

## The Stalin-Tito Conflict as Reflected in Literature

The causes and effects of the Soviet-Yugoslav dispute of 1948 are too well known to need repeating here. Various historians, military strategists, economists, and specialists in Communist affairs have established the basic facts and correctly pointed out the importance of that first break in the Soviet-controlled bloc. Vladimir Dedijer even wrote (supposedly quoting Henry Wallace) that Tito could be compared, though in a different field, to Martin Luther.<sup>1</sup> The independent brand of communism recently proclaimed by the Italian, French, and Spanish Communists (the so-called Euro-Communists) definitely has its precedent in the astounding and courageous example of the Yugoslavs.

I shall limit my analysis mostly to Yugoslav writers and describe how they reacted toward this discord in the "socialist" camp. They all basically defend the same point of view, but they differ in their approach and, above all, in literary quality. The older writers, for example, were intimately involved in the Soviet-Yugoslav dispute, and they display a passionate hostility toward Stalin. To varying degrees, they often combine an excessive reverence for Tito, the perennial Yugoslav leader, with boastful self-approval. Recent works, though duly emphasizing the tragedy for thousands of citizens, avoid clichés and journalistic reporting. Dragoslav Mihailović and Jože Javoršek, in particular, have produced original and captivating books.

The first important literary document of the conflict is a reply, in December 1948, by Yugoslav writers<sup>2</sup> to the Soviet authors Gladkov and Tikhonov, who a month earlier had observed the Yugoslav national holiday by broadcasting a message to the Yugoslav people in which they ignored or sharply criticized the Yugoslav Communist Party and its leaders. The letter from the Yugoslav writers, analyzed and rejected, point by point, the arguments presented in the statement signed by Gladkov and Tikhonov, who can hardly be assumed to have acted on their own.

The Yugoslavs first wanted to know how the Russians could congratulate the Yugoslav masses and bypass their leaders.<sup>3</sup> The Partisans indeed had played a significant role in the national liberation, but only the party, under the leadership of Tito, had succeeded in organizing their dispersed efforts, thus enabling them to hold a sizable part of the national territory throughout the entire war.

1. V. Dedijer, *The Battle Stalin Lost* (New York, 1971), p. 203.

2. This reply was published in a weekly periodical, *Književne novine*, no. 46 (December 27, 1948), p. 1, and in the official organ of the Yugoslav Communist Party, *Borba*, no. 313 (December 28, 1948), p. 4, and was signed by sixty-seven writers. Among them are such prominent names as Ivo Andrić, Antun Barac, Milan Bogdanović, Branko Ćopić, Oskar Davičo, Velibor Gligorić, Slavko Janevski, Vjekoslav Kaleb, Edvard Kocbek, Slavko Kolar, Miroslav Krleža, Skender Kulenović, Mihailo Lalić, Desanka Maksimović, Ranko Marinković, Dimitar Mitrev, Vladimir Nazor, Isak Samokovlija, Ervin Šinko, Josip Vidmar, and Oton Župančič.

3. "... pobjede je izvojevao narod *stihiskim* putem, sam, bez vođstva."

When the Russian army made its victorious advance into Yugoslavia (October 1944), it was welcomed not by a band of guerrillas, but by a regular government which had been functioning since November 29, 1943. The Yugoslav writers then took issue with another section of the Soviet message. Although the Soviets were correct in their assertion that the Yugoslav people loved the Russians, the Yugoslav writers declared that this admiration could be explained neither by a long friendly tradition nor by favorable bourgeois propaganda, but solely by the fact that the Yugoslav Communist Party, even when it was illegal during the prewar period, had disseminated abundant and positive information about the first socialist country. Except for the Soviet Union itself, said the Yugoslav writers, there was no country in which so many books were published about Soviet political, economic, and cultural achievements as there were in Yugoslavia.

Gladkov and Tikhonov had accused the Yugoslav authorities of two specific crimes: of being in the service of the capitalist countries, and of propagating antiquated nationalist ideas instead of internationalism. The Yugoslav writers now invited their Russian critics to show them a single instance in which the Yugoslav government had not supported the views and interests of the Soviet Union and other people's democracies at international assemblies. They also rejected the charge of "nationalist deviation" because the Yugoslav government had done everything possible in the past (and would continue to do so in the future) to eliminate the bourgeoisie and to solidify communism, not only in Yugoslavia but wherever possible all over the world. The Yugoslavs said they failed to understand how such false accusations could come from Gladkov and Tikhonov, who had recently visited Yugoslavia and been welcomed with open arms. Above all, they were surprised that Tikhonov, who only a year earlier had published an entire collection of poetry about Yugoslavia and its freedom-loving inhabitants,<sup>4</sup> could now denounce them together with their party as traitors to the cause of the proletariat.

The Yugoslav document went on to criticize Alexander Fadeev's recent speech at a meeting of progressive intellectuals (in Breslau) in which he failed to mention a single Yugoslav writer who had been killed in the fight against nazism and fascism. Fadeev had passed over in silence the fact that the Yugoslav nations had lost more than a million and a half citizens in the bloody struggle against the foreign invaders. The Yugoslav authors declared that the campaign against Yugoslavia did not promote the progress of socialism in the world, and they predicted that the day would soon come when apologies would be due the Yugoslav people and their leaders on the part of those who slandered them viciously.

In 1952 a "novel" entitled *The Yugoslav Tragedy* (*Iugoslavskaia tragediia*) by Orest M. Mal'tsev (1908– ) was published in Moscow; it immediately received a Stalin Prize, went through several editions, and was translated into Bulgarian and Serbian.<sup>5</sup> Later this same pamphlet-fiction was condemned by the Russians themselves as a false (*oshibochno*) presentation of the Yugoslav leaders during the Partisan war of liberation.<sup>6</sup> To a careful reader of this long

4. N. Tikhonov, *Stikhi o Iugoslavii* (Moscow, 1947).

5. I will quote here from the Serbian translation, Orest M. Mal'tsev, *Jugoslovenska tragedija: Roman* (Bucharest, 1953).

6. Cf. *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 4 (Moscow, 1967), p. 556.

attack against the Yugoslav Communists, it becomes obvious that the author did not describe either events or people as he saw them in 1943–44, but rather subordinated his narrative to the official Russian interpretations and distortions which arose after the Stalin-Tito conflict had occurred in 1948.<sup>7</sup>

The basic supposition of this corrupted story is that the prominent Yugoslav Partisans were willing stooges of the Western powers, and that therefore they did their best to prevent the Russian military advance in Yugoslavia. There were some among these greedy and treacherous “intellectuals,” however, who sincerely wished to see “the big Eastern brother” participate in the formation of a new Yugoslav society. Thus Arso Jovanović, who sided with the Cominform and was killed while crossing the Rumanian border, is depicted as a bright military strategist, a new Kutuzov; and Lola Ribar, who died or was killed in a plane accident at the end of 1943, is portrayed as having a vision to the effect that with the arrival of the Red Army universal peace, brotherly love, and economic prosperity would prevail among the Balkan nations.

For Mal'tsev, the Serbian masses (he rarely mentions other Yugoslav nations) are devoted body and soul to the traditional protector of the South Slavic Orthodox, and whenever the name of Stalin is mentioned (and his name appears on almost every page) the simple but brave soldiers experience a kind of ecstasy. Just as the author reserves all his esteem only for the Russians in the Soviet Union, so in Yugoslavia he reserves it only for the Serbs. On those rare occasions when Mal'tsev speaks about the Croats, he stresses that as Catholics they are subservient satellites of a foreign power. If there were no other reasons (and there were many) for mistrusting Tito, the fact that he was born a Croat and educated as a Catholic would be enough to make the Soviet writer suspect his motives. Mal'tsev often indulges in pure fabrications: for example, he asserts that Tito, while in Rome in 1944, had secretly visited the pope<sup>8</sup> and had consequently pardoned the “collaborator” archbishop of Zagreb, Aloysius Stepinac. In actual fact, it was Tito's regime that condemned Stepinac to a hard prison and kept him in confinement until his death, in 1960. Mal'tsev presents the influential Slovenian Jesuit, Antun Prešeren, as a Croat and falsely accuses him of heading a Vatican espionage service.<sup>9</sup> Those Yugoslav Communists who sided with the Kremlin are exalted as giants by the Russian propagandist, but Andrija Hebrang (a Cominformist) is not mentioned, perhaps because this former secretary of the Croatian Communist Party always stressed his Croatian nationality.

Despite Mal'tsev's scorn for the Croats, he at least grants them the redeeming feature of being Slavs. When he turns to the Westerners, particularly the Anglo-Saxons, his scorn knows no limits. He ridicules their military commanders in Italy and France, complaining that their advances were deliberately too slow

7. There is a total lack of objectivity and good taste concerning several matters. Thus, Mal'tsev has an American spy, already in 1944, foreseeing that László Rajk and Traiche Kostov will collaborate with the capitalist countries (Mal'tsev, *Jugoslovenska tragedija*, p. 508). One wonders what Mal'tsev's explanation would be now that these two revolutionaries have been rehabilitated.

8. Mal'tsev, perhaps knowing that no one would believe his outright lie, comments: “Ta stranica posete jugoslovenskog probisveta u Italiji ostala je privremeno prikriivena za istoriju” (*ibid.*, p. 449).

9. It is ludicrous to qualify Prešeren, a scholar and a saintly figure, as the head of a Vatican espionage service (“rukovodilac specijalne obaveštajne službe,” *ibid.*).

so that all the burden of the war fell upon the Russians. He insists that the Western powers were not primarily interested in defeating the Nazis and the Fascists, but that their main interest was preparations for exploitation of the countries to which they were now sending weapons (during the period of post-war reconstruction). They supposedly even destroyed cities, bridges, and roads to make the postwar governments more dependent upon them. These Westerners had nothing in common with the "noble" Russians, who were liberating the enslaved and oppressed nations without any ulterior motives: the only Russian concern was to make everyone as free and happy as the Soviet citizens!

Mal'tsev writes that the British parachute officers, F. W. D. Deakin and Fitzroy Maclean, whose war memoirs are a useful source of information on the Partisans,<sup>10</sup> were constantly watching the moves of Tito and his associates in order to monitor British influence on them. The British worries were "unnecessary," however, because Tito's acolytes (such as Djilas, Ranković, Kardelj, Velebit, Peko Dapčević, Dedijer, and Koča Popović) were military cowards but shrewd behind-the-scenes operators. They were already assigning important positions to their adherents, namely, those who disliked the Soviet Union and were mainly concerned with the future favors which the American and British would generously bestow upon them. In this respect Ranković and Popović proved to be the most effective: they eliminated all those who looked hopefully toward Moscow from the Yugoslav military and police apparatus. The members of this inner circle are depicted as a "royal court," whose principal occupation was to flatter the paranoid ego of the master. Moreover, the Russian author insists that certain celebrated Partisan "offensives" were in reality bloody defeats caused by incompetent and unscrupulous theoreticians who were directing the military operations from well-protected shelters.<sup>11</sup>

Although Mal'tsev tendentiously and falsely depicted the Yugoslav Communist leaders as pro-Westerners, even though they had been among the most fervent propagators of the Stalinist policies and methods until 1948, he has given a basically accurate portrait of Marshal Tito. All the peculiarities of the Yugoslav dictator which are today public gossip—for example, that Tito had four wives and even more mistresses, that he cherished expensive diamonds and uniforms with numerous medals, that he changed his clothes several times the same evening, that he delighted in pompous positions à la Napoleon, Goebbels, and Mussolini, that he followed in politics the Austrian imperial axiom: "*divide et impera*," that he was without principles, that his main teacher was Machiavelli, and that he had admirers but no real friends—these and other features of this complex and puzzling character are portrayed in *The Yugoslav Tragedy*.<sup>12</sup>

10. F. W. D. Deakin, *The Embattled Mountain* (New York, 1971); Fitzroy Maclean, *Eastern Approaches* (London, 1949); and Fitzroy Maclean, *Disputed Barricade* (London, 1957).

11. Mal'tsev frequently insists that the fighters were critical of the amateurish strategy of Marshal Tito and his egocentric cohorts, which resulted in many military defeats: "A šta bi drugo moglo da bude, kad skorojevići, hvalisavci i pesnicimilioneri uobrazu da su vojskovođe" (Mal'tsev, *Jugoslovenska tragedija*, p. 494).

12. Whether Mal'tsev gathered his information firsthand in Yugoslavia, or whether he obtained it from the Russian secret police, with whom he appeared to be intimately connected and whose views he expressed in his writings, is unclear. On the basis of his rather shaky knowledge of Yugoslav geography and history, I suspect that he never visited Yugoslavia.

In 1971 the prison and camp memoirs of Karlo Štajner, *Seven Thousand Days in Siberia (7000 dana u Sibiru)* were published in Zagreb. The author had been imprisoned in Moscow on November 4, 1936, and was released twenty years later, near Krasnoyarsk, thanks to the energetic intervention of the Yugoslav ambassador, Dobrivoje Vidić. He was joined in Moscow by his Russian wife Sonia, and then they both journeyed to Yugoslavia. Štajner (Steiner) was born an Austrian, but in the twenties he had been active as a printer in the clandestine Yugoslav Communist press. Upon his return, he was reinstated in the Yugoslav Communist Party.<sup>13</sup>

Štajner is not a theoretician. He usually avoids comments or conclusions; he presents the facts, hoping that the reader will be able to form his own judgment. Although it is evident from his minute and accurate narrative that the entire Soviet apparatus supported Stalin's terror, Štajner nevertheless believes that Stalinism was "not a consequence of socialism, but rather the betrayal of the socialist ideas."<sup>14</sup> At the end of his book, however, he admits that the Soviet Union was the country in which "the illusions of my youth were buried and which has stolen my most human feelings."<sup>15</sup>

After Štajner had spent twelve years as a prison and camp inmate (Moscow, Solovki, and Norilsk), a friend told him one summer day in 1948 that something had happened as momentous as the declaration of war or the October Revolution. He had learned from a newspaper that the Yugoslav Communist Party had been condemned by the Cominform. Štajner and the other inmates were happy that their comrades had said "no" to Stalin, but they wondered what the outcome would be. All the inmates were convinced that Stalin would not accept this challenge quietly—that he was ready to swallow criticism from the enemy camp, but that he would not take a "no" from someone in his own ranks.<sup>16</sup>

For two months Štajner lived in fear. Then in the middle of August he was summoned to the main office of the secret police (NKVD). A colonel had come from Moscow to interrogate him. After certain customary formalities, Štajner was told that he could be a free man, if he wished to take advantage of the opportunity. He was then questioned about where he had met Tito and other Yugoslav Communist leaders. Though aware that the colonel was well informed about his prewar activity in Yugoslavia, Štajner kept his testimony to a necessary minimum. Upon the colonel's repeated demand that he express his opinion about the Cominform resolution, Štajner replied that he was unable to say anything because his knowledge was based exclusively on the Soviet newspapers.

At one point the colonel indicated that he had been in Yugoslavia and was acquainted with the majority of its present leaders. To prove his point, he frequently interjected Yugoslav expressions in his speech. His comment was blunt and concise: "This gang, which has sold itself to the imperialists, will not remain in power much longer. The Yugoslav masses are on the side of the Soviet

13. For further information about Štajner, see Ivo Banac's review of *7000 dana u Sibiru* in *Russian Review*, 33, no. 3 (July 1974): 327–29.

14. Karlo Štajner, *7000 dana u Sibiru* (Zagreb, 1971), p. 7.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 474.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 291–92.

Union; there are already rebellions in every corner of Yugoslavia. The days of Tito's band are numbered."<sup>17</sup>

To Štajner there was nothing new in what the colonel said; it was identical to the trite phrases of the Soviet press. When the investigator finished his story, he demanded that Štajner make a statement averring that Tito and his assistants had been connected with the Royal Yugoslav police during the interwar period. Štajner categorically refused, and affirmed that when he had left Yugoslavia in 1931, Tito and Pijade were confined in the Lepoglava prison.

"That is not important," said the Soviet colonel. "If you wish to help us, do not think about such trifles."

"I have lost my freedom," Štajner answered, "but I have not yet lost my conscience."

"The Soviet Government is telling you that the leaders of the Yugoslav Communist Party are a gang of imperialist agents. Do you believe it or not?"

"I am positive that during the years when I had contact with them they were honest men."

"I repeat that you now have the possibility of becoming free. The days of the Yugoslav traitors are numbered. You know that we have crushed a colossus like Hitler's Germany. We shall settle accounts with Yugoslavia in a few days."

"I cannot help you."<sup>18</sup>

Two days later Štajner was again called to police headquarters. When he repeated his refusal to cooperate, the colonel retorted that he had heard that Štajner was "an incorrigible element." Before leaving the office, Štajner was obliged to sign a paper by which he promised that he would not speak to anyone about the meeting. If he did not keep his promise, he would be guilty of betraying a state secret.

Štajner now had reason to suspect that the secret police would take extraordinary measures against him. "It could happen," he wrote, "that they would kill me because I supposedly tried to escape or that I would suddenly die in jail from a heart attack."<sup>19</sup> After two weeks of anguish, during which he was not allowed to go to his usual work but was kept idle in a shack, he was ordered to pack his belongings (linen, trousers, spoon, dishes, blanket, pillow, bread, and sugar). For two days he was kept in a camp jail. In vain he sought an explanation; he feared the worst. Then he and twenty other prisoners were taken to the Norilsk railroad station. They received bread, sugar, and herring for two days; from this they concluded that a long journey awaited them. Štajner assumed that their banishment was connected with the Cominform resolution.

Štajner spent an additional eight years in various Siberian camps. He was released in 1956, a year after the historic embrace of reconciliation between Tito and Khrushchev.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

Vladimir Nazor (1876–1949), a leading Croatian poet of this century, joined Tito's Partisans at the end of 1942. During the ensuing years he composed *Partisan Poems*, *Legends about Tito*, and the diary *With the Partisans* (1943–44).

On several occasions, in his war reminiscences, he spoke warmly about the big Russian brother and Comrade Stalin. He recalled that, during the bombardment of Gračac, in Bosnia, he talked with a Franciscan, who was not afraid because he believed that nothing could happen to him without the knowledge of Saint Anthony. Nazor then expressed his own "credo," that is, his belief in the victory of Good over Evil, a better future for the Slavic nations, and the more just social order which the Slavs will bring to mankind, and his belief in the remarkable leader, Joseph Stalin.<sup>20</sup> The closer the Russian army came to the Yugoslav border, the more ecstatic Nazor's faith became. After the war, when Yugoslavia was one of the most fervent Russian satellites, Nazor retained and propagated his belief in Slavic brotherhood.

Nazor came out of the war physically very weak; consequently, his literary productivity in the immediate postwar period was minimal. At the beginning of 1948, however, his health improved, and in three months he produced a small collection of poems, entitled *Hymns and Odes*, in which he praised the legendary figures of Russia and Yugoslavia, Il'ia Muromets and Marko Kraljević, the Red armies of both countries, and the heroic leaders, Tito and Stalin.<sup>21</sup> Although this collection was never published in book form, several of these extremely "political" poems appeared before June of 1948 in various Yugoslav literary magazines.

In one of the "hymns" ("Two Armies"), Nazor writes that during the battles for Stalingrad and for Bosnia:

Bound by the same faith,  
two armies lifted their eyes  
to the same five-pointed red star  
which shone high above bloody, smoky  
battlefields. . . .<sup>22</sup>

In another ("Troika") he sees Russia completely changed from the times of Gogol's *Dead Souls*; now the peasants (*muzhiks*) are free citizens who participate actively in transforming a primitive country into a totally modern and powerful state:

Russia, you stand now on steel wheels,  
and your roads are endless;  
anywhere you move, the dead and the living rise up,  
stretching out their hands. . . .<sup>23</sup>

Although he held the honorific post of president of the Croatian Parliament (*Sabor*), Nazor knew very little about what was really going on either in his

20. V. Nazor, *S partizanima* (Zagreb, 1945), p. 76.

21. Mirko Žeželj, *Tragom pjesnika V. Nazora* (Zagreb, 1973), pp. 546–47.

22. *Republika*, 4, no. 4 (1948): 321.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 322.

own country or abroad. As soon as he was informed about the real reasons for the Russo-Yugoslav conflict, he expressed his undivided acceptance of the Yugoslav position. He remained a Pan-Slav, however, until his death. He sincerely thought that the conflict was only a temporary misunderstanding between the two Slavic nations, which always had yearned for mutual collaboration, and that sooner or later everyone would recognize that the Yugoslav comrades were following the path of truth.

In June 1949, just a few days before Nazor died, he wrote two significant poems. In the opening lines of the first one, entitled "The Lonely Oak," he exclaims:

We are alone. So be it, we have always been  
like an oak which stands alone in a clearing ;  
we grew and blossomed ; in vain did  
the wind, hail, and thunder lash at us.

He concludes by stressing that his proud nation, which for long centuries had stood alone, though often attacked and invaded, will surmount even this assault:

The oak stands alone in the clearing ; it knows  
all things will pass, even this bad dream.<sup>24</sup>

In the second poem, in which he speaks directly to "mother Russia," he expresses his bewilderment at why she should attempt to strangle her own child:

Mother Russia, do you really intend to strangle  
your own fair child ? The marks of your fingers  
are on his throat. Your freezing, gray  
shadow has reached our threshold. . . .

This child has grown up in your lap ;  
his first step was firm,  
on his forehead shone  
a red star, a promise of dawn.

Now you grab him by the throat, and force  
him to resist, kindle his fury.  
You want a raging fire on the mountain  
where once there was a gentle, festive flame. . . .<sup>25</sup>

24. V. Nazor, *Izabrane pjesme* (Belgrade, 1949), pp. 286-87. The battle against the former Cominformists was sometimes fought in a questionable manner: During the Partisan years, Nazor often met with two of the leading Communists, Andrija Hebrang, secretary of the Croatian Party, and Sreten Žujović, an influential member of the Supreme Command. In his diary he praised them as intelligent, devoted, and energetic comrades. In 1948 both Hebrang and Žujović sided with Stalin against Tito; Hebrang was executed and Žujović, after recanting, was forgiven. Šime Vučetić, who always seemed ready to follow the party line, prepared Nazor's diary for publication by Matica hrvatska and Zora (1965), two reputable Croatian publishing houses. In this new edition of Nazor's famous work the names of Hebrang and Žujović were totally omitted. Whether Vučetić carried out this vandalism on his own initiative or had received an instructive hint from above is not clear.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 288-89.



Marko Ristić (1902– ) was the Yugoslav ambassador in Paris during the immediate postwar years (1945–51). He had previously studied in France, and had been intimately connected with the French surrealists.<sup>26</sup> As a diplomatic representative of the “new socialist” Yugoslavia, he moved frequently in the circles of Communist and other “progressive” writers and artists.

In 1932 Ristić had written an article criticizing Louis Aragon (1897– ), who in the early thirties had been a vociferous exponent of party political goals and socialist realism.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, from 1945 to 1948, when Yugoslavia was considered to be a devoted satellite of the Soviet Union, relations between these two former surrealists were more than cordial.<sup>28</sup> They cooled, however, at the beginning of 1948, after an attack on Aragon’s wife, Elsa Triolet, who supposedly had distorted Yugoslav reality in her reports from that country, appeared in the Belgrade biweekly, *Književne novine*. After June 1948, Aragon was one of the leaders of what Ristić called the “slandorous campaign” against Tito’s Yugoslavia.

Paul Éluard (1895–1952) was another well-known French writer with whom the Yugoslav ambassador was very friendly. Like Aragon, Éluard had switched from the surrealist to the Communist ranks; but although much of what he wrote followed the party line (he even produced Stalinist verses), Éluard, in contrast to Aragon, never indulged in political diatribes. He had visited Yugoslavia in 1946, and was enthusiastic about the country and its leader. He wrote a moving poem about the poet Ivan Goran Kovačić (killed by the Chetniks in 1943) when *Pit (Jama)* was translated into French (*Le Tombeau*). The Ristićs often visited Éluard and his wife, and when Mme. Éluard died at the end of 1946, the ambassador did his utmost to console the widower, who was so despondent that he seriously contemplated suicide. Éluard was deeply touched by Ristić’s sympathy, as is obvious from the inscriptions in books which he presented to the ambassador and his wife.<sup>29</sup> Still, as soon as the edict came from the Kremlin against the Yugoslav Communists, Éluard meekly submitted and refused to have any contact with his former friend.

In 1954, while writing his famous and controversial essay, “Three Dead Poets” (about Miloš Crnjanski, Rastko Petrović, and Éluard), Ristić expressed puzzlement over Éluard’s actions. Why had that noble soul, who had a special place in his heart for Yugoslavia, joined other French Communists, such as Jacques Duclos, Étienne Fajon, and Jeannette Vermeersch, in resorting to distortions and lies against comrades who had shown a bit of independence toward the “infallible” Stalin. Ristić did not exclude the possibility that Éluard was an opportunist, afraid of ostracism if he criticized the decisions of the party, but the former ambassador preferred to believe that the frail and sensitive poet badly needed the support and encouragement of his “new confraternity”<sup>30</sup>: Éluard

26. See Ante Kadić, *Contemporary Serbian Literature* (The Hague, 1964), pp. 98–101; and Ante Kadić, *From Croatian Renaissance to Yugoslav Socialism* (The Hague, 1969), pp. 207–13.

27. *Nadrealizam danas i ovde* (Belgrade), no. 3 (1932), pp. 50–51.

28. “S Aragonom i sa njegovom ženom Elsom Triolet bili smo moja žena i ja bliski prijatelji sve do početka 1948” (Marko Ristić, *Politička književnost 1944–1958* [Zagreb, 1958], p. 70).

29. Marko Ristić, in his essay “Tri mrtva pesnika,” first published in *Rad*, vol. 301 (Zagreb, 1954); and then reprinted in his book *Prisustva* (Belgrade, 1966), p. 360.

30. Ristić, “Tri mrtva pesnika,” in *Prisustva*, p. 357.

may have thought that if he publicly expressed his doubts about the wisdom of the Yugoslav "excommunication," he would be crucified by his former associates and unscrupulously exploited by the bourgeois-reactionary clique. He did not want to accept either of those dreadful alternatives.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) also sided with the Russians against the Yugoslavs. Ristić, who had admired both Picasso's art and his evolution toward the left, wrote an essay about the painter in February 1937, a few months before Picasso created his famous "Guernica." When Ristić reprinted the essay in 1952,<sup>31</sup> he expressed his bewilderment at how this genius, who possessed so many traits typical of "decadent" bourgeois art, could fail to understand that he had absolutely nothing in common with the Zhdanovian doctrine of socialist realism. Ristić could not explain the contradiction. He assumed that Picasso, whose dove had become a symbol of Informbureau's peaceful intentions and who had received the Stalin Prize for peace, did not want to dissociate himself from progressive forces. Moreover, Ristić believed that Picasso, "an illiterate in politics," was abused and manipulated by Aragon.<sup>32</sup>

In essays and letters sent to various French editors, all written from 1948 to 1952,<sup>33</sup> Ristić was especially bitter toward Duclos and Fajon, whose honesty he questioned. He was convinced that these two influential French *apparatchiks* were envious of the Yugoslavs, who had by themselves organized a successful resistance and who, in the postwar period, had not allowed the "reactionaries" to take power (as had happened in France). Tito and his associates, at various meetings at home and abroad, had boasted excessively about their foresight and had criticized the French Politbureau for its unpreparedness. When, in turn, the Yugoslavs were censured by the supreme master, the French Communists were more than happy to retaliate. Moreover, because they were internally divided at that time, they saw the condemnation of Yugoslavia as a means of solidifying their shaken ranks.

Ristić was more indulgent toward Maurice Thorez (1900–1964); he wrote that the secretary of the French Communist Party was a warm, kind, and considerate man, deeply concerned with the future both of France and of the world proletariat. Ristić presents him as a nationalist who dearly loved his homeland and who was unhappy in the Soviet Union during the war—he wanted to return to France and take a leading position in the Resistance movement, but Stalin prevented him from doing so.<sup>34</sup> Later Thorez tried to persuade the Russians that they should take into consideration the specific conditions of the countries in which they hoped the Communists would be victorious. They ignored his arguments, however, and he yielded. Party orders were executed faithfully. Ristić condemns him for this submissiveness.

Ristić also thought very highly of Marcel Cachin (1869–1958), the co-founder of the French Communist Party. Cachin visited Yugoslavia and was pleased by the Belgrade May Day parade; after his return to Paris, he frequently extolled the accomplishments of the Yugoslavs, and was often seen in

31. Marko Ristić, *Prostor-vreme* (Zagreb, 1952), pp. 28–46.

32. "Iskorišćavajući njegov politički analfabetizam, Aragon ga drži u klještimu" (ibid., p. 255).

33. Ristić, *Politička književnost*, pp. 63–87, 104–26.

34. "Thorez se žalio kako ga Rusi ne puštaju da se prebaci u Francusku i stane na čelo Rezistencije. Intervenisaio je i kod Staljina lično, ali bez uspeha" (ibid., p. 68).

Ristić's company. When Yugoslavia was condemned, however, Cachin, as editor-in-chief of *L'Humanité*, allowed distortions and falsehoods to be printed on its pages.<sup>35</sup> Ristić was not at all surprised when Duclos wrote that the Yugoslavs had not published the Cominform condemnation (in reality they had), but he was very disappointed that Cachin permitted this and similar lies to be repeated day after day.

Miroslav Krleža (1893– ) was undoubtedly the pivotal figure in the fight against Stalinism and socialist realism. In his prewar periodical *Pečat*, and particularly in his book entitled *A Dialectical Antibarbarus* (1939), he launched a bitter attack on all those who were ready, as obedient servants of Moscow, to betray literature and make it subservient to political goals. When it became apparent that the conflict between Stalin and Tito was not a temporary disagreement but a fundamental clash, Krleža again played a leading role in clearing the literary atmosphere, which had been poisoned by various orthodox dogmatists and powerful bureaucrats, including Milovan Djilas, Radovan Zogović, Jovan Popović, Marin Franičević, and Boris Zihlerl. Krleža's speech at the third congress of Yugoslav writers, held in Ljubljana in October 1952, was an overture to a new era. From then until December 1971, a certain freedom prevailed in Yugoslavia and literature flourished.

On the occasion of Tito's seventieth birthday in 1962, Krleža wrote a lengthy article which he concluded by saying that it was a great accomplishment to find oneself (in 1948) assailed by a hurricane and to resist that storm with pride, dignity, and courage. Though he could not affirm that the situation would have been different if Tito had not been there, because in that dramatic and fateful moment he was surrounded by a phalanx of loyal and devoted collaborators and enjoyed the support of the party and the Yugoslav nations, Krleža nevertheless expressed the view that such phenomena as de-Stalinization, coexistence, the international fight for peace, and the policy of the nonaligned nations were linked to Tito's personal initiative.<sup>36</sup>

Ervin Šinko (pseudonym of Franz Spitzer, 1898–1967) was born in Hungary (in Apatin, near Subotica, Vojvodina, now a Yugoslav province). He participated in the unsuccessful revolution of Béla Kun (1919), thereafter lived in Vienna and Paris, and witnessed the Stalin purges in Moscow (1936–37); before World War II he came to Yugoslavia and subsequently took part in the Partisan movement. After the war he settled in Zagreb.

Šinko began his literary career by writing poetry (in Hungarian). Later he published novels, *Optimists*, about the first short-lived Hungarian Communist revolution, and *The Story of a Novel*, about the misfortunes of *Optimists* during the Stalin reign. In the postwar period he wrote short stories and essays, the best of which are included in a book entitled *Falanga Antikrista (A Phalanx of the Antichrist)*, Zagreb, 1957). Šinko wrote the majority of his works in Hungarian rather than in Croatian, but most of his works were first published

35. See Ristić's letter to Cachin, *ibid.*, pp. 82–87.

36. Reprinted from *Vjesnik*, May 25, 1962, in the book *Tito u zapisima suvremenika* [Tito in the Reminiscences of his Contemporaries] (Zagreb, 1965), pp. 367–68.

in Croatian translation. He and his critics stressed the fact that he belonged to both literatures, Hungarian and Croatian.<sup>37</sup>

Šinko's main concern was to propagate the goals of the October Revolution. Although he knew of the purges and the people involved in them, he still tried to present the left in a rosy light. He was afraid that otherwise he would impede the oncoming rebellion of the masses. Even after the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform, Šinko did not free himself immediately from the tenets of socialist realism.<sup>38</sup> Gradually, however, thanks to the strong impact of Krleža's "revisionist" writings, Šinko became a bitter opponent of Stalin's cruel and arbitrary methods.

In 1951 Šinko published a collection of his political articles, *Sablak kruži Evropom* (*A Phantom Circling over Europe*), of which the most revealing is a pamphlet on "the shame of the shameless." In this pamphlet, he ridiculed the Russians and their Hungarian accomplices who had condemned and executed a good Communist, László Rajk, for allegedly being a Titoist. Political historians will find this entire book indicative of the antagonistic attitudes between the Soviets and the Yugoslavs. Šinko also wrote two plays on the Cominform excommunication of the rebels, *Osuđenici* (*The Condemned*) and *Strašna sreća* (*Terrible Luck*) which were performed in the Zagreb theater in 1952 and 1954 respectively. The plays were never published in their Croatian version, however, although they did appear in Hungarian translation in Novi Sad in 1953 and 1955. Many critics who praised Šinko's works at the time of their theatrical production now point out their artistic weaknesses.<sup>39</sup> And Joža Horvat, even in 1952, stressed that Šinko's characters were not living, complex human beings, but the exponents of the two opposing views, typical representatives of an abstract thesis and antithesis.<sup>40</sup>

Šinko portrayed the Russians and their supporters as robots, slaves to their preconceived ideas and the bureaucratic system, while the Yugoslavs were portrayed as faithful both to the spirit of Marxist teaching and to individual freedom. He was convinced that history would pass the same judgment on the Kremlin leaders as it did on those of nazism and fascism; the Yugoslavs—the spiritual reformers—would, on the other hand, be extolled as the salt of the

37. Šinko is no exception to a longstanding Hungarian-Croatian literary relationship. In the past, Croats such as Janus Pannonius (Ivan Česmički, fifteenth century) and Nikola Zrinski (seventeenth century) were considered to be Hungarian writers as well, because of their literary activity among the Hungarians.

38. In his penetrating study of Yugoslav leftist authors, Stanko Lasić writes that Šinko has been "one of the most vociferous defenders and propagandists of socialist realism." Explaining Šinko's willingness to hush up the truth in order to live in the society in which "a lie is a normal practice," Lasić says that Šinko's verbosity, his erudition, and his quotations were there to hide the vacuum of his thoughts. In his book *The Story of a Novel*, Šinko affirms that already in the thirties he saw the alienation of socialism. Lasić correctly asks: "If he knew all this, why did he speak differently in 1945? Why did he not keep quiet? Why did he, together with other ideologists, celebrate the new Soviet man?" Lasić justly concludes that in the one person there were two contrasting personalities who did not want to know each other, but who could not ignore one another (Stanko Lasić, *Sukob na književnoj ljevici, 1928–1952* [Zagreb, 1970], pp. 257–58).

39. See, for example, Marijan Matković, in *Vjesnik*, November 14, 1952, p. 5; and Marijan Matković, "Introduction," in *Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti*, vol. 103 (Zagreb, 1969), p. 23.

40. *Vjesnik*, November 14, 1952, p. 5.

earth. Thus Šinko was mainly a propagandist, angry at the Kremlin for its attack on the Yugoslav Communists, carried away by his emotions, and convinced that the Russians had betrayed the revolution itself. At the end of the forties certain party members rated Šinko highly, but today his political writings are rarely mentioned by literary historians. His basic contributions to Croatian literature were some of his stories, his reminiscences of the Russian writer Isaac Babel, and his critical appraisals of Krleža.<sup>41</sup>

If there is a writer who dramatically and eloquently demonstrates how deep were the wounds inflicted in the minds and consciences of the Yugoslav Communists by the Stalin-Tito conflict, he is, without a doubt, Milovan Djilas. From a fervent admirer of Stalin as a person and of his contribution to Soviet and world communism, Djilas suddenly became his bitter accuser. After the shock of 1948, Djilas, who had written dithyrambs in honor of "the greatest human being of all times," labeled Stalin with the most derogatory epithets: the former builder of a happy society was depicted as the embodiment of paranoid, satanic, tyrannical, Machiavellian, and totally inhuman impulses. Space does not permit an extensive analysis of the love-hate relationship between Djilas and Stalin, but such an analysis might shed light on the Kremlin dictator's personality, as well as reveal how Djilas's mind functions in absolute categories.

Djilas's book *Essays* was published in May 1947.<sup>42</sup> There are two articles that deal exclusively with Stalin: the first was written in the Bosnian mountains in November 1942, when the Partisans badly needed encouragement; and the second was written at the very end of 1944, after the author had met his great idol for the first time. While the first sketch is more dogmatic and abstract, still located in the realm of faith, the second describes the blissful state of the pilgrim (Djilas) after he actually had seen his infallible "pope" and had traveled to Mecca.

The author begins his "homily" about Stalin by saying that in April of 1941, when Belgrade was destroyed by the German bombs, the shocked inhabitants were consoled by a vision of the "fatherly, concerned, and smiling Stalin," who was "the only statesman with a pure conscience and an unselfish heart."<sup>43</sup> In his "Meeting with Stalin," Djilas first portrayed the physical appearance of the beloved leader: "He is of medium stature; he has nice, small hands with quite long fingers, long legs, narrow shoulders, and a large head. Stalin's head is not only pleasant because of its gentle hardness, rustic features, its wise, lively, smiling, stern but caring brown eyes, but it is also beautiful in its harmony, its simplicity, and its vivid calmness and distinctiveness."<sup>44</sup> Having stated that he felt at ease in the presence of this "unusually modest man, whose life is the history of the contemporary epoch," the pilgrim looked again at the saintly figure and noticed that he was aging: "He is gray and wrinkled. But his age is not felt during his conversation. Stalin will not age because his thought is eternal, always new, completely mature, and thoroughly formed;

41. See Matković's judicious introduction to Šinko's works, in *Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti*.

42. Milovan Djilas, *Članci, 1941-1947* (Zagreb, 1947).

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-33.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

there is nothing that one can add to it. The common man Stalin is as immortal as the progress of mankind is eternal."<sup>45</sup>

Djilas broke with the Yugoslav Communist Party in 1954. His subsequent criticism of the Yugoslav position toward the brutal Soviet intervention in Hungary and the publication of his famous book *The New Class* sent him to jail, from which he was released in 1961. He then wrote *Conversations with Stalin* and was rearrested upon its publication in 1962. Having been disillusioned not only by Stalin but also by "the new class" as a whole, Djilas presented the very same events in a new light! Thus he described his meeting with Stalin somewhat differently, more convincingly:

Stalin's torso was short and narrow, while his legs and arms were too long. His left arm and shoulder seemed rather stiff. . . . His face was white, with ruddy cheeks. His teeth were black and irregular, turned inward. Not even his mustache was thick or firm. Still, the head was not a bad one; it had something of the folk, the peasantry, the paterfamilias about it—with those brown eyes and a mixture of sternness and roguishness.<sup>46</sup>

If we assume the viewpoint of humanity and freedom, history does not know a despot as brutal and as cynical as Stalin was. He was methodical, all-embracing, and thorough as a criminal. He was one of those rare terrible dogmatists capable of destroying nine-tenths of the human race to make the other tenth happy.<sup>47</sup>

In the book *Parts of a Lifetime*, consisting of excerpts from Djilas's writings, there is a chapter entitled "About Stalin" (written in 1969) with this interesting comment:

But the ghost of Stalin will circle the earth for a long time to come. Almost everyone renounced his legacy, but many still draw their strength from him. Most of them even unintentionally take their example from Stalin. Khrushchev disavowed him but admired him. The present Soviet leaders do not admire him but they bask in his glory. Even in the case of Tito—fifteen years after the split with him—respect for his statesmanship has revived. And I even have to ask myself: Isn't thinking about Stalin in itself a sign that he has left his mark on me?<sup>48</sup>

Dragoslav Mihailović (1928– ) is one of the leading Serbian prose writers. I do not intend to deal here with his stories and later novels or with the specific features of his style. I will limit my remarks to his first novel, *When Pumpkins Blossomed* (1968), which was eagerly read by the public, adapted for a theatrical performance, condemned by Tito, and thereafter translated into English.<sup>49</sup>

The novel is about a gang of young people in a suburb of Belgrade who chase girls, attack innocent people, break their own rules, and savagely fight among themselves. The main hero, Ljuba Vrapče, becomes furious when his

45. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

46. Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York, 1962), p. 61.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

48. Milovan Djilas, *Parts of a Lifetime*, ed. Michael and Deborah Milenkovitch (New York, 1975), pp. 312–13.

49. Dragoslav Mihailović, *When Pumpkins Blossomed* (New York, 1971).

sister is raped by another youth, Stole Apache, and commits suicide from shame. Ljuba is boxing champion, but Stole is also a dangerous fighter. The years pass by, but Ljuba does not forget his revenge. One night he waits in ambush for Apache and beats him so badly that Apache dies the following day. Ljuba escapes to Sweden, for no political reasons whatsoever, but only to save his skin when he realizes that the police have enough evidence to suspect that he was the murderer of Apache.

Inside this main story, there is another one about the "champion's" family. Vrapče's father and his older brother, a former Partisan, are arrested one night for their supposed sympathy with the Cominform. The boxing champion intervenes; and his father, a broken man, returns home, but his brother is sent to the ill-famed island "Goli otok," where thousands of political prisoners lived under extremely hard conditions. When Ljuba asks his father why he was jailed and how they treated him, his father says that it would be better for him not to become involved in those things. Though released, the father cannot find a job. The mother, having a beloved husband out of work, an older son in jail, and a daughter who committed suicide, becomes mentally ill and dies of despair. At the end, the older brother is set free, and the two brothers meet somewhere in Italy.

It is obvious that the author's sympathies are on the side of those who were imprisoned for no apparent reasons. The representatives of the police are depicted as stupid brutes, arrogant, corrupt, not caring for the rights of the citizens; their only concern is to keep their jobs, with which so many privileges are connected.

*The Memoirs of Peter the Cripple (Memoari Pere Bogalja)*, a novel written in 1968 by Slobodan Selenić (1933– ), is about a young man who, as a Partisan, had lost both legs but has remained a fervent Communist. While working on the political reeducation of Draga, the daughter of "a class enemy," he falls in love with her. His father Miloje, an important and influential political figure, who continues to live with his wife Tankosava, seduces Draga and she becomes pregnant. In order to save Draga's reputation, Peter marries her and thus becomes the father of his father's son.<sup>50</sup>

Peter is disappointed not only by the moral corruption prevalent among the members of "the new class," but also by the constant ideological conflicts and the gradual disappearance of the pristine idealism and sacrifices of wartime. He experiences the first shock when he is told, at a party meeting, that Hebrang and Žujović, who until then had been considered irreproachable, have suddenly become traitors, swine in the service of the capitalist system. How is it possible, he asks himself, that such desertions could occur among those who were at the top, whose utterances were accepted without question. Suspicion begins to torment his heart and soul: who will be the next, or, even more logically, whom can he trust; the answer was: probably nobody.

Jože Javoršek (pseudonym of Jože Brejc, 1920– ) is a Slovenian poet, dramatist, essayist, and novelist. Most of his works revolve around his own, usually traumatic, experiences. He was born into a conservative family, but as

50. This novel was reviewed by Mateja Matejić in *Books Abroad*, 44 (1970): 154–55.

a gymnasium student he fell under the influence of Eduard Kocbek, a Catholic but left-leaning writer; during the war they both joined the Partisans. After the war Javoršek studied comparative literature at the Sorbonne, and while in Paris he became familiar with some prominent French authors. Upon his return to Slovenia, in the autumn of 1948, he was arrested as a Cominformist; he was condemned on political and moral grounds and spent four years in jail.<sup>51</sup> During his imprisonment his wife died, and later (in 1968) his son committed suicide. He was shaken to the depths of his being.

In his book *How Is It Possible (Kako je mogoče, 1969)*, Javoršek tries to determine why so many Slovenes kill themselves. He provides us with an interesting survey of Slovenian geography and history; he examines the mentality of a small nation surrounded by powerful neighbors; he criticizes its Catholic "medieval" outlook; and he condemns the interest of the youth in material prosperity. In the middle of this half-autobiographical and half-historical analysis, Javoršek alludes to his imprisonment and to the lack of justice in postwar Yugoslavia. He describes his anguish in his cell, his rejection by his former friends and associates, his intention of putting an end to his life, the tenderness of some common people, and the anger of his small son at being called the son of a condemned man by other children. But we do not know whether Javoršek really was a Cominformist. Did he say something unwise in a crucial moment? Was his wish to study in the Soviet Union misinterpreted? Was his association with such French writers as Paul Éluard and Louis Aragon, who had sided with Stalin against Tito, considered an expression of his own political stand?

Javoršek is without doubt a highly educated and sophisticated man; he writes in a polished style, but his conceit is not far from narcissism. His judgments are one-sided; he is obviously unfair to the people (usually his former friends) with whom he disagrees. He appears to be a tormented soul, moving from one extreme to another; but whatever he does or says, he finds a justification for it. It is no wonder that this fascinating "confession" was badly received by several Slovenian critics, who rightly stressed Javoršek's often prejudiced statements.<sup>52</sup>

Although one might expect a greater reflection of the Stalin-Tito conflict in Yugoslav literature, it is apparent from the preceding pages that the Yugoslav comrades, as former staunch Stalinists, found it very hard to free themselves from their idol and to accept the new situation. Those, however, who remained loyal to their prewar, utopian ideas, the so-called Cominformists, were severely punished by the Yugoslav authorities. Another chapter could and should be written about the Yugoslav concentration camps, particularly that ignoble camp located on the "barren island" (*Goli otok*), in which thousands of Cominformists were brutally treated. Information about their tortures is still scanty; but, in recent years, especially in the Western European and émigré press, more and more gruesome stories have come to light.

51. Jože Pogačnik, *Zgodovina slovenskeg slovstva, VIII: Eksistencijalizem in strukturalizem* (Maribor, 1972), p. 171; cf. *Nova Hrvatska*, 18, no. 12 (1976): 16.

52. Pogačnik, *Zgodovina slovenskeg slovstva*, p. 177.