

## STUDIE

## Books and Rifles: The Political Activity of Yugoslav Communist Students in Prague from 1927 until 1937 (Part I)

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### **Books and Rifles: The Political Activity of Yugoslav Communist Students in Prague from 1927 until 1937 (Part I)**

This work deals with the previously under-researched topic of the Yugoslav communist student émigrés in Prague in the interwar period who would go on to become the political and intellectual elite of socialist Yugoslavia in the post-World War II era. Drawing primarily on sources from the National Archive in Prague and the Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, as well as memoirs of the movement's participants, this paper attempts to retrace their political activities and intellectual development through a period in which Comintern policy changed frequently, forcing the young communists to adapt to a constantly changing political climate. The first part of the article examines their attempts to take over the legal organizations of Yugoslav students in Prague, as well as their cooperation with the non-communist left which occurred in spite of Comintern's ultra-left policies in the period between 1928 and 1935. This twofold strategy helped them to ultimately gain the upper hand in their frequent confrontations with the representatives of the Yugoslav Legation in Prague.

**Keywords:** Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Communism in Yugoslavia, Spanish Civil War, Student Movement in Yugoslavia, Student Movement in Prague, First Czechoslovak Republic

## Introduction

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

Four days earlier, the Prague Police Directory had received a report from the Royal Yugoslav Legation in Prague, providing them with further information about the disappearance of the student Ratko Belović and his wife Olga, who had been reported missing two weeks before.<sup>2</sup> The Yugoslav Legation wrote that Ratko and Olga Belović had been to a field trip in the Krkonoše Mountains in late December, organized by the “Jugoslavija” Academic Association, the umbrella organization of Yugoslav students in Prague. They were accompanied by Branko Krsmanović, Lazar Udovički, and Ratko Pavlović, all newly-elected members of the Executive Committee of “Jugoslavija”. When the representatives of the Yugoslav Legation came to investigate in the student dormitory at the request of Belović's parents on the 26<sup>th</sup> January, Krsmanović, Udovički, and Pavlović were already gone. After further investigation, they discovered a letter by Belović to Krsmanović in which he espoused a leftist ideology and declared his intention to go to Spain as a volunteer. By the 1<sup>st</sup> February, the Prague Police could only confirm that virtually the entire Executive Committee of “Jugoslavija” had gone to Spain to fight in the Civil War. Fifteen left-wing students left Prague on the 27<sup>th</sup>; Belović, his wife, and three other students had left already during Christmas time.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Lazar UDOVIČKI, “Španija moje mladosti: pismo mojoj deci” (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 1997), 88–89.

2 Zora GAVRIĆ, “Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga,” in *Španija 1936–1939: Zbornik sećanja jugoslovenskih dobrovoljaca u Španskom građanskom ratu*, Vol. 5, ed. Čedo KAPOR (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1971), pp. 352–353.

3 Ibidem, p. 353.

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

What is remarkable is that most of these people found themselves on what could be loosely defined as the reform wing of the Party after the split with the Soviet Union, and that those who lived into the 1990s remained true to the socialist and internationalist ideas of their youth when the state they had participated in creating had started to collapse. Given how common left-wing nationalism was within the Yugoslav communist movement, which forged itself through a national struggle against foreign occupiers, the internationalist lessons which these people drew from their prewar experience are remarkable. Many of them have acknowledged the crucial role of Prague in the formation of their communist beliefs (and, indeed, most became communists only after they arrived to Prague). The intellectual atmosphere of Czechoslovakia helped them reimagine their own country and the world, the ethnically mixed group they were in made them into internationalists, and a relative lack of control from the central Party apparatus enabled them to develop a variety of political views which were not always uncritical of the official Party line. This paper will attempt to present the political actions and ideas that developed in the movement through the course of their work in the late 1920s and 1930s and examine the impact this had on their post-war political beliefs. It will not look exclusively into the impact of the social circumstances in Prague, but, more importantly, the role played by the small community they themselves had created and the organization of political life of Yugoslav students.

The young Yugoslav communists were active in Prague at a momentous time. The 1930s were the crucial formative period for the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Two parallel processes of the time – the formation of the Popular Front policy and the Stalinist purges – would lead to a creation of the kind of disciplined antifascist and revolutionary party that would take power in 1945. Like many Yugoslav communists, they had spent this important period abroad because of state persecution. More importantly, they were in a relatively left-wing and democratic country, which had a profound impact on many of them. It is important to note, however, that their experiences were far too diverse for all of them to be categorized uniformly as radically democratic socialists. There were always many disagreements and opposing views within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and the situation among the students in Prague reflected this. While reading this work, it is important to keep in mind the assessment of the Croatian historian Ivo Banac: “My own research convinces me that the Yugoslav Communist movement was always very diverse, as diverse as Yugoslavia itself. We err when we see a monolith even in the late 1930s and especially during the war.”<sup>4</sup>

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

This paper will focus on the political activity of the Yugoslav communist students in Prague from the establishment of the Party organization in Prague in 1927 until the students’ departure for Spain in 1937. It will be based primarily on accounts written by the Yugoslav communist students after the war, namely their biographies and memoirs, as well as documents from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. It will also

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

draw from the archival funds of the Registry of Associations of the Prague City Archive, the All-Students' Archive from the Charles University Archive, and the Prague Police Directory Archive in the National Archive of the Czech Republic, in order to better understand the details of their political activity in Prague. This paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the often-neglected experience of living and working abroad that many of the Yugoslav communists had been through before World War II, and whether this affected the unique Yugoslav post-war socialist system.

### **Yugoslav Revolutionary Student Movement in Prague before 1927**

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

In the wake of World War I, the Yugoslav student community in Prague was large and its socio-economic position was dismal. According to a report of the Legation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from mid-1919, the student population numbered over 1,000 individuals, most of whom “were condemned to starvation or even abandonment of their studies.”<sup>5</sup> Such a situation seemed perfect for dissemination of communist ideas. Surprisingly enough, this was not the case. As we will see, communism only gained wide support among the students in Prague after the establishment of the dictatorship in Yugoslavia in 1929. The troubles with factionalism plagued the communist youth organization, SKOJ, as much as its older counterpart, the KPJ. This, combined with the insistence of the KPJ that the students should work primarily outside of universities,<sup>6</sup>

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5 Momčilo MITROVIĆ, “Saradnja Beogradskog univerziteta sa univerzitetima u Čehoslovačkoj 1918–1939,” *Studia Balcanica Bohemo-Slovaca* VI (2006), 299. The number could easily be exaggerated, as the Legation lacked precise data at the time.

6 Miodrag Žiko AVRAMOVIĆ, “Prve demonstracije protiv vojno-monarhističke diktature pod rukovodstvom beogradskih studenata-komunista 1. aprila 1932. godine,” in *Beogradski univerzi-*

prevented a mass movement from developing among Yugoslav students at home and abroad. Additionally, the government soon started handing out scholarships in order to alleviate the hardships of some of the students, and those studying in Czechoslovakia on a government scholarship had to sign a statement promising not to engage in any kind of anti-state activity.<sup>7</sup> In spite of the fact that these government measures affected only a small percentage of the students,<sup>8</sup> the communists failed to develop a mass movement. Their work was limited to a small group of individuals who apparently failed to reach out to the wider student population. It appears that the Yugoslav police had a tendency to overestimate their impact, and in 1921 wrote that Yugoslav students from Prague and Vienna returning to the country are all “infested with communist ideas”.<sup>9</sup> However, there is no proof that this was actually the case. The only visible consequence of this “infestation” was that a lot of communist literature from Czechoslovakia arrived during these years to Vojvodina and left some impact on the youth there, prompting appearance of several communist youth organizations in the region.<sup>10</sup>

Dr Miloš Aranicki, who studied medicine in Prague from 1919 until 1921, writes that on his arrival, there was already a Club of Yugoslav Marxist Students, which was founded by Živković, Dr Pavlović and Nikola Kotur.<sup>11</sup> He does not give much attention to either Živković or Pavlović, withholding even their first names, but he does say that Kotur was a “distinguished youth activist”.<sup>12</sup> It is almost certain that he is talking about Nikola Kotur (1898–1938), who later became a Political Secretary of SKOJ and was killed during the Great Purge in the Soviet Union. Although his account of the Yugoslav communist movement in Prague is full of superlatives, he does not seem to remember many political activities organized by the communists during his two-year stay, and it appears that his role in the group was marginal. According to another source, this student club was actually founded

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*tet u predratnom periodu, narodnooslobodilačkom ratu i revoluciji*, Vol. 2, ed. Dobrica VULOVIĆ (Belgrade: Centar za marksizam Univerziteta u Beogradu, 1986), p. 169.

7 M. MITROVIĆ, “Saradnja Beogradskog univerziteta sa univerzitetima u Čehoslovačkoj 1918–1939,” p. 300.

8 Slavoljub CVETKOVIĆ, “Jugoslovenski napredni studenti u Pragu posle Prvog svetskog rata,” *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju* 22 (1980), p. 167.

9 Ibidem, p. 168.

10 Ibidem, p. 169.

11 Miloš ARANICKI, “Marksistički klubovi jugoslovenskih studenata u Beču i Pragu,” in *Četrdeset godina: Zbornik sećanja aktivista jugoslovenskog revolucionarnog radničkog pokreta*, Vol. 1 (Belgrade: Kultura, 1960), p. 115.

12 Ibidem.

by the future leader of the Yugoslav Trotskyists, Ante Ciliga, in 1920.<sup>13</sup> Another prominent communist student in the city at the time was Lazar Đurović (1893–1943), who was a KPJ activist in Montenegro in the interwar period and who was killed in World War II at the Battle of Sutjeska. He arrived in Prague on a government scholarship, which was revoked at the request of the Ministry of Interior in November 1920 because he took part in the organization of a communist rally in his home town of Danilovgrad.<sup>14</sup>

Roughly in the same period, from May 1920, Prague was the residence of a young and at the time still anonymous revolutionary from Bosnia called Rodoljub Čolaković.<sup>15</sup> After a brief time in Moravia, he settled in Prague and joined the Club of Yugoslav Marxist Students. He stayed in the city until December 1920, roughly around the time when the KPJ was banned in Yugoslavia. Soon after, Čolaković returned to his country and joined a Marxist terrorist organization called “Crvena pravda” with Alija Alijagić, which operated without Party approval. On 21<sup>st</sup> July 1921, the group carried out the assassination of the Yugoslav Minister of Interior Milorad Drašković because of his role in the banning of the KPJ. The assassin, Alijagić, was tried and hanged, while Čolaković was sentenced to 12 years in prison as an accomplice.<sup>16</sup> Another member of “Crvena pravda”, Nebojša Marinković (1898–1938), was cleared of all charges and then immigrated to Prague, where he attempted to connect all Yugoslav Marxist émigré organizations to the KPJ.<sup>17</sup> He remained in Prague until 1933, when he immigrated to the Soviet Union, only to become a victim of the Great Purge five years later.

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13 Mladen ŠVAB, s.v. “Ciliga, Ante (Antun),” *Hrvatski biografski leksikon*, 1st ed. (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 1989). <http://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=3573> (accessed August 23, 2016). Ciliga (1898–1992) would go on to become a member of the Politbureau of the KPJ and a leading member of the Party’s left faction. In the late 1920s, he openly sided with Leon Trotsky against Joseph Stalin, for which he was imprisoned in the Soviet Union. After his release in 1935, he left the country and settled in Paris, where he became one of the first people to openly condemn Stalin’s Terror. Starting in the 1940s, his views started shifting to the right: he collaborated with the Ustasha from 1944 and became one of the leading Croatian nationalist émigrés. He returned to the country after Yugoslavia’s collapse and died in Zagreb in 1992.

14 Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade (AJ), fund of the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (MP), carton 440, archival unit 702, letter from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Interior, November 16, 1920.

15 S. CVETKOVIĆ, “Jugoslovenski napredni studenti u Pragu posle Prvog svetskog rata,” p. 167.

16 Rodoljub Čolaković (1900–1983) would later become one of Tito’s closest associates and serve as a Minister of Education and Vice-President of the Federal Government in postwar Yugoslavia.

17 Z. GAVRIĆ, “Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga,” p. 350.

The activity of Yugoslav communist students in Prague died down starting from 1922, and would remain low for the next half a decade. This mirrored the situation in Yugoslavia, where a combination of police repression and factional struggles significantly weakened the once-powerful Party and its youth organization. An Embassy report from July 1923 stated that there are no known active Yugoslav communist organizations in Prague.<sup>18</sup> The number of students from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes studying in Prague also dropped sharply, and from 1923, there was an average of 200 students per year.<sup>19</sup> Given that number of students on a government scholarship was 167 in both 1923 and 1925,<sup>20</sup> it is safe to assume that the government measures, apart from improving the socioeconomic situation of the students, also helped pacify them and ensured that most of the students who went to study in Czechoslovakia were loyal to the regime.

The only conflict with any political overtones in those years appears to have occurred in the spring of 1925 between the “Jugoslavija” Academic Association and Dragutin Prohaska,<sup>21</sup> who served as the School Inspector of the Ministry of Education, overseeing activities of Yugoslav students. The members of “Jugoslavija” accused Prohaska of unjustly persecuting lower class students, stripping them off their scholarships, and reporting them to the Czechoslovak police.<sup>22</sup> Before sending the letter to the Minister of Education asking him to intervene, the students organized a protest in the center of Prague in order to bring media attention to the issue and strengthen their position. The five signatories of the letter were not the elected leaders of “Jugoslavija,” but were chosen to represent it by an assembly of students. At least two of the five signatories were communists: Josip Šarac and Dragiša Mišović.<sup>23</sup> Prohaska was in fact stripped of his duties several months later, but the reason was the significant reduction in the number of scholarship holders,

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18 S. CVETKOVIĆ, “Jugoslovenski napredni studenti u Pragu posle Prvog svetskog rata,” p. 169.

19 Fazlija ALIKALFIĆ, “Agan Bostandžić,” in *Sarajevo u revoluciji: Revolucionarni radnički pokret: 1937–1941*, Vol. 4 (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1981), p. 467.

20 M. MITROVIĆ, “Saradnja Beogradskog univerziteta sa univerzitetima u Čehoslovačkoj 1918–1939,” p. 300.

21 Dragutin Prohaska (1881–1964) was a well-known Croatian literary critic and historian of Czech origin. In 1934 he became an assistant professor at Prague’s University of Economics. A staunch supporter of the Yugoslav monarchy, he remained in Prague after World War II and died there.

22 AJ, fund MP, carton 441, archival unit 702, letter from AD “Jugoslavija” to Mr. Svetozar Pribičević, Minister of Education, March 30, 1925.

23 Dragiša Mišović (1898–1939), a medical student, became a communist already during his studies in France, which caused the Yugoslav government to revoke his scholarship. He then moved to Prague and became a doctor of medicine there. After finishing his studies in November 1925,

not the complaints of students.<sup>24</sup> We can conclude that the Ministry, being aware of Mišović's previous political activity as a communist, almost certainly ignored the students' letter, and the students were much more concerned with strengthening their position in the eyes of the Czechoslovak public than influencing the Ministry. Nevertheless, this tactic of appealing to the Ministry while simultaneously arising attention of the Prague public through protests would become a common method of pressure exerted by the students during the peak of the communist activity in the 1930s. Furthermore, it is extraordinary that the assembly of "Jugoslavija" was influenced by the communists to the degree that the students began their first of many conflicts with Prohaska as early as 1925. At a time when the communist movement was weak and "Jugoslavija" was an officially apolitical association mostly dominated by the pro-government monarchists, such a revolt is out of the ordinary. Apart from this incident, however, communist activity appears to have been minimal. It is very likely that this brief upsurge in anti-government activity was merely a consequence of agitation by Mišović, as it subsided again following his departure from Prague at the end of 1925.

### **Gaining a Foothold**

In 1927, a group of communist students arrived in Prague and started a process of transforming communist revolutionary strategy into one of reaching out to the masses of students at the university. These students were Muhamed Kadić, Marijan Krajačić, Vlajko Begović, Miron Demić, Dragan Miler, Zora Gavrić, Vaso Todorović and Branko Popović. These students were guided by the older communists who had formed an illegal Party organization before their arrival. This organization consisted of Nebojša Marinković, the aforementioned member of "Crvena pravda" and an accomplice in the assassination of the Minister of Interior; Josip Šarac, an engineering student who was the signatory of the letter against Dragutin Prohaska in 1925; Zvonimir Kavurić, a student of architecture; and Pavao Koporčić, another engineering student. Vaso Todorović and Branko Popović appear to be the only people in this group who failed to leave a significant mark on

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he returned to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and continued his revolutionary activity for almost a decade and a half before he was murdered by the Yugoslav police in 1939.

24 AJ, fund MP, carton 441, archival unit 702, decision of Ministry of Education concerning the recall of Dragutin Prohaska, the School Inspector in Prague, July 30, 1925.

the history of Yugoslavia in the subsequent period, and there is little to no biographical data available regarding their life and work. All the others became prominent Yugoslav revolutionaries and intellectuals whose fascinating biographies warrant mentioning here at least briefly.

Zvonimir Kavurić (1901–1944) studied architecture in Prague from 1921 until 1927, and became a communist during this period. He worked with the renowned Czech modernist architect Alois Dryák. From 1927, he worked for Le Corbusier, and partook in the creation of his famous project for the Palace of the League of Nations. In 1932, he returned to Zagreb where he worked as a city architect, designing public buildings and family houses. His most famous finished work is certainly the design of the dome of the Meštrović Pavilion, which is today one of the city's most prominent modern art galleries. While he retained his job under the fascist Independent State of Croatia, he worked clandestinely for the Partisan movement. The Ustasha arrested him during a Party meeting in June 1944 and he was hanged on 5<sup>th</sup> October that same year, after several months of torture.<sup>25</sup>

Pavao Koporčić (1902–1995) returned to Zagreb in 1932 after having finished his studies in Prague. He opened a private company manufacturing ventilation units. From 1939, with the help of his former comrade Marijan Krajačić, he opened an illegal Party printing office in the back rooms of his company. He financed many Party activities and used his connections with the high society to gather intelligence information for the Party before World War II. His house in Dubrava by Zagreb was the venue of the Fifth Land Conference of the KPJ in October 1940, the last and most significant Party meeting before the outbreak of World War II. He lost contact with the Party in August 1941 after the Italians executed Pavle Pap, the member of the KPJ Central Committee. During the war, he used his connections to help imprisoned communists, and continued his activities for the Party after they reestablished the connection with him in 1944.<sup>26</sup>

Vlajko Begović (1905–1989) became a member of SKOJ in 1927, and joined the KPJ in Prague in 1930. He was expelled from Czechoslovakia for communist activity in 1933. He left for France, and then moved to the Soviet Union in 1935. In Moscow, he attended the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West (KUNMZ). In 1936, he went to Spain as a volunteer in the Inter-

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25 Ivana HANIČAR BULJAN, "Prilog za biografiju arhitekta Zvonimira Kavurića (1901.–1944.)," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 30 (2006), pp. 281–297.

26 Pavao KOPORČIĆ, "Radio sam za Partiju," in *Zagreb 1941–1945: Zbornik sjećanja*, Vol. 2 (Zagreb: Gradska konferencija SSRNH, 1983), pp. 173–177.

national Brigades, and eventually became a Major in the Spanish Republican Army. After the fall of the Spanish Republic, he was detained in a French concentration camp, and then in a prison, following the German occupation of France. He escaped from prison in 1943 and spent the rest of the war fighting for the French Resistance. Following World War II, he served in a variety of high-ranking positions, including being the President of the Federal Planning Committee, Director of the Institute for International Politics and Economy, and the Director of the newspaper *Borba*.

Miron Demić (1905–1936) was a Bosnian revolutionary from Foča. After finishing high school in Sarajevo, he came to study in Prague, where he became a member of the KPJ. He was expelled from Czechoslovakia because of communist activity, at the request of the Yugoslav Ministry of Interior. He then settled in France, from where he departed for Spain in October 1936 to join the International Brigades. He died in the Battle of Madrid, just over a month after his arrival to Spain.<sup>27</sup>

Zora Gavrić (1905–1985) was, according to Vljako Begović, “the longest-standing member of our [revolutionary student] movement, partaking in all its areas of activity”.<sup>28</sup> The daughter of a peasant family from Tuzla in Bosnia, Gavrić became a member of SKOJ in 1925, soon after graduating from the Gymnasium. In the fall of 1925 she went to study in Brno, from where she moved to Prague and earned a degree in Chemistry. In 1931, she became a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). She worked in the laboratory of the famous Prague German chemist Ernst Waldschmidt-Leitz until March 1932, when she was dismissed because of a crackdown of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior on communists. She was arrested by the Gestapo in September 1940 and spent the next two and a half years in prison. After her release, she continued doing underground work for the KSČ. After the war, Zora Gavrić worked as the official Prague correspondent of Tanjug, the Yugoslav news agency. In 1948, she was the person who translated and then sent to Belgrade the infamous Cominform Resolution, which made the Tito-Stalin Split official. In October 1949, both she and her husband were arrested as “Titoists” and she spent three and a half years in prison without trial. After her release, she worked as a chemist once again until her retirement in

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27 Vljako BEGOVIĆ, “Učešće u pomoći Španskoj republici,” in *Sarajevo u revoluciji: Revolucionarni radnički pokret: 1937–1941*, Vol. 1 (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1976), p. 202.

28 Idem, “Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu,” in *Sarajevo u revoluciji: Revolucionarni radnički pokret: 1937–1941*, Vol. 1 (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1976), p. 583.

1963. She spent her retirement years researching and writing about the activity of Yugoslav communists in Prague in the interwar period.<sup>29</sup>

Muhamed Kadić (1906–1983) was a student of architecture from Mostar. After his arrival to Prague in 1927, he joined the communist movement and in 1931 he was elected president of the communist-controlled “Matija Gubec” Association in Prague. After being deported from Czechoslovakia for communist activity, he went to France and Belgium. In 1935, he returned to Yugoslavia, settling in Sarajevo, where he would spend most of his career. Together with his brother Reuf, the designer of Sarajevo’s first skyscraper, he designed many of today’s icons of modern architecture in the city, such as the Building of the Pension Fund, inspired by Soviet constructivism. In 1942, fearing persecution by the Ustasha, the brothers fled the city and joined the Partisans. Kadić was ordered to leave the guerilla unit and join the construction department where his skills were much more useful. After the war, he returned to architecture, and started teaching at the newly-founded School of Architecture at the University of Sarajevo. From 1975 until his death he was a member of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>30</sup>

Marijan Krajačić (1905–1942), like Kadić, was an architecture student and one of the leaders of “Matija Gubec,” who was expelled from Czechoslovakia in the same year as Kadić. Unlike Kadić, however, his life was cut short by the war. Born in Velika Gorica by Zagreb, he came to Prague after graduating from high school. He lived in France in the mid-30s, and came to Spain in September 1936 to fight in the International Brigades. He was heavily wounded in battle and evacuated to Paris. After he recovered, he returned to Zagreb, where he became a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia. He was arrested by the Yugoslav authorities in August 1940. The Axis occupation of Yugoslavia meant that he found himself in an Ustasha-controlled prison in April 1941.<sup>31</sup> Following an unsuccessful attempt at escape in March 1942, he was transferred to Stara Gradiška concentration camp where he was murdered. He was the older brother of Ivan Krajačić-Stevo (1906–1986), the People’s Hero of Yugoslavia and President of the *Sabor* (National Assembly) the People’s Republic of Croatia from 1963 until 1967.

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29 Jan KALOUS, Štěpán Plaček: Život zpravodajského fanatika ve službách KSČ (Prague: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2010), pp. 29–37, 100, 188, 213.

30 Ivan ŠTRAUS, “Muhamed Kadić, 100 godina rođenja,” *a4a info portal*, June 23, 2006. [http://www.a4a.info/ArticleView.asp?article\\_id=949](http://www.a4a.info/ArticleView.asp?article_id=949) (accessed February 11, 2016).

31 Ivan JELIĆ, *Tragedija u Kerestincu (Zagrebačko ljeto 1941.)* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986), p. 33.

Dragan Miler (1908–1951), better known under the name Dragan Ozren, appears to have been the most interesting and intriguing of all of these people, although very little is known about his life. A Croat of Czech origin, he was from Travnik in Bosnia, and lived as an émigré in the USSR after finishing his architecture studies in Prague. In Moscow, he worked for the Comintern, and became the first editor-in-chief of the Inostrannoe rabochee izdatel'stvo publishing house.<sup>32</sup> During the Great Purge, he became engulfed in struggles within the KPJ (of which he wasn't a member) when the Central Committee member Josip Broz Tito allegedly accused him of treason and factionalism. From his Comintern post, he is purported to have attacked Broz, together with other Yugoslav translators of Stalin's propagandist book *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)*, of filling the chapter on dialectical materialism with "Trotskyist formulations." Broz narrowly escaped death (the only one of the three translators of the book in Serbo-Croatian to have done so), and he did not forget Ozren's accusations: when Ozren returned to Yugoslavia in 1944 with the advancing Red Army, he was immediately arrested. Although he was soon released, he was arrested again in 1948 after the Cominform Resolution and murdered at Goli Otok prison camp,<sup>33</sup> which the Yugoslav state created for its Stalinist opponents.

Although it remains unclear whether they arrived there on Party orders or not, the arrival of these people to Prague signaled the need for an overhaul of communist work organization in Prague. The new Party organization was now divided into youth sections and the main KPJ organization. The people in both were quite young, but differed in experience as revolutionaries. The main KPJ organization was effectively in charge, and it formed "Marxist groups" of students, usually containing four students and one member of the KPJ main section (most often also a student). All of these groups operated illegally and unofficially, trying to stay off the radar of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior, and thus also the Yugoslav police, which received regular reports from its Czechoslovak allies.<sup>34</sup> The KPJ in Prague then established continuous contact with the Party organization in Vienna

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32 During the Cold War, this publishing house became well-known in the West under its new name, Progress Publishers.

33 Jože PIRJEVEC, *Tito i drugovi, I deo*. (Belgrade: Laguna, 2013), pp. 93–94.

34 V. BEGOVIĆ, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," p. 582.

through Vljako Begović.<sup>35</sup> Given that the KPJ organization in Vienna had been very active throughout the 1920s, and that many leading Yugoslav communists were exiled there, this certainly helped maintain continuity of action in Prague, where almost all Yugoslav communists were mere short-term expatriates. Additionally, the KPJ section in Prague managed to establish itself as the main connection between the KPJ Central Committee with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the Communist parliamentary group in the Czechoslovak National Assembly, and the left-wing press.<sup>36</sup> This undoubtedly made their existence more valuable for the KPJ. Apart from working within the communist movement, they also started a strategy of infiltration in legal student organizations, in particular “Matija Gubec” and the Association of Yugoslav Technical School Students. This infiltration was not spontaneous, but was part of a plan to legalize some aspects of communist activity and attract more students to the cause.<sup>37</sup>

The first organization that the young communists tried to take over was the Association of Yugoslav Technical School Students (*Društvo jugoslovenskih tehničara*, DJT). It was the logical choice, as it was the only student organization that showed any sign of class consciousness. This was a consequence of the economic situation of the technical school students. The law of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes barred those who completed their secondary education in technical secondary schools from entering university. This automatically excluded people from the lower classes from entering university, as they were the ones who would most often choose to send their children to technical schools, which were much easier to get into than Gymnasiums.<sup>38</sup> The president of the DJT, Jože Rus, was a liberal, but sided with the communists on many questions out of necessity, given the poor social standing of the students he was representing. He was among the five signatories of the letter to the Ministry of Education in 1925.<sup>39</sup> In April 1927, presumably after some political agitation, the communists Vaso Todorović,

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35 Adela BOHUNICKA, “Španska poznanstva u Pragu,” in *Španija 1936–1939: Zbornik sećanja jugoslovenskih dobrovoljaca u Španskom građanskom ratu*, Vol. 1, ed. Čedo KAPOR (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1971), p. 412.

36 V. BEGOVIĆ, “Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu,” p. 583.

37 F. ALIKALFIĆ, “Agan Bostandžić,” p. 468.

38 S. CVETKOVIĆ, “Jugoslovenski napredni studenti u Pragu posle Prvog svetskog rata,” p. 168.

39 AJ, fund MP, carton 441, archival unit 702, letter from AD “Jugoslavija” to Mr. Svetozar Pribičević, Minister of Education, March 30, 1925.

Vlajko Begović and Marijan Krajačić were elected into the Executive Committee of the DJT, while Dalibor Miloš Krno (1901–1983), a Yugoslav-born Slovak pedagogue with communist sympathies, was elected its president.<sup>40</sup> We can assume with great certainty that this was the group of people who first presented the idea of going on an excursion to the Soviet Union, which was organized in the summer of 1927 and led by Dalibor Miloš Krno.<sup>41</sup> The communists remained influential until the liberal leadership expelled Pavao Koporčić, Marijan Krajačić and Dragan Miler from DJT in 1928.<sup>42</sup> This move seems to have significantly weakened the impact of the communists on the association, as they failed to gain any significant posts in the Executive Committee after June 1928.<sup>43</sup>

After the failure to overtake the DJT, they turned to the “Matija Gubec” Academic Association. It was the most overtly political Yugoslav student group in Prague, although all societies had to be apolitical on paper. Named after a 16<sup>th</sup> century leader of a Croatian peasant revolt, it aptly gathered the supporters of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS). The Association was founded on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1928. In March, the Party president Stjepan Radić, himself a former Prague student, visited the city and held a lecture for members of the Association. His agrarianism and his firm oppositionist standpoint garnered him sympathy from the leftists at a time when the official KPJ stance was identical to that of the Croatian Peasant Party – that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is stifled by the hegemony of the Greater Serbian bourgeoisie. This attitude was only strengthened by the decisions of the Dresden Congress in late 1928, when the KPJ began openly calling for dissolution of Yugoslavia, armed insurrection, and cooperation with secessionist organizations.<sup>44</sup> Between the failure of the takeover of the DJT in mid-1928 and the establishment of a Dictatorship in Yugoslavia in January 1929, the ranks of “Matija Gubec” swelled with the increasingly successful communist agitators.

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40 Archive of the Capital City of Prague (AHMP), archival fund Registry of Associations (SK), DJT section (X/211), report to the Associations Department of the Prague Police Directory, April 2, 1927.

41 AHMP, fund SK, X/211, report to the Associations Department of the Prague Police Directory, December 10, 1927.

42 AHMP, fund SK, “Matija Gubec” section (X/364), report to the the Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior on communist agitation in “Matija Gubec” Association, April 1, 1929.

43 AHMP, fund SK, X/211, report to the Associations Department of the Prague Police Directory, June 15, 1928.

44 Hilde Katrine HAUG, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia: Tito, Communist Leadership and the National Question* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), p. 32.

Their strategy was twofold: raise class consciousness through personal work with students and legalize aspects of Party work through infiltrated student societies.

The class structure of the Yugoslav students changed significantly in this period, benefiting the KPJ. The overwhelming majority of the students in the late 1920s were studying at the Czech Technical University (ČVUT). About 150 out of 200 Yugoslav students at the time were technical school students.<sup>45</sup> Given their social class and the legal discrimination they faced in Yugoslavia, it is understandable why communist activity blossomed once they came to dominate the ranks of Yugoslavs. Communist literature and press, whether Soviet, Czechoslovak, German or Yugoslav, was widely available, exposing them to an ideology that seemed not only to explain their poverty and precarious social position, but also to offer them a way out of it. In interbellum-era Yugoslavia, prisons were called “schools for communists,” referencing the immensely successful activity of the imprisoned communists among the inmates. Everybody, however, underestimated the danger of actual schools that the youth of Yugoslavia attended, especially those studying abroad.

The communists now worked actively among the students, trying to get more of them to join the cause. This was the crucial difference between them and the students in Yugoslavia, whose strategy, all the way until 1931, was to work exclusively outside of universities.<sup>46</sup> The Prague students seem to have adopted a very personal approach when trying to bring people of proletarian and peasant origin to their ranks. They would often debate and persuade individual students to join their cause. The most famous case of “conversion” to communism (and certainly the one they were most proud of) was that of Marijan Krajačić. According to Adela Bohunicki, twenty-two-year-old Krajačić came to Prague as a Yugoslav nationalist and a supporter of the monarchy. This was not uncommon among the lower class students from peasant families, although it was uncommon for ethnic Croats like himself.<sup>47</sup> He became a communist thanks to the active work of Miron Demić (who later became a close friend of his) and Vlajko Begović, who debated politics with him on many occasions. Adela Bohunicki described how the process of conversion went: “It was a method of personal persuasion, which we practiced

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45 V. BEGOVIĆ, “Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu,” p. 580.

46 M. Ž. AVRAMOVIĆ, “Prve demonstracije protiv vojno-monarhističke diktature pod rukovodstvom beogradskih studenata-komunista 1. aprila 1932. godine,” p. 170.

47 It is highly likely that she had made a mistake, as she was writing about an event which occurred before her own arrival to Prague.

on students from the rival camp who impressed us with their personal qualities and abilities. The reorientation process would last for months with some students. Many of them told me later of their sleepless nights and their wavering. This is perfectly understandable when you consider that these were young people who mostly read pro-regime press and did not show much interest for the state of the country, nor did they have much contact with the working class.”<sup>48</sup>

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

The work within legal organizations was probably the most interesting and most fascinating aspect of the strategy of Yugoslav communists in Prague, as some aspects of it went completely against the sectarianism of the Comintern’s Third Period and the decisions of the Dresden Congress. They cooperated with the bourgeois democratic forces and tried to influence them, rather than alienate them. As we will later see, this was true not only for rank-and-file members, but also for leaders of bourgeois democratic parties. In the words of Vljako Begović: “We carried out very pragmatic politics – on a wide democratic basis, trying to gather all oppositionist and democratic students around the communists. We created a united front which fought in the interest of the students, against the Yugoslav regime and its branch in Prague – the Yugoslav Embassy. There were, however, sectarian tendencies, especially concerning the call for an armed uprising. Our student Party organization in Prague followed such [sectarian] orientation by supporting the work of the KPJ in the country and abroad. However, by working among students and by using the Czechoslovak bourgeois democracy, we developed a movement with a wide political platform, which gathered all opposition students. It is true that certain attitudes and individual statements were a reflection of sectarian radicalism, but this was not typical of the student movement as a whole.”<sup>49</sup>

This is quite a radical course for a disciplined Party group at this time. It is extraordinary that we can see signs of a broad and democratic, Popular Front-style tendency within the revolutionary student movement in the late 1920s, very different from the official ultra-leftism of the KPJ. Such an approach would become the most interesting and most pronounced feature of the Yugoslav communist student movement in the 1930s. The strategy of infiltrating non-communist organizations,

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48 A. BOHUNICKA, “Španska poznanstva u Pragu“, p. 412.

49 V. BEGOVIĆ, “Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu,” p. 584.

raising class consciousness among the poor pro-regime students, and getting into conflict with the representatives of Yugoslav state authorities in Prague all began in this period.

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

### **The Yugoslav Dictatorship and The Communist Offensive**

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

The aforementioned core of the communist student group was strengthened in 1929 with the arrival of two young idealistic revolutionaries from Bosnia and Herzegovina, both of whom joined the communist movement already in their high school days: Fazlija Alikalfić and Agan Bostandžić. Fazlija Alikalfić (1910–2004) was from Mostar and studied forestry in Prague, where he became an active Party member. In 1941, Alikalfić joined the Partisans, and fought in some of the most famous battles in Yugoslavia, at Neretva and Sutjeska. He was a member of

the first postwar National Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the founder of the School of Forestry at the University of Sarajevo, whose Dean he was between 1965 and 1969. In his retirement years, he became a critic (albeit a marginalized one) of the new regime and the nationalist ideologies which divided Bosnia and Herzegovina. His friend Agan Bostandžić (1909–1943) became a communist while at the Sarajevo Gymnasium. An excellent mathematician, he was admitted into the Charles University's Faculty of Arts, Department of Mathematics in the fall of 1928. He was well-versed in dialectical materialism and Marxism-Leninism and often lectured on these topics to other students in the "Matija Gubec" Association. After his graduation in 1934, he decided to get a second degree in actuarial studies while working for the Czechoslovak National Statistical Office in parallel. However, he returned to Yugoslavia in 1935 and was arrested as soon as he arrived to Belgrade. Bostandžić was released thanks to his uncles' connections, but was not allowed to return to Prague. In order to get away from police surveillance, he moved to Ljubljana and soon got a job in the "Slavia" Bank. He was active in the communist movement there, taking part in anti-fascist demonstrations and maintaining ties between the KPJ and pro-communist elements in the Royal Army. Soon after the occupation began, in May 1941, he moved to Sarajevo and joined the resistance there. He was in charge of forging documents for members of the Partisans and worked for the Partisan intelligence service. Arrested by the Gestapo in December 1943, he died in custody after brutal torture.<sup>50</sup>

This expanded group of communist organizers was quick to take over the formerly pro-HSS "Matija Gubec" Association as soon as the Dictatorship was established in Yugoslavia. By late March 1929, the assembly elected Marijan Krajačić as Vice-President of the Association, while another communist, Stanko Aranjoš, was elected President in a new assembly that was convened just over a week later.<sup>51</sup> Two more communists, Koporčić and Viktor Kralik, were also elected into the Executive Committee. Communist fellow travellers from the DJT, like Rudolf Turk (1907–1984), who later became a famous Slovene agronomist, followed them in joining the ranks of the Association.<sup>52</sup> The new assembly in early April 1929, at which Aranjoš became President, was intended to further strengthen the communist grip over "Matija Gubec," and the entire old pro-HSS leader-

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50 F. ALIKALFIĆ, "Agan Bostandžić," 464–484.

51 AHMP, fund SK, X/364, report to the Associations Department of the Prague Police Directory, April 1, 1929.

52 Ibidem, report to the Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior on communist agitation in "Matija Gubec" Association, April 1, 1929.

ship resigned.<sup>53</sup> The most hotly debated topic at the new assembly was the crack-down of the Czechoslovak police that preceded it by a few days. Dragutin Prohaska, who was reinstated as the School Inspector and was now also in charge of the Yugoslav student dormitory in Prague's Letná district, requested to look into the library that "Matija Gubec" acquired in March. He found a library full of communist books in Russian, which the students claimed to have received from Soviet exchange students merely for the purposes of learning the language and finding out more about the Soviet Union. The Czechoslovak police was sent the list and concluded that none of the books are illegal in the country, and that although some members of "Matija Gubec" are known communists, they did not perform any communist activities within the Association, so there is no basis to take immediate legal action against them.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, a further police investigation into the activities of the Association was launched two days later following a request from Prohaska.<sup>55</sup> The list of books they had was included in the report. It shows that the librarian of the Association, Vlajko Begović, managed to gather an impressive library of 156 communist books. Interestingly enough, this library even included the works of Leon Trotsky, who had been exiled from the Soviet Union just a month before. According to Begović, in the wake of this event, the HSS supporters became passive, allowing the communists to do whatever they wanted with the association.<sup>56</sup> A look at subsequent lists of the leadership confirms this, although some old pro-HSS members remained in the now communist organization.

Prohaska confiscated some of the books, leading the communists to hire a lawyer to help them, threatening to sue if he did not return them within eight days. The Ministry of Education in Belgrade responded by threatening to revoke scholarships and studying permits of those who disobey the School Inspector.<sup>57</sup> Just like Dragiša Mišević in the 1920s, the students tried to stave off their foes at

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53 The National Archive in Prague (NA), fund Police Directory Prague II – Presidium (PP II), Prague Police Directory (1785–1942) section, sg. S 114/1, report to the Presidium of the Prague Police Directory on the Extraordinary Assembly of the "Matija Gubec" Association, April 5, 1929.

54 AHMP, fund SK, X/364, report to the Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior on communist agitation in "Matija Gubec" Association, April 1, 1929.

55 AHMP, fund SK, X/364, request of Dragutin Prohaska, Director of the Yugoslav student dormitory, to The Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior, April 3, 1929.

56 V. BEGOVIĆ, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," p. 586.

57 AJ, fund MP, carton 442, archival unit 702, letter of Minister of Education B. Maksimović to Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy in Prague Grga Andelinović, April 19, 1929.

the Legation by writing letters to the Yugoslav Ministry of Education and accusing Dragutin Prohaska of personal attacks on the less affluent students. The strategy was identical to the one pursued in 1925, with a 100-strong protest taking place before notifying the Ministry in order to attract attention of the Czechoslovak media. They certainly succeeded, at least in the case of the communist press.<sup>58</sup> From then on, Prohaska was seen as their main rival. They considered him a police agent and an organizer of pro-regime students,<sup>59</sup> and such accusations were not too far from the truth. In order to have better control of the students, he personally resided in the Yugoslav student dormitory at Letná.

The interventions from the Yugoslav Legation and its contacts in the Yugoslav dormitory did not stop the students, who now had a legal organization through which they worked. Although links with the communist organization in Yugoslavia were severed following the establishment of a Dictatorship, the connections with the exiles and the Czechoslovak communists helped them remain strong and organized. Over the next five years, “Matija Gubec” would organize fairly regular bi-weekly lectures for Yugoslav students in Prague cafés Merkur and Metro. Café Metro on Národní třída was the main gathering place for the members of the Czech interwar avant-garde, but was also a favorite of the Yugoslav communist students. “Matija Gubec” organized lectures there on Marxism, literature, philosophy, women’s rights, the national question in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the rise of fascism, contemporary scientific and intellectual trends, agriculture, and industry. They occasionally hosted famous guest lecturers, such as Karel Teige, the Czech communist art critic and founder of the avant-garde movement *Devětsil*. Among the students, Muhamed Kadić appears to have been the most prolific of lecturers. The lectures were attended by between fifty and one hundred people, suggesting that the communist students were not the only ones attending, but that they succeeded to reach out to the broader student population. The students were pleasantly surprised that they could discuss Czechoslovak politics at these meetings, and go as far as to criticize President Masaryk, especially when it came to his support for the Yugoslav dictatorship.<sup>60</sup> However, their lectures always had Czechoslovak police officers attending, and reporting to the Ministry of Interior, which in turn

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58 AHMP, SK, X/364, newspaper clipping “Diktatura v SHS a pražští studenti – *Právo lidu* č. 92,” April 18, 1929.

59 V. BEGOVIĆ, “Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu,” p. 581.

60 Jovan R. BOJOVIĆ, “Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929–1935. godine,” in *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis* 4 (1964), p. 44.

informed the Yugoslav Legation of their activities.<sup>61</sup> This was in line with Czechoslovak law at the time, which stated that a police officer must be present at public gatherings and has the right to close down the meeting if the political order of the Republic or its officials were offended.

Although they were isolated from their home country, they did not shift their attention entirely to Prague. Instead, they slowly tried to revive communist agitation in Yugoslavia. They did so mostly in the summer, when returning home for the holidays. They would illegally transport communist literature to Yugoslavia and create illegal Party committees in places where they did not exist.<sup>62</sup> One such agitator was Ivo Vejvoda, a Croat of Czech origin from Karlovac, who joined the student movement soon after his arrival to Prague in 1929.<sup>63</sup>

Vejvoda joined the communist movement in Prague in early 1930. He later said that he did so “not out of hunger, because I was not starving back in Karlovac, but out of my own intellectual and moral revelations and beliefs. For me, Prague played a crucial role in that development.”<sup>64</sup> His entrance into the ranks of the communists was invaluable at a time of intensification of revolutionary activity. They organized new protests against the Yugoslav regime and against Prohaska, attracting attention from the Czechoslovak right-wing press, which warned against communist agitation amongst Yugoslav students.<sup>65</sup> After successfully taking over “Matija Gubec”, but failing to infiltrate DJT where their class base was the strongest, the communists turned to “Jugoslavija” Academic Association, starting a political battle that would last for over half a decade. At the end of 1929, communist presence was marginal, with the only elected communist in the Association being Rade Ukropina, who held a rather unimportant position in the Executive Com-

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61 Gojko BERIC, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće: Sjećanja Ive Vejvode* (Zagreb: Profil, 2013), p. 51.

62 Ibidem, p. 53.

63 One of the finest intellectuals that the KPJ ever had, Vejvoda (1911–1991) studied architecture at ČVUT and then fought in the Spanish Civil War as a volunteer. Throughout the interwar period, he remained close friends with Miroslav Krleža, probably the greatest Croatian writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even though Krleža was marginalized and attacked by the KPJ for his opposition to Stalin. After World War II, he became a diplomat, serving as the Yugoslav ambassador to Brazil, Czechoslovakia, United Kingdom, Italy and France. Described as “an aristocrat of Tito’s diplomacy,” he remained a committed communist and internationalist until his death in December 1991, when Yugoslavia was already disintegrating. See Tvrtko JAKOVINA, “Ivo Vejvoda, aristokrat Titove diplomacije,” in Gojko BERIC, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće: Sjećanja Ive Vejvode* (Zagreb: Profil, 2013), pp. 7–22.

64 G. BERIC, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, p. 49.

65 AHMP, fund SK, X/364, newspaper clipping “Jihoslovanské a bulharské studentstvo se orijentuje v Praze komunisticky! – *Polední list* č. 334,” December 2, 1930.

mittee: he was the head of the sports section.<sup>66</sup> Throughout 1930 and 1931, Ukropina, Ivan Jakšić, and Nikola Petrović, managed to get elected, but they only held positions of alternate members of the Executive Committee or were in charge of the sports section.<sup>67</sup>

After failing to take over “Jugoslavija,” the communists constantly disrupted the work of the association, primarily by organizing protests and spreading anti-government flyers. They would boycott the activities organized by “Jugoslavija,” but partake in its assemblies, trying to promote their agenda and get elected into the Executive Committee. On International Workers’ Day in 1931 the communists published a flyer calling for an overthrow of the Yugoslav dictatorship, in which they referred to King Alexander I as “Alexander the Last” and tried to disrupt a historical lecture about anti-Habsburg uprisings of the Yugoslavs. The Yugoslav Legation, supported by the monarchist students, took decisive action to stop the communist infiltration of the most important Yugoslav student association. Following the incident on 1<sup>st</sup> May, they persuaded the Yugoslav Ministry of Education to increase the funding of the “Jugoslavija” Academic Association from 8,000 to 10,000 Yugoslav dinars a year. Prohaska, who wrote the request, explicitly stated that “Jugoslavija” in Prague should be considered, under these circumstances, to be an Association at the forefront of the struggle against our communists abroad and the state should thus offer it extraordinary protection and financial aid.<sup>68</sup>

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66 AHMP, fund SK, AD “Jugoslavija” section (IX/304), report to the Associations Department of the Prague Police Directory, December 4, 1929.

67 Relatively unknown at the time, both Jakšić and Petrović later became prominent members of the Yugoslav communist movement. Ivan Jakšić (1911–1942) was the grandson of the famous Serbian 19<sup>th</sup> century poet and painter Đura Jakšić. He became close with the then-leader of the Party Milan Gorkić and joined the KPJ in 1932. He ran the Party press in Prague, and was deported to Vienna by the Czechoslovak authorities. After fighting in the Gottwald Battalion in the Spanish Civil War, he returned to Yugoslavia and joined the Partisans following the Axis invasion. He was killed by the Ustasha in Herzegovina in January 1942. Nikola Petrović (1910–1997) joined SKOJ in 1930 and the KPJ in 1932, while studying at ČVUT. He returned to the country in 1935 to work on revitalizing the Party cells destroyed in 1929. He worked in the agitprop of the Communist Party of Serbia, and helped hide KSC Politburo member Jan Šverma in Belgrade after the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. He fought in the Partisans in World War II, eventually becoming the first postwar Yugoslav ambassador to Romania. After that, he was the Yugoslav Minister for Foreign Trade, Energetics, and Mechanical Engineering. In 1951, he was expelled from the KPJ as a Cominformist, and spent the rest of his life working as a historian.

68 AJ, fund MP, carton 442, archival unit 702, letter of School Inspector Dragutin Prohaska to the Ministry of Education, May 13, 1931.

He suggested that the same measures be taken for the Technical Students' Association, the DJT. Additionally, he suggested that the Ministry should give the jurisdiction over issuing studying permits for students abroad to the embassies' school inspectors, as they were better informed of students' "misdemeanors" than the authorities in the country.<sup>69</sup>

Although "Jugoslavija" did receive additional funding, most of these measures came too late. The communists seem to have operated much faster than the Legation. Already in late 1930, they reestablished their presence in the Executive Committee of the DJT, and by the fall of 1931, the communists took it over, with Fazlija Alikalčić becoming the new President.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, they managed to get support from sections of the Collective of Croatian Students (Zadruga hrvatskih akademičara, ZHA), who adopted a "national revolutionary platform," meaning a violent overthrow of the Yugoslav state and establishment of an independent Croat state.<sup>71</sup> This view was in line with the decisions of the 1928 Dresden Congress, making them, for the time being, natural allies of the communists.

In the fall of 1931, the Yugoslav émigré community in Prague was strengthened by the arrival of an internationally-renowned figure. Svetozar Pribićević (1875–1936) was the authoritarian Minister of Interior who persecuted communists and supported a unitarist Yugoslavia. However, by 1925, he became increasingly opposed to the centralism of the government and was pushed into the opposition. He was imprisoned by the King after the dictatorship began, and was finally allowed to leave the country after an internationally publicized two-week long hunger strike in the summer of 1931. He settled first in Prague and then in Paris, before returning to Prague shortly before his death in 1936. At the same time, his supporters in Yugoslavia and abroad, disillusioned with the reign of King Alexander, formed an organization called the United Revolutionary Youth (Ujedinjena revolucionarna omladina, URO). This was a quasi-socialist group arguing for the abolition of the dictatorship and the monarchy and the establishment of a parliamentary social democratic republic. Pribićević, formerly a mainstream politician, was forced into illegal activity following his political U-turn. The communist students started cooperating with him and the URO in Prague. Given

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69 Ibidem, carton 441, archival unit 702, letter of School Inspector Dragutin Prohaska to the Ministry of Education, April 25, 1931.

70 AHMP, fund SK, X/211, report to the Associations Department of the Prague Police Directory, November 12, 1931.

71 J. R. BOJOVIĆ, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929–1935. godine," pp. 40-41.

that the communists were more experienced with underground work, they helped the URO establish connections with their supporters in Yugoslavia, taught them how to keep their correspondence secret, and how to send orders and receive reports from the country while avoiding detection from police.<sup>72</sup> It is interesting to note that the communist students were engaged in cooperation with the URO even in Yugoslavia at the time, even though the organization was essentially social-democratic.<sup>73</sup> This is an extraordinary example of communist collaboration with the non-communist left during the Third Period, when all collaboration with non-communist parties was rejected by the Comintern.<sup>74</sup> What makes it even more remarkable is that it was a collaboration that involved not only the rank-and-file members, but even the very leader of a republican socialist organization.

At the same time, the increasingly militant communists engaged in many demonstrations throughout 1931. They were organized jointly by “Matija Gubec” and DJT. Most notably, they commemorated the second anniversary of the murder of Yugoslavia’s leading communist revolutionary Đuro Đaković in April,<sup>75</sup> and expressed solidarity with the protest of students at the University of Belgrade in November. They sent a letter to all the major Prague newspapers in which they protested the brutality of the Yugoslav police and announced a protest against it. The planned protest was banned by the Czechoslovak police at the urging of the Yugoslav Legation, prompting the students to engage in direct action. On 24<sup>th</sup> November, around 25 communists, led by Krajačić and Demić, interrupted a literary evening organized by the “Jugoslavija” Academic Association, shouting “Down with the dictatorship!”, “Down with Prime Minister Živković!” and “Down with King Alexander!”<sup>76</sup> Although the Legation successfully covered up the incident itself, the letter the students sent and the news of subsequent ban of their planned protest by the police in Czechoslovakia were published by many newspapers in Prague. The Yugoslav communists thus used the liberal-minded Czechoslovak public to put pressure on the repressive regime in Yugoslavia. They also distributed

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72 Ibidem, 42.

73 M. Ž. AVRAMOVIĆ, “Prve demonstracije protiv vojno-monarhističke diktature pod rukovodstvom beogradskih studenata-komunista 1. aprila 1932. godine,” pp. 170–171.

74 For a detailed examination of KPJ’s policy in the Third Period, see HAUG, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, pp. 30–34.

75 J. R. BOJOVIĆ, “Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929–1935. godine,” p. 43.

76 AJ, archival fund of the Central Press Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (CPB), carton 32, archival unit 77, letter from the Yugoslav Embassy correspondent to the Press Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 25, 1931.

flyers against the dictatorship to Yugoslav scouting organizations which visited Prague in the summer, and vandalized the house of the Yugoslav Military Attaché Tešanović by writing “Down with the Yugoslav dictatorship!” on it.<sup>77</sup>

The incident that most successfully brought the attention of the Czechoslovak public to the conflict between communists and the Legation occurred on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1931, a day before the Yugoslav Unification Day. A group of students came to the dormitory at night and ripped off the colors blue and white off the Yugoslav flag, leaving only red. The nationalist students who guarded the dormitory started a pursuit and caught Desimir Cvjetković. He was then arrested by the Czechoslovak police and named his accomplice as Miron Demić. Cvjetković stated that he is not a communist, but a supporter of Pribičević and the URO.<sup>78</sup> The police report found, with the help of Cvjetković and the monarchist students, that Zora Gavrić and Marijan Krajačić were acting together with Demić. Dragutin Prohaska suggested that they, together with Branko Popović, Franjo Huša,<sup>79</sup> Nikola Galić, and Stanko Aranjoš, be expelled from Czechoslovakia. They already had their studying permits revoked by the Yugoslav government for participating in a protest to liberate Croatian politician Vladko Maček from prison in 1930. As the Czechoslovak government did not react back then, this was seen as an excellent opportunity to get rid of the troublesome communists once and for all. Prohaska believed that their expulsion, alongside with more scholarships for poor students, would weaken the communist movement in Prague.<sup>80</sup> In the letter in which he describes the incident, Prohaska also complains about the complacency of other Legation officials who do not help him in the fight against communists and points out that the Czechoslovak police do not take seriously the pleas of a simple high school teacher. This could explain his inefficiency when confronting the students and the rapid takeover of non-communist societies which occurred in spite of his efforts. This time, however, he was at least partially successful. On 24<sup>th</sup> December, Desimir Cvjetković, his roommate Oskar Blum, Miron Demić

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77 Ibidem, letter from the Yugoslav Embassy correspondent to the Press Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 6, 1931.

78 NA, fund PP II, Prague Police Directory (1785–1942) section, sg. S 112/2, statement of Desimir Cvjetković to the Presidium of the Prague Police Directory, December 11, 1931.

79 Franjo Huša (1909–1950), a one-time president of the DJT, was a Czech from Bosnia who was imprisoned as a Cominformist at Goli Otok in 1949 and committed suicide there a year later.

80 AJ, fund MP, carton 442, archival unit 702, letter from the School Inspector Dragutin Prohaska to the Ministry of Education, December 1, 1931.

and Luise Pichler,<sup>81</sup> described by Prohaska as Demić's "concubine", were expelled from Czechoslovakia.<sup>82</sup>

There was an attempt to deport Zora Gavrić as well, but it failed because she married a Czechoslovak citizen. Prohaska also noted in his report that the incident was widely reported in the newspapers, but that most of them omitted the fact that the students were communists, which in his view meant that it gave the Czechoslovak public the wrong impression that supporters of the democratic opposition are being unjustly persecuted. He also writes that communists asked Pribičević for help, and that he pleaded for them with the President of the Czech National Social Party.<sup>83</sup> Although the Czechs refused to help, considering the tearing of the national flag to be too grave of an offence, this event further testifies to the closeness between communists and Pribičević, who, unlike the Czechs, clearly had no qualms about the tearing of his nation's flag.

One last open confrontation was an attempt by Krajačić and Aranjoš to disrupt Saint Sava's Day celebrations on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1932.<sup>84</sup> This largely abortive attempt seems to have discouraged the communists from taking similar actions in the future. Krajačić was expelled from the country soon after,<sup>85</sup> what suggests that these actions merely gave the authorities an excuse to rid themselves of some of the most active communists. After that, communists turned to more immediate issues concerning the everyday needs of students. On 11<sup>th</sup> April, a Students' Assembly convened by "Matija Gubec" stated, in a language akin to Popular Frontism of the late 1930s, that "All progressive student groups and organizations, regardless of their specific political views" should stand together.<sup>86</sup> Their goals included the betterment of economic conditions of the Yugoslav students, nostrification of diplomas in Yugoslavia free of charge, establishment of students' self-management, resignation of

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81 Luise Pichler (1903–1989) was a medical student from Bosnia of German origin. After her marriage to Miron Demić, she took up the Slavic name "Borka Demić" to accentuate her self-identification as a Yugoslav. Borka Demić was a nurse in the Spanish Civil War (where her husband Miron was killed, just one day before her arrival) and in World War II. By the end of the war, she reached the rank of a major in the Yugoslav Army. After the war, she worked as a doctor.

82 AJ, fund MP, carton 442, archival unit 702, report on the expulsion of Yugoslav communist students by the School Inspector Dragutin Prohaska to the Ministry of Education, January 14, 1932.

83 Ibidem.

84 AJ, fund MP, carton 442, archival unit 702, letter of the School Inspector Dragutin Prohaska to the Ministry of Education, January 1932.

85 V. BEGOVIĆ, "Sarajevski studenti u revolucionarnom pokretu jugoslovenskih studenata u Pragu," p. 590.

86 J. R. BOJOVIĆ, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929–1935. godine," p. 43.

Dragutin Prohaska, freedom of action for all student societies regardless of political ideology, and an end to police control over studying permits.<sup>87</sup> Students' self-management was a particularly important demand, as it meant that the control over the policies of the dormitory would be given to the students who lived there, rather than Prohaska. The KPJ's call for an armed uprising against the regime and the destruction of Yugoslavia was tactfully avoided, which certainly helped get the approval of the more moderate students. By the end of the year, these struggles, along with the protests of students at the University of Belgrade which inspired them, were supported by the Association of Yugoslav Agricultural Technicians (Društvo jugoslovenskih agrikulturnih tehničara – DJAT) as well,<sup>88</sup> suggesting another successful case of communist infiltration and agitation in a student association.

From then on, the communists remained very critical of the Yugoslav regime, but avoided open confrontations with the authorities. Even the creation of a nationalist and monarchist Yugoslav National Youth (Jugoslovenska nacionalna omladina – JNO) in early May resulted in a moderate boycott, rather than open confrontations with nationalist students. In spite of being funded by the Embassy, the communists easily and rapidly marginalized the organization,<sup>89</sup> which is a good illustration of the regime's troubles when it came to maintaining popularity among the students. The communists then used the All-Sokol Gathering (Všesokolský slet) in June to pass out around 2,000 flyers to Sokol members from Yugoslavia. The flyers, disguised as Serbo-Croatian-language fliers for visitors made by the hosts, called for an armed uprising against the regime, abolition of the monarchy, freedom of speech and assembly, release of political prisoners, and right to national self-determination, including the right to secession.<sup>90</sup> The action was a great success and once again caused a lot of concern for the Yugoslav Ministry of Education and their inspector Prohaska. At the same time, the communists continued their attacks on him, this time by writing a letter of complaint to "Gajret" Association, an influential Muslim charity organization that financed many Bosnian students. They accused him again of oppressing poor students and unjustly labeling them as communists.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, the DJT fought to equalize the technical school graduates

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87 Ibidem, pp. 43–44.

88 M. MITROVIĆ, "Saradnja Beogradskog univerziteta sa univerzitetima u Čehoslovačkoj 1918–1939," p. 309.

89 J. R. BOJOVIĆ, "Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929–1935. godine," p. 46.

90 Ibidem, p. 45.

91 AJ, fund MP, carton 442, archival unit 702, letter of a group of students in Prague to the Executive Committee of the "Gajret" Association, August 31, 1932.

with those of Gymnasiums, thus ending the discrimination they had endured since the establishment of the country.<sup>92</sup> Finally, the communist students formed a separate students' assembly after failing to takeover "Jugoslavija" in the fall of 1932.<sup>93</sup> For the next several years, these assemblies would convene after every failed communist takeover, as a way to express policies alternative to those of the monarchist leadership. They appear to have been very successful, and visited by up to half of the Yugoslav student population at times.

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

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92 AJ, fund MP, carton 442, archival unit 702, letter of the DJT to the Minister of Education, February 20, 1932.

93 NA, fund PP II, Prague Police Directory (1785–1942) section, sg. S 115/29, report to the Presidium of the Prague Police Directory on the meeting of Yugoslav students in Prague, October 20, 1932.

## 1933: New Leadership and the Fight for Self-Management

On 28<sup>th</sup> October 1933, the president of the Central Institute for Social Welfare and the head of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav League, Petr Zenkl, opened a new student dormitory in Prague's Střešovice district. The three-story functionalist building, designed by the young Yugoslav architect Nikola Dobrović, himself once a student at Prague's ČVUT, bore the name of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia, indicating for whom the dormitory was intended. One of its first tenants, an agriculture student called Lazar Udovički, described it as follows: "It was a beautiful three-story concrete building in the shape of the letter 'H.' [...] everything was functional, clean, modern. 'Alexandrova kolej' was probably one of the finest student dormitories not only in the Czechoslovak Republic, but in all of Europe. [...] It was built on an empty space in the Střešovice neighborhood, in the near vicinity of the Presidential Palace at Hradčany."<sup>94</sup>

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

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

By early 1933, the old communist student core in Prague was decimated. Demić, Pichler, Krajačić, Begović, Kadić, Miler, and Slobodan Škerović<sup>95</sup> were all expelled from the country. Zora Gavrić was the last person remaining. Fortunately,

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94 L. UDOVIČKI, *Španija moje mladosti*, pp. 57–58.

95 Slobodan Škerović (1913–1941), a Montenegrin from Cetinje, became a communist in Prague, but was quickly expelled and continued his activity in Belgrade, where he studied law. By 1934, he entered the SKOJ Central Committee, but was arrested the same year and sentenced to four years in prison. He finished his studies after he was released, and remained an active SKOJ member. He was arrested and shot by the Nazis in July 1941.

the Party could still count on Huša, Ukropina, Petrović, Vejvoda, Jakšić, Alikalfić and Bostandžić. Zora Gavrić formed the new leadership around Vejvoda and Petrović.<sup>96</sup> This leadership was joined by Adela Bohunicki-Poca,<sup>97</sup> who was sent to Prague on Party's orders in late 1932, and they collaborated with newly-arrived young communists Ljudevit Trilnik,<sup>98</sup> Vojislav Vučković,<sup>99</sup> and Bartol Petrović.<sup>100</sup>

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

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96 L. UDOVIČKI, *Španija moje mladosti*, p. 59.

97 Adela Bohunicki (1905–1978) from Slavonski Brod in Croatia became involved in the revolutionary Marxist movement already during her high school days. She was a prominent member of the Club of Marxist Students at the University of Zagreb and became a member of the KPJ in 1925. As a consequence, she had to flee the country and finish her medical studies in Graz and Munich. The Party then ordered her to move to Prague and organize the movement there. In January 1937, she came to Spain, and spent the next two years as a doctor in the International Brigades. In May 1939, she was able to leave the French internment camp and go to Yugoslavia. The police, aware of her activities, arrested her and then deported her to Hungary, from where she got to Slovakia. She immediately established contact with the Slovak partisans, but spent the rest of the war as a pediatrician. In 1945, she returned to Yugoslavia. However, in 1949, Bohunicki was arrested as a Cominformist and spent 4 years at Goli Otok. After her release, she returned to pediatric practice until retirement, and published some memories of her revolutionary activity in the pre-World War II period. See Vojo RAJČEVIĆ, s.v. "Bohunicki, Adela – Poca," *Hrvatski biografski leksikon*, 1st ed. (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 1989). <http://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=2281> (accessed February 11, 2016).

98 Ljudevit Trilnik was a member of the last Executive Committee of "Matija Gubec" and a leading member of the Party cell in Prague, but after his return to Yugoslavia he was arrested and became a police informant.

99 Vojislav Vučković (1910–1942) was a student of the Prague Conservatory and a well-known Yugoslav left-wing composer and activist. During the Nazi occupation, he was arrested by the Serbian fascist police as a known communist and died in their custody.

100 Bartol Petrović was an engineer, member of the District Party Committee for Karlovac in Croatia, a courier of two Communist Party of Croatia (KPH) leaders Josip Kraš and Rade Končar, and a Partisan.

dent organizations. In May, the communist Jakov Brusić became the president of the ZHA, an association that was until then under control of the HSS members who resigned from “Matija Gubec” in 1929.<sup>101</sup> They tried to do the same with the Slovenian Students’ Collective (Slovenska dijaška zadruga, SDZ) but were much less successful, and often lamented the association’s support for the Yugoslav regime.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, the Collective of Students from Serbia, Montenegro and Bay of Kotor (Zadruga akademičara iz Srbije, Crne Gore i Boke Kotorske, ZAS) was ignored, and there were no attempts to take it over. This could be either because the organization was largely inactive between 1927 and 1933 or because the official view of Yugoslavia as a project of the Greater Serbian bourgeoisie made the communists less interested in this association. The nationalists were still active in all of these societies, and the presence of a communist president in ZHA did little to change that – as testified by continuation of nationalist lectures just a month after the election of Brusić as President.<sup>103</sup> In May, the nationalists attempted to retake the DJT, managing to postpone the assembly of the association twice through threats and even physical assaults.<sup>104</sup> The fight that broke out appears to have been a three-way showdown between Croatian nationalists, pro-regime monarchists, and communists. In spite of this, Alikalfić was reelected president of the DJT two weeks later.

As already stated, the real struggles began when the new Yugoslav student dormitory was opened in October. The students were dissatisfied with the regulations established by the leadership of the dormitory and the fact that so much power was again in the hands of the Yugoslav government. They protested through a magazine called *Pitomci – Chovanaci*, which they published themselves. The title roughly translates to “Idiots – Inmates.” The first part of the name was a pun, since “pitomci” simply means “alumni” in Serbo-Croatian, while the second was a comment on the state of the Yugoslav student dormitory imposed by the Yugoslav Embassy, which they compared to a prison or a military regime. The humorous maga-

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101 AHMP, fund SK, ZHA section (X/242), report to the Associations Department of the Police Directory, May 10, 1933.

102 Archive of the Charles University (AUK), archival fund All-students’ Archive (VA), International and Foreign Societies section, carton B 337, proceedings from the All-Students’ Assembly of A.K. “Matija Gubec”, DJT, and ZHA, March 10, 1933.

103 AHMP, fund SK, X/242, report to the Associations Department of the Police Directory, June 10, 1933.

104 NA, fund PP II, Prague Police Directory (1785–1942) section, sg. 115/29, report to the Presidium of the Prague Police Directory on the Assembly of the DJT, May 17, 1933.

zine was an illegal publication, which poked fun at the situation in the dormitory by calling it “Alexander’s Barracks” and attributing the authorship of the magazine to Mita Rackov, the most prominent monarchist student.<sup>105</sup> Given that it was an illegal publication, we do not know who exactly wrote the articles, but Adela Bohunicki writes that one of the main authors was Ivan Jakšić.<sup>106</sup> That same month, “Jugoslavija”, “Matija Gubec”, DJT and ZHA issued a joint resolution against the dormitory regulations, which they considered to be “the most reactionary of all dormitory regulations in Prague.”<sup>107</sup> They called for students’ self-management of the dormitory, re-stated their demands for an end to discrimination against technical school students in Yugoslavia, and introduced a new demand for abolition of tuition fees at all Yugoslav universities. This shows that the communists and their allies at ZHA could easily outvote the monarchist leadership of “Jugoslavija” as long as they held a joint all-students’ assembly. They received significant help from the KSČ, and the young Czechoslovak communist students, led by Václav Sinkule,<sup>108</sup> helped them spread anti-government flyers at the dormitory.<sup>109</sup>

As the communists attempted to draw attention to social issues faced by the students, the nationalist camp began to fragment. At the yearly Assembly of “Jugoslavija” in the fall of 1933, an entire group of former nationalists, disappointed with the situation in the country but not willing to support the communists, split and formed a separate group called *Centrumaši* – The Centrists. The group was immediately infiltrated by the communists, since it already had quite a lot of fellow travelers. The nationalist leadership responded by expelling 25 communist students from “Jugoslavija.” The communists then blocked the Assembly, which led to the expulsion of five more members. When the Assembly was finally convened, only the centrist and the nationalist list were on the ballot, and the nationalists won

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105 NA, fund PP II, Prague Police Directory (1785–1942) section, sg. P-31/75, the third issue of *Pitomci – Chovanci*, February 1934.

106 A. BOHUNICKA, “Španska poznanstva u Pragu”, p. 413.

107 AJ, fund MP, carton 441, archival unit 702, resolution of the All-Students’ Assembly of A.D. “Jugoslavija”, DJT, A.K. “Matija Gubec” and ZHA, October 4, 1933.

108 Václav Sinkule (1905–1942) was one of the most prominent KSČ youth organizers. He was a member of the Party from 1927, a leader of multiple revolutionary student organizations, and an editor of *Rudé právo* from 1935 until 1938. From 1938 until 1941, he was a member of the Central Committee of the illegal KSČ. In February 1941 he was arrested by the Gestapo. He was murdered in Mauthausen on 20th April 1942.

109 NA, fund PP II, Prague Police Directory (1785–1942) section, sg. P-31/75, report to the Presidium of the Prague Police Directory on communist agitation in King Alexander Dormitory, March 6, 1934.

with only three votes more than the centrists.<sup>110</sup> This was the beginning of the end of the nationalist and monarchist dominance of “Jugoslavija.” The leader of *Centrumaši*, Marko Spahić, joined the communists soon after.<sup>111</sup>

The cultural life of the students at this point was mostly organized by Ivo Vejvoda. He was the one who acquired new books and kept ties with left-wing intellectuals in both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.<sup>112</sup> Through “Matija Gubec” he still organized lectures which attracted large numbers of students. Sometimes as much as half of all the Yugoslav students in Prague attended the lectures, but on average about fifty students attended, which was still roughly one in four students. Additionally, he took the students to exhibitions, theater plays and film screenings. Although the students maintained a great deal of openness about the intellectual and cultural trends of the time, there were opinions that were never questioned and the USSR was still held up as the untouchable ideal. Artists who criticized it were often met with suspicion, and their books and films were unpopular among the communist students. Vejvoda recalls that he simply did not believe Vítězslav Nezval when he wrote about the beggars and prostitutes of Moscow following his visit to the Soviet Union. To him, the idea that there could be such things in the land of socialism was simply unimaginable.<sup>113</sup> Apart from providing a rich cultural life, the popularity of the communists also grew thanks to concrete achievements in the struggle for student rights. In 1934, they managed to persuade the Yugoslav government to relieve the poor students from any additional schooling fees, enabling them to effectively study for free if they had already received a government scholarship.<sup>114</sup>

Starting from 1934, Prague became incredibly important for the communists. With Berlin and Vienna both falling to the fascists, it was the last major European capital apart from Paris from which they could operate legally. Due to its proximity to Yugoslavia, more KPJ members opted for Prague. In these years, Prague provided

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110 J. R. BOJOVIĆ, “Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929–1935. godine,” 48.

111 Marko Spahić (1910–1980), a student from Eastern Bosnia, was later wounded in Spain and became permanently disabled. He was transported to Moscow, where he spent the war as a newscaster of Radio Free Yugoslavia. After the war, he returned to his country and became the first director of the *Jugoslavija Film* Production Company. In 1948, he supported the Cominform Resolution and was imprisoned for five and a half years. He was later pardoned and retired as a disabled war veteran. See Lazar UDOVIČKI, *O Španiji i španskim borcima (članci, intervjui, pisma, govori, izveštaji)* (Belgrade: Stručna knjiga, 1991), pp. 226–227.

112 A. BOHUNICKA, “Španska poznanstva u Pragu”, p. 413.

113 G. BERIĆ, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, p. 209.

114 J. R. BOJOVIĆ, “Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929–1935. godine,” p. 48.

shelter to many famous Yugoslav revolutionaries, including Mustafa Golubić, Vladimir Ćopić, Boris Kidrič, Prežihov Voranc,<sup>115</sup> Srđan Prica, Vukica Mitrović, Ivan Ru-kavina, Ružica Turković,<sup>116</sup> Josip Kopinić, Ivan Krajačić, and Julio Varesko.<sup>117</sup> It appears that most of the time the students did not know about these arrivals, or were unaware of the identities of the high-ranking Party officials they were involved with.<sup>118</sup> Most importantly, the KPJ leader, Milan Gorkić, moved to Prague following the fascist takeover of Austria. He organized the transport of the Party press from Vienna to Prague. From 1934 until 1936, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the KPJ, *Proleter*, was printed in Prague. The print production managers were Prague students – first Rade Ukropina,<sup>119</sup> and then Ivan Jakšić.<sup>120</sup>

In the summer, two young Jewish students from Bosnia came to Prague, where they would study for the next several years. Oskar Danon (1913–2009) studied at the Prague Conservatory, where he obtained a PhD in musicology. He fought in the Yugoslav Partisans from 1941, and attained the rank of a major. He composed many famous Partisan songs. After the war, Danon was a conductor of the Belgrade Opera and the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra. He taught at the Belgrade Music Academy. In the 1990s, he was a prominent antiwar activist in Bosnia. Ilija Engel (1912–1944) from Jajce studied at ČVUT, and was active in both “Matija Gubec” and DJT. He was a commander of a Republican anti-tank battery in the Spanish Civil War. He fought in the Partisans from 1941 and was the head of the 2<sup>nd</sup> department of the Main Operational Group of the People’s Liberation Army in Croatia, which operated in and around Zagreb. He was killed in an enemy airstrike in 1944 and posthumously declared a People’s Hero of Yugoslavia. Both Danon and Engel would play an active role in the events in the Yugoslav student community in the next three years.

In the fall of 1934, the management of the dormitory, headed by Zenkl, decided to appease the students by finally allowing students’ self-management. Most of the communists were expelled from the dormitory in the first part of the year, leaving only three communist sympathizers there.<sup>121</sup> This move certainly played a role in the decision to allow self-management, given that the communist

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115 G. BERIĆ, *Zbogom XX. stoljeće*, p. 27.

116 Marko PERIĆ-VELIMIR, *Doživljaji jednog Španca* (Zagreb: Stvarnost, 1963), p. 39.

117 A. BOHUNICKA, “Španska poznanstva u Pragu”, pp. 415–418.

118 L. UDOVIČKI, *Španija moje mladosti*, p. 79.

119 Ivan OČAK, *Gorkić: Život, rad i pogibija* (Zagreb: Globus, 1988), p. 183.

120 A. BOHUNICKA, “Španska poznanstva u Pragu”, p. 413.

121 J. R. BOJOVIĆ, “Napredni jugoslovenski studentski pokret u Pragu 1929–1935. godine,” p. 47.

threat seemed to be over. The election for Student President was supposed to be a sham, with the only candidate being Václav Dryák, a Czech and the son-in-law of the Yugoslav Envoy in Prague. On Election Day, Lazar Udovički, a monarchist and a member of the agricultural students' association DJAT, announced his candidacy as well. He won four times more votes than Dryák, surprising everybody.<sup>122</sup> This can be explained as a protest of students who wanted an independent representative, even if they were not openly anti-government oriented. However, nobody at the time knew that Udovički had approached Nikola Petrović the month before and professed to him that he became a communist.<sup>123</sup> He then successfully fought for an end to discrimination of anti-regime students by ensuring that admission to the dormitory was decided exclusively on the basis of economic status, much to the dismay of the monarchists in the Students' Committee. He even managed to pressure the conservative Director of the dormitory into resigning. Soon after, he joined the KPJ.<sup>124</sup> Udovički, as a Student President of the dormitory, was actually also the person most actively involved in spreading communist propaganda fliers there; no one knew that he was a member of the Party cell, and thus no one thought the President of the dormitory himself could have been the perpetrator. He was later forced to resign following a campaign by a Serbian student Branko Krsmanović, a supporter of the left-wing Agrarian Party.<sup>125</sup>

On 9<sup>th</sup> October 1934, the Yugoslav King Alexander was assassinated in Marseille together with the French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou. The assassin, Vlado Černožemski, was a member of pro-Bulgarian Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, who planned the murder together with the Croatian Ustaša. In the words of Udovički, the Party members in Prague did not "exactly shed many tears" over his death, although they did not approve of acts of individual terror.<sup>126</sup> However, the flyer that they circulated in Prague after the assassination tells us a lot about their views at the time. They spoke of a "so-called Yugoslavia" and reiterated their demands of a right to self-determination of nations oppressed by the Greater Serbian nationalists. They attacked the Little Entente, an alliance of Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia, as "an exponent of French imperialism".<sup>127</sup>

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122 L. UDOVIČKI, *Španija moje mladosti*, p. 63.

123 *Ibidem*, pp. 62–63.

124 *Ibidem*, p. 64.

125 *Ibidem*, p. 65.

126 *Ibidem*, p. 63.

127 NA, fund PP II, Prague Police Directory (1785–1942) section, sg. S 112/2, flyer of the revolutionary students "for all progressive students from Yugoslavia," October 1934.

This was the last time that Prague communists had expressed such views, as the KPJ stopped explicitly calling for a breakup of Yugoslavia following the Fourth Land Conference in December 1934.<sup>128</sup> It is very interesting that the rigidity on the national question remained unshaken throughout the period even though they did not adhere as strongly to the other official policies of the time, such as the need for militant action or the refusal to cooperate with non-communist left-wing parties. This could be because some of their close collaborators came from the ranks of the Croatian Peasant Party, which was largely disillusioned with unified Yugoslavia at the time. Serbian hegemony in Yugoslavia aside, fascism was already clearly seen as the biggest threat, as testified by the statement of solidarity and financial donation of “Matija Gubec” to the World Student Congress in Brussels in December.<sup>129</sup> The fight against “Yugoslav fascism,” meaning the state of Yugoslavia itself, was still seen as a part of this struggle. Support for a unified, federal Yugoslavia would only come during 1935.

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

(to be continued)

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128 Desanka PEŠIĆ, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje* (Belgrade: Izdavačka radna organizacija “Rad,” 1983), pp. 264–265.

129 NA, fund PP II, Prague Police Directory (1785–1942) section, sg. S 112/2, statement of Solidarity of “Matija Gubec” with the World Student Congress against war and fascism, December 29, 1934.

## SUMMARY

The activity of Yugoslav communist students in Prague in the 1920s and 1930s played a significant role in the development of the Yugoslav communist movement as a whole. The students who became communists during their studies abroad and gained revolutionary experience in the Spanish Civil War became part of the country's elite after the establishment of the communist regime at the end of World War II. Their main opponent at the time, the Yugoslav Legation in Prague, was unable to stop the spread of anti-regime sentiment due to both organizational failures and the political, social, and economic disarray that the country was in and of which most students were acutely aware. The communists defeated the pro-monarchy forces by overtaking a legal student organization through which they then acted, as well as through cooperation with the non-communist left. Such cooperation was at its peak during a period when the KPJ, under the directions of the Comintern, denounced all non-communist leftists as "social-fascists." This testifies to the students' relative freedom from central Party control at the time. After 1935, this strategy officially became the basis of the KPJ's Popular Front policy, which the Yugoslav communists began to gradually adopt a year earlier. By the mid-1930s, the young communists ultimately managed to gain a mass following among the students, which overshadowed all attempts of monarchist students at defending the status quo. This was achieved through their acceptance of cooperation with the non-communist left and through their alliances with national student organizations that perceived the central government in Belgrade as oppressive.

## RESUMÉ

Činnost komunistických studentů v Praze ve dvacátých a třicátých letech hrála významnou roli v rozvoji jugoslávského komunistického hnutí jako celku. Studenti, kteří se stali komunisty během svého studia v zahraničí a nabyli revoluční zkušenosti ve španělské občanské válce, patřili k elitě komunistického establishmentu v zemi po druhé světové válce. Jugoslávské vyslanectví v Praze – jejich hlavní oponent – nebylo schopno kvůli organizační neschopnosti a také politickým, ekonomickým a sociálním nepořádkům v Jugoslávii, jichž si většina studentů byla dobře vědoma, zastavit šíření protirežimních nálad. Komunisté porazili promonarchistické síly tím, že ovládli oficiální studentské organizace a spolupracovali s nekomunistickou levicí. Tato spolupráce přitom dosáhla vrcholu v době, kdy Komunistická strana Jugoslávie (KSJ) – na základě direktiv Kominterny – označila nekomunistickou levicí za “sociální fašisty”. To dokazuje tehdejší relativní nezávislost studentů na centrálním vedení strany. Po roce 1935 se tato strategie stala součástí politiky lidové fronty KSJ, kterou jugoslávští komunisté začali postupně uplatňovat už o rok dříve. Do poloviny třicátých let mladí komunisté tedy dokázali získat většinu studentů a tím zastínili pokusy monarchistických studentů bránit status quo. Podařilo se jim toho dosáhnout díky spolupráci s levicovými nekomunistickými studenty a s využitím jejich vazeb na národní studentské organizace, které vnímaly ústřední vládu v Bělehradu jako utlačovatele.

