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From stalinism to “heresy”. The evolution of the political thought of Milovan Đilas, 1941-1949¹

Summary: knowledge of communism, so carefully presented in the best and the most famous work of Milovan Đilas entitled *The New Class. An Analysis of the Communist System*, New York, 1957, undoubtedly resulted from his previous political practice and theoretical reflections. In the years 1941-1949, Đilas was both a politician and one of the main ideologists and propagandists of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. In his later writings, books and speeches, he pointed out that even in time of the war he began to express doubts whether the communistic idea, as he understood at that time, indeed could be fully realized.

The above mentioned doubts should be treated hypothetically, we should approach to them with caution. Mostly because they are expressed later after World War II. We do not have a possibility to confirm its veracity on the basis of other sources, documents and messages than those presented in the article. However, the analysis of Đilas intellectual attitude after the outbreak of the conflict between the Soviet and Yugoslav Communists in 1948, leaves no doubts that slowly and gradually, but irreversibly, Đilas began to undermine the meaning and the possibility of building „socialism” in line with Stalinist principles. Đilas propaganda initial admiration of Soviet reality gave way to criticism. Of course, in 1949, so at the end of the period, Đilas was still a communist. Nevertheless, he inclined to the conviction that Stalinist model becomes a clear deviation from the „true” Marxism.

It would be difficult to determine to which extent the conviction was authentic and to which extent - primarily the political consequence, arising from the fact that after the Cominform resolution of June 1948, the Yugoslav Communists, if they did not want to give up the dictatorship of Stalin, had to develop their own ideology and a line of conduct. Anyway, like other leaders of the CPY, Đilas became a „heretic” rejecting Stalinist orthodoxy. Such „heresy” was the begin-

¹ This article is part of a longer study devoted to Milovan Đilas’ political thought. Three articles have been published so far: *Between dreams and reality. Milovan Đilas’ political thought at the turn of 1953 and 1954*. “Dzieje Najnowsze” 2010, pp. 23-54; *Communist idea and practise in Milovan Đilas’ political thought (1911-1955)*, [in]: *History, politics and international affairs. Selected issues*, ed. A. Zaćmiński, Bydgoszcz 2010, pp. 11-30 and *The birth of a Stalinist. Milovan Đilas’ political thought in the interwar period (until the Axis powers attack on Yugoslavia in April 1941)*, “Recent history” 2012, 1, pp. 35-69. Those articles deal with the methodological aims and assumptions as well as the events and problems directly preceding those discussed in this text. To avoid repetition, they have been omitted here.

ning of an attempt to build Yugoslav ideology, orthodoxy. Until the turn of the years 1953/1954 Đilas would be one of its creators.

Keywords: Milovan Đilas, Stalinism, Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Yugoslav Communists, Cominform

The Axis invasion of Yugoslavia² in 1941 did not change the role of Milovan Đilas in the CPY [*the Communist Party of Yugoslavia*]. His activity and political thought co-created the general line of this party.³ It was consistent with the contemporary tactics and guidelines of Moscow and the Comintern. According to a record dated to May 9th 1941, the Yugoslav Communist leaders were informed by the Political International Communists about the possibility of world revolution and the incorporation of other countries, their own included, into the Soviet Union.⁴ On 22nd June 1941, the day the Third Reich attacked the USSR, the Central Committee of the CPY released a manifesto stating the need to fight the invaders. They were supposedly mainly motivated by the support given to the “blooming Soviet garden” betrayed by Germany. The manifesto proclaimed that the Soviet nations are fighting not only to protect their own homelands but also to save the world from subjugation by fascists but also for the liberation of the national and social “world of labour”.⁵ On 4th July 1941, the Central Committee of the CPY Political Office made the decision to engage in armed combat. Partisan warfare was supposed to be the main form of fighting the invaders.⁶ Đilas writes that this decision was made without debate; only on the basis of the Comintern’s directive and our ideological and internationalist commitments and love for the USSR – ‘the bastion of world communism’ and the ‘leading socialist country’. These feelings and commitments were fully harmonised with our situation and our aspirations.⁷

According to the existing line established at the end the 1930s, their aspirations were not just limited to protecting ‘the Country of the Soviets’, the land of the peoples’ councils. They were also connected to the desire to spark off revolution in their own country. The disintegration of Yugoslavia enabled various local forces to cooperate with Germany and its allies. With that in mind, Đilas wanted to step forward with

2 Germany, Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria.

3 See: M. J. Zacharias *Yugoslavia in British politics 1940-1945*, Wrocław 1985, p. 41 ff.

4 It was published in the Yugoslav magazine “The Communist” in 1948, and then in S. Clissold, *Whirlwind, An Account of Marshall Tito’s Rise to Power*, London 1947, pp. 238-241 and B. Raditsa, *The Sovietization of the Satellites*, “The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science”, vol. 271, September 1950, pp. 124-126.

5 See: *Proglas CK KPJ povodom napada fašističke Nemačke na Sovjetski Savez*, [in]: *Komunistka partija Jugoslavije 1918-1941. Zabranjeni dokumenti*, ed. E. Hasanagić, Zagreb 1959, pp. 254-258.

6 B. Petranović, *AVNOJ. Revolucionarna smena vlasti 1942-1945*, Beograd 1976, p. 24.

7 M. Đilas, *Wartime*, New York, London 1977, p. 5. The Comintern directive ordered to organise partisan units and start “partisan war” immediately in the areas occupied by the invaders, Ph. Anty, *Tito – A Biography*, London 1970, p. 72.

slogans of “antifascist revolution.” Its essence was the fight against “foreign and native fascism” led by all of its opponents whether they belonged to the communist party or other political groupings. In other words, in essence, the “antifascist revolution” was to inseparably link the revolt against the invader and civil war; which was to be waged as an inextricable component of the war against the occupant.⁸

Such phrases are very general and, what is more, they say more about the need to fight the invaders and their Yugoslav allies than about revolution which was to bring rapid and sudden political, social and structural changes with the use of violence. Đilas writes about these issues in a different place, but in the context of the struggle against the invader, he claimed that by ‘antifascist revolution’ he understood internal transformations connected to the worldwide war on fascism. They were supposed to lead to the elimination of fascist movements, whereas in the social sphere, “economic forces” were to stimulate the growth of these movements.⁹

It should be emphasised that even careful and measured opinions which, with the use of antifascist euphemisms, were designed to disguise the real meaning of the term “revolution”, aroused objections against Tito and his close associates, including Kardelj.

These people were afraid that the term “revolution” was incompatible with Moscow’s political tactics in the international field, especially towards Great Britain which was fighting the Third Reich. Great Britain was then seen as a potential ally. Đilas believed that they were also supposed to accept that “any call to revolution, even if only of the antifascist sort would reduce the possibilities in winning internal support and discouraging potential supporters from joining the ranks of the Communists. As a result, it was decided to present Communist –inspired initiatives as a struggle for independence.¹⁰ Đilas was to write that he accepted that solution without enthusiasm but also without undue dissatisfaction. He claimed that he did not notice a big difference between antifascist revolution and the struggle for independence, though for him, the latter was never sufficiently comprehensible. Nevertheless, the difference of opinion between him and “the leadership” was to confirm him in the belief that one ought to be disciplined, and graciously accept the majority view but without renouncing one’s independence of mind or yielding to pragmatic generalizations made for the needs of the moment. He took the view that one ought to think “with one’s own head” but do what can and should be done if the circumstances allow it – in accordance with one’s own beliefs.¹¹

8 M. Đilas, *Razvoj mog političkog mišljenja*, <http://milovandjilas.rs/Tekstavi/razvoj%20mog%20poličkog%20mišljenja.pdf>, part 6.

9 See: B. Kovačević, *Đilas. Heroj – antiheroj – iskazi za istoriju*, Podgorica 2006, p. 99.

10 M. Đilas, *Razvoj mog političkog mišljenja*, part 6. Regarding the Yugoslav leadership’s cautiousness: directly before the German attack on the USSR, the leadership of the Comintern ordered Tito: “Keep in mind that in the present (emphasis added by M. J. Z.) stage of action what you should be dealing with boils down to fighting against fascist oppression and not to pursue socialist revolution”, V. Dedijer, *Josip Broz Tito. Prilozi za biografiju*, Beograd 1953, pp. 274-275.

11 M. Đilas, *Razvoj mog političkog mišljenja*, part 6.

It can be assumed that the relatively ease with which he accepted Tito's attitude to the struggle for independence was on the understanding that these terms were only a smoke-screen to conceal their true revolutionary goals. Đilas was to write that each revolution is specific and cannot be accommodated to any template; it had to have its own separate goals which could neither be predicted in outcome nor fully defined beforehand.¹² Generally, at the beginning at least, the issue is always that of seizing power. After doing so, and being able to keep it, it is possible to implement the underlying intentions. In order to come to power, not only the invaders had to be defeated in Yugoslavia but also local opponents, by keeping up appearances and by adopting Moscow's tactics regardless of whether they cooperated with the invaders or not. As a result, soon after the defeat in April 1941, the communist leadership, with Đilas' participation, made the decision to "expose" Serb officers who, under the command of colonel and then general Dragoljub (Drago) Mihailovic, fought Germany and Italy, and embark on armed conflict with them and the Ustaše.¹³ Various party documents contained concealed, yet relatively clear, data regarding the communists' ultimate goals. Their authors claimed that the war was for "the creation of a new world (emphasis added – M.J.Z.) in which the roots of imperialist wars and national pressure would be cut." On the basis of the true independence of all the Yugoslav nations, a "free and fraternal community"¹⁴ was to arrive, with social and national liberation that was to automatically bring in train "freedom, independence and a better future."¹⁵

In accordance with Moscow's and the Comintern's recommendations, the fight for independence was related to the general strategy of the international communist movement. One of the leaders of the CPY, Boris Kidrič, mentioned it during the Fifth Party Congress in July 1948, just after the outbreak of conflict with the CPSU [*Communist Party of the Soviet Union*] and other Cominform [*Communist Information Bureau*] parties. In June 1941, Yugoslav communists turned to their countrymen with slogans proclaiming international solidarity in the fight against fascist invaders, Marxist-Leninist internationalism, the common progressive cause

12 *ibid.*, part 6.

13 S. Clissold, *Djilas. The Progress of a Revolutionary*, Hounslow, Middlesex 1983, p. 49; M. Djilas, *A Memoir of a Revolutionary*, New York 1973, p. 389.

14 *Zbornik podataka i dokumenata o narodnoslobodničkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda*, Beograd 1949, vol. 5, knj. 1, dok. 1, pp. 5-7.

15 P. Morača, *Strategia i taktyka Komunistycznej Partii Jugosławii w tworzeniu Frontu Narodowego w okresie wojny narodowyzwoleńczej i rewolucji 1941-1945*, Warsaw 1966 (mps duplicated, previously in the Library of Military History Institute in Rembertów, pp. 20-21. According to Morača, the CPY leadership confirmed the existence of conditions necessary to realise these goals, i.e. the readiness of the people to fight for liberation, the disappointment with the old social system and seeing the USSR as the power which in the future would favourably influence the development of the international situation. Irrespective of the fact that the people of Yugoslavia were actually disappointed with the previous, pre-war system, Morača's account is connected to the communist resistance movement and expresses the views of the CPY leadership during and after World War II, confirmed the significant and revolutionary goals of this party, camouflaged with "nationalistic" rhetoric.

of mankind and the need to devote everything to this cause - not just one's life, but also one's own national resources.¹⁶ Thus understood, the fight of Yugoslav communists was supposed to be an element of the global struggle against the Axis, and the joint efforts of "the world proletariat" was to achieve growth and so embrace the Marxist-Leninist ideals of revolution and communism.

During the war, Đilas held various functions – political, ideological and propaganda officer. Because this essay does not pretend to be a condensed biographical sketch, the main focus is on those aspects of Đilas' achievements in the spheres of ideology and propaganda that are closely connected to the evolution of his political thought. What is most striking is this politician's deep, almost dogmatic belief in the unlimited potential of the Soviet Union. He dismissed news about the rapid progress of German units on the eastern front in 1941 as merely the deceitful propaganda of the Third Reich.¹⁷ Regardless of the fact that even Soviet public admissions that German units were moving far into the USSR as if there was no organised resistance, ever obedient to the almost obligatory view, he believed in the rapid victory of the Soviet Union. This conviction stemmed from his enthusiastic acceptance of the Soviet propaganda that the USSR would transfer its military actions to the territory of the invader.¹⁸ As a result, he had little enthusiasm for either closer liaison with Great Britain, whose envoys suggested the need to coordinate the efforts of Tito's partisans and Mihailović's Chetniks, or for Britain's potential military assistance for these movements.¹⁹ He tersely reminded his fellow activists and colleagues to "Remember that the sun does not rise in the west."²⁰ What is more, he proclaimed that Yugoslav communists should not only accept help but also provide it, in this case – to the Soviet Union. This country is in a state of war. That is why, we, the Communists, will fight to the last man. He wrote that, irrespective of the realities and the nature of their own situation, CPY leaders were ideologically connected to the USSR and remained under its influence. It limited their autonomy in calling for an uprising but undoubtedly gave them courage and confidence.²¹

As a result, Đilas became the main CPY propagandist and he spoke highly of the USSR and its leader. The best example of his attitude was reflected in his article published in "Borba" on November 7th 1942. Stalin was presented as the invincible commander, best teacher, dearest father, faithful friend, verily "the Lenin of our times", "the Lenin, who lives among us." In short, for Đilas, Stalin was the epitomy

16 B. Kidrič, *On the Construction of a Socialist Economy in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, speech delivered at the Fifth Congress of the C.P.Y.*, Belgrade 1948, p. 63; B. Ulam, *Titoism and the Cominform*, Cambridge Mass. 1952. p. 98.

17 S. Clissold, *Djilas*, p. 53.

18 M. Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 7.

19 See: F. Deakin, *Britanija i Jugoslavija 1939-1945*, "Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis" 1963, 2, p. 42, [in]: W. Roberts, *Tito, Mihailović and the Allies, 1941-1945*, New Brunswick, New York 1973, p. 28; *British Policy Towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece*, ed. Ph. Auty, R. Clogg, London 1975, pp. 91-92, in Polish literature M. J. Zacharias, *Jugosławia*, pp. 54-56.

20 *British Policy Towards Wartime*, p. 91.

21 M. Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 7.

of perfection: he was gifted with extraordinary powers in quantities that are beyond the reach of mere mortals, he possessed vast knowledge, wisdom, far-sightedness, he was caring and sympathetic towards his friends and colleagues, he was pleased with the successes of Tito's fearless freedom fighters, indeed, he was nothing but a comrade who watched over them, who soothed their wounds, gave them courage, and looked on their valour and noble desires with gratitude. One might have thought that that was quite enough, but no, Đjilas was made of stronger stuff and, having caught his second panegyric breath, he continued, for it transpired that Stalin was also: "a sworn enemy of everything that is inhuman", the leader of the country who "is not guided by hidden motives"; who "will not enslave nations but who will help them in the war against Hitler's despotism"; (presumably rather worryingly for some) the man, who "knows everything and sees everything; no human sphere of life is foreign to him (...) It is a great honour to live in Stalin's times, fight under his command and be a part of something that will never disappear (...) Our love for the Soviet Union is lifelong because it has become the whole of our lives in fire and flood, our souls, our future, our bread. It is eternal love because it is ennobled by Stalin's spirit." Leaving nothing to doubt, Đjilas concluded that Stalin was a pillar of strength, and most importantly, "he determines the history of mankind."²²

In 1979, Đjilas claimed, that such idealization of Stalin in the quoted article was to serve a certain purpose. It was a symptom of a kind of pragmatism. He argued that "if we had not presented (...) such an attitude towards Stalin and the Soviet Union, we would not have been able to win the fight with Hitler. This attitude was necessary to our unity and our morale. We were fanatics and we had to behave in such a way. Did I believe in every detail of this panegyric in 1942? – that is another issue ... We found ourselves in a very difficult situation (in November 1942), and I may have used rhetoric ... which was to lift our exhausted partisans' spirits. Stalin's invincibility and omnipotence were an effective slogan in the face of the seemingly invincible Hitler ... I did not entirely believe in those adjectives, (but) praising him to the heavens was commonplace in those days."²³ The Red Army was also praised. It was believed to be fighting for the liberation not only of the nations of the Soviet Union but for all other nations "from fascist servitude". "Today it is safe to say" – Đjilas wrote in February 1943 – that the Red Army has saved "the whole of mankind" from returning to the barbarian past, the "Dark Ages". Đjilas waxed lyrical that the war spawned the brotherhood-in-arms of Russian and Yugoslav soldiers led by communists: "Our army sees in the Red Army not only an ally in those difficult moments, but also a mature, strong and wise brother who guarantees that the victory will be absolute and the common goals will be achieved."²⁴

22 M. Đjilas, *Staljin*, in: id., *Članci 1941-1946*, Beograd 1947, pp. 34-37, previously in: "Borba", November 7th 1942.

23 M. Džilas, *Chrystus i Komisarz*, in: *Stalin i stalinizm. Rozmowy George'a Urbana*, London 1987, p. 188.

24 M. Đilas, *Crvena Armija – spasilac čovječanstva*, in: id., *Članci*, pp. 72-77, previously in: "Borba" February 15th 1943.

If one is to believe Đilas' subsequent accounts, it could be said that his feelings and attitudes were not as optimistic and enthusiastic as his agitprop might have suggested; apparently this was all thought up on the spot in the heat of battle. Having evaluated the events and struggle in Yugoslavia from the post-war perspective, Đilas considered their meaning, force and motivating factors in relation to a war which induced people, nations and countries to savagery, murder and cruelty in the course of battle. The significance of these descriptions well reflects the atmosphere and attitudes known from his earlier reports connected with the events and his childhood memories of Montenegro which he had described earlier, mainly in "Land with no Justice". What was a significant new departure was Đilas' attitude to the idea or, to put it in broader terms, to ideologies motivating peoples' political and social activities. While describing these actions, Đilas implied that way back in wartime, he expressed slight but reasonable doubts as to whether the ideologies at play were indeed the motive forces of activity for different social and national groups and if they were actually able to lead to the realisation of ideological goals. In these descriptions, the clear thought occurs that in reality, activity undertaken in the name of ideology leads to goals inconsistent with the expectations. Đilas was to write that in his understanding, the revolution and the civil war were supposed to be the result of the ideological conflict of two classes, i.e. the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; it was to be a fight "in the cities and big centres". Instead, it gradually transformed itself into a bloody conflict "in villages, mostly among working people, often among neighbours and relatives." Sometimes those crimes assumed such enormous proportions that they overshadowed the struggle against the invaders. As a result, "the planned ideological confrontation, similarly to the ideological motivation, faded and became distorted. What kind of ideology is that, what kind of Marxism is that which instead of conflict with the bourgeoisie and the exploiters, leads to fighting against the lower middle class, minor office workers and peasants?" Đilas was to ask. Also, "what kind of Serbs and nationalists (are they), who accept arms from the invaders, live off them and participate in their war actions?"²⁵ Moreover, "what power makes people kill each other? It cannot be ideology, even the Nazi one, simplified and antihumanitarian". Also, the country's internal discipline, even that of the Germans, surely could not force "Heidelberg professors and the descendants of Hanseatic patricians to rampage through the roadless tracts of Bosnia killing herdsmen, students (...) and Jews throughout Europe." So if "neither Nazi nor our, communist ideology is the reason for murder, rape and bestiality, there must be a kind of inexplicable power behind it. Ideologists, politicians, national leaders can feel it in people and nations and use it to realise their sublime goals. Those forces – vague and inexplicable, not the ideology of 'us and them', have significant meaning. In their own way, they might be presented only by means of artistic inspiration, the mystical elation of their believers and employing the speculations of philosophers."²⁶

25 id., *Razvoj mog političkog mišljenja*, part 6.

26 ibid., part 7; id., *Wartime*, pp. 284-285; also see id., *Of Prisons and Ideas*, San Diego, New York, London 1984, pp. 11-12.

Leaving these last poetic and abstruse metaphors and descriptions aside, it should only be noted that in that sense, each ideology becomes something derived from primitive human instincts and passions. It also becomes something that stands in contradiction to reality which, more often than not, develops precisely in harmony with it and with its own logic. As a result, ideology can only serve the purpose of achieving other, hidden social or political goals.

We are not able to determine if Đjilas was merely projecting his own views on war and life as a partisan, or if he was presenting beliefs which he truly held during the wartime occupation. We cannot eliminate a third possibility – that it is a mixture of Đjilas' wartime and post-war thinking. He claims that he did not stop being a communist²⁷ and that in the rough and tragic days of war he did not abandon any part of his ideological commitment to Marxism – Leninism.²⁸ This assurance in juxtaposition with his avowed doubts, bears the hallmarks of an ambivalent and vacillating posture. It cannot be excluded that Đjilas' ideological loyalty to his belief in the internal coherence and compatibility of Marxist principles, which have subsequently been brought into question, should not be judged by reference to the reality that subsequently unfolded, but should be understood as the conviction that in the face of external aggression our cause is right and noble²⁹; and that the adopted ideology, albeit for opportunistic reasons, has a reifying effect on that conviction. It may be possible that his attachment to the ideology resulted from a belief that in the face of brutal reality all doubts, even justified ones, are of secondary importance and pale into insignificance. The only thing that mattered was, as he himself emphasised, “the party line”. Party decisions were made, approved and actioned by Đjilas and the leaders of the CPY. His opinion that man is the maker of history and also its victim³⁰ can be understood as a bitter evaluation of the limited possibilities of an individual in the face of the relentless and impersonal forces of history. An individual must assume thankless tasks and make decisions imposed by the reality of his situation which often go beyond ideological goals, rules and reasons. Keeping that in mind, it should be highlighted that in that dark and tragic war³¹, Đjilas was to take note of the sources of restraint which, after the war, would lead him to believe in the negative consequences of subordinating social and political development to ideology, in his case Marxism – Leninism and above all Stalin's version of it.

These reflections, especially on the ambiguities that intrude upon reason and the slim chances of shaping reality through ideology, did not affect Đjilas' position in the party authorities. Also, there was nothing to indicate that this hampered his actions which remained consistent with Stalinist principles. If they had made any impression on his way of thinking, they would have been disclosed during his personal contacts with Stalin and upon familiarising himself with Stalin's policies. Both

27 id., *Wartime*, p. 285.

28 id., *Of Prisons*, p. 12.

29 id., *Wartime*, pp. 284-285.

30 id., *Razvoj mog političkog mišljenja*, part 6.

31 To be more precise, these ideological doubts dated back to June 1943, see: id., *Wartime*, p. 285.

these processes started in the spring of 1944 when Đilas, as Tito's emissary, had his first interview with Stalin. Together with other members of the CPY delegation, he went a roundabout way to Moscow – through North Africa and the Middle East. It was his first journey abroad and at the same time his first contact with representatives of the West. Đilas was to write that his primitive and dogmatic understanding of capitalism ... as an uncompromising enemy of all progress, and the weak and oppressed was then intensified. Also, the "British leadership's" denial of the possibility for the Yugoslav delegation to come to Belgrade, which was treated as an "unsafe" city, was described as "the intention to conceal the colonial terror (which was) no less drastic than the German occupation of our country". The delegation's members treated the British with suspicion, kept away from them, and strengthened their "primitive ideas" on the Intelligence Service. Our attitude was a combination of doctrinaire templates, the influence of action literature and a rookie's uncertainty in the world at large.³²

It is obvious that this attitude of Đilas and his friends stood in stark contrast to what they felt about the Soviet Union. Đilas was "touched" when he looked at this country because of historical traditions, mainly of adoration of the old, pre revolutionary Russia in his homeland – Montenegro. Undoubtedly, he identified himself with "The hapless dukes and bishops of martyred Montenegro ... (who) took part in pilgrimages to Russia and sought understanding and salvation." Attachment to Russia as a revolutionary and communist country predominated among the Yugoslav delegates before and during their trip to Moscow. They were the members of a movement that was "ideologically connected to Moscow." Its representatives thought of themselves as Moscow's most faithful supporters. Stalin was not only the undeniable and genius leader but also the embodiment of the ideas and dreams of a new society. Sometimes his deification assumed humorous proportions. Đilas and his companions believed in everything Stalin said, and if his prophecies did not come true, they simply erased them from their minds. To them, this prophet could lose none of his superhuman powers. The capital city of the USSR was not only a political and spiritual centre but also the embodiment of the abstract perfection of "a classless society". It was something that not only soothed and sweetened their devotion and suffering, but also justified their existence. Moscow and the attitude of the Soviet leadership symbolised the ideology which was "the most rational and (...) all-embracing to me and all those in my war-torn and devastated country who were trying so hard to skip the centuries of captivity and surpass the reality"³³ Đilas confided. These words merely suggest that his ambivalent feelings and doubts were not the reflection of his subsequent post-war beliefs and that they had no part in shaping his attitudes and political outlook.

Đilas' contact with the Soviet reality in 1944 resulted in two articles. In the first one Tito's emissary presented *Homo Sovieticus* (in the positive rather than

32 M. Džilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, Paris 1962, pp. 19, 20, 21-22.

33 *ibid*, pp. 14, 15, 22, 48.

as subsequently accepted pejorative sense). He treated him as an emanation of Russia's historical development – its cultural and national traditions and – later the Soviet order, the party and the Komsomol policy. He observed that apart from the many positive features which were strongly accentuated in *Soviet man*, “a justified lack of trust towards the external world” was also in evidence. That apparently came from past negative experiences and the hostile attitudes of foreign countries. Djilas connected the main reason for this lack of trust with a very strong relationship between the governors and the governed; “the Soviet order is inseparably connected with people's lives” he mused airily. The authorities and the party “were bound with the people and grew out of them” in such a way that it would be difficult to “distinguish a party or Komsomol (...) member from an ordinary Soviet citizen.”³⁴

Đjilas wrote that this situation had the approval of society. However, in foreign countries, since the October Revolution, various conspiracies against “the party and the government, against the life of the Soviet nations” were hatched. They caused distrust or caution towards the external world. It was especially visible towards the enemy, in this instance Germany, and resulted only from their aggression, not prejudice. Đjilas could see that Soviet man had been raised in uncompromising consistently with the rules of humanism and internationalism. Soviet man responded with kindness to kindness, with trust for trust and supported the aspirations of others which, Đjilas found upon reflection, was just like Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia. As a result, “the great Russian soul opened before our nations.” Their delegation was welcomed with open arms in Moscow. “In reporting on our warm welcome, ‘Pravda’ published Tito's photograph on its front page”. Due to the friendly attitude of the “masses” towards the Yugoslavian fighters, it had a much bigger print run than usual. People were fighting in the streets to have this issue of the newspaper, to have Tito's photograph. “They carry it in their notebooks, frame it and hang it on their walls. Tito is currently the most popular and liked foreign personage”. The Soviet authorities and nations also treat the partisans under his command with the same respect and kindness³⁵, as they treat those of the USSR.” “The love of the Soviet people for our country is noble and unselfish ... Never and nowhere did we notice any tendencies to interfere in any domestic affairs (of others), including ours.” “The immortal Slavic Russia”, “the brotherhood with the Soviet Union” was indisputably the best guarantee of salvation during the war and the keeper of “our country's and national independence in the face of the threat of the revival of German imperialism after the war.”³⁶

34 M. Đzilas, *Sovjetski čovjek i naša borba*, in: id., *Članci*, p. 119 n. The article was originally issued in the magazine “Nova Jugoslavija”, no. 7-10, June-July 1944.

35 With time, the leaders of the CPY made efforts to transform partisan units into a regular army. It should be emphasised that the term “partisans” in the subject literature is used to describe Tito's units for want of a better word. It seems sufficient for the purposes of this paper since military issues are only of marginal interest.

36 M. Đzilas, *Sovjetski čovjek*, pp. 119-128.

Đilas published another article on his conversations with Stalin at the beginning of June 1944 in his customary agitprop tone. He lavished the customary praise on the Soviet leader and underlined the same qualities as in the quoted article from 1942. Let's focus only on the last part. Today it may sound amusing but during the war and the bloody battles with Hitler and his allies it might have appealed to the imagination of Tito's partisans who were mainly illiterate peasants devoid of any knowledge of the outside world. Đilas wrote that "leaving Stalin – lively, ordinary, immortal and a genius of a man, we felt that someday those difficult times would pass thanks to him. The birds would start singing for all people, the sun would warm them, flowers would be fragrant, children would be carefree and able to play, scholars would do their research in peaceful beautiful libraries and institutes, writers would intensify their output. And Stalin will be the one standing in the middle of such happiness and love. Everybody will sing about him enjoy their lives and limitless human happiness combined harmoniously with nature. Stalin, the ordinary man is immortal just like eternal human development. He will lead mankind together with Lenin (though Lenin by then being long dead, Đilas adroitly corrected his position to inform that after Lenin's death) he will continue alone with no hesitation and wandering far ahead until he finds peace and happiness – the everlasting dream of those who work."³⁷

Since Đilas was one of the most important ideologists and propagandists of the Yugoslav communists at the time, his idyllic descriptions standing in stark contradiction to some well known facts are all the more striking. We know for a fact that during his stay in Moscow, the Soviet side demanded that his article devoted to Tito was changed and adapted to the demands of Soviet censors before going to print. They wanted to tone down the praise Đilas heaped on his leader. The article was written in compliance with the obligatory slant that was the norm for reports on Stalin. Further to his suggestion that Tito was the Yugoslavian Stalin, a personage gifted with identical qualities, he was given to understand that "Stalin would feel unhappy if such an article appeared in the Soviet press."³⁸

In the end, the content of the article was adjusted to the sensitive Kremlin dictator's taste. The demands of Stalin's subordinates could only be understood as Moscow's restrained relations with Tito and Yugoslav partisans which fell far short of the ecstatic admiration for them that was described in the article on "Soviet man."³⁹ However, it should be emphasised that Đilas' article about Tito, even after

37 id., *Susret sa Stalinom*, in: id., *Članci*, pp. 186-192, a note quoted on p. 192; the article is also in B. Kovačević, *Đilas. Heroj – antiheroj*, pp. 283-288, quote: p. 288. First published in "Borba", December 21st 1944.

38 V. Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik Milovan Đilas. Prilozi za biografiju*, Beograd 1991, footnote*, p. 287.

39 Đilas' article about Tito was published in the USSR in the magazine "Rat i radnička klasa" titled *Maršal Jugoslavije Josip Broz Tito*, see: V. Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*. pp. 287-293. Original version entitled *Josip Broz Tito – nejm, ar slobode i bratzva naroda Jugoslavije* – ibid., footnote*, pp. 287-292. The article was published in "Borba" but Dedijer did not give its date. The original version of the article, see: id., *Dnevnik 1941-1944*, III, Beograd 1970, pp. 158-164.

its amendment⁴⁰, symptomised the cult of this politician. This cult was shaped with Đilas' input in the following years.

Đilas' subsequent post-war recollections totally contradict his originally propagated admiration of Stalin's policies and Soviet reality. They speak of a clash between Yugoslav partisans and their Moscow protectors and of his great disappointment. This was strengthened after the Red Army entered Yugoslavia in autumn 1944 and then – during his long journey to Moscow in spring 1945. In *Conversations with Stalin*, Đilas writes about Russia's underdevelopment, clear symptoms of chauvinism, xenophobia, contemptuous treatment of Central European nations and the primitive living conditions of USSR citizens. He found all of this distasteful, especially in confrontation with Stalin's luxurious and boorish lifestyle. The “drunkenness of Soviet representatives (which) more often than not was in the nature of a bacchanalia” characterised the way they spent their free time. Đilas also gives examples of his disregard and unfriendly attitude towards the Moscow authorities: “The Soviet press continually distorted the struggle of the Yugoslav communists while Soviet representatives aimed, in the beginning very cagily but with time more openly, at aligning Yugoslav propaganda with Soviet needs and models.”⁴¹ He writes about different false “gifts”⁴², attempts to infiltrate the CPY by “Soviet intelligence agents” and also the surprisingly unpleasant interpretation of the reality which was inconsistent with Marxist schemes of things, e.g. his account of a Red Army commander who claimed that “wars ... will achieve their predetermined function, when ... communism triumphs in the whole world.” However, “according to Marxist ideologies, which were as well known to Soviet leaders as they are to me, wars are only the product of the class struggle.” So, once communism abolished classes, the necessity to conduct wars was supposed to disappear. Nevertheless, that officer and “many Russian soldiers”⁴³ believed that the fighting between people would get fiercer only when all the people become subordinate to the same social system. It would be impossible to maintain it and different sects will aspire to destroy mankind in the name of happiness.⁴⁴

40 Đilas mentions many of Tito's qualities, probably both real and imaginary as well as his influence on his subordinates, concluding: “I have seen myself, our commanders and generals who came to Tito sad and gloomy, and leaving completely changed: happy and full of positive spirit”, V. Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, pp. 290-291.

41 M. Đilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, passim, quotes, p. 71.

42 “For example, Soviet leaders announced that they gave a gift to Belgrade as a form of help – a big amount of wheat. In reality, the wheat was imported by Germans from Yugoslav peasants and stored in the territory of Yugoslavia. The Soviet leaders believed that the wheat was among their spoils of war”, *ibid.*, p. 71. The whole account may seem unbelievable but in this case its accordance with reality is less important than Đilas' tangible and emphatic disappointment with and criticism of the Soviets.

43 Đilas adds: “also me” which indicated that he too had doubts regarding the accuracy of the mentioned “classics” understanding of wars in class-structured societies.

44 M. Đilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, pp. 42-43. Also see: *id.*, in: B. Kovačević, *Đilas. Heroj – antiheroj*, p. 150.

The observations included in *Conversations with Stalin* must have debunked different myths and beliefs regarding Soviet reality held by Đilas between the wars. His thoughts on the behaviour of Red Army soldiers had a similar timbre. In autumn 1944, the Soviets entered Yugoslavian territory devastating it just as they did in other "liberated" countries. Rape, assault and robbery were their hallmarks,⁴⁵ They became the fundamental if indirect causes of the dilemma which arose out of the necessity to confront theory and practice. It gradually undermined Stalin's image and political credibility. Đilas writes that he was not surprised by the attitudes of Soviet soldiers. He naively argued that even though they were the representatives of "the army of a classless society", being hampered by their baggage of historical experience, they could not be "everything they should have been". On the other hand, he expressed great astonishment and indignation at the fact that the Soviet authorities treated their crimes in Yugoslavia leniently, and any protests or complaints met with the arrogance and rejection typical of the attitude of a big country towards a small one, of the strong towards the weak.⁴⁶ Đilas was aware that his objections and reservations did not find support even among his closest comrades. His conscience was torn by a clash between good intentions aimed at making the world a better place to live in, and the lack of understanding from those who make decisions. He was torn "between conscience and experience ... the desire and the possibility ... which is very painful"; but, on his own admission he was cured of his previous sentiments and revolutionary elation.⁴⁷

His digressions about the loss of those "sentiments" and "elation" are of course exaggerated. Đilas did not stop being a revolutionary of the Stalinist type. Probably they are just a projection of his later views. However, in the same book, Đilas writes that "the first contact of two revolutions and two governments"⁴⁸ ... may have only led to friction. It happened within the confines of one closed ideology, so in the beginning it could have expressed the moral dilemma and sorrow that lie at the centre of real faith, the good intentions of a small party and a poor country, (which) were not understood." As Đilas wrote, Tito's emissaries had to accept the suggestions made after the first visit in Moscow that, in their present situation, after the actual dissolution of the Comintern⁴⁹, "we, the Yugoslav communists, must take care of our issues ourselves. We must only rely on our own strength."⁵⁰

45 In Dilas' opinion, Soviet soldiers during their march through Yugoslavia committed 121 rapes (111 with murder) and 1204 assaults and robberies, M. Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, pp. 67-69, 73.

46 *ibid.*, p. 70.

47 *ibid.*, pp. 77, 99.

48 In the case of Yugoslavia – the National Council of Liberation of Yugoslavia (Nacionalni komitet oslabođenja Jugoslavije – NKOJ) established in November 1943, served as a temporary government; in Polish literature, M.J. Zacharias, *Jugosławia*, p. 169.

49 The Comintern was dissolved on May 15th 1943 but it did not eliminate the subordination of communist parties in different countries to the Kremlin. The first to gain independence was the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (and with it – Yugoslavia) as a result of a conflict between the CPY, the ACP(b) and other parties of the Cominform in 1948.

50 M. Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, p. 66.

This last thread was to be developed in Đjilas' next work in which he presented Stalin as a heartless, ruthless realist who cared only about his own interests which he identified with the USSR's interests. In his revised view of Stalin, the perfect being was now a paranoid satrap who was forever on the look-out for potential enemies and stuck fast by the rule that if we wanted to survive we could not trust anyone. Of course, as opposed to himself, everyone was deemed to be a bandit and a villain. We were advised not to put our trust in anyone and anything besides "our own strength", and that we had to fight. Decisions could neither be rash nor delayed because we had to "enslave time and people since it is the only way to create history", real history. Bearing all that in mind, Đjilas wrote that "Machiavelli's prince would (only) be Stalin's average student."⁵¹

In such conditions, guided by the experience of his first trip to Moscow in 1944, Đjilas was to lean towards the view that "we, Yugoslav communists, as consistent internationalists, are and must be linked with the Soviet Union, but ..., we must deal with our national and political issues ourselves. Stalin and the Soviet authorities also think only about themselves", in caring about their country. In Đjilas' opinion, Stalin's attitude resulted from "hostile encirclement, long isolation and specific conditionings", i.e. "Russian underdevelopment". Yugoslavia was more developed, some of its regions approximate to European standards and that is why "our socialism" had to be slightly different, but without any connections to the West⁵² because the West was "anticommunist and favourable to our enemies" in Yugoslavia. Soviet help was needed only to maintain indigenous communist influence and security of its interests⁵³ which were vitiated by "the fight for independence". Đjilas wrote that the leading comrades in the CPY agreed with his views. After the second trip to Moscow in the spring of 1945, Đjilas started to have his doubts about the Kremlin's policies, mainly in connection with the Red Army's attitude towards Yugoslavia.⁵⁴

Had that judgement, presented many years later, truly influenced Đjilas' thinking at the tail end of the war? We would have difficulties trying to resolve this question in all its ramifications. We may only surmise with a high degree of probability that the earlier paeans and panegyrics of the CPY's leading propagandist in honour of "the leader of the world proletariat" did not necessarily exclude Đjilas' profound criticism after his close-up look at the Soviet reality. Moreover, the negative aspects of that reality, of Stalin and the behaviour of his closest henchmen, the general gloomy and depressing atmosphere in the USSR, the visible symptoms of terror, invigilation, hypocrisy, the tyranny of the security services, the contemptuous attitude to East European countries as being ripe for subjugation – all of these factors

51 Id., *Razvoj mog političkog mišljenja*, part 8.

52 "Only if our business requires it" can we cooperate with the West, *ibid.*, part 8.

53 A change in British policy towards Mihailović's Chetniks and Tito's partisans starting from the first half of 1943 was slow yet could indicate that London's intentions and then also Washington's were more complex, finessed and complicated than the ones presented in Đjilas' account, see: M.J. Zacharias, *Jugosławia*, p. 100 ff.

54 M. Đjilas, *Razvoj mog političkog mišljenja*, part. 8.

did not have to destroy the faith of Đilas and his party comrades in the necessity to promote revolution and introduce communism. In any case, in relying on the available documents and materials, that would be difficult to prove. Indeed, it was quite the opposite. A critical evaluation of the situation and the Soviet reality could only have strengthened their general, militant and very dogmatic belief that it was necessary to instigate "the real" revolution and introducing "real" communism. Since "the centre of the real faith" ignored its own dogmas, Yugoslav communists were free to actually consider building their own "real socialism". In such circumstances, "praising Stalin to the heavens", earnestly or with a large dose of hypocrisy, could successfully serve desirable propaganda purposes. It also meant pointing Tito's rank-and-file followers at the alleged existence of an ideal, i.e. a perfect if imaginary reality – that should be pursued with full conviction, with hope that it will bring the expected effects – equality, freedom, prosperity, national liberation and the elimination of exploitation.

As a result, Đilas' attitude might have been characterised with such ambivalence. That was all the more possible due to a great deal of research which seemed to indicate that kind and friendly relationships were a smoke screen for divergence from, hostility to, and tensions and misunderstandings with their Soviet allies.

These tensions occurred e.g. as a result of complaints made by the Yugoslavian side. Partisan leaders were unhappy because the Comintern authorities, especially in the years 1941-1942, encouraged them to cooperate with Mihailovic – the leader of the Chetniks, who was presented in Tito's propaganda as a traitor who collaborated with the Third Reich and Italy. They were also disappointed with what they claimed to be insufficient deliveries of Soviet military equipment and the Kremlin's disapproval of transforming partisan detachments into communist military units, i.e. the First Proletarian Brigade, which was formed on December 21st 1941, on the occasion of Stalin's birthday. The Comintern did not like the word "proletarian" which was treated as the expression of communist and revolutionary goals.⁵⁵ What is more, Stalin, together with the Comintern authorities, sent a protest by radio, which condemned the formation of "proletarian" units. Indeed, its name, as Đilas said, portended the ultimate, communist goals of the CPY leaders.⁵⁶ Soviet dissatisfaction was also visible later, following their negotiations in March and April 1943.⁵⁷ Tito angrily commented on it saying that the Russians ultimately only

55 id., in: B. Kovačević, *Đilas. Heroj – antiheroj*, p. 112.

56 M. Đilas, *Wartime*, pp. 120-121. Đilas wrote, probably with a slight exaggeration, that the First Proletarian Brigade, was the first permanent unit operating on Yugoslavian territory, yet he claims that it was also the first one that believed that the party's goals were the only ones. Understood thus, he added that even when partisans "fought for survival" they fought with "Leninist principles" in mind, and remained "in thrall of Stalin's ideas." The formation of the Brigade on the day of his birthday coincided with "the need to create a revolutionary army by the Yugoslav communists. I was also filled with enthusiasm connected to (...) the Brigade (...) and (the symbolic) moment of its establishment. In truth, were the heroic acts and sufferings of our bodies written in blood not the most real ideas of all?" *ibidem*.

57 Details in Polish literature, M.J. Zacharias, *Jugosławia*, pp. 118-120.

think about their own people and their own army.⁵⁸ Dissatisfaction with Moscow induced what in Stalin's opinion was a premature announcement of the resolutions of the second AVNOJ⁵⁹ session in November 1943.⁶⁰ It was connected to the disapproval that made itself visible in 1944. Because of his tactical expectations towards the United States and Great Britain, Stalin wanted to persuade the CPY leaders not to dismiss the idea of a temporary and tactical understanding with king Peter II Karađorđević and his government-in-exile in London, and to adjust their politics to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union.⁶¹

With the passage of time, all these jarring notes and misunderstandings began to undermine Yugoslav faith in Stalin's revolutionary credentials. Vladimir Dedijer recorded that just before the Soviet dictator's death, "to us, Yugoslav revolutionaries, Stalin's name was associated with long and difficult struggles. To us, he was their symbol. But all revolutions have their illusions." It is not easy to determine if in the English edition of Dedijer's book this rhyming couplet was intentionally employed to highlight an unjustified weight of the illusions the CPY leadership attached to the generalissimo's policy.⁶² In any event, in autumn 1944 there were opinions that Stalin "is a spent force as a revolutionary. He has become a statesman and has no revolutionary tendencies. He is tired with worrying about the borders of great powers and understandings about spheres of the influence."⁶³ They were accompanied by Belgrade's⁶⁴ unhappiness with Soviet attempts to dictate Yugoslav policy, e.g. the Kremlin's protest of March 1945 to accept the emigre politician Milan Grol, as a member of the communist-dominated Yugoslav government. Misunderstandings were induced by the government's declaration, broadcasted by Tito by radio on March 9th. The Soviet authorities were displeased with the fact that the declaration was made without consulting them and did not include a statement about the necessity to bring together the Soviet nations which must be "ready to do battle against any fresh attempts at aggression of German imperialism and its allies."⁶⁵ On the other

58 M. Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 231.

59 AVNOJ – Antifašističko veće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije (Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia).

60 Details in Polish literature, M.J. Zacharias, *Jugosławia*, p. 168 ff.

61 *ibid.*, pp. 188-223, *passim*. In advising the Yugoslavian partisans to act prudently and with moderation in relations with the Anglo-American side, and not to rush political matters and issues connected to the acceptance of the new authorities at their meeting in Moscow in the spring of 1944,, Stalin went on to admonish Djilas «What are those red stars doing on your hats? It's not the means but the goal that is important – and there's you with your red stars! Stars are not necessary!» Stalin went on to recommend negotiations with Ivan Šubašić, the London-based Yugoslavian prime minister-in-exile, and discovering his intentions.

62 V. Dedijer, *The Battle Stalin Lost. Memoirs of Yugoslavia 1948-1953*, New York 1971, p. 323.

63 It is the opinion of Moša Pijade who, next to Djilas, was a leading ideologist, propagandist and politician of the CPY, see: *Dokumenti 1948*, ed. V. Dedijer, vol. 1, Beograd 1980, pp. 59-60.

64 We wrote "Belgrade" because after it was taken by Tito's partisans and Red Army units on October 20th 1944 the city again became the capital city of a free, if communist, Yugoslavia.

65 B. Petranović, *Tito i Stalin (1944-1946)*, "Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis" 1988, 1-2, pp. 156-157.

hand, the Yugoslav side was unhappy with the methods of forming and running their inter-linked Soviet-Yugoslav economic societies, the trading terms between both countries and the activities of Soviet advisors in Yugoslavia. On top of that, Soviet intelligence and security service agents tried to influence various people and institutions in their political choices.

The biggest misunderstandings arose, however, in regard of Tito's speech in Ljubljana on May 27th 1945. Referring to various clashes between the powers of the victorious coalition, Tito implied that Yugoslavia cannot become their victim which was aimed primarily at Belgrade's formal and actual ally – Moscow⁶⁶; this came as an unpleasantly surprise to the latter, which took it as a sign of disloyalty. Tito claimed that a lot was said about the war aims and that it had been "just and we had treated it that way... We desire everyone to be the master of their own country." Yugoslavia did not intend to sacrifice its own interests in the name of an understanding between the powers or be a bargaining counter in the relations between the rich and powerful of this world. It did not intend to become entangled in "the sphere of political interests."⁶⁷ "Today's Yugoslavia" was not going to become the object of barter deals between the great powers.⁶⁸

This attitude of Yugoslav communists, during the war and soon after its end, can definitely give credence to Đilas' later texts and political views. The leading propagandist of the CPY could, on the one hand, embellish his recollections with spectacular details which in reality did not take place, and, on the other hand, emphasise, belittle or omit uncomfortable details according to need. Nevertheless, the general timbre of his recollections is in total agreement with the logic of events known from other records drawn up during the war and right after its end.

These reports, on top of what Đilas wrote, indicate that both sides i.e. the Yugoslav communists and the Soviet authorities treated the issues of communism and revolution from totally different perspectives. The Soviet Union was a country where communists already held power and shaped the political system according to the ideas of their leader. In the international arena they took action motivated not only by dogmas but also by tactical exigencies⁶⁹, interests, windows of opportunity, the desire to strengthen the country and maximising its power, and to influence events in Europe and the world. The Soviet Union was supposed to become a communist empire that resembled others in all but name.

66 April 11th 1945. Tito and Stalin signed a twenty year pact which spoke of friendship, mutual aid and post-war cooperation. M.J. Zacharias, *Jugoslawia*, p. 317.

67 This is an obvious reference to the Churchill - Stalin deal achieved at the Moscow Conference in October 1944 regarding Soviet and Anglo-American spheres of influence in the Balkans, M. J. Zacharias, *Jugoslawia*, pp. 266-268.

68 These extracts from Tito's speech of May 27th 1944 were quoted by Đilas, see: M. Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, San Diego, New York, London 1985, p. 91. For Tito's speeches see also: *Pisma CK KPJ I pisma SKP/b*, Beograd 1948, p. 4; *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union 1939-1973. A Documentary Survey*, ed. S. Clissold, London 1975, dok. 110, pp. 165-166.

69 See e.g. Stalin's admonition of Djilas in spring 1944 in Moscow, footnote 61 above.

As a result, such a pragmatic, global and imperial policy, the policy of “a statesman” in Moscow as it was sarcastically referred to in Yugoslavia, had to collide with the policy of a peripheral communist society in a peripheral country like Yugoslavia, which was not always willing to take on board the suggestions and orders flowing from Moscow and the Comintern. Yugoslav society was proud of its own achievements and its successes in fighting the Nazi and their allies, but it was completely devoid of rudimentary knowledge of the outside world, and, what is surprising and paradoxical, sometimes also about the Soviet Union and the true mainsprings of Moscow’s policy. A society that treated all the ideas of the “classics” very seriously and took them at face value, looked to the USSR for inspiration and friendship in building true communism. At least initially, it was to be a communist society based on the successful political system developed by that dependable student of Marx, Engels and Lenin – Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, who made the word become flesh. As a result, such a peripheral way of thinking and internalising the political nostrums of “the classics” at face value, had to lead to a painful conflict with the global, cynical, conformist, opportunist and ruthless policy of the “idol” in Moscow. He treated “the classics” opportunistically, reaching for their ideas only when they suited his domestic and foreign policy. It was the policy of the man who pursued his own interests and was ready to ride roughshod over the concepts of his Yugoslav acolytes.⁷⁰ That awareness came to inform not only the policies of post-war Belgrade, but also, what interests us the most here, the evolution of Milovan Djilas’ political and social thought. It seems that what should be highlighted is the fact that, given the documents now available, which were not written during the war and not by Djilas, his evaluations of Stalin in the years 1944-1945 are generally accurate and authentic – regardless of the fact that they were written many years after his personal contacts with the Soviet leader.

Based on the available documents we can say that Djilas – a communist, propagandist and politician who became more and more disillusioned with Stalin and the

70 They did not hide their dissatisfaction with such an attitude, see: M. Pijade, *Priča o sovjetskoj pomoci za dizanje ustanka u Jugoslaviji*, Beograd 1950, passim, V. Dedijer, *Izgnubljena bitka V. Stalina*, Sarajevo 1969, p. 69 ff.; M.J. Zacharias, *Konflikt radziecko-jugosłowiański w latach 1948 – 1954*, “Dzieje Najnowsze” 1990, 4, pp. 25-26; idem, *Wewnętrzne i międzynarodowe aspekty zwycięstwa komunistów w Jugosławii. U źródeł jugosłowiańskiej odmiany systemu komunistycznego*, in: *Czy Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia mogła się wybić na wolność? Materiały z sesji naukowej*, Olsztyn, October 26th 1995, ed. T. Kisielewski, N. Kasperek, WSP Olsztyn 1996, pp. 105-106. What is interesting, those discrepancies and complaints did not influence the conviction of the Belgrade authorities that Yugoslavia’s system had to be an exact replica of the Soviet model. In 1943, Fitzroy MacLean, the head of the British military mission to Tito, noticed, that “the observer who knows the Soviet Union sometimes has the impression that he is in one of the Union’s republics”, see: MacLean’s Report, February 1945, in: D. Biber, *Nova Jugoslavija u sudbonsnim poratnim trenucima*, “Vjesnik u Srijedu”, June 20th 1973, no. 1201, p. 25. Right after the war, Yugoslavia’s political system was closely modelled on the Soviet system – regardless of the differences between Tito and Stalin on current political issues – see. M. J. Zacharias, *System stalinowski w Jugosławii 1944-1949*, “Kwartalnik Historyczny” 1992, 3, p. 78 ff.; id., *Komunizm, federacja, nacjonalizmy. System władzy w Jugosławii 1943-1991. Powstanie, przekształcenia, rozkład*, Warsaw 2004, p. 58 ff.

Soviet reality – consolidated his ambivalent attitude after the war. What is more, he introduced the new phenomenon of criticising his own leadership and party environment and its policies. In reference to the situation that arose just after Germany’s defeat, Đilas wrote that victory was “different to what we expected and predicted”, because it was supposed to bring “freedom for everyone”. The hope was that the “brotherhood of communists”⁷¹ would transform itself into the “brotherhood ... of all Yugoslav citizens”. Đilas also claimed that freedom was not expected to take a political form but, by introducing the appropriate lifestyle related to the “liquidation ... of the capitalist propertied ruling class, the stalwarts of capitalism and (their) minions”, it was supposed to be “the power and freedom of working people”. And he explained: “As for me, I wanted to be released, once and for all, from my party duties and everyday political work”, and become “a free writer, a communist writer.”⁷²

Meanwhile, everything worked out otherwise. Nationalisation that was intended to serve the destruction of the capitalist method of production and building a classless society transformed itself into common robbery, taking other people’s property – villas, wealth, even personal property. Đilas saw the abuses, the collapse of morality, the betrayal of their own ideals, which first started among communists, and more to the point, the minions of the new ruling class because “the communists had absolute power.”⁷³

Such observations were confirmed by Vladimir Dedijer, who wrote that “when we entered Belgrade before the end of the war, the pace of moral erosion was huge. The partisan superiors appropriated the most beautiful villas of the defeated bourgeoisie. One of the top Serb leaders, my school friend Milentije Popovič, admitted that our revolutionary ethics, forged in agony in the prisons of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and on the battlefield, quickly evaporated. I cynically answered that our comrades, the labourers and peasants, who were dying of hunger for ages, today eat with such an appetite that their ethics are disappearing in their entrails.”⁷⁴

All of the plundering which did not have anything to do with common socialisation or nationalisation – the processes that should have taken place according to law and in respect for “truth and justice”, were accompanied by acts of terror. They strengthened not only the state of possession, but also the political position of Yugoslavia’s new rulers. They did not impose any limitations on themselves; they only feared the loss of respect abroad and influence at home. The revolutionary movement was transformed into the dominance of the bureaucracy and the state authorities. “The new country was becoming more alike the police and absolutist states.” Moreover, the unlimited power that Tito gained owing to the victory during the war was understood as the cult of personality comparable to that of Stalin in his country. According to Đilas, Tito became – “a small, moderate version of Stalin

71 Đilas added that they were already somewhat frayed during the war by the party and military hierarchical pacts and the cult of Stalin and Tito. See M. Đilas, *Razvoj mog političkog mišljenja*, p. 9.

72 *ibid.*, p. 9.

73 *ibid.*, p. 9.

74 V. Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, p. 294.

in a small non – imperialist country.”⁷⁵ His closest associates “gradually and unwittingly transformed themselves into the imitators of a foreign power, the courtiers and clerks of their autocrat.” As a result, Đilas claimed that right after the war, the most unproductive and “battered” period began, especially in the intellectual life which lacked in “theoretical deliberation”. Usually they were nothing but trivial repetitions of what the creators of Marxism – Leninism stated some time ago. Political practice was nothing but an imitation of foreign, Soviet patterns. “The world and life (was) composed of dogmatic models”, with hostile phraseology to accompany them. Seeking solace in loneliness⁷⁶, his escape from active politics was seen not as an official expulsion from the party but his “abstention from everyday political activity in various walks of public life.”⁷⁷

Nevertheless, even if we think that these feelings and desires were authentic, they did not bring Đilas to the point of undermining his faith in the need of revolution and building communism in Yugoslavia. He claimed that the course of circumstances, the need to rebuild and expand, the conflict with the Soviet Union in particular, and the insistence of his comrades that he should remain active for some time, frustrated the implementation of his desires and intentions.⁷⁸ We can only assume that the system’s edifice in Yugoslavia, modelled on the Soviet one, burdened with the same defects as the original model, provided further reason for his doubts, his disillusionment, as previously with Stalin and the Soviet reality. Be that as it may, Đilas remained the leading ideologist and communist propagandist in Yugoslavia, the head of Agitprop – The Department of Agitation and Propaganda. As he said, it was “one of the strictest and more radical institutions” in his country. Its duty was to “spread (the party’s) ideology and go against every active enemy... Generally, Agitprop presented and supported the official attitude with the mission of not only stimulating revolutionary fervour but also to prosecute and dole out retribution.”⁷⁹

It would be difficult to determine how, in Đilas’ opinion, his assumption of such a political role which involved the use of coercion, might have prevented the duplication of Soviet record of error and iniquity and, on the contrary, contribute to building a new system guaranteeing the desired freedom for all.⁸⁰ Accepting optimistically his criticism of Stalin and disillusionment with the new order, which so resembled the Soviet prototype, in Yugoslavia, and mindful of his part in the creation of Yugoslav communism, it should be concluded that Agitprop’s leader found himself in a profound personal dilemma; we do not know for certain what he based his hopes on that the communist experiment in his country would finally bear posi-

75 An outstanding role was played by Đilas’ hagiographic paeans in his propaganda articles which have already been mentioned and are discussed further below.

76 M. Đilas, *Razvoj mog političkog mišljenja*, part 9.

77 id., in: B. Kovačević, *Đilas. Heroj – antiheroj*, p. 184.

78 *ibid.*, p. 184.

79 M. Đilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 9.

80 Đilas denies that Agitprop directly participated in the persecution. He vaguely states that “Agitprop ever had anything to do with the arrest, unless it was through propaganda”, *ibid.*, p. 10.

tive fruit. Not having the possibility to resolve that question ourselves, we can only say that Đilas' propaganda slogans were still full of revolutionary zeal – just like during the war. That much can be seen in the article devoted to the nationality issue in Yugoslavia. In Đilas' opinion, the pre-war authorities were not able to solve it. After the outbreak of war, the nationality issue was exacerbated by collaborationist postures and the forces which refrained from cooperating with communists. It was their policy which took up the struggle against the invaders and collaborators, and propagated the "bratsva i jedinstva" (brotherhood and unity)⁸¹ of the Yugoslav nations, that became the factor leading to success and the positive resolution of the national issue. They were contrary to the policies of the emigre governments of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in London which "with all its strength" was trying to "bury the Yugoslav nations' success during its struggle for independence and restore the old Yugoslavia." The émigrés were opposed to the CPY, the only force capable of preventing the further rift among the nations of Yugoslavia. The leaders of this party resolved the national issue at the AVNOJ's second sitting on 29th November 1943. Yugoslavia was to be rebuilt on a federal basis which guaranteed an equal position for all of the country's nations. Without the CPY and its policy, so the argument ran, Yugoslavia would not exist. "Only the new movement of the fight for independence, with Tito at its head ... (attracted) the biggest mass of Yugoslavia's nations" which could lead to the country's reconstruction after the war.⁸²

In the next article⁸³, Đilas argued that Yugoslavia ended the war with deeper transformations than any other country. "There is no place, no settlement where the fight for independence did not shed its light and bring power." In numerous countries people continue to fight for power", in Yugoslavia they have it, and it just needs to be reconstructed, strengthened and ordered, though they still have to face major difficulties. "Yugoslavia's peaceful development only means that the war has ended." There are strong groups and social factions waiting for the time "when everything finally comes to an end" and "returns to normal". They are antagonists of the resolution of the main issues in Yugoslavia – of its reconstruction and economic policy in consonance with the popular demand of "the working class, the poor and the averagely affluent peasants, and the working intellectuals." In his opinion, these processes were more developed in Yugoslavia than in other countries, like Bulgaria or Poland, not to mention France, Italy and "some other countries" dominated by the bourgeoisie and capitalists.⁸⁴ To be sure, he admitted that Yugoslavia had acquired a "new bourgeoisie" created by "the black market, speculation and corruption" which grew from "our old habits – work least, take most" Which in practice it meant at the

81 i.e. "brotherhood and unity".

82 M. Đilas, *O rješenju nacionalnog pitanja u Jugoslaviji*, in: idem, *Članci*, pp. 254-265, esp. 260-261. The article was written in November 1945 in Belgrade for the Bulgarian magazine "Filosofska misao".

83 id., *O perspektivama razvitka Jugoslavije*, in: idem, *Članci*, pp. 266-270. The article was published in "Borba" on January 6th, 7th, 8th 1946.

84 In France, for example the working class still fights against trusts and the twelve families that rule the French economy, *ibid.*, p. 268.

“crowd’s” expense. For Đjilas, a fight with this group was inevitable, and the division would be between the state owned sector and the small and medium-sized peasant economy⁸⁵ on the one hand, and the private sector⁸⁶ which, Đjilas emphasised, was lawless and corrupt, and stole, disorganised, creates anarchy, and deepened “the poverty of masses” on the other. All the social forces were to be engaged in this struggle which was to be no less acute than the war that had just been fought because it was of equal significance to the war that had just been fought to liberate the country from foreign domination. The purpose was therefore to maintain the achievements of the struggle for independence. Those who sought to obstruct the new order and the country’s economic development were to be ruthlessly suppressed. Đjilas was satisfied that the new authorities had sufficient strength to accomplish their mission which was vested in “the masses” and “the organisations which used to manage the people during the war” – which was an obvious reference He was undoubtedly referring to not just the party authorities, but perhaps even more so, to the secret police.⁸⁷ So it was to be like the Soviet Union after all. There was to be no hesitation because, as he claimed, the prevailing international conditions⁸⁸ favoured the accomplishment of this mission.

Regardless of any doubts and criticism he may have voiced, or ambivalent feelings he may have had to what was happening in Yugoslavia, Đjilas’ written output after the war was supportive of Tito’s doctrinaire and ruthless policy. It went to show that, in reality, Đjilas was still a Stalinist and the opinions of foreign observers, at time that he was the most dogmatic Stalinist politician in the CPY leadership, were not devoid of reason.⁸⁹ Because of that, some researchers, like. François Feytö, were to pose numerous uncomfortable questions, notably, whether Djilas “had been ... the most despotic, brutal, intolerant of all the Yugoslav Stalinists? Belgrade intellectuals were afraid of this merciless inquisitor for many years. Dedijer has told us

85 That is that part of the peasantry was also counterposed to the kulaks (the wealthy farmers) in Yugoslavia.

86 It is not clearly understood why this word is underlined. It may mean that the communists wanted to deal only with that part of the private economic sector which caused problems and did not respect the law imposed by them. In reality, like in other East-Central European countries, the Yugoslavian private sector was also supposed to be nationalised together with agriculture. Only practical difficulties forced Yugoslavia’s leaders to stop the collectivisation of agriculture in 1953 (as happened in Poland three years later). Đjilas probably used this ambiguous phraseology for political tactical reasons.

87 It mainly concerns the Department of National Defence (Odeljenje zaštite naroda – OZNA) established in May 1945 and the Directorate of State Security (Uprava državne bezbednosti – UDBA), see: M.J. Zacharias, *System stalinowski*, p. 73, footnote 34. The establishment of these institutions, see also: W.D. McClellan, *Postwar Political Evolution*, in: *Contemporary Yugoslavia. Twenty Years of Socialist Experiment*, published by W.S. Vucinich, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1969, p. 129; *Jugoslavija 1918-1988. Tematska zbirka dokumenata*, ed. B. Petranović, M. Zečević, Beograd 1988, footnote 9, p. 699.

88 M. Djilas, *O perspektivama razvitka Jugoslavije*, pp. 266-270.

89 See: E. Halperin, *The Triumphant Heretic. Tito’s Struggle Against Stalin*, London 1958, pp. 112-113, 217-218.

that he was capable of shooting his countrymen just because they doubted Stalin's genius and nobility."⁹⁰

Immediately after the war, some of Đilas' statements could have confirmed the opinions about his relentless hostility to anything smacking of pluralism. One representative of "a rather insignificant group of intellectuals" professed: "There is no equality between us. We demand equality!" Đilas curtly replied: "You are not and you cannot be equal (to us). We, communists have fifty divisions and a horrible war behind us. You, on the other hand, are only a small group. Your idea of equality is wrong. It is not equality what is necessary but the ability to comprehend and understand" – in compliance with communist nostrums, no doubt.⁹¹ During the encounter of party leaders with Đilas at the beginning of 1954, Dedijer was not one of his enemies (quite the opposite, actually!). In his opinion, Đilas, like Alexandar Ranković – the head of Yugoslav secret police at that time, was supposed to sabotage the attempts to release communist opponents from prison.⁹² Đilas denied this later, but he did not negate the fact that Agitprop was a strict and relentless tool of the CPY policy.⁹³

Đilas' ruthless Stalinist attitude can also be corroborated by reference to other facts. We may observe a call for a reckoning with "class enemies", and the incontrovertible and primitive glorification of the Soviet Union, the CPY and Tito. Immediately after the war, Đilas lavished unalloyed praise on Tito, indeed, more than anyone, he helped spark off the personality cult in his own country, the very phenomenon he was to condemn in his later works, after his conflict with the party leadership in January 1954. Before, however, he lost no opportunity to express his respect for Tito which often took the form of shameless adoration. Allegedly, he proposed naming Podgorica, which was damaged during the war, Titograd, which some suspected to have been a calculated move."⁹⁴ At any rate, he presented Tito as "the bearer of all that is new and modern."⁹⁵ He also wanted to rename some other cities after Yugoslav communist leaders. Thus the cities of Kardeljevo, Rankovićevo and Đilasovo appeared on the map. The last name was given to Žabljak – one of the highest mountains in Montenegro. In his later works, Đilas strenuously denied being the author-in-chief of these place name changes and claimed that the name Titograd was suggested to him by the local Montenegrin authorities. "Even if I had wanted to, I would not have refused because I would have been cast as Tito's opponent which, obviously, I was not."⁹⁶

90 F. Feytö, *Prospects of the Evolution of Communism (a few notes on the margins of Đilas book)*, "Kultura" 1958, 123/124, p. 187.

91 M. Đilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 7.

92 V. Dedijer, *Novi prilozu za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, Zagreb 1981, p. 722.

93 Đilas polemics with Dedijer's suggestion and evaluation: M. Đilas, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 10-11.

94 In Dedijer's opinion, Đilas explained that the local Montenegrin authorities having named Podgorica in Tito's honour would have the resources to rebuild and reconstruct the city damaged during the war, V. Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik*, pp. 294-295.

95 J. Brković, *Anatomija jednog staliniste*, Zagreb 1988, p. 107.

96 Đilas' statement in: B. Kovačević, *Đilas. Heroj – antiheroj*, pp. 149-150. Đilas blamed Dedijer for spreading the news about his desire to rename various cities and mountains. He wrote that his

In Jevrem Brković's opinion, Đilas was the key figure in preparing the party leadership for confrontation with the kulaks – the wealthy peasantry. In his article published on 13th January 1946 in "Borba", he claimed that "the hostile forces in cities had already been defeated" but in the countryside they were strong and would fight and resist.⁹⁷ As a result, Djilas was virtually idolised by the communists and their followers, especially in Montenegro. His theoretical, propaganda and ideological articles were the reason for calling him "the next Marx."⁹⁸

The slowly and gradually unfolding conflict between Belgrade and Moscow did not change Djilas' attitude. Like other CPY leaders, he expressed clear dissatisfaction with the policy of the ACP(b) towards Western European communist parties, mainly the French and Italian ones. The leaders of the CPY looked on in some dismay at Stalin's policy of putting the brakes on some of his own revolutionary designs which, in his opinion, were premature⁹⁹, and even more so at his attempts to incline western communists to be moderate, as was the case until the beginning of the Cold War which was signalled by the announcement of the Marshall Plan and the establishment of the Cominform in 1947.¹⁰⁰

This policy went counter to Tito's attitude. Djilas writes that the Yugoslav leadership accused foreign communists of having "parliamentary illusions", not appreciating American "aggression" and "the weak support of the Soviet Union and the people's democracies." However, at the beginning of 1945, Kardelj and Djilas did not trust "the two members of the Italian Central Committee" who were staying in Belgrade, who spoke of their hope that Italian communists would gain "the majority in the upcoming elections creating the conditions to establish the same system as in Yugoslavia." "We doubted such victory" – Djilas was to write. He added that, together with Kardelj, they tried to persuade the Italians that "such a system can only be established as a result of the "destruction of the (capitalist – M.J.Z.) status quo by means of armed struggle (...). It was clear that our Italian comrades had illusions regarding the possibility of gaining power by peaceful parliamentary means."¹⁰¹ And

allegations that "I was the one who wrote that if Žabljak changed its name to Djilasovo etc. – are not exact. After 1948, I was able to dismiss the idea of rename a particular city in Montenegro after me... Personally I was against naming cities and streets after deceased people", *ibid.*, p. 150.

97 M. Djilas, "Borba" January 13th 1946, quote after: J. Brković, *Anatomija*, pp. 7-8.

98 J. Brković, *Anatomija*, p. 116.

99 It should be added that in compliance with Moscow's earlier insistence, CPY leaders still tried to avoid using the term "revolution".

100 See: M.J. Zacharias, *The Beginnings of Cominform. The Policy of the Soviet Union Towards Communist parties in Connection with the Political Initiatives of the United States of America in 1947.*, "Acta Poloniae Historica", 78, p. 175 ff.; *id.*, *Powołanie Kominformu w 1947 r. Przyczyny, przebieg, skutki*, "Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 1996, 31, p. 99 ff.

101 M. Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 135 – 136. See also: E. Kardelj, *Komunistička partija Jugoslavije u borbi za nezavisnost svojih naroda, za narodnu vlast., za ekonomsku obnovu i socijaličku privredu*, in: E. Kardelj. M. Đilas, *Borba za novu Jugoslaviju. Informacioni referat na savetovanju komunističkih partija u Poljskoj*, Beograd, Zagreb 1948, pp. 30-31. In such circumstances the attitude of Yugoslavia's representatives - in practice Djilas and Kardelj – was justified; during the Cominform's founding con-

no wonder that on 23rd March 1948, not long before the elections, the Italian communist leader – Palmiro Togliatti met the Soviet ambassador Michail Kostylev in Rome to familiarise himself with Moscow’s standpoint on the prospects of revolution in Italy. The issue was resolved a few days later when Molotov, on Stalin’s behalf, forbade to start up a revolution for fear of the reaction of the West. As a result, “the (Italian) communists shamefully lost the elections ... and abandoned the idea of an armed struggle.”¹⁰²

Finally, in spite of his idolatrous attachment to the Soviets, which was mainly evinced in copying their models and official paeans of praise for their policy, Đilas and other Yugoslav comrades consistently presented themselves as the only true revolutionaries.¹⁰³ Undoubtedly, it was a concealed form of criticism of the Kremlin’s policy towards the international communist movement, at least until the conference of nine communist parties in Szklarska Poręba in September 1945 and the establishment of the Cominform, and the change of Stalin’s policy in accordance with the CPY leaders’ expectations.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, in December 1947, Tito told the Bulgarian communist leaders in Budapest that: “Stalin has become too cautious after the war. He should have let the French and Italian comrades take power in the same way as we did.” Tito felt that Stalin did not appreciate “what we are doing in Yugoslavia.”¹⁰⁵ Such statements may have stemmed from Tito’s doubts as to whether the Soviet attitude presented in Szklarska Poręba actually meant a change in the Kremlin’s policy.

This pro - revolutionary attitude covered the true and unpleasant essence of Soviet-Yugoslav relations and the intensifying reasons for their rupture; it was also a tool for exerting doctrinal and propaganda influence on “the working people” of Yugoslavia. A prime example of such influence can be seen in Djilas’ report written on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia. Referring to Stalin, “our comrade Đido”¹⁰⁶ claimed that it had been an event which had not resembled any of the previous revolutions. On this occasion, Djilas argued that “They substituted the old classes exploited by new ones. The October Revolution meant the removal of all exploitation and oppression. The USSR nations had broken the bonds of imperialism and deepened the crisis of capitalism. Capitalism has become historically outdated, whereas the USSR safeguards peace and

ference in Szklarska Poręba in September 1947, they emphasised that “western communist parties have no interest in supporting the attempts to reconstruct their countries and participate in fighting economic difficulties”; E. Reale, *Avec Jacques Duclos au Banc des Accusés à la Reunion Constitutive du Cominform à Szklarska Poręba (22-27 Septembre 1947)*, Paris 1958, pp. 33-34.

102 P. Kowalczyk, *Zakazane piosenki*, “Rzeczpospolita”, “PlusMinus” supplement, November 27th-29th 2010, p. 23.

103 Let’s repeat once more – avoiding the word “revolution”.

104 For more on the establishment of the Cominform see: *Sowieszczanija Kominforma 1947, 1948, 1949. Dokumenty i materiały*, ed. G.A. Adibiekov, Moscow 1998, p. 3 ff.

105 Ch. Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Block*, Durham 1986, p. 88. These statements may have stemmed from Tito’s and other Yugoslav leaders’ (including Đilas) lack of conviction, so that Soviet attitude in Szklarska Poręba actually meant a change in policy.

106 In party circles, Djilas was often called “Djido”.

international cooperation. During the war, his policy, filled with understanding for the aspirations of nations to decide about their own fates, was significantly differed from that of the West since American and British imperialists truly aimed at a new division of the world in accordance with their own interests. Imperialism is a threat to freedom and independence and leads towards a new war. Only the peaceful policy of the USSR, the ideas of brotherhood and equal rights presented to the world by Lenin and Stalin, can be our salvation. During the war, Yugoslavia's nations often invoked the USSR's experience as well as the ideas of the two outstanding leaders of that country. Now they still want to stick to this way of acting. Each nation must do the same if they want to gain freedom, independence, peace and development. The fight for national independence in all countries inevitably ... becomes an integral part of an honest friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe. As a result, Yugoslavia's nations are aware that they can build their new society and live a happy life using the huge influence of the USSR – the country that fights for a fair peace, a country that opposes new warmongers.”¹⁰⁷

Nonetheless, the belief that the essence of Djilas' report was only a piece of propaganda, one of the many such pieces produced by him, his fellow-countrymen, and ideologists in the USSR and those of the newly-formed people's democracies, would be wrong. Regardless of appearances, the paper dealt with serious political matters that betrayed the position of Yugoslavia's authorities in face of the Kremlin's rising hostility. It was entirely devoted to Stalin, his policy and the statements which, in regard of the onset of the Cold War, must have been accepted in the USSR at least with mistrust and suspicion. The arguments were carefully phrased, never provocatively brandished, but to an astute observer of Yugoslav-Soviet relations, it would have revealed that after the conference in Szklarska Poręba, the establishment of the Cominform and Moscow's attempt to fully subordinate the people's democracies while conducting the Cold War, the Yugoslavs wanted to maintain a certain degree of independence. Djilas claimed that Tito, being aware of the meaning of friendship with Moscow and of Marxism-Leninism, made the right decisions. “He discovers new forms of fighting in a masterly fashion exactly because he practises the ideas of Lenin and Stalin” which did not necessarily mean a schematic transformation of the “forms of combat and organisation of October and immediately after.” Tito “faithfully adheres to Leninism, and accepts forms that suit our conditions. I believe that this is the reflection of Tito's greatness and the historical meaning of the struggle for independence in Yugoslavia.”¹⁰⁸

As a result, Djilas once again showed himself as the co-author of the cult of his leader - the phenomenon he would later condemn.¹⁰⁹ However, politically, the most

107 M. Djilas, *O tridesetogodišnjici Oktobarske revolucije. Referat na svečanoj akademiji Izvršnoga odbora Narodnog fronta Jugoslavije*, Zagreb 1947, p. 3 ff.

108 *ibid.*, pp. 22-24.

109 See footnotes 75 and 76. Nonetheless, Djilas' condemnation or, to be precise, criticism of the partisan commander was ambivalent. In his opinion, “the cult of Tito” was not only the expression of his desire but also that of “the masses” who needed a leader. Such desires, demands and needs, in both

important matter was the fact that Đilas and his fellow-revolutionaries either did not appreciate the timbre of the paper's essence or consciously informed Moscow that they, the Yugoslavs, reserved for themselves the right to make autonomous decisions. The idea of Yugoslavia treading its own path to socialism was the last thing Moscow was ready to accept at the end of 1947.

The conflict between the CPY, the ACP(b) and other parties of the Cominform which flared up on June 28th 1948¹¹⁰, signalled the beginning of a new phase in Soviet-Yugoslav relations, a political modification in Yugoslavia – not an immediate one but slow and gradual – and the evolution of Đilas' attitude and his political thought. Later he would write that together with the rupture with the USSR "the process ... of my mental, emotional and personal independence began." It would have begun earlier if Đilas could have separated himself from "the party's leading collective" and if he did not have to "work on the inside". Such an explanation raises certain doubts because, in spite of his numerous disappointments and disillusionment with Stalin and the Soviets¹¹¹, Đilas was an ideological communist at that time and he had no intention of abandoning Marxism – Leninism. The reasons why he

their emotional and down-to-earth aspects, associated with the party's pre war Stalinisation, emerged gradually and were built into the military and other hierarchies step by step. Officially, Tito's personality cult became institutionalised during the second AVNOJ Session on November 29th 1943. Djilas emphasised that while Tito did much to inspire this cult himself, it did not arise entirely without the connivance of his party comrades because, far from being mere submissive subordinates, they could see that it also served as a special purpose vehicle in a specific system enabling diverse interest groups to articulate their aspirations. They also had their parts to play under his rule and they believed that the hierarchy and system that came into being was an inevitable temporary measure along the way to a perfect future. Thus, Tito's glorification refreshed and maintained the revolutionary process. M. Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 12-13. To avoid misunderstandings, it should be added that Djilas spoke of "the revolutionary process" in the 1980s when the euphemistic term "fight for independence" that camouflaged the true goals of the communists during the war, could be safely discarded by Djilas himself and the SFRY [*Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*]. With time, glossing over his own role in promoting Tito's personality cult, Djilas evinced greater predisposition at given to criticising the party's leader and the country rather than on weighing up the subjective and objective factors that strengthened his power. He was to write that "he accepted him as a leader and was attached to him as a human". Nevertheless, he also added that his own, "revolutionary Puritanism" and "native (i.e. Montenegrin) nationalism aroused annoyance and anxiety" at Tito's transformation into an autocrat. "An autocrat who was not only surrounded by too much luxury" but also one who transformed the party into his adoration society and its authorities, together with Politburo, into obedient and passive lackeys". *ibid.*, pp. 71-72. In another place, Djilas wrote that in seventeen years of cooperation with Tito, the thought sometimes crossed his mind that the party, communism and the people were just tools used to express his personality and personal power – the very same habits and tendencies that Stalin displayed, M. Djilas, *Tito. The Story from Inside*, London 1981, p. 48. Nonetheless, we can observe that after the conflict with Stalin in 1948, his harsh criticism of Tito was toned down for some time. Regardless of any opinions he may have had, until 1953/1954, Djilas remained the marshal's faithful ideologist and propagandist.

110 Its expression was that day's resolution of the Cominform "On the Situation in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia" (in Russian version: *O položenu w Komunističeskoj Partii Jugoslavii* in: *Sowieszczanija Kominforma*, pp. 455-461).

111 Criticised only in later works.

could not turn his back on everything he had stood for seem obvious. He claimed that in the heated atmosphere of the time, he would have been misunderstood and “denounced as a pro-Soviet traitor and a deserter ... (at) the most crucial and dramatic moment for the party, the country and the idea – socialism”. Đjilas was to write that in time, when “the dam burst” after Stalin’s attack, critical thoughts were to creep into his mind. He began forming the suspicion that Stalinist methods were beginning to resonate in Yugoslavia. Tito and his closest subordinates did not understand that, but they did not reject those methods as they accorded with the mood and the manner of thinking of many people at the top of the party. Đjilas was convinced that in those circles “an anti-dogmatic critique” coming from “the rejuvenated (? – M.J.Z.)¹¹² dogmatism” held sway. He wrote that a grain of creativity could also be found in dogma when “the official dogma and the faith of the clerk are crushed by a more convincing, more logical dogma and faith with better prospects of salvation.”¹¹³

The conflict with Moscow thus led to an even more radical examination of the reality, generating ideas that ran counter to Stalinist theory and practice. It undermined the dogma only in a way that was to deprive it of the disadvantages and influences that hindered the true establishment of a new system and relations with the Soviet Union. Subsequently, Đjilas was to write that “we, the Yugoslav leaders, spent nights discussing and studying the Marxist classics to better understand the Soviet deviation, and mainly (its) transformation ... into an imperialistic power.” Đjilas described this attitude as “the new and consistent dogmatism”, opposed to the “fossilised, pragmatic dogma” of the Soviets.¹¹⁴ With time it would lead to the transformation of the Soviet-Yugoslav political conflict into an ideological one. Ideological differences and discussions between the two countries were to stop being only a cover for their political goals and became a free-standing issue in an ideological confrontation in the international communist movement.¹¹⁵

To Đjilas, however, the conflict with the Kremlin would, first and foremost, become “a temptation and inspiration ... the culmination of the Yugoslav revolution”. Comrade Đido would later write that “he knew instinctively and consciously the appropriate time for him to act”, and when he had the possibility to answer his calling, and express his personal integrity. “It is no accident that even today I believe that that period was the most prolific, the most audacious and decisive (to my future political thinking).”¹¹⁶

Nonetheless, it should be stressed that the new attitude of Yugoslavia’s leaders and Đjilas himself, would slowly be revealed. In the beginning the authorities in Belgrade showed great restraint and even hope that the conflict could be avoided. So far, the Soviet Union had been the main object of their admiration and worship,

112 As should be concluded – native, Yugoslav.

113 M. Đjilas, *Razvoj mog političkog mišljenja*, part 10.

114 *ibid.*, part 10.

115 M. J. Zacharias, *Komunizam, federacija, nacionalizmy*, p. 135.

116 M. Đjilas, *Pad nove klase. Povest o samorazoravanju komunizma*, Beograd 1994, p. 103.

at least in propaganda, regardless of the tensions and, as a result, society and their own party personnel was indoctrinated to think of the USSR in that way. As Đilas later wrote, Stalin and the Soviet Union were an unattainable model and "the source of spiritual inspiration" to Yugoslavia. "We even believed that we were a part of their party circle", at least until "we established our own regime" and "the political differences were exposed."¹¹⁷ In those circumstances, political and ideological unity had to remain unimpaired. Hence, at the CPY's Fifth Congress, deliberating in Belgrade between 21st and 28th July 1948, strenuous efforts were made not to intensify tensions with Moscow. Indeed, particular speakers, Tito included, made it clear that Stalinist models would still inform their policy.¹¹⁸ So, quite a paradoxical situation cropped up: delegates present at the Congress declared "their unswerving loyalty to the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin (emphasis added by M.J.Z.)"¹¹⁹, i.e. the continuation of the previous Stalinist policy, and, at the same time, they loyally closed ranks against the policy of the Soviet dictator. A question arises: if one wants to keep faith with "Stalin's science", why oppose his policy? Đilas later wrote that when we were trying to prove our unity with Stalin and Stalinists, and prove how loyal we were to them, we fell into a trap. The reassuring arguments conflicted with the actual attitude¹²⁰ which was clearly one that upheld the demand for autonomy in current affairs.¹²¹

During the Fifth Congress, these inconsistencies and tendencies did not prompt Đilas to undermine the post-Stalinist ideological course. In his speech, he made the same declarations as Tito and other speakers. He claimed that there had been an "unjustified attack of the Information Bureau and ... the Central Committee of the ACP(b) on our party" which might undermine faith in Marxism-Leninism, give rise to revisionist tendencies and promote "a certain underestimation of the development and achievements of contemporary political thought in the USSR." It would be "inappropriate...due to our relations with the Soviet Union" and also it would impede "ideological progress in our country. The ideological struggle in the USSR in the period leading to communist society will be of great significance to all countries, especially to us (due to) our path of socialist development". As a result, "all our issues" had to be resolved immediately and irrevocably "on the basis of studies of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin (emphasis added – M.J.Z.)". Regardless of that, there was a need to create "a new Yugoslav patriotism" that meant inculcating hatred towards invaders and warmongers which required instilling into the masses "the spirit of loyalty and love for the USSR and all the democratic and revolutionary

117 id., *Rise and Fall*, p. 83.

118 M. J. Zacharias, *Komunizam, federacija, nacionalizmy*, p. 105 ff.

119 See: J. Broz Tito, *Politički izveštaj CK KPJ na V Kongresu KPJ*, Beograd, 21 jula 1948, in: id., *O partii ulozi komunista*, vol. 2, *KPJ u borbi za pobedu i odbrane revolucije (194-1952)*, Beograd 1984, pp. 418-424; *Peti Kongres Komunističke Partije Jugoslavije. Stenografske beleške*, Beograd 1949, pp. 111-119; *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union*, dok. 128, pp. 213-214.

120 M. Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 247-248.

121 M. J. Zacharias, *System stalinowski*, pp. 78-79.

movements in the world". One of the party's tasks had to be "to support the struggle of the USSR and the democratic block led by that country". A ruthless ideological war had to be waged against "bourgeois philosophy, science, art, aesthetics and literature" Because those were evidently the means of conveying individualism, nationalism, pessimism, anti-communist thought, and collapse – the very tendencies represented by such artists and writers as Pablo Picasso and Jean Paul Sartre.¹²² Such attacks were similar to the speeches made by the Soviet ideologist Alexandr Fadayevev – a writer and the head of the Soviet delegation at the International Congress of Intellectuals in Defence of Peace.¹²³ This Congress was held in Wrocław between 25th and 28th August 1948, some months after the CPY's Fifth Congress.

In the following years, Djilas was to write, that soon after the Fifth Congress he came to the belief that the convention had been a futile undertaking. Its participants were not able to face fundamental issues and tackle their practical and ideological differences with the Soviets. He added that even then he could search for national and revolutionary equality, and perceive its hazy beginnings in the opposition to "the borrowed heritage of ideological unity with Moscow."¹²⁴

Such an interpretation of his own behaviour is naturally inconsistent with the content of his speech at the Congress and his other ideological and propaganda utterances during and after the war. But it would be difficult to see the reflection of those views in what he said at the time of the events. As already mentioned, in the paper connected to the thirtieth anniversary of the revolution of 1917, he adumbrated the characteristics of the Yugoslav "way of construction" of the new system. This was reaffirmed in his next article, in November 1948, in which he set out the direction his political thought was taking on the Yugoslav state and the party leadership.¹²⁵

122 M. Djilas, *Report on Agitation – Propaganda Work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Report delivered at the V Kongress of the CPY*, Belgrade 1948, p. 54 ff.

123 In the report "Nauka i kultura w walce o postęp, demokrację i pokój". Details: E. Krasucki, *Mędzynarodowy komunista. Jerzy Borejsza, biografia polityczna*, Warsaw 2009, pp. 165-166. In general, for information on the Wrocław congress see: *ibid.*, pp. 157-171. Fadayevev's speech and France's reaction, see also: D. Desanti, *Les Staliniens (1944-1956). Une experience politique*, Paris 1975. It should be emphasised that Picasso, who was castigated by Djilas, participated in the Congress. It is doubtful if Djilas and other CPY leaders, with their political and ideological tensions, would have been able to organise a similar event in Yugoslavia. It seems that the Soviet authorities were more flexible, and, having considered their propaganda goals, they tolerated and even supported the presence of various personages in Wrocław. However, it may be suspected that Stalin's views were consistent with Fadayevev's statements given at the Congress e.g. saying that "if jackals could learn how to type and hyenas use a pen, they would definitely 'create' something similar to books written by Millers, Elliotts, Malraux and other Sartres". E. Krasucki, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

124 M. Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 248.

125 M. Djilas, *Les accusations injustes et depourvues des principes diriges contre le CPY*, Belgrade, no date of publishing. French version of Djilas' article *Još jednom o nepravednim i neistinim optužbama*, "Borba", October 2nd 1948, pp. 3-4; October 3rd 1948, p. 241; October 4th 1948, pp. 2-3. The article was published in the volume *O neisnim i nepravednim optužbama protiv KPJ. Izabrani materijali*, Beograd 1948, pp. 238-195, see: H. Stys, "Chcemy mieć naród rosyjski za brata, nie chcemy jego kier-

In the November article, Đilas substantiated his view as to why the CPY was not a nationalist party, despite Moscow's accusations to that effect, and why it refused to participate in the deliberations of the Cominform in Bucharest.¹²⁶ He explained that their presence in the Romanian capital was not possible due to the fact that the CPY was being accused of betrayal. These accusations were groundless, but they put the CPY in the dock and hindered its defence. In effect, the Yugoslav envoys to Belgrade would have had to merely confess their Party's betrayal of which it was not guilty. Quoting Lenin and Stalin in this article, Đilas went on to refute the Kremlin dictator's allegations regarding the nationalism of "Tito's group". However, the various insinuations, allegations and accusations against the USSR which had not appeared before, at least not in such form, were the most important. Đilas pointed out that until the accusations against the CPY appeared, any criticism within the working class movement was based on "rules and facts". The Soviet accusations destroyed those standards of criticism and discussion. "Power, as it clearly results from the context – the Soviet one, is not everything, (because) the truth lies beyond (the reach of) power" [sic!]. Moreover, the campaign of lies, slander and provocation against the CPY "proved that there are horrible fighting methods rooted in the working class movement" which is contrary to its former rules – "the only rules the movement can rely on."¹²⁷ The Soviet campaign of slander showed that every method of fighting was good and moral if it enabled the achievement of its noble and sublime goals.¹²⁸

The most important accusations that Đilas made in his September article concern the fake image Moscow painted of the situation in Yugoslavia during the war and after its end and also the issue of understanding revolution in this and other countries in the world. For a long time, Soviet propaganda had been belittling the importance of "partisan units in Yugoslavia ... in the fight for liberation of the country." In the "Pravda" article of 9th September 1948, this approach was somewhat changed and it was admitted that "the heroic acts of the Yugoslav people are widely known." Nevertheless, neither this article nor other official Soviet pronouncements evinced acceptance of the obvious fact that in the four years of fighting the invaders, there was a people's revolution in Yugoslavia "that gave power to the working masses and the working class." The Soviets did not want to acknowledge it because they would have had to have admitted that the Yugoslavs liberated themselves, albeit "with the great assistance of the Red Army and the political and diplomatic support of the USSR authorities together with J. V. Stalin himself." They did not want to admit that that what was important was not "heroic acts" but the revolution in Yugoslavia which had its own special features which determined "the specific forms of Yugoslavia's development on the way to socialism." Such a revolution had

ownictwa za pana". *Działalność publicystyczna i polityczna Milovana Đilasa w czasie trwania politycznego konfliktu Jugosławia-ZSRR (1948-1952)*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 2010, 2, footnote 13, p. 34.

126 Meeting at which the declaration of June 28th 1948 was proclaimed.

127 M. Đilas, *Les accusations*, p. 10.

128 *ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

nothing to do with the revolutionary changes that came in other countries on the people's republic format.¹²⁹

As a result, the lack of recognition of Yugoslavia's achievements in battle and revolution, was in conflict with internationalism of the kind that had been taught by Marx and Lenin. "Our critics must take note that Yugoslavs have the right to their own revolution, their own, specific socialist structure. By protesting against it, our critics want to impose forms of struggle that have nothing to do with reality... and do not correspond to the needs of our working class and those who build socialism in the world. Such protest causes the departure from internationalism of those who criticise us as it stems from the Soviet authorities and their Cominform satellites."¹³⁰

In Đilas' opinion, all those powers together with Moscow were "moving away from the rule of (respect for) the diversity of forms of revolution and of imposing socialism, i.e. they do not want to grant other people the possibility to seek new formulas. They believe that life stopped where they stopped in their way of thinking. They are forgetting Lenin's words when he said that 'previous situations are not repeated in the same form' and 'no form can be treated as the final one until communism in its entirety is established'."¹³¹

In his later works, Đilas was to emphasise that it was he who in his September article wrote for the first time that there was "a revolution" in Yugoslavia during the war.¹³² Since then, that term was to be used more often, replacing "the inaccurate, Comintern – Tito phrase 'fight for independence'."¹³³ Đilas also claimed that the visible denial of Stalin's infallibility in his article "deepened and 'legalised' doubts in the «socialist purity» of the Soviet Union. It set in train criticism of the Soviet system, but it progressed at a slower rate than the recognition of the revolutionary past and the revolutionary reality."¹³⁴

It seems that without fear of contradiction, it may be claimed that Đilas' September reflections meant something more than just criticism of Stalin, his policy, the Soviet system, and the "socialist purity" of the USSR. Đilas laid clear emphasis on the possibility and need to employ various forms in the process of revolution and building socialism; it all depended on time and circumstances which, according to Đilas, meant that the Belgrade authorities started to question Soviet orthodoxy and Moscow's exclusive right to determine what revolutions are, decide where they take place and indicate what methods need to be used to conduct them and then – to build socialism. As a result, the Yugoslav state and party authorities, with the visible use of Đilas' theoretical underpinning, found themselves at the beginning of a road which would lead to a situation when the political conflict with Moscow would also become an ideological conflict.

129 *ibid.*, p. 20 ff.

130 *ibid.*, p. 22 ff.

131 *ibid.*, p. 24.

132 M. Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 248-249; *id.*, *Pad nove klase*, p. 104.

133 *id.*, *Pad nove klase*, p. 104

134 *ibid.*, p. 104. See: *id.*, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 248-249; *id.*, *Razvoj mog političkog mišljenja*, part 10.

Đilas accepted the beginnings of such political evolution with satisfaction. They might have meant a certain liberalisation of the autocratic system, and a considerable reduction of Tito's cult which would have been the consequence of the abolition of Stalin's personality cult. He finally wrote that because of the conflict with Moscow, Tito's role waxed and waned simultaneously: "it was growing as a bastion of resistance to the USSR and declining as that of a man perceived to be endowed with omnipotent, omniscient and infallible qualities. As a result, the oligarchic form of government was gradually driving out the autocratic one..." Đilas welcomed that with great satisfaction because the oligarchs had started to engross themselves in studies and ideological discussions in the search for new solutions.¹³⁵ Đilas was to observe that: "More often than not, so-called Soviet socialism was an obstacle to them." By "them", apart from himself, he meant Kardelj, Vladimir Bakarić, Boris Kidrić, and Milentije Popović. Those dignitaries were expected to express the need to depart from the Soviet pattern. At the plenary session of the Central Committee of Montenegro in January 1949, Đilas insisted that "bureaucratic tendencies and departures from socialism should be noticed in us and the system we support."¹³⁶

Nonetheless, it should also be emphasised that all those desires, indications and theoretical deliberations, found no immediate political application. On the contrary, directly after the beginning of the conflict with Stalin, there was a noticeable intensification of Stalinisation in Yugoslavia.¹³⁷ This surprising, paradoxical and perverse situation was noticed by Đilas. An entire chapter of one of his works is devoted to the establishment of what was effectively a concentration camp, for Tito's opponents, mainly the Cominformists.¹³⁸ What is more, he does not hide the fact that he was one of the founders and executives of that policy. He wrote that a revolutionary-democratic line that came from the confrontation with Moscow was accompanied by a press campaign supporting and popularising the USSR and condemning the North Atlantic Treaty which was being established at that time. It was supposed to be formed due to tactical requirements. Nevertheless, Đilas added that "re-Stalinisation" occurred at the same time, and this was reflected in the total subordination of the economy to administrative directives and in the strengthening of the party and the political police. Moreover, at the end of January 1949, the Yugoslav party leadership, together with Đilas, resolved to embark upon the mass collectivisation of agriculture.¹³⁹ Đilas would later write that this attitude consti-

135 *id.*, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 256-257.

136 *ibid.*, p. 249, 254; M. Đilas, *Pad nove klase*, p. 104.

137 M.J. Zacharias, *Komunizam, federacija, nacionalizmy*, p. 116 n.

138 M. Đilas, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 235-245. In his opinion, Golim Otok was "the darkest and the most shameful side of Yugoslav communism, even worse than communism itself. It expressed unimaginable humiliation", *ibid.*, p. 254. It should be added that the camp at Golim Otok was not the only one. There was a similar "institution" on the island of Sveti Grgur (Saint George), see: J. Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito. Cominformists Splits in Yugoslav Communism*, Ithaca and London 1988, pp. 247-253. Both camps were named "Marble Islands" or ironically "Hawaii" and "our Alcatraz" by the Yugoslavs.

139 M. Đilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 250.

tuted “a meaningful manifestation of the power of ideology. One of the most terrifying facts in the history of Yugoslav communism is that directly after the conflict with Moscow erupted, we were more severe oppressors than in the period of our struggle for power. For instance, our disastrous decision to collectivise agriculture was made after the beginning of the conflict with Moscow (emphasis added by M. D.). Why did we do it? We doubled our ideological toughness and intensified the terror, fearing that otherwise we would provide ammunition to Stalin and Zhdanov and show our ideological weakness. I wanted to prove that we were the principal communists, as good as our Soviet comrades” (emphasis added – M.J.Z.).¹⁴⁰

Đjilas claimed that this policy was “a zigzag process”. The underlinings in the foregoing quotation is evidence that Đjilas willingly participated in it and that it was based on his concepts. It still remains open to question to what extent these “zig-zags” were based on tactical requirements and how far they reflected the power of ideology. Most probably, Đjilas himself was on target when he suggested that only experience gained with time started to erode the power of ideology and intensify the tendencies to act independently and pragmatically, though it was still motivated by a utopian and ideological way of thinking. He was to write that “even in 1948, we did not entirely understand the Soviet Union. We were still at the stage of justifying the Soviet reality. We reassured ourselves saying that the Soviets may use brutal methods in their foreign policy but their great achievements in building socialism are undeniable. We gradually discovered the truth about Russia. It dawned on me that the Soviet system was not the one during my visit to Russia at the beginning of 1948.¹⁴¹ However, that still did not acknowledge the fact that our system in Yugoslavia was not any better.”¹⁴²

In such conditions, Đjilas’ arguments and observations considering the various possible methods in rearing socialism in his September 1948 article about the unfair and deceitful accusations made by the ACP(b) and its Cominform henchmen, were in fact groundless. After announcing the resolution of 28th June, the Yugoslav leaders were still building socialism along Stalinist lines. In the international field, on the other hand, they supported Moscow’s policy, which also applied to Đjilas. With him, they rejected “the vulgar and bourgeois” interpretations of Soviet foreign policy, which associated its conduct with the USSR’s backwardness and the truly totalitarian nature and structure of that country.¹⁴³

This attitude illustrates a clear ambivalence. Regardless of copying the Soviet model, the criticism of the Soviet system in Belgrade was intensified and it became the main reason for inaugurating discussions on the theory and practice of building socialism. They were inspired by the most important factors and, what is more, the most important people participated – Tito, Đjilas, Kardelj, Pijade and Popovi

140 M. Đjilas, *Chrystus i Komisarz*, p. 168.

141 A mistake. Đjilas was in the USSR in the spring, not at the beginning of 1948.

142 M. Đjilas, *Chrystus i Komisarz*, p. 189.

143 id., *Rise and Fall*, p. 255.

.¹⁴⁴ With time, they were to become the leading theoreticians of "true" Yugoslav socialism. It was constantly emphasised that their reflections were set in mainstream Marxism-Leninism.¹⁴⁵ Those personages were familiarising themselves with the basic works of the "classics", for instance, Marx's *The Civil War in France*, Engels' *Anti-Duhring*, Lenin's *The State and Revolution*. With time, they came to the conclusion that through their chauvinism and bureaucratic practices, the Stalinist authorities in Moscow distorted the most vital Marxist ideas and principles that were to lead to building true and perfect communism.¹⁴⁶ They had yet to draw their final conclusions, but they articulated their critical reflections on the Soviet system and its policy. Tito's response to Đilas' and Kardelj's remark that a deeper ideological critique of the Soviet system should be initiated or our resistance will be misunderstood and will lead to chaos in the party, was somewhat restrained. He stated in 1949 that it would be difficult for them to rival the Soviets because they were familiar with "all the right quotes"¹⁴⁷, and still possessed deeper knowledge of Marxism-Leninism.

Bearing in mind this ambivalence, it cannot be excluded that it was mainly Tito who wished to soft-pedal on the issue while the attitude of other Yugoslav politicians and theoreticians was different, more courageous and determined. In March 1949, Milentije Popović¹⁴⁸ published an article, "that I (Fjilas) supported"¹⁴⁹. He proved that the commodity – financial exchange system was the main reason for the lack of equality between the Socialist states.¹⁵⁰ In Đilas' opinion, the roots of this condition ought to be seen in the formation of the Socialist states after the war and also in Moscow's disregard for the Leninist principle of independence and self – reliance in their relations. According to Đilas: "Our party has never assumed in advance whether those states should be united in the future in one common country or not. It has always been reliant on the interests of the movement as a whole and wondered if unification with those or other countries would strengthen or weaken the development of socialism and democracy". This attitude was consistent with Lenin's instructions that the right of nations to self-determination does not have anything in common with the formal bourgeois democracy, and it may be realised only as a part of true, socialist democracy.

These general and empty arguments are important because they led Đilas to compare Stalin's behaviour to Lenin's actions and theories. He wrote that the masters of the Kremlin usurped their right to present themselves as "Lenin's only (sic! – M.Đ.) true students and heirs", but their practice belied their words. They publicly

144 *ibid.*, *Rise and Fall*, p. 255.

145 M. J. Zacharias, *Komunizam, federacija, nacionalizmy*, p. 126 ff.

146 H. Stys, "*Chcemy mieć naród rosyjski za brata*", p. 39. It is not clear what was meant by the statement "it meant a return to (...) the post-revolution organisation of society", *ibid.*, p. 39.

147 M. Đilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 255.

148 M. Popović, *O ekonomskim odnosima između socijalističkih zemlja*, "Komunist", March 1949, 4, pp. 89-147; see: H. Stys, "*Chcemy mieć naród rosyjski za brata*", p. 37, footnote 31.

149 M. Đilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 255.

150 *ibid.*, p. 255.

talked about the right of nations to self-determination and their freedom to establish relations between themselves as they saw fit, but at the same time, they “use the methods of ruthless pressure on socialist countries and crudely violate the right to the freedom of action of every nation.” This was evidence of a total discrepancy “between word and deed, theory and practice”. It was an abandonment of Lenin, whose thoughts, words and deeds were always consistent in relation to each other.

In Đjilas’ view, the Leninist assumption was that every communist or socialist had to fight the bourgeoisie and be driven by internationalism. They had to sacrifice national goals to fight for the proletariat. Each communist assumed that “his country’s relations with other socialist countries are a secondary issue” and must accept that the ruling communist party was to determine them “independently, from the point of view of social development as a whole and the issues of the proletariat’s fight for socialism.” The specific national and international conditions were supposed to determine the form such relations were to take, be it “a centralised country, federation, confederation, or secession.”

Đjilas suggested that Moscow’s reluctance to accept such assumptions stemmed from its rejection of the Leninist principle that particular countries aiming at “achieving the same goal – socialism and communism” would inevitably head in the same direction, albeit by different routes and at their own pace, and ultimately they could choose different forms. In fact, this was a repetition of the accusation levelled in his October article about “the unfair and deceitful accusations” of the USSR, only now they were restated more forcefully and extensively. Đjilas wrote that slanderers i.e. various theoreticians and Leninism’s revisionists from the USSR in theory and practice in going in the direction of idealism “violated the dialectical right to diversity of development”, which is a sacred right in the natural world and in the world of social development. The new theoreticians and Leninism’s revisionists from the USSR came into conflict with reality, prevailing in particular socialist countries as well as in various socialist labour movements in the world.¹⁵¹

In *Conversations with Stalin*, Đjilas was to write that his feelings towards the Soviet leader and the USSR went from admiration to doubts and finally to disillusionment.¹⁵² In general, the content of his previous works confirms such emotional and intellectual evolution. His earlier fascination gradually gave way to criticism of the ACP(b) policy towards Yugoslav communists. It was believed that Stalin was in the wrong, that he did not want to respect differing methods leading to socialism and that he and his henchmen were revisionists of Leninism. In fact, it meant that the Moscow leadership deviated from the right way of building socialism as prescribed by Lenin, who was glorified in Đjilas’ articles. Such an attitude meant that he and other Yugoslav leaders found themselves, in their theoretical deliberations,

151 id., *Lenin on Relations between Socialist States*, New York 1950, p. 5 ff. The article was originally published in the magazine “Komunist” and then printed again in “Borba” between September 5th and 12th 1949, id., *Rise and Fall*, p. 255.

152 “Admiration”, “Doubts”, “Disappointments” – these were the titles of the subsequent chapters of this work. See: id., *Conversations with Stalin*, p. 143.

on a collision course with Stalin's Russia. Đilas did not write anything about it but we can add that the Cominform's next resolution, adopted in November 1949, which declared that Yugoslavia had found itself "in the hands of murderers and spies"¹⁵³ could only have meant that any possibility of diverting conflict with Moscow had become totally impossible. Earlier, Belgrade gradually started to disengage itself from Moscow's international policy, by exposing its conflict with Stalin¹⁵⁴ and come forward with ideas that clearly went against the grain of Soviet practice. At the CPY's third plenary session at the end of December 1949, Đilas spoke of the need to develop socialist democracy which, of course, should be understood as ritual communist newspeak, but his statement that such a democracy necessitated "a decrease of the role of bureaucracy", i.e. a process that would go hand in glove with "the development and strengthening people's self – government"¹⁵⁵ – a practice alien to the USSR – was a clear symptom of the application of such methods and solutions in the system to come in Yugoslavia.¹⁵⁶ At the same time, a decision was made at the plenary session that school children would have a choice to learn either Russian, English, German or French. Learning Russian was no longer obligatory. Đilas' general propositions at the plenary session led to the party starting to act in line with the belief that the main issue was not connected to the idea of "what man we want to create" but "the most favourable methods to do so." Moreover, in the resolutions adopted under Đilas' influence, Marxism ceased being "a special, separate school subject".¹⁵⁷ This is rather surprising because Đilas himself wrote that at the turn of the years 1949/1950, "our leaders' theoretical deliberations" revealed the diminu-

153 See: *Bela knjiga o agresivnim postupcima Vlada SSSR, Poljske, Čehoslovačke, Madjarske, Rumunije, Bugarske i Albanije prema Jugoslavije*, Beograd 1951, p. 164 ff. Soviet text: *Jugoslavaska kompartija we własti ubijic i szpionow*, in: *Sowieszczanija Kominforma*, pp. 701-704; see also L.J. Gibianskij, *Kominform w zenitie ajtivnosti: sozdanje organizacionnoj struktury i tretje sowieszczanije*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 509-542.

154 The result of which were speeches by Đilas and Kardelj at Political Committee and at the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York in November 1949. See: M. Đilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 263; M. Đilas, *Govor druga Milovana Đilasa u Političkom komitetu*, "Borba", November 17th 1949; H. Stys, "Chcemy mieć naród rosyjski za brata", pp. 42-43.; E. Kardelj, *Edvard Kardelj's Speech at the Fourth Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations*, 1949, in: *id.*, *Reminiscences. The Struggle for Recognition and Independence: the New Yugoslavia, 1944-1947*, London 1982, pp. 256-263. Later, Đilas wrote about the influence of his observations made in New York in 1949 on his political thought. He claimed that he was not surprised at the level of life and technological development in the USA, "probably because interpersonal and social relations were more important to me." Nonetheless, he was convinced that "there must be something wrong with our Marxist studies (...) if so highly developed a country (the USA – M.J.Z.) is not socialist and its proletariat is anti-socialist". M. Đilas, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 261-262.

155 M. Đilas, *Problemi školstva u borbi za socijalizam u našoj zemlji. Rezolucija III. Plenum CK KPJ o zadacima u školstvu*, Zagreb 1950, p. 10.

156 In the form of a self – government system, see: M. J. Zacharias, *Kwestia tzw systemu samorządowego w jugosłowiańskim modelu ustrojowym w latach 1954-1964*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 1998, 2, p. 109 ff; *id.*, *Komunizm, federacja, nacjonalizmy*, p. 158 ff.

157 M. Đilas, *Problemi školstva*, p. 8 n, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 265-266; *id.*, *Pad nove klase*, 109.

tion of Stalin's role as was implied in the shared opinion on the need to get back to basics, to Marx. It would have been more logical to think about strengthening rather than weakening the degree of indoctrination in the Marxian spirit. What's more, regardless of Đjilas' arguments, the criticism of Stalin in Belgrade started to extend to his predecessor – Lenin, who was counterpoised to Marx. In the evaluation of another CPY leading theoretician Edvard Kardelj, “there is no possibility to entirely separate Stalin from Lenin. In the end, Stalin is (only) Lenin's successor”, i.e. the continuator in creating a specific type of party and political system.¹⁵⁸

What seems to be of great significance, however, was Đjilas' assertion that divorce – or more precisely, a gradual separation – from Lenin, was neither complete nor irrevocable. Similarly to other Yugoslav leaders, Đjilas started to express doubts regarding the need and relevance of maintaining “a Leninist type of the party”. He also emphasised that in returning to Marx's ideas, “we often put a brake our critical deliberations” when considering the usefulness of such a party. Not only was it the source and the instrument of victory but also the means to act after gaining power. Moreover, an attempt to reject the Leninist model of the party with immediate effect would only have met with the resistance of the “fossilised strata of the party's officials and bureaucracy – which was already established and consolidated.”¹⁵⁹ As a result of abandoning the all-powerful Leninist party in association with the gradual “acceptance of the Marxist theory of the disappearance of the state” could have been merely a theoretical desideratum that bore no relation to the actual political practice. However, regardless of that, theoretical reflections, typically served up in ideological or even agitprop packaging, slowly but surely drove Đjilas away from Stalinist templates and principles in his thinking. Đjilas the Stalinist was gradually transformed into an anti-Stalinist heretic. At the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, that was in line with the drift in the thinking of other party theoreticians, notably Kardelj and Kidric. The current goals of the CPY leaders were also not without impact on this reevaluation process. As a result, Đjilas' heresy was then seen as a symptom of a wider phenomenon: the criticism and rejection of Stalinist orthodoxy, the heresy of the party leaders in Belgrade.¹⁶⁰ What should be emphasised is that this heresy mainly applied to the theory while Stalinist practices were being abandoned reluctantly and inconsistently. As a result, there were insufficient conditions for the Stalinist system to find an appropriate alternative in Yugoslavia. The visible resistance of the Yugoslav leadership to the systemic changes was to become the main reason for the future conflict between Đjilas and Tito and his supporters in the CPY. Unlike them, “comrade Dido” was to attempt changing the theoretical heresy into reality.

158 id., *Rise and Fall*, p. 267.

159 ibid., pp. 267-268.

160 Of course only in evaluating the views of Đjilas and the remaining CPY leaders from the point of view of the orthodox Stalinist authorities in Moscow. From the Yugoslavian viewpoint, the “heresy” would have arisen in connection with the views and systemic solution in the USSR.