

## THE FIGHT FOR YUGOSLAVIA: LEFT-WING NATIONALISM AMONG YUGOSLAV STUDENT ÉMIGRÉS IN PRAGUE

*Stefan Gužvica*

In 1943, at the Second Session of the AVNOJ,<sup>1</sup> the Yugoslav communists finalized their proposal for Yugoslavia as a federation of equal socialist republics of South Slavic nations. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ)'s attempt to solve the national question was a result of their experiences in the interwar period. This paper will look into how the experiences of KPJ members in the 1930s shaped their view of the national question. In particular, it will deal with the activities of radical Yugoslav student émigrés in Prague, many of whom later became influential in the post-war Yugoslav state. The KPJ developed a left-wing nationalist vision of Yugoslavia as a response to the reigning right-wing nationalist ideology. The communist vision sought to resolve the national question by reconciling the nations and recognizing their right to self-determination within Yugoslavia rather than trying to force a unifying Yugoslav identity on them. In practice the unifying Yugoslav identity of the monarchy was manifested as Serbian hegemony. The approach of Prague's leftists to the Yugoslav national question will be examined here from the creation of Comintern's (an international communist organization that advocated world communism) Popular Front policy in August 1935 until the departure of anti-fascist Yugoslav students from Prague for Spain in early 1937.

### **Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period**

Yugoslavia was created on 1 December 1918 as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. It developed under the idea that the three nations are one and that all differences among them are marginal and would be abolished in the new state.<sup>2</sup> The limitations of this model became apparent early on, however, since the formation of distinct ethnic identities among Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was mostly over by 1918. The proponents of a supra-national identity were mostly liberal Serb, Croat, and Slovene intellectuals whose political influence was greater

---

<sup>1</sup> The Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) was the central governing body of the Yugoslav anti-fascist resistance movement. Founded in 1942, by the end of 1943 the Allies had recognized it as the legitimate government of Yugoslavia.

<sup>2</sup> Branislav Gligorijević, "Jugoslovenstvo između dva svetska rata" [Yugoslavism between the two world wars], *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis* 21, no. 1 (1986): 79–80.

than their actual share of the population.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the unitarist Yugoslav model, which was expressed in political and economic centralization, proved to be a tool for achieving Serbian hegemony. The royal dynasty was ethnically Serbian and the Serbian elite's political and military dominance before WWI made the unitarist and centralist model particularly advantageous for the Serbs.<sup>4</sup> This model was particularly problematic for the Croats, for whom it meant a loss of statehood, as they had had significant rights under the Habsburg state. The opposition to Serbian hegemony was led by the Croatian Peasant Party, which replaced the ideology of "historical rights" typical of the old nationalist forces in Croatia with the modern idea of the right to self-determination, suggesting a federalist Yugoslav model in place of a centralist one.<sup>5</sup> The federalist opposition, although influential, remained weak due to its heterogeneity. The only common ground of the opposition was the preservation of the South Slavic state, but with an acknowledgement of historical differences and preservation of regional political and economic interests.<sup>6</sup> Given that the former was too vague and the latter often conflicting, there was little chance for success.

The deadlock in which the centralists and the federalists found themselves was a constant source of tension throughout the 1920s. The nationalist tension culminated in June 1928, when a Serbian representative shot and killed three Croatian Peasant Party MPs in the National Assembly. King Alexander tried to end the ensuing political crisis by suspending the Assembly and the Constitution and establishing a personal dictatorship on 6 January 1929. By October, the country was officially renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and divided into nine administrative units separated along geographical rather than ethnic lines. The king tried to reinforce the unitarist idea of a single Yugoslav nation, strengthening centralism and suppressing all claims to national distinctiveness. However, as Pešić writes, "the temporary popular satisfaction with termination of inter-party conflicts was soon followed by an intensification of national contradictions."<sup>7</sup> Gligorijević called this unsuccessful attempt at resolving national differences "Yugoslavism by decree."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Branko Petranović, *Jugoslavija 1918–1988*, vol. 1: *Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914–1941* [Yugoslavia 1918–1988: vol. 1: The Kingdom of Yugoslavia] (Belgrade: Nolit, 1988), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Gligorijević, "Jugoslovenstvo između dva svetska rata," 84–85.

<sup>5</sup> Gligorijević, "Jugoslovenstvo između dva svetska rata," 78–79.

<sup>6</sup> Desanka Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje* [Yugoslav communists and the national question] (Belgrade: Izdavačka radna organizacija "Rad," 1983), 24–25.

<sup>7</sup> Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 247.

<sup>8</sup> Gligorijević, "Jugoslovenstvo između dva svetska rata," 85.

## The Communist Party of Yugoslavia from Its Foundation until the Eighth Congress of the Comintern

In this period, the views of Yugoslav communists on the new state changed radically several times. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia emerged as the fourth largest party in the Constitutional Assembly, but was banned soon after and remained marginalized throughout the interwar period. The KPJ initially viewed Yugoslav unification as a positive event, a fulfillment of the historical role of the bourgeoisie whose successful national revolution was a precondition for a future social revolution.<sup>9</sup> Support for Yugoslav unitarism came not as a form of nationalism, but first and foremost as an expression of Marxist internationalism.<sup>10</sup> The change in attitude only came as a consequence of interference from Moscow. In effect, starting from 1922, the KPJ's opinion of Yugoslavia was conditioned by the geopolitical needs of the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> The Comintern was "generally hostile to the post-Versailles world order,"<sup>12</sup> and thus it had pressured the KPJ into adopting a negative stance towards Yugoslavia. Starting from the Fourth Congress of the KPJ in Dresden in 1928, the party argued for dissolution of the Yugoslav state, considering it a project of the Greater Serbian bourgeoisie. Such a sharp turn in policy was a result of the vast national inequality in Yugoslavia and widespread dissatisfaction with the pro-Serbian line of the regime in Belgrade.<sup>13</sup>

In the end, the consequences of this turn to supporting secession from Yugoslavia proved detrimental and pushed the party even further to the margins of the country's political life. Furthermore, a great number of party members themselves were dissatisfied with the policy.<sup>14</sup> The change, which was met with great relief by most party members, came due to the rise of Nazism in Germany. The Fourth Land Conference of the KPJ in Ljubljana in 1934 repeated the need for an armed uprising against the "fascist" Yugoslav dictatorship, but this time without calling explicitly for the dissolution of Yugoslavia.<sup>15</sup> Anticipating changes in the Comintern, the KPJ organized a Central Committee Plenum in Split in June

---

<sup>9</sup> Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 21–22.

<sup>10</sup> Hilde Katrine Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia: Tito, Communist Leadership and the National Question* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 23, ProQuest ebrary. Accessed May 31, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 55.

<sup>14</sup> Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 41.

<sup>15</sup> Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 264–265.

1935, which stated that the KPJ, whilst supporting national self-determination, “does not insist on the break-up of Yugoslavia at any cost.”<sup>16</sup> The KPJ returned to its Yugoslavist roots, now in a federalist form, distinguishing between Yugoslav nationalism and national chauvinism.<sup>17</sup> While the KPJ did not yet finalize its vision of a federal organization of Yugoslavia, it accepted the basic tenets of national equality, a fight for political freedom, and the creation of a Popular Front of all democratic (meaning anti-fascist) forces. The same ideas were adopted by the Comintern at the Seventh Congress two months later. KPJ’s new stance led to the development of left-wing Yugoslav nationalism and made the national question one of the most important issues for the KPJ by 1935.<sup>18</sup>

### Communist Activity among Student Organizations in Prague

The KPJ was quite popular among young radicals who were university students, many of whom decided to leave the country and settle temporarily in places such as Czechoslovakia, a democratic country where political views which were illegal in Yugoslavia could be expressed more freely. Colonel-General Gojko Nikoliš of the Yugoslav People’s Army, who spent two months in Prague as a medical student in an exchange program in the summer of 1934, wrote in his memoirs that he was “pleasantly surprised to see that one can openly discuss things for which one would go to prison in Yugoslavia, whether on the city streets, in an apartment, or in a café on Wenceslas Square,” and that books of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin were sold legally in bookstores.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, as all Yugoslav students in Prague lived close together regardless of ethnicity, political agitation for an idea of a democratic, communist, and federal Yugoslavia was much easier than in the South Slavic Kingdom. Nonetheless, the political atmosphere among Yugoslav students in Prague was not uniformly left wing. The major exception was the oldest and most important students’ association – the “Jugoslavija” Academic Society – founded in 1919.<sup>20</sup> Even though the society was officially apolitical, the Yugoslav Ministry of Education wrote in 1931 that the state needed to send

---

<sup>16</sup> Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 40.

<sup>17</sup> Pešić, *Jugoslovenski komunisti i nacionalno pitanje*, 277.

<sup>18</sup> Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Gojko Nikoliš, *Korijen, stablo, pavetina (Memoari)* [Root, tree, clematis (Memoirs)] (Zagreb: SN Liber, 1981), 89, znaci.net (last accessed 9 March 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Momčilo Mitrović, “Saradnja Beogradskog univerziteta sa univerzitetima u Čehoslovačkoj 1918–1939” [Cooperation of the University of Belgrade with the universities in Czechoslovakia 1918–1939], *Studia Balcanica Bohemo-Slovaca* 6 (2006): 304.

“Jugoslavija” monetary aid in order to “battle against our communists abroad.”<sup>21</sup> Until 1935, the society was under the strict control of the Yugoslav Embassy in Prague and was accused by left-wing students of being monarchist, nationalist, and reactionary.<sup>22</sup>

The leading left-wing organizations, which formed the core of resistance to the right-wing leadership of “Jugoslavija,” were the “Matija Gubec” Academic Club (banned in 1935), the Society of Yugoslav Technical School Students (*Društvo jugoslovenskih tehničara*), the Collective of Croatian Academics (*Zadruga hrvatskih akademičara*), and the Society of Agricultural Technicians (*Društvo agrikulturnih tehničara*).<sup>23</sup> By the mid-1930s, most of these Yugoslav student societies in Prague were controlled by communists or their sympathizers in line with the KPJ directives on communist infiltration into students’ associations.<sup>24</sup> Many of the disagreements between the two groups revolved around practical issues of student life, such as the distribution of scholarships and the desire of student societies to have a say in the management of the Yugoslav student dormitory (which the leftist students called a “struggle for students’ self-management”<sup>25</sup>). Nonetheless, one can clearly discern an underlying political note in the arguments between these groups throughout 1935 and 1936. Several of their pamphlets explicitly refer to the political situation in Yugoslavia, and all of them clearly show a deep rift between the right and the left over what it means to be a Yugoslav.

## Opposing Conceptions of Yugoslavia

By 1935, a fierce battle of words was going on between the students who supported the governing Yugoslav National Party and the United Opposition. 1935 was important for Yugoslavs because a parliamentary election took place on 5 May. It was the first election in which opposition candidates were actually allowed to run since the 1929 coup. Furthermore, the federalist and pro-democratic parties

---

<sup>21</sup> Mitrović, “Saradnja Beogradskog univerziteta sa univerzitetima u Čehoslovačkoj 1918–1939,” 304–305.

<sup>22</sup> Zora Gavrić, “Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga” [The departure of Yugoslav students from Prague] in *Španija 1936–1939: Zbornik sećanja jugoslovenskih dobrovoljaca u Španskom ratu* [Spain 1936–1939: A collection of memories of Yugoslav volunteers in the Spanish war], ed. Čedo Kapor (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1971), 5:350.

<sup>23</sup> Gavrić, “Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga,” 350–351.

<sup>24</sup> Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 42.

<sup>25</sup> “Svim jugoslovenskim studentima u Pragu” [To all Yugoslav students in Prague], Archiv Univerzity Karlovy (AUK), Vřestudentský archiv (1848–1953), collection [fond] IV. Mezinárodní a jinonárodní spolky, B 337, 3 May 1935.

created a common platform and went to the election as the United Opposition, with the support of the KPJ.<sup>26</sup> The election coincided with the break between left-wing organizations and “Jugoslavija” over the issue of student self-management of the dormitory, which prompted the leftists to organize their own student assembly. It took place just four days after the Yugoslav parliamentary election and was attended by all the major student organizations: the Society of Yugoslav Technical School Students, the Collective of Croatian Academics, the Slovenian Student Collective (*Slovenska Dijaška Zadruga*), and the Society of Agricultural Technicians. Only “Jugoslavija” and the Collective of Academics from Serbia, Montenegro and the Bay of Kotor (*Zadruga akademičara Srbije, Crne Gore i Boke Kotorske*) did not attend.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly enough, one can discern from this that the left wing organizations were closer to Croatian and Slovenian student groups than to Serbian groups. This was most likely a consequence of the new Comintern-encouraged battle for federalism through the Popular Front as much as it was a consequence of the older communist view that Yugoslavia was merely an imperialist project of the Greater Serbian bourgeoisie. The only pro-government student organizations remaining at this point were ethnically Serbian.

Opposition to the centralist Yugoslav model was not received lightly; an anonymous flyer published in support of the “Jugoslavija” Academic Society in early May accused those who organized the student assembly of being “quasi-communists and separatists.”<sup>28</sup> These accusations were primarily directed at the Society of Yugoslav Technical School Students (DJT), which was also accused of hijacking the student assembly. The DJT leadership responded with a pamphlet which did not directly address the accusations of communism and separatism, but focused instead on emphasizing their struggle for improving the material position of Yugoslav technical school students. Their response was framed in Marxist terms, emphasizing the lower-class origin of most of their students, pointing out their poverty and the refusal of the government to aid graduate students, which they considered an “antisocial and reactionary measure.”<sup>29</sup> Another flyer, which the DJT published on 26 October 1935, was broader in focus, looking at the political situation in Yugoslavia. This one did not look at the issues troubling the students, but rather at the struggle of the United Opposition against an authoritarian,

---

<sup>26</sup> Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia*, 43.

<sup>27</sup> AUK, VA (1848–1953), B 337, 1 May 1935. Letter from the DJT to the Collective of Academics from Serbia, Montenegro and the Bay of Kotor.

<sup>28</sup> “Jugoslavenskim studentima” [To Yugoslav Students], AUK, VA (1848–1953), B 337,

<sup>29</sup> “Svima praškim studentima” [To all Prague students], AUK, VA (1848–1953), B 337, 18 May 1935.

“anti-people and anti-democratic government.”<sup>30</sup> They intentionally referred to the alleged last words of King Alexander in 1934, “Save Yugoslavia!” in order to emphasize that the government which claimed to be preserving Yugoslavia was actually destroying it through its reckless dictatorial policies. The DJT called for the government to turn to “strengthening old close ties with the Little Entente and France and establishing new ones with the USSR.”<sup>31</sup> This sentence more than anything else serves as a testimony to the reorientation of Yugoslav communist students towards the Popular Front policy. The document was signed by, among others, Marko Spahić and Branko Krsmanović, both of whom joined the KPJ less than a year later,<sup>32</sup> and Ilija Engel, the former president of the banned Academic Club “Matija Gubec” and a left-wing activist since his high school days.<sup>33</sup>

### Left-Wing Nationalists and Anti-Fascists

Other organizations close to the DJT showed a greater openness to framing the debate in national rather than class terms. The Collective of Croatian Academics (ZHA), although left wing, was ethnically a Croatian organization. This was not in contradiction to KPJ’s policies on nationalities in Yugoslavia, so the communist students cooperated with them. Before 1935, they had dealt with many of the issues relevant to Croatian nationalism, organizing lectures on the national question in Yugoslavia<sup>34</sup> and on the life of the Croatian nationalist leader Eugen Kvaternik.<sup>35</sup> A feeling of pride in the nation’s past, as long as it did not involve hatred towards other nations, was not seen as negative by the Yugoslav communists in the Popular Front period. Considering that the organization’s president, Ivan Ropac, went to Spain as one of the first Yugoslav volunteers from

---

<sup>30</sup> “Svima demokratski raspoloženim jugoslavenskim studentima” [To all democratic-minded Yugoslav students], AUK, VA (1848–1953), B 337, 26 October 1935.

<sup>31</sup> “Svima demokratski raspoloženim jugoslavenskim studentima,” AUK, VA (1848–1953), B 337, 26 October 1935.

<sup>32</sup> Lazar Udovički, “Venceremos!,” *Republika – Glasilo građanskog samooslobođanja* 1 July – 31 August 2013, <http://www.republika.co.rs/552-555/20.html>, [accessed July 5, 2015].

<sup>33</sup> Institut za savremenu istoriju, *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije* [People’s heroes of Yugoslavia], 2d ed. (Belgrade: Mladost, 1975), 137, znaci.net, [accessed 9 March 2016].

<sup>34</sup> “Policejnimu ředitelství (spolkové oddělení)” [To the police office (Associations department)], Archiv hlavního města Prahy (AHMP), Spolkový katastr, X/242, 13 February 1934.

<sup>35</sup> “Policejnimu ředitelství ‘spolkové oddělení?,” AHMP, SK, X/242, 10 June 1933.

Prague in December 1936,<sup>36</sup> one can conclude that the left-wing element of their struggle was not ignored.

A good testimony to the impact of the communists on Croatian students is the case of the student Matija Šiprak. Šiprak went to Prague in 1936 to study law. He came from a devoutly Catholic family which traditionally supported the Croatian Peasant Party.<sup>37</sup> He was also an anti-fascist, however, and after he arrived his colleagues introduced him to radical left ideas.<sup>38</sup> Joining the group of Yugoslav students that left Prague for Spain, he died in the Battle of Jarama.<sup>39</sup> The eulogy to Šiprak was produced by the leader of the Prague students, Veljko Vlahović, who became a high-ranking official and party ideologue after World War II.<sup>40</sup> Vlahović reiterated the vision of a nation of antifascists, opposed to the nationalist and chauvinist ideas of Franco's sympathizers; some Croatian fascists also went to Spain as volunteers to fight on the Nationalist side and this speech was aimed at attacking them as much as glorifying a fallen comrade:

We are convinced that the entire Croatian nation together with us will solemnize and avenge your heroic death, helping us in our struggle against fascism and condemning that group of misguided children at the University of Zagreb who think that politically and nationally they are closer to you, Comrade Šiprak, than us – followers of other parties and sons of different nations – and who extended their hand across your grave to the murderer of the Spanish people, the enemy of the Croatian people, General Franco. We are convinced that the entire younger generation of the Croatian people is not going to follow their example, but yours, Comrade Matija. May your glory be everlasting, worthy son of the Croatian nation!<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Čedo Kapor, ed., "Borci u Internacionalnim brigadama – Indeks imena P, R, S, Š," [Fighters in the International brigades – Index of names P, R, S, Š] in *Španija 1936–1939: Zbornik sećanja jugoslovenskih dobrovoljaca u Španskom ratu* (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1971), 1, [https://www.inicijativa.org/tiki/tiki-index.php?page=SGR\\_P%2CR%2CS](https://www.inicijativa.org/tiki/tiki-index.php?page=SGR_P%2CR%2CS) [accessed July 7, 2015].

<sup>37</sup> Vjeran Pavlaković, "Radicalization at the University of Zagreb during the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939," *Historical Journal* 62, no. 2 (2011): 500, <http://hrcak.srce.hr/70239?lang=en> [accessed July 5, 2015].

<sup>38</sup> Đuro Gajdek, *Španjolski borci Siska i Banije* [Spanish fighters from Sisak and Banija] (Sisak: Muzej Sisak, 1985), 145.

<sup>39</sup> Gajdek, *Španjolski borci Siska i Banije*, 151.

<sup>40</sup> Institut za savremenu istoriju, *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije*, 503.

<sup>41</sup> Čedo Kapor, *Krv i život za slobodu*, [Blood and life for freedom], 4th ed. (Belgrade: Unija-publik, 1978), 42, quoted in Pavlaković, "Radicalization at the University of Zagreb During the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939," 500.



Although he was a “son of the Croatian nation,” he was nevertheless closer to “followers of other parties and sons of different nations” – that is, his communist comrades of other Yugoslav nationalities – than he was to the people who also considered themselves “sons of the Croatian nation” but fought for the fascists. This “internationalist nationalism,” according to which a fellow Yugoslav of a different ethnicity is closer than a member of the same ethnic group who fought alongside the fascists, became the cornerstone of Yugoslav communist ideology in World War II.

### The Takeover of “Jugoslavija”

The final victory for the leftists came just before the group of Yugoslav students went to Spain to fight in the Civil War. In 1936, the communists successfully infiltrated the largest Yugoslav monarchist and nationalist stronghold in Prague – the Academic Society “Jugoslavija.” Throughout 1936, while the leadership was still nominally in the hands of the nationalists, the leftists were able to set their own agenda for “Jugoslavija.” “Jugoslavija” started to criticize both the Yugoslav and Czechoslovak governments and established cooperation with various left-wing and anti-fascist international student organizations.<sup>42</sup> The takeover was finalized on 4 November 1936, when the communists Ratko Pavlović and Veljko Vlahović became the president and vice-president of the society, respectively.<sup>43</sup> Both had been members of the SKOJ (League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia) and the KPJ for several years.<sup>44</sup> Several months later, the police started investigating the society, only to find that 9 out of 17 board members of the society had disappeared from the country and gone to Spain by the time the society’s headquarters were raided in February 1937.<sup>45</sup> The investigation found no proof of any abuse of the society’s funds by the new leadership, but the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior suggested banning the organization because its statute strictly prohibited political activity and affiliation with any political party.<sup>46</sup> As the funds of the society were left intact, it is safe to assume that the takeover of the “Jugoslavija” Academic Society was part of a broader strategy of infiltrating reactionary student groups rather than a means of getting to Spain. However,

---

<sup>42</sup> Gavrić, “Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga,” 360.

<sup>43</sup> Gavrić, “Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga,” 351.

<sup>44</sup> Institut za savremenu istoriju, *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije*, 363.

<sup>45</sup> Gavrić, “Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga,” 359.

<sup>46</sup> Gavrić, “Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga,” 360.

looking at the importance that the takeover had in communist historiography, it had strong symbolic significance for leftist students in Prague.

## Conclusion

Even before the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, the Yugoslav Communist Party began a shift towards Yugoslav federalism. In a multiethnic country with the political hegemony of one ethnic group over the others, the best way to appeal to the people was to recognize their national oppression rather than ignore it. In many cases, the preference for the narrative of nation rather than the narrative of class is evident in the publications of left-wing organizations. This approach led to the creation of a distinct form of Yugoslav nationalism – a nationalism with an internationalist background that united all anti-fascist forces. National differences were acknowledged at the same time as a common international struggle against fascism was emphasized. Zora Gavrić, who lived in Prague at the time and was close to several communist groups, acknowledges in her memoir over thirty years later that “the fight of [Yugoslav] progressive forces against fascism abroad was considered merely an extension of the fight of their own people.”<sup>47</sup> This approach formed the basis of the Yugoslav communist attitude to the national question in World War II, offering the alternative of a common Yugoslav struggle to a country torn apart by ethnic conflict and local fascist collaborators. This attitude eventually helped the Yugoslav Partisans sway the majority of the population to their side and liberate their country with minimal external help in the closing months of World War II. This view was formed through the experience of work abroad by many Yugoslav political émigrés. The Yugoslav students in Prague, many of whom lived through the war and came to shape the country’s policy afterwards, were a part of this process. Their left-wing nationalism, which developed in the 1930s under Comintern influence, remained present in the post-war Yugoslav state under the official state ideology of “brotherhood and unity” (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*).

---

<sup>47</sup> Gavrić, “Odlazak jugoslovenskih studenata iz Praga,” 349.