in the former Yugoslavia. During the communist period journalists and authors were forbidden to write about either man unless it was a party sanctioned diatribe. Even with the collapse of communism they remained figures of derision for their pro-Yugoslav sentiment. It might therefore be fair to say that historians and writers have fallen into the trap of the nationalists in the successor states. Both men have been viewed through the prism of the nationalists - former communists and dissidents whose views are no longer credible or relevant.

Unlike other anti-Titoist elements, Djilas has still not been rehabilitated in Serbia and all that commemorates his life is a small plaque on the side of his former home in Belgrade.¹⁶



All that is left to commerate Djilas in Belgrade¹⁷

¹⁶ D. Ivanović, 'Milovan Đilas zaslužuje ulicu u Beogradu', *Politika Online*, 17th August 2013, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/267253/Milovan-Dilas-zasluzuje-ulicu-u-Beogradu>

¹⁷ Photo taken by author at 8 Palmotićeve ulica, Belgrade, 15th March 2015

However, in certain circles Djilas is still remembered favourably. With the independence of Montenegro in 2006, the political authorities in the country reversed the process of ignoring Djilas and revealed themselves ready to borrow the lustre of his international fame. For instance when, in 2014, the Russian ambassador labelled the Montenegrin policy to become a NATO member as ‘monkey business’, billboards appeared in Podgorica quoting a speech made by Djilas in 1951: ‘Russians have never been friends to us, we have always been a “bargaining chip” for them.’¹⁸ This change is exemplified by Jevrem Brković. In 1988 the Montenegrin writer denounced Djilas as a Stalinist and a man of ‘political inconsistencies’.¹⁹ With the independence of Montenegro however, Brković completely changed tack. Djilas was now one of the most important Montenegrin writers ‘who spat bravely and publicly at those things that were most inhumane.’²⁰ The writer Branislav Otašević summed up this mood in his extensive book on Djilas: ‘in recent political history such an individual act of coherent morality has not been seen in the world, and still less in our country. Djilas is a unique figure, the paradigm of an era, and a precedent that will not be matched for a long time.’²¹

The resuscitation of Djilas in Montenegro is exemplified by the Montenegrin National Theatre’s decision in 2013 to show a play entitled *Everyman Djilas*. The three-hour long play mythologised Djilas’s stand against the privileges accrued by his colleagues in much the same way as the Western media had done nearly 60 years earlier. As a Montenegrin journalist prophetically wrote after Djilas’s funeral,

¹⁸ V. Kadić, ‘Bilbordi protiv, ‘čizme iz Rusije’, *Novosti Online*, 26th November 2014, <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/planeta.300.html:521509-Bilbordi-protiv-cizme-iz-Rusije>

¹⁹ J. Brković, *Anatomija morala jednog staljiniste*, (Zagreb, 1988), p. 5

²⁰ J. Brković, ‘Tajna pisaćeg stola’, *Vijesti*, 1st January 2010, p. 5

²¹ B. Otašević, *Milovan Djilas: Skice za portret*, (Podgorica, 2013), p. 6

‘papers will be written about him and his literary work, symposiums will be held ... dramas and biographies will be penned.’²²

Marking the centenary of his birth, the Montenegrin television station *NTV Montena* broadcast a series of conversations about Djilas in 2011. In one, Serbo Rastoder noted, ‘he is a person from whom we can learn a lot – not only about Djilas himself but about ourselves.’²³ In the same year Dejan Djokić recalled an event in Serbia:

On 12 June this year, on what would have been Milovan Djilas’s 100th birthday, I spoke at an event held in Belgrade about the legacy of the greatest Yugoslav dissident. The main hall of *Dom omladine Beograda* (The Belgrade House of Youth) was packed: some 500 people came to visit an exhibition about Djilas’s life and to attend the debate, while all the main media reported on the event, including the state TV.²⁴

On the surface it is surprising that so many Serbian intellectuals and young people wanted to attend a panel discussion about an apparently forgotten dissident who had died over 17 years earlier. Yet, in certain circles, just like in the West, Djilas was a heroic figure. He was a champion of individual freedom and human rights against a totalitarian state, but also a severe critic of the nationalism that had engulfed and destroyed the country. In their disillusionment about what had replaced communism, they looked up to Djilas as a ‘what if’ figure - if only Djilas had come to power everything would have been alright. As the distinguished journalist Stanko Cerović wrote: ‘now imagine this: It is the end of the Cold War. Djilas is the most famous

²² B. Jovanović, ‘Sa sahrane Milovana Đilasa’, *Matica Crnogorska*, Winter 2011, p. 326

²³ N. Adžić, ‘Šerbo Rastoder u emisiji “Istorijske paralele”, tema - Milovan Đilas’, *NTV Montena*, 9th November 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le1d2aCAClo>

²⁴ D. Djokić, ‘Djilas as a Historian and as a Source’ *Conversations about Djilas – Goldsmiths University*, 19th October 2011

dissident in the world, and his prestige in the West is limitless ... he is a Serb patriot, a committed Yugoslav, sincerely connected to all the Yugoslav nations ... the only man who was in a position to propose the best solution for the Serbs, the other Yugoslav nations, and America and Europe.’²⁵

For these reasons a substantial amount of work has been published on Djilas, especially in the Serbian language. The majority of these works are neither scholarly in nature nor are they based on an objective examination of the facts. Instead they tend to be journalistic in style and are typically authored by those that idolised Djilas or were even his close friends. These biographies include Boris Lalić’s *Milovan Đilas*, Desimir Tošić’s *Ko je Milovan Đilas?* (Who is Milovan Djilas?), Vasilije Kalezić’s *Đilas: miljenik i otpadnik komunizma* (Djilas: favourite and renegade of communism), Momčilo Cemović’s *Djilasovi odgovori* (Djilas Answers) and Momčilo Djorgović’s *Vernik i Jeretik* (Believer and Heretic).

More recently however, scholarly works have begun to emerge. Mira Bogdanović has deconstructed the newly formed myth of Djilas as a modern Serbian intellectual in her book *Konstante konvertitstva* (Constant Convert). A similar approach has been taken by Branislav Kovačević, Dragutin Leković, and Jože Pirjevec.²⁶ This study hopes to build upon these works by placing Djilas in the context of the rise and fall of communism in Yugoslavia.

The study also places Dedijer at the forefront of the analysis. Djilas’s and Dedijer’s life followed much of the same pattern, yet Dedijer has remained a mere footnote in the accounts of Djilas. This belies his own importance. Djilas’s intellectual transformation went hand in hand with Dedijer’s – they were mutually

²⁵ N. Grujičić, ‘Stanko Cerović, pisac, intervju: Na svojoj strani’, *Vreme*, 23rd February 2012, p. 17

²⁶ M. Bogdanović, *Konstante konvertitstva*, (Belgrade, 2013), B. Kovačević, *Đilas heroj-antiheroj: iskazi za istoriju*, (Podgorica, 2006), D. Leković, *Milovan Đilas i Socijalizam*, (Podgorica, 2010), J. Pirjevec, *Tito i Drugovi Vol. I and II*, (Belgrade, 2012)

reinforcing. Without Dedijer's support Djilas would not have emerged as Yugoslavia's archetypal rebel – an image that has made him such a fascinating figure for a biography. Nonetheless, like in the West, Dedijer has been virtually forgotten in the former Yugoslavia. Unlike his friend, all that marked the 100th anniversary of his birth was a small article confined to *Politika*'s website. In the article, Slobodan Kljakić, Dedijer's former colleague, lamented this development – 'in his native Serbia the heroic image of Dedijer had been completely forgotten.'²⁷

Therefore there has been very little critical literature produced either in the West or in the former Yugoslavia that has endeavoured to interpret and understand Djilas's and Dedijer's roles in the vicissitudes of Yugoslavian history, and in turn place them within the wider socio-political contexts. It is here that the thesis will aim to make a relevant and valuable contribution to existing Yugoslav historiography.

Methodology

The scholarly neglect of both men is even more surprising given the vast amount of primary material that they have left behind - according to Dobrilo Aranitović, 'there are 2281 units (books, collections of scientific papers, articles etc.) written by Djilas'.²⁸ While in power both men engaged in the production of numerous speeches, articles and party resolutions. This material was assembled by the party, and despite the purging of some of the documents written by them after 1954, much remains in archival collections. Moreover, their most important speeches and statements were published in official party publications, such as *Komunist* and *Borba*. Along with

²⁷ S. Kljakić, 'Sto godina od rođenja Vladimira Dedijera', *Politika Online*, 2nd February 2014, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/283185/Drustvo/Sto-go-di-na-od-ro-de-nja-Vla-di-mi-ra-De-di-je-ra>

²⁸ D. Aranitović, *Milovan Đilas: Bibliografija za hronologijom života i rada*, (Belgrade, 2008), p. 3

Tito and Edvard Kardelj, their works fashioned the central elements of the party's official policy.

In addition, both men penned numerous memoirs that have been published in both Serbo-Croatian and English. Their observations and wide-ranging scale of enquiry offer a unique insight into their interpretations of some of the most significant events in Yugoslav history. Each memoir reflects a change in its author in terms of their ideas, and in terms of Yugoslavia itself. Therefore, an analysis of each stage of Djilas's and Dedijer's lives provides a departure point for the wider exploration of Yugoslav society as a whole. In this respect the thesis will oscillate between the macro and micro. Only by understanding the wider Yugoslav context is it possible to gauge the extent to which both men's arguments were being heard and finding approval.

Furthermore, a complete understanding of Djilas's and Dedijer's dissidence, and the party's reaction to it, is only possible by appreciating the problems faced by the Yugoslav Communists in running an intricate state. In addition to a number of intra-party struggles, the party had to deal with the complex national question. Although it proclaimed to have secured the harmony of the country's ethnic groups following the war, national tensions continued to influence the policies of the communist authorities and the thinking of the country's cultural elites.

It was the national question, combined with Yugoslavia's shifting international position, which led to a number of important changes in the institutionalisation of the federal decision making system. Following the Second World War, the communist party's approach to the national question was to guarantee national equality by appealing to the internationalist values of the wider communist movement. Workers' solidarity had supposedly cut across ethnic and national boundaries. After the break

with the Cominform in 1948, the Yugoslavs began the process of attempting to promote a common Yugoslav identity based around an independent road to socialism. This Yugoslav type of socialism was built around the concept of workers' self-management, a non-aligned foreign policy, the personality cult of Tito and the Partisan resistance struggle.

However, by the early 1960s Yugoslavia was faced with the signs of a crisis. This was manifested through economic difficulties, social tension and sometimes overt nationalism. These issues inspired a reform-minded younger generation within the party to look for new solutions. They essentially tried to modernise the political system, freeing it from the constraints of statism.²⁹ Therefore they abandoned the ideal of a common Yugoslav identity based on a shared socialist project and instead recognised the rights of the individual republics. The reforms went too far for the party conservatives, but they did not go far enough to satisfy the Marxist intellectuals, who in 1968 helped launch a student revolt. In response the regime continued with the process of decentralising the federal system, but it also seized the opportunity to strengthen party authority. In this way decentralisation was used as substitute for democratisation. It was also at this point that the party reformers shifted their political attention to the republican level - the only remaining channel left available to them.

The 1974 Constitution further weakened the party at the federal level by paralysing the decision making process and removing any real authority from federal decisions. The policing of dissent was now largely in the hands of republican leaderships. Ultimately the new Constitution promoted the republics into sovereign

²⁹ N. Popov, *The Road to War in Serbia*, (Budapest, 2000), p. 399

states and the only real centres of power.³⁰ The institutionalisation of national identity within the federal socialist system served to strengthen the identification with national discourses, rather than weaken them. After all, in the 1990s, it was the federal units that served as the territorial basis for national self-determination. In addition, owing to the sustained possession of absolute power, the 1974 Constitution was introduced as the structure and morale of the party began to decay. The majority of party members were now opportunist careerists who had steadily forgotten their Marxist education. Faced with public apathy they started to pursue sources of legitimacy and support which were more accessible and natural. By necessity these sources tended to be provincial and inward looking, with a propensity to become nationalist. Therefore by the 1980s, even the most gifted party members realised that there was no political future outside the nationalist context.

It should also be noted that the constitutional revisions of the 1960s and 1970s were primarily initiated to improve the Yugoslav economy by empowering the workers' self-management enterprises. This process necessitated the transferring of vast regulatory power to the parties at the republican level. Ironically, it was the use (or abuse) of these powers by the republican leaderships that hindered the economic reforms, and in turn intensified the economic difficulties that the reforms were attempting to solve. Therefore, the party's biggest deficiency was its failure to improve Yugoslavia's poor postwar economic performance. These economic difficulties were constantly and inextricably linked to the national question. One of the main attractions of socialism in Yugoslavia was its promise to end regional inequality and to promote rapid economic development. While the party could be seen to be living up to this promise, the claims of party officials that they had

³⁰ *ibid*, p. 418

‘solved’ the national question were not completely implausible. After all, national tensions remained manageable so long as the economy was growing. It was only when socialism was evidently failing - economically and politically - that dissent grew and the national question returned to the centre stage.

The broad conceptual framework that this thesis encompasses ensures that although it takes the form of a specific study, it has a much wider historical and interdisciplinary relevance. This approach is also important because the memoirs of Djilas and Dedijer are so remarkable that it is not easy to get free from the gravitational pull of the biographical narrative. By placing the analysis of both men’s lives within the wider context of their role in creating and then undermining communism in Yugoslavia, the study aims to avoid repeating Djilas and Dedijer’s own narratives.

Memoirs are particularly important to the degree that the writer is ready to be self-critical - as Dedijer admitted: ‘to the extent that the author is able to put his fingers in the wounds of his own heart.’³¹ The majority of their memoirs, diaries and interviews are remarkably candid, yet both men were accomplished propagandists and could not escape their Agitprop roots. The most prolific writers of memoirs were often those who had been expelled from the party. For this reason they were habitually appealing to a Western audience as much as a Yugoslav one. These figures were motivated to write their autobiographies in an attempt to tell their own story and defend themselves from the attacks made by their former comrades. They were written retrospectively, as a means to oppose the official narrative of their actions; the authors wished to legitimise their own positions and decisions. Djilas and Dedijer were no different. Therefore, both men’s persuasive writing skills make

³¹ V. Dedijer, ‘Notes to the writing of *Veliki buntovnik*’, 5th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

the interpretation of their work rather tricky. Their publications were obviously self-serving and occasionally offered outright falsifications. On numerous occasions they backtracked or contradicted themselves. Whether they were lying deliberately is unknown, but it is more likely that their changes of mind were on the basis of political necessity, which seems to have been a habit which they practised as politicians. Both men failed to give answers to the question of their own roles in some of the darker events in Yugoslav Communist Party history. Championing the freedom of the individual and universal human rights, they avoided delving into their own roles in repressing real and perceived enemies during and after the war. For this reason both men's memoirs have been taken as retrospect subjective accounts to be used with qualifications.

While these accounts are subjective, they are still valuable because they give a bigger picture than the official party narratives, adding the sort of inside information that is often absent from official sources. In addition, they give an insight into how both men viewed their own roles in a number of important events. This adds a personal dimension that is useful in understanding the interpersonal relations within the party.

While an important component of the research is based around the rich corpus of memoirs which cover a great part of Djilas's and Dedijer's lives, these sources will not be used in isolation. Even though the communist party attempted to retain control over public discourse in Yugoslavia, control over the public sphere was more relaxed than in the Eastern Bloc. The debates and polemics that appeared in the media often alluded to both Djilas's and Dedijer's ideas, and in some cases went as far as to mention their names directly. These discussions, nominally social and

cultural debates, shed important light on how their ideas were perceived in the broader public sphere.

The study has also been based on largely unpublished documents from archives across the former Yugoslavia. The richest material emerged from the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia and the National and University Library of Slovenia, but documents from the Yugoslav Archives in Belgrade and the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb were also consulted. Finally, political leaders, intellectuals and dissidents provided the analyst with substantial help by publishing their memoirs and partaking in interviews to explain their relationships with both men.

Structure

In Chapter One the thesis analyses the interaction of Djilas and Dedijer with their Dinaric heritage. Both men held complicated notions of what it meant to descend from the rebellious clans of the mountainous regions of Montenegro and Herzegovina. The chapter avoids delving into a narrative of both men's childhoods because this has already been told in their own words. Instead, the focus remains on how they interacted with and utilised their Montenegrin and Herzegovinian heritage to justify their actions. Djilas and Dedijer were unlike many other former communists who turned towards nationalism, but they did fall back on their regional identities as a means to explain their 'rebellion'. Theirs was a romantic nationalism, a type of 'clan patriotism'. Chapter Two identifies the key role played by both men in constructing the new socialist state after the war. The horror of the destruction of communist Yugoslavia in the 1990s has led to the publication of hundreds of books on the subject. Far fewer have emerged on its creation and the myths upon which the

state was built. By looking at Djilas's and Dedijer's careers, the thesis aims to shed some light on the early foundations of the regime and the socio-political measures it used to build a functioning multi-ethnic state. Moreover, both men's role as chief propagandists played a vital role in their intellectual maturation – they were in a unique position to discern the incongruity between the utopian ideas they were extolling, and the reality of everyday life in Yugoslavia.

Chapters Three, Four and Five examine the disillusionment of both men with the state they had been so involved in creating. Specifically there is a focus on how their very different forms of dissidence contributed to the eroding of the benevolent image of the Yugoslav Communist Party. In the case of Djilas the analysis concerns his numerous attacks on the morality of the party and how well they were received in Yugoslavia, particularly among the intellectuals, youth and local party leaders. Djilas was never able to build an organised following around himself, but a good deal of 'Djilasism' persisted as an attitude of mind rather than an absolute creed. The analysis of Dedijer's dissidence takes a discursive approach to his career as an historian. He too attacked the ethics of the party, focusing in on its past record of immorality. Dedijer brought many of his journalistic tendencies to the role of an historian, in particular his passion for sensationalist stories. It was this aspect, tied to his sudden interest in the history of genocide, that not only damaged the party, but also the delicate inter-ethnic relations within the country.

These chapters also focus on how the communist elites conceptualised and responded to the challenges of dissidence. However, the thesis is not intended to be another broad history of Yugoslavia, nor does it claim to address all aspects of Yugoslav dissidence. Rather, by appreciating both men's careers, the thesis aims to shed further light on how the communist state was sustained, and then undermined.

Chapter Six analyses the constantly evolving relationship of both men with Yugoslavia's leader, Tito. After the war they idolised the Marshal and contributed, perhaps without comprehending where it was to lead, to fostering Tito's personality cult. By the 1980s however, the party had lost a lot of its legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of Yugoslavs. The party's one legitimising factor par excellence was the figure of the recently deceased Marshal Tito. Yet, after Djilas's and Dedijer's fall from power they reassessed the father of the revolution and started a process of demystification.

The final chapter explores the changing relationship between the two men. In the years following 1954 their friendship turned to enmity. Djilas noted in this final memoir that he hoped future investigators would delve deeply into his shifting relationship with Dedijer to confirm the facts and evaluate them both more justly.³² By analysing how the most 'liberal' of all communist regimes punished heretics, the final chapter aims to shed light on why their friendship crumbled.

Twenty-two years after Djilas's death and twenty-seven after Dedijer's, it is time to reassess their lives and the role they played in both the creation and destruction of communist Yugoslavia. In this post-communist and post-Yugoslav study there has been an attempt to give fuller weight to both men's lives and careers in the period after the revolution, and to their disillusionment after 1954 when they started to criticise the party. The discussion of their youth and war years has been reduced because this ground has been thoroughly covered elsewhere. Djilas's and Dedijer's lives covered the whole of communist rule in Yugoslavia and condensing them into seven chapters has required much to be downplayed or omitted. By focusing in on both men's role in creating and undermining the Yugoslav communist state, the

³² M. Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, (New York, 1986), p. 381

thesis aims to demonstrate that the regime's primary intellectuals, propagandists and historians, were in a unique position to discern the incongruity between economic and social liberalisation on the one hand, and a strictly monolithic party on the other. As early as 1954 they realised that Titoism was not a liberalising ideology, nor was it capable of its long term transformative goals - goals that promised an end to inter-ethnic strife.

With the collapse of the Yugoslav Communist state and the subsequent violent wars, there was a significant degree of shock among many Western observers. It was hard to comprehend the sheer scale of disillusionment with the regime that had appeared largely benevolent and enlightened in comparison with the rest of the Soviet Bloc. In response there was recourse to arguments of centuries-long hatreds between peoples who had not developed politically. Such arguments have now been debunked as studies have begun to emerge that explore how the communist state was created, mythologised, sustained, and then destroyed. By studying the careers of Djilas and Dedijer it is possible to build upon these studies and avoid some of the tendencies that lead to distortion in assessments of Yugoslav history.

Chapter 1: Born Rebels? The Burden of the Past

Although both men saw themselves as Serbs, and spent most of their lives in Belgrade, any study of Djilas (a Montenegrin by birth) or Dedijer (a Herzegovinian by ancestry) must take into account their interaction with their Dinaric heritage. The Dinaric Alps which extended the length of Yugoslavia, from Istria to the Albanian border, became associated with a heroic mentality. It was the Serb geographer Jovan Cvijić who firmly established the Dinaric highlander in the Yugoslav political imagination. In 1918 he listed the main psychological characteristics of the Dinaric man as: idealism, honour, heroism, and the desire to fight for freedom and justice. He believed that as highlanders these men were naturally prone to rebellion.¹ Similarly, in his influential study from 1939, the Croat ethnographer Vladimir Dvorniković portrayed the Dinaric character as virile and masculine.² Both Cvijić's and Dvorniković's motivations appear to have been driven by the political desire to create a symbolic spine for a common South Slav state. Nonetheless, despite the Communists' general propensity to ignore literature on the Dinaric personality, the highlander character developed a symbolic charge, as Djilas's and Dedijer's careers would demonstrate.

After their fall from power in 1954, a common trope of both Djilas and Dedijer became their own identification with their harsh mountainous 'homelands'. Moreover, they exhibited a tendency to seek answers to the problematic questions of the time by looking back to their heritage. Through all the vicissitudes, Montenegro and Herzegovina became the constants in their writing. Their split with the communist movement was as much of a shock to them as it was to their comrades. In

¹ J. Cvijić, *La Péninsule balkanique. Géographie humaine*, (Paris, 1918), pp. 281-379

² N. Bartulin, *The Racial Idea in the Independent State of Croatia*, (Leiden, 2013), p. 77

their confusion they tried to explain their rebellion, and their Dinaric heritage became the most accessible and simplistic explanation to propagate.

However, while Djilas and Dedijer identified strongly with their regional heritage after 1954, they had spent the majority of their lives in Belgrade. As politicians they appeared to embody the typical urbanite intellectual. The oscillation between these identities was a kind of Manichean dualism where one was honourable and the other flawed. Depending on the situation and their political agenda these valuations could be, and often were, reversed. As the novelist Vladimir Velmar-Janković noted, Belgrade has served as a mill, producing the urbanite out of the peasant ‘Serb’ from the mountains. Yet this mill is ‘not up to speed, with new additives constantly tried out, the miller himself still at a loss, the grindstone not yet the right weight and properly adjusted.’³ Therefore both men were considerably more complex than their own narratives imply. In reality their lives were an amalgamation of Belgrade and its European civilisation on the one hand, and the idealised peasant traditions of Montenegro and Herzegovina on the other.

Native Romanticism and Marxist-Leninism

During the Second World War the British envoy to Tito’s Partisans, William Deakin, noted the Montenegrin characteristics exhibited by Djilas, recalling:

Milovan Djilas was endowed with the outstanding physical courage of the Montenegrin clans ... he seemed to embody the legends of his divided land. This was the single impression first borne upon us ... By character intransigent, arrogant in the superficial certainties of Marxism as simplified in a student world ... his nature was

³ M. Živković, *Serbian Dreambook*, (Indiana, 2011), p. 43

complex and simple; rigid political beliefs of urban intellectuals had been imposed by a deliberate effort of the will on the realism and honesty of a clansman. The tragedy of Djilas was to emerge long after the events at hand; the irreconcilable conflict between rigid pitiless doctrinaire and the reflective imaginative artist of the mountain community of epic traditions.⁴

In the final part of his autobiography, *Rise and Fall*, Djilas himself acknowledged the importance of Montenegro in his career. He claimed that he was not just the victim of circumstances or political betrayal. Instead he revealed that much of his early psychological development had determined the events of his life.⁵ His spartan Montenegrin childhood directed him toward communism, but it also gave him an independent mind and an instinct to survive. When in 1954 Djilas's independence caused him to break with his comrades, he would later utilise the legends of his Montenegrin heritage to justify his defiance. For instance when Tito triumphantly proclaimed that Djilas was now politically dead, Djilas would later write: 'something strong and instinctive came over me - something which had nothing to do with communism but welled up from the ancient springs of my Montenegrin blood. No it won't be quite like that! I said to myself, I will never give in; never - as long as I live!'⁶

As was the case in Montenegro, in Herzegovina certain elemental human values - friendship, loyalty, devotion - assumed mythic importance. From his memoirs it is clear that Dedijer, like his friend Djilas, attempted to portray himself as a true representative of a mountain people: garrulous, tough and loyal. By embracing his Herzegovinian heritage he could explain the one thing that came to puzzle the

⁴ W. Deakin, *The Embattled Mountain*, (Oxford, 1971), p. 85

⁵ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 383

⁶ 'Marshal Tito Explains his Policy', *The Times*, 3rd March 1954, p. 7, M. Djilas, *The Unperfect Society*, (New York, 1969), p. 177

communist party: why had he abandoned his comrades and supported the traitor Djilas? In Dedijer's eyes his regional heritage provided him with his strongest character trait - loyalty - a quality that was to personify both his career and personal life. After all, following the split with Stalin he had refused to remove the name of Sreten Žujović from his published *War Diaries*.⁷ This was in spite of the fact that Žujović had taken the Soviet side in the clash between Stalin and Tito in 1948. His conscience and his feelings of solidarity towards a former comrade set him against the rest of the party and would not allow him to falsify history: 'I could never close my heart to the friends with whom I shared the war years. I disagreed with him politically but I refused to delete his name from my book.'⁸ This event prefigured the same feelings of loyalty he exhibited when, more famously, he refused to sacrifice his friendship with Djilas in 1954. Again he disagreed with many of Djilas's arguments, yet he contended, 'this is not just a personal feeling about a life-long friend. My life's philosophy concerning the problems of my beloved land, its people and their relations with others is expressed in it: the more tolerance within, the stronger the country.'⁹

Dedijer certainly exaggerated the traits of his Herzegovinian character in order to explain and justify his actions to Western intellectuals, the communist government, and – not least – to himself. It is no coincidence that the story of his great-grandfather, Jovan Babić, takes up a third of his own autobiography. According to Dedijer, Babić had betrayed his closest friend Stojan, when he failed to support him in his criticism of the Turks. He had violated the Herzegovinian practise of *pobratimstvo*, a church service of sworn brotherhood between friends.¹⁰ *Pobratimi*

⁷ V. Dedijer, *The War Diaries of Vladimir Dedijer: Vol. 1*, (Ann Arbor, 1990), p. xxxv

⁸ V. Dedijer, *The Beloved Land*, (Ann Arbor, 1961), p. 20

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 52

were closer than blood-brothers, and solidarity formed a key element of what it meant to be a Serb from the rocky mountains of Herzegovina. For Dedijer it surpassed any ideology, hence why he attached himself to two very different political deviations in steadfastly supporting both Žujović and Djilas.

As well as utilising their Dinaric heritage to explain their ‘inevitable’ break with communism, they also used it to explain their initial attraction to the ideology, and the violence they committed in its name. The political turmoil, poverty and violence of their youth purportedly laid the groundwork for radicalism: ‘it seems to me that I was born with blood in my eyes. My first sight was of blood. My first words were bathed in blood.’¹¹ The logic was simple - the rebellious, and often violent Dinaric character, that was drawn to hero-worship, found an instant affinity with Marxist-Leninism. As Djilas later proclaimed, ‘the Montenegrin temperament and the temper of Marxism (and especially Leninism) are a perfect fit.’¹²



Djilas (second from the right) - The odd Partisan out¹³

Despite this hyperbole Djilas was a very different type of communist than many of his comrades. During the war he carried the Montenegrin Prince-Bishop Njegoš’s

¹¹ M. Djilas, *Land Without Justice*, (New York, 1956), p. 25

¹² G. Urban, ‘A Conversation with Milovan Djilas’, *Encounter*, December 1979, p. 32

¹³ ‘Jugoslavija u Drugom svetskom ratu’ – fotogalerija at <http://znaci.net/fotogalerija/fg/28.htm>

Mountain Wreath with him rather than any Marxist text, and according to Dedijer, he often refused to wear his Partisan uniform, preferring his woollen Montenegrin peasant coat. In fact he gave away the short leather coat that identified him as a member of the Politburo to an ordinary Partisan soldier.¹⁴

Therefore Djilas's and Dedijer's native romanticism appears to have pushed them in the direction of humanistic philosophy and literature, notably to Pushkin, Pelagić, and Byron. Yet, this folk romanticism did not automatically lead them towards Marxist Leninism and the social reorganisation that it promised. Rather, they only arrived at the enticing ideology, which had only been established in Russia 12 years previously, when they joined Belgrade University. It was in the capital that their horizons broadened; alienation and maturation combined.

The Influence of Belgrade and University

Despite Djilas's later claims that he had become a communist at the age of eight while growing up in Montenegro - notwithstanding the fact that he did not know any communists, or even understand the ideology - he, like Dedijer, did not become a true communist until 1929 when he entered Belgrade University. His belief in communist ideals formed in stages. It was during his childhood that Yugoslavia's fledgling democracy was overthrown by King Aleksandar's dictatorship. As Djilas recalled, 'the dictatorship of January 6 suppressed all political and intellectual activity. It was an exceptional event in my life ... it only intensified my somber state of mind and discontent.'¹⁵ During this period while at his high school in Berane he was introduced to many leftist poems. The Berane gymnasium fostered a number of

¹⁴ V. Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik Milovan Đilas*, (Belgrade, 1991), p. 43

¹⁵ Djilas, *Land Without Justice*, p. 352

other future communists, including Radovan Zogović, Mihailo Lalić and Dušan Kostić. Borislav Cimeša in his talk on Djilas and Montenegrin National Identity at the University of Montenegro in Nikšić, noted that Djilas belonged to the ‘Young Literary Montenegro’ or the ‘New Literary Montenegro’ which arose between the World Wars. In this ‘painful era’ he argued that a number of young intellectuals largely left behind the epic literary discourse and replaced it by writing about ‘ideas of social justice’. For these young men this new literary wave had its impetus in moving past the epic lyric traditionalism to modernism.¹⁶ Yet Djilas’s real radicalism emerged, not atypically, when he left Montenegro for Belgrade. His years as a student were a time of ferment. He wrote, ‘the circumstances gave rise to a generation of revolutionaries among intellectual students.’¹⁷

Young people coming from patriarchal rural environments reacted rebelliously when confronted with the social injustice of the capital. Stifled by the dictatorship, they looked for an outlet and found one in the ranks of their fellow students who were also discontented with existing conditions, both political and personal. Djilas’s and Dedijer’s rebelliousness was not so much inherited from their Dinaric roots, but instead was fostered in 1930s Belgrade. With its mixture of influences from the whole country and abroad, its restricted social and political life, and its flamboyant displays of wealth besides visible mass poverty, the city was a setting that gave form and encouragement to the rebelliousness of the young.

Meanwhile the University was unable to channel the student dissatisfaction in an intellectual direction. A specific type of student emerged, one who spent the bulk of their time in political activity, who postponed their exams year after year while

¹⁶ B. Cimeša, ‘Đilas i crnogorski nacionalni identitet’, *Ličnost i djelo Milovana Djilasa - Zbornik radova s međunarodnog naučnog simpozijuma - Univerzitet Crne Gore, Filozofski fakultet Nikšić*, 21st April 2014

¹⁷ M. Djilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, (New York, 1973), p. 95

immersing themselves in revolutionary politics. Ultimately, the University forged an idealistic, fanatical and politically skilled group of young intellectuals who believed they were fighting for a just cause. In this respect Djilas's and Dedijer's romantic peasant populism gave way to communism, internationalism and to Yugoslavism. The establishment of the royal dictatorship by King Aleksandar, as well as world conditions, facilitated this. As Djilas noted of his time in King Aleksandar's Sremska Mitrovica prison, 'this made me the most dogmatic communist of all.'¹⁸ It was this myriad of factors that brought both men to communism.

Ultimately their relationship and identification with their ethnic homelands developed over time as their own positions changed. It is perhaps unsurprising then, that in their period of dissidence they reclaimed their heritage. Their early regional romanticism was revived, but they had surreptitiously changed its perspective. Now their heritage represented a new type of democratic, liberal Yugoslavism.

Djilas and Montenegro

It is impossible to understand Djilas's interaction with Montenegro without understanding what 'Montenegrinism' is. The legends of Montenegro were always based around history. Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries the Montenegrins were the only people in the Balkans who were never fully subjected by the Ottoman Turks. This struggle embodied the Montenegrin heroic epic and was embedded in the memory of all living Montenegrins.

The embellished stories of their ancestors exploits were verbally passed down from generation to generation. The penchant for storytelling was a vital part of the

¹⁸ D. Leković, *Milovan Đilas i Socijalizam*, (Podgorica, 2010), p. 165

Montenegrin psyche. As Njegoš put it, 'stories are the soul's delight.'¹⁹ Although Djilas grew up in a Montenegro in which the clan structure was dissolving to make way for a modern political system, remnants of a largely tribal world were still strong.²⁰ Djilas was brought up on these histories and stories. Hailing from a region that valued heroism and self-sacrifice above all things, to be without either was shameful.

There are two main characteristics which symbolise a culture built on pride and folk epics. First is the idiosyncratic notions about time, the constant awareness of the individual as a link between the heroic past and the anticipated future. Second there was a widespread absence of moral or civic virtues. The Montenegrin man was obligated to guard his honour and his ancestor's name. He was expected to become a hero and a martyr. It was of little surprise then that Djilas drew on these stories and values after 1954: 'bravery means to tell the truth, in most cases, it seemed to me.'²¹ He outwardly portrayed himself as a brave Montenegrin rebel who was not afraid of the consequences of his actions. In private however, he admitted, 'of course I am afraid but I know that I must not show it.'²²

It is of little surprise that the issue of his heritage came to dominate his written works after 1954. Throughout the most challenging, confusing and distressing vicissitudes in his life he returned to his love of writing and his primary literary interest: Montenegro. It became both a refuge and an outlet:

I have been in prisons - in those of the Yugoslav monarchy and those of the socialists
- and thankfully thought of Montenegro ... everything considered Montenegro was

¹⁹ D. Doder, *The Yugoslavs*, (New York, 1978), p. 182

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Djilas, *Land Without Justice*, p. 69

²² Doder, *The Yugoslavs*, p. 183

always foremost in my mind. And everything was measured against it, against its genuineness, against its trials and dead ... In the prisons' gloom Montenegro also re-nurtured in me an artistic-moral truth, a truth that I had previously steeped in ideology and politics. It was like a second childhood - a carefree and conflict-free childhood. Montenegrin rivers flowed through me and with their clear waters washed away the remnants of ideology and eased my bitterness with their freshness.²³

All his books written in prison were set largely in Montenegro, demonstrating Djilas's propensity to associate his homeland with victimhood and suffering. They helped him survive the dreadful prison conditions and aided him during the most challenging period of his life. It also provided him with a convenient explanation for a rebellion that appeared doomed to fail. In an interview in 1967, upon his release from his third prison term, he explained what governed his thoughts and actions: 'my Montenegrin heritage of honour, courage, loyalty and dedication to justice.'²⁴

The books written during his imprisonment were great literary works. *Land Without Justice*, a book of his Montenegrin youth was praised by Dedijer as belonging 'with the highest creations of Yugoslav writers in the twentieth century.' Meanwhile Radovan Zogović, a very severe literary critic, ranked the book alongside the best writing of Ivo Andrić, the only Yugoslav to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.²⁵

However, while these writings were personal folk epics, it must be remembered they were also written by an ex-politician who still had political motives. They served as a way for Djilas to explain his break with communism. It was telling that Djilas, sitting in his prison cell, felt compelled to write *Land Without Justice*, a book

²³ D. Reinhartz, 'The Nationalism of Milovan Djilas', *Modern Age*, (1985), Vol. 29, Issue 3, p.234

²⁴ M. Djilas, *Parts of a Lifetime*, (New York, 1975), p. 3

²⁵ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 12th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

about Montenegro. Part of his motivation appears to be have been to recall his youth and to escape into the past. Yet, a close reading of the book suggests a deeper, more subtle reason. The book weaves an elaborate allegory with strong political overtones. He wanted to tell the reader something about himself through the veil of Montenegro's folk character, where honesty, honour and freedom come above one's own safety and advancement in life. The sheer amount of references to the glory of heroism in lost causes means the book cannot be seen as purely objective.

This was also the case with Djilas's biography of Njegoš (*Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop*), written between 1957 and 1959 while in prison, and published in the West in 1966 and then in Yugoslavia 22 years later. The book saw Djilas replace his romantic idea of Tito and Marxism with Njegoš and Montenegro. The book may also be read as a pseudo-autobiography. The book's English translator, Michael Boro Petrovich, argued that a number of comparisons could be drawn between Djilas and Njegoš. They both believed in the 'necessity for man to fight evil constantly and wherever he may encounter it, in the name of freedom.'²⁶ In fact Djilas seemed to encourage these parallels. In a number of passages it is hard to distinguish between the personalities of himself and Njegoš. Both blended into one character.

Yet in 1952, before his fall from power, Djilas wrote a hugely critical biography of Njegoš. This book, entitled *Legenda o Njegošu* (The Legend about Njegoš), was an excellent example of Marxist literary criticism. It was intended to combat the 'bourgeois hagiographical account' of the Montenegrin Prince-Bishop by Isidora Sekulić. Djilas argued that Njegoš was being romanticised by bourgeois nationalist writers as a beacon for the preservation of Serbian unity and the Serbian Orthodox faith. Yet after Djilas's fall from power and the publication of his more famous

²⁶ M. Djilas, *Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop*, (New York, 1966), p. 5

biography in 1966, his approach to Njegoš changed completely. Where his first book criticised Sekulić's hero, his second paid tribute to Sekulić and he largely mirrored her hagiographical account of Njegoš. What had brought about this change?

Following his expulsion from the communist party, Djilas sought to reinvent himself as the champion of human freedom against despotic regimes. The paradox here was that he had been one of the most hard, violent and fanatical of the communists. In this respect Njegoš became a useful figure for Djilas to embrace. His decision to write about Njegoš appears to have been calculated to enhance his own rehabilitation as a Montenegrin hero. This was not simply a cynical, opportunistic action; the book was certainly an impassioned work. However, there were undoubtedly personal autobiographical motives driving his close identification with Njegoš.

As the Prince-Bishop was the archetypal Montenegrin, all his (and his countrymen's) errors and flaws could be justified. In this way his apology for Njegoš's violence was simultaneously an excuse for his own actions: 'foreigners reproached Njegoš for cruelty because of the taking of heads. They did not comprehend our sufferings and passions.'²⁷ Years after his disillusionment with communist ideology, Djilas justified the cruelties committed in his name: 'we had to have an ideology that would inspire general confidence and impress on our fighting men that we were struggling for a just, the only just, cause. That belief demanded the use of means which under different circumstances, I would have repudiated and rejected.'²⁸ Such rationalisation allowed Djilas to define atrocities committed by Montenegrins as virtuous: 'Njegoš's massacre was the first, or at least among the very rare, to be poetic and even a humanistic motif, one in which the very deed is

²⁷ *ibid*, p. 244

²⁸ Urban, 'A Conversation with Milovan Djilas', *Encounter*, p. 24

magnified. Njegoš was the first ... to give expression to a massacre as an aspect of human destiny, as a higher ordinance. Herein lies its originality and its greatness.'²⁹

Thus, even though he had repudiated the communist system, Djilas was not a humanist in the Western sense. He moved closer to this precept over time, but he refused to reproach Njegoš for his massacres or renounce the violence inherent in Montenegrin culture. Many observers have called into question Djilas's hero-worship of Njegoš. As Branimir Anzulović noted, 'Djilas in our time, champions Njegoš, although clearly, had he been Njegoš's prisoner, and not Tito's, he would have been impaled years ago.'³⁰ Yet this forgets that to condemn Njegoš's violence would have also called into question his own actions during and after the Second World War.

Djilas also utilised his Montenegrin background to portray himself as a born rebel. His communist past could be simply brushed away. He had just happened to find the handy package of justifications for this rebellion in Leninism. When asked about this in an interview Djilas stated, 'yes, most Montenegrin revolutionaries joined the communist movement for exactly the same reasons I did. As a young communist, I rejected the old regime with the same uncompromising resolve as I now reject communism. I was, and am, a Montenegrin!'³¹ In this respect Djilas portrayed himself not merely as the most influential dissident of Yugoslav communism, but more nebulously as an archetypal rebel. By drawing on his ancestry he portrayed himself as driven by a basic core of idealism and a native love of conflict.

This obsession with rebellion can be seen in Djilas's great interest in the Montenegrin *hajduks* - outlaws under Ottoman rule who were romantically viewed

²⁹ Djilas, *Njegoš*, p. 319

³⁰ B. Anzulović, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide*, (New York, 1999), p. 64

³¹ Urban, 'A Conversation with Milovan Djilas', *Encounter*, p. 23

as ‘freedom-fighters’. In his autobiography he claimed that as a child he was fascinated by tales about *hajduks*. He was proud to descend from these bandits. His great-uncle Marko had been a famous Montenegrin brigand who was killed by the Ottoman authorities, only for his grandfather Aleksa to avenge his death in the most brutal way. Thus these stories of his family connected the tales of Montenegrin legends with his own contemporary reality. He felt the burden of having such ancestors: ‘as my grandfather had, and his grandfather, and my own father, so too, must I struggle with my enemy as long as I had breath in me. All this weighed upon me like some talisman, some holy testament, handed down from the distant past.’³²

The tales of these outlaws and the general pattern of Montenegrin society spawned within him a profound cynicism of centralised government and bureaucracy. After all, while Djilas was being brought up on folk epics, the great political debate concerned the idea of independence versus unification with Serbia. On both sides of the argument the key term was ‘freedom’. Djilas, like many other young Montenegrins, consequently heard this word at a very young age. With his questing intelligent mind, Djilas appears to have grasped this concept before he really knew what it was. Throughout his numerous articles, written both before and after his fall from power, the dominant theme is the inevitable eruption of human force demanding freedom from the codified dogma imposed from above.³³ In these articles Djilas appears to be recalling the images of Montenegro depicted in the epic stories. He romanticised the decentralised informal system whereby Montenegrins governed their own lives, as opposed to the inescapable bureaucracy of the neighbouring Turkish villages.

³² M. Djilas, *The Stone and the Violets*, (New York, 1972), p. 236

³³ M. Djilas, ‘Za sve?’, *Borba*, 22nd November, 1953, p. 3

As Djilas reasoned: ‘I came from the revolutionary movement, but at the same time I never lost the moral sense – even when I did something wrong. When I look back on my life I see a certain logic running through it. I was once on the left, and even on the left of the communist movement. I now have quite different views but there is a line running through my life nonetheless.’ When asked what that line was, Djilas replied: ‘when I look back I see in my life not only Marxism, but also Yugoslavia’s popular literature and my own ancestors’ struggle with the Turks against injustice and poverty. When I was still a Marxist I did not believe that these factors influenced me, but now I see that they did.’³⁴

In this respect Djilas utilised his Montenegrin heritage to give meaning to his life and his choices. It provided a justification for his actions and for his compulsion to attack the regime that he had once helped bring to power. After all, honour and vengeance went hand in hand. Milovan wrote in his novel *Montenegro*: ‘The Montenegrin God is a God of vengeance - not just that, but above all else.’³⁵ While in his boyhood memoir, *Land Without Justice*, Djilas succinctly described the character and importance of the blood feud and cycles of vengeance:

Vengeance - this is a breath of life one shares from the cradle with one’s fellow clansmen, in both good fortune and bad, vengeance from eternity. Vengeance was the debt we paid for the love and sacrifice our forebears and fellow clansmen bore us. It was the defence of honour and good name... It was our pride before others ... It was centuries of manly pride and heroism, survival, a mother’s milk and a sister’s vow, bereaved parents and children in black, joy and songs turned into silence and wailing. It was all, all.³⁶

³⁴ H.J. Stehle, ‘A Talk with Milovan Djilas’, *Encounter*, June 1967, p. 65

³⁵ M. Djilas, *Montenegro*, (New York, 1963), p. 93

³⁶ Djilas, *Land Without Justice*, p. 71

Thus Djilas found meaning in his defiance by drawing on tales of Montenegrin retribution. This also explains why following his fall from power he became a writer, it was the only form of revenge available to him. As an article in the *New York Times* noted from an interview with the dissident, ‘he smiled the wry smile of a man who has long since accepted that his role is to be a nuisance to the powerful, at whatever the personal cost.’³⁷ This idea is perhaps best demonstrated in one of Djilas’s short stories, ‘*The Leper*’, rich in allegory. The hero, Lazar, contracts a terrible disease, leprosy, analogous to Djilas’s dissent. He is sent into solitary confinement by the village chief. However, he finds a way of communicating with the rest of the community by taking to the *gusle*, just as Djilas took to the pen, ‘the one weapon left to him.’ The hero used this weapon to take his revenge, attacking the corrupt village chief - or in Djilas’s case Tito. Lazar received numerous warnings but carried on despite the hardships brought to bear on his family. ‘Lazar was unable to remain silent and not say what he thought about village affairs.’³⁸ In this respect Djilas was attempting to portray himself as an archetypal Montenegrin martyr.

Despite Djilas’s proud proclamations of his Montenegrin roots, prior to 1954 his views toward his homeland were somewhat bittersweet. In a typical poem in the *Misao* journal in 1932, Djilas wrote: ‘insatiable! You drain me ... Land of my birth, dark, evil, painful, we are still thirsting for hate and love.’³⁹ After all, Montenegrin clan society was particularly violent, as Djilas once noted: ‘all my immediate ancestors were killed by their fellow countrymen ... my son once asked about these events, and was told something about them. His response was: “all that remains is

³⁷ J.F. Burns, ‘Belgrade Journal’, *The New York Times*, 27th March 1992, p. 4

³⁸ M. Djilas, *The Leper: and Other Stories*, (New York, 1964), p. 211

³⁹ C. L. Sulzberger, *Paradise Regained*, (Berkeley, 1989), p. 86

for me to be impaled.’”⁴⁰ Reflecting on his rebellious countrymen, Djilas stated: ‘they have the characteristics of primitive people. They are rebellious by emotion rather than by rational concept. Their psychology remains influenced by vestigial tribalism.’⁴¹ This left Djilas with a strange combination of both pride and embarrassment about his roots.

These feelings of embarrassment reached their zenith during the Second World War. Djilas was made leader of the Partisan uprising in Montenegro, yet the uprising quickly escaped his control and mass violence and chaos ensued. Within months Djilas was admonished by Tito and humiliated as he was stripped of his position. This period of Djilas’s life was undoubtedly one of shame and indignation, and it was caused by his own people. Yet even then he could not condemn his Montenegrin brothers. General Dapčević recalled Djilas pleading with Tito: ‘Montenegrin people are good, but [Ivan] Milutinović and I are just shit!’⁴²

Nevertheless, the incident clearly rankled with Djilas. In the years 1945-1954 he rarely dwelled on his Dinaric heritage. When he spoke of the Montenegrin character it was often derogatory. In a critical mood, he would describe his fellow countrymen as lazy, vain and hysterical. The best example of this can be found in the aftermath of Yugoslavia’s split with Stalin. On one occasion he and Aleksandar Ranković interrogated a Montenegrin air force pilot suspected of planning an escape to Albania. The accused man wept as he proclaimed his loyalty: ‘comrades give me a bomber and I’ll show Sofia and Budapest and Tirana who is a revisionist, who is a traitor. Let me serve my country and my party! Let me die honourably as a soldier and a revolutionary!’ While Ranković was willing to accept his appeal, Djilas

⁴⁰ A. Zulfikarpašić, *The Bosniak*, (London, 1998), p. 19

⁴¹ Sulzberger, *Paradise Regained*, p. 99

⁴² Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 207

insisted that the man was imprisoned, proclaiming ‘the Montenegrins are prone to pathetics and hysteria.’⁴³

Yet as already seen, following his fall Djilas began to portray himself as the archetypal Montenegrin:

One’s home and homeland are part of every individual. It is impossible to free oneself from them, just as it is impossible to choose one’s father and mother. They mature with the individual’s personality regardless of whether or not he is conscious with it ... I constantly feel Montenegro within me.⁴⁴

However, it was not only Djilas who began to utilise his Montenegrin background following 1954. The communist regime seized the opportunity to use Djilas’s ‘Montenegrinism’ as a rod to beat him with. It was suggested at his trial, by implication, that his deviation was attributable to the fact that he was a Montenegrin. When Djilas was brought before the Belgrade court in 1956 on the charge that he had published statements slandering Yugoslavia, the judge specifically described him as a Montenegrin. Djilas, who otherwise bore the indictment and even the sentence of three years’ imprisonment without discernible emotion, leapt to his feet: ‘I object, the statement should show that I am a Yugoslav.’⁴⁵ This is not to suggest that Djilas was ashamed to be a Montenegrin, but instead that he understood what Judge Vojislav Janković was implying by classifying him as a Montenegrin. He could insinuate that Djilas’s heredity incited his challenge against the communist regime, his heresy was predictable and inbred.

⁴³ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 228

⁴⁴ Zulfikarpašić, *The Bosniak*, p. 45

⁴⁵ Djilas, *Land Without Justice*, p. vii

The fact that Djilas had been elected vice-president of Yugoslavia and president of its one-party parliament only weeks before his first 'heretical' *Borba* article was published was not only embarrassing for the regime, but hard to explain. The suggestion that he was now governed as much by his Montenegrin roots as by his political experiences was a convenient way to solve this problem. After all, it was common knowledge that both Djilas's grandfather and great-uncle had rebelled against authority. As Tito informed *The Times*, the Yugoslav peoples had seen through Djilas's ruse that he was a protagonist of democratisation, it was clear to them that he was simply a Montenegrin advocate of anarchy.⁴⁶ While Tito did speak of some of his warm personal feelings for Djilas, describing him as a 'talented and interesting person', he was still a Montenegrin and a poet. According to Tito this made him 'a little crazy - he was a man, like most Montenegrins.'⁴⁷ Tito claimed he was impressionistic, idealistic and mixed up in his philosophy; and realising these Montenegrin traits, he ensured he was 'never a pillar of a revolutionary headquarters' and always a cabinet minister without fixed responsibilities.⁴⁸ Technically Tito was right; he had always been a minister without a portfolio. However, this likely had little to do with his 'Montenegrin temperament'; he was of course head of Agitprop and was likely too talented to be shoehorned into one particular position.

While on the surface these statements may appear minor, their significance should not be underestimated. The regime was focusing on the distinctiveness of an individual from a constituent republic, a practise that it had largely refrained from doing. The communists were unwittingly undermining an essential pillar of the new state: 'brotherhood and unity'. They were acknowledging that all Yugoslavs were

⁴⁶ 'Marshal Tito Explains his Policy', *The Times*, 3rd March 1954, p. 7

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ *ibid*

somewhat influenced by their origins. They could not escape their backgrounds. It was not the new Yugoslav communist state that governed people's beliefs and actions but their constituent nation. Djilas's Montenegrin background had undeniably left an imprint upon him, but it could not be used as an excuse for his actions since it failed to explain his divergence from his Montenegrin colleagues – all of whom continued to support Tito.

In addition, it must be remembered that Djilas identified himself as a Serb as well as a Montenegrin. The Montenegrin sociologist, Srdjan Darmanović, described the Montenegrin character as that of a 'national homo duplex, a victim of his double or divided consciousness.'⁴⁹ As Darmanović elucidated, 'many of those who nationally declare themselves Montenegrins have besides their "Montenegrin-ness" a strong Serbian ethnic feeling, based on sharing the same language and religion. Consequently Montenegrins as a nation have been caught - especially in the twentieth century - between their "Montenegrin-ness" and their "Serbian-ness", between the particular interests of the Montenegrin state and those of Serbs in general.'⁵⁰

This partly explains why Djilas identified as a Serb as well as a Montenegrin. He was influenced by a number of domestic and external events that Montenegro faced during his lifetime. He was also influenced by the region of Montenegro he came from. Serbia was just over the border from Berane in the Montenegrin Sandžak, and therefore remained a presence in his mind. Consequently he considered himself 'a Serb - a Montenegrin Serb'. The local identity did not exclude the feeling of belonging to the larger entity. Likewise, as a Serb, he also felt he was a Yugoslav, a member of the South Slav family. To quote one of Djilas's fictional characters: 'I am

⁴⁹ S. Darmanović, 'Montenegro: Destiny of a Satellite State', *Eastern European Reporter*, No. 27, March 1992, p. 27

⁵⁰ *ibid*

not a Montenegrin because I am a Serb, but a Serb because I am Montenegrin. We Montenegrins are the salt of Serbs. All the strength of the Serbs is not here, but their soul is.⁵¹

Djilas grew up during the dislocation of the First World War and the subsequent creation of the Yugoslav state. As part of this process Montenegro was assimilated into the new country and Djilas's romantic peasant populism gave way to Yugoslavism. The pan-Slav and pan-Serb influences originating from the works of writers like Njegoš and Vuk Karadžić was replaced with communism. After all, the ideas of Marxism and a unified global working class movement made any notions of Serbian versus Montenegrin statehood redundant. In addition, his time at Belgrade University imbued him with ideas of a greater Serbia of which Montenegro was a part. In 1941 he wrote a programme entitled the 'Communist manifesto of Serbianhood', in which he extolled the youth movement in pre-war Montenegro for trying to unify the two countries. For Djilas, throughout history Montenegro and Serbia had the same national interests.⁵²

Following the Second World War however, despite his denial of a separate Montenegrin ethnicity, Djilas still had to justify its republic status. In this respect he took the middle ground in the dispute between the 'Independents' and the 'Serbophiles'. He believed the Montenegrins were Serbs ethnically (*narodnost*), but Montenegrins by nationality (*nacionalno*). Djilas reasoned that the development of the 'nation' had begun later in Montenegro than in Serbia, and that it still needed time to be completed. For this reason he argued that the creation of a Montenegrin Republic was the logical expression of Montenegrin nationhood.⁵³

⁵¹ Djilas, *Montenegro*, p. 55

⁵² Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 12th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁵³ M. Djilas, 'O Crnogorskom nacionalnom pitanju', in *Članci 1941-1946*, (Belgrade, 1947), p. 200

Yet he continued to deprecate ideas of a separate ethnic national identity. In his famous work, 'On the Montenegrin National Question', published in *Borba* on 1 May 1945, he threatened: 'who still raises the question of Montenegro?' Any formation of a Montenegrin nation, Djilas argued, would represent the highest form of capitalism and imperialism. Djilas, the Marxist theoretician, saw the idea of the 'withering away of the state/nation' as a substitute for the assimilation of the Montenegrins into Serbs.⁵⁴ This represents the confused nature of Djilas's ideas: if the two peoples were to unify, this would see the disappearance and negation of the idea of fraternal notions and fraternal union. Were Montenegrins and Serbs identical or fraternal?

Following his break with communism Djilas continued to champion the ideas of Serbdom. In fact William Jovanovich, Djilas's publisher in the West, was shocked by Djilas's views on 'Srpstvo' or Serbism, the identity shared by all Serbs.⁵⁵ In an interview with *Le Monde* in late 1971 about the national question in Yugoslavia, Djilas stated that 'Montenegrins are an integral part of the Serbian nation.'⁵⁶ In 1989, he claimed that if the Montenegrins formed their own nation it would be meaningless from a 'scientific standpoint.'⁵⁷ In this respect we have a 'Djilas Paradox.' Djilas argued for a fight for freedom and an emphasis on individuality (all supposedly driven by his Montenegrin upbringing). Yet he had a peremptory vision of the decay and disappearance of the Montenegrin nation. As Branislav Kovačević argued, 'the controversial character of Djilas as a thinker, ideologue and politician is nowhere demonstrated as accurately as his thoughts on the Montenegrin national question.'⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 3

⁵⁵ W. Jovanovich, *The Temper of the West: A Memoir*, (South Carolina, 2003), p. 6

⁵⁶ 'Les communistes et la question nationale', *Le Monde*, 30th December 1971, p. 4

⁵⁷ N. Adžić, 'Polemike: Milovan Đilas – Negator crnogorske nacije', *Pobjeda*, 8th May 2012, p. 24

⁵⁸ Kovačević, *Djilas*, p. 68

Dedijer and Herzegovina

While Vladimir Dedijer's heritage has been less explored than Djilas's, he was no less drawn to his roots than his friend. He was born in Belgrade and spent most of his formative years in the capital. However, his mother's family had come from Bosnia, and his father's had originated from the rocky mountains of Herzegovina. The interplay between the stereotype of the Dinaric Herzegovinian and the urbane Serbian Belgrade intellectual is exemplified in the figure of Jevto Dedijer – Vladimir's father. Jevto died shortly after the First World War, but his son exhibited a keen interest in his life. Jevto Dedijer was born into a peasant family near Bileća close to the Montenegrin border (as codified in 1878) and was acquainted with a number of the Young Bosnians (*Mlada Bosna*), including Vladimir Gaćinović. However, through studying he introduced himself to some principles of geopolitics and moved to Belgrade studying under Jovan Cvijić. Jevto became a prominent intellectual and a passionate exponent of the idea of a 'Greater Serbia'.⁵⁹ Following in the footsteps of his father, Vladimir also utilised his Dinaric Herzegovinian heritage as the basis for romantic Serbianism - 'it is hard to be a Serb, but how beautiful!'⁶⁰

Dedijer's personal and often poetic accounts of a political reawakening after 1954 were often explicitly tied to his mountainous heritage. Dwelling on his ancestors, Herzegovina was presented as a primordial, patriarchal idyll. Although he was a Serb, he saw himself as a special kind of Serb, whose values of bravery and loyalty were enhanced. He recalled during the First World War how some of his Herzegovinian countrymen were so loyal that they had served the Austrian emperor.

⁵⁹ J. Dedijer, *Nova Srbija* (Belgrade, 1913)

⁶⁰ D. Binder, 'Vladimir Dedijer, Tito Biographer and Partisan Fighter, Dies at 90,' *The New York Times*, December 4th 1990, p. 21

During the battle of Mačkov Kamen they replied to Serb calls to surrender with their own call ‘have you ever heard of Serbs surrendering?’⁶¹

The harsh Herzegovinian karst landscape and the bloody conflicts that characterised many of the historical developments of the province meant that its peoples developed close knit bonds and values. The region’s mountains, with narrow roads running through passes, had encouraged highwaymen throughout the medieval and Ottoman period. This brigandage was especially endemic in Herzegovina.⁶² The families, of which Dedijer’s had been typical, organised as clans and fought to defend their lands. Just as in Djilas’s Montenegro, the warrior mentality became deeply entrenched in many Herzegovinian peasants.

The Christian Herzegovinians had frequently risen up against the local Muslim landholders and in 1875-6 many fought alongside the Montenegrins in their war with the Ottomans. Later they protested against the Austrian state with its heavy taxation and conscription policies. As Dedijer himself noted: ‘the people of Herzegovina and Southern Bosnia are strong and vigorous: ethnically, the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the purest in the Balkan Peninsula, but if one looks at history one finds a record of continual strife, of fear and death, exceptional even by Balkan standards.’⁶³

What was the cause of this exceptionally high amount of violence? Dedijer himself was unsure, but pondered that it was hereditary: ‘Is it because of something inherited or does the cause lie in the blood of the Slavs who came from Herzegovina and mixed with the Old Illyrians, a people notorious for their stubbornness? Or was

⁶¹ I. Božić, S. Ćirković, M. Ekmečić and V. Dedijer, *The History of Yugoslavia*, (Belgrade, 1973), p. 480

⁶² R.J Donia and J.V.A Fine, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed*, (Columbia, 1995), p. 27

⁶³ Dedijer, *Beloved Land*, p. 14

it the result of conditions in which people lived?’⁶⁴ Just like his friend, following his fall, Dedijer began to write about ‘his homeland’ appropriating its ‘values’ as a means of recovering from the shock of being cast aside by his comrades. After all, Dedijer was well aware of what it meant to originate from this harsh land. Its history of stubbornness, loyalty and rebellion became a useful conduit for his own career: ‘the story of my ancestors and my own family is a small but characteristic part of this history. The principal conflicts which sundered Herzegovinian society were present in my family as a microcosm.’⁶⁵

With the end of his political career, he began a new one as an historian focusing on his ‘homeland’. This not only included Herzegovina but Bosnia more broadly. Just as Djilas drew on Njegoš to explain and justify his rebellion, Dedijer turned to Gavrilo Princip. His massive study of the *Mlada Bosna* and the assassination of Franz Ferdinand was as much about delving into the history of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Serbs as it was about the assassination itself: ‘The Sarajevo legend has tormented me from early childhood. One of my uncles ... was a Young Bosnian who was killed at the age of nineteen ... I continued studying and discussing the Young Bosnians during the Second World War, during the night marches of our Partisan brigades.’⁶⁶ Dedijer was trying to show that the history of his ‘homeland’ had always been an important influence in his life. Prior to his break with the communist state however, he very rarely mentioned the history of Herzegovina or Bosnia. For instance in his famous war diaries there are very few references to Princip and the Young Bosnians, and no mention of them having any influence on his actions.

⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p. 17

⁶⁶ V. Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo*, (New York, 1966), p. 447

Nevertheless Princip became a useful figure to embrace. He was portrayed as youthful and courageous; he lived for the Serb value of self-sacrifice for moral reasons. Princip came to represent Dedijer himself after his disillusionment in 1954. Both their motives were represented as a classic craving for heroism and martyrdom deeply rooted in the folklore of the Serbian people. *Mlada Bosna* were not merely student patriots ready to die for their freedom. Instead they were stereotypes – ‘primitive rebels’ whose upbringing and environment were such that they were unable to understand the unorthodoxy of their actions. Meanwhile the Archduke and the reactionary Austrian regime symbolised Tito and his government. Dedijer’s explanation for the cause of the unjustness of the Austrian regime could have also been applied to its communist counterpart: ‘the injustice of some and the complacency of many.’⁶⁷ Clearly he could not (or did not want to) restrain his native passion into dispassionate scholarship. His invoking of the long dead assassin and his organisation was an attempt to present his own rebellion as an archetypal act removed from contemporary reality.

The First World War was a painful event for Dedijer (he lost his father) and for all Serbs. In his search for *telos*, Dedijer attempted to justify and rationalise this traumatic period of South Slav history by connecting it with events and ideas outside their frame. Princip and his conspirators were now presented as the predestined exponents of the Marxist dialectic. For this reason Dedijer’s book was freely published in Yugoslavia. After all, it was in the 1960s that his former comrades were also fostering a cult of *Mlada Bosna*. They were presented as representatives of the enslaved and oppressed masses of Yugoslavia. Their conspiracy was the forerunner for communist revolution and embodied an authentic yearning for freedom.

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p. 88

Ultimately Dedijer's book was a strange mix of Balkan nationalism and vaguely populist, almost libertarian Marxism. He was stuck between his communist ideals, which unlike Djilas, he could not fully discard, and his new identity as a Herzegovinian patriot and martyr.

In Dedijer's works the Sarajevo assassins were heroes, his only reservation was that one may deplore and disagree with their methods. Dedijer even planned to make a film on the Sarajevo assassination in 1968, alongside his friend Orson Welles, for the Rosna film company. The project had to be abandoned however, because of Dedijer's approach - in which he saw the assassins as heroic rebels in the mould of the Fenians.⁶⁸

In addition, these prototypical Bosnian and Herzegovinian rebels could be utilised to justify his own form of rebellion. In an essay entitled, 'The Ethics and Aesthetics of Young Bosnia', Dedijer pointed out that the Young Bosnia activists were just as much literary comrades as national revolutionaries.⁶⁹ For Dedijer writing was the key to any revolution. He therefore took on the mantle of another one of his Young Bosnian heroes, Vladimir Gaćinović, a Herzegovinian, who stated: 'a Serbian revolutionary, if he wants to win, he must be a writer, an artist, have talent for fighting and suffering, to be a martyr and conspirator, a man of Western manners but also an outlaw who will fight for the unfortunate and downtrodden.'⁷⁰ For these reasons Dedijer appears to have modelled himself on the political ideologue of Young Bosnia.

Dedijer's interest in his twin Bosnian and Herzegovinian roots was also apparent from his 1961 autobiography of his youth, *The Beloved Land*. The title alone shows

⁶⁸ V. Dedijer, 'Essays on Socialist Humanism' - Unpublished essay, (1968), (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁶⁹ V. Dedijer, 'Refleksije', *Sodobnost*, Vol. 11, Issue 12 (1963), p. 1158

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p. 1152

the romanticism he held for his family's homeland, particularly Herzegovina. It stood for the mountainous karst region as much as it did for Yugoslavia. Dedijer dedicates almost a third of his book to events before his birth. In the story of his family background and his own youth, Dedijer is sure to contain all the elements that would adequately explain his complicated break with the party. For instance while his youth was spent in Belgrade, he could not escape his Herzegovinian heritage and its cruelty and oppression, even within his own family. His mother would make him kneel on hard beans and taught him to hate himself for being male, because his sex oppressed hers. The reasoning behind this anecdote was clear. Namely that his background had unconsciously taught him a characteristically Balkan lesson: physical violence and suffering are little in comparison with social and mental oppression.

By looking back to his roots Dedijer attempted to prove that his break with communism was inevitable. The veiled argument went that as a Bosnian Serb whose origins lay in Herzegovina, he saw himself as an individualist who chose communism because it seemed the only workable alternative to the royal dictatorship. Purportedly, his notions of what it meant to descend from Herzegovina meant that he cared for communism only if it could be equated with social justice, equality, liberty and heroic integrity. It was his pursuit of these 'honourable' values that lead Dedijer to the communist party and a position of power in the post-war turmoil. However, it was also these values that brought him to join his friend Djilas in his difficult political strivings, and to dissidence.

In a revealing letter to *The Times* in 1966, Dedijer linked the 'dark psyche of Ireland' and the struggle for national emancipation to the struggles in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In his letter he stated that the history of the opposed groups in each

country demonstrated that without an outlet there was no option but to resort to self-sacrifice. In both cases the sacrifice could be seen as irrational to all those who had not grown up in those particular environments. Only by living in those societies could such a mentality of struggle and self-sacrifice be understood as a 'very rational means of emancipation.'⁷¹ Dedijer maintained that it was only natural given this worldview that he would rebel and become a martyr for his beliefs and values. In light of his heritage, the decision to stand by Djilas in 1954, while initially appearing suicidal and irrational, was now not only justified but natural and essential.

However, like Djilas, Dedijer held a bittersweet view of what it was like to descend from the Dinaric Mountains. He was never disposed to exonerate the Herzegovinian Serbs, for instance he often held them as irresponsible and prone to hero-worship.⁷² This was somewhat ironic given his own previous hero-worship of Tito, something he now condemned. In later life, Dedijer was well known for saying, 'we Serbs sometimes behave as if we were fathered by drunken Turks'.⁷³ As his colleague Slobodan Kljakić recalled, 'he despised the spirit of the bazaar, its insularity and primitivism, willingness to flattery and the curvature of the spine caused by having so many living saints.'⁷⁴ It should not be forgotten that the Serbs lived under Turkish rule for over 500 years. This left an impression on the Serbian people, on their culture, but also on their way of thinking. There appears to have been a note of deep anguish in Dedijer's comment about being fathered by drunken Turks. It was an acknowledgment that the Serbian people had some serious character flaws traceable to Ottoman rule. As Marko Živković has demonstrated, this kind of anguished obsession with national character flaws would slowly become the norm in

⁷¹ V. Dedijer, 'Ireland's Easter Blood Bath', *The Times*, 13th April 1966, p. 13

⁷² Dedijer, *Beloved Land*, p. 213

⁷³ Živković, *Serbian Dreambook*, p. 115

⁷⁴ Kljakić, 'Sto godina', *Politika Online*, 2nd February 2014

Serbia in the 1990s. National predicaments were perceived as having deeper causes originating in the national psyche: 'The Turkish taint became one of the most potent idioms in which all accusations and self-recriminations were expressed.'⁷⁵

Blaming the proverbial 'centuries of Turkish yoke' for all kinds of flaws in its people's national character was nothing new amongst former Ottoman subjects in the Balkans.⁷⁶ However, Dedijer also lamented that this 'Turkish taint' had encouraged a specific philosophy amongst many of his countrymen: misery, calamity and restlessness are basic and permanent laws and feeble human beings can change nothing. Obedience was the best policy.⁷⁷ In this respect the Turks had left many Herzegovinians with the philosophy of *kismet*, the belief that no one could escape from the predestined will of Allah. Yet, there were those who rebelled against such a defeatist philosophy, namely the *hajduks* and brigands. It was these men that Dedijer claimed he had descended from. After all, he was acutely aware that his family had belonged to the ancient clan of the Maleševci who had instantly rebelled against Ottoman occupation. Dedijer proclaimed that - fearing retribution - all of the clan fled, barring one son who staunchly refused to leave the Ulobić Mountain. According to Dedijer it was this brave outlaw that all Dedijers had descended from.⁷⁸

The Theme of Bogomilism

Both men's Dinaric heritage fostered an interest in rebellion. Following their own fall in 1954 they both utilised and exaggerated this tradition to define their own actions as a rebellion. It was a way of explaining their actions to their fellow

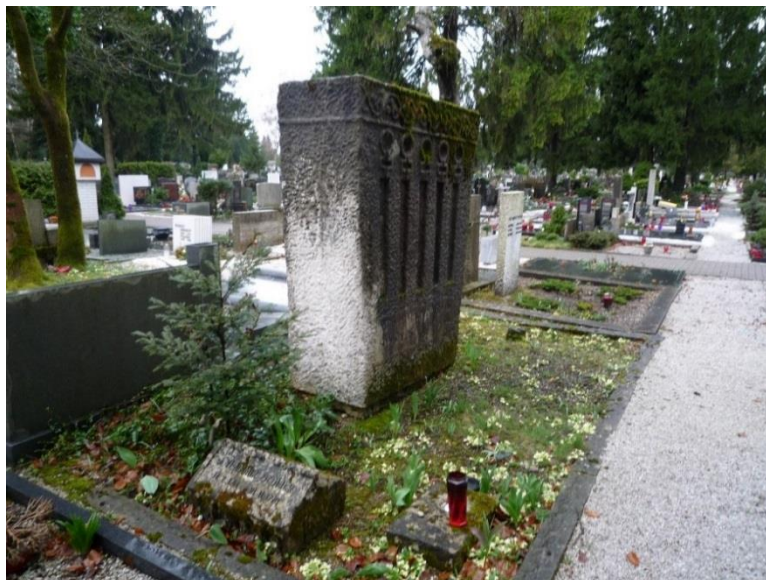
⁷⁵ Živković, *Serbian Dreambook*, p. 116

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 180

⁷⁷ Dedijer, *Beloved Land*, p. 16

⁷⁸ *ibid*, p. 75

Yugoslavs, the wider world and of course to themselves. Given this tendency, it is of little surprise that both Djilas and Dedijer also became fascinated by the Bogomil movement that had taken place centuries earlier. For instance, Dedijer's own grave is presided over by a gigantic Bogomil 'stećak' tombstone.



Dedijer and his sons' Bogomil tombstone in Žale, Ljubljana⁷⁹

During the twelfth century in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and parts of Montenegro, Christianity was not controlled by either the Byzantine or Roman Catholic Church. Instead this area was the stronghold of the Bogomil Manichean heresy. The Bogomils were a peaceful sect who were prevalent until the arrival of the Ottomans at the end of the fifteenth century. They believed in the equal power of God and the Devil and rejected the privileges and hierarchy of the church, arguing that it was too dogmatic and out of touch with the ordinary people. It is not surprising that both men developed a keen interest in this part of Balkan history, given the arguments that they were making in the 1950s. They were rebelling against the privileges and sacraments of their own church - the Yugoslav Communist Party.

⁷⁹ Photo taken by author at Žale cemetery, Ljubljana on 14/03/14

In the late 1960s, Dedijer, alongside the prominent Herzegovinian film director Fadil Hadžić, began working with the famous Jadran Film Company to make a film about Bogomilism entitled *Yugoslavia: Land of Heretics*. The scope of the project covered the history of Yugoslavia from the medieval dualistic heretics, the Bogomils, to the rebellious young students of the day. The film was never finished and only Dedijer's talks with Jean-Paul Sartre in the Herzegovinian Mountains were filmed. The work was stopped because communist officials pressured Dedijer to cut out the scenes where he linked Bogomilism with the students' unrest and the rebellion of Djilas. Dedijer refused, noting that the film should change its title to 'The Land of Moral Prostitutes'.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the transcripts of the conversation between Jean-Paul Sartre and Dedijer did survive. In these transcripts Dedijer revealed his immense admiration for this great rebellious sect, 'their movement had a strong anti-institutional character. For more than three centuries they defied the popes and various crusades that were organised against them.'⁸¹ He also proclaimed that the Bogomil influence was still being felt in Yugoslavia. He stated:

If we look at the social psychology of the peasantry of Herzegovina, Bosnia and Montenegro, if we study their folk philosophy, their folk poetry, which remained alive up to the 20th century, because of the tribal forms of life here were preserved, as if in a deep freeze, from medieval times up to modern times we can see a certain restlessness, a kind of permanent revolt. The Yugoslav writer Ivo Andrić described it as the *nemiri od vijeka*, disturbances through the centuries. No doubt that the material

⁸⁰ Dedijer, 'Essays on Socialist Humanism', (1968), (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁸¹ V. Dedijer, and J.P. Sartre, 'Heresy, Ancient and Modern', in K. Coates, *Essays on Socialist Humanism*, (London, 1972), p. 147

conditions of the peasantry in this area kept this idea of permanent rebellion very much alive.⁸²

Were Dedijer's assertions that the character of the rebellious Balkan movements could only be understood in the light of Bogomilism correct? There are no primary historical sources that prove a direct link between the Bogomils and heresies of later times. However, by harking back to the epic and lyric poetry of Herzegovinian folklore, he could present himself as an heir to the movement. As he poignantly stated at the end of the talk with Sartre, 'this land of heresy, is not only in the time of the Bogomils.'⁸³

While the Bogomil movement was less prevalent in Montenegro, Djilas too was drawn to the Bogomils' dualistic image of the world. After all he saw one of his newly adopted heroes, Njegoš, as a Bogomil in spirit. In his hagiographical biography he observed: 'there is no question that the problem of evil is of the utmost importance for Njegoš's work as a whole.'⁸⁴

Although an atheist, Djilas held a profoundly religious and moralistic view of the world and life. Throughout his autobiographical works he was well aware of man's 'unperfectability', and was preoccupied with the problem of good and evil.⁸⁵ In an interview with Mark Thompson he proclaimed: 'the Balkans are full of evil, of conflict and passion and irrationality. Perhaps Montenegrin folklore expresses it most fully; there is a proverb, "better their evil than my good." This means, hatred to the point of self-destruction. It is the weakness of the Balkans.'⁸⁶ His biographer Stephen Clissold offers the brilliant perception that Djilas saw the world as a

⁸² *ibid*, p.148

⁸³ *ibid*, p. 152

⁸⁴ Djilas, *Njegoš*, p. 263

⁸⁵ Djilas, *Land Without Justice*, p. 39

⁸⁶ M. Thompson, *A Paper House*, (London, 1992), p. 231

Manichean struggle in which the Devil rather than God appeared to be gaining the upper hand.⁸⁷ Moreover, the Bogomils believed that the Devil had dominion over all material objects; only a small elite, the '*Perfecti*' or 'Perfects', denied him allegiance by embracing a life of extreme austerity and abstinence - a hyper-puritanism. Djilas was drawn to these 'Perfects'. As a self-proclaimed idealistic revolutionary, Djilas saw the opportunity to present himself as their heir.

These dualistic beliefs help explain why during his time in prison in 1962, Djilas undertook the task of translating John Milton's *Paradise Lost* into Serbo-Croatian. The epic poem is often associated with the Bogomil characteristic of glorifying Satan over God. In later life in a conversation with his friend, Cyrus Sulzberger, Djilas revealed he chose to translate Milton's great work because paradise clearly symbolises 'freedom', and because the English poet had exhibited the typically Montenegrin trait of 'heroic martyrdom.'⁸⁸ It appears Djilas saw parallels between himself and Milton. Milton changed his religion from Catholicism to Anglicanism before joining the Presbyterian sect. Djilas shifted between orthodox Marxism, Stalinism, Titoism and reform Marxism, before ending up condemning all 'isms' and ideologies.

Therefore, not only have Djilas and Dedijer been mythologised by certain individuals as two great men fighting injustice, they also made up their own myths, often transforming existing ones to justify and promote their causes. This was the case with their utilisation of the myths of the Bogomil heresy. After all, recent scholarship has contended that no trace of Bogomilism can be found amongst the medieval Bosnian Christians. John Fine has argued that there is no evidence of an organised dualist sect that was connected to the Bosnian church - it retained its basic

⁸⁷ S. Clissold, *Djilas: Progress of a Revolutionary*, (Basingstoke, 1983), p. 290

⁸⁸ Sulzberger, *Paradise Regained*, p. 2

Catholic theology throughout the Middle Ages.⁸⁹ Referring to the orthodox theological character of Bosnian Christian writings, Noel Malcolm posits that Bogomilism was a myth that emerged out of the relative isolation of the Bosnian church.⁹⁰ Moreover, Dubravko Lovrenović has argued that this isolation would have kept the church relatively ignorant of the religious tensions in Christianity.⁹¹ No doubt some dualist-influenced heretics existed, but there appears to be no evidence to suggest that a Bogomil movement took over the Bosnian Church.

The legend of Bogomilism suggests that the dualist heretics, who were persistently persecuted by both the Christian Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, converted to Islam with the Ottoman occupation. Therefore the myth of Bogomilism was utilised by the twentieth-century Bosnian Muslims to give them an historical ethnographical claim on Bosnia. It also justified the conversion to Islam as a final act of defiance, rather than a sign of weakness and betrayal.⁹² This mythologising of Bogomilism was no different to that employed by Djilas and Dedijer. Although, both men used it for another purpose, namely to give historical substance to their own rebellion.

Conclusions

If Djilas's and Dedijer's autobiographies are read as fact, it would seem that their clash with communism was inevitable. They maintained that communism was a rationalisation of their native rebelliousness, reinforced by the Dinaric traditions of

⁸⁹ J.V.A. Fine, *The Bosnian Church*, (London, 2007), p. 22, J.V.A. Fine, 'The Medieval and Ottoman Roots of Modern Bosnian Society', in M. Pinson, *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina*, (Cambridge, 1996), p. 6

⁹⁰ N. Malcolm, *Bosnia*, (London, 1996) p. 14

⁹¹ D. Lovrenović, *Bosanska kvadratura kruga*, (Sarajevo, 2012), p. 233

⁹² Malcolm, *Bosnia*, p. 29

revenge and violence. Thus the argument of these two brilliant propagandists was that by their very nature they were bound, sooner or later, to revolt against the communist system. It was inevitable that the Montenegrin peasant boy and the descendant of Herzegovinian rebels would join Tito's Partisans. It was also inevitable that the heirs to the large masculine characters of Babić and Njegoš would back Tito in fighting off Russian claims of dominance, and then split with Tito on that very issue of freedom. Coming from the Dinaric Mountains they were purportedly bound to rebel against repression. They were as much fated to rise against Titoism, with its corruption and constraints, as each had been fated to rise against foreign domination, whether from Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia. According to their own narrative, the logic of their lives was that they were born with liberty in their blood, and it was their duty to their heroic ancestors to follow these ideas of freedom to their logical end, no matter how difficult.⁹³

However, this form of rationalisation was specious. While their heritage held some influence in their stand against the communist party, prior to 1954 neither man regularly interacted with it. Rather, following the shock of their removal from power, they looked back to the past in order to justify and explain the present. While their heritage gave them a strength of purpose, a sense of justice and asceticism, it held only minor significance in their rebellion against the party. Although they were hailed by their colleagues when in power (Blažo Jovanović once ended a speech with the encomium: 'Djilas is the greatest Montenegrin of all time; greater than Njegoš himself')⁹⁴ in 1954 Montenegrins and Herzegovinians did not support their rebellion but joined the attacks against them. In this respect Djilas and Dedijer were not typical Montenegrins and Herzegovinians, but exceptions. There were no public

⁹³ *ibid*, p. 143

⁹⁴ J. Brković, 'Tajna pisaćeg stola', *Vijesti*, 1st January 2010, p. 5

protests in their ‘homelands’. On the contrary, in Montenegro and Herzegovina there was a traditional proclivity for the most doctrinal hard line form of communism. For instance, when in the mid-1960s liberal reformist movements (of which Djilas and Dedijer were forerunners) began to attract supporters in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia; Montenegrins and those hailing from Bosnia-Herzegovina showed a noticeable lack of enthusiasm.⁹⁵

Explaining a person in terms of supposed ethnic traits is a perilous undertaking. After all, both men were in many ways far removed from the Dinaric stereotype; they seemed much closer to the cultured, sophisticated and urbane Western intellectual than to their ancestors. Yet their Dinaric heritage was a vital element of their makeup, detectible in their passion for writing, their love of language, their enthusiasm for story-telling, and their preoccupation with their own integrity.

In this respect, heritage and background amplified other important factors in their lives. Given their roles in Agitprop after the war, and their chief role in concocting the Yugoslav narrative of history, they were in essence giving literary form to the vicissitudes in their lives. This gave them a unique opportunity to examine its significance and progression - their development from the Marxism of their youth, through the revulsion and comradeship of war, to the intoxication of victory and subsequent power, and the sour aftertaste of disillusionment and disgrace.

The great lure of communism lay in its completeness. It offered a single formula to those young individuals who wanted answers to some of the most troubling questions of their time. As Djilas stated, ‘communism was the most rational and most intoxicating, all-embracing ideology for me and for those in my divided and desperate land who so desired to leap over centuries of slavery and backwardness

⁹⁵ E. Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, (London, 2007), p. 418

and to bypass reality itself.⁹⁶ For both men communism constituted a complete messianic worldview. Human suffering was the result of injustice that socialism would eradicate. It was this clarity of vision, together with their real literary ability, that qualified them as the party's principal propagandists. Nevertheless, this rigid worldview also made it very delicate. When one experience called into question a single aspect of this vision, the whole structure began to disintegrate.

If a Marxist-Leninist splits with their comrades, they not only lose power and privilege, but also their identity. For two men who had identified entirely with a movement that wanted to transform the world, a movement that necessitated total commitment and loyalty, a great void arose after the split. The psychological pressure to find a surrogate movement led them back to their regions. After all, many other former communists fell back on their regional identity as a substitute for Marxist-Leninism. Ultimately the use of nationalist language to express a vast range of anxieties is routine, even in areas where this language is less ingrained than it is in the Balkans. As Djilas acknowledged when Yugoslavia started to break up, 'I am strongly for Yugoslavia ... But I do not consider myself to be nationally a Yugoslav. I am a Serb from Montenegro.'⁹⁷ Meanwhile Dedijer described himself as 'a Serb – a Serb of Yugoslav tendency.'⁹⁸ However, it is important to note that Djilas and Dedijer were unlike many other former communists who turned towards nationalism. They turned towards their regions simply for a new form of identity and to explain and justify their own rebellion. Unlike their successors in the 1990s, they did not turn into Greater Serb nationalists. As Djilas would say: 'patriotism is relentless

⁹⁶ Djilas, *Unperfect Society*, p. 41

⁹⁷ M. Djilas and G. Urban, 'The End of the Bolshevik Utopia', *The World Today*, October 1991, p. 177

⁹⁸ C.C. O'Brien, 'Pot Shots from a Serbian Bazooka', *The Observer*, 28th September 1980, p. 11

against the patriot.’⁹⁹ Theirs was a more benign patriotism and a romantic identification.

⁹⁹ Jovanovich, *The Temper of the West*, p. 6

Chapter 2: Power and Propaganda

Active in the fields of ideology, agitation and propaganda, education, culture and foreign policy, Djilas and Dedijer were crucial figures in the period following the Second World War in Yugoslavia. After playing key roles in the revolutionary pursuit of power they came to the forefront of the 'defence of the revolution' and the construction of the new state at the war's end. By talent and general education both men were above the majority of the Yugoslav political leadership. They remained thoroughly in Tito's shadow, but their role in the Yugoslav post-war project was as important as the Marshal's. Tito was the undoubted leader of the party, yet he came to rely on Dedijer for his propaganda, and on Djilas for the ideological and theoretical endorsement of his regime. Therefore their importance exceeded their titular roles. Djilas's position in the government was the seemingly low-key one of Minister without Portfolio. In reality, he was the most important individual for anything connected with culture and propaganda. Along with his deputy, Dedijer, he issued daily directives to the Yugoslav press through the communist party propaganda centre called Agitprop (agitation and propaganda).

The term 'agitprop' emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1920s when a Central Committee department was formed to 'educate' the populace and mobilise public support. In many respects Yugoslav agitation and propaganda was similar to that of other communist states. The party sought to transform its citizens' values and morals by holding a complete monopoly of written, visual and oral communication. Through the powerful machinery of Agitprop both men enforced absolute uniformity across the country. They were responsible for the incessant drone of propaganda, for the numerous rallies and Agitprop campaigns aimed at keeping Yugoslavs in a

rapture of enthusiasm. They regularly wrote articles for the party paper *Borba* and converted it from a dull imitation of *Pravda* to a readable myth-making machine. According to official figures, some 700,000 copies were printed daily.¹



Power and Propaganda – Dedijer (sitting) and his brother Stevan in the *Borba* offices at the end of the war²

Both Djilas and Dedijer had been well known leftist writers in the interwar period. Dedijer's *Politika* articles concerning the Spanish Civil War stirred the imagination of many Yugoslavs while Djilas published numerous articles in left-wing journals such as *Venac* and *Misao*. They were in the vanguard of a wave of writers who came to prominence just before the war and carried their revolutionary fervour over to their writing after the conflict. They partly replaced the older generations of writers and the well-known pre-war surrealists, such as Miroslav Krleža and Oskar Davičo. As Djilas ironically proclaimed to Krleža, 'leave politics to us politicians, while we leave aesthetics to you writers. It is obvious which of these is more important.'³ There was an element of egotism and hubris about both

¹ J. Korbel, *Tito's Communism*, (Denver, 1951), p. 127

² S. Dedijer, *My Life of Curiosity and Insights*, (Lund, 2009), p. 153

³ M. Djilas, *Razmišljanja o raznim pitanjima*, (Belgrade, 1951), p. 46

men at the time. As young leftist writers they were driven by a compulsion to seek social justice. Yet, they also interpreted their struggle in terms of an historical drama in which they were set to play a vital part.

Few people made such a rapid rise within the illegal Yugoslav Communist Party as Djilas. Soon after joining the party in 1932 he became secretary of the party cell based at Belgrade University. A year later he was arrested and sentenced to three years imprisonment. In 1938 Tito brought him into the Central Committee, and two years later at the party conference in Zagreb he was promoted to the Politburo. He thus joined Tito, Kardelj and Ranković in the four-man leadership of the party. In addition, he quickly became the most skilful ideologist of the group. Tito rarely concerned himself with theory and knew relatively little about it; Kardelj often lacked the assertiveness needed to push through his ideas when confronting Tito; and Ranković, the least educated among the four, saw dogma only as a practical organisational tool. Djilas was the most passionate and articulate.

Dedijer meanwhile had been exhibiting sympathy for the communist cause while working as a journalist at *Politika* and studying law at Belgrade University under King Aleksandar's dictatorship. Through their links at university Dedijer began to associate with Djilas and, as a non-party supporter who was not being observed by the police, from 1936 he often hid leading communists, including Tito. It was also during this time that his home became the illegal seat of the Yugoslav Politburo members. He would finally join the party on the outbreak of the war.

Heading Agitprop and Building Socialism

During the war both men suffered enormous personal misfortunes as friends and family members perished. They were sustained by their idealism and vision of a communist Yugoslavia. In July 1945, when the Central Committee established the Department for Agitation and Propaganda, it came as no surprise that Tito placed these two brilliant writers at the top of the central department, Djilas at its head and Dedijer as his deputy. With the old power structures destroyed, new authorities were established at all levels. As Dedijer noted, ‘in this action Milovan Djilas excelled.’⁴ He enthusiastically took on the role of regime propagandist and cultural arbiter. With the liberation of the country, Agitprop’s task was not only to dismantle the control, real or imagined, of enemies to the new regime, but to build a new socialist cultural climate.

As Tito’s chief co-ordinators of agitation and propaganda, they not only formulated and articulated Yugoslavia’s ‘socialist realism’ policies following the war (during the party’s Stalinist phase), but with even more fervour devoted themselves to ‘liberalising’ the regime after its expulsion from the Cominform in 1948. Their roles were crucial given that throughout its existence the Yugoslav Communist Party faced a constant tension – to achieve its ideological promise to create a more just, healthier, egalitarian society, and to hold power long enough to realise that promise. In this respect they needed to justify, both to themselves and to the broader public, the continued hegemony of the communist regime. Propaganda was vital in this.

⁴ Dedijer, ‘Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*’, 10th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

Agitprop itself was a main department within the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party whose aims, as Djilas clarified in September 1945, were ‘to place, directly or indirectly, all political, cultural, educational, and scientific life in the hands of the party; to correctly convey the population’s aspirations for culture; and to prevent all efforts by enemy elements to direct cultural life toward their interests.’⁵ A year later Djilas elucidated further, ‘without a strong state apparatus working to mobilise the masses, we would not be able to realise the tasks standing before us.’⁶ In order to achieve those aims, the department sent directives to party, state and mass organisations; held regular meetings with leaders of all necessary institutions; and placed party members in leading positions in the media and education services.⁷ While Agitprop did not transform every Yugoslav into a self-sacrificing loyalist working solely for a new society, its activities enabled the communist party to prevent the dissemination of alternative view-points and helped ensure outward public acceptance of certain communist ideals.

This was also a period of great social change in Belgrade. Montenegrins and Herzegovinians moved into the capital and had a significant impact on a number of cultural fields. In the field of ideology they dominated, as exemplified by Djilas and Dedijer, as well as Radovan Zogović, Stefan Mitrović and Veljko Vlahović. They imposed their will and exhibited a fierce and confrontational pride in the revolution. For example, in 1946 the Yugoslav communists brought down two US transport planes flying over Yugoslav territory. During this episode Dedijer was with Kardelj attending the Paris Peace Conference where they met the Soviet delegation led by

⁵ M. Djilas, ‘Svim CK-ima I PK-ima o reorganizaciji agitacije i propaganda’, Centralni komitet Komunističke partije Hrvatske, 6th September 1945, *Hrvatski Državni Arhiv*, (HDA) HR-HDA CK SKH-1220

⁶ M. Djilas, ‘Izopacivanje karaktera narodne vlasti’, *Komunist*, October 1946, in *Članci*, p. 295

⁷ M. Djilas, ‘O agitaciono-propagandnim radu KPJ’, (1945), *Arhiv Jugoslavije*, (AJ), ACK SKJ 507, 12-a-35.

Molotov. He castigated the Yugoslavs, shouting ‘Don’t you know the Americans have the A-bomb?’ To which Dedijer replied, ‘we don’t care about their atom bomb, because we have our Partisan bomb!’⁸

A strong current of revolutionary radicalism and ‘partizanstvo’ – a kind of spontaneous, on the spot activism associated with the Partisan struggle – ran through much of the party’s immediate post-war activity. After all, not only were most of the leaders of the new regime very young, but they had also just defeated both foreign and domestic opponents largely by their own efforts. This triumphalism, combined with feelings of optimism, created an inclination toward radicalism that coloured the party’s rhetoric, bestowing it with a spirit of energy and enthusiasm, but also a degree of violence and primitivism. Certainly, there was a genuine willingness and readiness to make any number of sacrifices for the construction of the new society.

As Dedijer recalled, Djilas’s propaganda team was strictly organised and was often the bearer of useful and creative conceptual policy initiatives. As the leading member of this team, Dedijer stated, ‘we loved him because of his wild sincerity and openness, because he spoke his mind and every thought that came into his head. However, this made him extremely volatile and therefore you didn’t know what he would think tomorrow. I tempered this volatility, encouraging his great ambitions but tried to limit his heaving from one extreme to another. This often caused disputes between us but ultimately we made a good team.’⁹

As well as Djilas and Dedijer, Agitprop was also headed by Radovan Zogović and Stefan Mitrović. As the surrealist Aleksandar Vučo recalled, it was Djilas, along with his ‘courtiers’ Dedijer, Zogović and Mitrović who really dominated society.

However, with the break with the Soviet Union in 1948, Agitprop was put in

⁸ Dedijer, ‘Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*’, 12th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁹ V. Dedijer, ‘How I slaughtered others, and how I was slaughtered in the end 1954-60’ – Unpublished diary, 6th June 1959, *ibid*, box 7

considerable difficulty. Zogović and Mitrović were typical of many communist intellectuals in the Central Agitprop department who were caught in a dilemma: whether to declare for their country and the irrefutable fact that Stalin was not the benevolent father of the revolution, or stick to fixed ideological assumptions. In response Djilas escalated a campaign against the Soviet Union. It had a twofold effect; those who believed in his cause grew hostile, while those who supported Stalin grew frightened and harassed. In retribution, Zogović wrote an article in *Borba* (without Djilas's permission) praising the Soviet Union, while Mitrović did the same in a speech at the Fifth Party Congress. The squabbles in Agitprop escalated, with Djilas and Dedijer on one side, and Zogović and Mitrović on the other. As Djilas explained, 'differences of opinion with Zogović and Mitrović arose daily, and personal relations soon became intolerable. Everyone in Agitprop shunned them and some, like Dedijer, blew up at every opportunity.'¹⁰ Feeling threatened over his own position, Djilas turned to his friends and allies Kardelj and Ranković. At Kardelj's villa the three men convened and created their own informal court to try Zogović and Mitrović, which resulted in their expulsion from the party. Djilas's and Dedijer's control over Agitprop was assured.

Yet their complete control over the powerful organisation was not caused by some selfish desire for power. Rather it evolved naturally given the early problems the department faced. Given the all-encompassing nature of the institution with its copious opportunities to influence the population, it might have been assumed that the party's efforts of persuasion would achieve spectacular results. In reality party leaders were often frustrated with their attempts at societal and cultural transformation. Despite their confirmed position in power, the party was struggling

¹⁰ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 196

to achieve their short-term political agenda, let alone their long-term transformative one.



Djilas and Dedijer with Kardelj at the height of their power¹¹

In the aftermath of war, the party faced immediate political and economic difficulties. It became apparent that the use of force and economic incentives to coerce the populace was not sustainable. Thus the party realised that only through persuasion, or in communist terms ‘agitation and propaganda’, would it be able secure any real measure of public acceptance. This does not mean that the party leaders were unwilling to use force, but that they ultimately believed that communism could only be built with the voluntary cooperation and participation of the majority of Yugoslavs. Moreover, there was the challenge of educating new party members. In 1939 there were only 3,000 communists on party rolls and during the course of the war the majority of these members had perished.¹² Yet by 1948

¹¹ M. Milošević, ‘Jedini Titov dissident’, *Vreme*, 9th June 2011, p. 5

¹² C.A. Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power*, (London, 1963), p. 165, D. Bilandžić, *Historija Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije: Glavni procesi, 1918-1985*, (Zagreb, 1985), p. 101

membership had reached 468,000.¹³ This meant that the great majority of the party were new and lacked a solid understanding of communist ideology. As Djilas noted in 1946, ‘a number of new people entered the party, who brought with themselves a number of beliefs foreign to the party, a mass of illusions and prejudices.’¹⁴ In fact the vast majority had come from the villages and not only were they uneducated in Marxist-Leninism, they were often illiterate.

The relative inexperience and poor educational background of most party members was manifested within the party’s Agitprop organisation. The leaders of the central Agitprop department were highly educated and regularly doubled up as leading party members. However, at the lower local levels this was not the case. While the leading Agitprop members sought to fill the local departments of their organisation with ‘individuals who are accomplished writers and good orators, who are ready-made Marxists and agitators,’ they lamented, ‘these people do not exist, or if they do they are few in number.’¹⁵ As Djilas recalled, ‘the sum total of well-educated, seasoned communists being rather small, the few reliable and competent cadres took control of the majority of tasks.’¹⁶

Dediđer had originally intended that the Yugoslav media, while carefully sticking to the party line, would be permitted autonomy in its decision making. In fact he argued that this would differentiate the Yugoslav press from its Soviet counterpart, they would be allowed ‘more initiative’, with the central Agitprop department taking a more relaxed approach in regard to censorship.¹⁷ After all, the Yugoslav communists came to power by a popular revolution (unlike their Eastern Bloc

¹³ P. Morača and S. Stojanović, *Povijest Saveza komunista Jugoslavije*, (Belgrade, 1985), p. 322

¹⁴ M. Djilas, *O današnjim zadacima partije*, (Zagreb, 1946), p. 20

¹⁵ ‘Referat o ideološkom odgoju komunista’, Centralni komitet Komunističke partije Hrvatske, 8th December 1946, (HDA) HR-HDA CK SKH-1220

¹⁶ C. S. Lilly, *Power and Persuasion*, (Boulder, 2001), p. 68

¹⁷ ‘Zapisnik sa savjetovanja iz Komiteta za kinematografiju’, 2nd March 1948, (AJ), II/4-d-9.

neighbours who emerged because of Soviet geo-political concerns). This suggested that the Yugoslav government was more stable and therefore less reliant on the old communist techniques of agitation and propaganda. However, popular support did not translate into political capital. Rather the Yugoslav communists were burdened by the fact that they were facing an already mobilised public with heightened expectations for the future.

Dedijer quickly realised that initiative from below was inherently dangerous because of the inadequate political and ideological education of the masses. In response agitation and propaganda became highly centralised. Djilas and Dedijer, two highly educated and gifted intellectuals, who were loyal party members and brilliantly articulate, were expected to lead and influence the inexperienced cadres. In this respect both men were not only tasked with formulating propaganda and party lines but were instrumental in disseminating them as well. They had to work tirelessly, as Dedijer noted: ‘besides my own writing, which I do at night, I have two jobs – one in the Government Information Office, another in the propaganda division of the Central Committee. Each takes five to eight hours; so I work, like nearly everybody else, fourteen to eighteen hours a day.’¹⁸

In 1946 Djilas founded numerous Agitprop branches to deal with every aspect of civil society. These departments existed on the federal, republic and municipal levels, in a highly centralised system which made them all accountable to him. The decision-making process at the top of Agitprop took place in a very informal manner, often via personal conversations. The common practise was for Djilas or Dedijer to dictate their orders to other Agitprop departments through a telephone call. In addition, Djilas regularly sent out directives to all these departments on what to

¹⁸ L. Adamić, *The Eagle and the Roots*, (New York, 1952), p. 61

write, what to censor and who to denounce. One directive from Djilas to the Agitprop department of the Croatian Communist Party is indicative. Djilas ordered that realist writers should be championed and published as frequently as possible, that no publications founded under the Ustasha regime were to continue, and that any ‘decadent’, ‘pessimistic’ or ‘semi-pornographic’ material should be banned.¹⁹ Unlike the broad and vaguely written laws, Djilas had immense power to instruct what was and what was not acceptable.²⁰

Djilas and Dedijer also dictated their Agitprop orders through the party’s main authoritative organ, *Borba*. According to Djilas, every Agitprop department was to diligently study and refashion his articles, making them accessible to the populace. Meanwhile, each Agitprop department’s section for censorship and the press was instructed to monitor his own articles to guarantee that ‘the local press properly understands and applies the directives of the central press.’²¹ Ultimately, all media was expected to take all measures necessary to realise the pronouncements made by Djilas and Dedijer in the press. This is exemplified in an anecdote provided by Marko Lopušina. According to Lopušina, Djilas effectively ended the play *Knez od Zete* by printing an anonymous attack of it in *Borba*. While the writer was unidentified, the directors of the Zagreb theatre knew that anyone writing in *Borba* was sufficiently authoritative. The next day the play had been withdrawn from the theatre’s repertoire.²² In addition Dedijer recalled an incident when the modernist painter, Vojo Dimitrijević, upon learning that Djilas planned to attend his first post-war exhibit, quickly penned appropriate titles for all of his clearly modernist

¹⁹ ‘Letter from Milovan Djilas to Agitprop,’ Centralni komitet Komunističke partije Hrvatske, Agitprop, 17th January 1947, (HDA) HR-HDA CK SKH-1220

²⁰ L. Dimić, *Agitprop Kultura*, (Belgrade, 1988), p. 191

²¹ Milovan Djilas, ‘Svim CK-ima i PK-ima o reorganizaciji agitacije i propaganda’, (HDA) HR-HDA CK SKH-1220

²² M. Lopušina, *Crna Knjiga: Cenzura u Jugoslaviji, 1945-91*, (Belgrade, 1994), p. 224

paintings, including, for example, ‘Dream of a Wounded Partisan at the Battle of Sutjeska.’²³ The Agitprop chief also strictly controlled who was permitted to be a journalist. For example he insisted that ‘all journalists must be party cadres. If a journalist is not a party member he cannot comprehend the difficulties we are facing or write about them either.’²⁴ At the Fifth Party Congress in 1948 Djilas reported on Agitprop’s work. He boasted, ‘In our country we have liquidated private publishing. Among the 248 newspapers that are published, there is only a small number, religious and otherwise, that are not under direct party control ... we are leading the fight for a healthy ideological Marxist-Leninist basis of all culture and art.’²⁵

It was in these years after the war that a cult of personality began to grow around Djilas. Recalling this development, a Montenegrin who worked in Agitprop noted: ‘One could think freely, talk freely and write freely – as long as one agreed with Djilas.’²⁶ In his articles Djilas regularly attacked the ‘press magnates’ of the Western newspapers.²⁷ Yet, no individual in the West held the same amount of media influence as he did. However, it should be remembered that agitation and propaganda were terms that did not carry the same pejorative connotation among the Yugoslav communists that they did among Western observers. Instead they were seen to be a legitimate and natural part of politics.

Initial Interpretations of the War

Immediately after the war, numerous high-ranking Partisans published their personal memoirs. These became vital sources of propaganda and set the established

²³ V. Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, Vol. 3, (Belgrade, 1984), p. 146

²⁴ ‘Zaključci sa savjetovanja po pitanu lista rad’, 12th November 1948, (AJ), II/4-d-14

²⁵ *V kongres Komunističke partije Jugoslavije. Izveštaji i referati*, (Belgrade, 1948), p. 280

²⁶ Djilas, *Parts of a Lifetime*, p. 7

²⁷ Korbelt, *Tito’s Communism*, p. 131

narrative of the war. Djilas started this process with his *Članci 1941-1946*, but the most influential diary was without doubt the three bulky volumes by Vladimir Dedijer; it was a bestseller and was reprinted numerous times throughout the communist period. During the war, Dedijer, who was a journalist by profession, recorded every development within the Partisan movement. Through his eyes, he conveyed every aspect of Partisan warfare; the cold, hunger and exhaustion. The contrasts were clearly defined, the astonishing acts of bravery confined to the Partisans, and the sickening cruelty of the foreign occupiers and their deceitful and cowardly quislings. Dedijer did not hide the brutality of the war, but the focus never left the heroism, victories and comradeship of the Partisans. His passages from the diary held an almost epic quality. For instance the dialogue between the mother of a dead Partisan and his comrades:

‘So my Milutin has fallen?’

‘He has fallen heroically, not a tear.’

‘Did you recover his body?’

‘The comrades could not.’

‘Did you save his rifle?’

‘We did.’

‘May his death bring fortune to the cause for which you fight’²⁸

Djilas even went as far in his memoirs to portray these sacrifices in a quasi-religious light. He bizarrely noted that God was on their side and that he himself had seen a vision of Jesus Christ who was a proto-communist.²⁹ It was a struggle for moral and almost divine sanction in which the Partisans were reassured that their

²⁸ Dedijer, *War Diaries*, Vol 1, p. 190

²⁹ M. Djilas, *Wartime*, (New York, 1977), p. 284

cause was honourable and just. Djilas stated that he found himself ‘in some safe and glowing warmth’ and the apparition inspired a feeling of ‘calm and courage.’³⁰ In a later interview he explained, ‘the day’s events were gruelling. Many of my comrades around me lost their lives. The horror of all this revealed a hidden strain of religious feeling in me.’³¹ In both of their accounts, the Partisans were represented as mythical warriors. In this respect they mimicked the Balkan epics they had read in their youth. Dedijer’s description of the death of his first wife Olga, and Djilas’s of his close friend Ivo Lola Ribar, were not dissimilar to the stories of heavenly Serbia, in which an honourable death on the battlefield is only temporary.

Following the break with Stalin in 1948, Dedijer wrote his second major book, *Josip Broz Tito: Prilozi za biografiju* (Josip Broz Tito: Contributions Towards a Biography) or *Tito Speaks* in the English language edition. This surpassed even his *War Diaries* in popularity and sales. The book largely represented a typical communist hagiography, personified by a messianic saviour myth based around Tito and his Partisans. Naturally, certain unfavourable aspects of Tito’s life and the Yugoslav struggle were censored from the book. Djilas informed Dedijer that he must delete his passages about Tito’s failure as a commander in the first German offensive in November 1941. Dedijer recounted: ‘Djilas became very nervous and advised me not to write this, “otherwise your book will never appear and you might have a lot of other troubles.” I followed his advice and he gave me a list of further issues in Tito’s life about which I should not write.’³² The mythologising of Tito and his Partisans was such an important legitimising factor for the new regime that anything that even slightly challenged their complete righteousness was strictly prohibited.

³⁰ *ibid*, p. 285

³¹ Urban, ‘A Conversation with Milovan Djilas’, *Encounter*, p. 33

³² Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 199

Leading the Fight Against Stalin and the Soviet Union

In 1953 Dedijer was appointed professor for a new subject at Belgrade University: 'History of the People's Revolution'. In the history lecture room a large sign hung on the wall. It read, 'it is the duty of our historians to assist the struggle of the party for a true illumination of the national past. The historian must assist the party in its fight for a new life.'³³ The message was signed by Djilas and was accompanied by his scowling photograph.³⁴ Therefore history was an important part of Djilas's and Dedijer's propaganda. After all, following the break with the Soviet Union and the fact that the imitation of Soviet forms of agitation and propaganda had been largely inadequate, Yugoslavia began an independent path of indoctrination. It now focused on education based around the history of the Yugoslav communists and the Partisan movement. Yugoslavia's leading propagandists believed that by learning the historical and dialectical foundations of the regime, the Yugoslav populace would end up accepting that communist ethics and social norms were desirable, needed, and ultimately inevitable. In this respect Djilas believed that the party still needed to lead the state, but now he stressed that it must also strive to raise the consciousness of the people so that in time they could take control over the country.³⁵

Two years later, in 1952, Djilas developed this further in a series of talks throughout the country, elaborating upon the party's new role, goals, and theoretical perspective. In one of these talks in Priština, Djilas charted his view of the stages through which the communist party was passing in transitioning to socialism. In the

³³ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 11th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 179

³⁴ 'A Red University', *The Manchester Guardian*, 21st June 1955, p. 6

³⁵ M. Djilas, 'Naša dosadašnja iskustva u borbi za socijalizam - Savremene teme', *Borba*, 6th May 1950, p. 41

first stage he elucidated that the party had organised and led the revolution, while in the second, it had concentrated on ‘the construction of state power and the liquidation of capitalist elements.’³⁶ Only now, he argued, had the party moved on to the third stage. In his analysis, during the first two stages the party’s chief role had been organisational – it had planned and directed the class struggle – while its educational purpose had been largely forgotten. Now, in the third phase of the evolution, with all effective enemies gone, the party could concentrate fully on educating and raising the socialist consciousness of the masses.³⁷

As a part of this process Agitprop’s direct political control weakened. The party now urged the press to be more autonomous and vigorous in their critiques of lower level party officials. For example, in 1951, Djilas admonished journalists for waiting to be given the political line instead of immediately heading out to discuss the events. He reasoned; ‘they need to be where the line is being created.’³⁸ A few months later he went further, insisting that now the most important job for journalists and editors was to criticise and ‘spark discussions.’³⁹

Even before the final break with the Soviet Union, the two leaders of Agitprop were having reservations about the Stalinist control over society, propaganda and history. In an October 1947 report, Dedijer voiced his concerns about the uniformity of the media and the worrying tendency to close down publications instead of promoting a broader platform. A few months earlier in May, Djilas had endeavoured to reduce the involvement of the Agitprop departments in the everyday decision making process. Building on Djilas’s initiative, Dedijer argued that there should be more independent political entities, responding to different events by using their own

³⁶ M. Djilas. ‘O Partiji’, 6th June 1952, (AJ), IV-a-22.

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ ‘Zapisnik sa sastanka odrzanog kod druga djilasa, 1951’, (AJ), II/4-c4

³⁹ ‘Stenografske beleške sa sastanka diskusija Djilasa o odnosu izmedju stampe i državnih organa’, (AJ), II/4-c4

initiative.⁴⁰ Djilas envisioned the Yugoslav communists' control over society developing very differently to their neighbours:

Personally, I am of the opinion that a period is forthcoming when the individual socialist states will develop independently but closely linked together. They will form a bouquet of socialist flowers bound by common ideals but of different scents because of their different tradition, culture, economic standards, and ways and means of solving their political and economic problems. Lenin's theory dealt with the question of how to materialise socialism by different approaches, but as in his time there was no other communist state besides the Soviet Union, he did not envisage the problem of what the relations should be among countries which have established communism already. This is a new idea which I am studying now.⁴¹

Three months after Djilas had spoken about the bouquet of socialist flowers, the Yugoslav flower was discarded as a treacherous weed. Yet, Djilas continued to reiterate this position following the break at the Fifth Party Congress in July 1948, when he insisted that Agitprop departments should not try to exert their authority over everything.⁴²

The Yugoslavs' misreading of Stalin's behaviour can be traced to the near veneration of Soviet Communism by the Partisan leaders during the war, despite the Soviets' belated and insufficient help. The disparity between the Soviet's words and deeds failed to have much impact on the Yugoslav leadership. Myths, among ideologues, are not shattered easily, especially when they are formed during years of underground resistance and conflict. Djilas for instance had written in 1942 in

⁴⁰ V. Dedijer, 'kratka analiza naše stampe', 1st October 1947, (AJ), VI/1-b-24

⁴¹ Korbelt, *Tito's Communism*, p. 337

⁴² Lilly, *Power and Persuasion*, p. 147

conventional Agitprop tone: ‘Is there a higher honour and greater happiness than having the feeling that Stalin is your nearest and dearest comrade? Is there greater happiness and honour for our people than to be complimented by Stalin, the builder of humanity’s better fate in this most fateful hour for the whole of humanity?’⁴³

Only when, after the war, Stalin deliberately attempted to denigrate the Yugoslav wartime record did Tito and his comrades begin to have some very bitter second thoughts. It took Djilas and Dedijer several trips to Moscow before they became aware of Soviet realpolitik in the Balkans. The young Yugoslavs, accustomed to the puritanical habits of the Partisans, were dispirited when they witnessed the scenes of drunkenness and gluttony that took place at Stalin’s feasts. The pervasive sycophancy and distrust that prevailed in the dictator’s entourage was in marked contrast to the fraternal feelings and idealistic exhilaration of Tito’s headquarters. It shook their assumption that the interests of their nation, their party and themselves were identical with those of the revolutionary movement headed by Moscow. The bottom had been knocked out of their Marxist world and it would need a complete re-evaluation.

This re-evaluation did not merely mean a superficial critique of the Soviet Union, but a clear and complete alternative to the Stalinist system which provided the foundation for their own state. For the majority of party members - often limited in their intellectual abilities – this was an exercise beyond their capability. Thus the task fell to Djilas to be in the vanguard of these re-evaluations. As he once remarked, ‘I was responsible for twisting the brains and Ranković for twisting the arms of wavering party members.’⁴⁴ He made two points. Firstly, that any international dispute is the result of inconsistencies within society. Therefore the Soviet-Yugoslav

⁴³ M. Djilas, ‘Susret sa Stalinom’, in *Članci*, p. 186

⁴⁴ Doder, *The Yugoslavs*, p. 98

conflict confirmed there was something erroneous within the Soviet social system. Secondly, and vitally important given his first point, the Yugoslav social system was fundamentally different from the Soviet system: ‘The aggressive policy of subjugating other peoples derives in fact precisely from the internal relations existing at present in the Soviet Union ... the difference between the internal relations in Yugoslavia and those in the Soviet Union is precisely the difference that we find at the very core of the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict.’⁴⁵ In the early 1950s, in a speech to 20,000 students and teachers in Belgrade, Djilas analysed what he thought was wrong with socialism in the Soviet Union. He contended that a privileged caste of bureaucrats had arisen there and transformed the state into a ‘power above the people.’ In the list of sins that the Soviet Union had committed against the Marxist faith, Djilas included: the falsification of history, an un-Marxist conception of the role of leader, and tendencies of reducing socialist democracy to a minimum, including the straight-jacketing of opinion and the suppression of popular initiative.⁴⁶

Yet, Djilas was unable to define what the Soviet Union was if it was not truly socialist. This question was absolutely crucial for Djilas. Although Marx formulated his ‘scientific laws’ that advance societies from feudalism to capitalism to socialism, he did allow for deviations if they could be explained. However, the theoretical question concerning the Soviet Union’s deviation was particularly difficult to answer. What type of exploitative political system could emerge from a socialist revolution? This question never arose for the other leftist groups who opposed the Soviet Union because in their eyes the Soviet seizure of power in 1917 was not a true socialist revolution. The Yugoslav communists however, could not question the authenticity of the Soviet takeover since this would question their own legitimacy.

⁴⁵ M. Djilas, ‘Yugoslav-Soviet Relations’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 2, (1951), p. 170

⁴⁶ ‘Sins of Soviet Policy’, *The Times*, 20th March 1950, p. 3

Djilas grappled with this problem. As mentioned, in the early 1950s he depicted the Soviet Union as a society in which a privileged bureaucracy had distorted socialism and oppressed the people. In Djilas's eyes this socialist exploitation was no different to capitalist exploitation.⁴⁷ Later that year however, he went further, claiming that the Soviet Union was in fact a fascist state.⁴⁸ In 1951 he had changed his analysis again, now classifying the Soviet political system as one of counterrevolution and restoration.⁴⁹ A year later he had settled with the label of 'state capitalism.'⁵⁰ Such wide-ranging and largely incoherent attacks sufficed for the purpose of polemicising against the Soviet Union. However, Djilas's desire to find an intellectually fulfilling answer to this question was one of the key forces propelling him along the road to apostasy.

Nevertheless, during the confusion and fear of 1948, both Djilas and Dedijer were vital in calming their fellow Yugoslavs and spearheading the attack against the Soviet Union. As key contributors to *Borba*, for over five years, they co-authored a two-page centre spread column entitled 'Against Slander and Misinformation' which conducted a fierce campaign against Stalin. *The Times* attributed this column to the growing popularity of the newspaper.⁵¹

It was at this time that Djilas was already making a claim to be Yugoslavia's leading theoretician and thus he approached the conflict as primarily ideological. In a key meeting of the central Agitprop department in 1949 he advised party members to focus on theoretical questions and to reread Marx, Engels and Lenin.⁵² After all,

⁴⁷ 'A Crisis in Russia Seen by Yugoslav', *The New York Times*, 19th March 1950, p. 19

⁴⁸ M.S Handler, 'US Offers to Aid Yugoslav Troops', *The New York Times*, 21st November 1950, p. 20

⁴⁹ M. Djilas 'Themes Contemporaine', *Questions Actuelle du Socialisme*, No. 1-2, (1952), p. 22

⁵⁰ M.S Handler, 'Stalin Article masks Hidden Crisis', *The New York Times*, 13th October 1952, p. 5

⁵¹ 'Borba - Newspapers of the World', *The Times*, 22nd April 1965, p. 11

⁵² 'Savjetovanje u Upravi za agitaciju i propaganda CK KPJ po nekim aktuelnim pitanjima agitacije i propaganda', 28 March 1949, (AJ), II/4-d-18

Lenin had defended the equality of all socialist states, and in Djilas's opinion it was Stalin's 'imperialist denial' of this principle that had caused the Soviet Union to deviate from Marxist-Leninism.⁵³ In his personal mouthpiece, *Borba*, he published another series of articles, this time strictly theoretical, under the title 'Modern topics'. In these articles he again attacked the Soviet Union for being 'state capitalist'. Under Stalin's leadership the state had degenerated into a new form of class society under the rule of bureaucracy. In another commentary, 'The Beginning of the End or the End of the Beginning?' he defined bureaucracy as: 'the privileged caste', noting that absolute power served as the basis of its privileges. In order to sustain this authority, he continued, the bureaucracy needed 'ideology and a repressive state to stifle any freedom of thought.'⁵⁴

If the ideological struggle against the Soviet Union was to be successful, the Yugoslavs needed to find some new theoretical aspects to distinguish Belgrade from Moscow. Here the role of Milovan Djilas was enormous. Dedijer recalls: 'one should have seen Djilas in the morning in his office, pacing up and down, bristling with new ideas, putting questions to himself and then answering them, consulting over the special telephone line, often with Boris Kidrič, the economic tsar, on Djilas's latest direct communications with the cosmos.'⁵⁵ In fact Djilas claimed that on returning to Marx's *Das Kapital* he came up with the idea of workers' self-management and proposed the idea to Kidrič and Kardelj⁵⁶ - 'The idea was born in me.'⁵⁷ Dedijer would later claim however, that this was a deliberate lie. He argued that Kidrič had telephoned Djilas to explain his idea, and Djilas merely hijacked it and put it into

⁵³ M. Djilas, 'Lenjin o Odnosima medju Socijalističkim Državama', *Komunist*, No. 3, September 1949, p. 4

⁵⁴ M. Djilas, 'Začetak konca ali konec začetka', *Naši razgledi*, 29th August 1953, p. 9

⁵⁵ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 11th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 179

⁵⁶ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 219

⁵⁷ M. Djilas, *Druženje s Titom*, (Belgrade, 1990), p. 39

life.⁵⁸ Recent documentary research supports Dedijer's assertion that it was in fact Kidrič, along with Kardelj, who first formed the idea of self-management.⁵⁹

Nonetheless, Djilas's eloquent and regular meditations on self-management gave the impression that he was leading the reform movement.⁶⁰ It was Djilas who appeared to be the driving force in the shift from intimidation to persuasion, arguing that, while Marxism had reached a dead end in the Soviet Union, it was now moving ahead in Yugoslavia.

Djilas stressed that in defending Yugoslavia's new path of development, 'we are not simply defending the independence of Yugoslavia or its right to independent development; rather we are defending Marxist-Leninism from those who distort it.'⁶¹ As Djilas later revealed, 'the question of presentation was crucial. In offering self-management to the public and the world, it was important that we should have canonical sanction for striking out in this new direction.'⁶² In this respect Djilas, as in every heresy, had to stick to the revered texts while at the same time giving them an unorthodox meaning. This was not too difficult because much of Marx was vague and anti-communist in the Stalinist interpretation.

By creating its own system of communism with self-management, Djilas claimed that the role of the Yugoslav state had changed completely. It had moved from the highly centralised Soviet model of government to a regime that was still socialist in substance, but looser in form than before, less tightly controlled, less bureaucratic, a regime in which: 'factory workers will feel they have a real voice in management

⁵⁸ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 332

⁵⁹ V. Unkovski-Korica, 'Workers' Councils in the Service of the Market' *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (2014) p. 118

⁶⁰ V. Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia* (London, 2016) p. 84-5

⁶¹ Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 3, p. 514

⁶² Urban, 'Djilas on Gorbachov', *Encounter*, September 1988, p. 19

and peasants will have an opportunity for free marketing.’⁶³ Djilas had turned the veritable crisis of the split into a blessing in disguise. The heretic was not Yugoslavia but the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had made a mistake when, having nationalised production, the state refused to relinquish its control over industry and agriculture. Over time this developed into a despotic bureaucracy which was not producing socialism, but hyper state capitalism. The Yugoslav communists on the other hand, had nationalised the means of production upon seizing power, but this decision had gone no further. Now they were passing control over to the worker, starting the process of the ‘withering away of the state’. Taking advantage of the Soviet Union’s mistakes, Yugoslavia was returning to Marx’s true teachings.

In a private conversation at the time however, a prominent Yugoslav communist explained his reserve about expanding the condemnation of the Soviets beyond a foreign politics issue: ‘The methods used by Moscow in their controversy with us, indicate of course that there is a certain degeneration within the Soviet system. However, one should not investigate the beginning of this process or the extent it has reached. For if one starts to doubt the doctrine or interpret party history differently, one never knows where it will end.’⁶⁴ The Djilas and Dedijer case would end up proving this statement correct.

This change in policy had laid the foundations for Djilas’s break from the party. He now believed that the party should put emphasis on the importance of ideological debate and ‘the struggle of opinions’ in bringing about the transformation of society. His new watchword was, ‘from now on, the party line is that there is no line!’⁶⁵ As early as the Third Plenum of the party in 1949 Djilas called for major changes in the party’s educational strategy. He now suggested that it was more valuable,

⁶³ ‘Changes in Yugoslavia’, *The Times*, 12th June 1951, p.

⁶⁴ E. Halperin, ‘Letter from Belgrade – The Djilas Affair’, *Radio Free Europe*, 25th October 1956, p. 1

⁶⁵ ‘Milovan Djilas’, *The Observer*, 4th February 1951, p. 2

ideologically speaking, to provide convincing arguments against incorrect views than to prevent their expression. In addition he broached the argument that would foster his break with the party, namely that human consciousness could not be altered by administrative measures. These measures would lead to ideological monopoly and ‘curbing the initiative of the masses and inhibiting the growth of a healthy ideological struggle between the old and the new.’⁶⁶ In *Borba* at the beginning of 1952 he went further, stating that under no circumstance should there be a return to Stalinism ‘or the strengthening of dictatorship’. He added that only persuasion, rather than coercion, should be used, because ‘it would seem very dangerous to me for our democratic development if, in the struggle against reactionary bourgeois intriguers, we were to act by administrative measures and not exclusively ... by ideological educational, and similar means.’⁶⁷

Perhaps the most difficult and sensitive problem in Djilas’s re-evaluation of the Soviet Union was the role of the party. On the one hand, without the party, the revolution would not have been possible. Yet, it was also the party, and its massive administrative structure, that had led to the pervasive bureaucratic corruption in the Soviet system. Was the party’s structure not at least partially responsible for this bureaucratic degeneration? This question continued to play on Djilas’s mind.

In Djilas’s eyes the Yugoslav party had taken a fundamental step toward democracy and there could be no departure from that path. In the initial aftermath of the split with the Soviet Union this was in line with the thinking of the party’s other theoreticians, namely Kardelj and Kidrič. As a result, Djilas’s proclamations were seen by the party as a consequence of a wider phenomenon: the criticism and

⁶⁶ M. Djilas, ‘Problemi školstva u borbi za socijalizam u našoj zemlji’, speech at the Third Plenum of the Central Committee in B. Petranović, R. Končar, and R. Radonjić, *Sednice Centralnog Komiteta KPJ (1948-1952)*, (Belgrade, 1985), p. 289

⁶⁷ ‘Role of the Party in Yugoslavia’, *The Times*, 25th March 1952, p. 3

rejection of the Stalinist system. What should be highlighted is that this denunciation applied mainly to theory. Stalinist practices, however, were being abandoned inconsistently and reluctantly. The resistance of the Yugoslav leadership to systemic reforms became the main reason for the future clash between Djilas and Tito.

After all, while Djilas believed the liberalising reforms implied greater pluralism in the economic, socio-political and cultural spheres, Tito was unwilling to relinquish power or let his party wither away (at least not in the immediate future). The very real Soviet threat legitimised the party's continuing rule and enhanced its domestic prestige. Therefore, rather than promoting a pluralistic system, Tito preferred to replace administrative measures with the language of socialist legality.⁶⁸ It was the alleged flouting of this legality that would cause the downfall of Djilas.

While Djilas focused on theory, Dedijer, perhaps motivated by his disparagement in the Soviet press (he was labelled a Gestapo agent and the illegitimate son of President Truman⁶⁹) focused on the Soviet injustices against the Yugoslav people. In his biography of Tito he brooded about the war, about the thousands of burned down towns and villages, about the victims of the occupiers whose corpses littered the soil, and about how Stalin had ignored all their sacrifices and spat on them. Thus he emphasised the conflict between states – between a big and small state. He even cited his mother, who exclaimed:

We are a very strange people. When Hitler was at the peak of his power, when the whole of continental Europe was at his feet, we tore up the Pact which we had made with him. When the Americans were at the summit of their power in 1946, when everybody in the world was afraid of their atom bomb which they had dropped on

⁶⁸ Unkovski-Korica, *Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia*, p. 104

⁶⁹ 'Propaganda by Satellite', *The Manchester Guardian*, 1st November 1952, p. 1

Japan a year before, we shot down their aircraft because they had violated our national territory. And now when Stalin is bursting with strength we rejected his ultimatum. This reminds me of little Serbia rejecting the ultimatum of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1914.⁷⁰

With this argument Dedijer was making an important political point. Namely, that yet again the Yugoslavs were standing up to a bullying great power. This was the primary reason for the Yugoslavs' moral strength and was an easier argument for ordinary Yugoslavs to grasp than Djilas's dogmatic theories.

In addition, being more pragmatic than Djilas, Dedijer regularly sieved his friend's ideas and theories. The combination of Djilas's avalanche of ideas, and Dedijer's filtering of them, played a remarkable role in the struggle against Stalin and delivering blows to Soviet propaganda. Dedijer remembered:

I used to see Djilas several times a day, and each time he would give me new ideas from his powerhouse mind. After his initial hesitation Djilas excelled with all the optimism of a Montenegrin ... His greatest quality, even in his period as leader, was his habit of looking at things every day from some new angle. For instance, he was my chief for almost 17 years, but when I had to carry out his orders I always checked what was his final decision, even though we had discussed it only the previous evening.⁷¹

Thus both men were linked in a symbiotic relationship; without Dedijer, Djilas might have 'floated as high as a balloon', but with him he was kept in the realms of

⁷⁰ V. Dedijer, *Tito Speaks*, (New York, 1953), p. 373

⁷¹ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 192

reality.⁷² This was a benefit that Djilas himself acknowledged. When Dedijer once suggested a change to one of his ideas, Djilas laughed: ‘despite the hole in your head, you are not empty headed. This struggle against Stalin has taught you to think in the right way. You are dotting the I’s because I and Kardelj have been thinking for many months on these lines.’⁷³ Djilas’s outstanding intellectual abilities were appropriately tempered by Dedijer. After Djilas’s removal from the political scene in 1954, the Yugoslav regime badly lacked any such independent, critical voice at the highest level.

A New Source of Legitimacy – Mythologising the War

The process of attempting to promote a common Yugoslav identity and past did not really begin until after the break with Stalin. After all, prior to the dispute with the Cominform the Yugoslav regime appealed to the internationalist values of the wider communist movement, in particular to workers’ solidarity across ethnic and national boundaries. When Tito’s regime needed to develop a theory of the specifically Yugoslav road to communism however, this Yugoslav identity needed to be given some historical substance. At the Fifth Party Congress Djilas stressed this change, ‘What is different is that today we need to create it [history] faster and more boldly.’⁷⁴

In response the memory and interpretation of the war became the chief source of legitimacy. The Partisan struggle was now portrayed as a home-grown socialist revolution and was utilised to defend the construction of the Yugoslav state. In an

⁷² Dedijer, ‘Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*’, 11th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁷³ V. Dedijer, ‘Knjiga o knjizi 1945-53’ – Unpublished diary, 23rd April 1953, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁷⁴ M. Djilas, ‘Izvještaj o agitaciono-propagandom radu’, *V kongres Komunističke partije Jugoslavije 21 – 28 jula 1948. Stenografske beleške*, (Belgrade, 1949), p. 221

article written in 1951, Djilas proclaimed the ‘uniqueness’ of the Yugoslav war effort:

during the war against the Hitlerite invaders, Yugoslavia was the only country in Europe where a general popular resistance was developed Had the peoples of Yugoslavia not won their national freedom by their own exertions, they would have not been able to defend it today... Nor would they have been able to keep their country free under the terrific and total pressure exercised against them from the East.⁷⁵

The myth of the Partisan Struggle was now united with a new myth - Tito’s triumph over Stalin. The two victories complemented each other in a self-perpetuating myth, one victory fuelled and led to the other. Djilas’s article also illustrates how, in constantly harping back to their own independent liberation struggle, the Yugoslavs could retrospectively extricate themselves from the Soviets, despite the fact that their initial preference had been to mimic the Stalinist system.

Through Agitprop, both men were at the forefront of establishing the ‘master narrative’ of the Partisan movement and the split with the Soviet Union. Myths thrive in times of social distress and uncertainty; naturally post-war, post-Cominform Yugoslavia provided fertile ground for myth making. The ‘Yugoslav myth’ of history was a significant force in a society that was in flux and trying to deal with heavy trauma. It provided a way of drawing people together to face numerous threats, but it also aided them in their transition into a new society that they were still trying to comprehend.

⁷⁵ Djilas, ‘Yugoslav-Soviet Relations’, *International Affairs*, p. 167

The French philosopher, Ernest Renan, once advanced the argument that when building a common national identity the populace must establish a selective attitude towards the past: they must imprint certain historical events into their memory, while utterly forgetting others.⁷⁶ Yugoslavia's two leading propagandists acted in the spirit of this precept. At the heart of their version of Yugoslavia's recent history was the myth of the nation's birth during the Second World War, and its later reawakening in 1948 as it turned its back on despotic Stalin. Thus the core of the myth-narrative focused on the origin of the new state, which was shrouded in struggle and martyrdom. This manifested itself in a veritable cult of the nation's heroic 'founding fathers': the Partisans. They were liberators who secured both victory and redemption for the Yugoslav peoples. The second part of the nation's myth was the cult of its leader Josip Broz Tito as a war hero and skilful world statesman. Third, and most important of all, was the myth of 'brotherhood and unity' of all ethnic groups. As Djilas proclaimed: 'the brotherhood and unity of the peoples of Yugoslavia is not only an example of the concept of internationalism within one state, but will also lead to the complete reconciliation of the peoples of Yugoslavia...'⁷⁷

Accordingly the main maxim for the Titoist regime was '*bratstvo i jedinstvo*', or 'brotherhood and unity'. Streets were named after the slogan, it was shouted at mass rallies and repeated tirelessly by party members. As a result the communists proclaimed that the complicated, multifaceted national question had been finally solved. As Dedijer stated, 'ethically, the idea of brotherhood and unity gave a deeply humane aspect to Tito's political programme. In contrast to hatred (rooted in nationalist manipulations of ethnicity and religion) Tito urged love between all of

⁷⁶ E. Renan, 'What is a Nation,' in G. Eley and R.G. Suny, *Becoming National: A Reader*, (Oxford, 1996), p. 41

⁷⁷ M. Djilas, 'O nacionalnoj istoriji kao vaspitnom predmetu', *Komunist*, No. 1, 1949, p. 67

Yugoslavia's peoples ... We have eradicated hatred, turned it into dust, we have destroyed the prejudice of our enemies who exploited the sensitive national problem to incite hatred.'⁷⁸

Both Dedijer and Djilas took a keen interest in the history of the Slavs, and brotherhood and unity did contain an element of Pan-Slavism. Ultimately, it supported the old clan mentality as it envisaged the whole Yugoslav nation as a cohesive clan with a high degree of solidarity. Without the communist party and its policy, it was argued, Yugoslavia could not exist. As Djilas remarked, 'only the new movement fighting for independence, with Tito at its head, can appeal to the biggest mass of Yugoslavia's nations.'⁷⁹ Crucially, Dedijer and Djilas ensured that the motto of brotherhood and unity would be an important source of legitimacy for the communist regime. The idea and the system became inextricably linked under the combined historical and cultural rule of both men. It was now very likely that any struggle against communist rule in Yugoslavia would involve the destruction of brotherhood and unity.

Yet, initially brotherhood and unity was difficult to propagate given the murderous events of the Second World War. They appeared to erode the Yugoslav idea completely. With so much blood shed on all sides the idea of working together for a common goal appeared preposterous. After all, the events of the Second World War in Yugoslavia were complex. The interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia was dismembered by the occupying Axis powers. Yet, Yugoslav forces, divided along religious, ethnic and political lines, fought with and against the occupiers, as well as against each other. Indeed the Second World War in Yugoslavia was as much a civil war as it was a war of occupation and liberation. Large scale massacres and war

⁷⁸ Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 1, p. 585

⁷⁹ M. Djilas, 'O rješenju nacionalnog pitanja u Jugoslaviji', in *Članci*, p. 260

crimes were committed by the occupiers as well as by domestic groups against each other. These events left painful memories and a complicated history – both on a personal and societal level. The history of large-scale internal and interethnic massacres was deeply problematic for the reconstruction of a stable multi-ethnic state.

Dedijer and Djilas addressed this history by creating and disseminating a myth about the war. The myth simplified the conflict suggesting that the Partisans - comprised of and supported by all of Yugoslavia's nations and nationalities - were victorious in a liberation war, which was simultaneously a socialist revolution against bourgeois foreign occupiers and domestic collaborators. In this myth of wartime history, the liberation struggle and social revolution were combined. This meant that the Partisans' enemies carried the double stigmatisation of reactionary counter-revolutionary forces and traitorous collaborators. As Djilas wrote in *Borba*, 'the war was not simply a war between Germans and Slavs but freedom-loving peoples' struggle against fascism.'⁸⁰

In their narrative of history they achieved the difficult feat of reintegrating Yugoslav society at a symbolic level by blaming all crimes and atrocities on the fascists and collaborators, externalising guilt and responsibility. At the same time they delicately balanced the war guilt amongst Yugoslavia's nations and nationalities, ensuring that every nation and nationality had its collaborators. Dedijer stated, 'in his guidelines of March 27, 1941, Hitler had announced his intention of destroying the Yugoslav state and this idea had been adopted by his satellites in Yugoslavia: Ante Pavelić in Croatia, Marko Natlačen in Slovenia, Sekula Drljević in

⁸⁰ M. Djilas, 'Borba Slovenskih naroda za mir i demokraciju', *Republika*, 1st July 1947, p. 1

Montenegro, the leaders of the Albanian fascists (Ballisti) in Kosovo, and Dimitrije Ljotić in Serbia.’⁸¹

A basic outline of the war was provided in one of the communists’ authoritative works, Dedijer’s 1953 biography of Tito. The regime’s premier historian did not shy away from detailing the numerous shocking massacres and atrocities. Dwelling on the Ustasha’s practises of ‘mass extermination’ which involved ‘some of the worst murdering’ of the Second World War, Dedijer described how ‘whole villages were led in front of huge graves and here men and women, mothers and children were slaughtered and thrown into them.’ Yet, sticking to the communist narrative of balancing the war guilt, Dedijer then turned to the massacres committed by the Serbian ‘quislings’ in Bosnia.⁸² Ultimately the war crimes committed by the Yugoslav collaborators were defined as two sides of the same coin, namely the Nazis’ occupation of Yugoslavia.⁸³ Only the Partisans and their undisputed leader, Tito, were portrayed in a positive light, as the sole resistance movement that liberated and re-unified the country and its citizens.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of Second World War history was the issue of the Ustasha concentration camp complex at Jasenovac, the main symbol of Ustasha terror. Immediately after the war Jasenovac was the subject of an official investigation, testifying to the terror and inhumanity of the camp.⁸⁴ Yet it was dealt with very carefully, for instance Dedijer’s biography of Tito only mentioned Jasenovac in a footnote. In his other works, in most instances, the victims were simply referred to as prisoners. With regard to the perpetrators, ethnic affiliation was completely absent - they were Ustasha or Fascists. No connection was ever made

⁸¹ Dedijer, *History of Yugoslavia*, p. 651

⁸² Dedijer, *Tito Speaks*, p. 289

⁸³ T. Sindbaek, ‘World War II Genocides in Yugoslav Historiography’, *Aarhus University*, 1st January 2000

⁸⁴ Sindbaek, *Usable History?*, p. 44

with the Croatian people. On the contrary, it was stressed that the leaders of the Ustasha had to resort to terror because they had no support from the masses.

Therefore the communists refused to hide the atrocities and wartime massacres. A close reading of either Djilas's or Dedijer's books and articles show that while they were dealt with cautiously, they certainly were not ignored or silenced. Dedijer regularly used emotive terms like 'crime,' 'slaughter' and 'extinction'. The massacres were never the main issue in the writing of the war, this was always the heroic and superhuman efforts of the Partisans, yet they were present. In his wartime diary there is a chapter recounting events in July and August of 1942, entitled '*The bloody cloth of Krajina*'. It held several references to the Ustasha slaughtering Serbs and throwing bodies (living and dead) into deep pits:

...we continued down the road, hedges of ferns and hazels on both sides, and, at once, in the middle of the road, I don't remember the exact number, ten or twelve bodies. It seemed to me, just two middle-aged men. The rest were women, girls, boys, little children. Three or four steps from this pile of blood and flesh, an empty cradle, without a child, with the hay still humid from the child's urine. The child lay in the pile of bodies. But the head was crushed...⁸⁵

Only pages earlier he relayed a horrifying Chetnik massacre near Foča: 'today I walked next to the Drina ... Corpses in the water – one, two, three ... on the bank lay one – like a statue of wax in the Museum of Madame Tussauds. These were Muslim families, the Chetniks slaughtered 86 in one night!'⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Dedijer, *The War Diaries*, Vol. 1, p. 90

⁸⁶ *ibid*, p. 88

Djilas too recounted in his memoirs and articles numerous examples of Ustasha atrocities. These included young members keeping the eyeballs of their victims in their pockets and the mass slitting of Serbian throats in the village of Miljevina. He also recounted Chetnik atrocities like tying together Muslims and throwing them off bridges into the River Drina. Both Dedijer's and Djilas's accounts contain terrible graphic detail of ethnically defined civilian victims and their always identified perpetrators. Therefore the communist regime was extraordinarily candid about the massacres of the war. The ones they did not describe were, naturally, those committed by the Partisans themselves. The memoirs and other similar writings by both Djilas and Dedijer also demonstrate how the history of the war was defined and narrated from the very top of the Yugoslav Communist Party.

In addition, having attributed all the guilt of war crimes to the Partisans' opponents, the Titoist regime endeavoured to publicly deal with their wartime rivals. While most individuals attached to these groups had either escaped the country or been liquidated by the Partisans at the end of the war, in the immediate post-war years the regime put on trial those who it accused of collaboration. In 1946, for instance, two major trials were held against Chetnik leader Draža Mihailović and the Archbishop of Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac. Ranković was abroad in Moscow when preparations began for the Mihailović trial so Djilas himself took over the job of articulating the case for prosecution. Djilas indicted the Chetnik leader for collaborating with the Nazis and having instructed his generals to destroy the Muslims and Croats.⁸⁷ Crucially Djilas did not claim that Mihailović had planned to attack the Ustasha but the Croats as a whole, the Partisans were to be the only emancipators from fascism.

⁸⁷ 'Letter from Milovan Djilas to Aleksandar Ranković', 4th June 1946, (AJ), 119/I-9

It is clear that wartime massacres were not concealed or silenced, but those who committed these acts were always presented as the fascist occupiers and their bourgeois quislings. These traitors were now proclaimed dead, or in hiding abroad. Thus the leading members of Agitprop proclaimed that these internal enemies were now a matter of the past. This meant that there would be no further opportunity to discuss guilt and apportion blame to Yugoslavia's peoples. While this strategy simplified the reconstruction of the state, it also postponed *sine die* any chance to properly scrutinise the radical nationalist policies of the war. While Djilas's and Dedijer's strategy made sense in a class-based history, it also left voids in the official narrative of wartime Yugoslavia that would be addressed later on.

As with all national myths, Djilas's and Dedijer's narrative of history contained elements of the truth, around which they supplied regular support through education, media, and political rhetoric. However, reality never (particularly in wars) imitates myths in which 'good' fights 'evil'. Such a Manichean image of the world tends to exist only in myths. Yet it should be remembered that both men's work was an essential way of simplifying the complex and traumatic reality which Yugoslavs faced in the aftermath of the war. The myths they created about Yugoslavia's history simplified reality, or at least the perception of reality. It was an invaluable function in a society that was undergoing dramatic transformation.

In spite of all ideological changes, this black and white struggle was to remain the central concept of Yugoslav historiography until the 1980s. After all, the Agitprop narrative formulated by Djilas and Dedijer secured itself an almost total hegemony over public discourse. Of course other wartime narratives existed, but it was nearly impossible for them to be expressed publicly.

Conclusions

The year and a half through 1952 and much of 1953 saw Djilas and Dedijer at the height of their political power. It was also, following their remarriages, a time of new happiness in their personal lives. Their new wives, Štefica Barić and Vera Križman, were party functionaries who had served in the Partisan resistance. Both also originated from Slovenia and this perhaps demonstrates the attraction of the republic's relatively free intellectual climate to many of the intelligentsia. Djilas's place in the triad closest to Tito appeared totally secure. The party's powerful Agitprop machine, and particularly its official mouthpiece *Borba*, now edited by Dedijer, remained at their unfettered disposal. The events that followed 1948 afforded Dedijer the pride of leading the propaganda battle against Moscow. It also gave Djilas a sense of satisfaction at seeing his political theories accepted, and apparently shared by others. The conflict with Stalin acted as a stimulus, revitalising the camaraderie of the war years whilst infusing it with the excitement of ideological innovation. The ultimate paradox however, was that once rebelliously independent thoughts were nurtured in the ranks of Titoism, this freedom carried on to even more heretical conclusions. A deviation developed within the Titoist heresy itself. Djilas and Dedijer became the symbols of a revolt inside a revolt.

As the leading intellectuals in Agitprop they were expected to 'continue the revolution', extending it from the political sphere into the social sphere. They were expected to transform their fellow Yugoslavs' consciousness. Unlike the transformation of the political structure however, the transformation of consciousness was a process which had no inherent, clearly defined boundaries. It was therefore possible for both men to run far ahead of the political revolution.

In typical post-1948 Agitprop tone, Dedijer proclaimed in Tito's biography that: 'there can be no socialism without the freedom of the individual, these two concepts are identical.'⁸⁸ This was an incongruous admission from a regime that was in effect operating a police state which tolerated no opposition, and whose Agitprop department determined the narrative that all media had to follow. It was natural that the party's two chief propagandists would be the first to stumble upon this incongruity.

In this respect, when Djilas and Dedijer shifted Agitprop's emphasis on to long-term transformative goals in the early 1950s, after the split with Stalin, they found that they had inadvertently threatened the party's dominant position. The development of technology after the war enabled rapid communication. Combined with the expansion of literacy, the opportunity for ideological penetration was wide indeed. Yet, there was immense difficulty in achieving even a modest degree of social approval. A gap developed between the party and the people. The new model for the transformation of society had placed its faith in 'original' Marxist theory and the history of the 'Yugoslav revolution', believing that political legitimacy would inevitably follow. It did not. Initiative from below refused to remain within the prescribed confines, and the struggle of opinions did not lead to mass conversions to Marxism. On the contrary, it seemed mainly to result in an increasingly critical attitude toward the communist party. As the very first Serbian socialist, Svetozar Marković, after whom ironically the former Djilas street in Belgrade is now named, commented on Tsar Alexander II's reforms in Russia: 'It is impossible to keep the sheep intact and the wolves satisfied.'⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Dedijer, *Tito Speaks*, p. 436

⁸⁹ W. McClellan, *Svetozar Marković and the Origins of Balkan Socialism* (Princeton, 2006) p. 165

This miscalculation created a dilemma for the communist leaders. Would they maintain their grip on power at the expense of their link with the masses, forfeiting their vision for a freer more pluralistic future? Or would they remain true to the principles intrinsic to that vision, even if they had to sacrifice power? Ultimately, the party leaders chose the former, with Djilas and Dedijer being the sole exceptions. As a result they were purged in January 1954. Eventually, with the Agitprop leaders gone, the remaining party leaders seemed to give up on their goal of transforming society by means of persuasion. Instead they increasingly sought to build their legitimacy through more attainable political methods.

This political development may provide a partial answer to one of the enduring puzzles of communist regimes: how parties originally filled with fresh and intense idealists (such as Djilas and Dedijer) became dull organisations made up of colourless bureaucrats who believed in nothing but their own position in power. In the Yugoslav case, that shift away from idealism originated as a move towards it. As Carol Lilly has argued, ‘for only when the Yugoslav communists truly attempted to realise the promises of their ideology did they begin to lose faith in their ability to transform society by persuasive means.’ Party rhetoric could only do so much in instilling the population with new beliefs and behaviour.⁹⁰ Agitation and propaganda could help realise the party’s short-term political goals but not its long-term transformative one. The party leaders, shorn of Djilas’s and Dedijer’s literary brilliance, vainly hoped that their transformative goals would be achieved in the distant future by the sheer force of history. The socialist utopian vision of the future grew vaguer as the impulse to sustain power became the single goal. It is hardly

⁹⁰ Lilly, *Power and Persuasion*, p. 251

surprising given this compulsion that in the late 1980s so many party members could turn to nationalism – a phenomenon that would have tragic results.

Chapter 3: Disillusionment – The Djilas and Dedijer Affair

The year 1954 was one of the most important in the lives of Milovan Djilas, Vladimir Dedijer and the Yugoslav Communist Party itself. At the beginning of the year both men were forced out of the Yugoslav communist movement after over a decade in positions of senior responsibility. Their departures caused a temporary political crisis in Yugoslavia and left a permanent mark on the intellectual history of the country.

Djilas's removal from political office, his renunciation of communism, and his subsequent trial and imprisonment are well known in Yugoslav history as the 'Djilas Affair'. This title elides the key role played by Vladimir Dedijer. Dedijer has often been wholly ignored, given a cursory mention, or left to a mere footnote as the only man to stand by Djilas. Dedijer was under immense pressure and torment in 1954. He had to make several decisions of the utmost importance for his future. Djilas's resolve to confront the party leadership led to immense pressure on himself, of course, but also on Dedijer. After all, Dedijer was not merely a close friend and associate, but as sub-editor of *Borba*, he also bore large responsibility for having published Djilas's critical articles. Without him Djilas's famous critiques may have never been printed. It was only Dedijer, of all of Djilas's comrades, who defended him, launching a brilliant spirited defence of his friend at the party plenum convened to discipline him. Finally, it was Dedijer's interview with *The Times* that brought Djilas out of his disillusioned slumber, transforming him into a defiant dissident.

Unlike other leading comrades, neither Djilas nor Dedijer were burdened by administrative responsibilities. They exercised the duties of being members of the National Assembly (Djilas was its president) but otherwise they remained free of

representational duties, free above all to write. In the intensely ideological period that followed the break with Moscow, both Djilas and Dedijer began to call for more freedom domestically. After all, the greater ideological freedom was permitting increasingly bold discussions of Marxist-Leninism. This was perhaps most evident at the top of Agitprop. In one meeting of the Central Agitprop department in 1950, at which both men were present, Djilas hypothesised about alternative roads to socialism, including the possibility that it could be achieved without revolution: 'For the victory of socialism, the ideology of Marx or Lenin is not essential, what is essential is what form it will take (and it may take a completely liberal form, even Quakers).'¹

The High Point of 'Liberalism' and 'Democracy' – The Sixth Party Congress

After going through an initial phase of revolutionary extremism, following the break with Stalin the Yugoslav communists embarked on creating a new, more 'democratic', 'freer' form of communism. The leading figure and main architect of this new policy was Djilas. A meeting of the Central Committee in June 1951 gave a telling insight into Djilas's views about the nature of party reform. As part of the process that would culminate in the declarations of the Sixth Party Congress, Djilas made a speech: 'On the theoretical work of our party'. In typical Agitprop tone he attacked the Soviet Union as 'no longer Marxist' and 'exploitative'. Yet Djilas went further, raising the issue which would lead to his own split with the party; he contended that there was a worrying pattern of 'monopolism' emerging within the

¹ 'Beleske sa sastanka Uprave', 25th December 1950, (AJ) II/2-b-44.

Yugoslavs' party.² In Djilas's eyes, for the party to be truly Marxist and democratic it had to allow a free struggle of ideas. He stressed, 'being a disciplined communist does not mean not thinking for yourself, not daring to have different views on this or that theory or from this or that communist.'³

As one party member and *Borba* writer recalled of the period: 'in the aftermath of Tito's break with Stalin, political life in Belgrade was exciting, for it promised a radical internal change toward democracy. I covered a visit by a British Labour delegation when Milovan Djilas, speaking on Tito's behalf and still in the government's good graces, told the visitors, "if the people don't want us, they can vote us out of power." I felt energised by this seeming proof that we were on our way to become a real democracy of the proletariat, rather than its dictatorship.'⁴ A key event in promoting these new democratic ideas and ending Agitprop's control over culture was the Third Congress of Writers of Yugoslavia, held in Ljubljana in October 1952. The Congress, which both Djilas and Dedijer attended, was a vehement attack on Stalinism. Miroslav Krleža summed up the nature of the Congress, arguing for greater freedom of ideas and a critical revision of all the values of past and present.⁵

In many ways, 1952 was the high point of enthusiasm for democracy among Yugoslavia's communist leaders. Relations with the West were dramatically improving, hostility to the Soviet Union was at its peak, and American economic aid had halted the deterioration in living standards. The liberalising reforms in the political, economic and social spheres had produced an unambiguously positive response from the populace, and plans for a new Constitution were drawn up. This

² Petranović, Končar, Radonjić, *Sednice Centralnog Komiteta KPJ 1948-1952*, p. 591

³ *ibid*, p. 639

⁴ J. Levi, *The Last Exile*, (New York, 2009), p. 165

⁵ M. Ristović, *Jedno viđenje prelomne godine jugoslavenske posleratne kulturne politike*, Centar za politološka istraživanja, 1.3.3. Socijalistička Jugoslavija 1945-1964, p. 347

momentum appeared to be pushing the Yugoslav leaders along a road they feared to travel. The Sixth Party Congress in Zagreb, at the end of 1952, solidified these democratic developments. The congress sought to overcome the dangers of bureaucracy by decentralising the party structure, but it also declared that henceforth the party would limit its role to that of ‘the political and ideological educator of the masses.’⁶ As if to emphasise this shift the party renamed itself the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. Djilas argued eloquently for this change, which was officially suggested by Tito, despite the fierce objections from Ranković, who only accepted the renaming due to party discipline. The Sixth Party Congress also marked the promotion of the idea of the ‘withering away of the party’. Following the congress, this concept was heavily popularised by the publication of Dedijer’s biography of Tito.⁷

As the American Ambassador to Yugoslavia at the time noted, Djilas was leading a more ‘liberal’ faction in the party: ‘Djilas...favours more rapid change... [his group] are considerably impressed by the views of British left-wing Labour. They believe workers’ councils should be pressed energetically, favour decentralisation, control of industry by labour, and the withering away of the bureaucratic state. They are more theoretical and idealistic.’⁸

Djilas’s views were driving the liberalisation of Yugoslav communism. After all, his career reached its peak at the Sixth Party Congress, which many party members renamed the Djilas Congress because he wrote almost every resolution. Yet it is unlikely that these individuals saw these ideas as such an extensive change as Djilas did. *The New York Times* reported at the Sixth Party Congress:

⁶ D. Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment*, (Belgrade, 1978), p. 75

⁷ Dedijer, *Tito Speaks*, p. 428

⁸ The Ambassador in Yugoslavia (Allen) to the Secretary of State, 768.00/5–2651: Telegram, 26th May, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, (FRUS), 1951, Vol. IV, Part 2, Document 436

One communist [certainly Djilas] pointed out that all the power had to be concentrated in the communist party during the struggle for power and the consolidation of power after the war, but now the strength of the propertied classes had been broken so there was no longer any need for this concentration. This source asserted that in the future the communist party would lose more and more of its authority to dictate policies in the economic and political fields and that its power would depend on how much it could win by its own effort from the people.’⁹

In his book *The Battle That Stalin Lost*, Dedijer stated that in his entire career this was Djilas’s best speech.¹⁰ Djilas argued that bureaucratism had to be defeated because if political ideas were replaced with administrative measures democracy would never succeed. He continued: ‘We do not stand for democracy because of the West, nor East ... but for us, for our working class and our people – for without democracy there is and can be no socialism.’¹¹

The Sixth Party Congress represents the high-point of Djilas’s career as a communist politician. At the end of the penultimate day of the Congress he gave a speech commemorating the 35th anniversary of the October revolution. He condemned Soviet bureaucratism for betraying the ideas of the revolution and stressed that the spirits of Marx, Engels and Lenin were re-emerging ‘under different conditions and in different forms in the new life of our country.’¹² Djilas was interrupted fourteen times during his short speech by extended bouts of applause,

⁹ M.S Handlers, ‘Belgrade Weighs Shift to Join Pacts’, *The New York Times*, 5th November 1952, p. 6

¹⁰ V. Dedijer, *The Battle Stalin Lost*, (New York, 1971), p. 59

¹¹ *Šesti kongres Komunističke partije Jugoslavije: 2-7 Novembra 1952, (stenografske beleške)*, (Belgrade, 1952) p. 237

¹² *ibid*, p. 298

one of which lasted over 5 minutes.¹³ The Serbian writer Dobrica Ćosić, who attended the Congress, wrote in his diary that the delegates applauded with such enthusiasm that they almost broke their palms.¹⁴ Djilas's mother, who listened to the nationwide radio broadcast of this Congress, saliently remarked: 'It is not good for Djida if he is applauded more than Tito.'¹⁵

Nevertheless, so far, Djilas was only keeping pace with other reform minded party members who publicly talked about the 'withering away' of the party, such as Edvard Kardelj and Vladimir Bakarić. Kardelj, whom Djilas considered a party democrat, regularly wrote about the distortions in the Soviet system and viewed bureaucracy as a dangerous threat to socialism. In a speech in 1951, he asserted that it was the class struggle that had created the state; as a result it would wither away once the different social classes had been eradicated. Therefore, the one-party system would not give way to a multi-party system, but a party-less system.¹⁶ He went so far as to say that the party could no longer assume it was always correct and that it had to be ready to learn from the masses.¹⁷

Despite these proclamations, Kardelj remained largely guarded in his public statements. However, according to Djilas he was much more outspoken in private, expressing radical ideas – for example, the possibility that in the future a political opposition could emerge.¹⁸ Thus, although Djilas was the most influential exponent (particularly to the foreign press) of the party's new role at the Sixth Party Congress, he did not go beyond the other leaders. Dedijer supports this, noting privately that, 'of all the Yugoslav leaders it was Kardelj who was the most critical of some of

¹³ *ibid*, p. 397

¹⁴ D. Ćosić, *Piščevi Zapisi 1951-1968*₂ (Belgrade, 2000), p. 30

¹⁵ M. Djilas, *Vlast i pobuna – memoari*, (Zagreb, 2009), p. 237

¹⁶ E. Kardelj, *Problemi naše socialistične graditve II*, (Ljubljana 1955), p. 122

¹⁷ E. Kardelj, *Uloga i zadaci Socijalističkog Saveza radnog naroda Jugoslavije u borbi za socijalizam: referat na IV Kongresu Narodnog fronta Jugoslavije*, (Belgrade, 1953), p. 109

¹⁸ Djilas, *Druženje s Titom*, p. 112

Tito's steps ... if you gathered all the materials between the top four leaders, I am certain history will substantiate my main conclusion: up to 1954, Edvard Kardelj opposed Tito on many issues, a lot more than Djilas.'¹⁹

The Halting/Reversing of 'Democratic Reforms' – The Brioni Plenum

Although the party leadership had officially renounced the claim to uniform ideological control, pronounced freedom of theoretical discussion, and dismantled the vast Agitprop apparatus, the party's power remained unfettered. Despite paying lip-service to reform state and society, the communists were not prepared to let the party wither away. As a result, the party's internal structure remained virtually unchanged and the liberalising pronouncements of the Sixth Party Congress remained a dead letter.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the party's change of name. Djilas said in his speech at the Congress that the name change 'points out the direction to be taken in drafting a new programme.' Tito had said nothing like this in proposing the change. Instead he left his motivations decidedly vague.²⁰ So what was the motivation? In an article following the Congress, Moša Pijade revealed: 'the new name will formally mark the differences existing between our party and other communist parties, including the communist party of the Soviet Union, the parties which Comrade Tito in his report quite correctly termed as the "so called" communist parties. And it is a good thing that the existing differences will thus be marked and stressed in the name of our party.'²¹ The Yugoslav communists wanted to distance themselves from their Soviet counterparts, in part to facilitate much-desired relations with the Western

¹⁹ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 10th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

²⁰ H. Draper, 'How the Djilas Crisis Grew', *Labor Action*, 15th February 1954, p. 5

²¹ *ibid*

socialists. This was frankly stated by Tito: ‘further cooperation with the socialist and progressive movements have made these changes imperative’, and a specific commission on international relations was set up to achieve this ambition.²² The chairman of this commission and its secretary were none other than Djilas and Dedijer respectively. (In this respect, the later attacks on both men as ‘Bevanites’ and minions of the West overlooked that it was their job to make such connections.) Thus Djilas and Dedijer saw the name change as having political meaning rather than a terminological-tactical one.

The differences between the words and deeds of the party concerning the reforms caused Djilas great confusion. In a 1953 speech in Maribor he spoke in inconsistent terms about freedom of speech: ‘I consider it essential for writing to be completely free, however is this profligate? After all we must forbid the propagation of King Peter, the Chetniks, the spread of national hatred and the destruction of the social order, yet we must have free discussion.’²³ He also published a sociological article where he came to the confused conclusion: ‘every true socialist will get into a tragic inner conflict and experience a true “Hamlet antagonism”, for on one side he faces the necessity to resist pressure from the enemy of the people and had to fortify this resistance, while on the other hand he ought to forego this power for the sake of further democratisation, apart from which there is and can be no socialism.’²⁴

It was only a few months earlier that Djilas had been with Tito in his ceremonial Blue Train transporting the body of one of the most liberal communists, Boris Kidrič. According to Dedijer, at the Sixth Party Congress, just before his death, Kidrič had stressed to Djilas the need to develop workers’ control further. Both men

²² *ibid*

²³ ‘Stenografski znak zapisnika konferencije Milovan Đilas s obrazovnim i političkih radnika u Mariboru’, 31st October 1953, (AS) SI AS 1589, box 27

²⁴ E. Halperin, ‘Letter from Belgrade’, *Radio Free Europe*, 25th October 1956, p. 6

clearly saw the reforms of the early 1950s as just the beginning.²⁵ In *Savinjski Vestnik* Djilas proclaimed: ‘Comrade Kidrič cannot be replaced by any personality, he had a lot of energy and invaluable mental power ... the death of Boris Kidrič is equal to the loss of all Yugoslavs.’²⁶ The death of the man who had been at the forefront of developing the system of self-management unboundedly influenced Djilas to push on with his reforms. In trying to explain Djilas’s later deviation, Tito likened Djilas to Kidrič: ‘Comrade Djido was burnt out like our late Comrade Kidrič, he was burnt out by his amount of work, so much so that he claimed he saw bureaucrats in his everyday practise.’²⁷

Ultimately the fervour of the reform era was short lived. The conservative elements in the party, who envisioned democratisation leading to the death of the communist state, began to exert their control as quickly as 1953. This political change was prompted by the death of Stalin in March 1953 and the hopes of a rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Yet, there was a deeper reason - the observations of the political leaders that the party had grown weak. The greater political freedom within the party had led to a number of contradictory directives. As a result there was a pervasive lack of discipline among party members, resulting in rank and file apathy, and the espousal of opinions that often clashed with those of the political leaders. The confusion within the party was noticeable even at the time of the Sixth Party Congress. Djilas had to admit that the Central Committee was not able to lay out a set programme to the rest of the party because, ‘our socialist

²⁵ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 322

²⁶ ‘Borisa Kidriča ni več, Njegovo delo pa bo ostala’, *Savinjski vestnik: glasilo SZDL celjskega in šoštanjkega okraja*, Vol. 6, issue 15, 18th April 1953, p. 2

²⁷ J. B. Tito, ‘H Kritiki Stalinizma – Govor na trećem vanrednom plenumu centralnog komiteta saveza Komunisti Jugoslavije’, *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, Vol. 8, Issue 39/40, (1980), p. 327

development is not sufficiently clear in its outline.’²⁸ Given this observation, it is clear that the liberalising aims of the Congress, along with the proclaimed goal of the ‘withering away of the party’, had produced mass confusion. It was this uncertainty that would produce a party crisis, resulting in the Djilas and Dedijer Affair.

It was the question of the party’s role in society that came to divide Djilas from Tito, but also from Kardelj. While Tito opposed Stalin’s view that the party should control every aspect of society, he still believed that it should maintain a leading role. Even at the liberalising Sixth Party Congress, Tito defended the party’s position: ‘when I said that in the future the most important role of the party will be of an ideological-educational character, I did not mean by that all its other functions would end, no!’²⁹ The predicted irrelevance of the party appears to have concerned Tito. Djilas alleged that in 1952, out of nowhere, Tito suddenly shouted: ‘We will not have a multi-party system, we will have a multi-group system.’³⁰ Djilas maintained that such a system would inevitably be capricious. The confusion over the role of the party seemed to reflect confusion among the leaders themselves.

Therefore, while it would be going too far to suggest that the role of party remained unchanged following the Sixth Party Congress, the radical pronouncements of the political leaders were rarely put in practise. While some of the rank and file felt that the practical political measures fell short of the rhetoric, others struggled to understand what the new role of the party was. Stalin once argued that a party needs a clear political theory to give people, ‘strength and orientation, a clarity of perspective, confidence at work, faith.’³¹ While some Yugoslav communists questioned if their party had a theory, what confused others was that there seemed to

²⁸ M. Djilas, ‘Na programu Saveza komunista Jugoslavije’, *Šesti kongres Komunističke partije Jugoslavije*, (Belgrade, 1953), p. 88

²⁹ Djilas, *Parts of a Lifetime*, p. 169

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ F. W. Neal, *Titoism in Action*, (Berkeley, 1958), p. 64

be multiple theories that, if not mutually contradictory, were at best ambiguous. They had been told that they were obligated to stress the importance of democracy and tolerate different opinions. They had been told that the party no longer had a monopoly on setting the political line. They had been told that the party, to which they had devoted their lives, was to ‘wither away’. But at the same time, and often in the same sentence, the communists had been told that the party must maintain its leading position throughout society; that they must fight bourgeois tendencies and anti-state activity; and that they must struggle to safeguard the position of the party.³²

Without a solid backing in ideology, the confusion among party members was so great that by the summer of 1953 the leadership decided that they had to take action. From Brioni, his summer home in the Adriatic, Tito called a plenum of the Central Committee to tackle the problem. Symbolically, the plenum, taking place at Tito’s lavish residence, demonstrated the Marshal’s hostility to the democratising decisions of the Sixth Party Congress. As Djilas himself noted, the decision was an insult to the collective leadership.³³ The Brioni Plenum, as it became known, pronounced an immediate tightening of party discipline and reemphasised the principle of democratic centralism, affirming in effect, that any talk about the ‘withering away’ of the party was premature.³⁴ Djilas acknowledged there had been problems caused by the liberalising reforms, but saw the solution in further democratisation. He reasoned, ‘I have been to the West ... democratically they are far more progressive. The only way for us to overtake them is to continue the process of liberalisation.’³⁵ Tito, on the other hand, attacked unnamed sections of the party (almost certainly

³² *ibid*

³³ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 324

³⁴ *ibid*, p. 65

³⁵ ‘Stenografske beleške II. Plenum Centralnog komiteta Saveza komunista Jugoslavije’, (AJ), II/10

Djilas and his followers) for misinterpreting the meaning of democracy. He proclaimed that, 'because there is a bit more freedom, they do all sorts of unsocialist things.'³⁶ He was furious because of the 'Ljubljanska aferā' (Ljubljana affair) where numerous party functionaries had taken advantage of the devolution of power to enrich themselves.³⁷

The plenum concluded that relaxed party discipline had permitted 'ideological confusion to grow to the point where vast areas of the state are no longer revolutionary ... various anti-Marxist theories are developing everywhere.' The Brioni Plenum denounced these 'antisocialist deviations' and urged party members to close ranks.³⁸ A purge followed with over 72,000 members expelled from the party.³⁹ None of the resolutions of the Sixth Party Congress were revoked. However, the party leadership made clear that the rank and file were forbidden from promoting policies that were not in accordance with those of the Central Committee - especially when Central Committee policies represented the will of the party.⁴⁰ Since all of the Central Committee decrees purportedly represented the will of the party, criticism of the party leadership was completely restricted.

The key purpose of the Brioni Plenum was to demonstrate that democratic centralism had not disappeared. The party held a monopoly in the discovery and interpretation of the road towards socialism and therefore it had to be strictly observed, with no opposition to its decisions. The decree of decentralisation and democratisation of the party at the Sixth Party Congress was seen by some as the first step towards permitting free discussion in the party. However, the principle of

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ 'Zapisi podaljšan seja plenuma Centralnega komiteja Zveze komunistov Slovenije', 20-21 July 1953, (AS) SI AS 1589, box 1

³⁸ *ibid*, box 3

³⁹ Neal, *Titoism*, p. 66

⁴⁰ 'Prema stepenu discipline', *Borba*, 4th July 1953, p. 1

democratic centralism was never revoked. The Sixth Party Congress did not rescind the assertion of the Fifth Party Congress that democratic socialism is 'strict party discipline and the subordination of the minority to the majority.'⁴¹ Hence, Tito was disturbed when some members of the party continued to dispute Central Committee decisions after they had been agreed upon. Freedom of discussion would only be tolerated if it ceased once the party leaders had given their final word. Leninist theory had gone, but the Leninist concept of party discipline remained.

It was for this reason that Djilas did not oppose the new direction at Brioni. Under the principle of democratic centralism he had to accept the new line, just as Ranković had done with the renaming of the party even though he vehemently opposed it. It was the effort of Djilas to fight against this new trend that brought about his political downfall and showed conclusively that, however much the role of the party might change, Yugoslavia was to remain a one-party state for the foreseeable future.

Following the Brioni Plenum, Kardelj started preparations for the drafting of a new Constitution which was heavily inspired by the democratic ideas of the Sixth Party Congress. Djilas saw Kardelj regularly after the Brioni Plenum and clearly believed that they 'had a lot in common.'⁴² Presumably he saw Kardelj as an ally in putting the reform agenda back on the table. However, given the resolutions in Brioni, Tito intervened, summoning Kardelj to Belje where he was hunting. Djilas visited them the next day but was shocked to hear that Kardelj had decided to bow to Tito's orders. Djilas was vexed because Tito made this decision on a hunting trip as opposed to at a meeting of the Central Committee.⁴³ When confronting Kardelj over

⁴¹ *Peti kongres Komunističke partije Jugoslavije. Izveštaji i referati*, (Belgrade, 1948), p. 574

⁴² M. Djilas, *Tito*, (London, 1981), p. 108

⁴³ *ibid*, p. 109

this decision, Djilas declared that ‘Tito is the standard-bearer of bureaucracy’, an indiscretion that Kardelj would use against him at his sentencing in January 1954.⁴⁴

Djilas’s *Borba* Articles

Ultimately the Brioni Plenum demonstrated that if the party leadership did not want to reverse the move towards democracy and decentralisation, they at least wanted to put the brakes on it. Djilas held that the conclusions of the Brioni Plenum were one sided. ‘We have forgotten the struggle against bureaucratism.’ Indeed, he believed that ‘the Brioni Plenum had to be corrected.’⁴⁵ He set about doing this himself, penning a series of articles in the autumn and winter of 1953 in *Borba* and in his own theoretical magazine *Nova Misao*. He attacked the Yugoslav bureaucracy and made clear that the party itself was part of the problem. With these articles Djilas was trying to provoke public debate on the need for further democratic reforms and thus weaken the conservatives in the party. Furthermore, before publishing his views he sounded out a number of prominent party members, including the Slovene communist Miha Marinko.⁴⁶ Whether he had the intention of organising his own faction within the communist party is debatable.

At the beginning of October 1953 the newspaper *Politika* called for the publishing of some theoretical articles about the ideological problems within the party. This angered the writers at *Borba*, who stated that as the official party organ, it was their responsibility (and privilege) to publish such pieces. A compromise was

⁴⁴ E. Kardelj, *Socijalistička demokratija u jugoslovenskoj praksi*, (Belgrade, 1957), p. 38

⁴⁵ ‘Druga izjava Đilas je na Trećem Plenumu,’ *Komunist*, No. 1, January-February 1954, p. 157

⁴⁶ ‘Pogovor z Milovan Djilas’, 19th October 1953, (AS) SI AS 1532, box 11

reached; Djilas would write for *Borba* and Pijade for *Politika*.⁴⁷ The articles were formatted in the Western pattern – always of the same size and place in the paper.

It would become apparent however, that Djilas's articles embraced ideas that went further than anything else being discussed in the party. He called for the effective end of the party as an organised political force in society. Djilas contended that since the class struggle in Yugoslavia had been successfully brought to an end with the destruction of all effective enemies of socialism, the country was arriving at a new post-revolutionary phase. In this phase, 'the new enemy bureaucracy is even more dangerous than the previous one, capitalism.'⁴⁸ Djilas avowed that 'the goal is not communism or a communist society because in the end this goal is inevitable ... This goal only disguises from the bureaucratic reality.' Instead he went on describe what attainable goals the party should set: 'concrete measures, realisable from stage to stage, from one concrete target to another ... The goal today is quick progress of socialism and democracy through concrete and feasible forms.'⁴⁹

These articles appeared every Sunday without special fanfare or announcement. The first few were treated merely as additional instalments in the flow of abstractions which Djilas had been pouring into the nation's intellectual bloodstream since 1945. Large parts of them were devoted to the retelling of past events and repeating the same vague ideological generalisations. However, as each article appeared, the theme that inspired them became more apparent: 'The Revolution cannot save itself by its past. It must find new ideas, new forms, a new appeal ... If it is to survive, the Revolution must transform itself into democracy and socialism.'⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Djilas, *Tito*, p. 107

⁴⁸ M. Djilas, 'Subjektivne snage', *Borba* 27th December 1953, p. 3

⁴⁹ M. Djilas, 'Postoji li cilj', *Borba*, 6th December 1953, p. 3

⁵⁰ M. Djilas, *Anatomy of a Moral*, (New York, 1959), p. 39

In subsequent articles he elaborated at great length upon the new forms and new ideas which were to 'transform' the Revolution.

The uneasiness in the party was stifled by the reassuring thought that, after all, Djilas was a trusted party leader, whose adroit rhetoric had always furthered party interests. Tito himself chose not to intervene in the unorthodox journalistic exercise, in spite of what he later claimed was an acute concern. In a private letter, Djilas asked Tito what he thought of the articles. Tito replied that, 'they contain some things with which I do not agree. But in general they have many good points and I do not think that the other points are reason enough to stop you from writing. Go on writing.'⁵¹

Djilas's output increased. He also made his meaning clearer. Developing and expanding on the resolutions of the Sixth Party Congress, he wrote in increasingly critical terms of 'bureaucratism' and of the need to break the political monopoly of the party. Thus only with a close rereading did the true implications become clear to the party leaders. The Croatian party leader, Zvonko Brkić, later lamented that Djilas had crept up on his opponents, beginning 'with considerable circumspection', and then, 'as he proceeded to write his articles, sprinkling them with more and more venom.'⁵² This however misses that Djilas did not know from the outset what he wanted to say. His powerful evolution of thought occurred to him unnoticed and unheralded.

Toward the end of 1953, encouraged by positive responses from readers and by a belief that he was politically strong enough to weather any potential reproach, Djilas's views became increasingly radical. After all, at the end of December 1953 he was elected president of the National Assembly receiving 97.7 percent of the

⁵¹ F. Maclean, *The Heretic*, (New York, 1957), p. 373

⁵² Djilas, *Anatomy*, p. ix

votes, more than any other party member, more even than Tito. He was nominated for the position by the leader of the Croatian League of Communists, Vladimir Bakarić. Bakarić was not acting alone; his nomination was on behalf of a large group of the Assembly, and Bakarić himself was a close supporter of the newspaper *Naprijed* (Forward) whose journalists were echoing a number of his anti-bureaucratic ideas.⁵³ In addition, following the elections, Djilas addressed a large crowd of protesters who were demanding that Trieste be annexed to Yugoslavia. He was met with rapturous applause and was carried off by the crowd. Twenty years later Dedijer noted in his biography of Djilas, under a picture of this aforementioned event: ‘this cost Djilas his head.’⁵⁴



A threat to Tito’s charisma? - Djilas is carried aloft by crowds in Belgrade⁵⁵

Djilas’s election as president of the Assembly created the impression in the public mind that the rest of the party leadership supported his writings. But the truth was very different. At the end of December 1953 Tito voiced his disagreement, as did Ranković. Djilas noted that ‘in conversation he [Ranković] was ominously reticent’,

⁵³ D. Mujadžević, *Vladimir Bakarić: politička biografija*, (Zagreb, 2011), p. 228

⁵⁴ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 416

⁵⁵ A. Djilas, ‘Hronologija života I rada Milovana Đilasa’, at <http://www.djilas.info/HRONOLOGIJA/hronologija.html>

and described the latest articles by Djilas as ‘detrimental to the party’.⁵⁶ Djilas was not greatly surprised by his response.⁵⁷ However, he was stunned by Kardelj’s reaction. The Slovene voiced his concern that Djilas’s ideas were rushed and excessive. When the bewildered Djilas reasoned that they were allies in reforming the party, Kardelj countered: ‘No we are not! I do not agree with you! You want to change the whole system!’ Djilas alleged that this contradicted a comment Kardelj had made less than three months earlier when he confided: ‘As far as I am concerned, it would be better if this party did not exist.’⁵⁸

Kardelj embodied, more than any other leader, the basic contradiction of the Yugoslav system – the gulf between good intentions and the determination to exercise power. He largely agreed with Djilas about the need for democratisation of the country’s political life, but withdrew his support when it became obvious that Djilas was falling from favour. After all, some years later while on an official visit to Sweden, Kardelj told Agda Rossel, a Swedish diplomat, ‘you know, Djilas said a lot of things that are right. But he said them at a wrong time.’⁵⁹ Nonetheless, it must be remembered that Djilas’s *Borba* articles endangered and alarmed Kardelj. After all, was not his role as the regime’s authorised theoretician being threatened? Was Djilas now saying that they had come to an ideological parting of the ways, with Kardelj defending discredited old ideas while he, Djilas, stood for the ideas that would shape the future? Djilas had allegedly told Kardelj that, ‘Comrade Tito was defending bureaucracy, and that he would sooner or later have to fight it out with him, and that,

⁵⁶ Djilas, *Tito*, p. 157

⁵⁷ Swain, *Tito*, p. 105

⁵⁸ Djilas, *Tito*, p. 158

⁵⁹ Doder, *The Yugoslavs*, p. 100

whether we wanted it or not, a socialist left wing was emerging in our country and that the possibility of two socialist parties emerging cannot be discounted.’⁶⁰

Despite his colleagues’ criticisms, he thrilled his readers with his most controversial article in the *Borba* series, entitled ‘Subjective Forces’. The article concluded that socialist forces could, and did, exist outside the party. With this article the party began to understand that Djilas was actually presenting a brand-new political line, not merely some extreme exercises in reformist thinking-aloud. Next, Djilas surpassed ‘Subjective Forces’ with a bitter, satirical attack in *Nova Misao* on the very top ‘inner circle of party bureaucrats’, who he accused of living in a ‘closed world.’⁶¹ The imprecise, philosophical ruminations were enlivened by an indirect but obvious reference to General Peko Dapčević, Chief of Staff of the Yugoslav Army, and his 21 year-old bride, actress Milena Vrsajkov. Ultimately, the intensity of Djilas’s new convictions and his own temperament precluded moderation.

This essay focusing on a petty struggle for social advancement was an unusual one, yet it gave substance to Djilas’s preceding complex verbalisations. The article described the ‘massive, icy, and impenetrable wall’ that was put in place by Belgrade’s new governing social caste to exclude a ‘beautiful young actress’ whom the army Chief-of-Staff had married the previous year.⁶² The young woman represented one of those ‘modest people’ in whom Djilas placed all his hopes, and the sneering, bigoted women who had rejected her represented everything that was wrong with Yugoslav communist society. This infuriated the leading party members. They would have expected Djilas, the rigid puritan, to denounce the general for marrying a bourgeois actress instead of a loyal communist but he took the opposite

⁶⁰ Kardelj, *Socijalistička demokratija*, p. 38

⁶¹ M. Djilas, ‘Anatomija jednog morala’, *Nova Misao*, January 1954, p. 7

⁶² *ibid*

view. This provided them with further evidence that Djilas was simply intent on causing conflict.

These nonconformist views, published in official party publications by one of the most senior party officials, further exacerbated the pervasive ideological confusion across the country. They sparked widespread discussion and debate within the party and the press. The articles were popular with the rank and file, and even some junior members of the Central Committee welcomed them. One member, Krste Crvenkovski, even wrote his own article propagating 'Djilasism'.⁶³ Djilas's articles gave people, both within and outside the party, carte blanche to express their natural but long repressed passion for political controversy. Expectant meetings were held up and down the country to discuss the articles, and newspapers were flooded with readers' letters of support. It was the first approximation to a free exchange of views that had occurred in communist Yugoslavia. As one veteran trade unionist declared, 'there can be no doubt that Djilas has hit the right spot at the right moment. I personally also think that the time has come to free political life from the dead hand of the party machine.'⁶⁴ Another reader wrote: 'Djilas is one of our greatest and freest thinkers. I am only a working man of average intelligence. But Djilas has given expression to ideas which have long been forming in my mind and the minds of others. He found the living word which we lacked.'⁶⁵ For a few months in early 1954 change appeared to be on the horizon. The journalist Slavko Goldstein recalled an intellectual whispering to him: 'because of Djilas's articles life is worth living again.'⁶⁶

⁶³ T.T. Hammond, 'The Djilas Affair and Yugoslav Communism', *Foreign Affairs*, January 1955, p. 308

⁶⁴ Maclean, *The Heretic*, p. 376

⁶⁵ *ibid*

⁶⁶ S. Goldstein, 'Predgovor' in Djilas, *Vlast*, p.16

Djilas's popularity with certain elements of the party, and the enthusiastic response from the populace to his articles, appeared to go to his head. It is hard to believe that Djilas could have been so blind as to think that he could replace Tito, but his conversation with Kardelj does indicate that he imagined himself as the leader of a second socialist (or communist) party, or at least as the head of a faction within the party.

However, it is clear that Djilas was not taking practical steps to organise a faction. Perhaps Djilas felt that he and his programme were so popular among both communists and non-communists that Tito, Kardelj, Ranković and the other 'defenders of bureaucracy' would be too afraid to confront him. Having failed to win the argument at Brioni, Djilas appealed over the heads of the leading party officials to the communist rank and file. The majority of the party, he apparently believed, would condemn Tito's bureaucratic policy and would instead support his 'democratic' aims. As a result Tito would be forced to adopt his 'democratic' policy as his own, or face a split in the party and the wider communist movement.

The Third (Djilas) Plenum

By the start of 1954 the party leadership was in a quandary. Djilas had been their close comrade for nearly two decades, not to mention one of the most gifted individuals in their ranks. Yet to permit him to continue publishing his 'heresies', after numerous warnings, would add to the ubiquitous political confusion that was present across the country. True to his Leninist understanding of the party, Tito called a special Central Committee plenum on 16 January 1954 to remove Djilas from power. A few days earlier Tito summoned a meeting of the party leadership

(minus Djilas) to prepare for his ejection. Tito asserted that Djilas had betrayed the working class, noting that he was gathering support from the petty bourgeois intellectuals and students.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Ranković complained that Djilas's articles were a naked power grab: 'while we were busy with the elections and reforming the economy he used the opportunity to throw all sorts of things into the public domain ... the authorities in Montenegro have received letters from Djido ordering them to subscribe to his magazine *Nova Misao*.'⁶⁸

The Third Plenum in effect put Djilas on trial. The plenum proceedings were broadcast live on the radio and the Yugoslav papers were free to report them without censorship. Tito permitted this because he already knew the outcome of the plenum.⁶⁹ Djilas later claimed that he also anticipated the consequences and knew what was to come.⁷⁰ However, his behaviour and actions at the time suggest otherwise. Before the plenum he sent a prepared statement to Tito for his personal comments.⁷¹ He came to the session with the illusion that there would be a sensible discussion of his ideas, and that concessions would be made if he expressed his willingness to compromise. His behaviour also indicates that at this stage his goal was to reform the party, not to overthrow it.

Nevertheless, a media campaign against him had already launched, led by Petar Stambolić. Stambolić attempted to include Djilas's ex-wife, Mitra Mitrović, and his friend and political sympathiser Dobrica Ćosić in these attacks.⁷² While they steadfastly refused, it is certain that those who were known to be, or might have

⁶⁷ 'Sednica izvršnog komiteta SKJ', 13th January 1954, (AJ) III/61a

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 403

⁷⁰ Djilas, *Vlast*, p. 285

⁷¹ Kovačević, *Dilas*, p. 328

⁷² Ćosić, *Piščevi Zapisi*, p. 36

been, Djilas's allies and sympathisers were pressurised to denounce him. Many of them went back on their beliefs and sided with the party.

The case of Svetozar Vukmanović Tempo, Djilas's good friend and a supporter of many of his ideas, is exemplary in this regard. In 1953 he promised Djilas his support no matter what criticism he would face. Dedijer recorded: 'January 1 1954, there was a group of friends on New Year's Eve, among them Djilas, Tempo and some other Yugoslav leaders. General Peko Dapčević had been in Slovenia with Tito and he announced the unexpected news: "Comrade Tito thinks that Djilas's articles in *Borba* are no good." All of us were thunderstruck. Tempo was the first to speak. "Djido don't cover yourself in ashes. I am with you to the end."⁷³ Even the day before the plenum he promised Djilas his full support. He did not know, however, that the Yugoslav Security Service (UDBA) had already bugged his home and phone, and informed Tito of his intentions. Tito proceeded to call Tempo to his home the evening before the plenum for a 'discussion'. The next morning Tempo was the first to condemn Djilas.⁷⁴

Tempo was not alone. Following Tito's hour long opening speech in which he labelled Djilas's ideas as revisionist, the party leadership arose one by one to denounce their friend and colleague for deviationism. This was their opportunity to bring a number of long held grievances and grudges to bear on the party's *enfant terrible*. Despite the strict discipline and law against political groups, numerous personal rivalries, jealousies and intrigues had developed.

Numerous accounts describe Kardelj as being envious of Djilas, who was surpassing him as the main party ideologist.⁷⁵ The two had also clashed heavily over

⁷³ Dedijer, 'How I slaughtered others' – Unpublished diary, 1st January 1954, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁷⁴ S. Cvetković, *Između srpa i čekica II*, (Belgrade, 2009), p. 280

⁷⁵ G. Lazović, *Dilas o sebi, drugi o Dilasu: možda roman*, (Belgrade, 1989), p. 26

the costly building of the Bar-Kraljevo-Belgrade railway line. Djilas was a determined proponent of the scheme. Kardelj however, was a supporter of the less costly and more serviceable Ploče-Sarajevo-Belgrade line, which he believed had been side-lined to satisfy Djilas's Serb national sentiment.⁷⁶ Ranković had already clashed with Djilas over the issue of democratisation; this came to the fore in an article Djilas wrote, entitled 'Class Struggle', which criticised UDBA and Ranković for turning the police and courts into a separate political organisation.⁷⁷ Moša Pijade harboured numerous grudges against Djilas dating back to the interwar underground struggle. He was also frustrated when he, the oldest member of the National Assembly, was passed over for president by Djilas - a position he later assumed with Djilas's removal from the Central Committee.⁷⁸ Stambolić had held a grudge since the Sixth Party Congress, at which Djilas publicly attacked and mocked him for attempting to seduce another party member's wife. Blažo Jovanović and Miha Marinko meanwhile, were promised positions in the Central Committee for opposing Djilas.⁷⁹ As Dedijer notes, 'his friends started to desert him, one after the other, in the dirtiest possible way.'⁸⁰

Kardelj systematically tore apart Djilas's ideas, highlighting their ruinous effects on the party. Pijade accused him of 'political pornography'. Jovanović, a fellow pupil from the Berane gymnasium and a long-time comrade from the 1941 Montenegrin rising, declared that 'since Djilas has attacked the party there can be no place for him in its ranks.' The veteran Croatian communist Božidar Maslarić, in the

⁷⁶ Special Report - Memorandum for the Record, *Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)*, (Office of Current Intelligence), 2nd December 1958, CIA-RDP80B01676R003800180006-8, p. 1

⁷⁷ M. Djilas, 'Razredni boj', *Ljudska pravica-Borba*, 31st December 1953, p. 3

⁷⁸ Lazović, *Dilas*, p. 136

⁷⁹ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 386

⁸⁰ *ibid*, p. 334

tradition of Stalinist trials, shouted, ‘Djilas, you Trotskyite shit!’⁸¹ Even those party members who had supported his ideas joined the attacks. Vukmanović Tempo branded him as a reactionary. Veljko Vlahović, who had been an editor at *Borba* and even published a Djilas-esque article of his own, recanted and appealed for stricter control of the press. Peko Dapčević hastened to dissociate himself from his friend and from the whole *Nova Misao* incident: ‘It was all an invention of Djilas. I myself knew nothing of it!’⁸² Even Mitra, his ex-wife, while not openly condemning him, said she found his articles ‘in a certain sense dubious and exaggerated, and their publication had caused harm and confusion.’⁸³ This communist ritual made Djilas appear isolated, even though the great majority of non-party members and many party rank and file members sympathised with him.

Dedijer Defends Djilas

In this atmosphere there was bound to be intense interest in Dedijer’s choice of action. He had worked closely with Djilas during and after the war, and looked up to him as a more experienced revolutionary and the man who had brought him into the party. The solidarity and comradeship with his wartime colleagues was of immense importance to Dedijer. Seeing this supposedly close-knit group one by one turn on their ‘brother’, a man who they had championed only weeks earlier, spurred Dedijer to an eloquent defence of his friend. In many respects he would behave in a more courageous and principled manner than Djilas himself. After all, unlike Djilas, he made no recantation or apology for his actions.

⁸¹ *ibid*

⁸² Clissold, *Djilas*, p .252

⁸³ *ibid*

Just as Djilas began to notice the privileges that party members were accruing for themselves, Dedijer too grew repulsed by this development. The Slovene-American author Louis Adamić, who stayed with Dedijer on his visit to Yugoslavia, was shocked by his austere lifestyle. He told Adamić that he detested those who abused their position: ‘There’s plenty of talk which makes it unpleasant for the many who live modestly and isn’t helpful generally. There’s quite a struggle going on inside the party against the privileges.’⁸⁴

Publicly however, Dedijer left no clues that he would follow Djilas in his attacks. He recalled editing Djilas’s *Borba* articles: ‘I read all of Djilas’s articles underlying all the parts I agreed with in red ink. Djilas expressed his views in a long and rambling style. There was minimal red on my page.’⁸⁵ In *Borba*, during August 1953, he defended the existing system and its one party state against the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee’s critical remarks. Attlee had remarked that although he saw personal evidence of freedom in Yugoslavia, ‘full democracy’ could not exist within a single party system. Following these remarks *Borba* had altered Attlee’s comments so that they were ‘more favourable’ to Yugoslavia. Dedijer criticised the paper for such distortions, and suggested that his fellow Yugoslavs should follow his own lead and not lack any ‘faith in the country’s new social order.’⁸⁶ From this statement it is clear that Dedijer supported the one-party system in general, yet he was rebelling against the prescribed narrative and the lack of freedom of speech. It was this latter point, the freedom of discussion, where he was in agreement with Djilas. After all, the crux of his defence of his friend was that there was a ‘great fear

⁸⁴ Adamić, *The Eagle*, p. 59

⁸⁵ V. Dedijer, ‘Nekoliko mojih prema tome subjektivnih sećanja i ocean o nekim bivšim članovima vrhovnog štaba u priodu rata’ – Unpublished Essay, Undated, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 54

⁸⁶ ‘Mr Atlee Leaves Yugoslavia’, *The Times*, 24th August 1953, p. 5

among the literary people’, meaning - evidently - those like himself, who feared ‘a return to the days of prescribed writing.’⁸⁷

At the plenum convened to discipline Djilas, Dedijer was confused and clearly unhappy at the treatment of his old and close friend. He admitted that perhaps his colleague had been excessive in some of his arguments and wrong in some of his conclusions, but he defended his right to dissent: ‘Each of us has a right to think for himself, I am no robot.’ He continued, ‘whatever occurs, I am not going to eat dirt. If you have to eat dirt once in your life you will have to say it is good forever.’⁸⁸

Having spoken of the ‘spiritual torment’ through which he had passed, he declared that in his opinion there was no substantial difference between Djilas’s views and those of Tito and Kardelj. The trouble, he concluded, was that Djilas had ‘tried to systematise our theoretical thinking and in so doing had inevitably landed himself in difficulties.’⁸⁹

He told one journalist that in a conversation with Edvard Kardelj on 25 December (several days before Djilas was sharply rebuked) he had gained the impression that Kardelj had ‘no objections in principle’ to Djilas’s argument. In addition, Ranković had refused to comment on the subject when questioned by one of *Borba*’s editors Veljko Vlahović.⁹⁰ Dedijer posed some obvious and embarrassing questions:

Until a few days ago the views expressed by Djilas in *Borba* were more or less accepted by all of us sitting here. We cannot deny this ... of course, those who read Djilas’s articles thought that he had first discussed them with our Secretariat and that the Executive Committee was behind him. What does that mean? It means that people liked these articles, not because of their content, but because of the authority behind

⁸⁷ V. Dedijer, ‘The Party Needs His Strength and Talent’ in Djilas, *Parts of a Lifetime*, p. 234

⁸⁸ C.L. Sulzberger, *The Resistantists*, (New York, 1962), p. 168

⁸⁹ Maclean, *The Heretic*, p. 382

⁹⁰ ‘The Case of Vladimir Dedijer’, *Radio Free Europe*, 23rd November 1956, p. 1

them. Now things have changed. People who earlier approved of Djilas have started throwing stones at him ... From this I draw two conclusions. First, the ideological level in our country is lower than I thought it was. Secondly (and this is a purely moral question), how can we think one thing today and all of a sudden change our opinion overnight?⁹¹

The answer to Dedijer's question appeared to be that 'all of a sudden' the leadership of the party realised that its dictatorship was being challenged. He continued, 'I sincerely hope that we shall find a sensible solution. There are few people among us of Djilas's calibre. Should we pass wise judgment, we shall succeed in saving this great and turbulent spirit.'⁹² To conclude his courageous speech he quoted Tito to Tito: 'Our revolution does not devour its children; the children of the revolution are honest.'⁹³ However, none of it had any impact, either on Djilas's brothers, or his surrogate father.

In fact all that Dedijer achieved with his brilliant defence was that he drew the ire of his colleagues. They were as infuriated with him as they were with Djilas. As Moma Marković proclaimed, 'Did he try to insinuate that all of us others were dishonest or accepted the resolution of the Politburo out of cowardice or for some other reason, but that unlike us, he was being frank? This insult of Dedijer's just illustrates how far he has gone.'⁹⁴ Pijade proclaimed him a purveyor of 'spiteful and vile remarks', a comment that nearly caused the two to come to physical blows.⁹⁵

The question that also needed to be broached was how Djilas's 'heretical articles' were published. Dedijer was not only a close friend of Djilas, but, as a sub-editor of

⁹¹ Dedijer, 'The Party Needs His Strength and Talent', in Djilas, *Parts of a Lifetime*, p. 233

⁹² *ibid*

⁹³ *ibid*, p. 234

⁹⁴ 'The Case of Vladimir Dedijer', *Radio Free Europe*, 23rd November 1956, p. 1

⁹⁵ Draper, 'How the Djilas Crisis Grew', *Labor Action*, 15th February 1954, p. 6

Borba, shared the responsibility for having published his articles. He explained that he had done so because he believed them to have been written with the authority of the Central Committee. Moreover, they expressed very much what other leaders had been thinking and saying.⁹⁶

Thus as the political editor of *Borba*, Dedijer became a kind of ‘co-conspirator’. Unlike the sub-editor, Veljko Vlahović, he never tried to extricate himself. According to Dedijer, Djilas had been hesitating over whether he should publish his sensationalist *Anatomy of a Moral in Nova Misao*: ‘Most of us were wavering also, but Vlahović pressed Djilas very hard to publish the text, a decision which would lead to his political destruction.’⁹⁷ Nevertheless, at the plenum Vlahović attempted to distance himself: ‘I was worried somewhat at the time of the publication of the articles by Djilas, I received no remarks from the members of the Central Committee on these articles ... I was on sick leave and Comrade Tito was in Slovenia, and a talk on the subject was postponed ... therefore I should like to raise the problem of the editorship of *Borba* and *Nova Misao*.’⁹⁸ Yet again Dedijer took responsibility, telling the plenum: ‘my name also appears on the title page of that magazine ... accordingly, all blows which are hitting his [Djilas’s] head just now I also feel are directed toward me.’⁹⁹

Dedijer was, like Djilas, a leading member of the international commission that had visited London in 1951 and maintained contact with the British Labour Party. In particular both men felt a natural affinity with Aneurin Bevan, a Minister for Health and key figure in the Labour Government. Not only did they share common political ground, but also similar temperaments and a similar approach to politics. ‘They were

⁹⁶ *ibid*

⁹⁷ Dedijer, ‘Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*’, 14th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁹⁸ Draper, ‘How the Djilas Crisis Grew’, *Labor Action*, 15th February 1954, p. 6

⁹⁹ *ibid*

poets, romantics, unrestrainable individuals, strong unpredictable mountain types.’¹⁰⁰

The three men were intellectually stimulated by each other’s company. They enjoyed the lively interchange of ideas, the probing into the political and social reality of their respective countries and the universal principles behind them. Djilas returned to Yugoslavia impressed with the gradual progress toward socialism in Britain under a multi-party system. While Dedijer was not as advanced in his intellectual transformation as Djilas, he undoubtedly respected a different form of socialism. In particular, during a visit to Winston Churchill he admired the relatively modest home in which he lived in comparison to that of Tito.

Djilas’s and Dedijer’s experience during the ‘Djilas Plenum’, led them to rethink their views about communism. Djilas’s protest, and the party’s response to it, constitutes a critical point in the evolution of Yugoslav communism, it established the limits of the liberalising communist reforms. The party’s frantic efforts to expunge the Djilas and Dedijer heresy persuaded Djilas, and to a lesser extent Dedijer, that Yugoslav communism had more in common with its Soviet counterpart than the party liked to admit. The Soviet abuses that he and Dedijer had often described in great detail in their post-1948 writings no longer seemed specific to Stalin or the Soviet Union, but rather endemic to communism. As Dedijer observed:

On January 16 and 17, 1954 Milovan Djilas went to the stake where he was burned on the embers of a slow fire for two whole days. It was a typical Stalinistic, inquisitorial performance. There was no reasoning in the old Marxist tradition. This was more a religious performance, in which the old objective was to torment the victim until he admitted his guilt. For two days over 100 red cardinals were repeating dogmatic

¹⁰⁰ J. Lee, *My Life with Nye*, (London, 1980), p. 194

accusations, pressing Djilas to make, 'self-criticism.' The poor victim, at last exhausted, started his repentance: 'A devil entered my soul.'¹⁰¹

In his defence of Djilas at the plenum, Dedijer described his friend as a proud eagle restless for intellectual flight, who had broken the cage of dogma and should not now have his wings clipped: 'Such men are not born every day! The party needs his strengths and his gifts!'¹⁰² This plea fell on deaf ears. Even Djilas rejected it. He intervened to stress that, whatever impression his friend may have conveyed, his problems with the party were ideological and political, not emotional or personal. He even acknowledged that he accepted 90 percent of Kardelj's arguments, but was still convinced that the party needed sweeping organisational reforms.¹⁰³

Following the plenum Dedijer wrote: 'Milovan Djilas cut a very lonely figure during his trial. Almost nobody spoke to or even looked at him. He was roaming through the hall in the recesses, flying from utter depression to glimpses of euphoria.'¹⁰⁴ Ultimately the plenum had left Djilas feeling demoralised, humiliated and embittered. It is doubtful that he was expecting to be fully vindicated, as his pre-prepared statement to Tito suggests, but neither did he expect the abuse hurled at him by men who, only a few days earlier, called themselves his friends. During Tempo's speech, believing that he would defend him, Djilas experienced something of a psychological breakdown. He interrupted his former friend and castigated his moral character. Tempo was so shaken and upset that he could not continue his speech. After the day's session Djilas confronted and bitterly reproached him: 'so you too are a coward who kicks a man when he's down!' The following day Tempo repeated

¹⁰¹ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 14th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

¹⁰² Dedijer, 'The Party Needs His Strength and Talent', in Djilas, *Parts of a Lifetime*, p. 234

¹⁰³ Clissold, *Djilas*, p. 253

¹⁰⁴ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 14th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

Djilas's comments to the plenum as validation of the accused's stubbornness and 'factionalism.'¹⁰⁵

Dedijer was so surprised when Tempo took the floor to attack Djilas - contradicting his previous assurances - that he jumped to his feet, shouting: 'Shut up you damned Markisa!' (Markisa was the chief of Tempo's clan who in 1847 betrayed Montenegro and Prince Bishop Njegoš.)¹⁰⁶ Thus the beautiful image of the fraternal world of communist revolutionaries had diverged sharply from reality. As Djilas's son Aleksa argued, it was this sudden loss of support from his former comrades that explained his shaky performance at the plenum: 'On the first day he did well, and then he got confused. Because you see he was in a strange position. He had no other friends ... He was confronted with the people who created the closeness before the war as a young revolutionary, in the king's dungeon, and during the war, and later during the rescue of the country from Stalin.'¹⁰⁷

At the end of the plenum a motion to remove Djilas from the Central Committee and give him a final party warning was put to a vote and accepted unanimously. It avowed that the views expressed by Djilas in his articles conflicted with party policy, had confused the populace, and seriously damaged the party. Of the 109 members of the Central Committee, only 30 participated in the plenum discussion. Of the 27 who openly criticised Djilas, just five admitted understanding Djilas's articles, most confessed to just scanning them and some even conceded that they were too difficult to understand.¹⁰⁸ In this respect Tito's and Kardelj's concern was well founded.

¹⁰⁵ Dedijer, 'How I slaughtered others' - Unpublished diary, 15th January 1954, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*

¹⁰⁷ V. Vojinović, 'Aleksa Djilas: Đido, Majka i ja Protiv Tita-Partije-Armije i UDBe', *Vijesti*, December 2009, p.8

¹⁰⁸ D. Tošić, *Ko je Milovan Đilas: Disidenstvo 1953-1995*, (Belgrade 2005), p. 11

Given the low intellectual-ideological level of the party members, Djilas's articles had indeed caused alarming confusion.

The Djilas and Dedijer Trial

Even at this point Djilas naively thought that he would still be able to cooperate, albeit on a lower level, attending local Belgrade party meetings. After the plenum, however, it became toxic to associate with Djilas or Dedijer. Bodies such as the Serbian Journalists Association, which Dedijer had belonged to for many years, expelled him as being 'unworthy' of membership. Meanwhile, the Nikšić library in Montenegro returned the 200,000 Dinars Djilas had donated from the royalties of his *Borba* articles. The explanation given was that 'they did not want the enemy's money.'¹⁰⁹ As in the Soviet Union, the Politburo decided the position and other bodies jumped behind it without question.

This theme was not confined to mass organisations; ordinary Yugoslavs followed the same path. In the little town of Pančevo, Dedijer's 'constituents' declared after an overnight meeting that they were 'unanimously in favour of the withdrawal of their candidate's mandate'. The Pančevo resolution branded Dedijer a 'common traitor ... who had deceived them in a perfidious way and abused their confidence.'¹¹⁰ At a local party meeting a Slovene woman spat in Djilas's face. Before his trial she had been his friend and main source of reassurance that the people of Slovenia supported him.¹¹¹ Even Djilas's once close friend General Dapčević, whom he had defended in his *Nova Misao* article, sharply dissociated himself from both Djilas and Dedijer. Writing in *Borba*, he described them as

¹⁰⁹ 'A New Move in the Dedijer Case', *The Times*, 30th December 1954, p. 6

¹¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹¹ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 5th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

‘foreign agents’ whose acts he ‘detested as much as any other citizen of this country.’ Nothing, the general complained, could be ‘morally lower’ than to endeavour to interpret ‘the noble sentiments of old friendships as evidence of support of such counter-revolutionary action against one’s own country.’¹¹² This epithet was a surprise. It signalled the reappearance of language that was supposedly dropped from the vocabulary of the Yugoslav communists when dealing with political disagreements.

Contrary to established Western scholarship,¹¹³ the ‘irrepressible Montenegrin’ was anything but. With the exception of Djilas leaving the party in April and returning his member’s card, number 0004, for the remainder of 1954 - the best part of a year - Yugoslavs heard little of the ‘Djilas Affair’. The party appeared to have withstood its immediate effects remarkably well. Djilas remained a forgotten and disillusioned man. It was not until Dedijer defiantly walked out of a control commission in December 1954 that Djilas emerged as a strong defiant dissident.

After returning to the political scene in December 1954, following a break-down in health after the plenum, Dedijer was called to account for defending Djilas. The party’s control commission ensured the orthodoxy of Central Committee members by investigating those whose attitude appeared in any way ambivalent. Peko Dapčević was questioned and cleared, as was Mitra Mitrović. Dedijer was also summoned by the commission but it was his unexpected defiance that reopened the ‘Djilas Affair’. It was much to Dedijer’s surprise that he was even called before the body. He recalled that its president, Krsto Popivoda, started to shout at him in a shrieking, falsetto voice. He demanded that Dedijer respond to the control commission because of his speech at the third plenary session when he defended

¹¹² ‘A New Move’, *The Times*, 30th December 1954, p. 6

¹¹³ See D. Reinhartz, ‘The Nationalism of Milovan Djilas’, *Modern Age*, (1985), Vol. 29, Issue 3, pp. 233-241, Sulzberger, *Paradise Regained*

Djilas, and because he kept in contact with the Montenegrin after the plenum.¹¹⁴

Dedijer recalled his indignation:

When I heard this I boiled with rage and shouted at him that they had no right to conduct any investigation against me ... Before leaving for India both Tito and Ranković had assured me that I would not be called before the control commission. Finally, at the height of my rage, I shouted that I did not recognise them. All three gasped at me. As a parting insult I added that they were all mother-fuckers and stormed out.¹¹⁵

Dedijer could have survived these years if he merely recanted. However, like his friend he was a robust individual with a sharp tongue. It was one thing to challenge the legal competence of the party's control commission, but it was quite another to launch into a tirade of abuse and profanities. For a proud man like Dedijer, bowing to a majority decision at the 'Djilas Plenum' was not the same as being asked to make an embarrassing recantation.

He reacted by giving an interview to *The Times* (a paper that was freely available in Belgrade), complaining that certain 'pressures' were being brought to bear on him; he was being persecuted for refusing to join the boycott of Djilas. He told *The Times* correspondent:

I did not agree, and still do not agree with many of the theoretical theses of Mr. Djilas, but I have a great respect for him as an intellectual and humanitarian. I have spent twenty years of my life as his friend and we differ in many things, but I refused to join this boycott, because to do so would run contrary to my beliefs. ... I cannot stop seeing

¹¹⁴ Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 3, p. 557

¹¹⁵ 'Letter from Dedijer to Christopher Farley', 1st March 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

a friend who is now so very much alone. In my view a communist should be first of all a human being, and every political movement which puts aside ethics and morals carries within it the seeds of its own destruction ... there can be no development of socialism without the struggle of opinions.¹¹⁶

It is not hard to see why the Belgrade correspondent for *The Times* saw his action as the epitaph for Yugoslav communism. They noted that the action taken against Dedijer meant that 'the policy of encouraging the free struggle of opinion is being reversed' and concluded that Dedijer was correct, the Yugoslav communists were indeed sowing 'the seeds of their own destruction.'¹¹⁷

Three days after Dedijer's interview with *The Times*, Djilas gave an interview to the Belgrade correspondent of the *New York Times*. As the US ambassador to Yugoslavia observed: 'it would appear that Dedijer's precipitous action in challenging the competence of the control commission and his subsequent revelation of this incident to the press, has either by accident or design, given renewed opportunity for Djilas to spread his views.'¹¹⁸ Djilas stated that the hounding of Dedijer in an attempt to get him to recant was 'an attempt to frighten the democratic elements in the party. Such elements exist, but they are unorganised, whereas the party itself is in the hands of undemocratic forces.'¹¹⁹ He alleged that the liberalising tendencies of the Sixth Party Congress had been invalidated by the meeting of the Central Committee at Brioni less than ten months later. He denied any intention to lead a movement or faction against Tito, but he concluded that socialism in Yugoslavia could only succeed if there was free discussion and a second party. If

¹¹⁶ 'Mr. Dedijer's Personal Statement', *The Times*, 22nd December 1954, p. 8

¹¹⁷ *ibid*

¹¹⁸ The Ambassador in Yugoslavia (Riddleberger) to the Secretary of State, 768.00/12-2754: Despatch, 27th December, 1954, (FRUS), 1952-1954, Vol.VIII, Document 719

¹¹⁹ J. Raymond, 'Purged Yugoslav Asks Two Parties, More Democracy', *The New York Times*, 25th December 1954, p .1

free discussion and a second party were permitted, Djilas argued, the conditions necessary for political democracy might develop in the next decade. He acknowledged that he was putting himself in danger by being so candid, but predicted: 'I think that nothing bad will happen. It will mean a lot for our country to have a citizen say what he thinks.'¹²⁰

The most important element of the interview was his call for the establishment of a second, 'democratic socialist' party. This directly challenged the communists' monopoly of power. According to an entry in the diary of Edvard Kocbek, the Slovenian Christian socialist, Djilas had contemplated the idea of a dual party system with certain colleagues as early as 1950. He envisioned the new party as a legal opposition to the communist party, providing political balance and furthering democratic tendencies.¹²¹

Djilas had grossly miscalculated when he naively predicated that, 'nothing bad will happen.' This comment did not assuage his detractors. In Tito's absence (he had left shortly before on a prolonged visit to India and Burma), Kardelj was acting president and resolute in his desire to crush the new provocation. His years of friendship, collaboration, and political association with Djilas counted for nothing; in fact they may have made him all the more anxious to dissociate himself from his former companion. In a speech at the Congress of the Bosnian League of Communists on 27 December, he proclaimed that Dedijer was a figure of no political importance, and while Djilas had occupied positions in the government, the whole experience which he and his colleagues had had in dealing with him had proved that

¹²⁰ *ibid*

¹²¹ E. Kocbek, *Dnevnik 1950*, (Ljubljana, 2000), p. 318

Djilas had a confused and vacillating character.¹²² Kardelj continued, denouncing Djilas and Dedijer as ‘bankrupt politicians’ who had betrayed their own people by utilising the foreign press to become ‘political figures’ once again.¹²³ Dedijer claimed that someone in the foreign ministry had informed him that Kardelj, still anxious to prove his loyalty and to convince Tito of his firmness against the heretics, proposed that the two men be jailed immediately. Djilas should receive 20 years, and he, 10.¹²⁴

Nonetheless, a critical speech was not enough to silence Dedijer. The very next day he contacted a number of foreign journalists in Belgrade and informed them of his intention to hold a press conference. When the journalists arrived however, they found his home barred by the police.¹²⁵ Meanwhile, the public prosecutor was hastily passing a motion to deprive Dedijer of his parliamentary immunity so that he could face criminal charges. By the end of the year the courts had opened a case against both men under Article 118 of the criminal code. They were charged with producing ‘hostile and slanderous propaganda designed to damage the most vital interest of our country.’¹²⁶

The dilemma now facing Kardelj and his colleagues was a complicated one. A year earlier they believed that they had silenced and discredited Djilas without the need to arrest him and contravene their proclaimed liberal principles. They had hoped that by isolating him he would become a forgotten man with no political significance. These hopes had been thwarted. With the encouragement of Dedijer,

¹²² Despatch from the embassy in Yugoslavia to the Department of State - US-Yugoslav Relations—Present Trends of Yugoslav Foreign Policy, 21st February 1955, (FRUS), 1955–1957, Vol. XXVI, Document 239

¹²³ ‘Steps Against Mr. Dedijer’, *The Times*, 28th December 1954, p. 6

¹²⁴ Dedijer, ‘How I slaughtered others’— Unpublished diary, 28th December 1954, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

¹²⁵ *ibid*, 29th December 1954

¹²⁶ ‘Mr. Dedijer for Trial’, *The Times*, 29th December 1954, p. 6

the irrepressible Montenegrin had emerged from his disillusioned slumber. The latest developments in the 'Djilas Affair' were inciting domestic and international interest. A harsh sentence would be construed as Yugoslavia relapsing into Stalinist methods. It would legitimise Dedijer's accusation that the Yugoslav Revolution was now in fact 'devouring its own children'. On the other hand, to tolerate such insolence, to allow it to continue unchecked and unpunished, would risk it spreading.

Following the example set by Kardelj at Sarajevo, the authorities in their statements sensibly focused on attacking the foreign press for interfering in a purely domestic issue. Djilas and Dedijer were left at liberty to spend the holidays with their families and make numerous and much noticed public appearances at theatres and concerts.¹²⁷ By mid-January however, both men were brought to trial and unlike the live plenum that was broadcast, the trial, contrary to the statute, was secret. This proved to be a masterstroke on the part of the regime. After all, Djilas was no longer cowed and contrite, he raised his voice again calling for radical political action. During the trial he shouted down the judge, the prosecutor and even his own designated lawyer. Meanwhile Dedijer was defended by Dr. Ivo Politeo who, with equal courage, verve and defiance, had defended Tito in 1928 and Archbishop Stepinac in 1946.¹²⁸

Special importance was placed on the fact that Djilas and Dedijer had found a platform for their views in the foreign press. *Tanjug*, the official news agency, dubbed the pair 'foreign interventionist tools', and a torrent of attacks against the Western press was unleashed.¹²⁹ Moreover, Djilas and Dedijer were officially sentenced, not for their ideas, but for the way in which they advanced them. *Borba*

¹²⁷ Maclean, *The Heretic*, p. 390

¹²⁸ 'Case of Mr. Dedijer and Mr. Djilas', *The Times*, 17th January 1955, p. 6

¹²⁹ J. Raymond, 'Penalties Hinted for Tito's Ex-Aides', *The New York Times*, 7th January 1955, p. 1

asserted that, ‘the pair are free to fight for their opinions.’¹³⁰ This was specious.

Djilas and Dedijer were, patently, not free to fight for their beliefs. Accordingly they were convicted for violating the law on ‘hostile propaganda’, which stated:

Whoever intends to undermine the authority of the working people, the defensive power of the country or the economic bases of building socialism, or intends to destroy the brotherhood and unity of the peoples of Yugoslavia by means of cartoons, writings, speeches, or in any other way carries out propaganda against the state ... shall be punished by imprisonment.¹³¹

Therefore, not only did the deviating opinion have to be declared erroneous – it had for the sake of ‘monolith unity’, to be considered as a crime. Otherwise party members might believe that it was natural and forgivable to hold views contrary to those promoted by the party leadership. An individual possessing different opinions had to be morally discredited, branded as a heretic, and either expelled from the party or forced to make a repeal and public confession of their repentance. Furthermore, it had to be emphasised that the heretic was completely isolated, and that their opinions were far too dangerous and farcical to be shared by anyone of note. All persons holding office or rank in the party had to stand up and denounce the heretic, and it was crucial that their friends and family categorically break from them. Finally, anyone who had the courage to defend them (in this case just Dedijer) could not be respected, but had to be exposed along with the heretic.

Djilas and Dedijer were sentenced to eighteen and six months imprisonment respectively. However, the court suspended the sentence for three years for Djilas,

¹³⁰ ‘Slučaj Milovana Djilasa’, *Borba*, 25th January 1955, p.1

¹³¹ ‘Article 118, Yugoslav Criminal Code’, *Službeni List SFRJ*, No. 13, 9th March 1951, p.1

and two for Dedijer. Both men were permitted their liberty as long as they did not repeat their offense. Less than two years later Djilas did repeat his offence by discussing the Hungarian revolution with an American magazine; he was then imprisoned. In this respect the Djilas and Dedijer affair showed both the extent and the limits of the relaxation of totalitarianism. The regime forbade any opposition that threatened its dominant position. Yet it dealt with this opposition in a relatively moderate manner. The events of 1954 had proven that the Yugoslav Revolution, like others before it, did devour its children. Titoism had nothing of the pathological suspiciousness, the vindictiveness, and the sadism of Stalinism, but the Yugoslav communists were no less determined than the Soviets to hold and retain absolute power.

Conclusions

Dedijer once watched a game of chess between Tito and Djilas, and recorded in his diary that although Djilas attacked first and appeared to be winning, Tito defended doggedly and won in the end.¹³² The same pattern followed in the political arena during the years 1952-55. Djilas convincingly demonstrated the bureaucratic forms in society, but he underestimated their ideological and social bases. The fall of Djilas and his ally Dedijer marked the end of a dynamic period in Yugoslav communism, when ideas far exceeded political reality and the potential for reform seemed limitless. While many dates and events are given as the key to explain the decline of communism in Yugoslavia, whether the 1974 Constitution, the crippling economic debts incurred, or the death of Tito, Djilas's and Dedijer's fall merits a

¹³² Dedijer, *War Diaries*, Vol.1, p. 144

high place in this discussion. By condemning and expelling them, the party ensured that Titoist ideology, instead of growing into a movement capable of transcending the party, was condemned to stagnation. Retrospectively, it is apparent that both Djilas and Dedijer were correct in their arguments: the Yugoslav political system needed to ease some of the rigidity that had formed with the concentration and centralisation of power in a one-party state. Only by allowing a wider number of ideas to obtain legitimacy in the political arena could the Yugoslav political system achieve the adaptability and flexibility it would need to survive.

Yugoslav communism had proven its inconsistent character. Although the results of Djilas's and Dedijer's trial frightened party members into conformity, it did not answer the central question still facing the Yugoslav communists: conformity with what? Djilas had stumbled upon an inherent contradiction within Yugoslav communism. There was an intrinsic incongruity between economic and gradual political liberalisation on the one hand, and centralised, essentially authoritarian rule of a single-party on the other. This crucial discrepancy was never solved and would eventually play a large part in undermining the party. Dedijer appears to have been right when he said that Djilas had 'tried to systematise our theoretical thinking and in so doing had landed himself in difficulties.'¹³³ In order to distinguish their party from the Soviets, the Yugoslav communists enacted a number of reforms which fundamentally affected the role of the party in a one-party state. These changes were officially sanctioned at the Sixth Party Congress with Djilas drafting almost every resolution. It was also the responsibility of Djilas and Dedijer, as the party's chief propagandists, to detail these reforms and explain them to the public. Both men, with their questing minds, were inclined to go too far and to be carried away by their own

¹³³ Maclean, *The Heretic*, p. 376

ideas. The ensuing crisis had forced Tito to choose, and choose quickly, between Djilas and Dedijer on the one hand, and the party on the other. The choice proved not to be difficult. Djilas appeared to be positioning himself as the leader of a formal opposition, and this was a concept that was unacceptable to Tito.

After all, there was a legitimate fear that the radicalism fostered by Djilas would empower opportunist bourgeois elements in society who had been emboldened by both the westward tilt and the economic reforms that had followed 1948. In addition, Djilas's populist rhetoric appeared to be gaining traction in intellectual circles, in sections of the press, and with the country's youth. This alarmed the party because Djilas was raising the socio-political expectations of the populace that they could not hope to satisfy. Therefore, in the eyes of the party leadership, the 'Djilas and Dedijer Affair' appeared to represent an anarchist and pseudo-liberal attempt to weaken the party and undermine socialist development.¹³⁴ This concern was even explicitly stated in the party programme promulgated a few years later, and it was through this prism that the party viewed any future challenge to its hegemony.¹³⁵ After all, although by 1955 Djilas had been conclusively defeated in the political arena, he remained a gadfly. His ideas, often termed as 'Djilasism', re-emerged in subsequent decades and steadily undermined the state.

¹³⁴ Unkovski-Korica, *Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia*, p. 224

¹³⁵ *VII Kongres saveza komunista Jugoslavije: 22-26 Aprila 1958, (stenografske beleške)*, (Belgrade, 1958), p.115

Chapter 4: Djilas - 'the Father of Yugoslav Dissidence'

The study of Djilas and 'Djilasism' is important in analysing Yugoslav socialism. Djilas's political revolt accentuated the promises and pitfalls of a Marxist-Leninist ideology whose distant utopian goal of a classless society hindered any attempts at liberalisation and democratisation. Djilas himself had not opposed Tito and his government in any crude struggle for power. His challenge had stemmed from his ideas, and these ideas were subversive of Tito and his party's monopoly. This is why no reconciliation was ever possible. Although he changed his opinion about the best means of attaining his desired goal numerous times, the goal itself never changed. Djilas's aim was to create a new society in which human rights were respected, and totalitarianism, a cult of personality, and bureaucratic despotism would be abolished. While Tito easily crushed Djilas politically, this did not calm ferment from below. He was unable to crush Djilas's ideas (Djilasism) which had settled in parts of Yugoslav society.

With the abrupt ending of his political career, Djilas gradually began to transmute his experiences into the raw materials to attack the party. As he later proclaimed: 'history is not created by the victors, but by vanquished visionaries'.¹ His communist past, his dramatic fall, and the persistent debilitating propaganda against him, made it impossible for him to re-emerge as a political figure. Nevertheless, he remained literarily active throughout his long life, and his ideas, his writings, and his mere presence affected the political scene.

Djilas undoubtedly had the energy and literary talent to win over many people. The very fact that he was compelled to forfeit power and engage in a battle that

¹ D. Reinhartz, *Milovan Djilas: A Revolutionary as a Writer*, (Boulder, 1981), p. 14

seemed destined to end in defeat, gave his words a special kind of authority. Jara Ribnikar testified that ‘Djilas was like a fantasy, which drove us to trust him and admire him.’² Predrag Palavestra noted, ‘Djilas was truly the fallen angel of communism, he brought the seeds of disbelief and a sobering toward the communist system’.³ While the Serbian poet Matija Bećković claimed that, ‘Djilas represents the fall of tyranny, he did more than all of its opponents put together.’⁴ Although these statements inflate Djilas’s role in undermining the communist regime, the historian Stevan K. Pavlowitch’s claim that Djilas was ‘the father of Yugoslav dissidence’ carries more weight.⁵ He became the regime’s original dissident, testifying by his own persecution to the despotic essence of Titoism. Although officially a non-person during most of Tito’s rule, Djilas’s forbidden writings were surreptitiously read by Yugoslav intellectuals. He became a rallying point for oppositional politics, though never as leader. When in the late 1980s he was finally allowed to publish and began to reappear in public life, he became an oracle for those Yugoslavs dissatisfied with the communist state.

The Emergence of ‘Djilasism’ in the Aftermath of 1954

As with the break with Stalin, the fall of Djilas profoundly altered Yugoslav communism and its perception in Yugoslavia. While it may not have radically transformed the internal balance of power as Djilas had initially hoped, it certainly forced a number of Yugoslavs to re-examine their conception of communism. Their

² Leković, *Milovan Đilas*, p. 310

³ P. Palavestra, ‘Predgovor’ in M. Djilas, *Gubavac i druge priče*, (Michigan, 1989), p. 3

⁴ M. Bećković, ‘Bećković o Đilas: Rađao se tri puta’, *Novosti Online*, 11th June 2011, <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/reportaze/aktuelno.293.html:333934-Beckovic-o-Djilas-Radjao-se-tri-puta>

⁵ D. J. Schemo, ‘Yugoslavia’s Djilas Recalls Struggle’, *The Baltimore Sun*, 3rd April 1991, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1991-04-03/news/1991093025_1_milovan-djilas-yugoslavia-stalin

reinterpretations may not have been openly expressed (the persecution of Djilas and Dedijer was sufficient warning against any such action), but in the minds of many Yugoslavs the very nature of Yugoslav communism had been fundamentally altered, and not for the better. After all, Djilas had always enjoyed great popularity amongst certain groups. As the US Intelligence Agency observed at the time:

Many Yugoslav communists, particularly those added since the end of the war (more than 80% of the total) are probably sympathetic to Djilas's views. Djilas is also personally popular with the youth and with certain intellectual circles.⁶

Djilas's criticism of the Yugoslav system of government generalised a number of points which embraced the disappointments of everyday Yugoslavs with the socialist project. For this reason his *Borba* articles became a national sensation, attracting more interest than any other event in Yugoslavia since the clash with the Cominform.⁷ During the three month period in which the articles appeared, *Borba's* sales doubled as circulation reached 300,000 copies a day, and the newsroom received 30,000 letters of support.⁸ The articles signified a new and exciting change in both Yugoslav journalism and the country's political system. Djilas was trying to answer the question that numerous Yugoslavs were asking: why was the utopian dream of communism degenerating into Stalinism? People would stay up late into the freezing winter nights to read his articles as soon as they were printed. As Borislav Lalić noted, the question that everyone was asking across Yugoslavia was:

⁶ Office of the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Intelligence (Armstrong), PPS files, lot 65 D 101, "Yugoslavia", 18th December, 1954 (FRUS), 1952–1954, Vol. VIII, Document 685

⁷ R. West, *Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia*, (London, 1994), p. 256

⁸ B. Lalić, 'Napred teško, nazad nikako', *Novosti Online*, 13th June 2011, http://www.novosti.rs/dodatni_sadržaj/clanci.119.html:334162-Napred-tesko-nazad-nikako

‘have you read what Djilas has said?’⁹ In the student residences across the country each new *Borba* article was read aloud in a clamour of excitement, while Djilas’s literary magazine *Nova Misao* was published in advance to satisfy public demand for his sensational articles. Even when *Nova Misao* was banned, Dobrica Ćosić recalled that in Novi Sad people spent 15,000 dinars to get the last copies.¹⁰ He also acknowledged that it was Djilas’s articles that put him on his own path of dissidence.¹¹

Djilas’s articles caught the imagination of people both within and outside the party. Most reactions from the party rank and file were enthusiastic, and some members of the Central Committee supported them. One, Veljko Vlahović, referred to the *Borba* series as ‘powerful sunbeams shining light upon our lives’,¹² and a meeting of regional party secretaries, called by the Slovene party leader Miha Marinko, resulted in widespread praise for Djilas’s articles.¹³ The respected Croatian communist, Augustin ‘Gušte’ Šprljan, a party member for over 29 years, endorsed Djilas’s view that meetings of basic party organisations were a waste of time, and predicted that ‘the party ... is headed for the museum.’¹⁴ Meanwhile Bosnian and Macedonian radio stations broadcast surveys of opinion which, they said, confirmed Djilas’s views about the mistakes in communist party methods.¹⁵ Everywhere, people began to give rein to their long repressed wish for political expression.

Even after Djilas’s arrest there were signs of solidarity. On the occasion of his secret trial thousands of people gathered around the entrance to the court. Djilas’s

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Ćosić, *Piščevi Zapisi*, p. 47

¹¹ D. Ćosić, ‘Umni i gordi pobunjenik’ in B. Lalić, *Milovan Đilas: Vernik, buntovnik, mučenik*, (Belgrade, 2011), p. 10

¹² *Oslobodjenje*, 8th January 1954, p. 2

¹³ M. Režek, ‘Defeat of the First Party Liberalism and the Echo of Djilasism in Slovenia’, *Slovene Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1-2, (2006), p. 73

¹⁴ ‘Đilas članci’, *Vjesnik u Srijedu*, 6th January 1954, p.1

¹⁵ *ibid*

arrival was met with booing, cries of ‘traitor’ and shaken fists. Yet there was also cheering from groups of young people who tried to shake his hand.¹⁶ Djilas’s son Aleksa recalled that his family were often greeted by friendly, if discreet, smiles on the streets of Belgrade.¹⁷ Such acts of defiance from ordinary Yugoslavs were also accompanied by a huge spike in the number of people leaving the country. Tito acknowledged that the ideological disappointment of the ‘Djilas anti-climax’, largely explained the exodus in the following years (3,700 in 1954, 3,600 in 1955, and 11,000 in 1956).¹⁸

Despite the support for Djilas among ordinary Yugoslavs, the party’s greatest concern was the extent to which the media and intellectual elements appeared to be in the hands of the Djilas tendency. For instance, the Slovene magazine *Naši razgledi* had republished Djilas’s *Borba* articles with some of their own supporting opinions under the title, ‘Reflection on some questions of socialism.’¹⁹ In the same paper, Vlado Vodopivec, secretary of the Slovenian council for education and culture, led with a euphoric article on Djilas on the 26 December. Even Stane Kavčič, the vice-president of the Slovenian party, wrote an article praising Djilas’s ideas (although he quickly renounced it when Djilas fell from favour).²⁰ The contributors to *Naši razgledi* were accused of ‘Djilasism’ and the magazine suppressed. Yet Djilas’s ideas within the Slovene intellectual circle were not destroyed. They would re-emerge around the magazines *Beseda* and *Revija 57* at the

¹⁶ Maclean, *The Heretic*, p. 391

¹⁷ D. Djokić, ‘Britain and Dissent in Tito’s Yugoslavia: The Djilas Affair, ca. 1956’, *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3, (2006), p. 394

¹⁸ *Borba*, 20th April 1958, p. 2

¹⁹ L. Bavcon, ‘Razmišljanje o nekaterih vprašanjih socializma’, *Naši razgledi*, 5th December 1953, p. 6

²⁰ B. Nežmah, *Časopisna zgodovina novinarstva na Slovenskem v letih 1797-1989* (Ljubljana, 2012) p. 205

end of the 1950s, and most spectacularly in *Perspektive* at the beginning of the 1960s.

In addition to *Naši razgledi*, the party also had to repress the Croatian party paper *Naprijed*. However, the ideological purge was more severe in Croatia because some of the supporters of Djilas were members of the Croatian Central Committee. This included the respected Augustin Šprljan, who, after his expulsion, committed suicide.²¹ The party went to great lengths to cover up the reasons for the death, burying Šprljan with full honours.²²

Slavko Goldstein has argued that Djilas's ideas were particularly popular in Croatia.²³ This support coalesced around the figure of the Marijan Stilinović. Stilinović warned his colleagues in Belgrade that, 'the case of Milovan Djilas is being spoken about in many intellectual circles here, Djilas has left a very heavy impression, he has a lot of fans.'²⁴ At the end of 1954, Kardelj warned Tito that, 'there is information that a campaign is building as Zagreb groups are engaging around Stilinović.'²⁵ Tito took swift action, purging Stilinović from the party. Nevertheless, elements of 'Djilasism' remained in Croatia. UDBA recorded that: 'those who approve of Djilas's ideas come from the ranks of the Croatian intelligentsia ... Anatomy of a Moral is significant because it touches upon people's attitudes.'²⁶ In another report they observed, 'in the Daruvar district priests wail for Djilas and he is proclaimed a good man ... in Slavonia unhealthy elements use Djilas's articles to serve their political activities and Serbian chauvinists defend his

²¹ B. Črnja, *Zbogom drugovi*, (Rijeka, 1992), p. 241

²² 'Jučer su svečano sahranjeni posmrtni ostaci druga Gušte Šprljana', *Borba*, 27th January 1954, p. 2

²³ S. Goldstein, 'Predgovor' in Djilas, *Vlast*, p. 7-51

²⁴ B. Vojnović, *Zapisnici Izvršnog komiteta Centralnog komiteta Saveza komunista Hrvatske 1952-1954*, (Zagreb, 2008), p. 135

²⁵ E. Kardelj, 'Put J.B. Tita u Indiju 16th December 1954-5', (1955), (AJ) I-2/4-1

²⁶ 'Org-instruktorska uprava; Zapisnik sa savjetovanja sekretara iz kotareva: Zagreb, Dugoselo, Samobor, Zelina, Pregrada, Zlatar, Krapina, Klanjec, D. Stubica, Jaska, Vrbovec, Kutina, Daruvar, Pakrac', (HDA) HR-HDA CK SKH-1220

actions.’²⁷ In addition, the JNA officers based in the republic’s training centres were reported to ‘recount Djilas’s articles in the form of lectures with praise and approval.’²⁸ This support was not confined to just officers, but was firmly established in the army’s ranks.²⁹

As Zdenko Radelić has argued, Djilas’s influence in Croatia was exemplified by the weekly *Naprijed*.³⁰ From the early 1950s, *Naprijed*, caught up in the general mood of enthusiasm for further democracy, began to openly tackle the social, cultural and political issues of the day.³¹ The paper placed its hopes in the liberalising reforms that followed the split with Stalin. In the build up to the elections for the National Assembly in 1953 it reported, ‘[the election] has caught the interest of a wide range of citizens who boldly and freely enter political life.’³² Therefore there were signs that even before Djilas’s *Borba* articles, there was a wider desire in parts of society for greater ‘democratisation’ of political life. This does not suggest that a vast amount of Yugoslavs were pushing for a change of party policy in the direction of liberal democracy. Rather, it suggests that there was a desire for a loosening of party discipline and expression of different interests within the League of Communists.

Naprijed appeared to embody this trend in Croatia. The editors supported Djilas’s *Borba* articles and became an unofficial mouthpiece for his ideas. In mid-December 1953, they published an extensive article by one of the recently purged pro-Djilas

²⁷ ‘Referat sa X. Izvanredne Konferencije Saveza komunista kotara Virovitice, 4. travnja 1954’, (HDA) HR-HDA CK SKH-1220

²⁸ D. Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, (Zagreb, 1999), p. 355.

²⁹ M. Teržić, “‘Ništa nije radio već sedeo i pisao’: slučaj Milovana Đilasa u JNA 1954”, *Vojno-istorijski glasnik*, No. 2, (2010), p. 40

³⁰ Z. Radelić, ‘Đilasovci u Hrvatskoj i hrvatska historiografija’, *Disidentstvo u suvremenoj povijesti. Zbornik radova međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa*, (2010), pp. 53-74

³¹ M. Najbar-Agičić, ‘Od pravovjernosti do disidentstva – preobrazbe *Naprijeda*’, *Medijska Istraživanja*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (2016), p. 115

³² B. Črnja, ‘Na početku izborne kampanje’, *Naprijed*, 25th September 1953, p. 39

Naši razgledi writers.³³ *Naprijed* was euphoric with Djilas's election as president of the National Assembly. The first paper of the new year was titled 'Start of a new parliamentary period', with a massive picture of Djilas on the front cover. Although the idea of gradual democratisation of political life in Croatia was present in *Naprijed* before Djilas's showdown with the party, its writers certainly saw his ideas as a confirmation of the correctness of their own views. As Berta Črnja wrote, 'Djilas's election is a big step forward on the path of further democratisation and removing the bureaucratic form of the state and social life.'³⁴

Following in *Naprijed* footsteps, other Croatian journalists and intellectuals mimicked Djilas's ideas. These included Milan Despot (the editor of *Narodni list*), Dušan Diminić (the former Yugoslav Ambassador to Albania), Predrag Vranicki and Rudi Supek (intellectuals who would go on to be prominent members of the *Praxis* group).³⁵

However, as the full scale of Djilas's articles became apparent, the League of Communists realised that *Naprijed* was no longer implementing the party line. General Otmar Kreačić observed, '*Naprijed*, as a whole, no longer suits our purpose ... [the paper] is full of phrases that are abstract and are only intended for intellectuals who live in a philosophers' paradise.'³⁶ The paper was denounced at the plenum called to discipline Djilas. Zvonko Brkić accused *Naprijed* of attacking and threatening those who did not agree with them, and charged them with 'removing the quotes of Tito and Kardelj from their shallow articles, and replacing them with

³³ L. Bavcon, 'Tri problema konsolidacije našega socijalističkog društva – Razmišljanja uz članak druga Milovana Djilasa', *Naprijed*, 18th December 1953, p. 2

³⁴ B. Črnja, 'Početak novog parlamentarnog razdoblja', *Naprijed*, 1st January 1954, p. 1

³⁵ Z. Radelić, 'Đilasovci u Hrvatskoj', *Disidentstvo u suvremenoj povijesti*, p. 59

³⁶ 'Ideološka komisija, K-36 Izvještaj o pisanju lista 'Naprijed' za pregledane brojeve od 29', (1952), (AJ), II-7-X

Djilas's ... it is clear that they want two or more political parties!³⁷ With the defeat of Djilas, *Naprijed* was banned and its writers prevented from any journalistic endeavour.³⁸ This purge of Djilas's adherents was not confined to *Naprijed*. Instead it reached all Croatian public organs including *Narodni List* and *Vjesnik*.³⁹ Vladimir Bakarić, the leader of the Croatian communists, found himself on the front line in the fight against 'Djilasism' in Croatia. This was despite the fact that Djilas had considered Bakarić an ally in pushing the party down the road to liberalising reforms. Yet, it is likely that he was assigned the task of denouncing and purging Djilas's adherents for this reason. After all, Edvard Kardelj, Djilas's other reformist hope, had been assigned the role of main prosecutor at the plenum called to bring him to heel.

The silencing of Djilas reflected a critical stage within the party. The affair demonstrated that the 'democratisation' process had come to a definitive halt. This process had been replaced with a uniform party in which there was no room for those who dreamt of an ever-growing area of free discussion. Party discipline was tightened, and expulsions and resignations increased rapidly, especially amongst the young and the working class. Between 1952 and 1956 party membership fell by nearly 150,000.⁴⁰

The largest support for Djilas came from the youth. Following the war Djilas had been the greatest defender of the young Yugoslavs when they were attacked by sections of the party for their socialist apathy and appropriation of Western culture.⁴¹

In many respects Djilas was an eternal student. He would regularly meet the

³⁷ 'Deseti plenum Centralnog komiteta Hrvatske', *Komunist*, Issue 6, No. 3, (1954), p. 164

³⁸ M. Najbar-Agičić, 'Od pravovjernosti', *Medijska Istraživanja*, p. 135

³⁹ Draper, 'How the Djilas Crisis Grew', 15th February 1954, p. 6

⁴⁰ W. Vucinich, *Contemporary Yugoslavia: Twenty Years of Socialist Experiment*, (Stanford, 1969), p. 141

⁴¹ M. Djilas, 'O Partiji', 6th June 1952, (AJ), IV-a-20

Belgrade students and invite them to his home for coffee. A student after the war, Njeboša 'Bato' Tomašević, who knew Djilas through his sister Stana (a leading party member), recalled that Djilas would regularly ask the students for their opinions on particular laws that the government was planning to bring in. 'Djilas seemed still to be interested in the student life and as the students came from across the country he utilised them as a good source of information ... he still longed to be a student.'⁴²

On the day that the first of his provocative articles was published in *Borba*, Djilas's public appearance in Republic Square ended with him being carried off in a rapture of cheers by a group of students. His articles were extolled in student residences around the country, and some even took to wearing the 'Djilas hat' - a fleecy peasant flat cap that Djilas often wore at rallies.⁴³ Although Djilas was 42 at the time of his fall, and in a position of high authority, he still embraced student bohemianism. He rarely wore a suit, instead preferring an open-necked shirt and peasant cap. Although he had a weakness for foreign sports cars and expensive watches, he still rode the Belgrade trams and drank coffee at student cafes. Jovan Barović, a student and party member, recalled:

For us, Djilas was an exciting figure, young, good-looking, most articulate among the top leaders; we were mesmerised by his inexhaustible flow of pungent rhetoric ... We were excited about his ideas, we saw a new revolution in the society. I accepted the ideas wholeheartedly for they represented what I thought socialism was all about.⁴⁴

Following the purging of their hero, numerous students went through a period of acute disillusionment. Tito's biographer Richard West, who was living in Sarajevo at

⁴² Nebojša 'Bato' Tomašević interview with the author, 6th March 2014, Exeter, United Kingdom

⁴³ Lalić, *Milovan Đilas*, p. 18

⁴⁴ Doder, *The Yugoslavs*, p. 167

the time, recalled that many students were in tears, proclaiming: 'I can't believe it. I was sure the Old Man, at least, would stand by him.'⁴⁵ However, their response to the Djilas affair was disaffection rather than rage. Djilas had represented their hope of building socialism. After his fall they appear to have lost their enthusiasm for the socialist project.

Djilas's rebellion against the party and resulting disillusionment with communism never constituted the basis for a movement, but his criticisms found widespread popular support. This took the form of a struggle against the controls of ideology, party and bureaucracy. Djilas was undoubtedly correct when he said that 'there are no Djilasistes, in any formal, active sense, but there is lots of Djilasism though.'⁴⁶ Admittedly the initial symptoms of 'Djilasism' were counterproductive. The fall of Djilas served as a warning to others who wanted to discuss socialism's development. As one communist leader admitted in 1954: 'throughout Yugoslavia intellectuals are avoiding writing about the theory of Marxist-Leninism.'⁴⁷ However, while people were afraid to publicly express their thoughts, this does not mean that these thoughts disappeared. As a Croatian communist declared: 'we will not go against the party leadership, but we have stored up new ideas which we will utilise in the future.'⁴⁸

Hungary, Imprisonment, and *The New Class*

Following his expulsion from the Central Committee, Djilas fell into a disillusioned slumber. Isolated socially and politically, he continued to write. He attempted to explain the split with his comrades by writing his memoirs, telling the

⁴⁵ West, *Tito*, p. 259

⁴⁶ Neal, *Titoism*, p. 73

⁴⁷ 'Razvoj marksizam-lenjinizam,' *Pobjeda*, 24th October 1954, p. 2

⁴⁸ Neal, *Titoism*, p.73

story of the communist movement from the inside. When the first of these memoirs, *Land Without Justice*, was rejected by the Serbian publisher *Srpska Književna Zadruga*, he returned to working on theoretical texts. As Djilas later noted, ‘stunned by the rejection, I was now bent on creating a work with broader and more devastating impact.’⁴⁹ In an attempt to explain what he perceived to be the degeneration of Yugoslav communism, Djilas penned two extended essays, ‘*The omniscience of stupidity*’ and ‘*Freedom and ownership*’. These works critiqued an all-knowing ideology and dictator, and would eventually become the basis for his most famous work, *The New Class*.⁵⁰ It was also at this time that Djilas began to air his theories in the Western press.

In 1956, Tito attempted to stamp out ‘Djilasism’ with his internment of the arch-rebel in Sremska Mitrovica prison. In his speech in Pula on 11 November, Tito observed that ‘events in Hungary somewhat incited various elements who exist in our country ... [who] babble all sorts of things.’⁵¹ The uprising in Hungary appears to have led Djilas to the belief that his criticism of the social system in Yugoslavia, and other Eastern European states, was prophetic. He published an article in the American magazine *New Leader*, writing:

With the Hungarian people’s revolution a new chapter began in the history of humanity ... the Hungarian uprising is a new phenomenon, perhaps no less meaningful than the French or Russian Revolution ... the enslaved people has the right to choose its own non-communist path ... the Hungarian revolution has blazed a

⁴⁹ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 385

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 369

⁵¹ ‘Milovan Djilas’, *Radio Free Europe*, 20th November 1956, p. 1

trail which sooner or later other communist countries must follow. The wound which the Hungarian revolution has inflicted on communism can never be healed.⁵²

The Yugoslav communists however had adopted an ambiguous attitude towards the events in Hungary. In Djilas's eyes the party had been 'unable in its foreign policy to depart from its narrow ideological and bureaucratic class interests.'⁵³ Tito feared that the events in Hungary could trigger calls for radical reform in Yugoslavia; this is why Djilas's protest suddenly gained an additional dimension and he needed to be imprisoned. His fears were not unfounded. The subsequent atmosphere is exemplified by an off-the-record comment by a leading party member: '[the execution of Nagy] was a sign of fear, just as our treatment of Djilas was a sign of fear.' The unnamed source admitted that such views were not confined to the odd individual but were privately muttered by numerous party members.⁵⁴ Vladimir Dedijer supported these observations. In an open letter to Tito he noted that the party's attitude toward the events in Hungary, and their arrest of Djilas, had caused a split between the party and Yugoslav society as a whole.⁵⁵ As the *Borba* correspondent Jasha Levi noted as he resigned from the paper and the party: 'the promised liberalisation and democratisation of my country have reached a dead-end. Bureaucracy is rampant. The main signposts were Djilas and Hungary. After Djilas's arrest we now know the limits.'⁵⁶ In response, Ranković lamented that a significant number of journalists remained in the hands of the 'Djilas tendency' and had been

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ 'Former Yugoslav Leader Arrested', *The Times*, 20th November 1955, p. 10

⁵⁴ R. Lowenthal, 'L'Affaire Djilas – Djilas and the Yugoslav Dilemma', *Encounter*, October 1957, p. 43

⁵⁵ 'The Case of Vladimir Dedijer', *Radio Free Europe*, 23rd November 1956, p. 1

⁵⁶ H. Schwartz, 'Yugoslav Newsmen Asks Asylum In U.S.', *The New York Times*, 29th November 1956, p. 1

incited by the events in Hungary.⁵⁷ However, the party's imprisonment of Djilas posed a further question for average Yugoslavs: was their society really that different from the Soviet Union when they imprisoned someone who campaigned for peaceful democratic reform?

On the eve of his imprisonment, Djilas completed his all-encompassing critique of communism, *The New Class*. The first half of the manuscript was smuggled abroad with the help of a Western journalist, the second was hidden by Djilas's wife and then smuggled out of the country by the same means after his prison sentence had begun. Published in 1957 in both New York and London, *The New Class* ran to 23 editions and became the most translated of Djilas's books. The Yugoslav authorities (rightly) accused the CIA of promoting the book all over the world.⁵⁸ In some recent studies it is estimated that upwards of ten million copies were distributed.⁵⁹

To outline Djilas's assessment, communism was the most oppressive, deceptive and corrupt ideology in history. There was an inherent contradiction between the goal of a classless society and the reality of a party forming its own privileged caste. He argued that when put into practise, communism represented a 'type of totalitarianism' which consisted of a monopoly of ownership, political power and ideology by one party.⁶⁰ The heroic era of communism had quickly fizzled out as the passionate idealists were replaced by 'practical men' without any genuine conviction - the 'new class.'⁶¹ Djilas was not satisfied to merely expose Stalin's corruption of Leninism, or even Lenin's of Marxism, but rather to argue that a fundamental

⁵⁷ 'Zapisnik sa proširene sednice organizacionog sekretarija Centralnog komiteta SKJ ordžana', 8th December 1956, (AJ) V/IX

⁵⁸ 'Request for funds to cover the costs of exploitation activities regarding the Latvian language version of the book, *The New Class*' (CIA) (Office of Current Intelligence), 8th May 1958, PP/ICD Memorandum, p. 1

⁵⁹ M. Kramer, 'Introduction: Book Distribution as Political Warfare', in A.A Reisch, *Hot Books in the Cold War: The West's CIA-Funded Secret Book Distribution Program Behind the Iron Curtain*, (Budapest, 2013), p. xi

⁶⁰ M. Djilas, *The New Class*, (New York, 1957), p. 166

⁶¹ *ibid*, p. 81

corruption inhered in communism. For this reason Djilas, the former Stalinist, former Titoist and former Leninist, ended up denouncing Marxism in its entirety. Instead he championed the abstract idea of human freedom, and later argued that no single ideology or theory could capture the complexity of human life.⁶² This explains why Djilas could never form a movement. Doing so would require him to define and label his views. This was obviously anathema for an enemy of ideology.

With his one acutely perceptive theory, Djilas carved out his position as an important 20th century political theorist. He once acknowledged that, ‘practically everything I said was in part really said earlier by this author or that author’, specifically referencing the theories of Bertrand Russell and Nikolai Berdjajev. Yet, he claimed that none of these authors had influenced him – ‘in this sense, this is an absolutely original work’.⁶³ In her critical biography of Djilas, *Konstante Konvertitstva*, Mira Bogdanović has challenged this statement. In the second part of her book, Bogdanović claims that not only did the CIA fund the publication of Djilas’s most famous work, they also wrote most of it.⁶⁴ After all, Djilas was a useful figure to utilise. He was a former leading communist who was idolised by much of the anti-communist left. Furthermore, he had been exposed to great publicity in the West because of his involvement in Yugoslavia’s break with Stalin, and due to his own split with Tito.⁶⁵

According to Bogdanović, Djilas’s original transcript of *The New Class* was heavily edited when it was translated into English. The translator was never identified and when the CIA published the Serbo-Croatian versions of the book, it was translated from the English edition rather than from Djilas’s original

⁶² Djilas, *Parts of a Lifetime*, p. 434

⁶³ Sulzberger, *Paradise Regained*, p. 133

⁶⁴ Bogdanović, *Konstante konvertitstva*, p. 95

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p. 96

manuscripts. In addition, the book was published by Praeger, a publisher known for collaborating with the CIA.⁶⁶ In the final part of his autobiography, Djilas even cryptically noted: ‘I had one offer, from Praeger, and a vague one at that: for something that might be suitable for them’. He concluded with the esoteric lament that ‘the “leftist” Praeger did not play fair with me.’⁶⁷ Bogdanović alleges that the CIA altered Djilas’s manuscripts to assist them in their propaganda goals and to make the book more commercial to a western audience. As evidence she points to the extensive data used to explore contemporary American society, data that it is hard to believe was known to the nominal author.⁶⁸

Whether the book was penned by Djilas, the CIA, or a mixture of both, the Yugoslav authorities saw the work as a real danger to their legitimacy. *The New Class* was immediately banned in Yugoslavia and the Secretary of State of Internal affairs, Svetislav Stefanović, quickly passed a new law: ‘The Prohibition of Bringing into the Country and Distributing the Book Entitled “*The New Class*”’.⁶⁹ Breaking the law was a serious crime. A young Albanian, Mirvet Muca, who fled Albania to live in Skopje in the late 1950s, was questioned on numerous occasions by the Yugoslav authorities on suspicion of connections with the Albanian intelligence service. Yet he was only arrested when the authorities found him in possession of copies of *The New Class*.⁷⁰ In addition, an anti-Djilas propaganda campaign was launched and his sentence was increased by seven years. This repression had unintended consequences. It raised awareness of Djilas’s ideas and proved to countless Yugoslavs how capricious even moderately autocratic governance could

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 97

⁶⁷ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 385

⁶⁸ Bogdanović, *Konstante konvertitstva*, p. 99

⁶⁹ S. Stefanović, ‘Zabrana dovođenja u zemlju i distribuciju knjigu pod nazivom Nova klasa’, *Službeni list SFRJ*, No. 493, 4th September 1957, p.1

⁷⁰ Special Report – Ethnic Relations in Kosovo and Macedonia, (CIA) (Office of Current Intelligence), June 1988, CIA-31885173, p. 2

be. After all, as Paul Willen noted, most ordinary Yugoslavs, like history itself, tended to remember Djilas more for his bold act of defiance than for the intellectual discoveries that followed it.⁷¹ It was his act of defiance that made *The New Class* an important book - it did not matter that the majority of Yugoslavs could not read its contents.

Nonetheless, there were pockets of the population, particularly among the youth and intelligentsia, who managed to read the book. The *New York Times* reported that well-informed Yugoslavs, fascinated by the publication of *The New Class* in the United States, managed to read large excerpts of the book that were featured in Western magazines sold in Belgrade.⁷² Thousands of English-language copies were smuggled into the country, as were Serbo-Croatian versions printed in Munich. In December 1957 Allan Michie, an American journalist, was arrested following allegations that he had distributed copies of *The New Class* in Serbo-Croatian.⁷³

The book was particularly popular amongst Yugoslavia's students. Boris Lalić recalled, 'I managed to read an illegal copy and passed it down orally to those who had only heard of Djilas ... a worm of doubt entered our minds about the system that was shaping our lives.'⁷⁴ Meanwhile Duško Doder recalled: 'I had read *The New Class* in my college days. In an antiheroic age, he seemed to me the prototype of the romantic hero who enlarged his own legend through intelligence and courage.'⁷⁵ Even the son of Kardelj appears to have been influenced by Djilas's concept. He got his father into trouble when he wrote in an essay: 'In Yugoslavia there are two

⁷¹ P. Willen, 'Introduction', in M. Djilas, *Anatomy*, p. xvii

⁷² 'The New Class, Mr. Djilas's Book on Sale', *The Times*, 10th August 1957, p. 5

⁷³ 'Yugoslav Wave of Arrests,' *The Times*, 16th December 1957, p. 7

⁷⁴ Lalić, *Milovan Đilas*, p. 18

⁷⁵ Doder, *The Yugoslavs*, p. 177

classes. There is the governing class to which my father and his associates and I belong. And there is the working class.’⁷⁶

There was no way for the regime to tell how representative of the Yugoslav people these views really were. After all, when a party refuses to let private opinion organise itself into public opinion, that party cannot know what people think about an issue. This was pointed out by a party member to a Western journalist who had asked whether the gap between the interests of the individual and those of the party could be bridged. The answer he received was a surprising admission: ‘In my opinion, in my personal opinion, you understand - no.’⁷⁷

The fissure between the party and the populace worried some members of the party. This included Kardelj who had only just attacked the Stalinist Hungarian regime in 1955 for losing contact with its people. In fact, Kardelj seemed to agree with a lot of *The New Class*. One young party official noted, ‘a lot of what Djilas put into that book of his is just what Kardelj has been saying all along.’⁷⁸ Djilas’s descriptions of the ‘new class’ were strikingly similar to Kardelj’s of the Stalinists who ‘treated the relationship between individual and collective interests by subordinating absolutely individual interests to party interests.’⁷⁹ Kardelj persisted in his faith that Yugoslavia’s more ‘liberal’ version of communism would reconcile the interests of the individual with those of the party. Yet, after Djilas’s imprisonment, Kardelj became more critical of Tito. For instance, during a visit to Scandinavia six months later, he heavily criticised Yugoslav socialism in practise. He maintained that, ‘in reality the party is ceasing to represent collective interests because all

⁷⁶ Sulzberger, *Resistantists*, p .187

⁷⁷ G. Bailey, ‘Yugoslavia: No Middle Ground’, *The Reporter*, 14th November 1957, p .14

⁷⁸ *ibid*

⁷⁹ E. Kardelj, ‘Socialist Democracy in Yugoslav Practice’, *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, Vol. 26, Issue 1, January 1955, p. 3

individual interests are excluded from them.⁸⁰ In its argument, the speech virtually mirrored *The New Class*, where Djilas wrote: [the new class] obtains its power, privileges ... from collective ownership – which the class administers and distributes in the name of society.⁸¹

While elements of ‘Djilasism’ could be found among the youth and intelligentsia - especially in circles where discontent about the ‘Stalinist’ nature of the regime was already being expressed - the regime had dealt competently with this challenge. The vast rise in living standards undercut any unease caused by the silencing of Djilas. However, the question would return in the 1960s. After all, the early 1960s were a period of dramatic economic decline. Recession, unemployment and mass emigration were accompanied by widening income disparities. By the end of the decade while about 40 percent of those in employment were receiving monthly incomes of less than 600 dinars (then around \$48), others such as party functionaries and those in managerial positions were receiving six times that amount.⁸²

The Re-emergence of ‘Djilasism’ in the 1960s – *Perspektive, Praxis, Crni Talas*, and Mihajlov

It is a commonplace of Marxism that socio-economic transformations create imperatives for change in the political sphere. In the Yugoslav case, the dramatic changes in the economy during the 1960s found their way into politics. Under sweeping reforms in 1965, the party purported to reduce its role and give the workers in the self-management enterprises a greater say in economic planning. The motivations for the reform appeared wholly economic. The debate however rapidly

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ M. Djilas, *The New Class*, p. 15

⁸² Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment*, p. 205

took on an ideological character as more ‘liberal’ elements in the party began to argue for political change. Steven Vračar saw within the reforms an opportunity to dismantle the hegemonic political structure. Following in Djilas’s footsteps, he advocated a two-party system. In the Belgrade University magazine *Gledišta*, he pondered, ‘socialism, of course, remains the basis of any future system, but, would it not be more natural to have two parties, even if both of them were socialist.’⁸³ Even the party secretary, Mijalko Todorović, admitted: ‘ideological clashes both in society and the League of Communists will inevitably lead to differentiation within our ranks, but this is not a bad thing because it will limit the influence of those who rose to power during the party’s dogmatic past.’⁸⁴ As if to exemplify the dominance of the reformists in the party, at the end of 1966 Djilas was released from prison, serving just over half of his sentence.

It should also be noted that the 1960s considerably extended intellectual freedom in Yugoslavia. In many respects the 1960s were a ‘golden age’ in Yugoslav philosophy, literature and cinema – all areas that would seriously challenge the Titoist system. These artistic endeavours and philosophical explorations were based on a rereading of Marx and were influenced by the left-wing intellectual currents emanating from the rest of Europe. By examining everyday life in Yugoslavia, these endeavours led to a multifaceted critique of the unrealised promises of the Yugoslav revolution.⁸⁵ They took up Djilas’s condemnation of Stalinism and ‘bureaucratic degeneration’ in the communist party. Politically, Tito and his party were facing their greatest threat since the split with the Soviet Union. The relatively ‘liberal’ Yugoslav version of Marxism-Leninism had left the door open for criticism from the

⁸³ S. Vračar, ‘Partijski monopolizam i politička moć društvenih grupa’, *Gledišta*, nos. 8-9, (1967), p. 19

⁸⁴ V. Zorza, ‘Yugoslav Factions in Conflict on the Idea of Two-Party System’, *The Guardian*, 25th October 1967, p. 9

⁸⁵ Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, p. 22

left. After all, for much of its existence the real and most serious opposition to the regime did not come from nationalist or 'bourgeois' groups, but from the left. These people had accepted the idea of socialism, but became disillusioned with the way it was applied. Therefore, the New Left that emerged in the decades after Djilas's rebellion owed something to Djilas's work and spirit. Djilas may have been defeated but his struggle against the controls of ideology, party and bureaucracy continued. A good deal of 'Djilasism' persisted as an attitude of mind rather than an absolute creed.

The regime's first encounter with these 'Djilasist' deviations occurred in 1962. Concerned about the quantity of non-political publications, Tito attempted to impose restrictions on a number of journalists and artists. For instance the party banned a film, *Grad*, because it denigrated Yugoslavia's revolution. This caused a fierce backlash among the intelligentsia and caused Tito to back down.⁸⁶ Two years later the '*Perspektive* Affair' erupted in Ljubljana. For a number of years, the press in Slovenia had been permitted more freedom than elsewhere – partly because the Slovenian language was still largely impenetrable to most Belgrade officials and partly due to its closeness to Trieste where censorship could be escaped. Two Slovenian cultural reviews (*Revija 57* and *Beseda*) had been suppressed, but in their place had arisen the *Perspektive* literary magazine, which had attained considerable popularity among students. It openly criticised the party on a number of sensitive issues such as the one-party system, the conformity of the press, and the affluence of the party hierarchy. The magazine was still committed to socialism but its editor Veljko Rus was led to an inevitable conclusion:

⁸⁶ Special Report-Yugoslav Intellectuals Challenge the Regime, (CIA) (Office of Current Intelligence) 25th June 1965, EO12958 6.1, p. 2

If the elimination of existing antagonisms in the League of Communists is impossible and unreal, then the participative-democracy is also illusory. In that event, genuine democratisation is possible only through the institutionalisation of opposition tendencies.⁸⁷

Thus ten years after Djilas's apostasy Yugoslavia was back to his demand for another socialist party. The demand was no more acceptable to the authorities in 1964 than it had been in 1954 and *Perspektive* was suppressed. There was considerable public support and verbal resistance to the magazine's proscription in Slovenia, but also in the surrounding republics as well. When two contributing writers were finally arrested for continuing to defy court orders, the state was confronted with a wave of protests and a public petition was signed by many of Slovenia's most prominent intellectuals.

This resistance culminated with the *Perspektive* contributors' embodying their criticisms in a play by Marijan Rožanc. *Leglo* (Hotbed) was described by Andrej Inkret in the programme as a topical play that 'the audience must actively participate in ... the audience must recognise the social conflict and take a stand. This stand represents the beginning of social action.'⁸⁸ Like Djilas, Rožanc predicted a transition from an authoritarian system - in which every aspect of society was controlled by the party - to a democratic state whereby the workers would manage the country themselves. The main character of the play *Stari* (Old Man - a nickname of Tito) was a conservative revolutionary who believed in total obedience to the party. He strictly followed the party's directives at the agricultural cooperative he was administering despite the fact that they were not yielding the expected

⁸⁷ A. Shub, 'Moscow Summer, Belgrade Winter', *Encounter*, June 1965, p. 82

⁸⁸ A. Inkret, 'Vročja pomlad 1964', *Oder 57*, (Ljubljana, 1988), p. 165

outcomes. This resulted in his overthrow by workers who were now able to make a moral and prosperous society become a reality. At the end of the play a debate concerning a number of pressing social issues broke out. This forum, in which actors and audience merged into one, was supposed to symbolise a society in which ordinary Yugoslavs could rule and manage themselves.⁸⁹ The play was banned after just one performance. In response, the chairman of the university students' union declared that the party's actions had 'revolted the students', and an open manifesto of protest was signed by 85 leading Slovene intellectuals.⁹⁰

By this time, a new monthly journal in Zagreb, *Praxis*, was extolling 'Djilasist' arguments. From 1963, the Praxis group organised summer schools on the island of Korčula. These forums attracted humanist Marxists from all over the world, and they culminated a year later in the launching of the *Praxis* journal. A number of the leading Praxists had been deeply marked by the fall of Djilas. The most prominent political theorist, Svetozar Stojanović, had waited outside the plenum called to discipline Djilas so that he could applaud him as he left.⁹¹ The aim of *Praxis* was to give a thorough Marxian critique of Yugoslav society. Ultimately, the thinkers took up Djilas's condemnation of Stalinism and the 'bureaucratic degeneration' of the party. The communist establishment was habitually labelled as bureaucratic and it was even argued that they had created their own social stratum or class. The only way to overcome this bureaucratisation and social inequality was by 'a fundamental democratisation of political organisations and above all the party.'⁹² It is no surprise then that the members of *Praxis* positively appraised Djilas's critical articles that led to his downfall (although unlike Djilas they remained dedicated Marxists). As

⁸⁹ Yugoslav Intellectuals Challenge the Regime, (CIA), p. 3

⁹⁰ Shub, 'Moscow Summer', *Encounter*, June 1965, p. 82

⁹¹ Marković, *Beograd*, p. 62

⁹² S. Stojanović, 'Social Self Government and the Socialist Community', *Praxis (International Edition)*, No. 1-2 (1968), p. 111

Gerson Sher noted in his history of *Praxis*: ‘in their social analysis the basic Djilasist thesis about class and social structure has remained intact, retaining, as with Djilas, ominous political overtones.’⁹³

The 1960s also saw the emergence of *Crni Talas*, a ‘Black Wave’ in literature and cinema. Where the ‘New Left’ that emerged in philosophy examined the ideological nature of Yugoslav communism, the ‘Black Wave’ focused on the degeneration of Yugoslav communist society. Writers like Slobodan Selenić and film directors like Dušan Makavejev attacked the decadent, *nouveau riche* atmosphere in which the party members existed, having taken on the lives of the old bourgeoisie in whose homes they now lived. Many of the purveyors of the ‘Black Wave’ were influenced by Djilas. Makavejev acknowledged that his greatest inspirations were Albert Camus and Djilas. He appreciated both men’s take on the nuanced complexities of their fellow humans, along with their uncommon ability to express these things in poetry and prose. Makavejev praised Djilas’s brooding existentialism, his defence of the individual human against tyranny, and his rejection of religio-political zealotry.⁹⁴ He would eventually be expelled from the Belgrade Film Academy because he gave top marks to a student whose film extolled Djilas’s attacks on Yugoslavia’s social system.⁹⁵

By the latter half of the 1960s, this criticism was reaching alarming levels. In response Tito stepped up his campaign to denounce this criticism as ‘Djilasism’. As early as 1965 the CIA noted the challenge that the non-conformist intellectuals were posing to the Yugoslav regime:

⁹³ G.S. Sher, *Praxis*, (London, 1977), p. 142

⁹⁴ L. Mortimer, *Terror and Joy: The Films of Dušan Makavejev*, (Minnesota, 2009), p. 89

⁹⁵ L. Labeledz, ‘Shadows over Helsinki’, *Encounter*, June 1973, p. 87

The dissident intellectuals show no signs of flagging and the regime is hampered in its efforts to deal with them by the very system which the intellectuals wish to see further liberalised ... perhaps in part because of his unproclaimed but privately recognised success, there are in Yugoslavia today a number of intellectuals who are travelling the same road that Djilas pioneered. This time, however, the regime is finding it much more difficult to cope with the Djilasism. Critics of the regime appear to enjoy an important measure of public support. Many of them are not party members and therefore are not subject to the party discipline which could be an effective nonjuridical weapon. They are also operating in a political environment considerably different from that in which Djilas found himself.⁹⁶

Over the next few years the Yugoslav police regularly reported 'Djilasism' among the country's youth. Numerous students were expelled from university for expressing support for Djilas. In 1965, a number of students were arrested at Belgrade University following a philosophy lecture by Dr. Dragiša Djurić. While referring to the writings of Karl Marx, Djurić was interrupted by a group of students who proclaimed: 'we are not concerned with what Marx says but with what Djilas says!'⁹⁷

Later that year Tito felt compelled to call the Eighth Party Congress to deal with the growing number of leftist deviations. However, the Congress itself proved to be divided over the intellectual and persistent problem of 'Djilasism'. Aleksandar Ranković, the party hardliner, declared that:

⁹⁶ Yugoslav Intellectuals Challenge the Regime, (CIA), p. 1

⁹⁷ 'Maks Jan', *Zbornik Svobodne Slovenije*, Vol. 17, (Ljubljana, 1965), p. 170

First of all we must settle accounts with the various demagogues who are raising their voices with increasing insolence, allegedly on behalf of the working man ... these are various petty-bourgeois, self-styled champions of freedom.⁹⁸

Veljko Vlahović, on the other hand, appealed for much greater freedom in the party:

Today, ideological problems arise more from the real lack of respect for the equality of citizens, the real privileges, the real violation of the rights of working people, the real irresponsibility of individual communists, the real waste of the resources of our society etc., than they do from any kind of theoretical concepts and alien influences.⁹⁹

Vlahović's eloquent oration was exulted by the majority of the party. However, an almost indistinguishable appeal had been made over a decade earlier by Djilas. The condemnation of the party's lack of respect for the average working man and its ivory tower existence merely mimicked the criticisms made by Djilas and by those grouped around the Black Wave, *Praxis* and *Perspektive*.

Given the confusion within the party, Tito felt compelled to attack these deviations as 'Djilasism'. Speaking of the necessity of taking direct action against political offenders he referred to 'Djilasism' appearing in a 'new form'. He accused the press of publishing 'dangerous ideas' and criticised his party for tolerating and even condoning them. In his speech Tito revealed his anxiety that these alternative views were creating an organised group of support. He urged party members:

In such matters you must take action immediately and energetically ... It is not only *Perspektive* from Slovenia which is in question here. We have such examples also in

⁹⁸ Shub, 'Moscow Summer', *Encounter*, June 1965, p. 83

⁹⁹ *ibid*

Zagreb, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Sarajevo, everywhere. I ask myself is there some sort of organisation. It is interesting that they are working, so to say, concertedly and very skilfully, propagating distorted concepts in the press and in various other ways. It seems to me that this tendency, which we used to call Djilasism, is now assuming a new form. As I have said this is being propagated particularly in the press, and this is very dangerous.¹⁰⁰

This vehement attack was also prompted by a critical essay that had appeared a few months earlier in a prominent Yugoslav publication. The author of the article was the leading Djilas supporter Mihajlo Mihajlov. Mihajlov was a Serbian academic who had visited Moscow and on his return published an article that attacked the Soviet political system (he explicitly equated the Soviet Union and its death camps with Nazi Germany). Not only had the article caused a diplomatic incident between the two countries, it also linked the common facets of the supposedly more democratic Yugoslav communism and the more repressive Soviet type. Mihajlov noted that the Yugoslav communists, like their Soviet counterparts, had purged their comrades, killed and imprisoned their enemies, and created a totalitarian one-party state.¹⁰¹ In response, Tito made an example of Mihajlov. He was arrested, charged with ‘Djilasism’, and imprisoned. This did not silence him. Throughout his two-day trial Mihajlov remained uncowed, proclaiming, as Djilas had, that he would continue to write, even in prison.

Moreover, following Tito’s vehement attack on ‘Djilasism’ during the Eighth Party Congress, Mihajlov wrote an open letter to Tito. He publicly criticised Djilas’s imprisonment, stating: ‘I cannot remain indifferent to the almost veiled threats to

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 87

¹⁰¹ M. Mihajlov, ‘Leto Moskovsko 1964’, *Delo*, February 1965, pp. 91-121

those people whose way of thought you have defined as Djilasist.¹⁰² Less than a year after his release, Mihajlov was imprisoned again in 1966 for writing an article titled, 'Djilas and Today's Yugoslavia'. Mihajlov protested against Djilas's imprisonment, urging his fellow Yugoslavs that 'whether your children will be slaves to a totalitarian state, or will be free and healthy people in a democratic society, depends on the fate of Djilas.'¹⁰³ Mihajlov appeared to be taking Djilas's 1954 protest to its logical conclusion. He publicly called for an explicitly anti-Marxist journal basing itself on the ideology of 'Djilasism', and the foundation of a new political opposition movement.¹⁰⁴

Fundamentally, Tito's arrest of Mihajlov and his 1965 anti-Djilasist speech emphasised that it was becoming increasingly difficult for the party to keep liberalisation under control. This was particularly the case among a rising number of young writers who were not ready to submit to state interference. This conflict between the regime and young 'Djilasist' nonconformist intellectuals reached its peak in the late 1960s. In an unprecedented display of dissent, writers, philosophers and students demanded full freedom of expression.

It was in this atmosphere, during 1967, that the country (and particularly Slovenia) was gripped by the radio play '*Cortesova vrnitev*' (The Return of Cortes) by Andrej Hieng. *Cortesova vrnitev* was named the most popular radio programme by the Slovenian broadcaster *Radiotelevizija Slovenija*, and in 1968 was awarded first prize at the Radio and Television Festival at Ohrid, Macedonia. The play itself was a trilogy about the Spanish destruction of the indigenous inhabitants of South America in the 16th century. Yet, it was also an allegory about the problems affecting

¹⁰² M. Mihajlov, 'Open Letter to President Tito', *Encounter*, September 1966, p. 88

¹⁰³ R. Danilović, *Upotreba neprijatelja: Politička suđenja u Jugoslaviji 1945-1991*, (Valjevo, 1993), p. 180

¹⁰⁴ M. Mihajlov, *A Historic Proposal*, (New York, 1966), p. 144

contemporary Yugoslavia. In the play, Cortes and his comrades are idealists who commit terrible crimes in the hope of building a new world for Christ. It transpires however, to be for the profit and wealth of others. *Cortesova vrnitev* therefore can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the radical disillusionment with the communist revolution that was taking place in the 1960s. The concluding message of the play – that social utopia will never come and that all of the violence was in vain – expressed the final disillusionment with the socialist project of the younger generation. After all, the play was aired at the same time as the liberal faction inside the communist party was losing its power and the conservative one was regaining its position.¹⁰⁵

This process was exemplified by the purging of the leading communist and trade union official Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo. With the economy still stagnating, Tempo claimed that more power should be transferred to the workers. Making an alarmingly similar argument to Djilas, he stated that the majority of Yugoslavs would no longer accept the growing income disparities between manual workers and professional administrators.¹⁰⁶ He told one of the leading Yugoslav dailies that workers needed ‘to fight against the bureaucrats until they have replaced them as the real managers of their factories.’¹⁰⁷ Of course, Tempo’s demands for ever increasing powers for the workers was problematic for the rest of the Yugoslav leadership. Devolving even more power to the workers would negate the importance of the state. It was inconsistent with the notion of the leading role of the party. Given the growing tide of dissent, Tito could only see Tempo’s calls for further reform as a resurrection of ‘Djilasism’. At the beginning of 1967 he forced Tempo out of office. Fearing the emergence of ‘Djilasism’ in both his own party and in wider society,

¹⁰⁵ T. Gašper, ‘Zgodovinska drama na Slovenskem in njena družbena vloga pod komunizmom’, *Primerjalna književnost*, Vol. 30, Issue 2, (2007), p. 216

¹⁰⁶ *Treci Plenum CK SKJ*, (Belgrade, 1966), p. 146

¹⁰⁷ S. Vukmanović-Tempo, *Revolucija koja teče: Memoari II*, (Belgrade, 1971), p. 323

Tito reaffirmed on five separate occasions between April and December 1967 that Yugoslavia was not going 'liberal' or 'Djilasist'.¹⁰⁸

The 1968 Student Protests

By 1968 the growing dissatisfaction with existing conditions in Yugoslavia was creating an atmosphere of dissent. This climaxed in June with mass student demonstrations that shook the country. The already politicised students were heavily influenced by the internationally fashionable protest and activism that was emanating from the West. These protests began in Belgrade when the university students staged strikes and demonstrations against the growing inequalities in society. Among their slogans were, 'Bureaucrats, hands off the workers!', 'Down with the princes of socialism!' and 'Down with the red bourgeoisie.'¹⁰⁹ The target was bureaucracy - both the increasing numbers of bureaucrats running the party, and the broader trend of bureaucratisation at a societal level. The students repeatedly used this term in their proclamations, and in the slogans they chanted and hung on the facades of occupied university buildings. In a declaration displayed in the windows of the School of Philosophy, students vigorously condemned the 'existence of strong bureaucratic tendencies in our society.'¹¹⁰ The 'Programme of Political Action', one of the most important statements of the student protest, called for bureaucracy to be fought through the introduction of parity between managers' and workers' incomes.¹¹¹ In an open letter addressed to the workers of Yugoslavia, students identified bureaucracy as their common enemy:

¹⁰⁸ S. K. Pavlowitch, *Yugoslavia*, (New York, 1971), p. 319

¹⁰⁹ Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment*, p. 234

¹¹⁰ Z. Pavlović, *Ispljuvak pun krvi*, (Belgrade, 1990), p. 44

¹¹¹ N. Popov, *Društveni sukobi - izazov sociologiji: "Beogradski jun" 1968.*, (Belgrade, 1983), p. 34

The student protest that is taking place in Belgrade has clearly revealed the true enemy of the students and workers. It is the segment of our society that is attempting to isolate workers from students, and which, pretending to defend the workers' interests, is actually fighting to defend for their own bureaucratic privileges.¹¹²

By suggesting that the bureaucracy was forming their own class in a purportedly classless society, the Belgrade students dared to state what appeared to be in plain sight: that the analysis made by Djilas nearly fifteen years earlier was correct. Djilas, who seemed to encapsulate student radicalism, keenly watched the events unfold. The slogans paraded by the demonstrators had long been his own watchwords. While the students did not proclaim him their leader, they welcomed him when he came to talk. He denied the regime's claims that he had tried to hijack the movement, reasoning that he had merely attended the protests 'as a sympathetic spectator, without any intention to intrude on a purely student movement.'¹¹³

Belgrade University had a tradition of radicalism and its students had always been sympathetic to Djilas. Stojan Subotina, the director of the university library, maintained regular secret contact with the regime's arch-heretic and passed many of his texts on to the students.¹¹⁴ Ultimately the demonstrations articulated the same sense of alienation identified by Djilas. For the new generation that had lived entirely under communist rule and hoped to assume a position of influence, the disheartening truth was that a glass ceiling had been put in place. The students understood that when it was time to graduate, they would be forced to waste their youth in poorly

¹¹² *ibid*, p. 35

¹¹³ Clissold, *Djilas*, p. 299

¹¹⁴ J. Giedroyc, *Autobiografia na cztery ręce*, (Warsaw, 1996), p. 155

paid positions while waiting for the old party members (who owed their seniority to wartime service) to die.

The protests were not confined to Belgrade, instead they spread. Echoes of solidarity were expressed in all of the other universities and major demonstrations shook Ljubljana, Zagreb and Sarajevo. The students were supported by their professors and other Marxist intellectuals. Alarming for the party however, they were also praised by the workers in spontaneously held factory meetings. Ultimately, the June 1968 student revolt and its subsequent reverberations presented the regime with its most significant challenge since its break with the Soviet Union.

In the end Djilas would be disappointed with the demonstrations. While the initial revolt was characterised by violence, it quickly became subdued. Although the student protests had a political message, they never went as far as Djilas in calling for a multi-party system. The protests had all the elements of a revolution - enthusiasm, mass demonstrations, clashes with police – but crucially they did not call for the overthrow of the existing social order. Speaking directly to the students, Tito persuaded them to end their protests. He proclaimed:

I wish to say that I am happy to have such a youth, a youth which has shown itself to be mature. Here, the latest development in the universities has shown that 90 percent of students are our real socialist youth, who won't let themselves be poisoned by supporters of Djilas...¹¹⁵

Following the events of 1968, the party retreated into orthodox Marxist-Leninism. Despite more than twenty years passing since the Second World War, party propaganda returned to its revolutionary tone. It was proclaimed that Yugoslav

¹¹⁵ M. Arsić and D.R. Marković, *68. Studentski bunt i društvo*, (New Belgrade, 1985), p. 117

socialism was facing numerous hidden enemies including the bourgeoisie, who it was argued, had been revived by Djilas. This was hyperbole. In reality the bourgeoisie had been destroyed economically and politically. In sum, it seems hard to argue with the assessment made by Djilas himself:

In the late 1960s, Yugoslavia had another chance, the most promising if also the most uncertain, at democratisation ... but by the early 1970s Tito more firmly than ever held back the movement for change; he forced creative social, national and individual energies underground.¹¹⁶

In 1954, Tito argued that Djilas's proclamation that the party had to 'wither away' had been premature. The party had to play a leading role in society 'until the last class enemy has been disarmed, until the broadest masses have been educated to socialism.'¹¹⁷ Only nine years after the Second World War, Tito's assertion that the country was surrounded by bourgeois and nationalist enemies, and that its people were uneducated in socialism, appeared legitimate. By 1968, the students' level of debate suggested that Yugoslav society was very different. Arguably the Yugoslav communists' greatest error was that they could only see 'Djilasism', and not bureaucracy, as the inhibitor to building socialism.

¹¹⁶ Djilas, *Tito*, p. 177

¹¹⁷ J.B. Tito, *Komunist*, January-February 1954, p. 1

Djilas as a ‘Straw Man’ – The Identification of Liberalism with ‘Djilasism’ and Dissent

The mentioning of Djilas in Tito’s speech to the students is particularly interesting. While the students took on Djilas’s condemnation of bureaucracy, and welcomed him when he joined them in discussion, they refused to take him as a leader. The sustained ostracism was not without effect. While the most politically aware students knew of Djilas, numerous protestors knew little or nothing about him. When a correspondent of *The New York Times*, covering the unrest of 1968, asked a group of students whether they had been influenced by Djilas, he was met with blank expressions.¹¹⁸ In addition, when Djilas attempted to take the podium to address the students directly, he was prevented and met with boos.¹¹⁹ The students were aware that Djilas was a harmful figure for political reform. By directly linking their protests with him, they could be made to appear as enemies of socialism, wanting to overthrow the system rather than reform it. Perhaps this was Tito’s main aim in condemning Djilas’s influence on the students and the New Left in general. Djilas was acting as a ‘straw man’ for any opposition arguing for reform and greater democracy.

The aftermath of the 1968 protests served to further disillusion the more ‘liberal’ elements within the party. This group included Latinka Perović and Marko Nikezić in Serbia, Miko Tripalo and Savka Dabčević-Kučar in Croatia, Stane Kavčič in Slovenia, and Krste Crvenkovski in Macedonia. These younger ‘liberal’ communists were certainly marked by the purging of Djilas. Tripalo admitted that Djilas’s ideas in *The New Class* were ‘finding a strong following’, and agreed with Djilas that

¹¹⁸ R. H. Anderson, ‘Belgrade Revives Djilas as Target’, *The New York Times*, 21st June 1973, p. 7

¹¹⁹ Clissold, *Djilas*, P. 299

communist society had become static and that the party was ‘as an obstacle for future democratic and socialist development.’¹²⁰ While Perović later claimed that Djilas was ‘one of the rare political thinkers who could explain communism’.¹²¹

Even the top party official in Croatia, Vladimir Bakarić, admitted that while Djilas remained largely unknown, his ideas were occupying people’s minds across Yugoslavia. Despite the fact that Djilas was considered an ‘unperson’, Bakarić felt compelled to state that Djilas had been wrong in claiming that the party bureaucracy was a ‘new class’ opposed to the working class. Even though Bakarić only mentioned Djilas twice in his speech (which was also published in *Vjesnik*) to the officers of the Zagreb garrison in November 1967, the fact that he found it necessary to polemicise with the chief Yugoslav revisionist indicated that Djilas’s theories were not as unknown as the party hoped. Bakarić even admitted that a number of Djilas’s observations had been correct. He conceded that a class of bureaucrats had risen up, but defended their role as an instrument of the working class, rather than ruling over it. The bureaucracy was ‘our bureaucracy’. Bakarić accepted that ‘we had to discuss this problem in our press. This thesis does not support Djilas fully, nevertheless it is reminiscent of his views’.¹²²

Bakarić felt compelled to defend ‘our bureaucracy’ in order to discredit the dissatisfied liberals in the party. These liberal groupings could be found in Serbia, Croatia and Macedonia. However, they were most prevalent in Slovenia. Djilas had long been supported in Slovenia for his hard-line position on the future of the Free Territory of Trieste, demanding the province be incorporated into the republic, and his influence was felt in both *Perspektive* and *Corteso va vrnitev*. Božo Repe has

¹²⁰ ‘Mr Mihajlov’s aide is released’, *The Times*, 10th February 1967, p. 9

¹²¹ L. Perović, ‘Predgovor’ in M. Djilas, *Slutnja Postkomuničkog Haosa*, (New Belgrade, 1997), p. 1

¹²² S. Stanković, ‘Top Yugoslav Party Leader Polemicizes with Djilas’ New Class Theories’, *Radio Free Europe*, 7th November 1967, p. 1

demonstrated that Djilas's ideas had a strong influence on liberalism in Slovenia, and the leading Slovene liberal Stane Kavčič observed that, 'the most zealous adherents of Djilasism come from Slovenia.'¹²³ In 1973, the perceived level of support for Djilas-esque ideas among the Slovene youth resulted in Tito personally preventing a group of Slovene students from visiting the United States.¹²⁴ Following the events of 1968, the young 'liberal' communists in the republican leaderships objected to the fact that political reform had been consistently obstructed. By drawing on the same themes as Djilas they hoped to show the dilemmas resulting from this action. As Kavčič recalled: 'Djilas was the first to publicly raise the issue of democracy. And it is this issue that has been concerning the party ever since, we have walked around this problem like a cat around a bush!'¹²⁵

The exhuming of Djilas's ideas were anathema to Tito. In response he moved to purge his party of these reformist members, grouping them with the 'heretic' Milovan Djilas. As Kavčič noted despondently; 'it seemed as if we had reached this so-called liberalism with gradual changes, but then nothing! In burying Djilas's ideas the Yugoslav communist regime has buried all the hopes of socialism and communism.'¹²⁶

The association of liberalism with dissent was clear from the title of a volume of work published on behalf of the party, entitled *Liberalizam od Đilasa do danas* (Liberalism from Djilas to Today). This 900 page, two-volume work, combined all the different elements of intellectual criticism into one giant conspiracy. Djilas became a scapegoat for a wave of repression.¹²⁷ Since 1956, the party's policy concerning Djilas had been to largely ignore him. By the early 1970s however, his

¹²³ S. Kavčič, *Dnevnik in spomini: (1972-1987)*, (Ljubljana, 1988), p. 582

¹²⁴ S. Stanković, 'Anti-Djilas Campaign Escalated', *Radio Free Europe*, 16th March 1973, p. 4

¹²⁵ Kavčič, *Dnevnik*, p. 518

¹²⁶ *ibid*

¹²⁷ D. Marković and S. Kržavac, *Liberalizam: od Đilasa do Danas, Vol. 1*, (Belgrade, 1978), p. 5

name began to appear across the media. In 1972, the rise of ‘Djilasism’ was considered such a threat that it was deemed necessary for the Yugoslav army weekly *Front* to launch a number of attacks against him. The army and the partisan veterans justified their campaign as defending the ‘front line against counterrevolutionary elements’, denouncing Djilas and his followers as ‘traitors’ and ‘enemies’ of Yugoslavia.¹²⁸ This was followed a year later by a series of attacks in Yugoslavia’s largest weekly, *NIN*. This series, condemning ‘current heresies’, began with a four page article entitled ‘From Djilas to Liberalism’. *NIN* alleged that the country’s current problems could be traced back to the aberrations of the former vice-president.¹²⁹ This attack was certainly prompted by Tito’s denunciation of the decisions of the 1952 Sixth Party (Djilas) Congress in an interview with the Zagreb daily *Vjesnik* in 1972.

The purpose of the *NIN* series appears to have been to demonstrate that Djilas was a discredited and forgotten man who no Yugoslav should have any interest in. Yet ironically, until these attacks, many young Yugoslavs had heard little about the regime’s arch-dissident. Although they were espousing Djilas-esque ideas, the younger generation had little opportunity to read his works and make the links between their protests and those of the arch-heretic; the *NIN* attacks unwittingly made up for this - a point that the Croatian communist Milka Planinc made to the authorities in Belgrade.¹³⁰ Therefore the change of tactic, promoting Djilas from non-person to leading opponent, was counterproductive. For nearly twenty years Djilas had been judiciously isolated, either confined to prison or the privacy of his own flat. He was physically removed from the public eye. During this time all of his books had been banned, his image removed from public spaces and kept out of the

¹²⁸ L. Labedz, ‘Shadows over Helsinki’, *Encounter*, June 1973, p. 87

¹²⁹ S. Krzevac, ‘Od Đilasa do liberalizma’, *NIN*, 17th June 1973, p. 1

¹³⁰ S. Goldstein, ‘Predgovor’ in Djilas, *Vlast*, p.43

press, and his name virtually expunged from the history books. This sustained censorship was effective - as the blank looks from the students in 1968 demonstrate. However, the sudden attention seemed to suggest that the mounting dissent in Yugoslavia owed something to Djilas. This does not mean that all of the regime's detractors shared his views and analysis, or, if they did, that they were aware of it. Yet, because Djilas defended the right of others to hold and express opinions that differed from the official party line, he embodied every critic.

The press campaign revealed the extent of the regime's fear of 'Djilasism' in the 1970s. This was not only caused by outspoken reformists in the party, but also by Djilas's increasingly candid views expressed in the Western media. In 1977, Djilas told the United Press International news agency that if he were in power he would slowly convert Yugoslavia toward democracy in the Western sense of the word. The paper *Večernje novosti* hit back calling him 'ignorant', 'an unperson', 'a charlatan' working for Western espionage services, in an article entitled, 'If He Were in Power...'¹³¹ It was clear that the authorities were afraid that Djilas represented a real threat to whoever succeeded Tito.

Re-opening the National Question

After his spells in jail, Djilas went through a period of deep introspection. He was absorbed with settling accounts with himself. He turned to his first great love, writing epic Balkan literature. While the idea of 'Djilasism' was regularly evoked by both his supporters and enemies, Djilas himself remained fairly cowed on the domestic scene. From 1968 onwards however, perhaps motivated by the dramatic

¹³¹ S. Stanković, 'Djilas Attacked for Book Published in Vienna', *Radio Free Europe*, 13th April 1977, p. 2

political upheaval both in Yugoslavia and across the rest of the continent, he turned his attention back to politics. He began challenging two of the most important tenets of the Yugoslav regime: the Partisan narrative of history and the idea of brotherhood and unity. Tales of Partisan atrocities committed during the war had always been present in Yugoslavia. However, these narratives could not be publicly expressed, and those published in émigré circles could not be brought into Yugoslavia. Moreover, the émigré sources were not trusted because of their authors' zealous antipathy to communism. These tales received authentication when Djilas published his war memoirs in English in 1977. Djilas confirmed the extent of the atrocities:

... the number of dead exceeds twenty thousand ... A year or two later, there was grumbling in the Slovenian Central Committee that they had trouble with the peasants from those areas, because underground rivers were casting up bodies. They also said that piles of corpses were heaving up as they rotted in shallow mass graves, so that the very earth seemed to breathe.¹³²

While he did not deny that the Partisans exhibited extraordinary heroism and courage, he also revealed their savagery. Djilas implied that the war was not simply a war of resistance and liberation, but a civil war. He detailed how Serb fought Croat, Christian fought Muslim, town fought village, and clan fought clan.¹³³ Although Djilas's wartime memoir was strictly prohibited in Yugoslavia, *The Observer* reported that the release of the book caused a sensation within the party: 'The hottest reading among communist party officials in Belgrade is now 'Wartime' ... senior

¹³² Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 447

¹³³ *ibid*

party officials were so intrigued by the book's revelations that they organised a special illicit translation.'¹³⁴

A perfect example of Djilas's rewriting of history can be seen by comparing his account of events in Foča during 1941, with Dedijer's in his biography of Tito (the latter was still being used as the official narrative of history). In both accounts it is clear that the town has been occupied by numerous different sides before the Partisans arrive. In the official account Dedijer recalled meeting a clever shop owner who, to cover all bases, kept under his counter a German, Italian, and Yugoslav Partisan flag.¹³⁵ The anecdote was used because it implied that the war was as a conflict between the Partisans and two foreign invaders. Djilas's account, published in 1977, told a more truthful and unpleasant story of what really happened in Foča. One in which foreign invaders were not involved:

In the spring of 1941, soon after the establishment of the NDH, the Ustasha arrived in Foča and, assisted by Muslim thugs, slaughtered the Serbs. In the village of Miljevina, the Ustasha slit the throats of the Serbs over a large vat formerly used to store fruit pulp. Later Serb Chetniks led by a drunken white officer took their revenge by seizing and binding the Muslims, then throwing them off the bridge to drown.¹³⁶

These revelations compounded Djilas's assertions in *The Unperfect Society* that brotherhood and unity never really existed except as an empty ideological slogan. He stated: 'the idea of Yugoslavism is now evaporating before our eyes and the present regime is altogether to blame.'¹³⁷ Djilas had become increasingly disillusioned with the federal decentralisation that had taken place in the 1970s. He believed that the

¹³⁴ 'Tito and a Banned Book', *The Observer*, 29th January 1978, p. 9

¹³⁵ Dedijer, *Tito Speaks*, p. 174

¹³⁶ Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 139

¹³⁷ Djilas, *Unperfect Society*, p. 152

republican elites were manipulating national feelings in order to increase their personal power. In 1974 he offered a radical interpretation of where the impending failure of the Yugoslav idea would lead. In an article written in *Encounter* he predicted that Yugoslavia would not exist by 2024. His article appeared all over the West but was also excerpted in the Croatian press. He wrote that by 2024:

Yugoslavia will become a confederation of four states: Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia, with Serbia itself being a federative state and Kosovo becoming part of Albania. It is possible that those four states may later separate and become fully independent.¹³⁸

He was extrapolating contemporary developments in an attempt to predict where they might lead. It was interesting that Djilas anticipated no Montenegrin or Bosnian states. He felt that Montenegrins would become part of the Serbian state, and presumably felt that Muslim national self-consciousness did not exist. Ultimately he no longer believed that the party was capable of holding the country together. In an interview in a Slovenian émigré journal he claimed the only way that the nations of Yugoslavia would stay linked, was through ‘the inevitable merger with Europe which is both natural and necessary.’¹³⁹

While Djilas’s views concerning the ‘national question’ were somewhat limited by the prohibition of his books, they were certainly finding sympathetic ears in intellectual circles. In 1954 Tito had told foreign journalists that Djilas was ‘politically dead: the most terrifying death of all.’¹⁴⁰ Yet by the 1980s, when Tito and virtually all of his wartime comrades were literally dead, Djilas not only survived

¹³⁸ M. Djilas, ‘A World Atlas for 2024’, *Encounter*, August 1974, p. 25

¹³⁹ C. Žebot, ‘Djilas o Problemu Jugoslavije’, *Slovenska država*, Vol. 18, Issue 2, February 1967, p. 3

¹⁴⁰ West, *Tito*, p. 261

them, but was garnering a lot of attention. So much so, that in 1984 three intellectuals were imprisoned primarily for the crime of attending a discussion group lectured by Djilas. The group had been meeting for over seven years but its members were only arrested when Djilas had taken part.

The discussion group consisted of intellectuals who, as Djilas recalled, were ‘on average about 30 years old, most of them 26-35 years old; only a few were over 40.’¹⁴¹ The 28 participants (including Djilas) were arrested, and during questioning some faced harassment and beatings. Following this abuse, one individual, Jovica Mihajlović, attempted suicide, while another, the trade union activist Radomir Radović, was mysteriously discovered dead in his country cottage.¹⁴² Although it appeared that Radović had been poisoned, the police only carried out a superficial investigation into his death. Furthermore, *NIN* reported that following his interrogation, Radović was left in a state of acute fear of the secret police.¹⁴³

It was clear that the police action was designed to make Djilas’s participation in any activity risky, both to himself and to his sympathisers. As the Belgrade daily *Večernje Novosti* noted: ‘the 18 hour detention of Milovan Djilas should be considered a serious warning to “oppositional forces” in Yugoslavia who are using the current serious economic difficulties to turn the people against the regime.’¹⁴⁴ It was in 1984 that the Yugoslav government signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). By detaining its chief heretic, the Yugoslav communists clearly wanted to demonstrate that no opposition would be tolerated during this period of economic instability. *Večernje Novosti* called Djilas ‘a pawn

¹⁴¹ ‘Djilas Discusses his Detention’, *Radio Free Europe*, 26th April 1984, p. 1

¹⁴² ‘Enquiry Called into the Death of Radomir Radović’, *Index on Censorship*, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 27

¹⁴³ B. Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-up 1980-92*, (London, 1993), p. 91

¹⁴⁴ S. Stanković, ‘Detention of Djilas Seen as a Warning to the Opposition’, *Radio Free Europe*, 11th May 1984, p. 2

who dances obediently to the tune of an anti-communist orchestra.¹⁴⁵ Yet this only highlighted the hypocrisy of the regime, given their own negotiations with the IMF. *Večernje Novosti* concluded its attack by proclaiming the dissident a ‘general without an army.’¹⁴⁶ However, Djilas evidently did have a certain degree of support among young intellectuals. As Djilas noted in an interview with *Radio Free Europe*: ‘I have no organised supporters, but ... for 30 years I have been critical of this regime, and this has engendered a kind of approval among large sectors of the public.’¹⁴⁷

The subject of the discussion that got everyone arrested was the ‘national question’. Djilas claimed that he chose this topic because ‘it is the most topical issue in the country.’¹⁴⁸ Prophetically, he predicted:

Without liberalisation of the system, our country is in grave danger, it will end in chaos. The regime is not in danger because of any organised opposition (there is none with the exception of a few dissidents) but will happen because of a crisis between those who are already in the system. Most likely this will happen because of two republics who are unable to agree and won’t want to concede power to another republic. The second problem is the issue of Kosovo...¹⁴⁹

Of the 28 intellectuals arrested, three were eventually imprisoned. One, Miodrag Milić, was found guilty because the authorities discovered at his home an unpublished essay entitled: ‘The fate of Milovan Djilas and the Limits of

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 3

¹⁴⁶ V. Belotserkovsky, ‘An Interview with Milovan Djilas’, *Radio Free Europe*, 27th December 1984, p. 3

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*

¹⁴⁸ ‘Djilas, the Police and a Lecture in Belgrade’, *Encounter*, July 1984, p. 79

¹⁴⁹ M. Djilas, ‘Socializem mi ni tako jasen danes, kot mi je bil ko sem bil še mlad,’ *Slovenska država*, Vol. 33, Issue 7/8, July 1982, p. 1

Rebellion'.¹⁵⁰ He also fuelled a domestic scandal during his trial when he testified that Ranko Savić, a prominent Belgrade police official, had told him: 'I will kill you the way I killed Jovan Barović [Djilas's lawyer].'¹⁵¹ The trial was the most controversial and politically sensitive since the end of the war. While Djilas himself was not facing trial, his thinking dominated the proceedings. In addition, the trials turned out to be a complete debacle. Contrary to the regime's intention, they became a platform to condemn the communist system and its repression of free speech. The trials sparked a near total mobilisation of the Yugoslav intelligentsia, with notable protests in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana. The judges and political leaders were inundated with petitions signed by unprecedented numbers of people.

Just like in the 1970s, the regime's attempt to crack down on 'Djilasm' had actually brought his arguments back into public debate. As Djilas observed: 'the cafes are full of people saying the same things I did 30 years ago.'¹⁵² The party had gambled that in 1984, decades after his initial dissent, Yugoslavs would not be interested in the arrest of Djilas. They miscalculated. Spiro Galović, a member of the Presidency of the Serbian League of Communists, lamented: 'he is acquiring undeserved fame and appears on front pages abroad only because we made a mistake. This was due, perhaps, to oversensitivity of officials in authority, who find subversion everywhere.'¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ S. Stanković, 'Trial of Six Dissidents Begins in Belgrade', *Radio Free Europe*, 30th November 1984, p. 14

¹⁵¹ S. Stanković, 'The Belgrade Dissident's Trial Continues and Adjourns', *Radio Free Europe*, 30th November 1984, p. 17

¹⁵² F. Bordewich, 'Yugoslavia Since Tito', *The New York Times*, 13th April 1986, p. 54

¹⁵³ H. Kamm, 'Trial of Dissidents in Yugoslavia Seems to have Split Communists', *The New York Times*, 19th November 1985, p. 10

Semi-rehabilitation and Re-emergence

At the end of the 1980s, with the weakening of the party, the devolution of power to the ethnically based republics, and the rise within those republics of nationally orientated politicians, Djilas became a free man. He became free to publicly speak his mind and give interviews with widely read magazines and newspapers. His first public appearance came in 1988 when he spoke to over 300 people, mostly students, crowded into a student residence at the University of Maribor. He had been invited by the students to speak about the history of Yugoslav communism since the Second World War, and one-party rule. The lecture ended in a standing ovation as he told the students that they had a simple choice between democracy and disintegration: 'every republic must find someone to push through democratic reforms or Yugoslavia will be broken up into different republics.'¹⁵⁴ The lecture contained nothing that Djilas had not already expressed in the Western press on countless occasions. What made it significant was that he gave it in public in Yugoslavia. It was also an indication of the politically liberal climate in Slovenia.

The re-emergence of Djilas caused a number of conservatives in the party considerable anxiety. A year before his lecture at Maribor, the ideological hardliner Stipe Šušteršič banned an issue of *Mladina* because it contained an interview with Djilas. This failed however, because the same interview was published by the Maribor student journal *Katedra*. To compound the transgression, the issue was put on sale at the start of the young person's relay for what would have been Tito's birthday.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ S. Bizjak, 'Milovan Djilas – 35 let neke Anateme', *Tribuna: študentski časopis*, Vol. 38, Issue 6, (1988) p. 30

¹⁵⁵ 'Interview with top dissident printed in Yugoslav magazine', *The New York Times*, 27th March 1987, p. 3

The interview with *Katedra* was the first Djilas had given to a Yugoslav publication for 34 years. The editorial board defended its decision in the editors' note entitled, 'Why Djilas?' This note was perhaps more significant than the interview itself. It stated:

Milovan Djilas is today a phantom, his name alone arouses passions and fears, although the public at large does not know much about him and what his work represents ... Nobody has the right to erase the historical memories of a person who played such an important role, regardless of whether we judge his role to have been bad, good, or mixed ... it is inhuman, uncivilised, and lower than the lowest cultural level to have Djilas despised in such a way... Nobody has the right to invent various tales about him and permit unsubstantiated claims to be spread while depriving him of the right to express himself. We are all aware of the importance of this interview with Djilas as well as its political significance.¹⁵⁶

In the interview Djilas praised the Slovenes as the most democratic Yugoslavs - 'In the party there is no real democratic evolution except in Slovenia.'¹⁵⁷ In 1988, *Mladina* reprinted Djilas's 34 year-old *Borba* articles with commentaries by the original author on how these articles still related to Yugoslav society: 'I knew that something was not quite right ... decades later my heretical thoughts have been proved correct.'¹⁵⁸ According to Dedijer, Djilas was the most important individual in creating the division between the Slovenes and the communist state.¹⁵⁹

Following in their Slovene counterparts' footsteps, the media in other republics began to write positively about Djilas. By May 1989, even *Borba* had published an

¹⁵⁶ 'Interzju z Milovan Djilas', *Katedra*, No. 9, March 1987, p. 2

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*

¹⁵⁸ S. Bizjak, 'Anatomija neke morale', *Tribuna: študentski časopis*, Vol. 38, Issue 9, (1988), p. 27

¹⁵⁹ A. Tijanić, 'Djilas politički jeti', *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 19th June 1988, p. 6

eight-part interview with the arch-heretic. In the first instalment, a photograph of Djilas appeared on *Borba's* front page. The photo was much larger and placed above the photographs of the six newly installed members of Yugoslavia's collective state presidency.¹⁶⁰ In addition, Djilas's book about his experiences during the war, his biography of Tito, and his autobiography documenting his years in power were printed by a Belgrade publisher.¹⁶¹ After being *persona non grata* for so long, Djilas and his ideas now held a kind of aura. Borislav Lalić has noted how hundreds of Yugoslavs would crowd into tiny bookshops in Belgrade to get a glimpse of him promoting a new book that was finally appearing in Yugoslavia. The crowds were a mixture of young people fascinated by seeing the old dissident for the first time and people of the older generations, 'who were trying to make up for lost time most watched in awe and disbelief that they were now free to listen and even talk to him.'¹⁶²

Djilas was not officially rehabilitated, but he was morally rehabilitated – a former leading communist who had played an historical role and was no guiltier of past crimes than others. This opened Pandora's Box. The Yugoslav authorities were inferring that Djilas had been correct in a number of his observations all along. He was the first to expose the falsification of history, the lack of democracy in socialist society, and the corrupting effect of privilege – the 'new class'. In certain circles, this transformed Djilas into a highly respected public figure who could no longer be considered a political deviationist. As the former president of the Yugoslav High

¹⁶⁰ M. Andrejevich, 'Milovan Djilas and Aleksandar Ranković to be Rehabilitated', *Radio Free Europe*, 27th June 1989, p. 14

¹⁶¹ 'Rehabilitation and De-Titoisation', *Radio Free Europe*, 27th June 1989, p. 8

¹⁶² Lalić, *Milovan Dilas*, p. 13

Court, Josip Hrnčević, now noted: ‘Djilas’s trails were political rather than criminal’.¹⁶³

It appears that the decision to partially rehabilitate Djilas was part of a semi-disguised attempt by some (nationalist) party members to discredit some of Tito’s policies. After all, Djilas’s re-emergence in popular society began to undermine the communist system and its historical foundations. Aleksandr Prlja, a senior communist party official, bemoaned that: ‘two years ago intellectuals were being put in jail. Now Yugoslavs are free to discuss everything in public, Djilas is again on the TV!’¹⁶⁴ Milan Pančevski, the president of Yugoslavia’s League of Communists, lamented: ‘attacks on Tito and the revolution, particularly from nationalist and anti-communist positions, have increased in certain media throughout the country. Due to the re-emergence of Djilas we are faced with attempts to proclaim our entire revolutionary path as a failure and an unsuccessful experiment.’¹⁶⁵

Therefore the re-emergence of Djilas in Yugoslav society should not be underestimated. While the former vice-president did not wish to lead a formal oppositional movement and regain power, he did become a mouthpiece for opposition in the field of ideology. This was vital. After all, it was ideology that justified the existence of the party and the communist state. The end of communism as a working ideology also opened the possibility of a return to national conflicts – after all, communism made the claim that it would heal and eliminate such antagonisms. Of all the myths of communism that Djilas revealed, this proved to be the most lethal.

¹⁶³ J. Hrnčević, *Svjedočanstva* (Zagreb, 1986) p. 255

¹⁶⁴ A. Cowell, ‘Press Testing Looser Bonds in Yugoslavia’, *The New York Times*, 5th December 1989, p. 13

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*

Djilas and *Srpstvo*

In his later life Djilas was perplexed by how it would be possible, democratically, to make Yugoslavs loyal to a system of beliefs apart from their nation and religion – and so hold the country together without resorting to exclusionary ideologies.¹⁶⁶ This was the question that Djilas continually asked himself until his death; it was a conundrum that he could never solve. It was also an important question given that his return to the public scene coincided with the rise of nationalism and the emergence of the problematic issue of Kosovo. Kosovo held particular significance within the Serbian national consciousness in the 1980s - there was an increasing bitterness over territory that was, in theory, still part of the Serb republic. Kosovo had once been the heart of the medieval Serb kingdom. However, by the 1980s it was vastly Albanian, as the Albanian birth rate became the highest in Europe and thousands of Serbs emigrated from the province. Regardless of the real source of the Serb exodus from Kosovo, many Serbs blamed it on the behaviour of the Albanians, who were alleged to be conducting a violent campaign to drive Serbs out. In this atmosphere, the populist politician Slobodan Milošević was able to manipulate the issue of Kosovo to seize power in October 1987 in a virtual nationalist coup.

Djilas harboured a romantic view of Kosovo. Falling back on his nation in later life, he claimed that Prince Lazar's choice of a heavenly kingdom during the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 provided him with the inspiration to continue writing his articles in 1953.¹⁶⁷ Just like Prince Lazar, he wanted to take pride in his defeat – a defeat he rose above. Djilas was drawing on the myths of the province in an attempt to further his own martyrdom. His sentimental views of Kosovo clouded his typically lucid

¹⁶⁶ Jovanovich, *The Temper of the West*, p. 101

¹⁶⁷ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 201

judgements. On the one hand he logically argued that the unrest in Kosovo during the 1980s was caused by the propensity of the republican leaders 'to play the national card as a substitute for democracy.'¹⁶⁸ On the other, he publicly supported Milošević's subdual of Albanian influence in the province:

I agree with the policy of sorting out the relations of Serbia with her province. I think Milošević is right in this respect and the mass meetings were a positive thing ... So potent is the thrust of [Albanian] nationalism that the Yugoslav territories dominated by an Albanian population have seen a mass exodus of the Serbian and Montenegrin minorities. We may expect further unrest and continued Albanian interference to be waiting in the wings for the most opportune moment ... Wipe away Kosovo from the Serb mind and soul and we are no more.¹⁶⁹

When, in 1989, Milošević began toppling the republican leaderships that opposed him in his so-called Anti-Bureaucratic Revolutions, Djilas praised him. In an interview he proclaimed: 'he [Milošević] managed to achieve important results on the national level ... he helped weaken authoritarian tendencies.'¹⁷⁰ He even sent a congratulatory message to the newly installed President of Montenegro, and Milošević apparatchik, Momir Bulatović. He praised Bulatović as the first 'freely' elected president in Montenegrin history, noting that while the new government was not ideal, 'in these times it is best. It is more capable than previous ones. I met Momir. He left a good impression on me ... he wanted to end the campaign against me.'¹⁷¹ In addition, when the northern republics attempted to secede a Serbian dominated Yugoslavia, Djilas condemned them. He advocated the arrest of the

¹⁶⁸ M. Djilas, 'Kosovo, Danas', *Naša reč*, Issue 336, June – July (1982), p. 2

¹⁶⁹ D. Djokić, *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea*, (London, 2003), p. 132

¹⁷⁰ Lazović, *Djilas*, p.32

¹⁷¹ M. Cemović, *Djilasovi odgovori*, (Belgrade, 1997), p.32

republican leaderships in order to maintain the integrity of the state. He stated: 'I am an opponent of putsches and violence, but the army has to intervene decisively and if necessary arrest the state leadership and prevent the violent breakup of the state.'¹⁷² Borislav Cimeša has argued that Djilas's actions in the late 1980s demonstrate that he was supporter and propagandist of a Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia.¹⁷³ However, such an interpretation is too simplistic. Initially, Milošević used the language of rights within a familiar party framework. Therefore his early policies did not cause a dilemma for dissidents like Djilas. Rather, they seemed like a welcome development, combining their struggle for democracy with ideas of the nation. At this stage these concepts did not appear to be in conflict, after all, the communist regime was manifestly failing both.

On assuming power Milošević made a concerted effort to restore the reputations of various Serbian and Montenegrin dissidents. In this respect Milošević's courting of the intellectuals paid off. Djilas admitted: 'I have a soft spot for him - Milošević gave me the possibility to publish my books'¹⁷⁴ and 'under Milošević's regime Serbia is intellectually freer than it has ever been.'¹⁷⁵ In this respect, at least initially, Djilas was short-sighted and insufficiently critical of Serb nationalism; but this reticence was in keeping with his kind of Yugoslavism. Nonetheless, Djilas's relaxed attitude toward Milošević ensured that many prominent figures in the West, who held Djilas in high esteem, believed that Milošević was not an enemy of Yugoslavia.¹⁷⁶ In the *International Affairs Journal* he urged the West to support the collapse of the Yugoslav communist state. He even defended the nationalistic

¹⁷² A. Miletić, 'Kratik pregled "Djilasologije"' in B. Dimitrijević, *Istoriografija i savremeno društvo*, (Niš, 2014), p. 231

¹⁷³ Cimeša, 'Đilas i crnogorski' *Univerzitet Crne Gore, Filozofski fakultet Nikšić*, 21st April 2014

¹⁷⁴ Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, p. 211

¹⁷⁵ 'Razgovor s Milovan Đilas', *NIN*, 24th May 1991, p. 17

¹⁷⁶ D. Binder, 'Man in the News: Slobodan Milosevic', *The New York Times*, 14th October 1988, p. 8

republican leaders: ‘ethnic disputes, which are assiduously fostered by national communist oligarchies, do disrupt the course of democratic development, but at the same time they also tend to break up the centralised party state and contribute to the dissolution of ideology.’¹⁷⁷ Like many Serbian intellectuals, Djilas did not see Milošević, at least initially, as a danger to a cohesive Yugoslav state. As he told George Urban in 1991, ‘You may be surprised to hear that at the general elections I supported Milošević against [Vuk] Drašković ... Drašković stands for the Chetnik tradition, his election would ensure an immediate and bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia.’¹⁷⁸

Djilas also became actively involved in campaigning against the Albanian authorities in the province of Kosovo. In 1985, Djilas was approached by his close friend, the Serb poet Matija Bećković, to write a letter of protest to the party. According to Bećković, Djilas was selected because of his immense literary talent. In his letter Djilas decried the party for ignoring the violence committed against the Serbs in Kosovo. He claimed, ‘the violence has an initial goal of “ethnically cleansing” Kosovo of Serbian, Macedonian and Montenegrin peoples, culture and history.’ There was no evidence in his eyes of ‘Greater Serbian nationalism’ at work, just evidence that the Serbian population faced destruction and expulsion from their property, beatings, rape and murder. He ended by stating that he was not protesting because he was a Serb, but because he was a human being. He reasoned, ‘we do not wish evil and injustice to the Albanian people, we are looking for the equality of all

¹⁷⁷ M. Djilas, ‘A Revolutionary Democratic Vision of Europe’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 66, Issue 2 (1990) p. 266

¹⁷⁸ Djilas, ‘The end of the Bolshevik Utopia’, *The World Today*, October 1991, p. 175

ethnic groups in Kosovo.’¹⁷⁹ Djilas’s moral authority and his power of expression strengthened the Serb self-image of national victimhood.

The historian Zvezdan Folić has noted that Djilas managed to divide his dissidence between a progressive, anti-communist kind for Western consumption, and a conservative nationalist kind for Serbs.¹⁸⁰ Yet, like his fellow dissidents and intellectuals, Djilas’s main protests were directed against the communist party’s political monopoly and the widespread and irrational interference of the state. He hoped to replace the one-party state with a new, more representative system based around the respect of civil and human rights. His original demand, like the rest of the Serbian intelligentsia, was for democratic change. However, by the late 1980s the defence of the Serbian nation had become a part of Djilas’s protests, and indeed had become the main focus of some of his colleagues. This change was not a complete volte-face. Instead it was linked to previous campaigns and protests. The party carefully controlled, and sometimes suppressed, discussions on ethnic matters. Therefore, when Djilas publicly protested about the abuse of Serbs in Kosovo, he was not only defending human rights and free speech, but he was opening up discussion on the largely taboo national question.

In 1988, Djilas affirmed to George Urban: ‘There isn’t a single Serb writer who has not sought to involve himself in shaping the future of his people; I am no exception ... The realisation that your nation may be on the brink of disaster focuses the minds of its intellectuals wonderfully on the one thing that really matters – survival.’¹⁸¹ By the late 1980s, the ‘nation’ appeared to be the main focus of Djilas’s loyalties. This was at odds with the beliefs he had held for much of his life. Indeed,

¹⁷⁹ M. Djilas, ‘Sva nasilja Albanskog Staljinističkog Fašizma’, 30th December 1985 in M. Bečković, ‘Milovan Đilas O Kosovu i Metohiji’, *Pecat*, 20th June 2011, <http://www.pecat.co.rs/2011/06/milovan-dilas-o-kosovu-i-metohiji/>

¹⁸⁰ Z. Folić, ‘Djilasovo zaveštanje Crnoj Gori’, *Vijesti*, 10th September 2006, p.28

¹⁸¹ G. Urban, ‘Djilas on Gorbachov’, *Encounter*, September 1988, p. 18

just over a decade earlier in the 1970s he supported the ‘Eurocommunism’ movement, and in 1985 he gave his tacit approval to Gorbachev’s reforms. Therefore, his embrace of the Serbian nation in the late 1980s seems to have been an attempt at replacing the utopian element of communism with something more deeply rooted in the popular psyche of the people. Just like many other disillusioned intellectuals, Djilas was attempting to connect his fundamental criticism of the communist system to a rediscovery of the national past. For Djilas, this was a form of patriotism based around national culture and language. It was a benign form of nationalism whereby the assertion of national identity did not necessitate animosity among Yugoslavia’s nations. However, many other intellectuals were taking this criticism much further down the nationalist path.

In the mid to late 1980s, a number of writers and poets took up the pervasive myth of Serbian victimhood. Their elegiac hyperbole was so strong that it stifled reasoned thought. The most influential purveyors of these narratives were Dobrica Ćosić and Matija Bećković. Both would become close friends with Djilas in his later life. The three men would regularly meet at Djilas’s flat to discuss the contemporary political climate. Ćosić had admired Djilas since the break with the Soviet Union. In his diary he revealed: ‘Djilas symbolises our increased freedoms. He is our guarantee that the fight for opinions in Yugoslavia will continue.’¹⁸² As an editor of Djilas’s magazine, *Nova Misao*, he acknowledged: ‘reading his articles in *Borba* and listening to his critical lucid thoughts I began to lose faith in our order.’¹⁸³ Djilas’s fall from power set the young Ćosić on the path to dissidence. He looked up to and

¹⁸² Ćosić, *Piščevi Zapisi*, p. 107

¹⁸³ Ćosić, ‘Umni i gordi pobunjenik’ in Lalić, *Milovan Đilas*, p. 10

even idolised him as an archetypal rebel: ‘I feel proud to have known Milovan Djilas, I incorporated his own personality and ideas into my own destiny.’¹⁸⁴

Matija Bećković, the son of a Montenegrin Chetnik leader, also took Djilas as his idol. He recalled, ‘there was an aura around his name and it began to interfere with my life, this was at the time of his servitude [1954] which coincided with my schooldays and studying ... when I first met him in 1966 I was as pale as a sheet, I remember my excitement.’¹⁸⁵ In the 1980s Bećković would become one of the most vehement Serbian nationalists amongst the Belgrade intelligentsia. This poses the inevitable question of how a committed Yugoslav could associate so closely with extreme nationalists. It appears that after decades of isolation, Djilas was drawn to his fellow intellectuals, even if he disagreed with some of their political views. In an exchange with Djilas, Bećković revealed that he was heavily criticised by many of his colleagues for his close relationship with the former communist, to which Djilas shot back: ‘And do not think I brag about my friendship with you!’¹⁸⁶ Djilas clearly disapproved of many of the chauvinistic aspects of Bećković’s character, yet as an intellectual, he was still drawn to him.

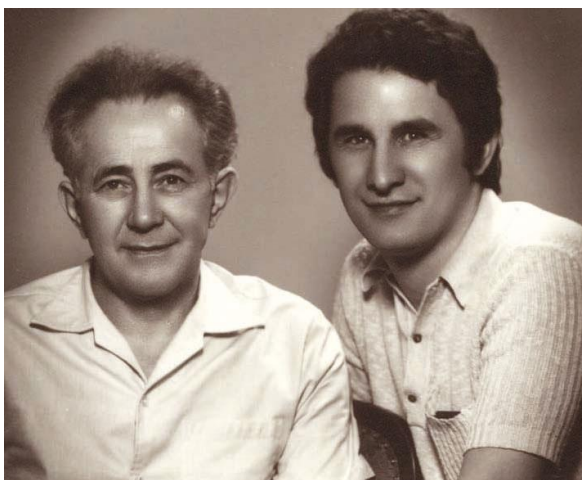
Djilas regularly meditated on his loss of power. Referring to the events of 1954-55 as a prolonged death at the stake, his language often drew upon the imagery of centuries of ‘slavery’ under the Ottomans. This type of martyrdom was mimicked by Bećković. He proclaimed that, ‘every man should embrace their suffering and humiliation, for this is the point at which a poet is born, they are born from their own

¹⁸⁴ *ibid*

¹⁸⁵ M. Bećković, ‘Nije bio ideološki pisac’, *NIN*, 30th March 2006, p. 19

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*

bruises.’¹⁸⁷ Their politics may have differed, but as writers, they revealed the same lyrical, solipsistic, romantic view of suffering.



Replacing old friends with new ones - Djilas and the poet Matija Bećković.¹⁸⁸

Nonetheless, Djilas’s friendship with these intellectuals needs to be qualified. It was not until the events of 1987 that sections of the Serbian intelligentsia began to betray the humanist values that had previously been the core of their activism. Prior to 1987, the predominant concept of the state imagined by the Serbian intelligentsia was not nationalist - it did not argue for a Greater Serbia. There was no demand for the eradication of the autonomous provinces and a redrawing of the borders of the republics. The dissolution of a common Yugoslav state, which would become a reality four years later, did not seem to be even a remote possibility to the vast majority of the Serbian intelligentsia.

Therefore, it was not until the rise of Slobodan Milošević and his adoption of new extra-institutional methods, that the critical intelligentsia’s commitment to democracy was put into question. Even when a large component of the Serbian intelligentsia, including Djilas and Dedijer, began to give their tacit support to

¹⁸⁷ M. Bećković, ‘Kosovo je najskuplja srpska reč’, *Glas crkve: časopis za hrišćansku kulturu I crkveni život*, (1989), p. 27

¹⁸⁸ M. Bećković, ‘Bećković o Đilas’, *Novosti Online*, 11th June 2011

Milošević, they were not advocating for a 'Greater Serbia', let alone ethnic cleansing and genocide. Instead their support was based around Milošević's opening of the cultural sphere and was comprised of notions of pluralist democracy and the defence of human rights. It was not until the 'nation' was given precedence over these humanist values that they began to have second thoughts about the direction in which the rest of the Serbian intelligentsia was travelling.

Like its counterparts in other republics, Serbian nationalism claimed that the nation had to create its own state. The notion that the Serbs needed to be unified in one cohesive state was utilised to challenge the need for democratic reforms, and instead, was used to preserve one-party rule. Consequently, it was not until the late 1980s that Djilas became aware that his motives were irreconcilable with those of his Serbian intellectual colleagues. While he strove to explain the incompetence and immorality of the communist system, which he believed subjugated all of the Yugoslav peoples, his fellow intellectuals and friends used these same explanations to argue that such a system discriminated against Serbia and the Serbian people exclusively.

Therefore, Djilas's friendship with the likes of Bećković and Ćosić can only be understood by appreciating the developments within their intellectual circle. Within the last decade of Yugoslavia's existence the Serbian intelligentsia was involved in two political processes. At the beginning of the 1980s it was in the vanguard of resistance to the ideology and control of the communist regime. The dissidents were not divided. By the end of the 1980s it found itself assisting the new government to exert its control and put in place a new nationalist ideology. It was only then that a division emerged.

Conclusions

Although he held a romantic view of what it meant to be a Serb, Djilas remained a committed Yugoslav who felt linked to all Yugoslav peoples. In this way, Djilas might have been one of the few individuals who could have suggested a solution to the Serbian people that was also acceptable to other Yugoslavs. However, in the 1990s it was men like Ćosić and Bećković who came into the political mainstream, while Djilas remained marginalised. Latinka Perović, writing about the bloody collapse of the Yugoslav state, criticised the anti-communist movements of the 1990s because they were no different from communism - they were totalitarian. Perović claimed that Djilas could have influenced a different outcome if he had been in a position of authority.¹⁸⁹ The Serbian commentator Teofil Pančić, writing in 2011, came to a similar conclusion. In his eyes, had the opposition parties embraced Djilas instead of Milošević, the whole course of Yugoslavian and Serbian history would have been different. Djilas could have been the Serbian Havel.¹⁹⁰

What these counterfactual ruminations miss is that by the 1990s Djilas was 80 years old, he had a murky communist past, and just as in 1954, he held no political ambition. He had passed through his revolutionary phase, but also his phase as a dissident. By the 1990s he was emotionally abstract and neutral in his thoughts. In the third stage of his life he was no longer a revolutionary or a dissident, he was an observer. When in 1991 he was asked whether he had a message for young Yugoslavs, he replied, 'no, except fight and be fully stretched in the service of some great idea, but beware you can never attain it.'¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Perović, 'Predgovor' in Djilas, *Slutnja Postkomuničkog Haosa*, p. 1

¹⁹⁰ T. Pančić, 'Palmotićeve 8', *Vreme*, 15th September 2011, p. 33

¹⁹¹ G. Urban, 'Djilas Revisited', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 11th December 1992, p. 14

While Djilas showed remarkable detachment from the events of the 1990s, in one interview he broke down: ‘We must be the only country in Europe actively rehabilitating fascist [Chetnik] collaborators ... Milošević’s Serbia is ‘Balkan fascism.’¹⁹² The fact that he had lived to see the collapse of communism only to see a worse system emerge was particularly painful. As the full effects of nationalism became evident, with the brutal fratricidal wars that shook Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Djilas condemned the racial purifiers with complete conviction.¹⁹³ Before his death he wrote to Dedijer’s older brother Stevan, lamenting: ‘The Serb people will be paying the price for what Milošević has done for the next hundred years.’¹⁹⁴ By opposing the wars Djilas enraged Serbian politicians and media. He was accused of betrayal and made responsible for the bloodshed. It was argued that it was the ‘anti-Serb’ Djilas who had left so many Serbs outside Serbia when he set the country’s internal borders following the Second World War.¹⁹⁵ After several years of freedom he became a pariah once again.

By the time of his death in 1995, Djilas had fallen into a state of apathy. Although he campaigned against the communist state for nearly 40 years, the horrifying violence that accompanied its end led him to conclude that, ‘there have been no rational or fundamental reasons for the disintegration, for tearing down Yugoslavia, no matter how unjust it used to be for many and unfree for all its peoples.’¹⁹⁶

Djilas was typical of many Yugoslav dissidents, who, in their disillusionment with the communist state, started to look back to their nations. They were seduced by

¹⁹² I. Traynor, ‘Serbia Against the World’, *The Guardian*, 3rd July 1993, p. 20

¹⁹³ M. Ignatieff, ‘Conversation with the Last Partisan’, *The Observer*, 14th March 1993, p. 21

¹⁹⁴ S. Dedijer, ‘Carl Bildt and the Hot Pilaff’, *Bosnia Report (Bosnian Institute)* No. 2, January - February 1998, p. 5

¹⁹⁵ J. F. Burns, ‘Amid Serbia’s Battle Cries, Old Voice of Dissent’, *The New York Times*, 27th March 1992, p. 4

¹⁹⁶ M. Djilas, ‘Separated but Together’, *Balkan Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (1993), p. 5

nationalist ideology, seeing it as the only alternative to the dictatorial superstructure of communism. In reality, nationalism turned out to be a kind of pseudo-democratisation. Therefore, the suppression of Djilas and other reformists was a crucial moment in Yugoslav history because it removed any democratic alternatives to communism. As Eric Gordy has shown, nationalism was able to emerge from the collapse of communism in the 1990s, precisely because of this destruction of alternatives.¹⁹⁷ As Djilas summarised: ‘communism defeated itself, it collapsed in on itself in the ugliest, most shameful and permanent way... communist bureaucracy had created nothing, literally nothing ... only hatred could erupt from this wasteland.’¹⁹⁸ In this respect Djilas had been correct nearly 40 years earlier when he said that Yugoslav socialism needed to grow into a movement capable of transcending the party.

Djilas had played a small but vital role in undermining the ruling party. By the 1980s, the atmosphere was one of insecurity. Djilas observed: ‘all that was needed was the sterile juxtaposition of evil memories and above all, the ideological belief that others are to blame for all national and other troubles.’¹⁹⁹ One of these memories was the Second World War. As Djilas asserted in 1991, ‘the Serbs have lived with that memory for 45 years. Why the sudden discovery? Of course the Serbian people are exceptionally sensitive and easily provoked. They have certainly been provoked by a campaign of “revelations”’.²⁰⁰ Many people were involved in this process, providing the raw materials for hatreds and resentment to grow. Perhaps the first of them, inadvertently, was Djilas’s former close friend Vladimir Dedijer.

¹⁹⁷ E. Gordy, *Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives*, (Pennsylvania, 2010), p. 22

¹⁹⁸ Djilas, *Slutnja Postkomuničkog Haosa*, p. 24

¹⁹⁹ *ibid*, p. 27

²⁰⁰ Djilas, ‘The end of the Bolshevik Utopia’, *The World Today*, October 1991, p. 175

Chapter 5: ‘History Will Never be the Same Again!’ - Dedijer in Semi-Dissidence

After his fall in 1954, Dedijer’s immediate political career was over. He filled the vacuum by devoting his life to historical research. This was not surprising given his communist past. If the principal justification of communist rule was its alleged dialectical inevitability, then the interpretation and creation of history possessed enormous importance – moral, political, and ideological. Under communist rule the past was read from the present, but following the events of 1954 the present had drastically changed. Dedijer now believed that the past also had to be rewritten.

Dedijer is often assigned substantial responsibility for having fostered both the Partisan myth and the Tito cult. On the other hand, it was Dedijer, with his journalistic drive for sensational stories, who contributed decisively to the destruction of these narratives. As Tea Sindbaek notes in her study of the fluid nature of Yugoslav history and culture: ‘[Dedijer’s] work functioned as a first call to revise the past from the perspective of national conflict, victimisation and genocide, while disposing of old restrictions and taboos.’¹

The semi-dissident and nonconforming historian came to symbolise the messy, politicised revision of the past that destabilised the communist state in the 1970s and 1980s. Following the publication of one of his revisionist works in 1981, he characteristically boasted that history would never be the same again.² His efforts to reassess the hegemonic narratives approved by the party were an attempt to create a more pluralistic society. A more important development than Dedijer’s revelations came later, when nationalists tried to manipulate the past in order to justify the

¹ Sindbaek, *Usable History?*, p. 143

² Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 1, p. vi

dismemberment of the country into separate nation states. Nevertheless, since the latter development was dependent on Dedijer's first revisions of communist history, he takes on significant importance. Finally, his historical revisionism posed a serious challenge to the party because it questioned their moral right to rule and their ability to deal with the present-day crisis. Thus it is essential that Dedijer's vague heroic aura is re-examined so that he is seen as the product of a particular set of personal, societal and cultural circumstances.

Career in the West

Denied employment and isolated socially after his removal from power, Dedijer absorbed himself in study and writing. As the American journalist Cyrus Sulzberger recalled about their meetings in the years after 1954, 'after lunch, he showed me a weekly schedule he had prepared for himself ... Although he was still banned from any public job he was able to read continually in the public library and at the university. He kept on writing giving himself schoolteacher grades on these efforts – A, B, C.'³ This practise was reinforced by the suicide of his son Branko in 1959 and later by the death of another son, Boro in 1966. Their father buried his grief in work. In his personal correspondence with Djilas he revealed his depressed state: 'I work mainly so that I can escape from our atmosphere of violent untimely death.'⁴

Yet, with the suicide of his son he was allowed to go into 'voluntary exile' in the West and it was here that he began his career as a professional independent historian. He told Sulzberger that he believed this career was his destiny.⁵ In a letter to Djilas in 1955, Dedijer revealed that after 1948 a process started within him of critically

³ Sulzberger, *Resistantists*, p. 185

⁴ 'Letter from Dedijer to Djilas', 18th March 1967, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 179

⁵ Sulzberger, *Resistantists*, p. 201

assessing everything around him, of everybody including himself and even his own actions while in office.⁶ In another he exclaimed that, ‘I am doing my best to study as much as possible, because this is the safest way to preserve one’s intellectual integrity.’⁷

Dedijer began to follow the path of his hero Vladimir Gaćinović, a member of *Mlada Bosna* who once proclaimed: ‘wandering around the world, seeing the big cities and attending different universities changed my life and my views of it.’⁸ Dedijer too travelled widely, holding several academic positions in Britain, Sweden, and the United States, lecturing on ‘Heresy and Dissent’. This experience undoubtedly altered his world view. He became familiar with a number of prominent intellectuals and activists, including Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Noam Chomsky. These contacts led Dedijer to become actively involved with the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and its War Crimes Tribunals, even being named its president.



President of the Russell Tribunal – Dedijer listens for evidence of war crimes and genocide⁹

⁶ ‘Letter from Dedijer to Djilas’, 18th March 1955, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁷ ‘Letter from Dedijer to Agnes’, 27th October 1957, *ibid*, box 179

⁸ Dedijer, ‘Refleksije’, *Sodobnost*, (1963), p. 1148

⁹ *Roskilde Lokalhitoriske Arkiv* photo available at <http://kulturstroeg.dk/russelltribunalet-i-fjordvilla>

Serving as president of the Russell Tribunal, Dedijer became intimately involved in investigating the activities of the United States in Vietnam. According to Simone de Beauvoir, he quickly became the group's *enfant terrible*.¹⁰ Along with Sartre he developed an obsession with the issue of genocide. He even helped the Frenchman write his famous essay 'On Genocide', claiming, 'I prepared a long history of genocidal practises which became the basis of Sartre's essay.'¹¹ Both men were implacable in their assessments. Given Dedijer's ego-centric and forceful personality he regularly came into physical conflict with those who challenged his views. In one outburst he attacked Ralph Schoenman, trying 'to strangle him and bite his head.'¹² During the proceedings he showed little restraint in his judgements. Along with Sartre, he announced the verdict, condemning the United States Government of 'genocide against the people of Vietnam.'¹³

Nevertheless, Dedijer's reputation as an historian and scholar grew rapidly at this time. Noam Chomsky spoke very highly of him: 'he was a very serious kind of dissident; he understood the complications of the situation he was protesting. He had a very sensible critical analysis and was very engaged.'¹⁴ At the same time he was influenced by these intellectuals - none more so than the German historian Fritz Fischer. While in the West he attended a number of his talks at the universities in Hamburg and Vienna, and clearly idolised the historian. Dedijer wrote, 'he destroyed the old models of history ... Fischer was the first brave rebel in Germany to attack the spiritual stagnation in the country.'¹⁵ Fischer himself had destroyed the

¹⁰ H. Steiner, 'Unermüdliches Enfant terrible', *Wiener Zeitung*, 7th September 1990, p. 6

¹¹ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 5th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

¹² N. Griffin, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell, Vol. 2*, (London, 2013), p. 607

¹³ 'Kronologija dela mednarodnega sodišča za vojne vložine v Vietnamu', *Sodobnost*, Vol. 16, Issue 5, p. 536

¹⁴ D. Džalto 'Davor Džalto talks with Noam Chomsky about the Breakup of Yugoslavia, Kosovo, EU and more,' viewed online on 17/03/14: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VID17mv-PWk>

¹⁵ Dedijer, 'Refleksije', *Sodobnost*, (1963), p. 1159

established narratives of the First World War when he published his book, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (published in English as *Germany's Aims in the First World War*) in 1961. He proclaimed, in what came to be known as the 'Fischer Thesis', that Germany had intentionally started the Great War in an aggressive bid to become a world power. Fischer's work generated so much anger that his Hamburg publisher's house was firebombed. Yet these hardships inspired Dedijer in his own historical revisionism. He praised Fischer as 'a conscientious historian who was reluctant to accept the official history of the ruling circles of West Germany.'¹⁶

Another Western intellectual who had a profound impact on Dedijer's career was the French historian Albert Soboul. He advised Dedijer that 'the historian must be critical of all sources and all truths, starting with his own.'¹⁷ Dedijer also heeded Chomsky's advice that 'intellectuals are in a position to expose the lies of governments. It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies.'¹⁸ He returned to Yugoslavia with these ideas ringing in his ears. He admitted as much in an article in *The Times Literary Supplement*. Dedijer argued that participants in events could not write the history of those events because of the element of subjectivism in the participant: 'his passion at the time of writing will cloud his judgement.'¹⁹ In another article he repeated the assertion of the prominent Slovenian non-communist historian, Fran Zwitter, that there was going to be a fight in Yugoslavia to 'overcome the obsolete and out of date historiography.' Finally he stated that Yugoslavia's current historiography had 'come straight from its Stalinist source', notwithstanding the fact that Stalin himself had been discredited. As Dedijer

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ V. Dedijer, 'L'influence d'Albert Soboul en Yougoslavie', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, Issue 54, No. 250, (1982), p. 582

¹⁸ N. Chomsky, 'The Responsibility of Intellectuals', *The New York Review of Books*, 23rd February 1967, p.16

¹⁹ Dedijer, 'Participants as Historians', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 30th May 1968, p. 555

acknowledged, his time in the West had ‘cleared his mind.’ In the West there was ‘no party line’ and a ‘tolerance for people’s historical opinions.’²⁰

Return to Yugoslavia and the Initial Revision of the Communist Narrative of History

Dedijer returned to Yugoslavia in the late 1960s. The Yugoslav regime incorrectly believed that he was no longer a threat. As a Western journalist noted, while mentioning Djilas’s name in official circles would open ‘the floodgates of abuse’, mentioning Dedijer would be ‘precipitated [by] facial expressions of vague respect.’²¹ As *Politika* reasoned, Dedijer had ‘always described himself as a loyal Marxist,’ and he had ‘achieved a measure of rehabilitation in the eyes of the party.’²² However, upon returning, Dedijer immediately engaged himself in dissident activity. During the summer of 1968 he met with a number of students who were leading ‘revolutionary’ protests across the country. Recalling these meetings, Dedijer revealed that he was encouraged by the students, who reminded him of the young Herzegovinians on the eve of the First World War. Yet his hope in the youth of Yugoslavia collapsed when the students negotiated with the communist regime and ended their protests. Dedijer expressed his frustration in the Slovene daily, *Delo*, recalling how the student leaders had been ‘manipulated’ and ‘brainwashed’ by the regime.²³ The events of 1968 persuaded Dedijer of the need to challenge the totalising state and examine its foundations.

²⁰ V. Dedijer, ‘New Focus – Destalinization’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 8th September 1966, p. 837

²¹ O’Brien, ‘Pot shots from a Serbian Bazooka’, *The Observer*, 28th September 1980, p.11

²² D. Binder, ‘Yugoslavia Gives Dedijer a Job’, *The New York Times*, 6th August 1964, p. 10

²³ ‘Kot sredstvo za identifikacijo napadalci’, *Delo*, 23rd May 1969, p. 18

Dedijer's return to Yugoslavia in the late 1960s also coincided with the first appearances of a more critical historiography of the Second World War. The war was becoming more distant as its survivors aged and passed away; it was becoming history rather than the recent past. The very top of the party aided this process by signalling that it was willing to loosen the strict mythological accounts of the war. In 1972, in his 80th birthday speech, Tito acknowledged that the conflict was not simply a war of liberation. He lamented that it could be better described as, 'a civil war. But we did not want to talk about that during the war, because it would not have been useful for us.'²⁴ With this comment, Tito was admitting that the party's mythologising of the war could not last, and that it was permissible for the official narratives to be gradually challenged. Unsurprisingly, this challenge was first taken up by Vladimir Dedijer.

Dedijer was the lead historian in a volume of history published in 1972, entitled *Istorija Jugoslavije* (The History of Yugoslavia), along with three other popular Serbian historians. In this work he portrayed a more accurate picture of the Partisan struggle during the war and examined the prickly national issue, particularly Serbo-Croatian relations. The book aroused the strongest polemics in the field of historiography under the communists, involving an extensive and never settled dispute between Serbian and Croatian historians. Dedijer's portion of the book concentrated on the history of the twentieth century. He remained restrained in certain areas and his chapters were still written from a Marxist perspective; for instance, although he was aware of the 1943 March negotiations with the Germans, they were never divulged. Yet he was very candid on other topics, most notably in

²⁴ S. K. Pavlowitch, *The Improbable Survivor*, (London, 1988), p. 132

his analysis of the erosion of the original Partisan ethics both during and after the war.

The book, like Dedijer's later work, was written with a journalistic tone. He acknowledged in the preface that he wanted to appeal to a popular audience as much as a scholarly one. This aim encouraged hyperbole. For instance, he claimed that the number of Serbs dead in Ustasha Croatia totalled over 600,000.²⁵ Such claims not only fuelled growing Serb antagonism and fears, but also Croatian ones. As one historian noted: 'should we believe the number of 600,000 Serbs killed in Croatia alone, then take a look at the censuses of the last forty years, we would have to question the motives of those who make such claims.'²⁶ Numerous Croatian historians attacked the book for being anti-Croat. Mirjana Gross condemned the double standard of highlighting the history of Croatian national movements which sought to create a Greater Croatia, when the ideologies and movements that sought to create a Greater Serbia were not explored.²⁷

Given the angry responses to the book, the question arises as to why it was allowed to be published. The answer lies in the political climate of the late 1960s, specifically the internal conflicts taking place inside the party. A 'liberal' reformist bloc, calling for further pluralist development and greater decentralisation, was challenging the party's hegemony. In his crackdown on these reformist elements, Tito utilised Dedijer's book. After all the book was titled 'The History of Yugoslavia', not the 'History of the Peoples of Yugoslavia' as *Politika* had demanded.²⁸ Dedijer's chapters had a strikingly centralist orientation. He held that

²⁵ Dedijer, *History of Yugoslavia*, p. 582

²⁶ I. Banac, 'Yugoslavia', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 4, (1992), p. 1091

²⁷ M. Gross, 'Ideja jugoslavenstva u XIX stoljeću u "Istoriji Jugoslavije"', *Časopis za Suvremenu Povijest*, Issue 5, No. 2 (1973), p. 15

²⁸ Banac, 'Yugoslavia', *The American Historical Review*, p. 1090

religion was culpable for all nationalism in the Balkans and contended that only language could form the basis for a separatist nationality.²⁹

Istorija Jugoslavije was a ground-breaking work. Until this point Yugoslav historiography was still firmly tied to party myths and ideology. Retrospectively, it can be seen that the book started the erosion of the party's control of history by causing a bitter political dispute that had taken on an increasingly ethnic dimension. Tito, however, quickly suppressed the debate and *Istorija Jugoslavije* constituted the end of the pursuit of politics through history, until Dedijer unleashed it again in the 1980s. While the emotions and debates were stifled they did not disappear.

Novi Prilozi

From the early 1980s onwards, Yugoslavia was convulsed by political and economic crises. With the economy stagnating, unemployment and inflation rapidly rising, living standards plummeting, and no solution in sight, confidence in the party dwindled. The economic crisis steadily grew into a political one. National clashes in the province of Kosovo brought the national question back into the public sphere. This atmosphere of instability and crisis seeped into culture as ethnic grievances began to be reflected in historical inquiry. Thus the crisis in Yugoslavia was not rooted in the past – as is often portrayed - but instead the increase in historical revisionism was rooted in the crisis of the present. When a society faces a national emergency, it tends to focus on its foundations, re-examining its core beliefs and

²⁹ Dedijer, *History of Yugoslavia*, p. 529

assumptions. As Dedijer claimed, his histories were merely part of ‘the roar of the times’, they were a ‘repository of the feelings of the people.’³⁰

In 1981, the year after Tito’s death, Dedijer opened Pandora’s Box with his sensationalist *Novi Prilozi Biografiju Josipa Broza Tita* (New Contributions to the Biography of Josip Broz Tito). As well as critically reassessing Tito’s reputation, Dedijer also provided a number of revelations that fundamentally reassessed the official portrayals of the Partisan movement. From 1953 to 1966, Dedijer kept a private diary covering the whole of the Djilas case and its aftermath. Its title was: ‘*How I slaughtered others, and how I was slaughtered in the end: a contribution to the ethics of the Yugoslav working class movement in the transition period*’. This diary became the basis for the book.³¹ The former chronicler of the revolution argued that the history of the war had been doctored by the party. He revealed scandals concerning the Croatian communists and their separatist nationalist desires; the cruelty of the Partisans’ summary executions; the atrocities committed by the Ustasha against innocent Serbs, and the numbers killed in the Jasenovac concentration camp – all subjects that would later be fiercely disputed in public debate. Belgrade’s news weekly *NIN* proclaimed the year 1981 as that of ‘the outburst of history’.³²

Two more instalments of *Novi Prilozi* were published in 1982 and 1984, again comprising a combination of documents, memories and unverified stories concerning Tito and the dubious actions of the party. The books were journalistic in nature, tackling every taboo subject in post-war Yugoslav communism. Indexes were absent and exact sources were rarely revealed. Unsurprisingly the books were a sensation, 70, 000 copies immediately sold out with readers willing to pay 1,400 dinars for

³⁰ Kljakić, ‘Sto godina’, *Politika Online*, 2nd February 2014

³¹ Dedijer, ‘Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*’, 5th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

³² Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, p. 77

each instalment.³³ Dedijer utilised the books for his own promotion. Testifying to his self-absorption, he claimed that the popularity of the books caused the boom of newborn babies in Yugoslavia named Vladimir.³⁴ Ivo Banac has claimed that it was an ‘ungraceful book, a cabbage head on a makeshift body’, full of unrelated provocations and slanderous comments.³⁵ Notwithstanding the numerous errors and gross exaggerations, sales soared.

As the official diarist of the Partisan struggle and Tito’s hand-picked biographer, Dedijer’s criticisms and re-evaluations took a sensationalist and surprising form that aroused excitement among fellow intellectuals and society alike. The idea of a new book reassessing his early work was exciting and stimulating. The book made headlines across all media in Yugoslavia. By January 1982, *NIN* wrote: ‘If a book was judged by its commercial success, or by the number of copies sold, even by the number of readers, Dedijer’s *New Contributions for the Biography of Josip Broz Tito* has been the book of the year.’³⁶ As Dragović-Soso has revealed, a number of intellectuals surveyed by *Književne novine* named it the best book of 1981, while the magazine itself lauded Dedijer’s work for exposing the need to reconsider Yugoslavia’s modern history.³⁷ The book was the most controversial and eagerly sought after since the war. As the veteran communist and dissident Gojko Nikoliš stated, the book was the ‘most sensationalist of all that have appeared in our era and our soil.’³⁸

Perhaps the most damning revelations concerned the unpleasant aspects of the Partisans’ wartime struggle, such as the reprisals and summary executions of not

³³ S. Pavlowitch, ‘Dedijer as a Historian of the Yugoslav Civil War’, *Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1984), p. 97

³⁴ ‘Letter from Dedijer to John and Mary Erwin’, 16th July 1984, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 179

³⁵ Banac, ‘Yugoslavia’, *The American Historical Review*, p. 1093

³⁶ Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, p. 80

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ ‘Novi prilozi ... od prigovora do osporavanja’, *Vjesnik*, 10th March 1982, p. 5

only their enemies, but ordinary civilians. Dedijer revelled in publishing documents such as Tito's 13 May 1945 order for the slaughter of over 50,000 domestic enemies trying to flee to the British forces near Dravograd.³⁹ The reproduction of documents such as this was ground-breaking. Not so much because the information was new (rumours of Partisan massacres were expressed in private) but because they were published by a reputable historian. Dedijer was corroborating the vociferously denied allegations of the émigrés. Equally controversial, Dedijer claimed that leading wartime Croatian communists revealed rampant nationalist tendencies. He maintained that they disregarded brotherhood and unity trying to form their own separate party and state. Croatian politicians and academics refuted these accusations, launching their own diatribes against Dedijer and their Serbian colleagues. However, the final unintentional result was to exacerbate the growing Serbo-Croat antagonism that had begun nearly a decade earlier with *Istorija Jugoslavije*.

However, unlike in *Istorija Jugoslavije*, Dedijer did not hide the shocking account of the Partisan accommodation and secret negotiations with the Nazis in March 1943. He translated German military documents on the ceasefire agreement and uncovered that it went further than a simple exchange of prisoners - undermining the Partisans' claim that they were the only side that had consistently defied the invading forces. This furthered nationalist discontent in Serbia because Dedijer also alleged that the Partisans considered their chief enemy not to be the Axis powers, but the Chetniks. Such an interpretation enabled the Serbian nationalist intellectuals to rehabilitate the Chetniks and portray them as the real heroes of war - only to have their reputation sullied by the communists. Discussions of Dedijer's revelation

³⁹ Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 3, p. 146

reached such an extent that in 1985 the party officially sanctioned a work explaining the negotiations. Miša Leković's *Martovski Pregovori 1943* (March Negotiations 1943) praised Tito for his tactical genius.⁴⁰ Yet this only posed further questions: Firstly, how could the Partisans' negotiations with the Nazis be interpreted as a tactical manoeuvre, while the Chetniks' ceasefire was denounced as treason? And secondly, if the Partisans' talks with the enemy only demonstrated Tito's tactical intellect, why did it need to be hidden from the public for 40 years? In this way Dedijer had started a complete reinterpretation of the war. As the historian Vladislav Marjanović has noted, 'all of a sudden, the issue of collaboration and treason during the Second World War was relevant once again.'⁴¹

With Tito giving his express consent to the work before his death, and with the respected Dedijer as its author, the launching of the book was deceptive. It came with advanced acclaim, and was serialised in various newspapers. When the true nature of the work revealed itself and the extent of the revelations became known, a scandal ensued. Leading politicians and a host of war veterans launched an offensive. Vladimir Bakarić accused Dedijer of 'dirty tricks', saying that some of the more sensationalist findings were his, such as Ranković bugging Tito's home in connection with Tito's wife Jovanka. Dedijer had stolen what he had merely overheard.⁴² Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo attacked him as a 'dishonest historian' who 'does not write the truth', and accused him of 'stealing' many of his

⁴⁰ M. Leković, *Martovski pregovori 1943*, (Belgrade, 1985), p. 5

⁴¹ V. Marjanović, 'L'Historiographie contemporaine Serbe des années quatre-vingt. De la mystification idéologique, à la mystification nationaliste' in A. Mares, *Historie et pouvoir en Europe médiane*, (Paris, 1996), p. 144

⁴² V. Bakarić, *NIN*, 17th January, 1982, p. 19

documents.⁴³ While speaking at a special meeting convened to discuss Dedijer's book, Tempo concluded:

Well comrade Dedijer, this is not the way to deal with things if you want to be an historian. You write Tito's biography and actually you talk about the post-war tragedy of your own sons. This has no connection whatsoever with history. A real historian cannot work like this. For me this is not history ... If you want to be an historian you have to be honest. You are not permitted to take sides, to tailor history.⁴⁴

Ultimately Dedijer was roundly condemned as a falsifier of history and a hack pursuing best-selling sensations.⁴⁵ On Belgrade TV he was denounced as 'the first sinner of all Serbian intellectuals.'⁴⁶ Meanwhile *Borba* organised a round table on Dedijer's book at the beginning of 1982. The participants identified the work as 'contributions to Dedijer's undermining of the revolution that he has abandoned.' The rhetoric was strikingly similar to that of 1954 - 'an average but deeply premeditated political pamphlet, full of anti-socialism, anti-communism, and anti-Marxism.'⁴⁷ The former liberal Slovene communist, Stane Kavčič, recalled of the round table: 'it strongly reminded me of the medieval inquisition processes.'⁴⁸ Even though the book targeted Djilas more than any other figure, it was characterised by

⁴³ S. Stanković, 'Vukmanović Censures Dedijer Over Tito's Biography', *Radio Free Europe*, 2 December 1981, p. 2

⁴⁴ S. Stanković, 'Former Top Yugoslav Leader Protests Attempts to Silence Him', *Radio Free Europe*, 1st September 1981, p. 2

⁴⁵ S. Stanković, 'Vladimir Dedijer – A Whipping Boy for Tito?', *Radio Free Europe*, 5th March 1982, p. 5

⁴⁶ 'Letter from Dedijer to Mary Erwin', 11th April 1988, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 179

⁴⁷ M. Vasić, 'Manipulaciju istorijske činjenice', in *Razgovor o knjizi Vladimira Dedijera "Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita"*, (Belgrade, 1982), p. 22

⁴⁸ Kavčič, *Dnevnik*, p. 321

party theorists as being ‘formulated to glorify Djilas and his dark liberalism.’⁴⁹

‘Djilasism’ was analogous to dissent.

The publication of *Novi Prilozi* brought great pressures on Dedijer. His home in Istria was set on fire⁵⁰ and his wife Vera received numerous threats that bombs would be attached to her car if her husband did not stop writing.⁵¹ On another occasion, when his health deteriorated and he was admitted to a hospital in Zemun, Belgrade television displayed his obituary.⁵² In a letter to Mary Erwin of the Michigan University Press Dedijer revealed a measure of his fear of the authorities: ‘My doctor in Maribor, under direct order from the authorities, is fiddling with my insulin prescription and other strange tricks.’⁵³ In an interview with the *New York Times* he lamented these underhand tactics: ‘we are falling fast, now we are on the level (of civil rights) of Bulgaria. If we continue like this, we will be where Rumania and Ceausescu are.’⁵⁴

The campaign against him went on for many months. Yet just like *Istorija Jugoslavije*, the *Novi Prilozi* controversy had a specific political dimension to it. In April 1982, Dedijer sent an open letter to a number of papers in both Yugoslavia and abroad which accused the leading Croatian communist Vladimir Bakarić, in conjunction with Ivica Račan (a prominent member of the League of Communists of Croatia) of having instigated and led the campaign against him. He claimed that he had instructed his lawyers to prepare the necessary material in order to sue Bakarić

⁴⁹ M. Vasić, ‘Manipulaciju istorijske činjenice’, in *Razgovor o knjizi*, p. 22

⁵⁰ D. Binder, ‘As Taboos Fall, Press in Yugoslavia Turns Bold’, *The New York Times*, 9th February 1984, p. 2

⁵¹ ‘Letter from Dedijer to J.L. Kopričić’, 24th July 1990, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁵² ‘Letter from Dedijer to Mary Erwin’, 11th April 1968, *ibid*, box 54

⁵³ ‘Letter from Dedijer to John Erwin’, 9th February 1988, *ibid*

⁵⁴ H. Kamm, ‘Tito’s Heritage Being Debated in Yugoslavia’, *The New York Times*, 24th November 1985, p. 6

‘as the main organiser and participant in the harassment against me and my book.’⁵⁵

Alluding to his arguments in *Novi Prilozi* about the Croatian communists during the war, he made the serious political accusation that Bakarić was trying to hijack control of the party. He stated:

For three months now I have been the subject, together with my collaborators and my family, of unprecedented attacks throughout the country’s media because of the publication of the second volume of contributions to the biography of J.B. Tito. This harassment has gone beyond measure, particularly in the television programme of January 14, when even the memory of my late wife, Olga Popović-Dedijer, a medical officer of the Yugoslav Army, killed as a Partisan in the battle of Sutjeska in June 1943, was spat upon ... in Croatia the campaign has been stepped up. For instance *Vjesnik* carried two articles by Ivica Račan, in which, using a full page, he attacked me in a nasty way. *Novi List* did the same. The party investigation into the Liburnija publishing house is using real inquisition methods. The party organisation in Croatia has ordered an investigation into the editors of my book, Dr. Rudolf Rizman and Miodrag Marović ... My family and I are exposed to continuing pressure, and I received another death threat. My telephone conversations have been interrupted 18 times, every time I mentioned Bakarić’s name.⁵⁶

In the private documents sent to his lawyers, Dedijer claimed that initially Bakarić had, ‘more than any other living person’, been involved in the writing of the book. Yet, the Croatian was now taking his revenge because he had published telegraphs which proved that Bakarić had been instrumental in removing Andrija Hebrang and assuming his position in the party. He even claimed that the Croatian leadership were

⁵⁵ Z. Antić ‘Dedijer-Bakaric Controversy Over Tito's Biography’, *Radio Free Europe*, 22nd April 1982, p. 4

⁵⁶ *ibid*

taking revenge on him for his work investigating the Catholic crimes committed at Jasenovac with the Russell Tribunal.⁵⁷ Again, perhaps unwittingly, Dedijer was stoking the growing Serb-Croat antagonism in the country: a charge that Bakarić himself levelled at his former friend. Dedijer denied such assertions, arguing that, 'he has dropped to new lows making false accusations that I hate Croats! He is using my book to further the deepening problems between himself and the Serbian leaders. This has shocked me. All of us Yugoslavs are brothers!'⁵⁸

Dedijer's polemic with Bakarić embodied the growing divisions within the party regarding the country's political future. Bakarić favoured decentralisation and was one of the most vocal supporters of the 1974 Constitution. It is therefore relevant to note that in one of his attacks on Dedijer, Bakarić accused him of writing from an 'extreme unitarist position.'⁵⁹ Despite his individualistic nature, it was strange that Dedijer was permitted to sue and openly attack Bakarić, perhaps the most senior member of the party. In addition, while most of the media attacked Dedijer, some, such as Belgrade's *Politika* and *NIN*, appeared to encourage him. In this respect it would not be a stretch to suggest that Dedijer might have benefitted from the protection of some centralist elements in the party, particularly those in Serbia. After all, Dedijer's books became a useful tool to weaken the leading decentralist. By exhuming Bakarić's past, his reputation could be smeared. If, as Dedijer claimed, Bakarić had failed in morally leading the party during the war, how could he be trusted to lead it during another critical period in the 1980s?

⁵⁷ 'Letter from Dedijer to J.L Kopričić', 24th July 1990, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁵⁸ 'Letter from Dedijer to Veljko', 28th May 1982, *ibid*, box 144

⁵⁹ V. Bakarić, *Vjesnik*, 31st December 1981, p.1



Dedijer with his wife Vera, and daughter Bojana, outside their home in Istria which doubled as an archive. The home would be firebombed and Vera threatened.⁶⁰

Since the Second World War the party's claim to legitimacy was based on the assertion that they, unlike their wartime rivals, were morally superior. Not only did they win power, but they deserved to win it, and therefore rule the country.

Consequently, it was only natural that the party would condemn *Novi Prilozi*. After all it seriously threatened to undermine the regime's self-legitimising myth. As the historian Dušan Strbac told *Borba*, the book 'has been sharply condemned by the veterans' organisations, which have appraised that the book is a tendentious attack on the morals and ethics of the national liberation war, revolution and the party.'⁶¹

Yet over the three volumes, the general account of the Partisan struggle and governance under the communists is still largely positive. The epic descriptions of heroism and self-sacrifice remain from Dedijer's earlier works. However, in vehemently and continuously criticising the book, the leading party members only drew more attention to the book and its most negative reassessments. As Dedijer confirmed to *Politika*, 'I am convinced that, after these books of mine, after so much

⁶⁰ Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 2, p.80-81

⁶¹ Stanković, 'Vladimir Dedijer', *Radio Free Europe*, 5th March 1982, p. 3

lightning and thunder, the history of the revolution will have to be written in a new manner.’⁶²

Novi Prilozi was supposed to be a four-volume project but only three were completed before Dedijer’s death. The first two volumes were published freely, but given their sensationalist nature, the Yugoslav authorities (particularly in Croatia) attempted a crackdown. This pressure caused Dedijer’s publishers, *Liburnija* in Rijeka and *Mladost* in Zagreb, to announce that they would no longer publish the remaining volumes. Dedijer was riled at these actions. In a letter to his editors he wrote, ‘we might lose an honorarium of two and half billion dinars from the royalties, the third volume should be published in 110,000 copies!’⁶³ In response the Serbian authorities, much to the anger of their Croatian counterparts, allowed the Serb publishing house *Rad* to take up the third volume.⁶⁴ The first 50,000 copies that were printed immediately sold out, with Dedijer noting, ‘only in Croatia was there a very sharp Stalinistic attack.’⁶⁵ He even had to acknowledge that ‘the situation concerning freedom in historiography is much better than immediately after the war, when Djilas and I were party censors.’⁶⁶

Despite the sharp attacks in Croatia, the book was immensely popular in both Serbia and Slovenia. The first two volumes were published in the Serbo-Croatian language, but due to its popularity in Slovenia, the third volume was also published in Slovenian. In typical self-absorbed fashion, Dedijer believed that his book had a profound impact in the northern republic. During an interview in 1990 he proclaimed that: ‘the current democratic changes in the Slovenian leadership have been

⁶² ‘Intervju sa Vladimrom Dedijerom’, *Politika*, 13th March 1982, p. 3

⁶³ ‘Letter from Dedijer to John Erwin’, 8th October 1983, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 144

⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁶⁵ ‘Letter from Dedijer to John and Mary Erwin’, 16th July 1984,’ *ibid*, box 179

⁶⁶ ‘Gorbachev, Historiography and Censorship’ - Lecture given at the University of Michigan, 28th November 1987, *ibid*, box 240

influenced by the revelations in my book. It is now impossible to hide all the secrets of the past.’ He praised the role of Janez Janša and *Mladina* in forcing this democratic process, but incredibly held himself more important: ‘It is true that the editors of *Mladina* are undoubtedly crazy people but I have been much crazier. They have been arrested but I have had my publishers’ house in Germany attacked.’⁶⁷

It should also be noted that Dedijer’s books were titled ‘New Contributions to Tito’s Biography.’ This work was meant to revise his original, almost hagiographical, biography of the 1950s which he believed was no longer credible. Dedijer saw his books as documentary sources for future academics rather than as a complete history. It is for this reason that this collected work spawned so much revisionist material. In an interview just before his death he stated: ‘You must understand, I am a chronicler of the revolution, I cannot lie. The man I am in deep old age with all this sickness, means I have to leave behind a testimony for younger historians and future generations to build upon.’⁶⁸ At the end of the second volume of *Novi Prilozi*, he explicitly appealed to his readers to ‘produce their own documents, memoirs, recollections and correspondence so that our knowledge of Tito’s life could be extended.’ This request was answered, he noted: ‘the response is most gratifying, I am proud that many documents have now been published.’⁶⁹ In fact *Novi Prilozi* produced a veritable flood of Yugoslav intellectuals’ defection from Titoist orthodoxy. Although it was not permissible to say it publicly, de-Titoisation was rampant. This was often a chaotic and deeply politicised process. The debate about history often masked the fact that the real focus remained on present politics. Depending on the individual or group, this revisionism was often aimed at defending

⁶⁷ S. Kljakić, ‘Razgovor s akademskim Vladimirom Dedijerom’ – Unpublished Interview, 4th February 1990, *ibid*, box 1

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ ‘Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*’, 17th February 1989, *ibid*, box 240

or furthering real political interests. Dedijer's volumes were undoubtedly important in this development because of the vast amount of new material that they provided. The Croat critic, Ivo Banac, credits the controversial and widely read account as having 'legitimised sensationalist debunking and diminished genuine scholarship.'⁷⁰

If Dedijer's volumes of *Novi Prilozi* were published on completion they may have been less influential. However, after Tito's death Yugoslav officials wished to protect his memory and therefore delayed the publication. As Dedijer told *The Times Literary Supplement*: 'It is true that I had to wait two years for publication because some of Tito's successors thought that Tito should be made a pharaoh.'⁷¹ In delaying the book however, they ensured that it was released at a time when frustrations with the regime were growing to their highest ever proportions. Given this context it is unsurprising that Dedijer's book spawned numerous new histories and memoirs that began to challenge the official founding myths of the Yugoslav communist state. These revisionist works built upon the revelations in *Novi Prilozi*, particularly focusing on the cruelty of the communists when dealing with their opponents. Yugoslav intellectuals unquestionably gained courage from the party's general indecision about how to deal with Dedijer. His books were vigorously attacked and their publication delayed, but he was not arrested, nor were his books banned.

The most extraordinary example of this new 'revisionist' history was a book published in 1985 about the Chetnik leader Draža Mihailović, entitled, *Saveznici i jugoslavenska ratna drama* (The Allies and the Yugoslav War Drama).⁷² Its author, Veselin Djuretić, largely rehabilitated Mihailović and the Chetniks, portraying them as the true anti-fascists of the war. His analysis was clearly a Serbian response to the malaise of the 1980s. Nonetheless, Dedijer's de-legitimisation of the Partisan war

⁷⁰ I. Banac, 'Yugoslavia', *The American Historical Review*, p. 1094

⁷¹ V. Dedijer, 'A Tito Biography', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 8th March 1985, p. 259

⁷² V. Djuretić, *Saveznici i jugoslovenska ratna drama*, (Belgrade, 1985)

record, and their retribution policies, opened the door for the rehabilitation of the nationalists targeted by them. This opens up the question of why Djuretić was allowed to publish his work and why he did not attract immediate condemnation. The answer is because he enjoyed Dedijer's personal support and protection. It was Dedijer that persuaded the Serbian Academy of the Arts and Sciences (SANU) to publish his work and Dedijer who urged the research institutes to not give way to the barrage of fire from the authorities that financed them.

Following the release of *Saveznici i jugoslavenska ratna drama* and despite the fact that he had only just had a heart attack, Dedijer wrote to Djuretić: 'I thought it was excellent, I hope to personally write a review of your book. Of course I am not able to at the moment but once my health is repaired I hope to personally see and work with you.'⁷³ Djuretić in turn was inspired by Dedijer. He replied: 'First of all I want to heartily thank you for your comments and your own work. Your research covers so much ground and opened up an entire new general context of this topic that I was inspired to further your contributions to the subject.'⁷⁴

During a party ideological conference in Belgrade, a leading party member lamented that Dedijer's books should have been banned years ago because, 'presently we are faced with little Dedijers springing up all across Yugoslavia'.⁷⁵ At the same time General Ljubičić bemoaned the 'Dedijerist' historians and writers who wanted a 'new interpretation of history.'⁷⁶ The Slovenian historian Tone Ferenc summed up the mood of the 1980s when he exclaimed that Partisan history was a 'raped lady'. Dedijer had 'unchained the dog', and the politicians would now have to

⁷³ 'Letter from Dedijer to Djuretić', 27th May 1985, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 144

⁷⁴ 'Letter from Djuretić to Dedijer', 2nd June 1985, *ibid*

⁷⁵ 'Manipulacija i prekrajanje istorije', *Politika*, 4th April 1985, p. 12

⁷⁶ Pavlowitch, *The Improbable Survivor*, p. 140

‘chase the dog’. Yet given the state of the League of Communists this would be virtually impossible.⁷⁷

Dedijer and the Theme of Genocide

As Christian Axboe Nielsen has noted, Dedijer also played an important role in bringing the theme of genocide into Yugoslav national discourse. This is of primary importance in the historiographical debate given that each national group began to interpret their plight in the 1990s in the historical context of their ethnic group as a ‘victim of genocide.’ This was open for manipulation by the nationalists to take revenge in a ‘like manner.’ In this way the mythologies of genocide engendered actual genocide.⁷⁸ The Serbo-Croatian word for genocide, *genocid*, was rarely used in the first three decades after the war. In the Military Encyclopaedia, genocide was defined as a crime under international law. The examples given were confined to the ‘Fascist’ and ‘Nazi’ killings of ‘Slavs, Jews and Roma during the Second World War.’⁷⁹ Specifically Yugoslav massacres, such as those committed by the Ustasha and Chetniks, were conspicuously absent. In the immediate decades after the war, the term genocide was applied only to international events.⁸⁰ *Genocid* would only enter domestic historiography with its introduction by Dedijer in the early 1970s.

Dedijer’s personal worldview appears to have led to his interest in genocide. He was confronted with, and repeatedly engaged in, debates on genocide throughout his career: during the Second World War he recorded the crimes of the occupiers and their domestic collaborators in his war diaries; he was a member and contributor of

⁷⁷ B. Repe, *Between Myths and Ideology*, (Ljubljana, 2009), p. 43

⁷⁸ C. Axboe Nielsen, ‘Surmounting the Myopic Focus on Genocide’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, pp. 21-39

⁷⁹ *Vojna Enciklopedija*, Vol. 3, (Belgrade, 1960), p. 340

⁸⁰ Sindbaek, *Usable History?*, p. 18

the United Nations Genocide Convention in 1948; and in the 1960s he was a leading member of the ‘Russell Tribunal’ that prosecuted and condemned the USA for genocide in Vietnam.⁸¹ After heading the Tribunal, Dedijer seems to have become obsessed with the theme of genocide. While Bertrand Russell formed the tribunal to ‘condemn’ war crimes in Vietnam, it was Dedijer who played an important role in qualifying the crimes as ‘genocide against the Vietnamese people.’⁸² Consequently, it was Dedijer who introduced the term ‘genocide’ into Yugoslav discourse when he returned to the country in the late 1960s.

Dedijer’s emphasis on genocide appears to have been part of the Western turn towards the issue in the 1970s. The decade saw a marked growth in Holocaust and genocide studies. This interest was furthered by his fascination with the work of Ivo Andrić. While Andrić never used the term genocide, Dedijer interpreted genocidal actions in his works that aimed at destroying ‘the survival of a people.’ In an essay for SANU, he claimed that the theme of genocide in Andrić’s literary works highlighted ‘its universality throughout Balkan history.’⁸³ In his literary work Andrić delved into the methods of oppression committed by the Ottoman Empire against the Serbs. Dedijer concluded that these methods amounted to cultural genocide. He would go on to admit that this influenced his role in pushing for cultural genocide to be a part of the 1948 UN Convention on genocide; his later role in the Russell Tribunals; and the writing of his book *Istorija Jugoslavije*.⁸⁴

In his chapters on the Second World War in *Istorija Jugoslavije*, Dedijer regularly raised the question of genocide. He used it in a chapter title and described it as a concept: ‘in the crime of genocide, it is the intention, *animus iniuriandi*, that is

⁸¹ *ibid*, p. 105

⁸² ‘Kronologija dela mednarodnega sodišča za vojne zločine v Vietnamu,’ *Sodobnost*, p. 536

⁸³ V. Dedijer, ‘Andrić i Genocid’, 23rd May 1976, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 24

⁸⁴ *ibid*

essential, that is, the intention of destroying the members of a nation, race, or religious group for the precise reason they belong to their community.’⁸⁵ The theme of genocide was not confined to describing the events of the Second World War. Recounting Austro-Hungarian crimes against the Serbs in the First World War, Dedijer claimed that the Austrian government had relied on Croatian nationalist ‘Frankists’ to commit genocide. Consequently, when he went on to describe the persecution of Serbs in Ustasha Croatia, Dedijer argued that the Ustasha were not only motivated by the ideology of Nazi-Germany, but also by the chauvinistic Croatian nationalism espoused by the ‘Frankists’ in the First World War. He concluded: ‘thus in 1941 two nationalist positions colluded, the great-German and the Frankist Ustasha, which developed into racism.’⁸⁶ Crucially then, he argued that the Ustasha’s idea of killing Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia was as much home-grown as it was imported from Germany.

There was a need for a reasoned and sober approach to the exploration of some of the more problematic aspects of Yugoslav history. Instead, Dedijer’s revisionism was sensationalist and even bordered on fear mongering. However, Dedijer’s use of the term genocide in 1972 had little pronounced effect. It caused a stir and incited discussion but the atmosphere in Yugoslavia was not conducive to widespread fear and distrust. Yet, it was a signpost for Dedijer’s much more numerous and sensationalist works in the 1980s, a time when Yugoslav society was very different.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Yugoslav communism entered a period of crisis. The atmosphere of dissatisfaction and dissent developed into a growing interest in the atrocities of the Second World War. In the vanguard of this process were the efforts of Dedijer. However, once these more honest assessments of the war had

⁸⁵ Dedijer, *History of Yugoslavia*, p. 493

⁸⁶ *ibid*, p. 494

gained an audience, the credibility of the communist narratives were quickly eroded. This free thinking mind-set debunked the myth of a Partisan resistance built upon the brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav peoples, which in turn weakened the cohesion of the state.

The Second World War occupied the majority of the second volume of *Novi Prilozi*'s 1260 pages. Dedijer ended his descriptions of the domestic Yugoslav atrocities by claiming that genocide and wartime massacres had been deliberately kept secret by the party.⁸⁷ In particular he claimed that a number of Croatian communists had directly prohibited him from writing about the crimes of the Ustasha so as not to hurt Croatian national feelings. Such a claim was illogical given Dedijer's own accounts while working in Agitprop after the war. Certain wartime events were indeed erased from the history books, namely Partisan war crimes. Yet the crimes of the Ustasha, and the Chetniks for that matter, were always detailed. Nevertheless, the suspicion of each ethnic group that past crimes committed against them had been intentionally ignored and silenced, strengthened their tendency to see themselves as victims. After all, the accusations and counter accusations about moral culpability for past crimes composed the raw materials out of which the nationalism of the 1990s was being formed.

Dedijer's *Novi Prilozi* also returned the controversy concerning the role of the Catholic Church and the Jasenovac concentration camp to public discourse. According to Dedijer the Catholic Church was primarily responsible for the forced conversion of Serbs and was intimately connected with the Ustasha's policy of genocide.⁸⁸ Additionally, *Novi Prilozi* featured a chapter dedicated to the issue of Jasenovac. Its author, Antun Miletić, an army colonel and the chief researcher at the

⁸⁷ Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 2, p. 15

⁸⁸ *ibid*, p. 535

museum established at the former camp, alleged that 700,000 people lost their lives there.⁸⁹ Miletić's graphic description of the camp horrors tended to focus on the Serb victims.

Therefore Dedijer played a large part in diverting Yugoslav historiography off its established safe course. The party history, with its unimaginative and tiresome routine phrases about 'brotherhood and unity' and 'bourgeois imperialists' became redundant. This does not mean that Dedijer sought to bring down the communist party and the Yugoslav state. He asserted in an interview in 1984 that 'the party is the only thing holding Yugoslavia together.'⁹⁰ He merely wanted to reappraise Yugoslav history in the hope that the regime would reform. Nevertheless, Dedijer was inadvertently destroying one of the party's pillars of legitimacy - the myth of its history. This vacuum was filled by nationalist histories focusing on the victimhood of a particular ethnic group. It was these narratives that would become the new histories of Yugoslavia's successor states.

The Emerging Narratives of Muslim, Croat, and Serb Victimhood

In 1983 Dedijer formed a commission within SANU to 'assemble information concerning the genocide of the Serbian and other Yugoslav peoples in the 20th century.' In a letter to his publisher, Dedijer claimed that, 'the majority in the academy are behind me, except Sima Ćirković, he claims such a study will be counterproductive, but in reality he is frightened to hell after someone set my house on fire.'⁹¹ In another letter to the History Department of SANU, Dedijer thanked the

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p. 555

⁹⁰ Binder, 'As Taboos Fall, Press in Yugoslavia Turns Bold', *The New York Times*, 9th February 1984, p. 2

⁹¹ 'Letter from Dedijer to John Erwin', 8th October 1983, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 179

organisation for allowing him to set up the genocide commission, stating that: ‘the emergence of a critical school in Serbian historiography is a significant fact in historiography in general, because it is a rare example of taking the scientific over the mythical.’⁹² He concluded that the work of the committee was essential, because ‘for nationalistic reasons powerful individuals in the party have disregarded this issue for over 40 years.’⁹³

By the time of his death in 1990, Dedijer had overseen the completion of eleven books. However, with the exception of a study focusing on genocide against the Muslims, all of the volumes focused on Serbian victimhood. Many of these works abandoned the party’s calculated principle of balancing guilt among Yugoslavia’s nations and nationalities. For instance, the vast majority of the studies concentrated on the crimes of the Ustasha.

Though proclaiming Serbian victimhood, Dedijer was not a Serbian nationalist. Remaining loyal to the idea of brotherhood and unity, he constantly highlighted that war crimes and genocide were committed by all sides. He appears to have been honestly motivated by the anger and annoyance caused by what he interpreted as the party burying the issue of genocide. When he received the letter from the SANU Professor Miloš Macura that his proposal to set up a genocide committee had been accepted, he recounted: ‘my wife Vera read me the letter because my sight was so poor, when I heard the news I descended into tears of joy.’⁹⁴ In addition, after declaring that the USA had committed genocide against the Vietnamese people, Dedijer made clear that there was no state or social order in the twentieth century

⁹² ‘Letter from Dedijer to the History Department of the Vojvodina Academy of Sciences and Arts, SANU’, 6th September 1982, *ibid*, box 240

⁹³ V. Dedijer, ‘Uvod’ in V. Dedijer and A. Miletić, *Proterivanje Srba sa Ognjišta*, (Belgrade, 1989), p. 8

⁹⁴ S. Kljakić, ‘Razgovor s akademskim Vladimirom Dedijerom’ – Unpublished Interview, 4th February 1990, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 1

that had not committed crimes of genocide.⁹⁵ There was no political agenda to Dedijer's activism, he felt compelled to document genocidal practises, no matter who was the victim or perpetrator.

This was exemplified by the fact that among the SANU genocide commission he was the only academic to look at a victim group other than Serbs. Dedijer was one of the first historians to systematically delve into the Serbian mass killings of Muslims during the Second World War in *Genocid nad Muslimanima* (Genocide Against the Muslims). This demonstrates that he was not simply furthering a Serbian national cause. While the Chetnik persecution and massacre of Muslims was described in various communist narratives of the war, including Dedijer's own, the theme of genocide against the specifically targeted Muslims was new.⁹⁶ According to the historiographer, 103,000 innocent Muslims died at the hands of their neighbours' Chetnik knives.⁹⁷ He continued, 'at 8.1 percent of their total population, this was a higher proportion than that suffered by the Serbs (7.3 per cent), or by any other people except the Jews and the Gypsies.'⁹⁸ Dedijer even included an appendix with the names of 3,525 Muslims killed by the Chetniks in Foča during 1941-2 for full shock effect.

The book played an important role in shaping Bosnian Muslim identity and in fostering a suspicion of the Serbs. *Genocid nad Muslimanima* became a rallying point for Bosnian Muslim intellectuals in the 1990s. It was serialised in the Bosnian press and its publication coincided with a number of religious commemorations organised in memory of the Muslims that had been slaughtered during the Second World War. As if to exemplify the relationship between Muslim identity and

⁹⁵ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 169

⁹⁶ Sindbaek, *Usable History?*, p. 207

⁹⁷ V. Dedijer and A. Miletić, *Genocid nad Muslimanima 1941-1945*, (Sarajevo, 1990), p. vii

⁹⁸ *ibid*, p. 6

victimhood, the Bosnian Muslim Party of Democratic Action regularly used extracts of Dedijer's book in their meetings, such as the mass rally in Foča in 1990.⁹⁹

For this work Dedijer became anathema to Serb nationalists. His study of the Muslims in Yugoslavia led him to research the history of Iran in *Tehran Diary*. On one occasion he headed an international conference in Tehran and was received by Imam Khomeini. When he returned to Belgrade he was accosted by a number of Serb intellectuals for meeting Khomeini, a man 'who in the first year of his rule killed more than 12,000 of his opponents.'¹⁰⁰ Dedijer wrote, 'my answer was swift: "comrades, Khomeini has a handicap of 10 years to reach the number of people we executed in the first few weeks at the end of the war."'”¹⁰¹ To the consternation of the Serbian intellectual milieu to which he belonged, Dedijer was not concerned about the ethnicity of the victim, Muslim or otherwise. Instead he was driven to uncover all the crimes committed by all sides during the war.

As well as stoking Serbian and Muslim antagonisms, Dedijer was also contributing to the growing Slovene-Serbian disagreement that was serving as something of a warm-up to the much more vehement Croatian-Serbian dispute. The friction between the Slovenes and Serbs was not inconsequential however, after all it appeared to be linked to the Slovene backing of the Albanian protests in Kosovo. In particular, Dedijer took up the cause of those he labelled *izbrisani* (The Erased), that is, over 20,000 people of non-Slovene descent who were living in the northern republic but lacked equal rights. In 1989 Dedijer wrote a number of open letters to the Slovene authorities. Appearing in numerous Slovene magazines he condemned the Slovenes for their persecution of non-Slovenians, in particular Serbs. He even

⁹⁹ X. Bougarel, 'Du code pénal au memorandum: les usages du terme génocide dans le Yugoslavia communiste' in I. Delpla and M. Bessone, *Peines de guerre: la justice pénale internationale et l'ex-Yugoslavie*, (Paris, 2010), p. 78

¹⁰⁰ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 9th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

¹⁰¹ *ibid*

claimed that there was a form of slavery developing in Slovenia. He wrote: ‘the Serbs are denied social housing, live in really unbearable conditions and are second-class citizens, the Slovene nation does not accept us.’¹⁰² Again, Dedijer was tapping into the Serb ‘victim complex’. Many Slovene writers hit back. The *Delo* journalist Miro Gradić stated that such claims hurt the Slovenes because Dedijer was well respected across the republic. His outburst had proved that he had become a purveyor of ‘Milošević politics.’¹⁰³

This belief was furthered when Dedijer directly attacked the Slovene government in his 1987 book *Vatikan i Jasenovac* (The Vatican and Jasenovac). He claimed that some of the new figures in the Slovene government had family links to the Slovenian quislings during the war.¹⁰⁴ In particular he focused on the leader of the Slovene communists, Milan Kučan, and the archbishop of Ljubljana, Alojzij Šuštar, claiming that both men covered up the crimes of the Catholic Church: ‘Kučan has no morals – he would sell his own mother to stay in power!’¹⁰⁵

Next, Dedijer would exacerbate the growing Serb-Croat antagonism. In 1986 the Ustasha politician Andrija Artuković was extradited from the USA and put on trial in Croatia. The trial was one of the most widely publicised in Yugoslav history and public observers were allowed in the courtroom.¹⁰⁶ This brought Dedijer’s criticisms to a much wider audience. He launched a vociferous attack in the press condemning the decision to only try Artuković for war crimes and not genocide. He hinted that this was the result of anti-Serbian factions operating in the Croatian League of

¹⁰² M. Gradić, ‘Glasilo občinskih konferenc SZDL’, *Delo*, 17th August 1989, p. 33

¹⁰³ *ibid*

¹⁰⁴ V. Dedijer, *Vatikan i Jasenovac*, (Belgrade, 1987), p. 430

¹⁰⁵ H. Steiner, ‘Unermüdliches Enfant terrible’, *Wiener Zeitung*, p. 6

¹⁰⁶ Special Report – ‘1986 Report on Human Rights Practises in Yugoslavia’, (CIA) (Office of Current Intelligence), October 1986, CIA-42947627, p. 5

Communists.¹⁰⁷ Sindbaek claims that this one event encapsulates the majority of Dedijer's actions in the 1980s. On the one hand there was a fundamental drive for documenting the history of genocide and war crimes, but on the other there was suspicion and anti-Croat feelings.¹⁰⁸

Although it is going too far to label Dedijer as anti-Croat, he was certainly anti-Catholic. This was exemplified in *Vatikan i Jasenovac* which professed that there had been Vatican conspiracy, in conjunction with the Nazis and willing Croats, aimed at slaughtering innocent Serbs.¹⁰⁹ Much of the book consisted of unverified stories, black and white simplifications, and dubious analysis heavily based on rumour and hearsay. The book even lacked a bibliography and index. Unsurprisingly the book received acclaim from the nationalist Serbian government in Belgrade.¹¹⁰ Its preface was written by Mihailo Marković, a Belgrade professor who was prominent in writing the controversial SANU Memorandum and would later become vice-president of Slobodan Milošević's party.¹¹¹

The book fell into the trope of Serbian victimhood that was pervasive across Serbian society at the time. Dedijer made sweeping allegations that the Roman Catholic Church, including the papacy, fostered a centuries-long hatred of Serbs and wished to exterminate them.¹¹² Unsurprisingly the Croatian media hit back. *Danas* noted that while Dedijer listed the names of the priests who had supported the Ustasha state, the documents mentioning the numerous priests who supported the Partisans were suspiciously absent from his book.¹¹³ *Glas Koncila*, the official

¹⁰⁷ V. Dedijer, 'Predgovor' in M. Bulajić, *Ustaški zločini genocida*, Vol. 1, (Belgrade, 1988), p. 20

¹⁰⁸ Sindbaek, *Usable History?*, p. 171

¹⁰⁹ Dedijer, *Vatikan i Jasenovac*, p. 28

¹¹⁰ 'Letter from Dedijer to Mary Erwin', 11th April 1988, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 179

¹¹¹ M. Marković, 'Preliminarna napomena o istorijskoj pozadini trenutne Jugoslovenske krize' in Dedijer, *Vatikan i Jasenovac*, p. 9

¹¹² Dedijer, *Vatikan i Jasenovac*, p. 28

¹¹³ N. Ivankovic, 'Dedijerove generalizacije odozdo', *Danas*, 17th November 1987, pp. 42-43

Croatian Catholic Church publication, went further, explicitly stating that Dedijer ‘completely falsified history.’¹¹⁴

While Dedijer overemphasised the importance of the Catholic Church’s role in the Ustasha massacres, his analysis concerning the Vatican’s lack of acknowledgment of Catholic involvement was correct. Nevertheless, his numerous claims that Ustasha and Catholic crimes had been silenced were absurd.¹¹⁵ Indeed, within *Vatikan i Jasenovac* he quoted already published books that detailed Ustasha atrocities, most notably his own war diaries.¹¹⁶ However, his journalistic style ensured that the book was a bestseller. The first editions that were published sold out in less than a week with over 10,000 copies sold.¹¹⁷

It was at this time that Dedijer was also involved in heading a conference at Jasenovac in which he claimed that the hugely exaggerated figure of 800,000 Serbs had been killed there.¹¹⁸ Dedijer clearly saw the conference as an important step in the crimes being recognised as genocide. He hoped to emulate Simon Wiesenthal, inviting him to attend the conference and proclaiming: ‘you are one of the greatest persons of our era!’¹¹⁹ Again however, there was an underlying anti-Croat element to the conference. Dedijer attacked the mentality of the Croats during the war and openly accused Vladimir Bakarić of keeping some ‘important documents’ concerning the Ustasha crimes ‘locked away’.¹²⁰ The journalist covering the conference for the Belgrade weekly *NIN* called his report ‘Genocide and Silence’ and claimed that for decades Jasenovac was ‘buried in a coffin with a lid of

¹¹⁴ *Glas Koncila*, 29th January 1989, p. 10

¹¹⁵ Dedijer, *Vatikan i Jasenovac*, p. 56

¹¹⁶ Dedijer, *War Diaries*, Vol 1, p. 472

¹¹⁷ ‘Letter from Dedijer to Mary Erwin’, 11th April 1988, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 179

¹¹⁸ Dedijer, *Vatikan i Jasenovac*, p. 151

¹¹⁹ ‘Letter from Dedijer to Simon Wiesenthal’, 12th September 1988, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

¹²⁰ ‘Genocid i tišina’, *NIN*, 27th November 1988, p. 27

silence.’¹²¹ As already shown, this assertion was false. In the previous decades various studies concerning the camp at Jasenovac were published.¹²² Yet, these new accounts were addressing the issue from an explicitly nationalist perspective with a clearly defined ethnic victim and perpetrator.

Intellectuals from across Yugoslavia attended the conference, but it only served to highlight the widening gap between them. The biggest divide appeared to be between the Serbs and Croats who descended into an acrimonious argument about the history of the Second World War. The conference received full coverage in the Serbian media, who used emotive language, characterised by black and white generalisations, to spread fear and hatred. A typical report from *NIN* claimed that Jasenovac housed the ‘breaking of legs and arms, gouging of eyes, cutting of tongues and noses, hammering of nails into skulls and brains, the nailing of hoofs on people and mass rape of virgins’.¹²³ These stories of Serb victimhood were accompanied by shocking photographs from the war, showing torture, murder and mass graves of mutilated bodies.¹²⁴ In June 1989, after the conference, Dedijer even sent a letter of thanks to Milošević for allowing the discussion on Jasenovac: ‘we have you to thank, I do not pass judgement on your plans and programmes, but they appear very practical. Stambolić banned all our collections when he was head of Serbia.’¹²⁵ Dedijer’s initial support of Milošević should not be underestimated. After all, Milošević’s courting of the Serbian intelligentsia was a key feature of his rise to power.

¹²¹ *ibid*, p .26

¹²² See N. Nikolić, *Jasenovački: logor smrti*, (Belgrade, 1975), S. Simić, *Prekrštavanje Srba za vrijeme drugog svetskog rata*, (Belgrade, 1959)

¹²³ ‘Genocid i tišina’, *NIN*, 27th November 1988, p. 27

¹²⁴ Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, p. 113

¹²⁵ Bougarel, ‘Du code pénal au memorandum’ in Delpla and Bessone, *Peines de guerre*, p. 73

Dedijer's writings generated a fierce backlash in Croatia. He was criticised by Ivo Goldstein in *Danas* as a manipulative writer of false history, and his status as the founder of SANU's genocide commission was given as evidence of his Serb nationalism.¹²⁶ In the same paper Željko Krušelj furiously attacked Dedijer for deliberately lying about the Croatian archives withholding material on Jasenovac.¹²⁷ Meanwhile the future nationalist President of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, retaliated with his book *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti* (Wastelands of Historical Reality). In an attempt to correct what he saw as 'the creation of the myth of Jasenovac', he attacked Dedijer's claims. Dedijer and Tuđman held a particular grudge, going back to 1954. Initially the two had been close friends and co-presidents of the Partizan tennis club. It was here that Tuđman gained Dedijer's enmity: 'After the Djilas affair it was Tuđman who demanded I leave the tennis club, this despite me being a former Yugoslav Ping-Pong champion and one of the better players. He claimed it was because of my unorthodox views. I replied the only thing unorthodox was my backhand!'¹²⁸

Tuđman claimed that the ever-increasing number of victims at Jasenovac was Dedijer's attempt to portray the Croats as a historically aggressive people. Dedijer was depicted as a villainous mythmaker who had moved from the lies of the 'Partisan myth' to a new more dangerous 'Jasenovac myth'. Tuđman disputed that Jasenovac was particularly notorious, claiming that it had only achieved its exceptional status in recent years with Dedijer's work.¹²⁹ Thus in retaliation Tuđman belittled the issue of war crimes and genocide at Jasenovac, maintaining that as little as 40,000 people were killed at the camp. Bypassing the crimes of the

¹²⁶ I. Goldstein, 'Novokomponirana historiografija', *Danas*, 5th September 1989, p. 44

¹²⁷ Z. Krušelj 'Zasto je zloupotrebljen Miletić', *Danas*, 12th April 1988, p. 42

¹²⁸ Dedijer, 'Notes to the writing of *Veliki buntovnik*', 23rd February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

¹²⁹ F. Tuđman, *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti*, (Zagreb, 1989), p. 89

Ustasha, Tujman concentrated on the Croatian victims of the Partisan mass murders at the end of the war.¹³⁰ Therefore, the focus on Serbian victimhood was countered by a Croatian one. These diatribes were becoming solely national in character. Croatian historians, politicians and media reacted angrily to what they perceived as Dedijer assigning guilt to Croatia by exploiting and exaggerating the history of Ustasha crimes. Conversely, Dedijer deplored what he interpreted as a Croat refusal to even acknowledge the crimes as genocide. This ‘verbal civil war’ that Dedijer largely started, created narratives that were totalising, leaving no room for ambiguity. These narratives became important instruments for the nationalists looking to aggravate ethnic differences and to legitimate civil war. Ultimately Dedijer had helped to start an arms race of victimhood.

One of the rare voices speaking out against the recurring theme of genocide was Djilas. He argued that the rise of nationalism in Croatia did not mean that there was a realistic prospect of a genocide aimed at the Serbs. He concluded: ‘I do not believe there is any danger genocide will occur again in Croatia; the Croatian government was elected legally, it is a legitimate, multi-party, government with a parliamentary system.’¹³¹ However, Djilas was a lone voice in the growing atmosphere of fear and mistrust.

After all, Dedijer’s proliferation of ethnic victimisation did not occur in a vacuum. From the mid-1980s onwards, nationalist politicians, in league with the media and prominent intellectuals, generated paranoia about renewed violence and impending genocide. A prime example of this came from SANU and their 1986 memorandum which claimed that the Serbs in Kosovo were victims of a ‘physical, political, legal and cultural genocide’. Speaking at the Russell Tribunal in August 1988, Dedijer

¹³⁰ *ibid*

¹³¹ B. Trivić, ‘Neću da lažem za otasžbinu’, *Stav*, 10th January 1992, p. 10

denounced the situation in Serbia's southern province: 'the party and state authorities in Kosovo are applying the methods of genocide for clean ethnic territories ...

Altogether 30,000 Serbs and Montenegrins have had to leave their homes ... The cases which we have mentioned could be the embers of a future tragedy.'¹³² The fear of imminent genocide against the Serbs was quickly utilised by nationalists to create geo-political entities that would unite and protect Serbs. The numerous petitions made to the communist government about the plight of the Serbs in Kosovo increased tenfold after Dedijer's collection of works on genocide, and again after his conference at Jasenovac.

Nevertheless, true to the ideals of brotherhood and unity, Dedijer condemned the memorandum and the growing nationalism within the academy. Following the leak of the memorandum he wrote a letter to his fellow SANU colleagues:

It is sad that the leaders of the Academy want to turn back the wheel of history. Therefore I have two concrete proposals for the Academy: First to select one independent commission to investigate the text of the memorandum and how it became public. We need to investigate who organised such a provocation and who from the academy took part in this dishonourable business. Secondly I believe it is necessary to call a general meeting of SANU to stress the strict scientific method and tolerance of opinions that should run through our work. We need to stress that it was only 16 members of a total of 137 regular and part time members that have attacked our scientific objectivity.¹³³

Dedijer labelled the nationalist members of SANU as a 'parochial Ranković group of hard-line bureaucrats,' headed by Vojo Djurić and Antonije Isaković. He wrote:

¹³² V. Dedijer, 'Kosovo and Genocide', 17th August 1988, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

¹³³ 'Letter from Dedijer to SANU', 30th October 1986, *ibid*, box 1

... these men have blocked me from speaking to the Academy about the dangers of the path they are treading ... There are a number of honest people but they have been completely intimidated ... All this has convinced me that in the present atmosphere in SANU there is no possibility to solve this dispute with them. That is why I have taken the following decisions: I will not attend any session of the Department of Historical Sciences, I will not participate in any symposium or any other public event. Instead I will continue to collect material for my books and fight for the values of the revolution ... There is no difference between my position in 1954 and now, again I am acting as the protector of free speech in Yugoslavia.¹³⁴

In addition, Dedijer quickly reassessed his judgement of Milošević. Dedijer's motivation to uncover pan-Yugoslav victimhood quickly clashed with Milošević's desire to focus on Serbian suffering. When Dedijer announced that his genocide commission was going to study the fate of the Macedonian people (who were ruled by the Serbs from 1912-41); the Slovenes; the Kosovar Albanians from 1875 to today; and Yugoslav Jews and Gypsies, Milošević quickly withdrew the commission's funding. As Dedijer protested, 'one of the most brutal acts of censorship in Belgrade has been perpetrated, ironically thwarting research on the martyrdom of the Yugoslav people.'¹³⁵

The narratives of ethnic victimhood played an important role in the unravelling of the common Yugoslav state. A significant number of Serbs became so concerned by the Serbian variant that they placed all their hopes in a communist party apparatchik. Believing that he was their national saviour, the Serbian nationalists were able to manipulate the tropes of victimhood into a number of ruinous wars against other

¹³⁴ 'Open Letter from Dedijer to *NIN* Newsroom', 30th October 1986, *ibid*, box 144

¹³⁵ V. Dedijer, 'When Yugoslavia rings down the curtain', *The Guardian*, 18th March 1987, p. 12

ethnic groups. Yet it was Dedijer who played the initial, and therefore crucial, role of normalising these narratives, bringing the idea of Serbian victimisation into the political mainstream. He envisioned his revelations as a cure to the myths and ‘double-talk’ of the party. Only by understanding and overcoming their difficult past could the communists address the apathy and dissatisfaction that they faced. In reality however, his disclosures, and the sensations they spawned, turned out to be just as totalising as the communist narratives, and even more dangerous.

Conclusions

Chomsky once said of Dedijer, ‘his knowledge of history was incredible; he continued to his last days, he never stopped.’¹³⁶ Dedijer died in 1990 with numerous works still in progress. By the mid-1980s however he was very ill, almost blind, a survivor of multiple heart attacks and experiencing severe headaches.¹³⁷ Despite all this Dedijer refused to cease researching and writing, or slow down his literary output. His unstoppable drive to rewrite history and truthfully retell the communist narrative that he had fostered after the war could not be tempered. In many respects the chief Yugoslav historiographer worked himself to death.

Dedijer was not trying to further ethnic disharmony in Yugoslavia with his histories (although this was certainly the result). Ultimately he was a victim of the times. Historical revisionism meant something quite different in the 1970s and early 1980s than it did in the late 1980s and 1990s. Dedijer interpreted it as a pivot towards genocide studies like in the West. He sought to uncover some of the more problematic aspects of the country’s past that had only superficially been explored.

¹³⁶ Džalto ‘*Davor Džalto talks with Noam Chomsky*’

¹³⁷ ‘Letter from Dedijer to Katherine Gribbs’, 14th April 1988, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 144

By the late 1980s however, this revisionism was closer to nationalist politics than he appeared to realise. Therefore Dedijer was not – at least consciously - working for a nationalist propaganda project. His criticisms were directed at a pan-Yugoslav audience, they were aimed at undermining the authoritarian communist state and not at building nationalist sentiment.

However, given the growing nationalistic antagonisms, Dedijer's revelations only spread fear and what Sabrina Ramet has called an 'apocalypse culture'. Yugoslav culture in the late 1980s became inward-looking, absorbed in a quest for meaning, and prepared to question the fundamental political and social values of society.¹³⁸ With this political crisis, numerous Yugoslavs linked their ethnic group's problematic past with their current situation. As Sindbaek notes, the widespread propaganda of national victimisation 'as unrecognised, unreconciled and unrevenged, obviously contributed to national polarisation and enmity.'¹³⁹ Dedijer identified this alarming change in atmosphere, but failed to appreciate his own role in fostering this change. He wrote: 'the increase in superstition is doubtless related to the sharpening of social contradictions – threats of war and other calamities. Having no power to control these phenomena, people try to find answers in irrationality as has happened before.'¹⁴⁰ Even to this day, the successor states of Yugoslavia are fighting an often failing battle with the circle of victimisation and retribution that Dedijer inadvertently helped to put on the political agenda in the 1970s and 1980s.

Historians and intellectuals are often so determined to revise earlier ideas that they neglect the elements of self-evident truth from the original interpretations. Dedijer adopted this type of revisionism. In questioning and challenging the original history of the Partisans he destroyed certain truths that the myth was based on. It

¹³⁸ S.P. Ramet, *Yugoslavia in the 1980s*, (Boulder, 1985), p. 3

¹³⁹ Sindbaek, *Usable History?*, p. 224

¹⁴⁰ 'Letter from Dedijer to J.L. Kopričić', 24th July 1990, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

cannot be doubted for instance that the Partisans exhibited immense bravery and represented a more inclusive movement than any other in Yugoslavia. However, in undermining the Partisan myth, Yugoslavia was sent on a fateful course. The communist party could no longer call on the Partisan struggle for its legitimacy. Given the political, economic and social crises, neither could it build new legitimacy on its ability to evolve, its effectiveness, or its popular support. It was also during this period that another pillar of the state - the authority of Tito - was in the process of being destroyed.

Chapter 6: The Third Man - Tito and his Cult

The Tito cult was perhaps the most prominent feature of Yugoslav communist society. Unlike a number of imposed personality cults, Tito's charisma formed spontaneously. It supported Max Weber's assertion that 'charismatic leadership occurs most frequently in emergencies, it is associated with a collective excitement through which masses of people respond to some extraordinary experience and by virtue of which they surrender themselves to a heroic leader.'¹ Given the dire circumstances of the Second World War, Tito quickly assumed the aura of divine saviour. Like in the history of almost all revolutions and wars of liberation, the masses wanted to believe that there was a great mind behind them who understood everything. Tito was perceived as having the strength to withstand overwhelming crises whilst also uniting the country's disparate ethnic groups. Although the cult was instinctively created during the war, it was also positively fostered after 1945. In 1948, Tito was again made to appear as having a superhuman power to defy overpowering forces. Once secure in power, the party fell back on the cult for political guidance and mediation. Up until 1954 Djilas and Dedijer were at the forefront of this process. As Dedijer noted, through their eulogistic writings they built upon 'the mood of the nation governed by a totalitarian party and accustomed to charismatic individuals.'²

Tito believed in his own myth and ensured that his country's future would be tied to him. This was fatal given the Marshal's death in 1980. The cult did not outlast him. Instead it began to fall back into reality as Tito became a decidedly human figure with both positive and negative traits. Again, Djilas and Dedijer were at the

¹ R. Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*, (London, 1966), p. 300

² V. Dedijer, 'Podsetnik u vezi sa knjigom Milovana Djilasa "Godine Vlasti"' - Unpublished essay, undated, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 179

forefront of this process. This was an important development because by the late 1980s a new, equally false but negative cult emerged. Tito was now made responsible for all of Yugoslavia's problems. Ultimately, a lasting social system could not simply be built on the myth of Tito. Similarly, on its own, the cult was unable to integrate all of Yugoslavia's ethnicities.

The Party's Patriarch

Given the role that Djilas and Dedijer played in both fostering and then destroying the Tito cult, it is important to explore the relationship between the three men and the background of the party. This relationship was very complex and constantly evolving. In part this reflected the wider and more general issue of the relationship between a leader and their possible successors, who are typically their closest followers. From 1937 when they first met, until their break in 1954, Tito was the leader of a Marxist-Leninist party. Despite some relaxation following 1948, democratic-centralism remained a key tenet of the Titoist regime. This ensured the obedience of all party members because anyone not abiding by Tito's directives could face exclusion and expulsion. Yet, the deference of Djilas and Dedijer (and many other prominent party members) had another important source: Tito was twenty years their senior and his success in building the party, before, during, and after the war, ensured he was held in great esteem.

Djilas's autobiographies give the impression that he opposed Tito early on in their relationship, but in the seventeen years of their friendship he never questioned Tito's authority. Rather, he showed Tito filial loyalty: 'If someone had asked me five or six months before the rift opened between us, whether I could conceive of any force that

would separate me from Tito, I would have said “No - not even death could separate us.”³ Recalling their first meeting, he wrote: ‘Tito’s image seemed familiar somehow, like something out of a distant dream. I couldn’t get it out of my head ... There was something human and beautiful in that smile.’⁴ Dedijer too fell under Tito’s spell on their first meeting: ‘I met Tito for the first time in 1937... Tito spent several weeks at my home and we had long discussions about everything. He made a deep impression on me.’⁵

Tito also loved Djilas and Dedijer. On becoming head of the party he built up a new leadership primarily relying on the younger cadres who he had carefully handpicked. The underground revolutionary and wartime struggles had a profound influence on the relationships of the top Yugoslav communists. They were true comrade-at-arms, and a real friendship and trust forged in battle for a common cause existed between them. Unlike his Soviet counterparts, Tito was not marked by a suspicion of his comrades. In fact he had an open mind, especially toward the younger party members who impressed him with their enthusiasm for the cause. Dedijer praised Tito for the extent of early trust he placed in him and other young comrades.⁶ The extent of this faith can be seen in Tito’s decision to entrust Djilas with the party’s most controversial and secretive mission – the clandestine negotiations with the Germans in 1943.

Moša Pijade, a bitter enemy of Djilas, surmised that Tito’s profound trust in the young Montenegrin was based around a number of ‘personal services’ he provided for Tito in the interwar years. With the fall of Milan Gorkić as Secretary General of the party in 1937, Tito’s greatest rival for the post was Petko Miletić, a carpenter

³ Clissold, *Djilas*, p. 245

⁴ Djilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, p. 259

⁵ Dedijer, *Beloved Land*, p. 253

⁶ V. Dedijer, ‘My Two Comrades’, – Unpublished Essay, 7th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

from Djilas's district in Montenegro. While Djilas and Miletić had been imprisoned together, upon meeting Tito Djilas changed allegiances. According to Pijade it was Djilas who provided Moscow with (allegedly forged) police interrogation documents showing that Miletić was a traitor.⁷ The documents would be decisive for Miletić's fate. He was executed in the Soviet Union while Tito was made head of the party. Djilas denied these rumours and there is little evidence that Pijade's assertions were anything more than hearsay. It is more likely however, that Tito was drawn to Djilas because of his independent personality and his great talents. Djilas was inclined to brood and come up with new ideas; he saw things from a different angle to his colleagues. Tito was drawn to his inexhaustible imagination, noting: 'he always reminds me of those young Montenegrin shepherds sitting in the shade of Mount Durmitor. Their dogs take care of the flocks while the young shepherds contemplate the universe.'⁸

Although it would later destroy their relationship, Tito was drawn to the way Djilas veered away from strict discipline and protocols, and he seemed to encourage his '*enfant terrible*' nature. Sulzberger recalls Tito first introducing him to Djilas: 'Djilas said: "Ah, so you are the man who writes that our Tito is slaughtering Serbian peasants with American Rifles." He turned his back. Tito patted me on the shoulder, laughing: "Don't pay any attention to him."⁹ Tito also loved Djilas because of his idiosyncrasies. Dedijer recalled an incident during June 1942. Djilas went from Tito's headquarters to visit a Montenegrin detachment. On his return, Tito burst into overexcited laughter. Djilas had exchanged his horse, his revolver and his excellent jackboots for a pair of peasant-made *opanci* (traditional peasant shoes).¹⁰

⁷ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 191

⁸ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 17th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁹ Sulzberger, *Residentialists*, p. 161

¹⁰ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 7th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

In Dedijer's case, Tito felt indebted to him. During King Aleksandar's dictatorship Dedijer had taken great risks to hide Tito in his home. In addition, with the outbreak of war and his arrival in the capital in May 1941, Tito began organising the apparatus that was to become the leadership of the Partisan resistance movement. His closest lieutenant during this period was Dedijer. The giant revolutionary played a key role in resurrecting the communist daily *Borba* and setting up a propaganda apparatus. This would prove vital for the war effort. Recalling this period, Tito admitted that he was drawn to Dedijer because of his 'childlike devotion to the cause.'¹¹

Therefore, a kind of father-sons relationship developed between Tito, and Djilas and Dedijer. An example of this can be seen during a secret meeting of the Central Committee before the war. Tito had been unable to get a suitable forged passport. Meanwhile his rival Miletić had secured one with little difficulty. In his anger Tito blamed Djilas because of his links with Miletić. This resulted in a distraught and aggrieved Djilas defending himself in tears. After the meeting however, Djilas recalled that the two went on a walk and 'I began to thaw.'¹² A similar incident occurred during the Second World War when Tito castigated Djilas for making errors in Montenegro. Djilas replied like a scolded child:

First of all, comrades, I want to emphasise one thing: I do not permit anyone in the Central Committee to love and esteem Tito more than myself. I shall fulfil every word of Tito's even if I have to go to my death ... Do not be angry at me, if I made such decisions, I am nevertheless always your child whose ears you could tweak. I promise that I will do my best to stop making mistakes.¹³

¹¹ Adamić, *The Eagle*, p. 443

¹² Djilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, p. 352

¹³ Dedijer 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 9th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

Until 1954 there were numerous arguments between Djilas and Tito, but they always seemed to resemble that of a caring but strict father, and a loving but unruly son. As Djilas admitted: ‘a very special relationship developed between Tito and myself – small irritations and an easy familiarity, as between father and son.’¹⁴

This is not to suggest that Tito was not as close to his other comrades, like Ranković and Kardelj. After all, he was certainly politically closer. But there was not the same father-like devotion which he exhibited toward Djilas and Dedijer. This relationship is exemplified by the nickname given to Tito. It was Djilas (along with Lola Ribar) who first gave Tito the affectionate name ‘*Stari*’ (Old Man). The name ‘Old Man’ not only signified that Tito was much older than his lieutenants, but also showed the veneration with which they regarded him.

Developing the Cult

Given their admiration for the Marshal and their literary skills, both men took on the mantle of furthering the cult that had begun spontaneously during the war. By cultivating the mythology of Tito uniting his people, both men hoped to draw on the Marshal’s charisma for post-war reconstruction under communism. As Djilas proclaimed, ‘Tito faithfully sticks to Leninism, and finds solutions that suit our present conditions. I believe that this is the reflection of Tito’s greatness, he represents the struggle for independence in Yugoslavia.’¹⁵ From this comment it is apparent that Djilas was presenting Tito as the nation’s saviour, providing comfort during a time of trouble and hardship. Loaded with Judeo-Christian connotations, Tito was portrayed as a creator, a saviour and a peacemaker, whose influence

¹⁴ Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 177

¹⁵ M. Djilas, *O tridesetogodišnjici Oktobarske revolucije. Referat na svečanoj akademiji Izvršnoga odbora Narodnog fronta Jugoslavije*, (Zagreb, 1947), p. 22

resulted from the adoration of the people. Both Djilas's and Dedijer's accounts presented him as the antithesis to other absolute rulers. He was ideologically flexible, willing to listen to others, humble and humane. Finally, he was portrayed as having the talents of a world statesman: he was brave, strong, principled, and possessed a personal charm that other politicians lacked.

Logically, both men focused on the more romantic and heroic aspects of Tito's life. They quickly skipped over the more problematic phases such as his time in 1930s Russia during the purges, as well as the more repressive Stalinist years immediately after the war. Instead there was a focus on his heroism during the war, the staunch defiance of the Soviet attempt at subjugation, the liberalisation of communism, and Tito's emergence as a world leader. While the promulgation of Tito's greatness increased tenfold after the break with Stalin, it was still present in the preceding years. In fact, both men's love for Tito helped them break away from the Stalinism of their youth. For instance, following the war Djilas went to great struggles while in Moscow to publish an article on Tito. This article, while appearing in a Russian magazine, was heavily edited because it was deemed 'unsuitable'.¹⁶ The Soviets wanted to moderate Djilas's admiration of the Marshal which went as far as to suggest that Tito was the Yugoslav Stalin. He wrote: 'I have seen first-hand our leaders and generals who come to Tito sad and despondent, and who leave transformed, happy and full of optimism.'¹⁷ The Soviet censorship of Djilas's article was one of a number of affronts that caused him to revise his hero-worship of Stalin and the Soviet Union.

While Dedijer is the most well-known purveyor of the Tito cult, it was Djilas who was the first to build it. As early as 1943 he worked with Radovan Zogović to write a

¹⁶ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 287

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 290

biographical ode to Tito.¹⁸ Djilas visited the Soviet Union on three occasions and was a keen observer of how the Soviet press depicted Stalin as a god. As leader of the Yugoslavian Agitprop, he started to describe Tito similarly. Djilas was not motivated in this endeavour by sycophantic reasons. Instead, he was following in the tradition of all wars and revolutions, building upon the mass euphoria of the war years. Although Tito was central in encouraging his own personality cult, the rest of the party were not merely passive observers. Djilas passionately took up the task of promoting the myth because he realised that it played an invaluable role in post-war society. He noted that Tito's glorification renewed and preserved their revolutionary development.¹⁹

After his break with Tito, Djilas condemned the cult of personality and even negated his own role in fostering it. Yet prior to 1954, his mythologising was so brazen that even Tito seemed embarrassed by the adulation. For example, Radovan Zogović remembered an editor of *Borba*, Mile Vitorović, recalling an event that took place during 1946 in the Montenegrin capital Podgorica. During a visit, Djilas instructed an old Montenegrin in national costume to make a fiery speech and announce to Tito that from then on, the capital of Montenegro was going to be named Titograd.²⁰ On another occasion shortly after the war, Djilas was charged with planning the building of New Belgrade. He regularly clashed with the architects over the planned building of a large square big enough for over a million people to gather. When asked by Tito why such a large square was needed, he replied, 'we must mark the great era of your rule.'²¹ While Djilas denied these stories he does appear to have followed in the footsteps of his hero Njegoš. He attempted to

¹⁸ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 7th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

¹⁹ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p.12

²⁰ 'Transcript of Dedijer's interview with Radovan Zogović', 30th March 1985, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

²¹ Kovačević, *Dilas*, p. 150

immortalise both Tito and himself through great odes to liberty. He encouraged a number of writers to commemorate Tito's achievements and popularised a number of poems. One opened: 'the party is boiling with waves around Tito and Djilas,' while another, 'Tito, the falcon, could not err, nor the black eye of Djilas.'²²

While Djilas may have started the organised campaign to build a cult around Tito, it was Dedijer that made the biggest contribution to it. He largely achieved this through his work - *Josip Broz Tito: Prilozi za Biografiju* (Josip Broz Tito: Contributions to the Biography), or *Tito Speaks* in its English edition. While writing the book Dedijer grew closer to Tito. He saw him every day and spent the best part of two years at the Marshal's side.²³ Ultimately the book was a brilliant representation of the love, awe and admiration he held for Tito. Furthermore, the book was hugely successful; it was translated into 38 languages and became a bestseller both in Yugoslavia and abroad, selling over 300,000 copies in Yugoslavia alone. In total the book earned Dedijer over 500,000 dollars which he donated to a hospital to be built in memory of his first wife Olga.

Believing that the lasting success of the revolution depended on a strong leader, Tito wanted to build on the cult that naturally emerged during the war. He had initially envisioned Dobrica Ćosić as his official biographer, but he outright refused. When Ćosić heard Dedijer was writing the biography, he prophetically warned: 'You must kiss the mud through which the wheels of Tito's Mercedes passes.'²⁴ In his notes about writing the biography, *Knjiga o knjizi* (Book about the Book), Dedijer noted that, 'a historian who deals with contemporary events, especially if you write biographies of leading statesmen of your own era, must first open his soul and

²² Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 276

²³ Sulzberger, *Resistentialists*, p. 165

²⁴ *ibid*

examine the motives that drive him to write such a book.²⁵ Given that the book was written in 1951, the motivation was to ‘combat the Soviet lies’ and tell a ‘true history’ of Yugoslavia’s leader.



Tito reads a draft passage of Dedijer’s best selling biography²⁶

At the beginning of his biography, Dedijer claimed that forty percent of the narrative was told in Tito’s own words.²⁷ While writing in the first person ensured the story was absorbing, it is questionable how much of the book was Tito talking, and not Dedijer talking for Tito. After all, the text was characterised by more literary skill than any of Tito’s speeches and articles. Perhaps this explains the moving narrative and subsequent success of the book both in Yugoslavia and abroad. Tito was never an accomplished writer, his personality cult was in far more capable hands with Dedijer. Nevertheless, the complete draft was read by Tito and received his endorsement; this alone gave the book enormous significance.

The British historian Phyllis Auty, who wrote her own biography of Tito, proclaimed that:

²⁵ Dedijer, ‘Knjiga o knjizi’ – Unpublished diary, 11th November 1949, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 229

²⁶ Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 1, p. 614

²⁷ Dedijer, *Tito Speaks*, p. ix

When I started work on this book I approached people in Yugoslavia who had access to material about Tito's life. I was told "we all have to begin with Dedijer's book." This I have found to be true ... it was based largely on autobiographical material which Tito told the author. In this sense the book is an original source for all future work on Tito's life.²⁸

The book was only titled as 'Contributions towards a biography', because Tito acknowledged 'in the writing of history we must obey the theory of distance.'²⁹ Yet, Dedijer's book crucially determined the accounts of all subsequent publications (until his revisions in the 1980s) of the Yugoslav leader's life. After all, Tito never wrote an autobiography. This meant that Dedijer's book, which was penned on behalf of the Marshal, was seen as an authoritative 'biography'. Although he was not at the very top of the political leadership, Dedijer was close enough to this inner circle, and had sufficient authority within the party, for his biography to have seeming insight and authority. For this reason all potential future writers, at least in Yugoslavia, were largely discouraged from pursuing a further investigation of Tito's life and work. Furthermore, those who did attempt a reinterpretation found their accounts frustrated by an official authoritative biographical narrative. For this reason Dedijer's biography took on enormous significance.

Dedijer used all his journalistic skill to create a book that portrayed Tito as the father of Yugoslavia. Dedijer's Tito was primarily a man of courage. He was a man that defied the Nazis, then the predatory West, and finally his only ally - the Soviet superpower - rather than defile Yugoslav heroism and independence. The book only gave part of the picture of Tito's life and work, the parts Dedijer wanted to amplify.

²⁸ P. Auty, *Tito: a Biography*, (Michigan, 1970), p. xii

²⁹ Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 1, p. vi

In this respect the book was largely a typical communist hagiography - it was written by a propaganda minister with the motivation of furthering a personality cult. However, its sincerity took it above a mere piece of propaganda and partly explains the book's popularity. Dedijer admitted: 'some will say that I have written this biography with bias, with passion, with hatred or love, this I shall not deny. I love my country and I love Tito.'³⁰ During the war, he remained loyal to Tito for four punishing years, a decision that had left him with the haunting memory of his wife's death in battle. Therefore, the sincere loyalty and devotion that would normally disqualify a biographer's claims to authenticity, actually provided it. It offered a valuable example of the extreme loyalty which led Tito's followers into numerous conflicts that seemed destined to end in defeat.

Djilas was also intimately involved in writing Tito's biography. He believed Dedijer's book was vital because they needed to 're-pay Tito for saving all the people when they were in difficulties.'³¹ They worked very closely to complete the book with Djilas offering advice and his own small biography of Tito that he had written for a Soviet encyclopaedia. In *Knjiga o knjizi* Dedijer recorded a conversation that he had with Djilas:

I had a long talk with Djilas about the book. He has read the entire manuscript carefully. He thinks the book is good and will have a good effect, both abroad and in the country. He especially likes the absence of hagiography. "You wrote about him as a living being with extraordinary qualities which helped him to be what he is. But also as a living person like all other beings, you revealed all his human and ordinary things."³²

³⁰ Dedijer, *Tito Speaks*, p. i

³¹ Dedijer, 'Knjiga o knjizi' – Unpublished diary, 20th July 1952, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 229

³² Dedijer, 'Knjiga o knjizi' – Unpublished diary, 8th January 1951, *ibid*

This recorded talk from 1952 reveals a lot about that the mental climate in Yugoslavia at that time. Both men were trying to reconcile their condemnation of Stalinism with the continuation of building a cult around Tito. By presenting Tito as a talented but ordinary Yugoslav they were trying to escape from the Stalinist interpretation of the role of personalities in history.

After all, following the conflict with Moscow, Tito's role increased and decreased simultaneously. It was growing as a bulwark of resistance to the Soviet Union and both Djilas and Dedijer grew even closer to their leader. However, at the same time Tito's role in their mind declined, because was not the idea of an infallible man having omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent qualities a fallacy? This question started to play on Djilas's mind as he began to doubt Tito's role in society. The break with Stalin had emphasised that these men of differing ages, differing heritage, and differing character, had a different interpretation of the road to socialism.

All three men agreed that the Soviet system had become exploitative, but differed in their interpretation of how their own party should avoid following a similar path. Djilas and Dedijer believed that for the Yugoslav party to be truly Marxist and democratic, free discussion was essential. While Tito gave lip-service to opening up the party to more democracy, he could not depart from his idealised view of how a Marxist-Leninist party should function. When an intra-party struggle developed he instinctively saw the resolution as a purge rather than a free discussion. This mind-set ensured the fall of Djilas and Dedijer, but also a legion of other younger comrades - the Cominformists, Ranković, Vukmanović-Tempo and the liberal reformists of the 1960s and 1970s.

1954 – A Personal Betrayal

When the split came in 1954 it was a deeply painful event for all three men involved. Like many disputes in communist regimes it represented a split between the personalities of Dedijer and Djilas on one side, and Tito on the other: a split between ideals and reality. All three men were linked by a bond, forged during the underground struggle against the oppressive interwar state and tempered during the Partisan resistance. However, this bond was decisively broken when Djilas decided to challenge Tito's authority by calling for further liberalising reforms in Yugoslavia. From then on their relationship changed from a parental one to one of estrangement.

The 'Djilas Plenum' revealed the Freudian nature of the leading members of the party. Following their seemingly hopeless struggles against both Hitler and Stalin, they had become a sort of proxy family with Tito as the patriarch. The published accounts of the trial reveal something of the intimacy that characterised the relationship between Tito and his lieutenants. During his speech Tito often referred to them by their affectionate nicknames of 'Djido' and 'Vlado', and Djilas and Dedijer continually referred to Tito as '*Stari*'. When Tito opened proceedings he was not angry but dejected. He was deeply confused, questioning: 'why did Comrade Djilas break with his old comrades with whom he worked for seventeen years?'³³ Part of the answer laid in Djilas's own nature. His attack was similar to that of a young man renegading against his father and the old system that he still clung to.

Djilas was the party's *enfant terrible*. In the underground and war years this part of his character seems to have intrigued Tito and drawn him to Djilas. During their years in power however, Djilas's unorthodox nature began to upset Tito the ruler. In

³³ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 14th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

a conversation with Dedijer 25 years after their fall, Tito angrily recalled: ‘Imagine Vlado, when I saw him [Djilas] in Zagreb at the house of the musician Markovec, all of a sudden he put his foot on the table. No sense of dignity, although I was 20 years older than him, although I was head of the party!’³⁴ Djilas was a maverick. He was a man bored with stagnation, a man who liked to shock and surprise. During large state receptions Djilas would often turn up late and in peasant dress. This was in marked contrast to the rest of the party who wore suits and military uniforms. As Dedijer remembered, ‘he would stand in the middle of the hall with a childish naughty smile as everyone gazed at him. Then he would start his favourite game: he would put his finger in his nose and wipe it on his trousers.’³⁵ These displays greatly angered Tito who interpreted them as arrogant and disrespectful. Therefore, while the break between the two men was driven by their differing views on solving the social contradictions in Yugoslavia, the conflict was also a classic rebellion of a son against a father.



A meeting between Tito and Djilas after the war – contrast Tito in his suit with Djilas in peasant attire³⁶

³⁴ V. Dedijer, ‘Notes from meeting with Tito’, 1st November 1978, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 229

³⁵ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 192

³⁶ J. Gligorijević, ‘Anatomija jednog morala’, *Vreme*, 22nd March 2011, p. 3

Tito also appears to have been jealous of his younger colleague. By the 1950s Djilas had begun to develop his own charisma that appeared to challenge Tito's personal popularity. This became evident to Tito as early as the Sixth Party Congress. When Djilas proposed the party change its name to League, he received far louder applause than the patriarch. Then in the autumn of 1953, when his articles in *Borba* were receiving praise across Yugoslavia, he became president of the Federal Assembly, receiving the most votes in the whole country, two more than Tito. Djilas appeared to be suggesting that the 62 year-old Tito was defending old discredited ideas, while he possessed the answers to some of the more problematic questions concerning Yugoslavia's socialist development. Was Djilas's challenge merely theoretical then, or was it a move for power? Dedijer believed the latter, recalling that in the crisis of 1954 Djilas had whispered to him, 'wait for the spring, when we organise street demonstrations.'³⁷

Despite Dedijer's assertions (he had developed an obsessive dislike of his former friend in later life) there is no concrete evidence that Djilas's popularity caused him to harbour secret hopes of taking Tito's place. Nonetheless, it certainly encouraged him to continue his criticism of the party, even when Tito began to voice his dissatisfaction. In continuing this criticism Djilas was, by proxy, challenging and attacking Tito. In this respect Stane Kavčič was right when he said that Djilas was the first Yugoslav to challenge Tito's charisma and unchangeable authority.³⁸ Many leading party members believed that Djilas's popularity had gone to his head. Kardelj warned Tito that it was 'Djilas's dream to overthrow you from your position.' This incensed Tito, as did a comment made by the famous Italian socialist

³⁷ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 17th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

³⁸ Kavčič, *Dnevnik*, p. 582

Ignazio Silone, who noted, 'Djilas seems to us to be the man of the future.'³⁹ The fear of Djilas's ambitions appears to be one of the motivating factors in Tito's decision to bring Djilas to trial and proclaim him as Yugoslavia's 'enemy number one'.⁴⁰

Dedijer's response to the purging of his friend particularly irked his surrogate father. In his disillusionment he met with Tito and explained that he could not agree to destroy Djilas. According to Dedijer, Tito replied that 'you have every right to hold your own views but do not speak at the plenum.'⁴¹ It was vital for Tito that Dedijer remain silent because the plenum was to be openly broadcast across Yugoslavia and Djilas needed to appear totally isolated. By the end of the plenum both men felt deeply hurt and betrayed. Dedijer, because Tito had tried to silence him and stifle the principle that he believed was at the core of socialism – the freedom of expression. While Tito was angered because Dedijer had disobeyed his order and aired his dissatisfactions in public. Their relationship further deteriorated when Dedijer appointed Ivo Politeo as his lawyer at his subsequent trial. In 1928 Politeo had defended Tito during his own trial in Zagreb. Politeo appeared to have been chosen to insult Tito directly.⁴²

Ultimately the events of 1954 were a treachery that Tito never forgave. He regarded it as a personal betrayal as much as a political defection. Although his initial reaction had been characterised by sorrow, the pain quickly morphed into anger and a lasting resentment. After all, Djilas and Dedijer had rejected both his political and paternal authority. This open subversion of his power was damaging on a governmental level, but also on a private level, causing him acute embarrassment.

³⁹ S. Stanković, 'Anti-Djilas Campaign in Yugoslavia', *Radio Free Europe*, p. 2

⁴⁰ 'President Tito Stands Firm', *The Times*, 26th April 1958, p. 9

⁴¹ Dedijer, 'How I slaughtered others' – Unpublished diary, 15th January 1954, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 229

⁴² *ibid*, 6th January 1955

In addition, the event had a profound effect on his future party policy. He warned: ‘we suffered a huge loss, we must not make new mistakes and let this happen again ... we must again change our course because we have made an error in following it ... we should be much more vigilant.’⁴³

Djilas found his break with Tito hard. Even during the emergency plenum called to discipline him he stated: ‘Comrade Tito is still for me – regardless of the current dispute – the incomparable figure of the Yugoslav national and social development ... he is the movement and the country.’⁴⁴ Dedijer also found the break distressing. He was placed in a difficult position where he had to choose between Tito and Djilas, a decision he likened to choosing which finger to cut from his hand.⁴⁵

During his time in prison however, Djilas began emotionally detaching himself from Tito. His brilliant novel *Montenegro*, written while in jail, was a kind of catharsis. In the final section he tells the story of two former friends who had fought together for Montenegrin liberation during the First World War, but came to blows on the form the new state should take. One followed the true path while the other had been deceived. Perhaps because Tito had not confined him to a jail cell, Dedijer did not come to a similar realisation. He felt betrayed, lamenting: ‘I wrote Tito’s biography, he himself authorised it, supported it, loved it. It was translated into 38 languages and published in magazines around the world, yet when I spoke my mind and pointed out a fault I was scolded.’⁴⁶ However, he refused to believe that the benevolent father of the revolution was truly behind these punitive measures. He wrote: ‘I was sacked from the Philosophy Faculty at the University and my name was removed from all my books. I cannot believe this was Tito. I believe it to be the

⁴³ Office of the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Intelligence (Armstrong), PPS files, lot 65 D 101, “Yugoslavia”, 18th December, 1954, (FRUS), 1952–1954, Vol. VIII, Document 685

⁴⁴ Leković, *Milovan Đilas*, p. 50

⁴⁵ ‘Letter from Dedijer to Tito’, 16th December 1954, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 229

⁴⁶ ‘*How I slaughtered others*’ – Unpublished diary, 16th January 1954, *ibid*, box 229

work of Ranković ... these bitter lessons for me and especially my family have not created a hatred for Tito.’⁴⁷ In the years following his expulsion from the party his home was still filled with pictures of the Marshal, and he appears to have survived the break through deliberate self-deception. He wrote numerous letters to Tito to complain of his treatment, but when he received no reply he told himself that this must have been because Tito never received them.⁴⁸

Unlike Djilas, who openly attacked Tito in the Western press whenever he got the opportunity, Dedijer always refrained from directly offending him. Even when asked to comment on Tito’s imprisonment of Djilas, he refused, only noting: ‘poor Tito, he leads the life of old John D. Rockefeller, friendless, lonely, surrounded by toadies.’⁴⁹ Again the fault was placed on Tito’s advisors and not the ‘great man’ himself. The cult, of which he was so central in creating, appears to have penetrated deep into Dedijer’s consciousness. In the early 1970s he summarised his feeling towards Tito in the Slovenian weekly *Tovariš*: ‘while we no longer share a common political programme, look at the wound on my head, me and Tito were wounded in the same battle, the greatest battle of our revolution. A bomb later in the battle killed my wife Olga. This created a common human bond with Tito that was impossible to forget. The bond could never be terminated.’⁵⁰

Tito also had a particular weakness for Dedijer for a number of reasons: Olga was killed while she was in the Marshal’s headquarters and was standing next to him; Dedijer’s head wound caused him immense pain for the rest of his life; he was the only leading Yugoslav communist who spoke perfect English, and his contacts with a number of British and American colleagues were vital following the break with

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ Sulzberger, *Resistantists*, p. 172

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p. 200

⁵⁰ ‘Tito’, *Tovariš*, 24th April 1972, p. 24

Stalin. He was an excellent journalist who served Tito well, writing a brilliant and moving bestselling biography of him; and finally, Tito's own persecution of him and his family after 1954 had led to the death of two of his sons.

This allowed Tito to slowly forgive Dedijer. It appears he saw Djilas as the leading heretic, while Dedijer was merely an unwell and confused man who had been deceived and tricked by his so-called friend. Sulzberger recalled a conversation with Tito in the years following the purging of both men:

After an extensive and rambling conversation on world questions, I asked the Marshal about the two renegades, his former friends. Tito turned quite purple. For a moment, he only spluttered, walking up and down ... Then he said: "As for Djilas, we have forgotten him already. He had no real influence, no popular backing. He voluntarily quit the party and we will never, never permit him to re-join. However, Dedijer's a different case. We hold nothing serious against him even though the masses find it difficult to understand why he supported Djilas. Time will iron out his position. His health is bad and we will do our best to see he gets some rest."⁵¹

For this reason Dedijer was treated very differently to Djilas. While Djilas was continually refused a passport, as early as 1957 Tito personally permitted Dedijer to travel to Sweden and give a number of lectures to some Scandinavian socialists. In these lectures Dedijer savaged socialism in the Soviet Union. He attacked the gap between the highest and lowest salaries in the country. He noted that in the Soviet Union there was no desire to fundamentally change the policies of Stalin. He spoke of the Hungarian uprising and Russia's savage repression of it. He even made links between the communists in Russia and Yugoslavia: 'there is no essential difference

⁵¹ Sulzberger, *Resistantists*, p. 200

between the “conservative” (Stalinists) and the “progressive” (anti Stalinists) such as the Yugoslav communist leaders.’⁵²

When Djilas made virtually the same allegations about Hungary and the state of socialism across Europe in the *New Leader* magazine, he was thrown in jail. Tito however, made sure that on his return to Yugoslavia Dedijer would not face a similar punishment. Moreover, his precarious financial position rapidly improved because he was permitted to keep the lecture fees and the contracts that he had arranged to write articles and book reviews for Western publications. Later that same year Tito even acted personally to give Dedijer’s second wife and eldest son passports. He also secured them access to a special hospital in Vienna where they could be treated for their nerve problems.⁵³ As if to exemplify this lenient treatment, in 1959 Tito permitted Dedijer to move abroad in order to further his career as an academic. During this period Djilas was still languishing in jail.

As was demonstrated by his entry into the Yugoslav encyclopaedia in 1968, when Dedijer returned to Yugoslavia in the late 1960s he was transformed from a ‘renegade of socialist Yugoslavia’ to the regime’s premier historian.⁵⁴ His brilliant literary talent meant that Tito wanted to utilise him for political means. After all, in the late 1960s the party was facing a challenge both internationally and domestically. Internally there was a growing reformist bloc within the party that was pushing for greater decentralisation. Tito considered this division to be exceptionally dangerous given the Soviet Union’s aggressive actions in Czechoslovakia. In response, after fifteen years, Dedijer was permitted to publish again. His book *Istorija Jugoslavije* (The History of Yugoslavia), which praised a centralised political system, assisted Tito in his condemnation of the decentralist elements in the party. Meanwhile his

⁵² ‘Vladimir Dedijer – His Master’s Voice’, *Radio Free Europe*, 10th May 1957, p. 1

⁵³ Sulzberger, *Resistantists*, p. 189

⁵⁴ *Mala enciklopedija Prosveta vol.1*, (Belgrade, 1968), p. 353

next published work, *Izgubljena bitka Josifa Visarionoviča Staljina* (The Battle Stalin Lost), which dealt with Yugoslav-Soviet relations between 1948 and 1953, helped Tito propagandise against the Soviet Union. Although it did not focus on contemporary issues, the book demonstrated that by occupying Czechoslovakia the Soviets had not changed their way of thinking. They were an aggressive power who were still a threat to the Yugoslavs. The book itself was published across Yugoslavia in 1969, and was serialised in numerous newspapers.

Dedijer's partial rehabilitation was confirmed a decade later in 1978 when Tito invited him to his villa on the Bay of Kotor. Dedijer was still fascinated with the man whose cult had defined his career. He recalled: 'I was interested again in his face ... For the twenty-some years I had been away from Tito I wondered if his face still projected the same features.'⁵⁵ Yet, Tito was very different to the man he once idolised. As was evident in *Istorija Jugoslavije*, Dedijer had become obsessed with the erosion of the Partisan ethics from the war, and no-one more than Tito appeared to symbolise this process.⁵⁶ Dedijer privately recalled:

... nothing described this unfavourable process to me more vividly than dinner with Tito in November 1978 ... He was very amiable to his biographer and to my son Marko. He ordered chicken for us from his personal farm; they were very tasty. Without intending to offend the host, it dawned on me when was the last time I had eaten chicken with Tito. At the beginning of December 1941 we had hidden in a peasant house near the village of Jabuka. Italian units were burning down parts of the village. On the table we placed our hand grenades and submachine guns, ready to offer our last resistance if they came to the house ... at that time it was our ascetic rule that we all ate from the same pot without plates, just each with his own spoon ...

⁵⁵ Dedijer, 'Notes from meeting with Tito', 1st November 1978, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 229

⁵⁶ Dedijer, *History of Yugoslavia*, p. 662

Being an impulsive man, I reminded Tito of that dinner, and he started to recall even more details than I. He even remembered the name of the peasant. My son Marko looked at me with embarrassment, and like lightning the thought flashed through my mind: here you are witnessing the complete erosion of Partisan ethics, from the days when we ate in a humble peasant house all from the same pot to this dinner in this fabulous palace.⁵⁷

After observing the degeneration of the revolutionary ideals within Tito, Dedijer decided to rewrite his original account of the Marshal that had been so vital in building his charisma. He told Tito of his intention, and surprisingly the Marshal agreed. Perhaps realising his own mortality at the age of 85, and concerned about the future of the country after his death, he reportedly told Dedijer: ‘We are all going to die and people will be free to write about us. Therefore, the most important thing is to leave behind all the documents so we cannot be accused of falsifying history ... remember Vlado, only the truth.’⁵⁸ Dedijer had called his first biography, *Josip Broz Tito Prilozi za Biografiju* (Josip Broz Tito Contributions to a Biography). He had always hoped to revisit his original biography when he had a longer historical perspective, to reinvestigate and review his original work. It is for this reason that his revised book was called *Novi Prilozi za Biografiju Josipa Broza Tita* (New Contributions to the Biography of Josip Broz Tito). Tito supported the title despite the fact it would override the hagiographical account of the 1950s. In the introduction to his collected works, republished in 1977, he summed up his mood: ‘Let history and future generations give their verdict about us as we really were, as

⁵⁷ Dedijer, ‘Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*’, 17th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁵⁸ Dedijer, ‘Notes from meeting with Tito’, 1st November 1978, *ibid*, box 229

we ourselves were developing, which direction we were taking, and what were our goals.⁵⁹



Rekindling their friendship in later life, Tito opened his private archives to Dedijer⁶⁰

Tito appeared to trust that Dedijer would honestly disclose the truth and not misrepresent his views in the interests of contemporary issues, because in his will he named Dedijer the lone executor of his papers. Tito did not envision the extent of Dedijer's revisionism. By the time the book(s) were released however, Tito had died. This was vital because Dedijer's revelations were in marked contrast to the mystical image of Tito that the party was propagating following his death.

Bringing the Cult Back to Reality

The collective leadership of the party that succeeded Tito tried to inherit his cult, portraying themselves as his disciples while simultaneously intensifying the Marshal's charisma. They did this by incessantly invoking Tito's image, by public obeisance at his tomb, and by ceaselessly proclaiming the motto 'After Tito - Tito!' Thus the most shocking feature of the period that followed Tito's death was its

⁵⁹ J. B. Tito, *Sabrana Djela, Vol. 1*, (Belgrade, 1977), p. 3

⁶⁰ Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 3, pp. 80-81

continuity with the past. The regime hoped to reassure its people that despite Tito's death, his beliefs and values lived on. By doing this however, they were acknowledging that the Tito cult was of immense importance for the legitimacy of the regime. Therefore the party was suspicious of anyone who interrogated Tito's persona because they were also questioning their own source of legitimacy.

Given the increasing economic, social and political difficulties, this proved to be a wholly ineffective endeavour. The persona was out of sync with what was happening elsewhere in Europe - a personality cult was seen to be in conflict with the prevailing trends of political democracy. In addition, the party's continual proclamation of the cult was in visible contrast with its inability to solve the country's difficulties. In the eyes of many ordinary Yugoslavs, Tito was an historic figure who belonged to the past. The present appeared paralysed, and as the absolute leader of the country for 35 years, he was responsible for it.

This was the climate in which Dedijer's *Novi Prilozi* controversy unfolded in 1981 (two more volumes were published in 1982 and 1984). In addition, Dedijer had been granted access to all state archives, including Tito's own papers, and notable party members had been forthcoming in providing interviews and other important documents. This made his work particularly sensationalist. He noted, 'my special authorisation has allowed me to view important documents that are still being protected in the archives of the security services ... while in the personal archives of Tito I have found numerous pearls for the historian.'⁶¹

Despite the sensationalist nature of the work, Dedijer's main aim was to reveal the real Tito, the great man he revered, who had been hidden under the cult. He hoped his book would free the Yugoslavs from the past. Unencumbered by the Tito

⁶¹ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 7th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

cult they could discard his failed political, social and economic policies, and in turn create a new Yugoslav identity. He was influenced in this type of historical revisionism by the intellectuals he had met during the Russell Tribunal. In particular he was drawing on the historical methodology of the French historian Albert Soboul. Soboul had been critical of the hagiographical nature of Dedijer's earlier work, telling him: 'we should consider Tito as a great man, but also as a human being, with all his passions and also his faults.' In keeping with Soboul's methodology Dedijer argued, 'Tito in 1948 began his struggle against Stalin and made himself a sort of Pharaoh. Today, to be faithful to the memory of Tito, we must oppose these methods of pharaonic history.'⁶² Consequently, with his compulsive effort to re-examine the Marshal, Dedijer gave impetus to a process of demystification. The persona began to recede as Tito became a more ordinary figure. Dedijer wrote: 'many accuse me of wanting to reduce Tito's importance. This is simply not true. In history Tito still remains a revolutionary, warrior and statesmen ... Yet I am a scientist and have to look ahead.'⁶³

On the surface the books appeared to augment his initial account of 1953. Dedijer was still largely flattering to Tito, but on deeper examination there was no expansion of the descriptions of the impressive soldier-statesman. Instead he formed a new image of Tito – a more mortal and human Tito hiding behind the facade of a divine leader. This irreversibly damaged the persona of Yugoslavia's late president. Tito was now a hedonist who lived a life a world away from his 'subjects'. Dedijer revealed the astonishing details of Tito's personal life, making wild assertions that he was manipulated by his wife Jovanka who spied on her husband for Ranković. However, it was Dedijer's shocking political re-evaluations that caused permanent

⁶² Dedijer, 'L'influence D'Albert Soboul en Yougoslavie', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, p. 582

⁶³ *ibid*

damage to the Tito cult. The late leader was depicted as a Machiavellian schemer who was intimately involved in the intraparty disputes that resulted in the purges of his former friends and colleagues. He was naive and lacked foresight, as evidenced by his negotiations with the Nazis over a non-belligerence pact so that he could destroy the Chetniks. Finally, he was an expert in 'excessive retortion' (Dedijer's euphemism for Tito's killing of his opponents) who used the Stalinist methods of intimidation, harassment, torture, exile and execution to remove his enemies.

Dedijer's *Novi Prilozi* did not destroy the Tito cult, but it certainly damaged it and opened it up for further questioning. It encouraged many new historians to delve deeper into the Tito myth and challenge its foundations. After all, Dedijer was a hugely controversial and stimulating writer. His disclosures sparked mass gossip and rumour about the once great leader, some of the most outlandish even alleging that he was a foreign freemason and that Josip Broz and Tito were in fact different people.⁶⁴ One of the most damaging aspects of *Novi Prilozi* was to bring ethnicity into his re-evaluation of Tito. Dedijer claimed that Tito's most deep-rooted and obsessive fear was that Yugoslavia's nations and nationalities would start killing each other again. He believed that there was a possibility that the genocidal massacres of the Second World War would be repeated. In addition, he continually emphasised that Tito had personally attacked Serbia during the Austro-Hungarian invasion of 1914. This provided the Serbian nationalists with a gift which they could use to brand Tito as 'anti-Serb' to his core.

The vast and virulent discussion that succeeded the publication of Dedijer's book led to numerous open attacks on Tito's legacy. In response the party announced a new law in 1984 to protect 'Tito's image and legacy', and attempted to ban the third

⁶⁴ Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*, p. 79

volume of *Novi Prilozi* after the first two had immediately sold out.⁶⁵ The party's ideological commission called for an immediate meeting to launch an offensive against the deviations from Titoist orthodoxy that had started with Dedijer's book. One ideologist proclaimed: 'Some circles in our country assert that Tito was a man of great skill in manipulating others, even a tyrant, who led an unsuccessful and unnecessary revolution and left behind an allegedly insecure Yugoslavia.'⁶⁶ Another noted that Tito was being presented as a mere figurehead who had failed to play a critical role in the country's history. The leading Croatian communist Stipe Šušteršič lamented: 'There is a danger that Tito will be preserved only as a photo in offices, on monuments, and in the names of streets and factories.'⁶⁷ The commission regularly referred to an opinion poll from Split. A number of young people were asked to name the most important personality in their lives. Topping the list were Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II. Tito was not even listed. One ideologist exclaimed, 'young people are writing anti-Tito slogans on walls, this is not an exception but takes on a general character. First there are whispers, then books, now open attacks.'⁶⁸

As Stevan Pavlowitch noted in his own biography of Tito, 'by the time of the tenth anniversary of his death, not only was he [Tito] being depicted as greedy, vainglorious and dishonest, but all of the ills of Yugoslavia and of its ethnic communities were attributed to him.'⁶⁹ Combined with the political, economic and social crises that were enveloping the country, Dedijer's revelations helped to destroy the facade that he and Djilas had originally enshrouded around the

⁶⁵ 'Titova Zaostavština', *NIN*, 23rd June 1985, p. 21

⁶⁶ Kamm, 'Tito's Heritage Being Debated in Yugoslavia', *The New York Times*, 24th November 1985, p. 6

⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ S. K Pavlowitch, *Tito: Yugoslavia's Great Dictator*, (Ohio, 1992), p. 92

communist leader. He had started a process of de-Titoisation that meant that by the mid-1980s the source of the country's pervasive crisis was revealed – it was a crisis of the system that had been embodied by Tito. *Danas* noted this important development, titling one of its cover stories: 'The Second Death of Josip Broz'. The article began: 'As we approach the 10th anniversary of Tito's passing away, the entire country is going through the drama of his second death.' The magazine also quoted the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who observed: 'we have to distinguish between Tito's physical death and the symbolic death of Tito's political being. What's happening today is the end of Tito's Yugoslavia.'⁷⁰

While Dedijer's three part work on Tito broke many taboos, it is revealing that he left out some of his most sensationalist findings. For instance, in his research notes he revealed that Tito had been intimately involved in liquidating supposed 'Trotskyists' during the Spanish Civil War. The former Yugoslav diplomat Leo Mates had allegedly told him: 'he did dirty services in Spain, which was an important testing ground for the Soviet Union - military, strategic and personnel. Tito was cleansing people.'⁷¹ While the Yugoslav Comintern member Joesph Kopinić revealed, 'Vlado, remember this: both Tito and Kardelj saved their necks because they had to work for the KGB in Moscow.'⁷² Yet these damaging revelations were not disclosed in any of *Novi Prilozi*'s pages. While he indicated that Tito was probably aware of the purges, he did not provide evidence of his active role in them. Perhaps he feared the consequences of revealing such a shocking secret, or maybe he was unsure of its accuracy. Neither of these points usually concerned Dedijer too greatly however. In an interview just before his death he acknowledged

⁷⁰ 'Drugo Smrti Josipa Broza', *Danas*, 6th June 1989, p. 1

⁷¹ 'Dedijer Interview with Leo Mates', 27th September 1983, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 44

⁷² V. Miladinović, 'Tito: Državnik, Legenda, UBICA', *Press Magazin*, No. 251, 28th August 2011, p. 29

that while he had found condemning evidence that Tito had been involved in the liquidation of Yugoslav communists in Spain, he could not believe that Tito would have orchestrated such an action. Instead he blamed such cruelty on Kardelj. After all he reasoned, ‘Edvard Kardelj had a vengeful character and wanted to liquidate any potential competitors in the leadership of Yugoslav communism.’⁷³ Despite the fact that he had broken away from Tito and played a vital role in undermining his cult, he was still struggling to reconcile himself with the darker side of Tito’s past. In another interview he revealed that he had kept numerous details of Tito’s past from the public because, ‘the truth is like a drug, large quantities in a short period are like a poison.’⁷⁴ Therefore, Dedijer was not simply an ignorant hack on the hunt for best-selling sensations. To a certain extent he had appreciated the danger of destroying Tito’s reputation for the future of the country.

!!!
Mates, 27.9.82
Tito, u matenju sni u Zujub,
imat' Sabah, Anxi Butova, valjadeni:
-Ja sam traja danga posleo
u Spanji: u snud!

!!! – Dedijer’s reaction to Leo Mates’s discovery of Tito’s actions in Spain. Dedijer was clearly interested in scandalous findings, but he chose not to publish this sensation.⁷⁵

Djilas would also play a vital role in reassessing Tito’s character. Following his former mentor’s death in 1980 he wrote a scathing biography that was published in the West entitled: *Tito: The Story from the Inside*. Tito was portrayed as a man without talent, a man with only superficial knowledge of theory, a man of no military

⁷³ S. Kljakić, ‘Razgovor s akademskim Vladimirom Dedijerom’ – Unpublished Interview, 4th February 1990, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 1

⁷⁴ Kljakić, ‘Sto godina’, *Politika Online*, 2nd February 2014

⁷⁵ ‘Dedijer Interview with Leo Mates’, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 44

skill, and a man obsessed with luxuries.⁷⁶ A Serbo-Croatian version, *Druženje s Titom*, was published by his son Aleksa in émigré circles. Numerous copies made their way into Yugoslavia and were surreptitiously read by eager readers. By the late 1980s however, the book was freely published in the country when the arch-heretic's enforced isolation was lifted. Djilas's book, like Dedijer's, was immensely popular. Unlike *Novi Prilozi* however, *Druženje s Titom* emerged in the late 1980s when communism was collapsing. This was a time when an ever-increasing number of Yugoslavs were convinced that the origins of the political, economic and social problems that were paralysing the decision making process in the country, lay in the Tito era. Djilas summed up this mood in an interview with *NIN*, stating: 'democratic and economic development largely depends on our ability to free ourselves from the Tito cult'.⁷⁷

While he was fighting with Tito against the monarchists, the Nazis and their quislings, and the Soviets, Djilas never looked inwards. However, in the aftermath of 1954 he began to take stock, coming to the conclusion that Tito was not the man of the cult. Unlike Dedijer, once Djilas had broken from Tito there could be no reconciliation, he had completely lost faith. In an interview with a Dutch newspaper he stated: 'I would be disavowing everything I have said if I visited Tito's tomb. Of course, I never hated Tito, but he did keep me in prison for 12 years.'⁷⁸ Following 1954, Tito could not control his hatred for Djilas and permitted the police and party machine to exert the most ignominious pressures on him. From 1956 to 1966, except for a short break in 1961-62, Tito kept Djilas in prison under terrible conditions. Despite the pressure to release Djilas by some of the most prominent humanitarians

⁷⁶ Djilas, *Tito*, pp. 9-16

⁷⁷ Andrejevich, 'Milovan Djilas and Aleksandar Ranković to be Rehabilitated?', *Radio Free Europe*, 27th June 1989, p. 15

⁷⁸ Z. Antić, 'Djilas Answers his Critics', *Radio Free Europe*, 25th July 1980, p. 3

of the era, such as Bertrand Russell and Aneurin Bevan, the Marshal was immovable. The element of reason he showed so often in his life did not operate in the case of Djilas. Instead, he was driven by a sheer emotional hatred, and struggled to even mention his name - Djilas became known as 'the renegade and traitor'. In the introduction to his *Collected Works*, republished in 1977, Tito recommended that a number of former party members be rehabilitated. Djilas, however, was singled out for exemption:

Milovan Djilas was for a time a distinguished representative of the party ... But dissatisfied with the difficulties and contradictions of our socialist development, and perhaps because of the weakness of his character, he entered into the service of forces outside Yugoslavia and became a renegade of the communist movement, behaving as an offended prima donna. Even today he is ready to make all kinds of mischief against his fatherland, in which he enjoys all the benefits instead of sharing the difficult life of the people of Yugoslavia.⁷⁹

Despite his treatment at the hands of Tito, Djilas still had a soft spot for him. After his release from prison he was asked by *The New York Times* for his personal assessment of Tito. He replied: 'This is very contradictory. I one day think one thing, on another day another. But generally I regard him as an historic person. Especially in critical situations he is good ... you cannot compare him with Stalin because he is not so morbid and such a cruel person.'⁸⁰ By the time of his partial rehabilitation in the 1980s, he even condemned Dedijer for his own attacks on Tito in *Novi Prilozi*. In an interview with the Belgrade daily, *Večernje Novosti*, he noted: 'Dedijer wants to portray Tito as a Mafioso. This is blatantly not true. Contrary to Dedijer's allegations

⁷⁹ Tito, *Sabrana Djela, Vol. 1*, p. 6

⁸⁰ M. S. Handler, 'Djilas, in Interview Here', *The New York Times*, 27th November 1968, p. 10

Tito was very loyal towards his people.⁸¹ In fact Djilas's own biography of Tito, *Druženje s Titom*, still portrayed Yugoslavia's late leader as a passionate man of absolute dedication, vision and resolution. Many of the Belgrade opposition who became Djilas's close associates in later life, such as Ćosić and Bećković, lamented that his book was far too easy on Tito: 'You were unduly fair to him, he was a lot worse than you have shown him to be.'⁸² In this respect Djilas's book was an anticlimactic ending to a protracted battle between the leader and the arch-heretic.

Nevertheless, though the biography paid tribute to Tito's positive qualities, it also attacked his weaknesses - his narcissism, his ruthless pursuit of personal power and prestige, his kitsch artistic tastes, and although carefully concealed, his mediocre intellect. Djilas acknowledged that he was driven to write the book because of the outpouring of grief that followed Tito's death in Yugoslavia and abroad. This was too much for Djilas, who wanted to bring Tito back down to earth. Just like Dedijer, Djilas's Tito encouraged extravagant stories about himself, he exaggerated his own bravery during the war and his key role in building Yugoslav socialism; he lived the life of a communist emperor accruing for himself numerous palaces, servants and luxury cars; as he aged he became increasingly intransigent, unwilling to accept any personal criticism; and ultimately, despite all his wealth and power, he was unable to achieve his political goals or genuine personal happiness.

None of these criticisms were new, Djilas had been expressing them in the Western media for years. What was new however, was Djilas's suggestion that Tito lacked courage. While he alleged that the former Yugoslav leader had exaggerated his war record, not once during his three decades of dissent did he question Tito's

⁸¹ 'Povratak Milovana Djilasa', *Večernje Novosti*, 18th September 1988, p. 27

⁸² Urban, 'Djilas on Gorbachov', *Encounter*, September 1988, p. 17

role as a leader of men.⁸³ Now however, in his most devastating attack on the cult, there was constant innuendo that Tito lacked physical bravery. During the Nazis' 'Sixth Offensive' Tito decided to transfer his headquarters from Jajce to Drvar, where he set up camp in a mountainside cave. According to Djilas this demonstrated that Tito was a man who 'had an overwhelming concern for his personal safety.'⁸⁴ He was not simply characterised as a man of caution, but a man of cowardice. This was a strange allegation because no one else who spent time with Tito during the war doubted his bravery. His wartime decisions appeared to be standard precautions for a political-military leader who was no longer a front-line soldier. Nonetheless, Djilas's inference was very different to the established narrative of Tito's wartime bravery. In Dedijer's original biography *Prilozi za Biografiju*, Tito was not hiding in a cave during enemy fire, but instead rushing to the aid of his wounded comrades.⁸⁵ Both of these accounts encapsulate how the truth was distorted over time. Dedijer's original biography certainly inflated Tito's actions during the war, but by the late 1980s equally exaggerated myths were being created about him – such as Djilas's hints that he was a coward.

Conclusions

Both Djilas and Dedijer ensured that the Tito cult would quickly fade. As Djilas remarked: 'Tito's achievement cannot be separated from Tito's personality. His personality is more arresting and original than the achievement. And more enduring'.⁸⁶ Despite his condemnation of the cult - 'it is impossible to derive from

⁸³ Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 359

⁸⁴ Djilas, *Tito*, p. 12

⁸⁵ Dedijer, *Tito Speaks*, p. 203

⁸⁶ Djilas, *Tito*, p. 179

Marx anything like a cult of the personality' - it was he, along with his deputy Dedijer, who played a vital role in building one in Yugoslavia.⁸⁷ Fatefully, both men displayed a greater tendency to attack the late leader, rather than exploring the subjective and objective factors that had reinforced Tito's authority. By re-exploring Yugoslavia's 'founding father' they began to bring the cult back to reality. Yet their re-evaluation of Tito was not entirely negative. This made their books even more dangerous for the late Yugoslav leader's image because it did not discredit the writers' impartiality. While they ensured that Tito was a more human individual, with both positive and negative traits, their roles should not be underestimated. Following their revelations a number of intellectuals began to launch a barrage of attacks against Tito's legacy. After bringing the Tito myth back to reality, a new myth would emerge. While this myth was just as false as the previous one, it was an entirely negative myth. Tito was no longer a god-like figure, nor was he just an ordinary man, now he was a cruel schemer who had caused all of Yugoslavia's ills. This was a fateful process given that Tito's successors were clinging to his achievements and charisma for their own legitimacy.

After all, the undermining of the Tito cult would have been manageable had the party been able to carve out its own legitimacy based on its political and economic effectiveness. Instead the eroding of Tito's charisma was happening in conjunction with a number of wider crises, such as rising ethnic tensions and economic collapse. Therefore a regime whose validity was based around the slogan, 'After Tito - Tito', was living on borrowed time as well as borrowed money.

⁸⁷ Djilas, *Slutnja Postkomuničkog Haosa*, p. 17

Chapter 7: From Friendship to Enmity

A picture was taken in 1951 of Djilas and Dedijer standing side by side in a London cemetery at the grave of Karl Marx. Heads down in respect, both men considered Marxism as their complete future. Yet, less than three years later they would split from their comrades. This break put great strain on them, but also on their families and their own friendship. They suffered abuse, impoverishment, intimidation, and the death of loved ones. They dealt with this victimisation very differently, and drew very different, perhaps incommensurable conclusions from it. By reassessing their lives, they also reassessed each other.



Communism as their complete future - paying respects at the grave of Karl Marx¹

Djilas and Dedijer first met in the communist underground of the 1930s. During this challenging and covert period party members became very close. Yet there was a deeper bond between Djilas and Dedijer. It was Djilas who helped the disaffected Dedijer, horrified by the reactionary nature of the monarchist regime, find his cause

¹ 'Djilas i Dedijer na Marksovom grobu', at <http://fenomeni.me/milovan-dilas-revolucionarni-rat/djilas-i-dedijer-na-marksovom-grobu/>

in communism. Himself an aspiring author, Dedijer felt the impact of Djilas's strong personality and looked up to him. Three years his senior, he was not only an experienced revolutionary but also a moral guide.² Meanwhile, Djilas was drawn to Dedijer's brilliant journalistic talents and found his presence at the top of the party refreshing. In comparison with the rest of the party he found Dedijer intellectually stimulating. Exclusive involvement with party activities, while exciting, was also limiting. He noted: 'practical party functionaries ... never quite satisfied my need for exchanging thoughts on a wider more varied plane.'³ Dedijer was not merely a party functionary, he had joined the party much later than the rest of the leadership. He had travelled widely, was witty, and was familiar with modern literature.

They grew closer during the war when they spent a lot of time together producing propaganda in Tito's headquarters. Perhaps apocryphal, they both recalled an event in 1941 in Zlatibor that demonstrated their closeness. Djilas was selected to lead a mission behind German lines to recover some boxes of silver that had been buried there earlier that year. Dedijer volunteered to scout the area on Djilas's behalf. After setting off he heard Djilas approaching: 'I cannot leave you ... to be killed and so I am coming to share your destiny.'⁴ During this period Dedijer appears to have idolised Djilas. Following a German attack where a shell fragment became embedded in his skull, Dedijer was transported to an allied hospital in Cairo. Sulzberger had numerous conversations with Dedijer while he was recovering in Egypt in 1943. He recalled that, 'he talked principally about three people: Olga (his first wife) and her tragic death; little Milica (his first daughter) whom he had not seen since he left Belgrade in August 1941; and Milovan Djilas.' The latter would dominate the conversations. Sulzberger continued, 'Vlado kept referring to him,

² Clissold, *Djilas*, p. 51

³ Djilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, p. 313

⁴ *ibid*, p. 331

saying: “He has taught me the value of our dream. He has taught me why we must sacrifice so much. It is for what Milovan has taught me that Olga was sacrificed.”⁵

Both men also shared similar interests. Following the end of the war they would spend days alone together on hunting and fishing trips and developed a similar sense of humour.⁶

While the events of 1954 marked the high point of their relationship, it was also the point at which they started to question each other’s motives; no longer did they appear perfectly aligned. After all, by the end of their lives they had become bitterly estranged. Dedijer’s *Novi Prilozi* (New Contributions) was as much an attack - if not more so - on Djilas, as it was on Tito. His final book, a biography of Djilas, was more of a hatchet job than a piece of scholarly work. Djilas did not refrain from the mud-slinging. In the final part of his autobiography *Rise and Fall*, it is only the passages that focus on his relationship with Dedijer where one can detect any real bitterness. He noted:

I have abandoned the idea of refuting Dedijer because the object of this memoir is not to refute someone else’s lies but to narrate truths of my own ... future investigators interested in delving more deeply into my shifting relationship with Dedijer will confirm the facts one way or another and evaluate us more justly.⁷

This is not an easy task. Neither man was willing, or able, to discern what had caused their friendship to descend into animosity. However, it is apparent that their relationship slowly deteriorated in the years following 1954. Despite splitting with the party, they could not escape from the dialectic atmosphere that had enveloped

⁵ Sulzberger, *Resistentialists*, p. 159

⁶ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 193

⁷ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 381

much of their lives. Not only did they continue to challenge the party's decisions, but they also challenged the conclusions drawn by each other. It was these very different and incommensurable conclusions that were fatal for their friendship.

Disillusionment and Suspicion in the Aftermath of 1954

Djilas's decision to confront the party leadership placed great strain on Dedijer. Yet when Dedijer made the fateful decision to support Djilas, it was immediately rejected by his close friend. In an attempt to protect Djilas from his comrades' attacks, he argued that the Montenegrin's arguments were more of a personal, rather than political, nature.⁸ This appears to have annoyed Djilas who clearly thought his arguments were being subordinated. In turn Dedijer felt betrayed. He had put himself in a dangerous position, but this defence had been thrown back at him.

Following the plenum and his expulsion from the Central Committee, Djilas remained a committed communist and hoped to remain a party member. However, by April 1954 he had returned his party card. He told the Western media that he was driven to this action after hearing a statement made by Dedijer - he had accepted the actions taken against Djilas and intended to return to the political scene.⁹ While Dedijer would later cement his break with the party, immediately after the plenum he was struggling to come to terms with the loss of power and privilege. As Djilas later recalled:

In January, I maintained frequent and close relations with Dedijer. But early in February, Dedijer and I began to draw apart. I am not sure what was the cause of the

⁸ Maclean, *The Heretic*, p. 382

⁹ 'Mr Djilas Leaves the Party', *The Times*, 22nd April 1954, p. 6

cooling off of my relationship with Dedijer, but the problem did not arise with me.

When all is said and done, I believe that the primary cause lay in certain traits of Dedijer's character and his undue pragmatism in politics.¹⁰

Djilas's assessment of their deteriorating relationship was only half correct. After initially agreeing with the Central Committee's judgement concerning the fate of Djilas and attending a number of government social events, Dedijer drew the line at being instructed to join a boycott of Djilas. He was already living in isolation and obscurity. Dedijer walked out of a control commission called to investigate his support of Djilas, an action that confirmed his break with the party. He justified this action, not because he agreed with Djilas's theoretical explorations, but because he was his friend: 'I am a Serb, and I have been taught to stand by my friends.'¹¹ Dedijer was a rare communist who believed that friendship could survive political differences.

Dedijer's actions were not driven by political pragmatism in the way that Djilas had imagined, instead he had sacrificed everything for his relationship with his friend. He had lost his position in the party and his standing in society, a society that he did not feel the need to repudiate. In contrast, Djilas's main goal was to fully repudiate contemporary communist society. For this reason, despite his sacrifice, Djilas went no further than praising Dedijer as 'a man of considerable personal courage of an emotional type.'¹² Friendship and solidarity were not on his mind when he was going through his personal, moral and political crisis - his rebellion was a private one.

¹⁰ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 366

¹¹ Sulzberger, *Resistantists*, p. 173

¹² The Ambassador in Yugoslavia (Riddleberger) to the Secretary of State, 768.00/12-2754: Despatch, 27th December, 1954, (FRUS), 1952-1954, Vol. VIII, Document 719

The association of these two well-known figures with immense literary talent was seen as a dangerous pairing that the party had to bring to an end. In reality such a union ended at the conclusion of the first hearing of the Central Committee (Djilas) plenum, if a formal union ever really existed to begin with. For instance at the end of 1954, until he was told by foreign journalists, Djilas was not even aware that Dedijer had walked out of the control commission and effectively left the party.¹³ He bitterly reproached Dedijer for not informing him of his intended action in advance, but this only antagonised Dedijer further. Vladimir noted that he felt Djilas was acting like his superior, and that he despised being referred to as 'Djilas's junior partner' in the Yugoslav dailies.¹⁴

Meanwhile, Djilas viewed Dedijer with a mixture of suspicion and exasperation. Although Dedijer had vocally supported him at the control commission in December 1954, at the beginning of the year he had actually bowed to a majority decision to punish him. Djilas acknowledged that this led Vlado to be 'caught in my web of suspicion'. He suspected that Dedijer had been sent to spy on him by Ranković and regularly refused to meet him.¹⁵ This particularly hurt Dedijer who, finding the break with his comrades hard, attempted to turn to Djilas for support. He recalled a meeting which Djilas did agree to in Terazije: 'I greeted him, but he looked at me as if I was some pathetic dead calf. Before he left he exclaimed, "I am not at your beck and call!" My assessment of him drastically altered at that point.'¹⁶

¹³ 'Mr. Dedijer's Personal Statement', *The Times*, 22nd December 1954, p. 8

¹⁴ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 23rd February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

¹⁵ Clissold, *Djilas*, p. 254

¹⁶ Dedijer, 'Nekoliko mojih prema tome subjektivnih sećanja', Undated, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 54

‘Like Orwell’s 1984, but Worse’ – The Treatment of Dissidents in the Most Liberal of Communist Regimes

For much of its existence, Titoist Yugoslavia was viewed positively by the West. It appeared to be a model communist state: politically less dogmatic and more respectful of human rights than the Soviet Bloc. Yet, the benevolent picture that Yugoslav communists presented to the world disguised an oppressive system with an extensive state security administration (UDBA) and a penal system for political prisoners comparable to those in the rest of Eastern Europe. While the Yugoslav communists had nothing of the sadism of their Soviet counterparts, they were no less determined to punish anyone that appeared to challenge their monopoly of power. As Dedijer told Sulzberger: ‘Maybe one might contend that Stalin was less cruel. He just shot his heretics. Our system slowly deprives them of life. It is like Orwell’s 1984, but worse.’¹⁷ Both men coped with this persecution very differently. This was most evident at their trial in 1955. While Djilas gave a speech defending his position and challenged the prosecutor’s statements, Dedijer remained cowed. Djilas recalled: ‘Dedijer had not even prepared a speech; his replies were brief and despondent, interspersed with complaints about his illness.’¹⁸ When they emerged from the court after receiving suspended sentences, Djilas was buoyant. He embraced his family and posed for photographs. Dedijer meanwhile portrayed a rather sad figure. He was clearly exhausted, clinging to his wife’s arm as she led him away.¹⁹ In the aftermath of the trial, Dedijer’s brother Stevan recalled:

¹⁷ Sulzberger, *Resistantialists*, p. 200

¹⁸ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 375

¹⁹ ‘Belgrade Trial Ended’, *The Times*, 25th January 1955, p. 8

I drove to Vlado's house and noticed it was surrounded by police. As I entered the room he hugged me and his eyes were full of tears. The war-wound in his head was bad and he felt sick. After a while Djilas entered and I told him: "I thought you were a better politician, Djido. With your story about Peko's wife in *Nova Misao*, you got all of us in the shit." He just smiled.²⁰

The fact that the regime's official historian, and Tito's biographer no less, had sided with a condemned heretic was a great embarrassment to the party. Applying pressure to Dedijer in an attempt to get him to climb down became a priority. Djilas wrote to his friend at the end of 1954 claiming that the powerful Serbian leader, Petar Stambolić, had told him: 'If we put you and Dedijer in jail, I am certain that you as a brave man would not admit anything even under torture, whereas Dedijer is a weakling, and if we press him a little he will start singing like a bird about everything you and he have schemed against the party.'²¹ In his reply Dedijer admitted that 'Ranković would call me almost once a month to come and see him and would usually ask, "Are you going to recant?"'²²

The revolution did not devour Dedijer in the Soviet sense, but it did attempt to starve him into submission. After losing his prestigious lecturing post in the Faculty of Philosophy at Belgrade University, he was denied all jobs for which he applied. Unlike Djilas, who was imprisoned, in theory Dedijer remained a free man. Yet, he could not work to support his wife and five children; he was (initially) denied a passport so he could not seek employment abroad; he was prevented from publishing his work, even if it was non-political; and his former friends were told to ostracise

²⁰ S. Dedijer, *My Life*, p. 179

²¹ 'Letter from Djilas to Dedijer', 29th January 1954, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

²² 'Letter from Dedijer to Djilas', 31st January 1954, *ibid*

him. The apparent hope was that driven to misery and despair, watching his family suffer the consequences of his insubordination, he would in the end recant.

Anyone who remained linked to Dedijer was also persecuted. His brother Stevan was fired from his editorship of *Tanjug* and was denied his doctorate in atomic science.²³ Furthermore, Stevan's wife, influenced by social and economic pressure, divorced him - 'with your Djilas-ite thinking you will be arrested. The secretary of Ranković, my friend, told me that you are on the list of those to be arrested. I must take care of our girls.'²⁴ Given this ostracism Stevan seriously considered suicide: 'I often thought of hanging myself in central Belgrade in the hope that the masses of people would see me hanging as a protest against the party to which I had devoted my life.'²⁵ Pavle Ilić and his wife, who also refused to sacrifice their friendship with Dedijer and his family, faced a concerted campaign to isolate them socially, economically and politically. They were fired from their jobs as archaeologists and forced to make a living as a chauffeur and a waitress.²⁶ Their punishment was to serve the very party members who had destroyed their lives.

After donating his substantial fortune from the foreign royalties of his biography of Tito, Dedijer found himself destitute when he fell from grace. His second wife Vera refused to divorce him and as a result she too was expelled from the party, losing her income. As a result Dedijer turned to writing non-political articles and book reviews for foreign journals. These journals tended to be socialist in orientation and therefore were not in a position to pay large fees. For five years the family subsisted meagrely on bread, soup and cabbage. This period appears to have deeply affected Dedijer's children. On one occasion, with Vera seriously ill, Dedijer

²³ S. Dedijer, 'Research and Freedom in Undeveloped Countries', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. XIII, No. 7, (1957), p. 238

²⁴ Dedijer, *My Life*, p. 179

²⁵ *ibid*, p. 225

²⁶ 'Letter from Dedijer to Milica Dedijer', 15th October 1979, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 54

suggested that the only way to relieve his family's suffering was to commit suicide by taking poison. Dedijer's children overheard this remark, screaming, 'we are all going to take poison in our bread and die.'²⁷

Given these circumstances, Dedijer began to criticise his friend whose actions had brought such hardships. After all, he believed that Djilas's family was living, comparatively, better than his own. He lamented that while he had given his book royalties away, Djilas's wife had hoarded her husband's: 'Instead of giving the money to some foreign socialist enterprise, Mrs Djilas keeps all the money so that she and her child live really well!'²⁸ Dedijer's anger was also perhaps driven by his friend's lack of sympathy and support. In their own arms race of victimhood, Djilas reasoned: 'with his large family, Dedijer had trouble making ends meet. But so did I. In my own family, though, two sisters, a brother-in-law, all with numerous children, and even more distant relatives, were fired from their jobs and exposed to misery and blackmail.'²⁹

Djilas, like Dedijer, experienced a deliberate and ruthless campaign of disparagement and humiliation. He was prevented from publishing his work – his only source of income; he was denied a passport; his family were harassed and only survived by selling their personal belongings. Secret police occupied the flat opposite his home and anyone who came into contact with him or his family was immediately interrogated. Unlike Dedijer however, Djilas also spent nine years in jail. For the majority of his sentence he was kept in solitary confinement in a freezing prison cell. He was banned from reading and writing, resorting to surreptitiously writing on toilet paper with pencil stubs. The long imprisonment also left a permanent mark on his health - for the rest of his life he had various muscular

²⁷ Sulzberger, *Resistentialists*, p. 186

²⁸ *ibid* p. 174

²⁹ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 375

conditions and his spine was so weak that he had to wear a specially designed hard medical collar to support his neck.³⁰

When these methods failed to achieve the desired outcomes, the Yugoslav communists targeted the dissident's family. A campaign to embarrass Djilas's wife Štefica into denouncing him was launched. Women would approach her in the street and loudly proclaim to be Djilas's mistress. On one occasion, after such a proclamation, Štefica was arrested and appeared in court 'on a charge of having created a public disturbance.'³¹ As within all communist regimes, once the party had decreed an individual as an enemy of the state, the rest of the population jumped in behind this decision. With little instruction from the party, parents encouraged their children to belittle Djilas's. The bullying of Djilas's eldest daughter Vukica, at the hands of her teachers and fellow pupils, forced her to change her name to Vukica Mitrović. Djilas's only son Aleksa was also bullied as a child because of his father. This continued throughout his military service at the Austrian border and it persuaded him to leave Yugoslavia and study abroad. Yet the Yugoslav communists' reach was long. Aleksa received numerous death threats; accusations of being a 'Chetnik' and a 'terrorist'; and even needed police protection in London following a provocative interview which his father gave to George Urban.³²

The persecution of Djilas and his family is illuminating. It provides a unique insight into their characters and personalities. While Dedijer and his family struggled to adapt to the split from the party, the Djilas family seemed to embrace the oppression that followed Milovan's drive to confront his comrades. They saw within their hardships a means of exposing the evils of the regime. Aleksa, like his father, was proud and defiant. He bravely refused police protection in London and decided

³⁰ Doder, *The Yugoslavs*, p. 193

³¹ Djokić, 'Britain and Dissent in Tito's Yugoslavia', p. 378

³² Urban, 'A Conversation with Milovan Djilas', *Encounter*, p. 10

to begin his own campaign against Titoism. He also recalled how his mother was 'never easily frightened' and, despite all the measures of the authorities, was never intimidated: 'For many of our relatives, it was a life between the two extremes, on one hand suffering, but on the other the hope of a bright future because of this suffering - Djido was still a world famous man.'³³

While Djilas and his family developed a keen sense of their own martyrdom, Dedijer's family continued to suffer from Titoist oppression. This is exemplified by the events of 1959. Dedijer was forced to watch as his children were deprived of the privileges that they had grown accustomed to. They were isolated from their friends, and were continually harassed by the police when attending and leaving school. This harassment was not without effect. In retribution, Dedijer's son Branko smashed the windows of what he believed to be a surveillance car. The Yugoslav police hauled the 12 year-old boy in for interrogation and only released him on the promise that he would report back to them on his father's activities. At the same time Branko was bullied at school for being an 'enemy of the country' and was held up in front of the school as a disgrace. He had failed an examination and was publicly lectured as 'a miserable example of anti-regime elements.'³⁴ The case of Branko Dedijer demonstrates that while the Yugoslav communist regime took on a freer, more democratic, more tolerant facade, the party was no less spiteful than the rest of the Soviet Bloc. It went to every length to discourage any questioning of the party. It was for this reason that Branko was made to suffer the same torment as his father.

On 7 September 1959 Branko committed suicide. He left a note explaining that he had disgraced his family and suicide was the only honourable way out.³⁵ In its vindictive obsession to bring Dedijer to heel, the Tito regime also trapped a 12 year-

³³ V. Vojinović, 'Aleksa Djilas: Đido', *Vijesti*, December 2009, p. 8

³⁴ Sulzberger, *Resistantists*, p. 194

³⁵ V. Dedijer, 'Kronologija dolezni Marka Dedijera', 31st January 1973, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

old boy in an apparatus he could not hope to understand. The shock and horror of Branko's death led Dedijer to the belief that no loyalty to a friend or cause was worth losing his son. He confided to Bato Tomašević that he constantly reproached himself over this moment for his whole life.³⁶ Not only did Dedijer have to deal with the heartbreak of losing his son, he was also held largely responsible by the communist regime. It was reported that Branko was a poorly behaved child who was struggling in school because his father 'failed to take an interest in his unfortunate son.'³⁷ He also received letters and threats from unknown individuals, stating that the tragedy was his punishment for being a traitor to the Yugoslav people and a Djilas collaborator.³⁸

However, the tragic event also appears to have shocked Tito, who was certainly more compassionate than many of his Eastern Bloc counterparts. Less than two months after the tragedy, Dedijer and his whole family received passports. Vlado was permitted to accept a position at Manchester University and take his wife and three youngest children with him; his eldest, Milica, was permitted to live in the United States; and his brother Stevan was allowed to study in Denmark with Niels Bohr. It is not possible to prove any link between Branko's death and the party's sudden leniency, but the sequence of events is revealing. It can be inferred that Tito, who had lost so many of his own children with his first Russian wife, was persuaded by this death to relax his maltreatment of Dedijer and his family.

On his return to Yugoslavia in the mid-1960s Dedijer experienced a further tragedy. Just eight years after Branko's suicide, in July 1966 his eldest son Boro was found dead near Lake Bohinj in the Slovenian Alps. The cause of death was unclear.

³⁶ Nebojša 'Bato' Tomašević interview with the author, 6th March 2014, Exeter, United Kingdom

³⁷ N. Smiljić, 'Smrt dva Dedijera', *Novosti Online*, 22nd November 2003, http://www.novosti.rs/dodatni_sadržaj/clanci.119.html:276301-Smrt-dva-Dedijera

³⁸ 'Letter from Dedijer to J.L. Kopričić', 24th July 1990, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

The Yugoslav authorities declared that it was a mountain accident, but Dedijer was not convinced. In an interview with *Mladina* he proclaimed: 'UDBA killed my two sons'.³⁹ On his return to Yugoslavia, and just before Boro's death, he had been receiving a number of threatening letters. This was proof to Dedijer that the 'Stalinist hardliners' in the party were renewing their campaign against him.⁴⁰

Despite Dedijer's protestations that foul play had happened, it appears that the death was another suicide. Only 6 months earlier Boro had written an article for the Slovene Student Journal *Tribuna*. In the article he spoke of feeling lost and alienated like many young people with the 'corrupt and repugnant authorities that less and less resemble everyday people.' He continued that, 'our civilisation is conceited because of egocentrism, incredible arrogance, narcissism ... we as humans are powerless, to be human is degrading.'⁴¹ Slovenia had been racked by a number of suicides and a disproportionate amount of these had been the children of former Partisans. These included the son of the playwright Jože Javoršek and the son of Edvard Kardelj. Both felt that they could not live up to their overbearing and absent fathers. In the 1960s and 70s, throughout the northernmost republic, a number of suicide clubs formed - Dedijer's son appears to have joined one called 'Banzai.'⁴² These suicide clubs attracted various high school and university students. They hoped that by committing 'altruistic suicides' they would awaken the population's conscience and force the party into reform.

The death of his second son deeply affected Dedijer. More than a decade of enforced isolation within Yugoslavia had not been without effect. In addition to

³⁹ N. Smiljić, 'Pisac Agent Službe', *Novosti Online*, 23rd November 2003, http://www.novosti.rs/dodatni_sadržaj/clanci.119.html:276302-Pisac-agent-službe

⁴⁰ 'Letter from Dedijer to Milica Dedijer', 15th October 1979, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 54

⁴¹ B. Dedijer, 'Kratko izrekamo hvaleznost svojo da ni življenje nikdar večno', *Tribuna: študentski časopis*, Vol.16, Issue 12, (1965-66), p. 10

⁴² 'Brei des Hasses', *Der Spiegel*, Issue 10, 3rd March 1969, p. 132

being his son, the nineteen year-old Boro was Vlado's closest friend and collaborator. He wrote:

How I have suffered. Was it an accident, murder or did he himself decide that he had had enough of his life? Boro was my closest friend, a first rate intellectual, despite his youth. He had a sense for the abstract and was my closest critic. That is why I miss him so much. In truth I have acquaintances and see them, for example historians like Zwitter, but our conversations deal only with history. It does not seem humane to burden them with my cares, which are not small ... Branko's death had poisoned Boro day after day. Boro had seen his brother hanging at the end of the rope, it tortured him. He always pressed me to avenge Branko, but I was helpless; I could not bring my dead son back to life.⁴³

Dedijer tried to escape his grief by burying himself in his work. Yet, it was his decision to return to Yugoslavia and re-establish himself as a prominent intellectual that put immense pressure on his family. He wrote to Djilas: 'I am tortured by the fact that my family was happy in the West but they returned to Yugoslavia against their will because of their love for me and my wishes.'⁴⁴ Vlado's wife came from Slovenia and he felt that the greater intellectual freedom in the republic was conducive to furthering his academic career and rewriting Yugoslav history. However, while his surviving son Marko had flourished in schools in England and America, he struggled in Ljubljana. His command of Slovenian was weak and his teachers berated him in front of his peers for communicating in a mixture of Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian and English. Like his elder brothers he was also harassed

⁴³ 'Letter from Dedijer to Djilas', 13th January 1967, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 179

⁴⁴ *ibid*

by the police, and attempted suicide.⁴⁵ His father prevented his attempt to hang himself, but Marko descended into drug addiction and depression.⁴⁶ After further suicide attempts Marko was eventually diagnosed with schizophrenia and hospitalised.⁴⁷

The vicissitudes of Dedijer's personal life appear to have only reinforced his tendency to view himself as a victim. He was also a passionate and rather unstable man. On the surface it appears that after facing so many tragedies in his life, many of which befell him after defending Djilas, he began to blame his friend for his misfortune. In reality, both men kept in contact until 1967 and, given their enforced isolation, confided in each other. In a letter to Djilas in 1961 Dedijer unburdened: 'Djido, I cannot escape premature violent death ... I cannot explain the sadness that has come following Branko's death. I feel like crying every afternoon.'⁴⁸ Djilas replied expressing his solidarity:

Dear Vlado, I am not able to send anything except words. But know that I stand behind them – with all my strongest feelings. Take these few lines as proof of the fact that I am constantly thinking of you. It sounds banal if I say, as the saying goes, how little and worthless everything appears at life and death moments! But that is how I feel, thinking of you today and during these days. When everything between us is added together I tell myself: Everything is unimportant to me beside our friendship.⁴⁹

Again Dedijer turned to Djilas with the death of Boro. It was Djilas who provided the verse written on Boro's tomb, because he had a 'fine feeling for human

⁴⁵ 'Brei des Hasses,' *Der Spiegel*, p. 132

⁴⁶ 'Letter from Milica Dedijer to Dedijer', 16th December 1973, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 54

⁴⁷ 'Letter from Vera Dedijer to Maria', 3rd January 1974, *ibid*

⁴⁸ 'Letter from Dedijer to Djilas', 22nd March 1961, *ibid*

⁴⁹ 'Letter from Djilas to Dedijer', 27th February 1964, *ibid*

tragedy.⁵⁰ However, only a few years later their relationship completely deteriorated. While Dedijer did not blame Djilas directly for his adversity, he certainly began to reappraise his past. He wrote: ‘Djido, do you think all the wrongs that have happened to me and my family after 1954 are revenge for our actions between 1948 and 1954 when we were in power? Revenge for all the injustices we committed, like killing our comrades at Goli Otok?’⁵¹

Open Attacks

While there had been some visible contempt between the two men (especially in the years following their fall from power), this had morphed into something greater by the 1970s. After rekindling his relationship with Tito, Dedijer developed an obsessive loathing of Djilas. What had caused this change? They first clashed publicly over whether the Russell Tribunal should investigate Kurt Waldheim’s wartime past, and it was while mixing with these Western intellectuals that Dedijer had begun to reanalyse his friend.⁵² He related to Jennie Lee that Djilas had a negative and unsocialist Montenegrin attitude towards women; and when Sartre compared Djilas’s bravery with that of the Montenegrins during the Napoleonic wars, Dedijer was quick to point out that the Montenegrins had beheaded their French enemies and Djilas too had a violent streak.⁵³ These comments were both harmful and embarrassing for Djilas. He had just re-emerged from prison and his only contacts were the very same Western humanists and socialists.

⁵⁰ ‘Letter from Dedijer to Djilas’, 13th January 1967, *ibid*, box 179

⁵¹ *ibid*

⁵² Special Report – Austrian Press Summary No. 130/86, (CIA), (Office of Current Intelligence), 16th July 1986, CIA-28396284, p. 1

⁵³ Dedijer, ‘Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*’, 15th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

Like Djilas, Dedijer also sought approval from these high-profile Western intellectuals, and may have been jealous of Djilas's success and acclaim in the West. Hence the comments that he made to Jennie Lee and Sartre. Meanwhile, Djilas resented Dedijer for exploiting his reputation as Tito's official biographer to procure well-paid lectures abroad. Dedijer had engineered his partial support of Djilas's private rebellion into an illustrious position on the prestigious Bertrand Russell War Tribunal, while Djilas was constrained to a tiny flat in Belgrade. Bato Tomašević noted that, 'both were similar in their stubbornness and ego-centricity. This was only exacerbated with their careers in the West. Now, in a capitalist system, they believed that they had to prove themselves, even if this was at the expense of each other.'⁵⁴

It was under this backdrop that the two men met for the final time in 1967 at the *Dva Jelena* restaurant in Belgrade. Djilas accepted his friend's invitation because of his 'disparagement of me and my wife to the British Labourites ... I went in the hope of smoothing over old enmities.'⁵⁵ Dedijer's motivations were very different. Given that he was writing a revisionist history of the war, he wanted to know more about the taboo subject of Yugoslav-German negotiations during 1943. The emergence of such a revelation was as damaging to Djilas as it was to the Yugoslav regime. Accommodation with the Nazis was anathema to a self-styled courageous rebel and champion of freedom. Djilas denied any peace talks but Dedijer called his bluff, producing a German document with his signature. According to Dedijer's account, Djilas stormed out of the restaurant stating only: 'You know, I don't wish to reveal state secrets to you.'⁵⁶ After 30 years of friendship - a friendship that survived monarchical dictatorship, Nazi invasion, the split with Stalin, and the split with Tito - the two men never spoke again.

⁵⁴ Nebojša 'Bato' Tomašević interview with the author, 6th March 2014, Exeter, United Kingdom

⁵⁵ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 377

⁵⁶ M. Djorgović, 'Istina o našem ratu i nama danas', *Danas*, 4th October 2013, p. 12

However, they continued their dispute in their books. In his sensationalist reinterpretations of modern Yugoslav history, Dedijer attacked the reputation of Djilas and his family. While *Novi Prilozi* has often been described as an anti-Tito book, for much of its three volumes Tito was still portrayed as a generally positive figure. He has a decidedly human character with both positive and negative qualities. Djilas, however, was not treated as fairly. Of all of Tito's former lieutenants analysed in *Novi Prilozi*, Djilas certainly received the most severe treatment. Old lingering resentments were expressed. Dedijer debunked and unmasked him - he was no longer the chief martyr of Yugoslav dissidents. He revelled in revealing disputed details of Djilas's cruelty towards political enemies and towards those in his own ranks. The allegations of 'war crimes' mounted up as he became personally involved in executions, hangings and murders. Only a few years earlier Djilas had already uncovered some of the horrifying Partisan practises in his extraordinarily candid memoir *Wartime*. However, in Dedijer's account, Djilas became responsible for virtually everything immoral in Partisan warfare. He was also made solely guilty for spreading lies and half-truths in politics and propaganda in the post-war years, years in which Dedijer was working by his side.

Dedijer was now irritated, like so many of his former comrades before him, by Djilas's puritanism. He attacked his former friend's censures of party member's sexual activities before the war. He claimed that Djilas, 'carried away by his own vanity', tried to claim credit for the Yugoslav communists' asceticism. This was hypocritical. While Djilas had one Bosnian communist, only known as Paternoster, killed for his numerous affairs, Djilas himself had many 'healthy love affairs.'⁵⁷ A more damaging allegation however, concerned Djilas's father. In Dedijer's account,

⁵⁷ Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 1, p. 627

Nikola Djilas was a bourgeois Serbian nationalist who murdered numerous Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia before the First World War. This directly resulted in an insurrection in Kosovo in 1913 and later the mass expulsion of Serbs and Montenegrins in 1914. The Albanians took revenge on the Serbs who had oppressed them, and some, including Djilas's father, were murdered.⁵⁸ Like many of Dedijer's revelations, the fate of Nikola had been greatly altered. Djilas's father was killed by Albanians, but not in 1914. Instead he died in 1943 when he was attacked by Albanian fascists. Dedijer distanced himself from this mistake, blaming his publishers for a typographical error.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, whether he originally wrote that Nikola was killed in 1914 or 1943, his motive for including this story was evident. He was implying a genetic link between all of Milovan's misdeeds and the alleged crimes of his father. They were both bourgeoisie Serbian nationalists. It was for this reason that he even claimed that Milovan's son Aleksa was a Chetnik counterrevolutionary. Aleksa was not born until 1953. Dedijer was well acquainted with Djilas's family, so it appears that these falsifications and half-truths were not simply innocent mistakes. Instead they represented a determined campaign to denigrate Djilas and his family.

Seeing such vitriolic attacks coming from a man that had once been a close friend shocked and angered Djilas. He hit back in the final part of his autobiography *Rise and Fall*, where he questioned: 'What is the matter with Dedijer? Slovenly research? Malice? Madness? Or all three at once?'⁶⁰ The book itself was partly written in order to refute 'untrue', 'distorted', and 'misinterpreted' claims. He admitted that, 'it was my original intention to devote an entire chapter to a point-by-point rebuttal of

⁵⁸ Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi*, Vol. 2, p. 589

⁵⁹ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 7th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁶⁰ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 381

Dedijer's inaccuracies concerning me in his book about Tito.'⁶¹ Djilas defended himself by making the salient point that many of Dedijer's claims were gross exaggerations if not complete falsities, noting: 'disastrously characteristic of him is the conscious, almost congenital ease in which he fabricates and perverts reality.'⁶² Yet, in his refutations he denied a number of truths. He claimed that 'Dedijer was never my closest-friend' and denied any knowledge of the communist known as Paternoster.⁶³ This was despite his acknowledgment in an earlier memoir that, 'on the way back he fell off the train "accidentally" and was killed instantly. That was the public story - but we knew better.'⁶⁴ Therefore, in an attempt to sully Dedijer's credentials, he was falling into the very same practise of making blatant falsifications. He too was rewriting history from the present.

Given the very public nature of their dispute and Djilas's standing within certain circles in the West, a number of intellectuals condemned Dedijer. He appeared to have sided with Tito and unfairly criticised the rebellious Montenegrin. In responding to this criticism, made by the British historian Nora Beloff, Dedijer revealed the bitterness that he now held for his former friend:

From 1954 to today I have defended his right to freely express his thoughts and publish his books ... For such protests I have been bitterly punished. I lost my chair at Belgrade University. No book of mine was published in Yugoslavia for 13 years. My family had no income throughout that period. To this day I continue to receive anonymous death threats, and I lost two of my sons in circumstances still not clarified.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p. 380

⁶² *ibid*, p. 303

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ Djilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, p. 296

More recently the house of my German publisher was blown up and someone tried to burn down the building housing my archives.⁶⁵

From Dedijer's response it appears that he now held Djilas responsible for all the misfortunes that had befallen him since 1954. In a letter to *The Times Literary Supplement* he acknowledged that Djilas's reckless and short-sighted behaviour had inadvertently caused him much hardship, and this was his main motivating factor in reassessing him.⁶⁶ He defended his decision, noting: 'Milovan Djilas has suffered a lot, yet this suffering does not make him infallible nor give him the right to immunity from independent scholarly assessment.'⁶⁷ However, Dedijer's blatant exaggerations and half-truths suggest that he was not simply motivated to produce a serious piece of academic study. There was something more sinister in his reassessment.

Given that Dedijer appeared to reject his friend at the same time as his rapprochement with Tito, Djilas was led to the unavoidable conclusion that Dedijer's blatant campaign against him was motivated by the Marshal. Dedijer had struck a deal with Tito; he would be rehabilitated if he condemned Yugoslavia's arch-rebel. This idea was also reported in the Yugoslav daily *Politika*, following the release of *Novi Prilozi* in 1981.⁶⁸ Tito had always been sympathetic towards 'Vlado' and had tried to protect him from the regime's worst excesses. In addition, following their reconciliation, Dedijer was given full access to all of the country's archives, historical institutes and even Tito's own papers. Such acquiescence appeared to support the notion that Dedijer had made a deal with Tito to discredit Djilas. After

⁶⁵ V. Dedijer, 'Relations with Djilas', *The New York Review of Books*, 26th September 1985, p. 48

⁶⁶ E. Barker, 'Conditioning and Condemning', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 18th January 1985, p. 61

⁶⁷ V. Dedijer, 'Relations with Djilas', *The New York Review of Books*, p. 48

⁶⁸ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 380

all, this was a period in which the Titoist regime felt threatened by the increasing interest in Djilas and his ideas among certain sections of society. Dedijer, however, denied this accusation, noting: ‘It is silly to state I made a deal with the Yugoslav authorities about Milovan Djilas. No conditions or understandings on the nature of my book on Tito were ever made. I, after all, am a free man in the full sense of the word.’⁶⁹ Whether Dedijer made a deal with Tito or not, the publication of the book would not have been possible without their reconciliation.

Communism as a Failed Ideology? – Drawing Different Conclusions

Whereas Djilas’s fall from power marked the end of his belief in communism, for Dedijer it was a more extricating experience. His faith in Marxism was damaged but he could not turn his back on it completely. Doing so would be to give up on the better, more just future that the doctrine promised. Until the late 1960s this had left him completely isolated in Yugoslavia. He became a pariah in much of society because he was considered an anti-party element, yet he was also shunned by the anti-communists for his continued faith in the doctrine. Djilas, on the other hand, had begun socialising with other anti-communist intellectuals such as Borislav Mihajlović-Mihiz, Dobrica Ćosić and Matija Bećković. This partly explains how Dedijer was able to make peace with Tito in the late 1960s. He was still a committed Marxist and was not embedded in any dissident milieu.

In the aftermath of the events of 1954, Dedijer’s personal ideology evolved but he continued to define it as ‘communism’ – just as Tito had done when he broke with Stalin. He believed that the Yugoslav political system could still be reformed –

⁶⁹ V. Dedijer, ‘Relations with Djilas’, *The New York Review of Books*, p. 48

communism was still a workable ideology, the state just needed to implement it in the right way. When Nikita Khrushchev visited Belgrade in June 1955, just a year after the fall of Djilas, Dedijer proudly proclaimed that ‘Titoism has won the struggle against Stalinism.’⁷⁰ He believed that Yugoslav social forces made real socialism a possibility in the country and believed it could even be rescued in the Soviet Union. He told a journalist from *Radio Free Europe* that, ‘the social forces will also gain standing even in the Soviet Union although this will take a very long time.’⁷¹

Djilas’s rebellion in 1954 demonstrated that, unlike Dedijer, he believed that the possibility to reform the Yugoslav state within the boundaries of the communist system had reached a dead end. Following the events in Hungary, he concluded that communism as a doctrine had failed and demanded the introduction of a social democratic regime in Yugoslavia.⁷² By the 1970s he remarked that all that remained of Marxism was, ‘a ceaseless movement into new circumstances and new possibilities.’⁷³ Djilas was referring to the endless attempts of communist revisionism that were allegedly ‘rescuing’ the doctrine of Marxism. Djilas disparaged this revisionism because he believed that communism could not be saved. His remark seems to have been partly motivated by an open letter published by Dedijer only a few months earlier. In a letter to Sartre in *The New York Times*, Dedijer appeared to be supporting the ‘deteriorated’ type of Marxism that Djilas condemned. He urged Sartre to look past their generation because they had failed to implement a genuine Marxist society and in turn create a better world. Instead, he encouraged him to place his faith in the New American Left. He wrote, the United

⁷⁰ ‘The Case of Vladimir Dedijer’, *Radio Free Europe*, 23rd November 1956, p. 1

⁷¹ *ibid*, p.4

⁷² ‘Vladimir Dedijer – His Master’s Voice’, *Radio Free Europe*, 10th May 1957, p. 5

⁷³ M. Djilas, ‘On Alienation: Thoughts on a Marxist Myth’, *Encounter*, May 1971, p. 15

States today 'is a real Noah's Ark with all kinds of rebels ... whose effort is to liberate man in all his repressive relationships.'⁷⁴

Dedijer was typical of many disillusioned Marxists. Unable to extricate himself from an ideology that had dominated his life, he continually tried to revise the doctrine. He believed that communism could be renewed and ultimately achieve its goal of a better, fairer world. In this respect Dedijer was a revisionist Marxist in the mould of Leszek Kołakowski. Like Djilas, Dedijer regarded individuals such as Stalin, and to a lesser extent Tito, as aberrations. Yet, he gave no indication that he believed the failures of Marxism went beyond the flaws of individual leaders, but were instead intrinsic to the doctrine of communism. For this reason, in contrast to Djilas, Dedijer never felt the need to provide an analysis of the essential meaning of communism.

The differing political development of both men meant that they clashed over certain international events. In a statement given to *Politika* in the 1980s, Dedijer accused Djilas of supporting America in the war with Vietnam: 'A big conflict between myself and Djilas erupted at the time of the Vietnam war. While he was praising the morale of the American troops in Vietnam, I was condemning them before the Bertrand Russell Tribunal.'⁷⁵ Djilas denied this claim on two counts: 'First, there could have been no squabble over Vietnam, big or little, since he and I never engaged in any discussion, public or private, over that war. Second, only once did I make a public statement on the Vietnam war - and against American intervention at that.'⁷⁶ Djilas did not want to be seen to be supporting a supposedly aggressive 'imperialist' foreign country, but Dedijer's assertion appears to have been born out of some fact. The British journalist David Pryce-Jones recalled Djilas

⁷⁴ V. Dedijer, 'A Letter to Jean-Paul Sartre', *The New York Times*, 4th February 1971, p. 35

⁷⁵ 'Intervju sa Vladimirom Dedijerom', *Politika*, 13th March 1982, p. 9

⁷⁶ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 379

telling him before an interview: 'I know nothing about you, you may be a spy or provocateur. But if you have any influence, use it to tell the Americans that they must win the war in Vietnam.'⁷⁷

Djilas's complete repudiation of communism shocked Dedijer. In his disillusionment Djilas appeared to be supporting Western 'exploitative' capitalism. Dedijer wrote:

[Djilas] accused the Soviet Union of being the only imperialist state in the world at a time when the United States was conducting a colonial war in Vietnam. On several occasions he openly flattered the USA, praising the American social system and the freedom in it. He did not utter a single word of criticism of US society or undemocratic actions in the world ... Even Solzhenitsyn behaved differently to Djilas. He suffered greatly in the Soviet concentration camps, but once in the United States, after telling his truth on the Soviet Union he made a deep criticism of Western society.⁷⁸

Herein lies a partial answer as to why their relationship deteriorated. In 1954 they actually agreed on little beyond the absolute necessity of freedom of opinions in the party. In addition, they drew very different conclusions from their purging. For a man that was still committed to communism and the freedom that it promised, Dedijer believed that Djilas was prostituting himself out to capitalist circles in the West. In 1968 Djilas travelled to New York and received that year's Freedom Award. During his acceptance speech he praised the United States and proclaimed himself a 'die-hard anti-communist'.⁷⁹ In Dedijer's eyes Djilas had betrayed

⁷⁷ D. Pryce-Jones, 'Remembering Milovan Djilas', *The New Criterion*, Vol. 18, October 1999, p. 8

⁷⁸ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 15th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁷⁹ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 294

socialism and the Yugoslav left. He lamented: ‘the Cold War is in full swing and he has deliberately chose to be on the side of the USA and their corporations. He completely neglected the rising gulf between rich and poor. He increasingly keeps the company of foreign collaborators and publishers pursuing a Cold War agenda.’⁸⁰

Djilas’s transformation dumfounded Dedijer. He believed that Djilas’s years in jail had seriously affected his judgment, as had his idiosyncratic personality. ‘He has a mood of swinging like a pendulum from one side to another.’⁸¹ Jennie Lee, one of Djilas’s most ardent supporters, also recalled this trait, lamenting: ‘Milovan Djilas ... seemed to us to have reacted so violently against the earlier devotion to Stalin that he was in danger of exaggerating the virtues of the Western world.’⁸² As he would do in his later works, Dedijer focused on the supposed flaws of Djilas’s Montenegrin character, noting: ‘Djilas’s orientation with the West was the greatest disgrace in his life ... of course there are the sad traditions of Montenegrin tribes joining their enemies when hungry or in danger of annihilation.’⁸³ Dedijer was suggesting that Djilas’s belief in the total righteousness of the West was no different to his total belief in Stalin and then Titoism. It was a form of escapism and therefore there could be no nuances in his support for the West, because any escape needs to be total.

In reality Djilas tended to refrain from observing either the strengths or weaknesses of the Western political systems. While he did admit that Western capitalism was a better alternative than communist dictatorship - ‘Eastern bureaucratic socialism is in every respect inferior to democratic capitalism’ - he acknowledged that both systems were inherently bad and inhibited the freedom of

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ Dedijer, ‘Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*’, 10th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁸² Lee, *My Life with Nye*, p. 194

⁸³ Dedijer, ‘Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*’, 15th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

the individual.⁸⁴ Categorized on the basis of what he opposed, he found a ready welcome among the hard-core Western capitalists who persistently misread his diatribes against communism as sympathetic to their own world views. Somewhat closer to the truth, political commentators interpreted the ‘neo-revisionism’ of Djilas as symptomatic of the triumph of pragmatism over ideology in Eastern Europe. After all, in the practical sense, the ‘Djilas Affair’ demonstrated the limit of political initiative and free expression in what was deemed the most liberalised of the communist states. In this respect, Djilas was simultaneously a product and a casualty of the Cold War. It was the ideological point-scoring of the Cold War, in which the superpowers in turn sought to monopolise virtue in different fields, which catapulted Djilas into isolation and despair, and it was the same system which celebrated him and adopted him, assigning him the role of world-famous martyr.

Therefore, the striking revisions of communist theory that were largely originating from the West during the 1960s and 1970s seem to have directly affected the men’s relationship with each other. This revisionism was not uniform; in fact the only common theme was the denunciation of the totalitarian tradition of thought. Just like in the inter-war period, there was a multifaceted and rancorous dispute about the future of communism. The framework of the debate had changed, but as Djilas and Dedijer demonstrate, the left was no closer to agreement.

***Veliki buntovnik* – Dedijer’s Biography of Djilas**

Following the success of his revisionist biography of Tito and his new critical thoughts concerning Djilas, Dedijer felt compelled to write his biography. In a letter

⁸⁴ N. Beloff, ‘Liberal Communism is like Fried Snowballs’, *The Observer*, 6th February 1977, p. 6

to Mary Erwin he noted that this book was the most important to him personally - 'I am impelled to work day and night until I complete it.'⁸⁵ Djilas had already written his own four-part autobiography, but Dedijer reasoned that a more critical account was needed to overcome the hero-worship of Yugoslavia's arch-rebel in certain domestic and Western circles. He stated:

He is an incredibly interesting and controversial personality. Yet most of all he is a violent Dinaric type. This is a man that stabbed his own brother, a man that was involved in many murders of which he either ignores, places the blame on others or describes in a detached almost documentary fashion ... I think about Djilas a lot, I am not really his enemy, I sacrificed myself for him after all, and anyone that has the courage to voice their own opinion must be credited. However after 1968 he had turned his back on these noble values. Now he aims to simply appeal to the West!⁸⁶

The biography was entitled *Veliki buntovnik: Milovan Đilas* (Great Rebel: Milovan Djilas) and Djilas was primarily depicted as a man of violence. This built on Dedijer's claim in *Novi Prilozi* that Djilas was an 'an inveterate murderer', but it also built upon the anti-Djilas propaganda of the communist regime in the 1970s. Dedijer repeated the rumours and hearsay from the war concerning Djilas's penchant for killing as fact.⁸⁷ Yet he also took this imagery of the violent and sadistic Montenegrin further than even the Titoist regime believed plausible. Dedijer's accounts of Djilas during the war resemble a villain in an epic poem – he would lick

⁸⁵ 'Letter from Dedijer to Mary Erwin', 11th April 1968, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 54

⁸⁶ Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 15th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

⁸⁷ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 263

the blood off his bayonet and proclaim to his soldiers that ‘if you taste the enemy’s blood he cannot kill you.’⁸⁸

Not only was Dedijer’s Djilas violent but he was also a coward: a further accusation that the Titoist government refrained from, given Djilas’s war record and known recklessness. Far from defiantly standing up to police interrogation in the interwar years, Dedijer accused Djilas of betraying his comrades. He provided a number of police reports that named numerous underground revolutionaries and appeared to be signed by Djilas. Dedijer left the reader in no doubt, noting: ‘I can assure you, seeing his signature and handwriting numerous times, his signature is real.’⁸⁹ Even the most ardent anti-Djilasist had to admit that he played a vital role in one the Yugoslav communists’ greatest achievements – the rejection of Stalin and the Soviet Union. However, in complete contrast to Djilas’s own accounts, Dedijer suggested that the Montenegrin undermined his comrades’ criticisms of Stalin. Rather than being indignant about the Red Army’s behaviour in Yugoslavia at the end of the war, Djilas wrote to Stalin apologising for his comrades’ attacks: ‘I beg you to excuse my disturbing you, but I, like the rest, feel very wretched if it appears that we are ungrateful to you and to the Red Army.’⁹⁰

To compound this accusation Dedijer suggested that Djilas was completely unstable. After being declared a Trotskyite by the Soviet Union, he claimed that the only option was to commit suicide: an alleged threat he also made under the stress of imprisonment and during the battle of Sutjeska.⁹¹ What was Dedijer’s motivation in making these accusations? The book was written in the late 1980s when the communist state was collapsing. A number of liberals were suggesting that Djilas

⁸⁸ *ibid*, p. 164

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p. 181

⁹⁰ *ibid*, p. 279

⁹¹ *ibid*, p. 179, 225, 292

could be the man to lead Yugoslavia through a complicated transition to socialist democracy. Dedijer's Djilas however, exhibited 'unbalanced behaviour', his mood swinging from one extreme to the other, from optimistic euphoria to pessimism. This mental instability appeared to disqualify him from becoming a political figure again. He lacked the prerequisite qualities of leadership.

The most striking feature of Dedijer's biography of Djilas was the criticism of his Montenegrin background and 'violent Dinaric character'. Since his fall from power, Djilas had already drawn on his heritage to explain his psyche, as Dedijer himself had done. In Dedijer's new study however, these qualities were not positive but wholly negative. In describing the 'violent Dinaric character', he wrote:

A Dinaric man believes that there are no difficulties which he could not overcome (in this way they consider themselves to be chosen by God), they possess an overly vivid imagination and untamed nature, are prone to sudden changes of ideas, have a grandiose view of themselves, a complete lack of any self-critical instinct, see the world in black and white, have an inclination to self-pity, a lack of real knowledge and finally an intolerance to the extreme ... these violent types make rapid, uncontrollable decisions, stooping all the way to methods of treason, cheating, murder and massacres.⁹²

Dedijer believed that Djilas's homeland was permanently a part of him, it defined him and his actions. All the negative traits of the Montenegrin psyche were embodied in him. However, Dedijer himself descended from the Dinaric Mountains. Did these criticisms not also apply to him? The journalist Momčilo Djorgović posed this question just before his death. Were these negative traits found in all Dinaric

⁹² Dedijer, 'Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*', 14th February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

peoples or just Montenegrins? Dedijer candidly replied: 'I almost became racist to Montenegrins and declared the whole nation to be liars, but they are more dramatic than us.'⁹³ Dedijer outlined these perceived differences: 'Djilas is the Dinaric type. After all, I am too. Dinarics are brave, persistent and proud. However, some, in realisation of their aspirations, are too aggressive. These Dinarics are destructive until the very end. This is where we differ.'⁹⁴ This narcissism of minor differences was a convenient way for Dedijer to explain Djilas's sudden break from the party and his supporting of it. As Cvijić noted of the Dinaric type: 'within them something can happen to change their minds so they can break away from a movement. And they are ready to influence people contagiously around them.'⁹⁵ He had been fooled by the violent Dinaric Montenegrin and this had cost him his position, his reputation and even his sons.

The most irrational of Dedijer's accusations was that Djilas was an anti-Semite. As proof, Dedijer asserted that when the police raided his apartment in 1933 they found a prepared article for the illegal party paper *Udarnik*. Written in Djilas's handwriting it was entitled, 'What is Zionism and what does it want?' The whole article was republished in Dedijer's book. Like a number of revolutionaries on the left, Djilas appeared to have associated 'Zionism' with capitalism and imperialism. In the article Djilas asserted: 'Zionism, organised by the international imperialist gang with the help of Jewish millionaires, represents a mad dog on an imperial leash, growling against the subjugated masses.'⁹⁶

The charge of anti-Semitism had also been made by the Jewish poet Oskar Davičo. In an interview in the Sarajevo review *Svijet*, during a period of intense anti-

⁹³ M. Djorgović, 'Istina o našem ratu i nama danas', *Danas*, 4th October 2013, p. 12

⁹⁴ E. Čengić, 'Zapisi: s akademikom Vladimirom Dedijerom', *Nedjelja*, 18th March 1990, p. 25

⁹⁵ Cvijić, *La Péninsule balkanique*, p. 379

⁹⁶ Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 337

Djilas propaganda, Davičo recalled a comment that Djilas had made to him: ‘You don’t know Serbian and you never will. It is not your language. You are a Jew.’⁹⁷ Yet both Dedijer and Davičo are rather poor witnesses. In the communist underground the men had been good friends and made a living selling Davičo’s poetry. However, Djilas stepped in and prevented Dedijer from assisting Davičo because, ‘he is a traitor, a Trotskyite’ – a possible conflation with Judaism. Davičo and Djilas had been feuding since their time in Sremska Mitrovica prison, and Dedijer was particularly hurt that Djilas had forced him to turn on his friend as well as removing his only source of income (he had just been fired from his position at *Politika*).⁹⁸ Given that Djilas was a pariah in society, accusing him of anti-Semitism was an effective form of revenge. After all, Djilas strictly denied these allegations. He admitted that he may have criticised Davičo for his incomplete use of the Serbian language, but this ‘had nothing to do with his Jewishness.’⁹⁹

In addition, unlike in a number of other Eastern European communist regimes, there was never any observed traces of anti-Semitism in the Yugoslav leadership. In fact the great revolutionary figure in Serbia, Moša Pijade, was of Jewish descent. However, as Dedijer was quick to point out, from the moment that they met in the 1930s until Pijade’s death in 1957, Djilas had a bitter feud with the veteran revolutionary. Despite Dedijer’s allusions to anti-Semitism in this conflict, Djilas only referred to Pijade’s heritage on one occasion – during a conflict in occupied Montenegro where he accused Pijade of wanting to flee to England. Instead, the mutual antagonism appeared to be driven by personal and generational differences rather than anything more sinister.

⁹⁷ O. Davičo, ‘Dilas i antisemitizmu’, *Svijet*, 3rd March 1981, p. 12

⁹⁸ Dedijer, *Beloved Land*, p. 264

⁹⁹ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 288

It should also be noted that Djilas played an important role in combating anti-Semitism in Yugoslavia. For instance, after the trials of Rudolf Slansky and his Jewish friends in Prague, and the arrest of a group of Jewish doctors in Moscow, he wrote a large piece in *Borba* on 14 December 1952, entitled 'Antisemitizam'. He bemoaned: 'anti-Semitism fouls and scorches all that is human in man and all that is democratic in a people. The historical stamp of shame which it imprints cannot be wiped away. The intensity of anti-Semitism is the measure of the extent to which a reactionary social order has succeeded in subjugating its own people.'¹⁰⁰ Dedijer, who was the secretary of the Central Committee, was tasked with distributing Djilas's article around the world through Yugoslav embassies. Therefore, Dedijer was acutely aware of this article that denounced anti-Semitism in all of its forms.

Conclusions

Djilas and Dedijer were drawn together in the revolutionary underground. They were both talented intellectuals who were fully committed to the communist cause. In age, background and personality, they were closer to each other than any other member of the communist leadership. Yet there was a major difference between both men, a difference that would have fateful consequences for their lives. Djilas was totally inflexible in his beliefs and thoughts once they had fully formed in his mind, while Dedijer was more pragmatic. Their relationship foundered during Djilas's removal from power, when Dedijer had to make a decision, or several decisions, of the utmost importance for his future. Djilas's resolve to confront the party leadership led to immense pressure on himself, but also on Dedijer. Those decisions were about

¹⁰⁰ M. Djilas, 'Antisemitizam', *Borba*, 14th December 1952, p. 1

ideas, but they were also about survival and commitment, about the goals and purpose of life - they were existential. Friendship was a collateral casualty of Djilas's tremendous resolve.

Dedijer's defence of Djilas cost him his comfortable standing in society, a society that he was not at odds to repudiate. His decision to confront Tito was out of loyalty to Djilas instead of any real ideological complaint. For this sacrifice he expected gratitude and support from Djilas. He was shocked therefore when his friend rejected his brilliant and spirited defence. Dedijer did not appreciate that Djilas's defiance was special because it was essentially a personal rather than a political act. His protest was a streak of pure idealism, breaking with little warning. Djilas's disillusionment with Titoism was for him alone, it was for his exclusive salvation. For this reason he asked for no support (and thus stoutly rejected Dedijer's efforts to defend him).

This resolve to confront the party brought great strain on both men and their families. The subsequent adversity persuaded Djilas to push on with criticism because he was convinced that his analysis of communism was correct. Perhaps because he was purged from a party that he felt no need to disavow, Dedijer suffered greatly. With a number of tragedies in his own family, his disillusionment with Djilas grew. Given the dialectical nature of communism it appeared that Djilas had taken the wrong turn. He appeared to be aligning himself with Western capitalism – an insult too far for a man that still believed in the utopia that communism promised. In the 1970s Dedijer was drawn back into Tito's political orbit and launched a number of scathing attacks on his former friend. Djilas was shocked and hurt by Dedijer's actions. In his final autobiography, he concluded: 'A truly pathetic epilogue of friendship. Of all the campaigns conducted against me in more than

twenty-eight years in Yugoslavia, his has been the most untruthful, and therefore the most arbitrary and ruthless.’¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 380

Conclusion

Contribution to Existing Literature

By appraising communist Yugoslavia through figures other than Tito, a much more nuanced picture of the country emerges. Through the important political, literary and cultural figures of Djilas and Dedijer, it is possible to understand both the constructive and destructive policies that helped build a multi-ethnic Yugoslavia and then destroy it.

Much has been written on the collapse of Yugoslavia and the role played by the intelligentsia in fostering nationalism. However, much less has been written on why the political climate of the late 1980s was so conducive to this process. Following their removal from power in 1954, Djilas and Dedijer became Communist Yugoslavia's most prominent and persistent critics. They engaged in a number of efforts to weaken the hegemonic position of the party and the narratives that it relied upon. Both men highlighted the democratic deficiencies of the communist state, and its historical and contemporary disregard of human and civil rights. Later dissidents, by contrast, exploited both men's earlier criticisms and revelations to approve the dividing of Yugoslavia into separate nation-states. Since the second process was reliant on Djilas and Dedijer's earlier challenges to the state, the careers of both men are of significant importance.

In their explorations of the emergence of nationalism within the Serbian intelligentsia, Jasna Dragović-Soso and Nick Miller demonstrate that Serbian nationalism was based around a distinct language and mythology. However, it was Djilas and Dedijer who inadvertently helped to formulate these images. The

aforementioned authors also show that the intelligentsias' later embrace of nationalism was fundamentally at odds with their proclaimed support of democracy. Again, the figures of Djilas and Dedijer offer insight into why this was the case. The nationalisms of the late 1980s were built on conspiracy theories, narratives of victimisation, and accusations of genocide, all of which were put back on the political agenda by both men in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This discourse prohibited the compromise needed for any transition towards democracy. Instead it created a desire for a saviour figure, hence the support given to the numerous demagogues that emerged at the end of communist rule.

This study of Djilas and Dedijer also highlights the unique position of Yugoslav dissidence. Although the Yugoslav Communists did not permit anyone to challenge their sole right to rule - as the purging of both men demonstrates - following the split with the Soviet Union they were prepared to liberalise the public sphere. This permitted the intelligentsia to adopt a more critical stance toward the party without experiencing the repression that faced their counterparts in Eastern Europe. By decentralising the party structure, the communist leadership signalled that they believed socialism could be developed at a local level through critical analysis. Therefore, the liberalising reforms gave Yugoslav citizens tacit permission to voice dissent, providing that this dissent did not become an opposition.

Although the Yugoslav Communists were largely unique in acknowledging the difference between dissent and opposition, their distinctive stance created a paradox. Yugoslav dissidence was both weak and widespread at the same time. If dissent was defined as direct opposition to communism, then Yugoslav dissidence was confined to a handful of nonconformist intellectuals, most notably Djilas and Mihajlov. Unlike in the rest of the Eastern Bloc, the relatively liberalised form of communism

provided a safety valve which channelled discontent. However, if a wider definition of dissent was adopted, including anyone at odds with official party ideology, Yugoslav dissidence can be said to have encompassed vast swathes of society. This included elements of the press, non-conformist intellectuals, student groupings, factory floor workers and even younger reform-minded party members. It is only under this broader definition that Dedijer can be labelled as a dissident. These groups did not, for the most part, advocate the overthrow of the communist government. Rather their dissent was political because they defended their right to question party policies which they disagreed with, and to defend human and civil rights. Therefore Yugoslav dissidence was nuanced in its character. While it can only be understood as part of the wider resistance to communist rule across Eastern Europe, it was also operating under unique conditions.

The fascinating figures of Djilas and Dedijer could not have emerged anywhere else but Yugoslavia, their lives explain as much about Yugoslavia as they do about their characters and personalities. They were an important phenomenon in the post-revolutionary politics of Yugoslav society. Therefore this study has highlighted the delicate interplay between their careers and the broader political developments within the country. Interest in both men and their ideas increased during times of economic ferment. Consequently, the party's biggest weakness was its failure to advance the Yugoslav economy. In addition, the country's numerous economic difficulties were intimately linked to the national question. One of the main attractions of socialism was its promise to end regional inequality and to promote rapid economic development. While the economy was growing the issues raised by Djilas and Dedijer remained manageable. It was only when socialism was evidently

failing economically and politically, that both men's narratives of victimhood found sympathetic ears.

In challenging his comrades about the anomalies in the political system in 1954, Djilas became the father of dissidence in Yugoslavia. He became the symbol for all those who had become disenchanted with the communist project. Tito, concerned with the unity of the party as the guarantee of the Yugoslav socialist project, moved swiftly to counter any divergences. Although he was able to contain discontent, he was never able to resolve the anomalies highlighted by Djilas. Kardelj saw the answer in decentralising the political system. As the architect of the 1974 Constitution he inadvertently weakened the party at the federal level by paralysing the decision making process and removing real authority from federal decisions. Kardelj's attempt to combine federal decentralisation with Tito's efforts to strengthen party authority was supposed to secure the popular acceptance of the regime. In practise it simply paved the way for the eventual collapse of the party and the country.

By the time of Kardelj and Tito's deaths at the turn of the 1980s, the federal party had become largely irrelevant. In what was essentially an eight-party system, real power was held by the republic elites. The substitution of democratisation with decentralisation did not solve the issue of authoritarianism or bureaucracy. The articles written by Djilas 30 years earlier still rang true, yet by the 1980s these problems were even more difficult to resolve. This was partly because of Dedijer's own revelations. Following his disillusionment with the party he took up a career as an historian. In an attempt to free his fellow Yugoslavs from the past, he tore apart the delicate communist narrative of history that justified both the party's rule and the state's multi-ethnicity. Both men served as reference points for the country's

informal opposition, embedding themselves in the Belgrade nationalist, ex-communist, and Western socialist milieus.

The timing of their dissidence (reaching its peak in Yugoslavia in the 1980s) is also important. As Sher notes, ‘the specific form which dissident thinking assumes in a given historical instance often has a profound impact on its ability to persuade others and to sustain itself.’¹ Djilas and Dedijer did not merely think their dissident thoughts, they also articulated them in a way that directly related to the societal issues facing many Yugoslavs.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Djilas and Dedijer were part of an emboldened group of intellectuals who publicly challenged the party over censorship and the political persecution of writers and dissidents. Their democratic credentials were not in question as they defended dissidents from all nations and nationalities. However by the mid-1980s, nationalist discourses were being developed by significant individuals. This was most evident in Serbia, where, with the growing protests and ethnic tensions in Kosovo, a number of intellectuals eagerly embraced Slobodan Milošević. Djilas and Dedijer, like many other intellectuals who supported Milošević at this crucial juncture, denounced him as soon as the full effects of his policies became evident. However, by then it was too late. Their importance receded as the nationalists accumulated all power in their hands. Djilas’s and Dedijer’s roles may have been inadvertent, but they played a part nonetheless. They were, after all, brilliant writers and their grievances with the communist inertia, real and imagined, were quickly manipulated by the nationalists and turned into a fully-fledged narrative of national victimhood.

¹ Sher, *Praxis*, p. xiii

Influencing Political Trends but Not Directing Them - Qualifying the Roles Played by Djilas and Dedijer

While it has been shown that both Djilas and Dedijer played an important role in building and then undermining the Yugoslav communist state, their roles need to be somewhat qualified. In the immediate post-war years they played a vital role in Agitprop, ‘defending the revolution’ and constructing socialism. They unleashed a barrage of propaganda, set the boundaries of what was acceptable in the new state, prevented the dissemination of any alternative view point, and established the party’s official narrative of history. Yet, they were only acting under Tito’s aegis. They were given immense freedom in this task because of their vast intellectual and literary talent, but it was not possible to expound views contrary to Tito and the rest of the party (or not for very long, as the events of 1954 demonstrated).

In addition, while both men undermined the party in a number of differing ways in their years out of power, their influence was somewhat limited. They destabilised the regime but they did not re-emerge as crucial figures in shaping what would replace it. Communist reformers condemned their arrogance and egotism; democrats could not overlook their violent communist pasts; Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Montenegrins (committed to independence) derided their perceived Serbophilism; while Serbs criticised their anti-nationalism.

In 1954, the fall of Djilas and Dedijer caused uproar across Yugoslavia. Their seemingly overnight transformation from leading communists to an outspoken dissident (in Djilas’s case) and semi-dissident (in Dedijer’s) was shocking. Nevertheless, following the initial scandal, ordinary Yugoslavs heard very little of either man. They remained politically and socially isolated. They became non-

persons. Dedijer was banned from publishing in Yugoslavia for over a decade and Djilas for over 30 years.

After an opening barrage of propaganda in which the Yugoslav press labelled them ‘traitors’, and carried pages of cartoons depicting Djilas as a Texan millionaire and Dedijer as a fat prostitute, the party quickly changed tack.² As the Slovenian party leader Boris Kraigher argued, any systematic campaign could create a Djilas faction within the party due to his popularity with the intelligentsia.³ The Titoist leadership wanted both men to be forgotten, not turned into martyrs. In this respect, the party’s complete control over society was utilised to comprehensively silence discussion of the Djilas and Dedijer affair. Despite once being leading members of the Central Committee, in the 2nd volume of *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije* (Bosna-Dio) published in 1956, there was no entry for Dedijer.⁴ Two years later the 3rd edition (Dip-Hid) similarly excluded Djilas.⁵ In attempting to purge both men from memory, the Yugoslavs honoured a technique of their Soviet counterparts: their images were cut out of important state photographs.⁶ While this could not expunge both men from people’s memories, it signalled that they were no longer acceptable figures. Fred Warner Neal recalls an anecdote that was doubtless apocryphal, but it illustrates this point: An old Montenegrin peasant was boasting about how he knew all the famous Yugoslav leaders ‘from way back’. He was asked about Tito: ‘I nursed Tito’s wounds during the war’. He was asked about Blažo Jovanović: ‘Why, I held Jovanović in my arms when he was a baby.’ And Djilas? ‘Djilas?’ said the peasant. ‘I never heard of him in my life.’⁷

² Dedijer, ‘Notes to *Veliki buntovnik*’, 23rd February 1989, (AS) SI AS 1979, box 240

³ ‘Posvetovanje z regionalnimi sekretarjev LCS’, 20th January 1954, (AS) SI AS 1589, box 4

⁴ M. Krleža, *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije Vol.2*, (Zagreb, 1956)

⁵ M. Krleža, *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije Vol.3*, (Zagreb, 1958)

⁶ A. Stipčević, *Cenzura u knjižnicama*, (Zagreb, 1992), p. 1

⁷ Neal, *Titoism*, p. 74

After successfully directing both men into obscurity in the aftermath of 1954, the party, perhaps fatefully, allowed them to return to the public sphere in the 1970s. Dedijer was still a (reform) Marxist and appeared to be a useful ally in undermining the growing decentralist groupings within the party. He was permitted to return to Yugoslavia and publish his works of history. Tito falsely believed these histories to be more beneficial than harmful. The 1970s also marked the return of Djilas into public consciousness when a further campaign against him was initiated. Fearing that he could become a rallying point for the decentralists, non-conformist intellectuals, New Leftist and student groups, he was again proclaimed to be a 'renegade', a 'puppet-like creature',⁸ and a bourgeois nationalist working for 'his bosses in the West.'⁹ Re-introducing the figure of Djilas to a number of Yugoslavs who had previously only limited knowledge of him proved a monumental failure. These young Yugoslavs were dissatisfied with the communist system and their prospects within it. Djilas could not possibly embody all the disparate and incommensurable goals of these groups, but because he defended the right of others to hold and express an opinion, he embodied everyone who was disillusioned with the Yugoslav political system.

However, while both men returned to prominence in the 1970s and played an important role in undermining the communist state, it is interesting how small their political role was. They influenced political trends but they were never in the position to direct them. The feud between Djilas and Dedijer on the one hand, and the regime on the other, was as much private and personal as it was political. This blind emotion ensured zero tolerance for individuals connected with either man. Disparagement in the media, police harassment and pariah status could be expected

⁸ J. Vlahović, 'Kvisling iz političkog podzemlja', *Vjesnik*, 23rd July 1980, p. 1

⁹ S. Stanković, 'Milovan Djilas Called Blind Renegade', *Radio Free Europe*, 10th July 1980, p. 4

for anyone who chose to associate with the regime's chief dissidents. The anti-communist writer Borislav Mihajlović-Mihiz, who lost his job with *NIN* for his continued association with Djilas, once told him: 'You they write about in the Western press, but I can be liquidated over the telephone'.¹⁰ Due to their standing in the West, both Djilas and Dedijer were somewhat protected – Dedijer once acknowledged, 'if it were not for foreign press I would be hanging from the Terazija!'¹¹ Yet those who associated with them were not afforded this luxury.

This factor helps explain why the majority of nonconformist intellectuals and dissident groups kept a wide berth from the regime's premier dissidents. They were afraid that openly associating with these figures would further compromise them in the eyes of the authorities. By refusing to engage with the famous dissidents, they hoped to institutionalise social criticism, ensuring it did not have an explicitly political dimension, something that Djilas and Dedijer had so readily ignored. While a number of dissident groups owed something to Djilas's and Dedijer's work and spirit, directly calling upon them was not only dangerous, but harmful to their hopes of reform.

While the fear of associating with either man largely explains why a number of prominent intellectuals refused to publicly support them (even if they agreed with their analyses), it does not explain why these intellectuals held a profound distrust of both men. Instead, their communist past made them problematic figures. As the US ambassador to Britain noted after meeting them at the height of their power: 'Djilas and Vlado Dedijer are both intriguers and dogmatic Marxists. I regard them as

¹⁰ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 371

¹¹ The Ambassador in Yugoslavia (Riddleberger) to the Department of State, 768.00/12-2954: Telegram, 29th December 1954, (FRUS), 1952-1954, Vol. VIII, Document 720

among the more sinister figures of present regime.’¹² Their moral legacies were far less unsullied than they wished to portray. Dedijer had been well known for his Stalinist leanings and adherence to violent methods. As Sulzberger recalled of the immediate post-war years: ‘At this time Dedijer was a bitter, arrogant man. Sometimes he would walk through the capital and see someone whose antipathy was communism, and ask: “what are you doing out of jail?”’ It was rumoured some of these people later disappeared.¹³ Dedijer’s previous fanaticism engendered little sympathy for him when he became the victim. As Mitra Mitrović remarked following Dedijer’s outburst at being called before the control commission: ‘In what kind of party did you grow up? You helped build it this way.’¹⁴

However, as Jože Pirjevec has noted in his biography of Tito and his closest comrades, it was Djilas who was the most notorious of all the Yugoslav communists.¹⁵ Throughout the protracted period of war, Djilas was a ruthless class warrior who had no qualms about the killing of real and imagined enemies. There were numerous rumours and hearsay of his conduct during the war. Most concerned him slitting prisoners’ throats and being a zealous exponent of executions without trial.¹⁶ Up until 1954 no one dared to mention these rumours. After his fall from power however, they were given official confirmation as all manner of accusations were made. A typical story concerned Djilas’s killing of a young boy in the Piva valley. He was said to have suddenly taken his rifle and killed a shepherd boy in the distance. Tito demanded to know why he had done this, to which Djilas shrugged

¹² The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Grifford) to the Secretary of State, 768.5–MAP/1–3151: Telegram, 31st January 1951, (FRUS), Vol. IV, Part 2, Document 382

¹³ Sulzberger, *Resistantists*, p. 86

¹⁴ M. Djorgović, *Dilas: Vernik i Jeretik*, (Belgrade, 1989), p. 225

¹⁵ J. Pirjevec, *Tito i Drugovi*, (Belgrade, 2014), p. 487

¹⁶ Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 17

and replied that the boy was a Chetnik.¹⁷ These stories were not without effect. As *Danas* reported in 1987, Djilas could never become a prominent political figure again, despite the increasing turmoil, because many Yugoslavs still accused him of mass killings during the war.¹⁸ Therefore, while after 1954 both men argued that they were now on an honourable path, a fundamental question still remained: if these men could have made such errors in the 1940s, how could they be trusted now?

In addition to their problematic communist past, neither man had a ready base of support within Yugoslavia. Dedijer's support of Djilas cost him his place in the party, but he did not attack the party as such. True, he argued for the greater clash of ideas within the League, but he never challenged communism as a dogma. Djilas was more conclusive in his beliefs – after initially calling for a second socialist party, he would eventually condemn communism as an ideology. Yet he was no less problematic. He lost a lot of his legitimacy in 1954 at the plenum called to discipline him. Kardelj methodically tore apart the foundations of his argument. Djilas was accused of pushing on open doors, of renouncing Marx, and of experimenting in liberalism and bourgeois anarchy. During the debate Djilas could not compete with Kardelj, whose logic, backed up by Tito's authority, had completely destroyed his confidence. After all, Djilas conceded that he agreed with 'ninety percent' of Kardelj's analysis.¹⁹ Anticipating Djilas's recantation, Tito ordered all press and radio stations to report on the plenum proceedings. Djilas's submissive acceptance of his defeat destroyed the euphoria that had been building up over the preceding months and disappointed his supporters. As the young Slavko Goldstein recalled, 'It was immensely sorrowful listening to Djilas's raspy, stuttering voice on the radio.'

¹⁷ Dedijer, *Novi prilozi*, Vol.1, p. 722

¹⁸ 'Milovan Đilas i Drugog svjetskog rata', *Danas*, 1st December 1987, p. 29

¹⁹ *Kommunist*, No. 1-2, January-February 1954 in Djilas, *Parts of a Lifetime*, p. 237

Djilas's repentance represented the funeral of all our youthful hopes.'²⁰ When at the end of 1954 he recovered and decided to re-launch his campaign against the party, he did so stripped of all influence, with Dedijer his lone supporter.

Ideological disputes within communist parties are legion. However, these clashes tended to combine ideological debate with power struggles. Therefore it was unclear whether the ideas and concepts being put forward were genuine, or were simply invented to legitimate a power struggle. Djilas and Dedijer, by contrast, engaged in no power grab. While they voiced their critical ideas for a short-lived period, anticipating that their fellow Yugoslavs would support them, they refused to organise a faction. They avoided any real politicking, instead acting as lone prophetic figures who hoped to win others over to their view by the strength of their arguments, rather than actively canvassing for support. This made them heroic symbols in the West, but disappointing figures in Yugoslavia for those who wanted an alternative to the communist regime.

The criticisms made by both men were also undermined by their timing. Tito claimed that what had surprised him and his colleagues most was that Djilas's and Dedijer's 'rebellion' had come at a time of 'our full economic and political enthusiasm and development.'²¹ This is what Kardelj meant when he claimed that Djilas was pushing on an open door - since 1948 the Yugoslav state had become more free and democratised. During the 1950s, the theories of Djilas - who sought to transform the whole political system - and Dedijer - who supported a more enlightened form of Marxism based around the further democratisation of the state - were fringe views. The advocates of reform, such as pockets of students and intellectuals, were isolated from the rest of the population (who were enjoying the

²⁰ S. Goldstein, 'Predgovor' in Djilas, *Vlast*, p.24

²¹ 'Marshal Tito Explains his Policy', *The Times*, 3rd March 1954, p. 7

economic benefits of the liberalising reforms) and the party members (who were willing to respond to public opinion provided that their ruling monopoly was not challenged).

For decades after 1954, reformists throughout the country attacked both men for abandoning the party and causing a considerable setback in the liberalisation process. While Djilas claimed that the door had been shut on democratisation, and Kardelj claimed that Djilas was pushing on an open door, in reality neither were correct. In 1954 the door was ajar, but Djilas's premature attack had slammed it shut. Therefore, liberals both in and outside the party criticised Djilas for setting the cause of democratisation back by alerting Tito too soon to the growing desire for reform. After all, in his speech at the plenum Tito exclaimed: 'The only positive thing in this entire case with Djilas's articles is the fact it has opened my eyes that so many people we would have never suspected, falsely believe we have liquidated the last class enemy.'²²

Kardelj, who many saw as Djilas's ally in pushing Tito further along the path of reform, once admitted that 'Djilas's ideas are not wrong but 20 years ahead.' During the beginning of the 1950s, Kardelj was pursuing an extensive 'liberal' policy based around economic reforms. For many liberals across Yugoslavia, Djilas's and Dedijer's actions had hindered Kardelj's reforms which they believed, without both men's ill-judged interference, would have reached their natural conclusion. This is why for the rest of its existence, the conservatives in the party saw every 'liberal' as a potential Djilasist – even though very few Yugoslavs actively supported Djilas and Dedijer. The 'Djilas and Dedijer affair' had demonstrated the danger of following a 'liberal path'. This danger was not so much in Yugoslavs following either man as a

²² Tito, 'H Kritiki Stalinizma', *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, p. 328

leader, but rather in the people raising the issue of political reform, even if they forcefully condemned both men. This may appear paradoxical – but only when the difference between Djilas and Dedijer as personalities, and Djilas and Dedijer as definite ideas is recognised, can their importance be understood.

The Importance of Djilas and Dedijer in the Yugoslav Context

The lives of Djilas and Dedijer are among the most fascinating in the political history of communist-ruled Yugoslavia. They campaigned and fought against monarchical dictatorship, Nazi occupation, and Soviet subjugation, before rebelling against the communist project to which they had devoted their lives. Collectively these two figures provide a remarkable prism through which to view the slow disenchantment with the communist state following the Second World War. In addition, their subsequent dissidence is significant not only in its causes, but also in how it was dealt with by the most liberal of communist regimes, the different forms it took, and how this dissidence was adopted and manipulated by the nationalists in Yugoslavia. Therefore, without the appreciation of the roles of Djilas and Dedijer and their ideas, a complete picture of how the Yugoslav state was created and then undermined is not possible.

While after 1954 both men attempted to present themselves as a prototypical Montenegrin and Herzegovinian, seeking answers to the problematic questions of the time by looking back to their childhoods, in reality the influence of their heritage was much more complex. By drawing on their Dinaric heritage both men presented their clash with the communist government as inevitable. Communism was simply a rationalisation of their native rebelliousness. They were primarily rebels,

communism was merely a tool to give their rebellious nature meaning. Such a justification was in reality too simplistic. Rather, following the shock of their removal from power, they looked back to the past in order to justify and explain their actions. This rationalisation was not new among discarded and disillusioned communists. After all, if a Marxist renounces power what can he become? Djilas and Dedijer had not only lost their influential positions in society, they had also lost their complete identity. The emotional pressure to find a substitute movement led them back to their regional identities. Ultimately their Montenegrin and Herzegovinian backgrounds amplified other important influences in their lives.

One of these influences was their time in Agitprop at the end of the war. In establishing the new founding myths of the communist state, they were essentially giving literary form to the changes in their lives. This gave them a unique chance to explore its pattern and importance - their progression from the idealism of their youth, through the violence of war, to the intoxication of victory and power, and subsequent disappointment and degradation.

As the leading propagandists of the new regime, both men played an essential role in rebuilding the shattered and dislocated country after the war, both physically and mentally. They also attempted to transform society. Their vast intellectual and literary talents made them the ideal candidates for this task. By educating their fellow Yugoslavs in socialism, they believed that they would secure the party's political legitimacy by demonstrating that communism offered Yugoslavia a new and better future, free of inter-ethnic strife and oppression. However, as time went on they observed that active support for the party was dwindling.

After the split with Stalin in 1948, the Yugoslav communists declared that they were on the true Marxist path to genuine workers' democracy. Yet, once Yugoslavia

launched its independent road to socialism, inconsistencies in the system became evident. There was an incongruity between social and economic liberalisation on the one hand, and monolithic one-party rule on the other. In keeping with the rest of the party, both men believed that the socialist system in the Eastern Bloc had become reactionary and exploitative. Yet they also observed that ‘monopolistic’ and ‘bureaucratic’ elements had survived in their own party. These elements seemed to be using the Leninist concept of the leading role of the party to protect their own privileges and interests. This not only put Djilas and Dedijer in a quandary, but the whole of the party. Would they remain committed to their goals of democracy and freedom even if they had to concede power? Or would they maintain their hold on power at all costs - even if it put them at odds with the masses they were supposed to represent? The events of 1954 provided an answer, Djilas and Dedijer believed in the former, and Tito and the rest of the party in the latter. Both men argued that to be truly Marxist and democratic the party had to permit free discussion and expression of ideas. Only with the free struggle of ideas could socialism succeed. Tito and the rest of the party did not agree, refusing to loosen their grip on power. The events of 1954 were important because they demonstrated that any attempt at further democratisation was interpreted as a counter-revolution.

By studying both men’s role in Agitprop it is possible to appreciate how the Yugoslav Communist Party - which was initially made up of passionate idealists - ended up by the 1980s, filled with tiresome bureaucrats who were only concerned with maintaining their own privileges and positions in power. When it became clear that the party could not transform society, Tito and his party purged the visionaries and set a single goal of holding power. It was this motivation that would drive so many party members to nationalism in the late 1980s.

While Tito attempted to make ‘the revolution’, Djilas and Dedijer sought ‘a revolution’. This may seem like an abstruse or minor difference, but it was key. Djilas and Dedijer, like many ousted visionaries – intellectuals, propagandists, historians – saw the revolution as an ongoing search for collective freedom. In contrast, after assuming power, Tito and his party took a defensive position, converting to ardent supporters of order and compliance. While there has been many explanations for the collapse of communism in Yugoslavia, the ‘Djilas and Dedijer Affair’ deserves an important place in the debate. By discrediting and dismissing them, the government confirmed that Titoism was incapable of inspiring those outside of the party. Instead stagnation set in. After all, the leaders who remained in power after their fall generally lacked the vision and talent of the men they replaced. With the possible exception of Tito, these men also failed to inspire the same level of passionate public support as Djilas and Dedijer. Retrospectively it is clear that both men were correct in their arguments that the Yugoslav system needed some easing of the concentration and monopolisation of power in a one-party system. For socialism to last in Yugoslavia a larger number of ideas needed to acquire legitimacy in the political sphere.

With their fall from government, both men came to the conclusion that it was not possible to build a working state simply around the ideology of socialism, or on mythological accounts of the Second World War. In the years after 1954 they sought to demonstrate this to their fellow Yugoslavs. While the party was largely successful in hushing up the affair and isolating its dissidents, this study demonstrates that oppositional narratives were created by both men. Djilas became Yugoslavia’s most prominent and persistent dissident and critic. Dedijer meanwhile took up the career of an historian, attacking the very pillars of legitimacy that the communist

government relied upon, one by one. The two men helped start a torrent of revisionism, exploring the communists' disreputable past, Tito's failures, Stalinism in the Yugoslav League of Communists, and the extent and limits of individual freedom and human rights within the country.

Resistance from the conservative party members only served to strengthen the resolution of both men. Yet, for all of their disparagement of the current state of socialism in Yugoslavia, never did it become – the assertions of their critics notwithstanding – the basis for an oppositional political movement. Nevertheless, both men refused to remain marginalised. Rather they presented themselves as representatives of social justice and as the defenders of human rights. These ideals had not been fully realised during Yugoslavia's transition to socialism and, as dissident intellectuals, they were committed to their full implementation. They believed that by raising their fellow Yugoslavs sense of public awareness, the authoritarian tendencies that prevailed in Yugoslav society could be resisted. Therefore, it was the unique conditions in Yugoslavia that helped to mould them into dissident-intellectuals.

While Djilas was unable (and unwilling) to canvas support for his political ideas, his fall from power highlighted the dangers of a Marxist-Leninist ideology that appeared to block any efforts aimed at democratisation and liberalisation. His rebellion against the party and resulting disillusionment with communism never formed the foundations of an oppositional movement, but his criticisms did receive significant popular backing. This took the form of a struggle against the hegemony of the party, bureaucracy and ideology. The suppression of Djilas and other 'liberal' elements (often denounced as 'Djilasism') persuaded a number of dissatisfied Yugoslavs that by the 1980s any form of activism had to take place outside the party.

As demonstrated by Djilas's embrace of Serbian nationalism in the 1980s, a number of dissidents attempted to substitute the communist lure of utopianism with something more deeply rooted in the popular psyche of the people. In Djilas's interpretation, the assertion of national identity did not necessarily mean hostility between Yugoslavia's nations. In reality however, this patriotic nationalism turned out to be a kind of pseudo-democratisation.

Dedijer followed a similar path, fostering a number of myths concerning Serbian victimhood. Taking up the career of an historian, he hoped to revise the hegemonic communist narratives that he had once been so involved in creating. This was an attempt to create a more pluralistic society. However, Dedijer's sensationalist revelations opened the floodgates of revisionism and in turn opened the door (completely inadvertently) for the nationalists to exploit the country's problematic history in order to legitimise the creation of nation states. Dedijer was not trying to further ethnic disharmony in Yugoslavia, instead he hoped to unearth some of the more challenging features of the country's past. Nonetheless, Yugoslavia was sent on a fateful course. Shorn of its historical righteousness, and its inability to build legitimacy on its own effectiveness, the party was left clinging to Tito's legacy for legitimacy.

Again both men were at the forefront of destroying a further pillar of communist legitimacy, a pillar that they had largely built – the Tito cult. In their years in Agitprop they presented Tito as the nation's liberator, the founding father. Drawing on Judeo-Christian imagery he was depicted as the creator and saviour. Yet in the aftermath of the split with the Soviet Union, not only did they see vestiges of Stalinism within their own party, but also in the figure of Tito. While they presented him as the bastion of resistance to the Soviet Union, they also observed that

bestowing an individual with omnipotent characteristics had all the features of Stalinism. Following their fall from power they began to reassess the party's patriarch. In their new accounts of Yugoslavia's late leader, Tito was no longer an infallible leader but a decidedly ordinary man. He was a man of distinctly average talents who had a penchant for violence against anyone that opposed him. Both men ensured that the Tito myth would dissipate. However, the barrage of gossip and rumour that followed their reassessments also ensured that a new negative myth emerged. Tito was now made responsible for everything misbegotten in Yugoslav Communist Party history.

The final part of this study examined perhaps the most fascinating and puzzling aspect of both men's lives - their relationship with each other. After sacrificing power and privilege for their friendship, they developed an obsessive dislike of one another. Ultimately their relationship foundered during Djilas's removal from power. Friendship was a collateral casualty of Djilas's tremendous resolve to confront the party. Dedijer's decision to defend Djilas was not motivated by some shared political ground, but simply by friendship. Therefore his decision to stand by Djilas cost him his comfortable standing in society, a society that he was not at odds to repudiate. In 1954 they actually agreed on little beyond the absolute necessity of freedom of opinions within the party.

The examination of their friendship also provides a remarkable prism through which to view the methods that the most 'liberal' of communist regimes utilised in order to punish their heretics. While the Titoist system did not physically liquidate its most famous dissidents, they still suffered imprisonment, isolation, abuse, impoverishment and intimidation. They dealt with this victimisation very differently and drew incommensurable conclusions from it. Whereas the events of 1954-55 led

Djilas to make a clean break with communism, for Dedijer it was a more extricating experience. His personal ideology changed but he still defined it as 'communism' - he remained committed to 'reform Marxism'. Herein lies the crucial answer as to why their relationship deteriorated.

Despite their differing political evolutions both men played an important role in destabilising Yugoslavia's delicate political equilibrium. They demonstrated that Titoism relied upon conspiracy theories, an interminable pursuit of (already defeated) bourgeois enemies, the replacement of meaningful political policies with tiresome ceremonies and unimaginative slogans, and myths about the country's past. They argued that their criticism was Yugoslav-friendly, it did not challenge the integrity of the multi-ethnic state. Yet, in a country as complex as Yugoslavia, whose leaders could not rely on a history that went back further than the emergence of communism, Djilas's condemnation of Marxism was particularly dangerous. As the socialist utopia failed to emerge, his analysis began to appear prophetic. The Yugoslav communists could not replace the utopian elements of Marxism with a form of unitary Yugoslav nationalism because this had already been discredited during the inter-war years. Neither could they permit the process of political decentralisation to reach its logical conclusion, allowing the republican leaderships to explore a secessionist nationalist path. With the socialist project failing economically, socially and politically, the party fell back on its legitimising factors par excellence - the People's Liberation War and cult of Tito. However, by the 1980s Dedijer had successfully undermined these narratives and inadvertently began the process of dividing the Yugoslavs. By the 1990s no ideology, narrative, or cult, was left to hold Yugoslavia together. Between them, Djilas and Dedijer played a significant role in discrediting the communist narrative, both ideologically and

historically. Crucially though, they did not invent a new ideology or past that could support a democratic but still Yugoslav state.

Instead their disproportionate focus on communist violence and oppression, both contemporary and historical, created an atmosphere of suffering and victimhood that was to influence many Yugoslavs in the 1990s. Both men hoped that by investigating the more troublesome elements of Yugoslavia's past and present, they would institute socio-political guarantees against abuse and repression. Only by uncovering the ghosts of the communist party could they instigate a dissident movement based around human rights and personal freedoms. However, in a society plagued by growing nationalistic antagonisms, their revelations only spread fear and an apocalypse culture concerning the disregard for basic human rights, and the degradation of the individual and society.

Therefore, Djilas's and Dedijer's dissent was not simply impotent. By appreciating their careers it is possible to see the cumulative effect of their protests. The ideological disputes of 1954, like those that followed it, significantly weakened the state. Moreover, the extent of these criticisms demonstrated that the opposition was divided and their opinions incompatible. This ensured that when communist power collapsed, it was virtually impossible for these disparate groups to find common ground within a Yugoslav state, whether socialist or capitalist, federalist or centralist, totalitarian or democratic.

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