

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

Role Kovač

**WITH US,
VLADO
DAPČEVIĆ**

Publisher's Note

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INTRODUCTION

This work is an autobiographical account. Its goal is to describe the last eleven years of Vlado Dapčević's life, covering the period from 1990 to 2001. It utilizes documentary material from numerous interviews Vlado gave to newspapers and television, as well as his specific political work (especially in founding the Party of Labour and his activities within the organization), which is much less known to the public. And finally, it includes my memories of our joint companionship and work with him, though there is a risk of a subjective approach that may lead to a biased judgement.

The author of the book *Cominformist* is the journalist Slavko Ćuruvija. The book was published in 1990. In it, Vlado's story of life is recorded shortly after his release from prison, following many years of imprisonment. That book ends with Vlado's remark that, for him, everything was over, that he was tired of it all, in poor health and had a family to whom he wanted to dedicate the rest of his life. He felt he could only be frustrated by everything happening in Yugoslavia. However, that was not the end for Vlado, as he soon returned to Yugoslavia.

He stated: *“Returning after 33 years was an immense joy for me, because I am connected to this country with every drop of my blood. Perhaps because I have struggled so much here. And, to put it a bit poetically — this is a land that I literally soaked with sweat, blood and tears. And precisely because of that, I love it immensely. When I saw*

the rise of nationalist madness, which was affecting all the peoples of Yugoslavia to varying degrees, knowing the consequences it posed for this country, I felt it was my duty to return once again to the stage of political battle.”

Vlado simply followed his life maxim, which he realized very early on and consistently adhered to throughout his tumultuous life: *“A revolutionary is a person who has come to a certain ideo-political understanding and can no longer be a person without being a revolutionary... Revolutionaries fight until death. And as long as my tired heart beats, there will be no rest for me, and I will contribute as much as I can to the greatest and most beautiful ideal — the realization of communist ideas.”*

This work is also my view of a time whose consequences we still feel and live with, and it seems to me that they will never disappear from the Balkan region.

The Author

THE BLACK SPOT

Vrbas is a small town in Vojvodina, founded in the 16th century as a small settlement of Slavs. Later, Swabians (Germans) settled there and gradually urbanized the town, particularly through industrialization at the beginning of the 20th century. The town was home to Serbs, Germans, Hungarians, Rusyns, Ukrainians, Jews and others. The Germans, Jews and a few wealthier Hungarians owned factories — oil mills, sugar refineries, slaughterhouses, hemp mills and textile factories. They contributed the most to the development of culture, sports and overall social life. There were few wealthy Serbs, only a few traders or landowners. Most were peasants, labourers, workers and the poor, as were the Rusyns, Ukrainians and others.

After the First World War, a few Montenegrins settled through colonization. At the end of the Second World War, most of the Germans fled with their army before the liberators arrived. Those who remained were Germans who hadn't supported Hitler. At that time, through mass colonization, a significant number of Montenegrin families, along with some Bosnian families, settled in the area. The Montenegrins settled the entire municipality, divided by their clans. Each clan received a village in the municipality, while in Vrbas, several clans were given separate streets with abandoned Swabian houses. This concentration of partisans became the new ruling class, which led the native Serbs to withdraw and

mind their own business. The Hungarians joined them because they had been occupiers and had to adapt to the new reality. It took the liberators a long time to overcome cultural differences, primitive behaviour and clan divisions and to adjust to the new conditions of life on the plains.

However, the unprecedented enthusiasm for building new relationships and a better, more just life, which was infectious in its optimism, didn't last long. The year 1948 came, along with the Cominform Resolution — the so-called Tito-Stalin split. The Montenegrins were ideologically divided. The split was sharp, not only in political alignment but also tearing apart family, clan and friendship ties. These divisions left a deep mark on interpersonal relations and remained for decades. In the end, the Titoites won, arresting and imprisoning many on Goli Otok, while an even larger number were expelled from the party. Under the growing wave of repression, some tried to hide. A few individuals went rogue; one even fled to Romania. Most of the arrested and imprisoned endured unimaginable torture and humiliation, and many were forced to formally renounce their ideological beliefs. Others were co-opted by the regime. The rest remained silent, constantly under surveillance, never speaking about politics.

I come from a partisan and Cominformist family, as all supporters of the Cominform Resolution and Stalin were called. My uncle, after whom I was named, died in the Battle of Batina, and my maternal uncle was killed

by the Chetniks. Both my mother and father were expelled from the party, so I grew up in a family marked with the stigma of Cominformists. However, I believe this was secondary in my ideological development, with the core being that I came from a working-class family, where my father was the only one in a large family who worked. Our mouths were always hungry, and that's when I developed complexes and felt ashamed of our poverty.

My family wasn't the only one "isolated." In the street where I lived, among fifty Montenegrin houses, six people had been on Goli Otok, two had been arrested and later released, and seventeen had been expelled from the party, nine of whom were women. Nearly three decades later, a state security inspector named Apro Rihard, a German from Vrbas who was interrogating me, told me, "For us, Vrbas has always been a black spot on the map of enemy activities," while boasting over the phone to someone that he had just received a watch from the president for successfully suppressing enemy elements — this was during the time of the arrest of an entire Cominformist group, and me as some isolated and incidental case.

Tito's death shook and frightened everyone. Many sincerely mourned and cried. A senseless tradition was introduced, whereby on the anniversary of his death, at precisely three o'clock and five minutes, everyone would stand still, no matter where they were, to honour him. This was not only a tribute but also a sign of the regime's desire to continue

along the same path under the slogan, “After Tito, Tito.”

In the town, I had a group of friends with whom I met daily. From that period, which was essentially a bourgeois way of life, a few events stood out to me as small signs of the coming “inevitable and great” shift, and based on which I tried to predict or project the societal process. I gave special significance to these small signs.

The first sign was when I read a brief news item, almost a footnote, about Albanian students in the cafeteria in Prishtina staging a social revolt with political slogans. At the time, this act of rebellion seemed significant to me, following the nearly forgotten events like the 1968 student protests and the incursion of a group of Ustaše into Yugoslavia, as well as my fresh memories of imprisonment. At that moment, a familiar excitement washed over me.

In Vrbas, the Yugoslav Youth Poetry Festival was held. Typically, most Yugoslav poets would gather, from Desanka Maksimović, Gustav Krklec, Oskar Davičo, Mika Antić, to a number of newly established young poets. These were generally pleasant and interesting days, as it always is with poets. At the festival’s opening, a party official gave the obligatory speech on behalf of the authorities, which was usually standard and boring. At that moment, two poets, Novica Tadić and Dugo Krivokapić, entered the hall, with Krivokapić notably drunk. Tadić said, “Eat your fat demagogic ass!” The shock was palpable. The poets were arrested, and a big fuss

was made over it.

Not long after, Tanasije Jakić, a bank clerk, was arrested for Cominformist activities. The entire operation was executed spectacularly, as if they were capturing some important terrorists, with the town being locked down by the police.

All these seemingly small signs hinted that the political situation in society was changing and that contradictions would only deepen. Not to mention the appearance of articles in *Književne novine* that we regularly read and commented on in which the stench of nationalism was becoming increasingly noticeable. The economic crisis was deepening, becoming more political, with national party bureaucracies unable to resolve it.

A friend from the street, with whom I grew up, initiated a proposal from the youth work brigade to posthumously award Tito another medal and make him a four-time national hero. However, someone smart — or for other reasons — stopped the initiative. Soon after, Vrbas managed to change its name to Titov Vrbas. At that time, each republic and province in Yugoslavia had one town named after Tito. My friends were almost all Titoites, but they were against this action, and I jokingly told them, “We might be against it when they remove that name.” This indeed happened a decade later, when most of those officials cowardly accepted the dictate of the new nationalist government to remove Tito’s name.

At the entrance to Vrbas’s town centre stand two monuments. One monument fea-

tures a large cross, and the other a red star. The one with the cross was hastily erected recently, with no aesthetic appeal. The second is also relatively new, and I would say a bit more thoughtful. It features a red star and was erected on the former pedestal of the Russian monument commemorating two Red Army soldiers who died liberating Vrbas — one Russian and one Ukrainian.

On the poorly constructed monument is the name of my relative, Bata, who, along with dozens of citizens, was the first to attack members of the Chetnik organization who, bearing their symbols, attempted to hold a rally in town in the late 1980s. The Chetniks, who didn't know what hit them, were beaten as if in a pogrom. But this wasn't just a spontaneous outburst of public dissatisfaction; it was an organized resistance, still under the Titoite Vojvodina police, against the growing influence of Great-Serb nationalism and unitarism from Belgrade. My relative later ended up in Vukovar "fighting against the Ustaše" with volunteers who had heard "there's good looting there." He was found killed by a sniper's bullet. The same monument bears the names of policemen who died in Kosova during actions enforcing apartheid against the Albanian people.

The Soviets long ago took the remains of the fallen Red Army soldiers from their monument, and one colonist later took part of the monument and brought it to his mother's grave in Montenegro — following the saying "mother is mother." The monument was re-

stored at the beginning of the 21st century. At that time, I think it was the only monument with a red star erected in Europe. Representatives from the Russian and Ukrainian embassies visited it on Vrbas' Liberation Day, with the assistance of the local nationalist government. That tradition was interrupted when the Ukrainians refused to continue during more recent times, when "Russian and Ukrainian brothers" were at war. Only my comrade Feliks and I continued for several years to make an improvised red star, which we would replace on the monument every time the fascists destroyed it.

THE TABLE IN SOLITUDE

In the central garden of the Vrbas hotel, there was a so-called “elitist table,” a common sight wherever people gather to discuss grand topics, as the genocidal poet Matija Bećković wrote: “Because of the grand thoughts that one thinks, everyone thinks they are great!” Similarly, at our table, we daily dissected café politics as if the fate of the world depended on us, as if we had the power to influence political events and knew in which direction they would unfold. There were about ten of us, and the “entry ticket” to the table was high. In truth, many had no desire to even approach it.

One of the regulars was Mečo, as we called him, one of the Perović brothers, a bored military pensioner who retired at barely twenty-something years old, and the military was happy to be rid of him due to his unruly nature. He, standing almost two metres tall and weighing over one hundred kilograms, did nothing but tirelessly roam antique shops and buy books. At night, he studied history and lectured us on the uniqueness of Montenegrins, including the three new letters they allegedly had, and much more. We mostly laughed at this, considering him to be nationally obsessed and largely outdated. At the same time, he had over three hundred pages written on the partisan commander Sava Kovačević, which he never published. He was an authority in the group, someone everyone somewhat feared, although we sometimes mocked his clumsy formulations that often hit

the core of the matter.

Then there was his brother Milenko, my best man. Milenko and I were relentless rivals in countless chess matches during our daily gatherings. He had moved from a Nietzschean student phase, through the Frankfurt School, and was positioned with the Yugoslav Praxis philosophers, earning his doctorate in philosophy under the renowned philosopher Kangrga in Zagreb on the topic of the petty-bourgeoisie. He wrote articles on this subject in magazines. He was the editor of *Savremenost*, the theoretical journal of the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, but later switched to the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, where he focussed on ethics. The relationship between the Perović brothers was a classic patriarchal family dynamic of competition — who would be better and achieve more — and entire sociological and psychological studies could be written about it. I was something of a mediator between the brothers, although I knew that it held little weight until Mečo's storm passed, especially when he lost a chess game, causing the chessboard to fly off the table, and then, in a surreal scene, he would jump on it with all his weight.

The third member of the table was the “entertainer” Ročko, an eternal student of Marxism, sharp-witted and humourous, who at the age of seventeen had already established himself as an “icon” among artistic and intellectual circles. Simply by his presence, he opened doors everywhere. He was the editor of the Novi Sad youth magazine *Stav* and the main

joker at our table, but without any recognized “gravitas.” Ideologically, he oscillated between Marxism, Trotskyism, anarchism and even Titoism if necessary, as ideology was not that important to him. He had already conducted interviews with well-known politicians like Mira Marković, Slobodan Milošević’s wife, and Tudjman, among others. He would later make fun of them in his own way, creating a “scene,” and we would laugh. During the Yugoslav wars, he ended up in Russia, then in Ukraine, in Donbass, Donetsk, again as a journalist, with doors open everywhere. He followed Mečo, who had gone to Moscow, leaving behind a flat in Tuzla with a few thousand books and a military pension, forgetting everything.

There was also Miodrag Karadžić from the same village as the war criminal Radovan Karadžić. The son of one of Tito’s security officers and my boss in a construction company, he wrote the comedy *Djekna Hasn’t Died Yet, and When She Will, We Don’t Know*, which left a mark not only on Montenegrin society but also beyond. Many local Montenegrins criticized him, shouting, “Why did he insult us like that!” To which he replied in his own style, “I wrapped you in cellophane so no one would see what you’re really like.” Karadžić was constantly torn between the need to be protected by his father’s influence and his desire to be something else.

Once, Mečo threatened him at the table, saying, “Role, are you planning to hire me?”

Karadžić called State Security the next

morning. They told him they had nothing to do with it and that he should decide for himself. That's how I ended up in the system, working as a lawyer in a construction company, so I wouldn't have to work in brick factories or dig ditches for water and sewage lines to support my family.

Also at the table was Bajo Zečević, my schoolmate, mild-mannered and somewhat indifferent to politics, considering it all relative and transient. Finally, there was the silent poet Tomo Djivuljski, who later committed suicide under pressure, refusing to serve the corrupt government and rejecting to sign off on a dubious multimillion-dollar project.

Overall, it was an ideologically diverse group, and as a Marxist-Leninist, I was something different to them. I knew that there was no room for me at that time, and the doors were closed to any organized political work, partly due to ideological differences, partly due to the lack of interest from my friends, and also because of police surveillance. However, the events around us pushed us to move away from "world politics," the National Liberation War, the history of Montenegro, literature, and the analysis of texts on the state of society written by Milenko, and to start addressing phenomena and texts increasingly charged with nationalism. After the publication of the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and the subsequent debate it sparked throughout society, it became clear to us that something was happening that we hadn't expected or clearly understood where

it would lead.

After the 8th session of the Serbian Communist Party in 1987, Slobodan Milošević took over the party. His visit to Kosova, where he positioned himself as the leader of the Serbs and Montenegrins, showed us that things wouldn't remain confined to intellectual circles, although we still didn't clearly foresee how the political crisis would unfold.

Events accelerated, and within three years, everything that led to the war and the dissolution of Yugoslavia escalated.

Whether by chance or design, Vrbas was chosen as one of the starting points in a series of rallies promoting Great-Serb nationalism. First, they had to settle things "in their own house," primarily in Vojvodina, before moving on to other regions.

Previously, the Party Committee in the city held a meeting and decided to oppose the destructive intentions of the demonstrators from Kosova. The rally was supposed to express solidarity with the Serbian people in Kosova, who were allegedly being terrorized and persecuted by the Albanian majority — or as they derogatorily referred to them, "Šiptars." Later on, rallies became a daily occurrence, but this one was the introduction. It was organized by the Serbian State Security.

From early morning, demonstrators arrived in large numbers, sitting in ditches, parks, crowded cafés and in the hotel garden. The president of the municipality already had a speech prepared to somewhat calm the growing tensions. However, during the night,

the police from Belgrade took control, and the municipal president gave a different speech, supporting the Serbs in Kosova and the demonstrators.

A large banner read, “Oh Serbia, you will be whole again from three parts,” followed by, “From Triglav to Tirana, they give us deep wounds,” and images of Slobodan Milošević with the message, “We want one like this...”

When the rally began, we felt a sense of pride that our table remained in complete isolation, detached, yet with the feeling that something significant was brewing.

The event in Vrbas was merely a prelude to the main showdown between Milošević’s government and the provincial leadership of Vojvodina. That confrontation took place at the beginning of October 1988 in Novi Sad over two days. Everything was well-organized, fuelled by public dissatisfaction with the entrenched political structures, and exacerbated by the worsening economic situation and the intense nationalist fervour that had already gripped the masses, driven by aggressive propaganda about the alleged endangerment of the Serbian people.

On October 5, everything came to a standstill. Everyone was heading to Novi Sad.

I asked a colleague from the company:

“Why are you going?”

“To overthrow the Vojvodina government!”

“Why?”

“I’ve been waiting for an apartment for fifteen years and still haven’t gotten one.”

People attended the rally with slogans like: “We believe in the League of Communists of Serbia,” “Down with the 1974 Constitution,” “Kosova is Serbia,” “Vojvodina is Serbia” and “Together we are stronger.”

However, the leadership of Vojvodina still resisted and didn’t want to capitulate or resign easily. That night, the provincial government building was pelted with rocks and yogurt — hence the term “Yogurt Revolution.”

The next day, we took the train to Novi Sad, not knowing the outcome. Tickets were no longer being charged. Everyone seemed to be in a mild trance, thinking that something better was coming. In Novi Sad, we saw crowds of intoxicated people and demonstrators celebrating. The cellars had been opened the previous night and drinks were flowing freely. The speeches on stage were varied, clumsy but triumphant. To our surprise, we saw Mišović, an occasional guest at our table and a local bohemian and writer, on stage with his literary comrades from Kosova.

It was only later that we realized that the groundwork for the armed conflicts in Yugoslavia had been laid in Vojvodina. The province’s autonomy was effectively abolished.

We returned from the rally feeling disheartened.

Mečo offered his analysis:

“Milošević and his people are on the rise now, and all we can do is throw tacks on the road.”

That image of throwing tacks on the road, like in some partisan films, stuck in my mind.

It reflected the reality of our insignificant power. And not just ours, but much, much wider.

Karadžić informed us that he had been invited to work in the cabinet of the new provincial secretary and that he accepted the offer. He moved to Novi Sad, and I immediately cut off contact with him, as did the others — or perhaps he cut off contact with all of us.

Soon, Radoman Božović also aligned himself with the new government and Milošević. Božović had come from Montenegro to attend high school in Vrbas. As a curiosity, he had his graduation photo taken wearing a Montenegrin cap, which attracted attention, just as my later photo in a “Mao cap” did, as these were novelties at the time. When he began studying economics in Subotica, alongside my brother and his group of friends, Božović began asserting himself with his sharp wit and audacity. Thus began his rise through the university and political hierarchy, especially after the fall of the Vojvodina leadership. The third of the Perović brothers, Blažo, passed on the information that Boško Kovačević, the party secretary in Subotica, had refused Milošević’s offer to take over the leadership of Vojvodina after the “Yogurt Revolution.” However, Božović didn’t refuse anything that was offered, and he advanced to the position of prime minister, and later the speaker of the Serbian assembly. He zealously defended that policy with cynicism and brazenness. With his instincts, he managed to avoid being swept away by the later downfall of Milošević,

retreating into political anonymity in time, preserving his wealth and business connections. I remember my mother's words when we told her that Božović had sided with Milošević: "I'm only sorry for the pillow I gave him as a student so he'd have something to sleep on..."

Then came the downfall of Montenegro's Titoite leadership, which had been boasting in vain, while Milošević pushed forward new frontrunners — Milo Djukanović, Momir Bulatović and Svetozar Marović, the so-called "sweater-wearers," as they were dubbed at the time, supposedly modest in contrast to the "armchair politicians" in power. After the so-called "Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution," as it was named, these sweater-wearers took the title "the young Montenegrin leadership." Milo Djukanović, later nicknamed Milo Britva (The Razor), was the first to side with Milošević, creating a rift in the then Montenegrin leadership, which was still entrenched in the framework of Tito's Party and couldn't adapt to the new circumstances.

Following the tried and tested method used in Vojvodina, the key to toppling the Montenegrin leadership was to win over the workers of the Nikšić steelworks and the aluminum plant in Titograd (now Podgorica). After several unsuccessful attempts, with the help of nationalists from Kosova, such as Šolević, Kosta Bulatović and other Milošević loyalists, an attempt was made to send demonstrators from Nikšić to Titograd. However, the police met them at Žuta Greda and dispersed them. This only added fuel to the fire,

giving Milošević's forces even greater propaganda leverage and the ability to mobilize the people. At the pivotal rally in Titograd, workers were once again mobilized. The slogans were a mix of everything: "We want change," "Long live the League of Communists of Yugoslavia," "Long live the working class," "Comrade Tito, we swear to you," "Yugoslavia, Yugoslavia," but also "Down with Vidoje Žarković," "You have betrayed Serbdom." The crowd chanted: "Slobodan, son of Serbia, when will you come to Cetinje," "Slobo, freedom," "Leaf through the forest, bloom flowers, Montenegro is heading to battle" and "Who says, who lies, Serbia is small."

We followed the events on television and later discussed them at our table, trying to touch up the picture a bit in the false hope that things might not end so badly.

Next in line was Kosova, where the Kosova leadership, led by Kaqusha Jashari and Azem Vllasi, tried to offer some resistance. However, under military and police pressure and threats, Kosova's autonomy was abolished. In response to the abolition of autonomy, about eight hundred miners from Stari Trg descended into the mine and barricaded themselves nine hundred metres underground. This event shook all of Yugoslavia. Stipe Šušvar, the leader of the League of Communists of Croatia, descended into the mine to negotiate and to support the miners, having previously made the loud declaration that he would "call a spade a spade," meaning he would oppose Milošević. However, nothing

came of it because by then, the situation also began to suit Croatian Party members. Šuvar did not oppose it, and representatives of the Yugoslav state and party leadership acted tragically comical, as had Ivan Stambolić and Buca Pavlović in Serbia earlier, in their attempts to restrain Milošević.

That night, when the situation with the miners was at its breaking point, Rajko Cerović, a journalist, publicist and the former chief editor of TV Titograd, joined our table. He was no longer favoured by the new Montenegrin authorities and was forced to resign under pressure. We came to a unanimous conclusion: "Yugoslavia is being defended at Stari Trg." Although I wanted such a Yugoslavia to collapse due to its betrayal of socialism and everything else, I now wanted to defend it, even if it was in this state. Especially since I admired the strength and determination of the miners, I sought a class signature in their actions, and perhaps, naively, the foreshadowing of something greater.

At the same time, Milošević organized a large rally in Belgrade, demanding the arrest of Albanian leaders like Vllasi and others. In response to the crowd's chants of "Arrest Vllasi!" he cynically replied, "I can't hear you well!" The appearance of Raif Dizdarević, then-president of the Yugoslav presidency, under a large image of Milošević at the rally was met with jeers from the crowd. Under pressure, the Yugoslav Presidency decided to declare a state of emergency in Kosovo and the Dukagjin Plateau. Special police

units were sent in, descending into the mine through ventilation shafts and arresting the miners. Azem Vllasi was also arrested.

In Belgrade, Serbian intellectuals, inflamed by nationalist hatred, especially writers, supported all the regime's measures against the "Albanian rebellion" and criticized the support for the miners coming from Slovenia and Croatia.

Knives were being sharpened quickly.

The final act was set to take place at the 14th Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, held in January 1990 at the Sava Centre in Belgrade. But before that concluding event, the final rally at Gazimestan in Kosova took place, marking the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosova, where Milošević, before hundreds of thousands of his supporters, threatened war.

We eagerly awaited and closely followed the congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. Delegates from all the Yugoslav republics were present, as well as delegates from the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). The congress became the pinnacle of the conflict between two visions of how Yugoslavia should be organized — centralist and unitary under Belgrade's domination, and confederal as proposed by most other republics. Naturally, the congress was doomed to fail. The sharpest clashes occurred between the Serbian and Slovenian delegations. The former advocated for a "one man, one vote" system, meaning the centralization of Yugoslavia, as Milošević's intention was to take control of the party at

the federal level. However, the Slovenians proposed a confederation of the party and state. The essence of their proposal was the introduction of political pluralism. Elections had already been held in Slovenia for their representative in the federal presidency, and Croatia and Slovenia were preparing for the first multi-party elections. They demanded a redefinition of relations between the republics to ensure that overrule by any single entity would be impossible. All the proposals from the Slovenian delegation, led by Milan Kučan, were rejected. All of Milošević's proposals were accepted by the majority of votes. The Slovenian leadership walked out of the congress, which Milošević tried to use to impose his views, but then the Croatian delegates also walked out, followed by the delegates from Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The party that formally united them disintegrated.

Personally, I felt satisfaction that the revisionist and nationalist rot of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia had fallen apart. It pleased my ego, as I had advocated for this outcome. However, the unravelling didn't happen according to my naive vision of a revolutionary uprising of the masses against the traitorous League of Communists, but instead, under their direction, where they were already fully prepared to renounce even that nominal communism they had so fervently professed, all while living comfortably off it. I remembered that night the wonderful thought: "Renegades are always worse than the class enemy."

We could hardly wait for Roćko to return from Belgrade, where he had managed to secure access to the congress' corridors and share with us all the juicy details. And, of course, to dramatize the scene of how he, while helping the elderly Baja Radosavljević, one of the leaders of the Serbian leadership, climb the stairs, launched a tirade against the Slovenian and Croatian leaderships, all while Baja complained about the atmosphere that had taken over the party.

THE PARTY FOR THE FIRST TIME

The news that the Association for a Yugoslav Democratic Initiative (UJDI) was founded at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb in early 1989 unsettled me somewhat. The founding members included Branko Horvat, Nebojša Popov, Žarko Puhovski, Bogdan Bogdanović, Milan Kangrga, Lev Kreft, Shkëlzen Maliqi, Vesna Pešić, Koča Popović, Milorad Pupovac, Ljubiša Ristić, Božidar Gajo Sekulić, Rudi Supek, Ljubomir Tadić, Dubravka Ugrešić, Predrag Vranicki... All of them part of what one might call the so-called humanist intelligentsia. It was an attempt by intellectuals to oppose the nationalist surge, but in their misunderstanding of reality, and one could say of politics itself.

In Novi Sad, the UJDI held a panel discussion attended by the philosopher Miladin Životić from Belgrade. Milenko and I returned with him. I was afraid that Milenko might be drawn in by that philosophical inclination, as he too was part of that Praxis school. I wasn't afraid because Milenko didn't belong among those intellectuals, but because I had already decided that we needed to attempt once again to form a communist party, and Milenko was a crucial link in that.

Milenko made his decision: "The UJDI has no weight."

Our shared stance was that intellectuals, with their so-called civic concept, could not stop the nationalists with the sterile idea that

all they needed to do was explain things to the masses. This later proved to be true. The UJDI's attempts did not resonate with the masses and remained marginalized, eventually merging into the neoliberal Civic Alliance, which also disappeared from the political scene over time. Some members of the UJDI "betrayed" the cause and ended up supporting Great-Serb nationalism.

When the multi-party system was announced in Serbia, we welcomed it with some relief, seeing the need for more organized work ourselves. I immediately suggested to Milenko that we start forming a party. Milenko advised that we wait for some communist parties to emerge from the centre because we were unknowns, and no one broader would support us. It was a realistic assessment.

Then a decisive event happened for me — Vlado Dapčević's return to Yugoslavia and his first interview in the press. I knew little about Vlado in September 1990, aside from what I had read when I was 19, in December 1975, while in investigative detention in Novi Sad. Back then, I read that Vlado Dapčević had been arrested on Yugoslav territory for counter-revolutionary activities. I only knew that he was the brother of Peko Dapčević, a Spanish Civil War fighter, national hero, Tito's general and liberator of Belgrade, which gave me additional strength at the time. I knew nothing more because it was impossible to find out anything else then. It wasn't until after the collapse of Yugoslavia that I began to piece together a clearer picture of

Vlado, especially after I got my hands on the book *Cominformist* by Slavko Ćuruvija, which was an autobiographical account of Vlado's life. I read it in one sitting, then slowly, page by page, committing everything to memory. That's when I gained a clearer picture, which I later filled in further.

If I were to summarize Vlado's life, as difficult as that may be, it would look something like this:

Vlado Dapčević was a well-known revolutionary within the communist movement. He was a pre-war member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. He was arrested multiple times. He was severely wounded in a confrontation with Ljotić's forces. He participated in the National Liberation War from the first shots of the uprising and was wounded several times. He fought in all the major battles during the war. After the war, as a colonel, he said the historic "No" to Tito in 1948. During an attempt to flee Yugoslavia across the Romanian border with General Kadja Petričević and JNA Chief of Staff Arso Jovanović, Arso was killed, Kadja was captured and Vlado was later caught. He was sentenced to twenty years in prison. In investigative detention and later on Goli Otok, he was subjected to the most horrific torture, which lasted over eight years. They failed to break him or make him renounce his ideological beliefs. Upon his release from Goli Otok, under the threat of re-arrest, he fled to Albania with a large group of comrades and later moved to the Soviet Union, where he continued his political work.

Due to increasing conflict with Khrushchev's policies and revisionism in general, and his siding with the Albanian and Chinese communist parties, he came under attack from the Soviet authorities, forcing him to leave the USSR to avoid arrest. He moved to Western Europe, where he worked the hardest manual jobs to survive, but he was constantly harassed and expelled from various European countries. In Belgium, he met his future wife Micheline, with whom he had a daughter, Milena. In the 1970s, the Yugoslav police attempted to assassinate him by sending an agent to Brussels, but the assassination failed. During those years, he refused his comrade Mileta Perović's proposal to form a communist party in Yugoslavia, believing it was too early and destined to fail. In 1975, through cooperation between Yugoslav and Romanian police, Vlado was kidnapped in Bucharest — two of his comrades were killed — and he was transported to Yugoslavia. He was initially sentenced to death, then to twenty years in prison. He was released in 1988 after nearly thirteen years of imprisonment but was denied the right to stay in Yugoslavia. Unexpectedly, he reappeared in Yugoslavia in September 1990, as he had been granted permission to return.

I read his interview in *Borba* carefully, after his panel in Titograd. The journalist mentioned that he didn't simply descend the stairs but seemed to fly down them, even at the age of 73.

He said:

“The only reason I decided to come back to Yugoslavia so quickly is because I’m deeply troubled by what is happening in our country. And, as always when necessary, I decided to come and contribute, even if just a little, to preserving this country that was built with blood. We must prevent the horror looming over this country — the horror of the most terrible civil, national and religious war. If the vast patriotic majority, which is currently silent, does not wake up, rise and organize, and instead allows the chauvinists and nationalists to lead, none of us will fare well.”

Milenko’s premonition came true, and soon one Goli Otok survivor, in whom we didn’t have full trust — not because of any particular reason but because we generally didn’t trust Goli Otok survivors, knowing they were often blackmailed into working for the regime — approached me. He proposed that I attend the founding assembly of the New Communist Party of Yugoslavia (NKPJ) in Belgrade. I accepted the invitation, and together we went to Belgrade. At the entrance to the hall, two members offered me a membership form to fill out, as well as a program for the NKPJ. Quite a few people had gathered, mostly older. As the event began, I started reading the program. In the introductory pages, I didn’t find anything that particularly put me off, except that it was written in a somewhat archaic style. After a few pages, I came across a section on Kosova, where it stated that the NKPJ supported constitutional changes regarding the autonomy of Kosova and the Dukagjin Plateau, in line with Milošević’s regime’s efforts to revoke au-

tonomy. I immediately stood up, returned the membership form to the organizers and left. During a break, I noticed a group of about ten people standing apart from the main crowd. I realized they didn't belong to this event and approached them. They said they were members of the "Bar Communist Party of Yugoslavia." I had heard of them because I had been imprisoned with some of their members almost two decades earlier in Sremska Mitrovica. At the time, I had tried to establish contact with them and organize political work in prison, sending them a smuggled letter to their pavilion. They argued about it, and one comrade slapped another who supported accepting the contact and the need for political work even in those conditions. Most of the group considered it a provocation, so my initiative went nowhere.

Now they gave me propaganda material, which I took back to Vrbas. On the way, I read the program. It also seemed archaic, but I didn't detect any overt nationalism, and it was clear it had been written in an earlier period.

I informed my comrades that I had joined the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and everyone accepted it.

I began working on expanding the organization. The first issue of the party newspaper *Komunistička Iskra* was printed, which I distributed among members and sympathizers. The organization gradually grew stronger. I was no longer alone.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF YUGOSLAVIA

Soon, Milenko and I were invited to a meeting in Belgrade. That's where we met Mileta Perović, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ). Mileta was tall, balding, with a moustache, prominent cheekbones and a rough face. He gave off an impression of intelligence and sharp insight.

Immediately, Milenko and I were placed into the Central Committee, which flattered us but also raised some doubts about the seriousness of the organization.

From the very beginning, I felt some sort of hesitation in my relationship with Mileta. I wasn't sure what caused it. Later, I concluded that it was probably because he was pragmatic. He was already ill and was rushing to create some kind of connection for the future, no matter the cost. I, on the other hand, was rather sectarian — not so much in theory but in my relations with people.

We didn't know much about Mileta's life. In the first issue of *Komunistička Iskra*, it said:

“Mileta Perović was born in 1923 in Peja. As a boy, he joined the revolutionary movement, and the educational authorities expelled him from all high schools in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. He joined the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) in 1941. He participated in the National Liberation War from its early days. In 1942, the Italian occupiers captured him and sentenced him to death, though the

sentence was immediately commuted to 101 years in prison. He managed to be transferred to a hospital, from which he escaped and returned to fighting. After the war, he served as a military attaché in Albania, a military intelligence officer, and then head of the Infantry and Cavalry Division of the Organizational Mobilization Directorate of the General Staff. In 1949, under accusations of being a Cominformist, he was arrested and sentenced to 18 years in prison. He served his sentence in Stara Gradiška, Goli Otok, Bileća and Goli Otok again. He was released at the end of 1956, after 7 years and 9 months. In mid-1958, as part of a group of high-ranking Goli Otok prisoners, he illegally emigrated to Albania and, two years later, moved to the Soviet Union. There, he earned a degree in political economy, completed postgraduate studies and earned a doctorate. He became a professor of political economy at the Institute of National Economy in Kiev. At the Congress of Bar in 1974, he was elected, in absentia, as General Secretary of the illegal Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Shortly afterwards, he moved to the West and lived in several countries, mainly France. In 1977, he was kidnapped while on vacation in Switzerland. In Belgrade, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He served his sentence in Sremska Mitrovica. In prison, he wrote 10,000 pages on political economy. He was released on New Year's Day in 1989 after 11 years and 6 months. Counting his earlier imprisonment, he spent a total of 19 years and 3 months in prison, making him one of the

world's record-holders among political prisoners. He lives in Belgrade and represents foreign trade companies from Kiev in Yugoslavia and Western Europe. He is the author of several books and numerous articles on political economy. He speaks Russian, French, German, Italian and Albanian."

Milenko and I realized that the Central Committee of the party was composed of people stuck in the past, and some were burdened with psychological issues, like Momčilo Jokić, the party's chief ideologist and propagandist, who later wrote books trying to prove that Tito was not really Tito. Mileta let all of this go. People could almost walk in off the street and join the Central Committee. At the same time, we assessed that Mileta had practically shifted to the Gorbachev line, justifying everything that was happening in the USSR at the time.

When a proposal passed in the Central Committee that a comrade should not be admitted to the CC because he couldn't afford to attend meetings due to poverty, Mileta reacted harshly: "Poverty cannot be a reason for someone not to be a member of the Central Committee if they deserve it!"

Milenko always returned from meetings in Belgrade dissatisfied, but I was focussed on moving forward.

A special event was our trip to Belgrade for the launch of the first issue of *Komunistička Iskra*. Jokić organized it at a high level, as if we were some significant political force. The ceremony was held at the Sava Centre. About a

hundred people attended, and I had mobilized our members to appear in full force. A choir of a hundred members performed just one song — *The Internationale*. Then, two people entered carrying a flag that Jokić announced as the flag from the *Aurora* ship, allegedly preserved by sailors until today and handed over to us. It was complete madness. But by then, there was no turning back.

Mileta soon called me and asked if I could organize a visit to Czechoslovakia, specifically to meet with their communist youth. Four of us from the Vrbas organization, along with two from Belgrade, travelled to Prague. When we arrived, the people there were completely taken aback. They couldn't believe anyone would show up, especially since Czechoslovakia was in the midst of the so-called collapse of communism. Mileta even believed they would all be thrilled by our visit, but the Czechs merely tolerated us out of politeness.

Soon after, a shock hit all of us. The latest issue of *Komunistička Iskra* came out, and on the front page was a caricature of Milošević oiling a “faltering” red star at the very moment when Yugoslavia was falling apart.

That evening, Mečo appeared at the table and tossed *Komunistička Iskra* in front of me, saying, “Where have you led us?”

I immediately decided to call a meeting of the Vojvodina organization, where about thirty of us drafted a letter to the party leadership, demanding clarification regarding the issue.

The letter stated, among other things: “As

soon as this double issue was released, we received complaints from ten comrades who demanded an immediate response to the appearance of Great-Serb nationalism in our paper... We convened a meeting where almost all participants in the discussion expressed concern that the infiltration of any nationalism into our party would place the KPJ on the same footing as the former LCY or the current NKPJ, which would inevitably lead to its demise from the historical stage.”

We did not receive a response, but we were invited to a meeting with Mileta. Milenko and I went. Mileta introduced us to Vlado, who was then staying in the apartment of Mileta's sister, Senka. He was exactly as Slavko Ćuruvija had described him in his book: grey-haired, with a characteristic broken nose, not very tall but broad, with a sharp voice and eyes that still held fire. At first, we were sizing each other up. At one point, Mileta said something critical about the Cultural Revolution in China, mentioning how they had forced professors into physical labour. Vlado defended the Cultural Revolution and retorted to Mileta that it would be better to call his *Iskra* “Chetnik” rather than “communist,” which both surprised and delighted Milenko and me. After that, everything went smoothly. Mileta left us in Vlado's hands.

To Vlado's question: “*What do you think of Stalin and his purges?*”

Milenko responded: “If things could have been different, they would have been.”

I said: “I support everything, except the

waving of his portraits everywhere and his failure to curb the cult of personality around him.”

Vlado replied: “*That was an expression of the times.*”

Soon after, Mečo conducted an interview with Mileta for *Monitor*, which was then the only opposition publication in Montenegro, advocating for Montenegrin independence. However, the interview contained mostly generalities with little substance.

In the meantime, Vlado began working on his idea of gathering Goli Otok survivors as a political force. He refused to believe that the Goli Otok associations were already under the control of the authorities in Belgrade and Titograd. He thought those former prisoners would be excited to engage politically once again. Stubbornly, he rejected the notion that most of them had become “former people,” forced to make numerous compromises with the regime over the years. At a gathering of Goli Otok survivors in Belgrade, when Vlado appeared, the audience stood up and applauded, but the chairman of the meeting, writer Dragoslav Mihajlović, said, “Here’s our Vlado, but he’s only a guest here.”

As in his previous appearance at the forum in Titograd, the entire hall rose and applauded for several minutes. When Vlado took the microphone and said, “*We’ve been living with Albanians for 1,300 years in peace, and we should continue to live in peace!*” The room fell silent, followed by a wave of discontent. Some people stood up and started approaching Vlado with

threatening intent.

“I had my Beretta in my pocket, and I was ready to shoot, not allowing myself to be beaten like I was on Goli Otok.”

It took some time before Vlado heard and read the smears directed at him. Eventually, he threw in the towel and made his characteristic break, as he always did when he realized someone had irreversibly ended up on the other side of the barricade. But several important events unfolded before that final moment.

VLADO AT THE HELM OF THE KPJ

After returning to Vrbas, we concluded that we needed to “play the Vlado card.” I took the initiative and organized a KPJ forum in Vrbas. The poster announced that Mileta Perović, Vlado Dapčević and Milenko Perović would be speaking. I used a bit of trickery and boldness — without even informing Vlado. Mileta called me and said that Vlado refused to come because he wasn’t a member of the KPJ. I spent half an hour on the phone with Vlado, trying to convince him. Still, he wasn’t budging. I told him his name was already on the printed posters and that his presence was crucial for advancing our ideas in this region. In the end, I “broke” him and he agreed to come.

The cinema hall in Vrbas was packed. People were standing along the sides of the seating area. I moderated the forum, and after the polite but dry speeches from Mileta and Milenko, Vlado took the floor and spoke with passion. People were so inspired they approached the stage in excitement. His words struck the core of the issues. He especially criticized the Montenegrin colonists for supporting Milošević just because he was safeguarding their Tito-era pensions and allowing them to live in abandoned German houses, fearing they would lose them in these turbulent times. But his main focus was on fighting the impending war, urging everyone to wake up and prevent the evil that was coming.

Mileta returned to Belgrade, while Vlado stayed with us, visibly satisfied. I suggested to Vlado that he hold another forum in the neighbouring village of Lovćenac, where many of his fellow Katunjani from the same region of Montenegro lived. The event was organized by Vlado's friend Petar Vrbica. Though the turnout was good, we sensed a certain caution from the audience, likely due to their past suffering and the overall uncertainty in the society.

Vlado stayed at my place that night. Milenko and I had a long conversation with him. Our view was that we couldn't make any meaningful changes within the party without his help, and that he, too, couldn't influence much from the outside. He needed to join the party. Vlado agreed. He told us that Mileta was ill and would soon be going to Kiev for treatment and that he saw new strength in us — two key reasons for him joining the party.

He said: *"Now, slowly, we'll clean out everything that's wrong."*

Vlado's entry into the party and his appointment as party president while Mileta was undergoing treatment sparked a storm. Almost the entire membership of the NKPJ joined. This left Kitanović, the leader of that party, with only a small group of followers. Everyone wanted to join the KPJ because of Vlado. A bigger commotion ensued than ever before within the KPJ. The Central Committee now had 73 members, as if we were the Communist Party of China. Almost every third member was a member of the Central Committee.

The party was essentially composed of three main factions — the “Bar Party,” which held much of the control, our strong Vojvodina organization and Kitanović’s newcomers, which included some high-quality comrades like the poet Milan Nikolić from Kragujevac and academician Radonja Vešović, as well as members from other Yugoslav republics. The party had between two and three hundred members.

CONFLICTS

Vlado held a session of the Central Committee of the KPJ. In his speech, he was somewhat cautious, stating that we should support the so-called Western positions regarding the situation in Yugoslavia, which advocated for a peaceful resolution to the crisis, and that the JNA should maintain the unity of the country. This stance provoked a reaction, and rumours began to spread, especially in Montenegro, that Vlado was working for the West, as he was supporting their proposals.

The real conflict within the party began with Vlado's appearance on TV Sarajevo on July 9, 1991. Vlado always claimed that media interest in him was like the interest consumers have in a new product — temporary, until it fades away.

The interview on TV Sarajevo was certainly a novelty and a shock for a portion of the Bosnian public that year. In it, Vlado presented our views in a completely transparent and principled manner.

On his return to Yugoslavia:

"I said that I wasn't thinking of returning because I hadn't yet been granted permission to return to Yugoslavia. In the meantime, my eldest brother (Milutin), who had done a lot for me, passed away, and I couldn't even attend his funeral. As soon as the opportunity arose, I returned with joy. I asked if I could return without being arrested or persecuted again, privately through the journalist Ćuruvija, and I received a positive answer. I've suffered many times because of my naivety, but my

desire to return to Yugoslavia was so great that I seized the first opportunity and came back. Since my return, I haven't encountered any obstacles, nor has anyone summoned me... Coming back after 33 years was an immense joy for me because I am bound to this country with every drop of my blood. Perhaps it's because I've struggled so much here. And, to be literary for a moment — the land I literally soaked with my sweat, blood and tears. And for that reason, I love it immensely. When I saw nationalist madness taking hold, more or less across all the peoples of Yugoslavia, knowing what consequences this could bring to the country, I felt it was my duty to once again join the political battle, even though I am an old man with limited means, to do what I can to prevent the worst — to stop this country from sinking into a sea of blood, into interethnic and religious conflict.”

On Goli Otok:

“Goli Otok arose from a specific situation. People who considered themselves communists, and many perhaps believed they were, betrayed the cause they fought for and switched to the other side of the barricade — to the position of the class enemy. And, like all renegades, they persecuted those who remained loyal to socialism, to the communist idea, far more viciously than the class enemy would have.”

On the Yugoslav People's Army:

“The Yugoslav People's Army, as its name suggests, should be both Yugoslav and of the people, and should treat all nations objectively. Even the slightest bias can gravely compromise the JNA. We must remember that we are a multinational country, and everything happening around us inevitably

affects the army. Because of this, the JNA must act objectively toward all."

On Bosnia:

"To save this country, to prevent fratricidal war at all costs, especially here in Bosnia, because without Bosnia, there is no Yugoslavia, nor can Bosnia exist without Yugoslavia... If fratricidal conflict is allowed to break out here, rivers of blood will flow, not just streams. We must remain faithful and consistent to our past, to fight for Bosnia and Yugoslavia and not allow anyone in Bosnia to spread any interethnic hatred, because they are the same Ustaše and Chetniks we fought so successfully against."

Then Vlado went to Tuzla, where a statement of his was published in the press, accusing Milošević of destroying Yugoslavia. This caused a real uproar in the party. That evening, Branislav Dragović from the "Bar Group" and a member of the party leadership informed me that, due to Vlado's actions, the Political Bureau had decided to remove him from the leadership of the KPJ. I replied that I hadn't read his interview yet, but that only the Central Committee could remove him since they were the ones who elected him. After about fifteen minutes of persuasion, Dragović agreed to hold a Central Committee meeting.

I immediately called Mileta's sister, Senka, and told her I would be coming the next day and needed to urgently speak with Vlado. Mečo and I travelled to Belgrade. The problem was that two former "Kitanović men" were with Vlado, and he had been casually talking with them for hours. Later, we learn-

ed that their role was to distract and monitor him, something one of them admitted under pressure. We interrupted the conversation and asked Vlado to step outside with us. We went to a café near the Partizan football stadium. Vlado was completely caught off guard by our information, stunned and in total disbelief. We told him we were preparing for a Central Committee meeting and that we would do everything we could to ensure our line prevailed. Later, Senka told me that Vlado, who usually slept peacefully, kept waking up and getting out of bed that night.

The meeting was attended by 49 members of the Central Committee. Vlado chaired the meeting and gave the floor to those proposing his removal to explain their reasoning. After speeches from Jokić, Bošković, Dragović and others from the “Bar Group,” I realized they were ready for a compromise — Vlado wouldn’t be removed as long as he distanced himself from his statements. They were supported by Kitanović’s man, Renovčević, who declared that he wouldn’t allow the party to wrong the Serbian people a second time. Then the rest of the members stood up in defence of Vlado, defending his position on principle. Finally, Vlado took the floor and attacked them, not only for attempting to violate democratic centralism but also for accusing them of being agents, stating he had proof. Vlado was pushing the conflict to the extreme. The proposal to remove Vlado was supported by nine members of the Bar Group, three abstained, while 37 members opposed

the proposal. Left in an absolute minority, the Bar Group demonstratively walked out of the meeting, saying as they left: “We are the KPJ. We have the seals!” The meeting lasted from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Milenko, Mečo and I returned from the meeting satisfied. When I got home, I turned on the TV to see if there were any news updates. In the announcement for the evening news, there was a headline that the Central Committee of the KPJ had removed Vlado Dapčević and expelled him from the party. Up until then, there had never been any news about the KPJ on state television. I was stunned but immediately realized that the state machinery had kicked into gear and that we were entering a battle of “the lame against the horned.”

The “Barists” immediately tried to win Mileta Perović over to their side. They sent him materials and their version of the “dismissal of Vlado.” Mileta responded from Kiev on August 15, 1991:

“Dear Branko,

“I received your letter, a report from some gathering, and the ‘Report on the Split with Comrade Vlado Dapčević,’ which you, Momčilo Jokić, and four other comrades unknown to me signed, along with the Central Committee of the KPJ stamp and seal.

“First, I must tell you that both the letter and the ‘documents’ surprised me so much that I initially doubted their authenticity, as stamps and seals can easily be forged and misused, as you have done on this occasion. But

regardless of the improper form, I read your letter and the 'documents' countless times, and I couldn't find a single reason for this unprecedented attack on Comrade Vladimir Dapčević. In fact, you don't cite any authorized interview by him, only the writings of journalists from our republics. However, in your interpretation of Vlado's statements, I couldn't find the slightest reason, not even for the mildest rebuke, let alone for denouncing a fellow party member through external (mostly regime-controlled) mass media.

"Communist morality and political ethics regard such actions not only as a major moral offence but as a grave sin against the party. Good god, comrade, is it normal or permissible to air household disputes in the street?

"I cannot condone such a practice, which has no precedent, either as a person or as a communist. On the contrary, I categorically condemn it.

"Furthermore, your letter and 'documents' clearly show that you have grossly violated the Party's Statutes. You, a mere quarter of the Political Bureau, illegally, without the knowledge of the Political Bureau, the General Secretary or the Central Committee, removed Comrade Vlado Dapčević from his position as acting General Secretary. According to the KPJ Statutes, such an action requires a decision by the Central Committee of the KPJ. What this means and what consequences may arise, I leave to you to consider and to conscientiously, in a communist manner, review your position and inform not only the Cen-

tral Committee of the KPJ but also all Party members and the Yugoslav public through the media outlets where you published your previous unconstitutional decisions.

“If you do so, I will make every effort to ensure that the Central Committee of the Party and the communists assess your actions as leniently as possible, following the old saying, ‘What’s done cannot be undone,’ and I firmly believe in the possibility of resolving your case in this way.

“However, if you persist in holding onto your untenable positions, I will propose to the Central Committee the formation of a commission to thoroughly investigate your relationship with Comrade Vlado Dapčević, consisting of the following members... (a list of ten names).

“For now, that’s all. With respect, Mileta Perović.”

With this letter, Mileta and Vlado once again found themselves aligned. Mileta passed away a few months later. He would often say about Vlado: “Vlado is leagues ahead of us.”

UPHEAVAL, WAR IN SLOVENIA AND CROATIA

The armed conflicts in Yugoslavia cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader context of the so-called “collapse of communism” and events across Europe: the dissolution of the Soviet Union, regime changes in all Warsaw Pact countries, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany and the creation of a new concept of a united Europe. The uniqueness of the Yugoslav situation lay in the fact that the systemic crisis did not play out “as it should have.” Yugoslavia had, in fact, become a confederation by 1974, but now, amid a deep economic and political crisis, proponents of different concepts were fighting for dominance and the future structure of the country — either a return to a centralized, unitary system, or further confederalization. On one side were Croatia and Slovenia advocating further confederalization, while on the other side was Serbia pushing for a return to centralism and unitarism.

In this clash of republican bureaucracies, the reformist, pan-Yugoslav liberal concept of rapid privatization, championed by then-Prime Minister Ante Marković, was gaining more and more supporters. This concept was backed by the West, particularly the U.S. and other countries that supported the preservation of Yugoslavia. However, the national revisionist party bureaucracies were openly rallying under nationalist banners, especially in Belgrade and Zagreb, eager to consoli-

date power within their own borders. The only question remaining was how much of “their own” they could secure in the minds of the local imperialists.

The struggle between party bureaucracies inevitably led to a resurgence of the ideologies, mobilization and aggression of forces defeated during the Second World War — namely the Chetniks and Ustaše. Just as liberals had to retreat before the still “communist structures” in these lands, Titoism’s remnants were forced to make compromises and concede more and more to openly nationalist forces — Chetniks and Ustaše in all but name.

The events of 1991 unfolded rapidly, like a film reel.

The nationalist and anti-communist bloc, led primarily by the writer Vuk Drašković, held a rally in Belgrade on March 9, 1991, against the five-pointed star and for “media freedom,” challenging the “remnants of communism.” The rally turned into demonstrations and clashes with the police. Milošević, too, had to show force, deploying police and even receiving support from the still-federal JNA. With the help of tanks, a state of emergency was imposed in Belgrade. Soon after, the Milošević regime found a way to resolve the internal tensions and dissatisfaction of the inflamed nationalist masses, which it had itself incited: by “exporting” the conflict outside of Serbia. Belgrade pressured the JNA leadership to take matters into their own hands, providing institutional space for a military coup. The coup never materialized, but

in Slovenia and then in Croatia, the call for independence grew stronger. This provided the regime in Belgrade with two options: to demand that the JNA intervene, prevent secession from Yugoslavia and arrest the republican leaderships opposing Yugoslav unity, or to negotiate a peaceful separation with the Slovenes. Belgrade worked on both fronts: preserving Yugoslavia under its dominance, even in a truncated form, or, if that failed, creating a Serbia based on the ethnic territories of the Serbian people.

As the exponent of increasingly aggressive Great-Serb nationalism, Milošević continued to consolidate power in Serbia, quelling the remnants of autonomy movements in Vojvodina and openly clashing with the Albanian population in Kosova after the Kosova Assembly declared independence. In Kosova, Milošević used federal institutions to impose martial law, enforce a curfew and brutally suppress Albanian resistance.

The attempt to “discipline” Slovenia by organizing a rally in Ljubljana failed when the Slovenes banned the gathering, prompting Serbia to cut economic ties with Slovenia.

After Slovenia’s decision to secede, the JNA was deployed to prevent it. The Federal Yugoslav government formally made the decision to send the army into Slovenia. Slovenia mobilized and resisted with its modest but united forces. This so-called Ten-Day War revealed the complete incompetence of the JNA, leading to a military, political and, above all, moral collapse. It also exposed Serbia’s inten-

tion not to oppose Slovenia's exit from Yugoslavia. This gave Belgrade two powerful advantages: the opportunity to fully subjugate the JNA and to send a clear message to Croatia that it would not leave Yugoslavia without a fight. Now Milošević had to follow the plans of the Serbian nationalists, proclaiming some form of Yugoslavia on ethnically Serbian territories, which automatically meant war with Croatia and redrawing its borders.

In analysing the events in Yugoslavia, the role of the Counterintelligence Service (KOS), Tito's military intelligence, must also be highlighted, particularly its conflict with republican state security services, and later the roles of these services' cadres in the post-Yugoslav period, where they seized economic levers of power, often with the cooperation of foreign intelligence agencies.

In our party, we still formally adhered to the idea of recognizing all republics within their Anti-Fascist National Liberation Council (AVNOJ) borders. At the same time, we clearly saw events unfolding that signalled the division of Croatia along the line of Karlobag-Ogulin-Karlovac-Virovitica, as the war-mongering criminal Šešelj constantly advocated. This notion was shared by the Serbian "map-makers," writers like Vuk Drašković and Dobrica Ćosić, who carried maps under their arms and "negotiated" how to carve up Yugoslavia. Ćosić, the "father of the nation," later accepted the position of president of the so-called rump Yugoslavia but was eventually pushed aside when Milošević no longer

needed him. The fact that Ćosić transitioned from a former communist to a nationalist was not particularly surprising — what else could one become in a revisionist Yugoslavia but an even bigger nationalist or an even bigger liberal? Many never forgot or forgave him for his months-long journey with Tito on the *Galeb* ship, serving as the “court writer,” or his strutting around in white linen suits on Sveti Grgur, an island in the Adriatic that served as a women’s labour camp for Cominformists. There, with a notebook in hand, he tried to persuade Brana Marković to admit that Stalin had killed her husband, Sima Marković, a prominent Yugoslav communist, which she refused to do. According to Borislav Jović, a key figure in the Serbian leadership and Milošević’s right-hand man (if he can be believed), Ćosić’s stance was: “We must fight for the genetic map of Serbian space. That is the future space of Serbia. Kosova cannot be held. History teaches us that Serbs move northward. We have taken Vojvodina, and we can partition Kosova. This plan must be kept secret and activated at the critical moment.”

In an interview, Ćosić openly stated: “I do not recognize the AVNOJ borders. These are Comintern and communist borders.”

The list of primarily Serbian but also Croatian intellectuals who fancied themselves not only political architects but historical actors is long. When their poison was unleashed upon the Yugoslav peoples, it left behind tens of thousands of dead, massacred, raped, and hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

They justified their actions by claiming “mistakes” and downplayed their role in the devastation, mostly blaming the politicians.

Our party always emphasized the critical role and responsibility of intellectuals. Vlado often repeated: *“If we had a party of the same quality as before the Second World War, a party with ten thousand supporters, we would have driven out all these nationalists in Belgrade and Zagreb and saved Yugoslavia.”*

In Croatia, the nationalist Croatian Democratic Union, led by former Tito’s general Franjo Tudjman, won the elections. The Serbian population in Croatia perceived this as the revival of Ustaše ideology, with Belgrade’s propaganda fuelling fears by recalling the Ustaše massacres during the Second World War. Franjo Tudjman declared: “The Independent State of Croatia was not merely a puppet and fascist creation but also an expression of the historical aspirations of the Croatian people.” Meanwhile, a rally was held on Mount Petrova Gora by Serbs in Croatia under the slogan “This is Serbia,” filled with threats against the “Ustaše,” Tudjman and Ivica Račan.

Soon, tensions and conflicts escalated in Croatia under the banner of the “Log Revolution,” where Serbian residents blocked roads and declared certain territories as their own. The Croatian regime was preparing to declare independence, while Belgrade sought to prevent it by stirring up the Serbian population in Croatia and demanding the redefinition of existing borders.

At that time, Vlado's position was that the Serbian people should ally with the so-called democratic forces in Croatia against the Croatian nationalists. This was principled but unrealistic.

At the gatherings of Serbs in Croatia, groups from Belgrade were sent to fuel the nationalist fervour and provoke conflicts. While some representatives of the Serbian community in Croatia tried to negotiate with relevant forces, namely Tudjman, in hopes of a peaceful resolution, both Milošević and Tudjman were working to escalate the conflict — Milošević to redraw Croatia's borders and Tudjman to find a "final solution" to the Serbian question, viewing it as a disruptive factor and aiming to preserve Croatia within its "historical borders."

As a party, we were mere spectators of these events, without the strength to seriously influence anything. We engaged in minor propaganda efforts and decided that party members should not respond to military draft calls or participate in mobilization.

Two of our comrades couldn't evade the draft and ended up being mobilized. They fought in the Osijek and Vukovar battlefields. At a party meeting, I demanded that both be expelled from the party. However, I faced resistance from within the party, as one of them was an internationalist and a "party favourite." Still, I remained firm and insisted. After a long debate, the decision to expel them was made. This was necessary to maintain the ideological unity of the party. After nearly

a year, we readmitted the internationalist to the party. He then expressed his full self-criticism, saying: "I will never forgive myself for ordering the firing of seven shells at our Croatian brothers."

Some members of the Vrbas organization managed to evade mobilization thanks to my cousin, who worked in the military office and agreed to withhold draft notices for acquaintances, mostly along Montenegrin lines, so they wouldn't be sent to the front. However, the poor Rusyn, Hungarian and other minority populations were mobilized, proving their loyalty to the Serbian regime.

In Vrbas, two locals played key roles in the war propaganda in the media: Milijana Baletić, reporting from the Dubrovnik front, and Petko Koprivica, covering the Slavonian front. Later, Petko became the lead announcer for the evening news, spreading interethnic hatred and propaganda lies every night with his booming voice. Yet, when slightly drunk, he would ironically and quite candidly say to those gathered in the café: "I'm off to spread some Chetnik propaganda."

The war in internationally recognized Croatia triggered action from the so-called international community, which became particularly active after the peak of military operations around Vukovar, its fall, and the entry of Serbian forces, still under the Yugoslav name. A situation of mediation arose, and a ceasefire was reached, along with secret agreements between Milošević and Tudjman, not only regarding the end of the war in Cro-

atia but also their plans to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

THE RALLY IN TITOGRAD

In February 1992, we travelled to Titograd, which would change its name to Podgorica two months later.

At the time, the situation in Montenegro was becoming increasingly complicated. The “young Montenegrin leadership” was in power, to which Vlado often remarked, *“Youth is no excuse. I’ve seen 17-year-old SS soldiers commit horrific crimes.”*

The war in Croatia had been going on for more than half a year. Although Montenegro was not officially involved in the war, it had sent so-called volunteers to Herzegovina and Dubrovnik with the support of the army. Alongside the war frenzy and euphoria, resistance to the war was also growing in Montenegro, splitting the country between those supporting the war effort and those opposing it. Among the opponents of the war, the Liberal Alliance, led by Slavko Perović, stood out. After several smaller gatherings, especially in Cetinje, the Liberal Alliance, together with the Social Democratic Party, rare intellectuals and anti-fascists, organized a rally in Titograd called “For a Sovereign Montenegro.” On the same day, at the same square, the government organized a counter-rally “For Yugoslavia,” composed mainly of supporters of the Democratic Party of Socialists (formerly the League of Communists of Montenegro) and the pro-Serbian Chetnik-oriented People’s Party.

Our party decided to attend the rally and

support the anti-war policy while encouraging the struggle for Montenegrin sovereignty. I travelled with five comrades, and Vlado joined us in Titograd.

Two groups gathered in the square. The “For Montenegro” group had several thousand people, fewer than the “For Yugoslavia” crowd. A police cordon separated the two gatherings. The “sovereignists” displayed old Montenegrin flags, while the other group prominently displayed the Yugoslav flag with the red star.

At the “sovereignist” rally, people sang and chanted: “O bright May dawn, our mother, Montenegro,” “O, heroic cradle of ours, viva vero Montenegro,” “Montenegro will have no peace, as long as Milo and Momir are around,” “E viva, e viva, e viva Montenegro” and “Montenegro may be small, but it will be sovereign.”

Vlado informed us that the rally organizers had asked if he would speak. I saw that Vlado was hesitant and asked for our opinion, so we all discussed it. I asked each comrade individually, and they all agreed that Vlado should speak. We knew the potential consequences of his speech, especially since we had just dealt with the presence of Serbian nationalism within the party. We were aware that Vlado’s speech could be used in propaganda against us, accusing us of supporting the Montenegrin nationalists.

Before Vlado, Boško Djureković spoke — a pre-war member of the KPJ, participant in the July 13 Uprising in 1941, fighter in the

National Liberation War, recipient of the Partisan Memorial, People's Hero of Yugoslavia and Colonel General of the JNA. As Vlado made his way through the crowd, people recognized him and began chanting his name. At the beginning of his speech, Vlado seemed a bit tense, carefully choosing his words.

He started by addressing those who had died on the Dubrovnik front, in the war against Croatia. He said: "I feel sorry for Montenegro's youth and those young lives that were lost in vain. But they have brought shame upon Montenegro."

The rally organizers tried to stop him due to his "harsh words," but Vlado couldn't be stopped:

"Serbia and Slobodan Milošević are not the same. The vast majority of Serbia is against Milošević's disastrous, criminal policy and the scum surrounding him. No matter how Yugoslavia is reorganized, Montenegro must be a separate, truly sovereign state.

"The entire policy of Milošević and that group has inevitably led to a bloody fratricidal war, the worst destruction and crimes this country has ever seen. We have no reason to support Momir and his cronies either, as they have continuously pursued an anti-Montenegrin and anti-Yugoslav policy as lackeys of Slobodan Milošević. The policy of the Memorandum was an anti-Yugoslav policy, a policy of fratricidal hatred and war."

The crowd became euphoric.

The rally ended with a speech by Slavko Perović, but as soon as it concluded, the police began to remove the cordon, and the

“Yugoslavists” pushed the “sovereignists” back. They moved forward with the Yugoslav tricolour, chanting “Yugoslavia, Yugoslavia” and raising three fingers, singing, “Who says, who lies, that Serbia is small. It’s not small, it’s not small, it fought in three wars...” They were indeed for Yugoslavia, but with a Chetnik heart.

We were satisfied with the outcome and continued our journey across Montenegro. But that wasn’t the end. That evening, a special broadcast aired on Montenegrin television, featuring Momir Bulatović, President of Montenegro, Slavko Perović as a representative of the rally organizers and several other participants, where Vlado’s speech was condemned. None of the participants defended him. Momir Bulatović, with his characteristic sweet smile, began his attack on Vlado with the words: “Comrade Vlado, pardon me, ha ha, now Mr. Vlado...”

But even that wasn’t the end. Titograd’s *Pobjeda* newspaper launched an orchestrated smear campaign. They attacked politicians, prominent public figures, and members of the Albanian and Muslim (Bosniak) communities in Montenegro, particularly the sovereignists: Slavko Perović, the leader of the Montenegrin liberals, Montenegrin writer in exile Jevrem Brković and, of course, Vlado Dapčević. The campaign also targeted the editorial policy of the independent weekly *Monitor* and its authors.

The second page of *Pobjeda* was dedicated to reader responses, and for nearly a month, it

published attacks on Vlado and other rally participants. The attacks on Vlado mostly came from Goli Otok survivors and former partisans. On our return to Belgrade, we read *Pobjeda* and these reactions. The attacks affected Vlado, but when he read one that labelled him a “three-time traitor,” he paused: “*How, damn it, three times? Alright, if they consider me a traitor for ‘48, and now. But the third time? I don’t get it. Unless they consider the 1941 uprising a betrayal...*” And then he started laughing like a child.

THE PARTY OF LABOUR

Vlado attempted, through statements and denials, to counter the false portrayal of the KPJ in his name, even naively considering starting a legal battle. However, this was a waste of time with minimal chances of success. Milenko and I believed we should move forward with a new name for the organization. We knew that the “other KPJ” was doomed to failure in the long run, given the people involved, the lack of a clear program and the regime’s preference for backing the NKPJ which, with its social chauvinism, was at least somewhat useful to them by creating confusion on the so-called left.

With that proposal, in early March 1992, I travelled to Belgrade. Vlado received me in what was now his apartment, which he had obtained due to his status as a first-time fighter and holder of the Partisan Memorial, a relic of Tito’s laws. The 48-square-metre apartment was located on Ruzvelt Street. It consisted of a small kitchen, a bathroom, a tiny hallway, a living room and a bedroom. Vlado’s comrades from Belgrade had managed to find some furniture to equip the apartment. Most of it was old and worn out. In the living room, there was a couch, three armchairs, a picture on the wall, a small table and a larger table covered with newspapers and books, along with a very old phone that looked like something out of a war movie. It was a rather ascetic environment. We spent two days there, talking.

At one point, Vlado went to the wardrobe

in the bedroom and pulled out a folder. Inside was a newspaper clipping from *Borba*, which had been the first to publish serials about Goli Otok survivors sharing their testimonies from the camp. In Serbia, and in other parts of Yugoslavia, discussions had begun about the need to rehabilitate Goli Otok prisoners and all political prisoners of the “communist regime,” which most Goli Otok survivors supported. The clipping was about my reaction against rehabilitation, in which I had stated that only those who had faltered could demand rehabilitation. Vlado had circled and cut out the article.

I returned to Vrbas. Although I hadn't completely convinced Vlado about the need for a new party name, he said he would think about it. We immediately held a meeting of the Vojvodina organization, where thirty of us decided that if the KPJ's name were to be changed, the new party should be called the Communist Party of Internationalists. We felt it was important to distinguish ourselves from all the other parties calling themselves communist, which were essentially nationalist.

A week later, Milenko and I went back to Belgrade with the proposal for the new name. Kosana Milošević, a former Cominformist prisoner who had been arrested as a lieutenant and endured the torture of women's camps, was with Vlado. She had a sharp sense of people's character, having worked in personnel departments after the war. She was from Lijeva Rijeka in Montenegro, like Slobodan Milošević's father, and they were distant

relatives. Once again, we presented Vlado with the argument for changing the party's name. After a brief pause, he agreed. Kosana also agreed, provided we didn't lose people. I suggested the party be called the Communist Party of Internationalists and explained why. Vlado immediately responded, saying that the term "communist" had been compromised by both revisionists and nationalists who wielded it, and that it should be avoided in the party's name. He cited Lenin's proposal to remove the word "social-democratic" from the party's name because the term had been compromised in the workers' movement. Vlado proposed naming the party the Party of Labour. After a brief hesitation, Milenko agreed, explaining that "labour" is one of the fundamental principles of Marx's theory. I opposed the name, as I was bound by the decision of the organization. Kosana sided with Vlado's proposal. Left in the minority, I accepted the majority's decision.

Upon returning to Vrbas, I called a new meeting. I had to explain to the comrades why we had abandoned our proposed name for the party. I said I had been in the minority and had to accept the majority's decision. The comrades reluctantly, and with some reservations, accepted the proposal for the new party name. However, we had already "crossed the Rubicon" and rid ourselves of the burden of Serbian nationalism in the party, which was the most important thing.

The founding assembly of the Party of Labour was held in Belgrade on March 28,

1992. Around fifty members attended. Vlado explained why we were adopting a new name, noting that we were almost blocked, that there was another group calling itself the KPJ that was causing confusion and had the regime's backing, and that this could go on indefinitely, but events were dictating that we move forward. Some attendees objected to the name change and the removal of "communist" from the title, and a few left the party later. Milenko presented the party's program, which he had written, and there were no significant objections. Then it was my turn to explain the party's statutes, and that's when an issue arose — why the emblem featured only a red star and not the hammer and sickle. I had to explain that the circle represented totality, that the red star filled that totality, and that the party would still use the hammer and sickle as its symbols. In the end, the majority accepted the new party name. The leadership was elected, with Vlado at the head to prepare the congress.

We were particularly pleased that Milosav Petrović, also known by his partisan name Mića Kolubarac, from a prominent Serbian family from Ub that had suffered under the occupiers during the First World War, joined the party's leadership. His brother had wrapped the Yugoslav tricolour around his body and carried it to the top of the Albania Palace, then the tallest building in Belgrade, during the liberation of the city. Mića had been sent to Goli Otok. He retained the "Bolshevik spirit of a communist," particularly in

his understanding of the party, its duties, and the responsibilities of its members. He would later be a great support and role model, especially to the younger members.

Vlado, satisfied, returned to Belgium to be with his wife Micheline and daughter Milena. We stayed behind to continue expanding the party. The work was like mining — gruelling and never-ending. I threw myself fully into daily activism. All the responsibilities of caring for our two children fell to my wife. We built the party's structure in Vojvodina, Belgrade, other parts of Serbia and even a bit in Montenegro. The party grew with new members. I remembered Milet's stance, which had bothered me — his focus on quantity over quality.

In Vrbas, our base was mostly composed of young people from partisan families, like Raško Koprivica, Slavko Višnjić, Zoran Miljanić and others. A group of workers from the factories, led by Djoko Pokrajac, joined, as did Slavko Grubač from Bačko Dobro Polje with his relatives, along with about ten bus drivers and conductors from the station. All of them came from the Titoite era with their own understanding of “communism” and the party. There were also members from Crvenka, like Ante Bošnjak, who wanted to materially support the party, and Djoko Pejović, known as “the four-motor” (he was imprisoned twice on Goli Otok and another two times in regular prisons), with an incredible sense of humour even in his eighties. A portrait of Stalin hung on his wall. Another important figure

was Slobodan Plavšić from Kruščić, whom we nicknamed the Internationalist because of his connections with the Cubans. In the 1960s, he was persecuted by the State Security for raising a red flag on his house during Cuban holidays. He was quite isolated in his village, considered an oddball, especially since, as a self-taught veterinarian, he provided free help to the villagers with their livestock. He proudly kept a letter from Castro and decorated his walls with portraits of revolutionaries — from Marx, Engels, Stalin, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Che and Castro. Later, he added a special portrait of Vlado. My brother Dragan and wife Ljiljana joined the party. In Novi Sad, Nedjo Krivokapić was active. In Belgrade, there was a group of Goli Otok survivors working with a student named Milan Cvetković.

The greatest gain for the party during that period was the membership of the student and young poet Nenad Glišić Gile, with the help of the poet Milan Nikolić from Kragujevac. We immediately saw that he was a promising future cadre for the party, and he soon brought Saša Marković and a few other young people from Kragujevac into the party. Around the same time, Comrade Ismet Adrović, an exceptional cadre with a long history in the communist movement, contacted us from abroad. The party was growing both in numbers and in terms of cadre quality. However, this also required significant internal party work with new members.

We began our activism in front of factories. We distributed leaflets with class-based

content to workers. The workers were disinterested, with one even responding, "I'll work for Hitler as long as he pays me!" Simply put, our leaflets with that kind of phraseology and slogans didn't resonate, partly due to the nationalism that had taken hold of the working class, the atmosphere of war and the collapse of "socialist industry," where the imposed understanding of so-called social ownership was that "what belongs to everyone belongs to no one."

We launched the party's *Bulletin*, a small brochure printed in about a hundred copies. We printed it illegally in a state printing house, thanks to a sympathizer who secretly printed it at night, along with all the other propaganda materials.

The ideological framework for our texts in the *Bulletin* was not only given by the party's basic documents but also by Vlado's earlier statements, which he frequently repeated:

"The roots of everything lie in 1948. That's when Yugoslavia shifted from the positions of proletarian internationalism to general Yugoslav nationalism. And that nationalism necessarily had to be transferred later to the republics and regions..." or, as journalists liked to highlight in their headlines: *"I tip my hat to Tito for his wartime merits, but for '48, I'd take his head off."*

Usually, I would draft rough theses for the main text, and then Milenko would refine them to give it a more theoretical form. In '92 and '93, we essentially formulated our positions and later only supplemented them.

— The Party of Labour grows out of the

tradition of the struggle of the international communist and workers' movement to overcome the general principles of the bourgeois era, the essence of capitalist society, and all the fundamental economic, political, cultural and mass-psychological consequences that affect the modern human being.

— Analysts who, in their reflections on political reality, start from the Marxist method of thought and analysis, who understand the essence of capital relations and its tendency for planetary expansion, see nothing new in the so-called “latest” world processes except the old ambition of the world of capital to dominate the entire world, to fully capitalize it, to impose its measure on things and dictate all the rules of “life’s expression.”

— The West made Yugoslavia into such a “flexible” type of state and social structure that, on the one hand, was constantly instrumentalized for the purpose of defence against the communist threat from the East (thus Yugoslavia was maintained as a relatively strong state and military structure). At the same time, it performed the “job” in the international workers’ movement, among countries liberated from colonialism, and in general — among the countries of the so-called Third World — and that job was being the “Trojan horse” of the capitalist world, aiming to direct the revolutionary energy in those movements and countries against the potential global proletarian synthesis.

— On the other hand, the West systematically fuelled and maintained internal Yugoslav

contradictions (national, religious, social and regional), which, according to specific historical circumstances, would enable the “cordon sanitaire” to break once there was no longer a political or military need for it. Such a “floating” policy was possible based on the reality created after 1948 (the mutualist model of ideology and social-state organization), and it was implemented through political and economic pressures and blackmail (from constitutional solutions to regional planning of industrial development).

— Based on these premises, it is possible to explain the so-called change in the West’s stance on the issue of “Yugoslav unity.” The collapse of the Soviet Union had to bring with it the collapse of the Yugoslav “cordon sanitaire” set up against the Soviet Union. The “cordon” lost its purpose, and there was no longer any need to finance its continued existence with substantial resources.

— The new Western concept regarding the East, in which Yugoslavia appears as an indispensable part, is a concept of fragmenting the state tissues of former socialist countries, based on encouraging existing or fabricated national, religious and other contradictions. The fragmentation of newly emerged national states is a model for establishing more lasting Western dominance over the East.

— However, an essential question arises: if the existence of the Yugoslav community rested on the strength of the Yugoslav idea, how could it happen that this community collapsed twice in this century in a sea of blood?

The answer is not hard to find: Yugoslavia disintegrated because of the militant nationalism that had taken over the political consciousness of its peoples! Where are the roots of this nationalism? How was it possible that during the fifty years of the so-called socialist order in Yugoslavia, such a political opponent was not restrained, especially knowing very well that it was from that opponent that Yugoslavia could most likely be destroyed, along with that so-called socialist order?

— The Party of Labour believes that the roots of nationalism lie at the heart of the collapse of the socialist revolution in Yugoslavia, which occurred in 1948. The ruling oligarchy of Yugoslavia at that time destroyed the foundations of the revolution in which it had participated, provoked a conflict with the Soviet Union and the international communist and workers' movement, abandoned the most authentic socialist revolutions and proletarian internationalism, and sided with the imperialist and bourgeois forces of the world for “a handful of dollars”... The leading intellectual elites in all Yugoslav nations spiritually prepared the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Nationalist political bureaucracies systematically worked for decades on its internal dissolution, and the so-called collapse of socialism — i.e., the legitimization of the anti-communist nature of society and the open restoration of capitalism — led to its final breakup through war.

The second fundamental reason, closely linked to the first, is the deep economic crisis

that Yugoslavia had fallen into. After 1948, Yugoslavia based its economic development on generous Western aid. This was the price of betraying the revolution. In this regard, the speed of economic development was not established from the stability of the economic system, but from non-refundable aid from the West and favourable loans, which allowed the ruling bureaucracy to control social and class contradictions in society without major difficulties, even to work on establishing elements of a consumer society and producing wide middle layers. By the late 1980s, due to changes in the West's strategy regarding Yugoslavia's role as a "showcase" of consumer "paradise" facing the East, the economic crisis deepened, the standard of living declined and, in turn, the political crisis worsened. The accelerated process of impoverishment of the working class, peasants and middle strata facilitated the rise of nationalist movements and the gradual fascization of society. War was the inevitable outcome of Yugoslavia's economic collapse.

The third cause of Yugoslavia's breakup was already indicated in the previous one. Yugoslavia's complete economic and political dependence on the West, its reliance on its role as a "cordon sanitaire" against the East, meant complete dependence on the global outcome of the superpower confrontation. The West's strategy after the "fall of communism" was to fragment and divide all Eastern states so that they wouldn't rise into a serious power opposing Western interests for a long time.

The fourth cause of Yugoslavia's collapse relates to the difficulties of the modern existence and functioning of multinational federative states. The first Yugoslavia collapsed due to the inability to resolve the national question and the growing conflict between national bourgeoisies over the model of organizing a multinational state. The second Yugoslavia collapsed again because national bureaucracies, rejecting the communist, internationalist principle, objectively began to act like national bourgeoisies.

VLADO'S WORKDAY

While Vlado was staying in Belgrade, I would visit him every Friday afternoon and return on Sunday evening. Vlado would sleep in the bedroom, while I slept on the couch in the living room. He would wake up around 7 a.m., and by that time, I was already awake. Vlado would spend almost half an hour in the bathroom each morning, showering and shaving. Then, he would go to the bedroom and choose his clothes from an old wardrobe. He had quite a refined taste in dressing, although I think this was largely due to the influence of his wife, Micheline. She was meticulous about making sure he always wore quality clothing — from shoes, underwear, shirts, ties and suits, to coats and jackets. Everything was high-quality, made from the finest cotton, cashmere and velvet.

He would enter the living room fully dressed, sit down and quickly scan the headlines of the newspapers I had already brought. We would have breakfast around 8 a.m. in the small kitchen. He always drank tea, rarely coffee. He brought black tea from Belgium and enjoyed explaining its origin and health benefits. He would talk about why lemon shouldn't be added to hot tea immediately or whether sugar or lemon should be added first, considering their different chemical properties. Butter was always on the table, as well as aspirin every morning, for his heart. I traditionally opposed all kinds of medicine and told him that it was more of a placebo effect. During

breakfast, we would discuss internal party developments. Afterwards, we would move back to the living room, where he would work on crossword puzzles from the newspapers. I found this amusing, but he would “justify” it by saying it was a way to exercise his memory and prevent forgetfulness. Then, the analysis of the news we had read would begin.

Although he was a passionate smoker, he wouldn't light a cigarette until around 10 a.m. He did this with particular pleasure. Slowly, he would tear off the filter from the cigarette and light it. He smoked slowly, as if wanting the cigarette to last as long as possible. He treated cigarettes with care, as though saving them — likely a consequence of the war, his time on Goli Otok and other prisons, where a cigarette was a true treasure. Just as he smoked his cigarettes slowly, lunch with Vlado was a marathon. Although he wasn't a gourmet, he behaved like the Russian nobility who would eat for hours. While he ate for a shorter time, he enjoyed pausing mid-meal and engaging in a conversation for half an hour.

Around ten or eleven, various visitors would start arriving.

I knew almost all of Vlado's answers to the visitors' questions by heart. This was due to his incredible memory. I eventually realized that his exceptional memory wasn't just a result of genetic predisposition but also of his years in prison, where he would constantly analyse his past life in minute detail. All these memories and thoughts had passed through his mind so often that they were permanent-

ly etched in. In his stories about his past, you couldn't add even a comma — everything was as precise as if recorded on tape.

Sometimes, the conversations with these visitors were tiring for me, especially when they involved people I couldn't stand. But Vlado thought it was important to “explain” things to them. Many weren't even interested in his explanations, seeing him as a “relic of the past,” or they admired him so much that they enjoyed simply speaking with him. This gave rise to the ongoing “conflict” between Vlado and me, which lasted in various forms until his death. He believed we should use every opportunity to spread our ideas, and while I could accept that, based on Lenin's views about using the bourgeois press, I couldn't tolerate certain people he met with — our ideological enemies or people of weak character. In those situations, I would always avoid contact with them, not even wanting indirect engagement.

Vlado would always tell me: *“These media and others use me as a new kind of detergent, as long as I'm interesting to them, until they use me up.”*

Occasionally, Stevan Mirković would visit — Tito's general and former Chief of the General Staff of the JNA. Stevan dedicated himself to preserving Yugoslavia but didn't understand all aspects of politics. He honestly admitted that he had even volunteered to “defend Knin from the Ustaše in 1991.” He was one of the founders of the League of Communists — Movement for Yugoslavia, a party

of generals, as it was called, because it was mainly composed of military personnel. He later clashed with Mira Marković, Slobodan Milošević's wife, who took control of the party and merged it with the Yugoslav United Left (JUL). Afterwards, he accurately described the relationship between Milošević and Mira: "She steers the bicycle, and he just pedals."

Stevan would visit without ulterior motives or to complain. He remained a committed Titoite, and his relationship with Vlado was almost friendly, with mutual respect. Sometimes they would have lunch together at the small table in the living room.

To Vlado's surprise, Dragoljub Mićunović once stopped by — a former Goli Otok prisoner turned professor, opposition leader, liberal and one of the leaders of the so-called democratic forces. He came to complain that Zoran Djindjić had taken over his party while he was in the United States, ousted him as the leader of the Democratic Party, and seized the million marks they had in the party's treasury. A decade later, Mićunović played a significant role in toppling Milošević and even became president of the Serbia and Montenegro Assembly.

Vlado was visited by party members, former Goli Otok prisoners, many journalists for interviews, and, occasionally, a relative or two who rarely stopped by.

The son of Kadja Petričević, with long hair and living in difficult conditions, once came by. He wanted Vlado to explain whether his father had truly recanted, something

he couldn't accept. Vlado carefully tried to explain that his father had been a great and deserving man but that he had broken at one point, something he needed to come to terms with. However, I could see that Vlado's explanation had little effect.

A filmmaker once arrived with his camera. The filming started well, but as the smell of roasting meat began to waft from the kitchen, the filmmaker became more interested in the food than the filming, frequently leaving to check on the pot. At one point, Vlado stood up and said:

"The filming is over!"

The look on Vlado's face prompted the filmmaker to hurriedly pack up his equipment, leaving without the footage — and without the meal.

Ljubo Dapčević, Vlado's close relative, would visit late at night. He ran casinos and restaurants in Belgrade and belonged to the criminal underworld. Ljubo would announce his visit around 8 p.m. and show up with a bottle of whisky since Vlado rarely had any alcohol at home, nor did he care much about it. A trait of people who don't enjoy drinking. I would withdraw to the room, knowing that Ljubo had a need to engage in ideological sparring with Vlado, constantly teasing him, while Vlado would remind him of the world he belonged to and his youthful criminal adventures in Paris. Ljubo would leave around midnight after finishing the bottle of whisky. He later helped organize Vlado's funeral. He met a tragic end, killed by his wife, who also took

her own life after emptying almost an entire magazine into him and their daughter.

One day, Vlado “tested” the endurance of young party members who had gathered from all over. He began his talk at 9 a.m. and didn’t finish until 11 p.m. — a full 14 hours. I only prepared a small meal for him once and gave him tea. Some couldn’t endure it. Later, I teasingly told him: “You’re like Castro. He’d keep people on the square for two days in the blazing sun.”

I especially enjoyed it when Martin Opančar, Vlado’s friend from Goli Otok who had emigrated to Hungary, would visit. The three of us felt completely “at home” then. Martin had been married four times and had a daughter in Belgrade. He was almost “in love” with Vlado, always looking at him with a constant smile. He always carried a camera and would photograph Vlado hundreds of times.

I first met Martin when I travelled to Budapest with Slavko Višnjić from Vrbas and Nataša Omerkić from Tuzla. Vlado gave an interview there to a comrade from a Belgian communist party, and we tried to see if there was any concrete potential for more serious political work in Hungary.

Martin had played a significant role in Vlado’s life during his kidnapping in Bucharest. He had managed to get information from a Hungarian intelligence contact, who had relayed a tip from his agent in the Romanian police that a plot to abduct Vlado in Bucharest was underway. Martin immediately called Micheline in Brussels, but it was already too

late — Vlado had been kidnapped by Yugoslav state security and transferred to Yugoslavia, with two of his comrades killed. However, the news gave Micheline enough time to mobilize her family connections in the Belgian government and alert the public, thus preventing Vlado's planned execution or death sentence.

Before leaving, a departure that was clearly difficult for him, Martin would take one last photo, smiling and wistfully repeating: "Ehhh, Vlado, Vlado..."

BOSNIA, BOSNIA

After Vlado's alarming interview on TV Sarajevo and his warning about the impending disaster and the need for everyone to mobilize to prevent the war, Bosnia became our main concern and "open wound." We felt powerless to do anything concrete. Preserving the unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina was a matter of life and death for us because we knew that this was the foundation for breaking the grip of nationalism across Yugoslavia. Vlado had a sentimental attachment to Bosnia, having spent his best years there during the war.

"The preservation and strengthening of a united Bosnia and Herzegovina is important not only because all the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina will live together, blending their cultures, customs and habits as they have for centuries, but also because the existence or non-existence of a united Bosnia has tremendous significance for the future of all the people of Yugoslavia. It's no coincidence that bitter enemies — Serbian and Croatian nationalists — agreed to divide Bosnia and create some form of a 'Greater Serbia' and 'Greater Croatia,' aiming to either kill or expel the Bosniaks (Muslims) from Bosnian territory. They wanted to divide Bosnia because a divided Bosnia means the destruction of the idea of rebuilding Yugoslavia."

We wrote: "The war conflicts from Croatia inevitably had to spill over into Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Party of Labour continually emphasized in its addresses to the people that Bosnia was the cornerstone and guaran-

tee of any possible future union of our peoples and that the fate of the two most powerful and dangerous nationalisms in the region — Serbian and Croatian — was being decided there. The destruction of Bosnia meant delaying the possibility of forming such a future union.

“Despite the fact that nationalism had also begun to take root among the Muslims, their fundamental political nature was for Yugoslavia. It was in Yugoslavia that they experienced national, social and spiritual-cultural affirmation. Therefore, it was easy to predict that in the event of Yugoslavia’s dissolution, they would pay the highest price — being squeezed, marginalized and threatened by both Serbian and Croatian nationalism. Before and during the war, the Muslims had no real choice. Aligning with Croatian nationalism would put them under attack from Serbian nationalism. Aligning with Serbian nationalism would put them under attack from Croatian nationalism and lead to the loss of their national identity. By seeking a united Bosnia and an independent Muslim state in Bosnia, they would come under attack from both Serbian and Croatian local imperialism. The lack of real choice for the Muslims and the expansionist plans of Belgrade and Zagreb for the territorial division of Bosnia (with the later annexation of conquered territories to Serbia or Croatia) completely defined the nature of the war events in Bosnia.

“Muslims (Bosniaks), in this war that was entirely imposed on them and for which they were the least prepared, grew into a modern

national entity — not as an ‘invented’ nation, not as ‘Croatian flowers,’ nor as ‘Serbs by origin,’ but as a nation that, through the experience of war, gained national consciousness, self-respect, and recognition of political and spiritual sovereignty. The price of this recognition was certainly enormous, in terms of human casualties, suffering and material losses. However, from their position as the designated victims, the Muslims transformed themselves into something Serbian and Croatian conquerors of Bosnia least expected — a fully-fledged nation! This fact holds deep historical significance because it proves to be the main bulwark against Serbian and Croatian expansionist plans for Bosnia.

“Therefore, the vast majority of the Muslim nation, along with all those forces within the Serbian and Croatian peoples of Bosnia who unwaveringly stood for a united Bosnia and Herzegovina, could become the only political force capable of restoring the multinational, democratic and united state community of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only such a united state can serve as the foundation for breaking Serbian and Croatian nationalism and as a bulwark against their current and future expansionist endeavours.”

In the Party of Labour, we rejoiced at every success and advance of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. With full hearts, we distributed a leaflet across Serbia, which concluded with the statement: “Bosnia will not be divided because it cannot be divided!”

During Operation “Storm,” Croatia lib-

erated its territory, giving the Croatian regime the opportunity to expel a large part of the Serbian population. Columns of refugees from Croatia, under attack from the Bosnian army, poured into Banja Luka. In that situation, the U.S. warned Alija Izetbegović, the Bosniak leader, that if his forces entered Banja Luka, the U.S. military, which had previously bombed Serbian positions around Sarajevo, would now bomb his units as well.

The columns of refugees then moved towards Serbia, mainly heading for Belgrade. However, Milošević did not allow them to enter Belgrade or Kosova, aware of the potential consequences. He even attacked the leader of the Croatian Serbs, Martić, saying, “You fled from Croatia like dogs,” despite already having agreed with Tudjman: “Take that, Franjo. Western Bosnia doesn’t interest me.”

Thus, most of the refugees ended up in Vojvodina. From the perspective of Great-Serb nationalism, this was a smart move because it changed the demographic structure of Vojvodina, creating a strong base for Great-Serb ideology, which had already captivated the masses. Playing on their support later paid off in maintaining power and dominating over the so-called autonomism and multi-ethnicity in Vojvodina. However, in the long term, these new “arrivals” also held the potential for resistance to Belgrade itself.

Columns of refugees also appeared in Vrbas. They were housed together in the sports hall. Despite the August heat, local “tennis players” indifferently passed by

the refugees, unwilling to miss their regular match. Women from the neighbourhood organized themselves, preparing and bringing food, water and drinks for the refugees.

Vlado remarked: *“The war in Bosnia raged for four years, with the U.S. and NATO not intervening in the conflict. They watched the destruction of the people of Bosnia with indifference, witnessing the worst atrocities, genocides and more. However, when the danger arose that the war would spread from Bosnia, through Kosova and Macedonia, across the entire Balkans, jeopardizing the global interests of U.S. imperialism and threatening to cause events to spiral out of control — leading to war between two NATO members, Turkey and Greece, which were strategically crucial — the U.S., as the global superpower, intervened, deciding to end the war. They forced Milošević and Tudjman to sign the Dayton Agreement, which would guarantee a unified Bosnia, preserve it as a state, ensure the return of refugees to their homes, allow freedom of movement and punish war criminals.”*

Nearly two decades later, we stood with the rebellious Bosnian masses, who were protesting the worsening social situation and feeling that they had fought in vain, only for some to get rich and strengthen a corrupt system. At that time, in a spontaneous surge, the masses burned down major state institutions. Interestingly, among the protesters was our comrade Erna, one of those who had fled Bosnia as a refugee. Not only that, but this same comrade carried the May Day banner in Belgrade, blocking the workers’ procession

with the intent to direct them towards Serbia's state institutions and replicate the actions of the Bosnian masses from two years earlier. The police reacted swiftly and prevented it. The banner bore the symbolic inscription: "No more marches. Bosnia, Bosnia."

INTERVIEWS, TRIBUNES AND SCHOOLS

Journalists often tried to portray Vlado as a remnant of the past. Given the circumstances and ideological positions in which they lived, it was natural for them to view him this way, calling him “The Last of the Mohicans.”

Vlado would respond:

“I am more or less like any other person, an ordinary man. By the force of circumstances, I was placed in situations where I had to participate in struggles that sometimes exceeded my abilities and strength. I tried to do it as best I could. I have no reason to renounce either my communist past or present. If someone else had been in my place, they might have done it better and smarter than I did.

“In my basic ideological positions, I wouldn’t change anything because the goal I fought for all my life has not yet been achieved. As for imperialism, it hasn’t changed in essence — it’s only become even more imperialistic, more monopolistic (multinational corporations, holdings, etc.), and economically, morally and politically more ripe than ever to be replaced by socialism.”

Vlado was invited to tribunes that involved various professors. The professors would “stick to their stories,” while Vlado would try to ignite activism among the audience, mostly students. At one tribune, he stood up and interrupted the professors, “entrenched in their intellectual trenches” and unable to break free from their scholastic stereotypes and habits:

“All of this is smoke and mirrors. War is ahead of us, and if we don’t organize, things will not turn out well.”

Due to the limited reach of the party in Vojvodina, Belgrade, Kragujevac and a small number of members in Montenegro, we decided to try to expand while the war in Bosnia was still ongoing. My decision to hold party tribunes during the summer and the 1994 FIFA World Cup turned out to be a mistake.

Two of our members, the Nešić couple from Jagodina, organized the first tribune. Their inexperience and the circumstances resulted in only one journalist attending the event. I suggested to Vlado that we cancel the tribune, but he refused. For an hour, he patiently endured often meaningless and provocative questions and answered them.

After the tribune, we went to their unfinished house, which exuded poverty. Two little girls ran out and immediately hugged Vlado. Tears welled up in his eyes. He reached into his pocket and gave them some money. That night, Vlado held another “tribune” for Nešić, who bombarded him with hundreds of questions, which he patiently answered. I couldn’t keep up and went to bed. The smell of clean sheets, the familiar touch of poverty and patriarchy, when a special guest arrives, reminded me of my childhood.

The next day, we travelled to Čačak, where we were greeted by Milojko Rovinac, an intriguing figure in every way. He was a former officer of the JNA and currently a professor teaching a still-existing course on General

People's Defence.

Rovinac was a "true believer in communism." His father had emigrated from Yugoslavia at the end of the war and ended up in the Australian army, and Rovinac grew up in an orphanage, which left a mark on his personality. He became a strict disciplinarian, believing he had to be an example for everyone else — always and everywhere acting for the collective. His wife told us that he would sometimes, in the middle of a summer downpour, get out of bed, go to the barracks, catch a soldier sleeping on duty and write it down in the logbook, even though it would reflect badly on him as it was his soldier who was caught sleeping. And so it went for his entire life.

Rovinac filled the lecture hall with students and acquaintances for the tribune. He had somehow pressured the students by telling them they would all get a passing grade (six out of ten) and wouldn't have to study if they read *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Ostrovsky and *Cominformist* by Vlado Dapčević. Later, a student supporter told me that most students lied about reading the books, and Rovinac took them at their word, marking a six in their grade books. Nevertheless, the tribune had a good atmosphere. Vlado engaged the audience and encouraged discussion.

In Montenegro, in Podgorica, the tribune was poorly attended, with only about twenty people, which was a consequence of the media's earlier smear campaign against Vlado. We visited the Zeković family, one of

Vlado's friends, as well as Mrki Vuković and the poet Petar Đuranović. We returned to Belgrade unsatisfied. It was a great physical effort for Vlado, but the results were negligible.

We held party schools once a year in my apartment in Vrbas. About ten of us would stay there constantly, while others stayed with comrades. We ate at a restaurant. Vlado patiently gave lectures, as the ideological level of these young comrades was not very high. Milenko would occasionally give a lecture as well. In the evenings, we would go out to socialize. To break the monotony of lectures and discussions, we organized shooting training with firearms (rifles and pistols). Weapons could always be found among the members.

VLADO AND HIS FAMILY

After a long analysis of everything Vlado had told me, I can roughly summarize his relationship with his immediate family, although this is always a delicate area due to the complexity of family relationships.

Father

Vlado, and likely his brothers, never managed to get close to their father. According to Vlado, he was a cold and rigid man, traits he believed Peko inherited from him. What haunted Vlado most was his father's participation in the Podgorica Assembly of 1918. It wasn't because he thought it was against the interests of the Yugoslav peoples, as he emphasized, but because it led to the abolition of Montenegro's statehood and forcibly halted the development of Montenegrin national consciousness. When he was allowed to return to Yugoslavia in 1990, the first thing he did was organize the transfer of his father's remains from Albania. His father had been interned in a camp in Albania during the Second World War, where he died. Vlado said that the Albanians maintained the grave. When his father's bones were exhumed, a bullet casing was found with a note inside bearing the name "Jovan Dapčević" — so it would be known.

Mother

In the patriarchal world, a mother is something untouchable and something people rarely talk about. You fight for your father's

honour, but you die for your mother. Vlado almost never mentioned his mother, except in the context of her arrest by the Italian fascists and the call for the people of Cetinje to witness her execution. At her trial, she reportedly said: "I am proud to have followed in the footsteps of men. I have four sons, and I know they will avenge me." She was led to the firing squad, but at the last moment, the decision was changed and she was sentenced to thirty years in prison. The reasons for this are unclear — whether it was because of her family connections to the Italian queen, the daughter of King Nikola, or because of fear of retribution from her sons in the guerilla forces, or something else entirely, it's hard to say.

Brothers

He had three brothers. The most famous was Peko — a Spanish Civil War fighter, Tito's general and the "liberator of Belgrade." Vlado and Peko fell out in 1948, and their estrangement lasted until the end of their lives. They never saw each other or exchanged any words after that.

After the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Peko told Vlado:

"Why are you so pensive, Vlado? Leave that big philosophy of yours behind. Let's just go along with the Central Committee, and whatever happens, happens. As for Stalin? To hell with him if he's wrong."

Vlado responded:

"To me, Stalin is a representative and ideologist of the international communist movement,

and I believe that whoever shoots at Stalin today is, by extension, shooting at communism. Therefore, I am inclined to shoot at anyone who shoots at Stalin, and hence, communism!"

"Even at me?"

"Even at you, if you start shooting!"

Their wives, who had been eavesdropping behind the door, intervened to prevent the brothers from physically fighting or even killing each other.

When Vlado was released from Goli Otok, an esteemed elderly Montenegrin was sent from Montenegro to "reconcile the brothers." Vlado agreed, but Peko, after listening to the old man, said:

"Listen, if Tito told me to jump off the 'Albania' building, I would jump."

To which the old man replied:

"Peko, I thought you were a wiser man."

Vlado kept in touch with Peko's daughter Milica, attending birthday parties for her children. I had the chance to witness her visit to Vlado. Her eyes were fiery — full of the "Dapčević spirit." On the other hand, Vlado didn't think much of Peko's son, considering him a typical product of Belgrade's bourgeoisie. He also couldn't understand Peko's obsession with philately and gambling "in dens with the worst rabble in Cetinje," deeming it unworthy of him.

"Peko is like a machine, with a heart of steel. He feels nothing. I watched him stand upright while bullets flew around him because, as a commander, he couldn't show weakness... On the Neretva, we captured some high-ranking Italian officers who

showed bravery and dignity before their execution. But Peko chose the worst soldiers to execute them — men you wouldn't even trust to crack a walnut. I told him we should show dignity too and assign the best soldiers, but he didn't listen."

Vlado almost never mentioned his brother Drago, nor did he maintain contact with him, as Drago had behaved poorly after being arrested in 1948. However, he was close to his brother Milutin, who had also been in Goli Otok and helped him whenever possible. Milutin died shortly after Vlado was released from his last imprisonment. Below Vlado's apartment on the second floor lived his sister-in-law, Milutin's wife, with their son, who was already elderly. Vlado maintained a formal relationship with them, and only occasionally would go down to watch a sports event since he didn't have a TV in his apartment. If I wasn't there and Vlado was ill, his sister-in-law would sometimes fetch the newspaper for him, and that was about it.

Sister Danica

Vlado adored his sister Danica, who was the eldest. She married before the war to the son of Savo Lazarević Batara, a colonel in the Montenegrin army and a notorious war criminal against the Albanian people. He earned the nickname Batara because he didn't execute Albanians and Muslims one by one but with volleys of gunfire into crowds. He also participated in organizing the liquidation of the well-known Albanian leader Isa Boletini. Since they had no children, Danica re-

turned to Cetinje. During the war, she was imprisoned in an Italian camp, from which she helped organize the escape of prisoners. She was arrested and imprisoned again in 1948. She was particularly close to Vlado, and her life after that was dedicated to caring for and supporting her brother. After Vlado's release from Goli Otok, they lived together until Vlado fled the country. She visited him in the Soviet Union and was with him when he left the Soviet Union for the West. After his kidnapping in Bucharest, she knew she would never see him again. Vlado often said: "*Danica is better than all of us.*"

With other relatives, Vlado didn't maintain any special contact, except with his cousin Rade from Cetinje, who helped him a lot in his later years, along with his family.

Wife Micheline

I don't think Vlado ever fully established a close relationship with his wife. Ideological and life perspectives stood in the way of a complete connection. However, Vlado owed her a great deal, as she sacrificed herself for him, subordinating almost everything to him: from accepting him as a homeless man, refusing his advice to abort when she became pregnant, asking him to choose a name for their daughter from those of their homeland and much more. For me, the best indicator of her dedication was her relentless engagement during his kidnapping in Bucharest, which ultimately saved his life since his execution had been planned. She fought for him for years,

ultimately securing international pressure on the Yugoslav government, leading to his early release. There was also a deeply rational relationship between them. When she called him from Brussels, they spoke in French, and I could tell from the tone of their conversations that it was often unpleasant, almost quarrelsome. She often wrote him letters.

Micheline would sometimes say to him: “How long am I supposed to finance your party?”

In reality, she gave him just enough money for a few months. Naturally, Vlado used half of it to support the party, as no one else funded it except for small contributions from its members. Micheline was constantly afraid of losing him again — and how could she not be after everything that had happened?

Daughter Milena

Vlado never established a close relationship with his daughter either. When she was born, he was already over fifty and completely grey-haired. When he would take the baby for a stroll around the building, the neighbours would say, “Look at the grandpa, taking care of his granddaughter.”

Milena didn't remember him well, and after his kidnapping, she almost erased him from her memory. When he returned, she was already a grown woman. At a family dinner, one of the guests turned to Milena and said: “Your father is an extraordinary and fascinating person.” She coldly responded: “Maybe, but I know I didn't have a father when I need-

ed one most.”

A year after Vlado’s death, Milena married an Italian man, had a son named Vladimir, and visited her father’s grave in Ljubotinj to pay her respects and take a photo.

THE STRIKE

During the time of hyperinflation and war, our attempts to connect with workers were unsuccessful. At the same time, being absorbed in party work, I failed to notice what was happening right before my eyes in my own company.

In the construction industry, due to the war, sanctions and the overall state of the economy in Serbia, the consequences were increasingly severe, and this affected the company's operations, which began to collapse. The director surrounded himself with his people, and open theft began. It wasn't just the director but also others who had the opportunity, as they saw no future for the company. About twenty workers sat down on the steps of the administration building just before the New Year in 1995, protesting while waiting for their wages. But there were no wages, not for the next four months either. It was then that I decided to organize a strike. I had one sympathizer and one party member with me. We formed a strike committee, and in our demands, we called for the removal of the director and the company's leadership. We also gained the support of younger engineers. We then went around the construction sites and facilities, seeking the workers' support for the strike. The workers were sceptical about whether anything could change.

One event gave us additional momentum and convinced us that we couldn't back down. At one construction site during breakfast, we

noticed that most workers were eating bacon, while some bricklayers and carpenters weren't eating anything. I asked the foreman:

"Why aren't they eating?"

"They don't have enough for every day."

Since the director didn't respond to the strike committee's demands, we organized a workers' assembly at the machinery facility, while at the same time, the director convened a workers' council to discuss our demands for his dismissal. Around three hundred workers gathered at the assembly. The director was given a few hours to resign. Our colleagues from the workers' council informed us that the director was stalling the meeting and refusing to resign. At that point, there was hesitation among the workers and some began leaving the assembly. I knew the situation was critical and that we could be defeated, so I proposed that we march to the administration building and forcibly remove the director. This proposal seemed to turn the tide. The drivers, mixer operators, bulldozer operators, excavator operators and forklift drivers all started their machines as one and headed toward the administration building. The rest of the assembly organized into a column, like an army, and marched through the town toward the administration building. Meanwhile, the director requested police protection, but they did not respond. Realizing that he would be forcibly removed from the building, he submitted his resignation. There was jubilation. One worker fired a gun into the air. My heart was full because, for the first time, I felt the real power

of class struggle and the strength of organized labour.

But that wasn't the end of the company's troubles — the fight had just begun. Fifteen days later, the former director gathered some of his supporters and attempted a "counter-attack." However, our sympathizer, Vojo Knežević, a technician and poet, quickly quelled the leader of their group by force. But even the new director and management didn't have money for wages. I then suggested that we temporarily adopt a "war communism" approach, where about twenty workers employed on the only available project would receive their wages, while the rest would receive nothing. This arrangement lasted for two more months. Then we secured some new contracts, and we made a new decision: all workers on the construction sites would receive their full wages, while all administrative staff in the office, from the director to the cleaning staff, would receive the minimum wage for the next six months. That meant everyone would get the same amount. We managed to pull the company out of the crisis, and this lasted for nearly six years until the general privatization in Serbia began, and the company could no longer operate as a so-called socially-owned enterprise. The workforce began to dwindle, and work became scarce. In desperation, we tried selling our vacation property in Montenegro. It was proposed to the workers' council to decide whether the proceeds from the sale should be reinvested in the company to renew outdated machinery and shift our focus

to infrastructure work, or whether the money should be divided into six workers' wages. Everyone voted to distribute the money for wages, and thus they had enough to live on for another six months.

THE CONGRESS OF THE PARTY OF LABOUR

After the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, the Party of Labour found itself at a crossroads. How should we proceed tactically?

Milenko was already tired. He had never fully adapted to organized party work due to his intellectual individualism, which suffocated him. He also had a strong motivation to continue the work started by his brother Mečo on the Montenegrin national question. Later, Milenko played a significant role in the standardization of the Montenegrin language and in defending Montenegrin identity.

Milenko wrote me a letter stating that he was leaving the party and that he knew I, as a friend, would never forgive him for it, which was true.

Vlado also began feeling increasingly physically exhausted, a consequence of his age and the onset of illness. He would travel to Belgium for almost six months at a time, saying:

"I'm going to rest and recharge my batteries."

Vlado was against organizing a congress and adopting a new program, arguing that it was not yet time. He expressed this view in a statement published in the press on May 1, 1996: *"It is not yet time for a Party of Labour."* Vlado believed that although the war in Croatia and Bosnia had ended, the process of crushing aggressive nationalism was still unfinished, as the issues of Montenegro and Kosova remained unresolved. He was right

about that.

My argument was that we had existed for several years without a finalized party program and that we needed to strengthen the weakened leadership with new and younger cadres. Vlado eventually relented, and we began preparations for the congress in the summer of 1997.

By then, Vlado was eighty years old. Our preparations for the congress were somewhat surreal. In the intense midday heat, we went through Belgrade's antique bookstores to find any remaining Marxist literature before it was destroyed, intending to distribute it to younger members. Vlado, despite the scorching heat, wore a long-sleeved shirt, corduroy pants and sneakers. He would sometimes experience sudden chills even in the middle of summer. Upon returning from the bookstores, two quixotic figures dragged themselves across the hot asphalt, carrying large bundles of books. We stopped at the "Moskva" hotel for a break, as Vlado had a lifelong "dependency" on baklava. His mother, who had worked as kitchen help in King Nikola's court, had mastered the art of being an excellent cook. I patiently waited while he enjoyed the sweets like a child.

We wrote the party program in an apartment at thirty degrees Celsius, with Vlado dictating, shirtless and in his underwear, while I typed on a second-hand "Pentium 2" computer, struggling with my almost total computer illiteracy.

After the first day and thirty pages typed,

I turned off the computer without saving the document. The next day, we started over. After a few more pages, I went to make coffee, tripped over the power cord and the computer shut off again. Vlado said nothing, seeing my frustration, which was unusual for him as he knew me to be calm and introverted. (*"You remind me of a comrade because he was calm, and I was hot-tempered."*) We started from scratch for the third time. I kept shortening the program due to my habitual minimalism, while he insisted that earlier events and processes needed to be explained. Besides the program proposal, we also drafted two resolutions: one on the national question and another on NATO's presence.

The program contained both minimum and maximum goals. The maximum goal was the struggle to overthrow the capitalist system and replace it with a socialist one, in the fight for communism. The minimum goals included: "Given the current state of societal consciousness, under the dictatorship of the mafia, the working class is not capable of fulfilling its role as the most progressive class and driving force of society. Therefore, the first and most important task of the Party of Labour is to persistently and systematically remove the bourgeois nationalist consciousness from the working class and replace it with democratic proletarian consciousness... The Party of Labour must unite with all democratic, anti-nationalist and anti-war forces into a unified front... The working class and people of Serbia and Croatia must lead and organ-

ize a democratic revolution to overthrow the bureaucratic-mafia dictatorship. This is the only possible path that must be traversed before further struggle for socialism can begin.”

The resolution on the national question posed no problems, as we already had it in our previous documents and positions, but the issue of NATO, our greatest enemy, was tricky, especially how to justify its intervention, which at that point had only occurred in Bosnia. Vlado had previously stated:

“The Party of Labour is absolutely opposed to NATO’s expansion, as it is preparation for the most reactionary imperialist war, which will certainly engulf our country as well. Therefore, we will fight with all our might against this, today the most reactionary force in the world.”

In the resolution, it stated:

“It is clear that NATO remains an aggressive military force of imperialism and that it is doing everything possible to ensure, not only through economic and financial means but also through military power, that imperialism dominates the entire world...

“NATO troops, along with their political staff, are present on Yugoslav territory, deployed in Bosnia, Croatia and Macedonia...

“Unfortunately, in Yugoslavia, nationalism has gripped the masses.

“The Great-Serb and Great-Croat chauvinists, through their policies of war and endangering the global interests of the U.S. and NATO, essentially invited NATO into Yugoslavia. The fact is that in Yugoslavia, due to the widespread nationalist consciousness, no

forces could be organized to oppose the disastrous chauvinist policies of Milošević and Tudjman. The fact is, had NATO troops not arrived and stopped the war by force of arms, there would likely have been hundreds of thousands more deaths, new destruction and new atrocities over the past two years.

“The act of stopping the war was positive.

“If, even after peace is established in Bosnia and these fundamental problems are resolved, NATO troops remain in Yugoslavia, the Party of Labour will consider them occupiers, which they will truly be. At that point, the Party of Labour, as a truly patriotic party, will organize political and other struggles against NATO’s presence, including armed struggle to liberate the country from occupation.”

The congress was held in Belgrade. With thirty delegates present, a new leadership of seven members was elected, including “the old guard” — Vlado and Mića Petrović — as well as younger cadres.

Vlado said:

“Every idea is only as valuable as the people who carry it. For the Party of Labour to be up to the historical task, it must be composed of people capable of fulfilling that task. Therefore, the Party of Labour will only admit the most politically aware, militant and consistent individuals into its ranks.”

COMRADES

Vlado's relationship with women and comrades is a unique story, and much could be written about it. Vlado loved women and they loved him. He often emphasized: "*Women are the better half of humanity. I've been convinced of that hundreds of times in my life.*"

I met him toward the end of his life, and I would describe his relationships with women at that time as something between comradeship and memories. He would say, "*That's passed for me, like an old woman trying to whistle*" (meaning an old woman without teeth can't whistle). But what intrigued me most, aside from a visit from a mysterious woman with a tattooed number on her forearm, marking her time in a German concentration camp, and Vlado's outings with his partisan comrades ("*I was at the cemetery. They and I are both one foot in the grave.*"), were three women who regularly visited him.

Kosana Milošević was often present as a party member and was in love with Vlado. Then there was Senka, Miletin's sister, whose husband, despite being an invalid, swam across the Danube in 1948 to reach Romania. However, Vlado was always somewhat reserved toward her, and I never found out why. The third, and to me the most interesting, was Kosa. At just sixteen, she joined the movement and immediately fell in love with her commissar. Once a week, she would secretly bring Vlado several cooked meals. She moved slowly due to a wound in her thigh from a burst

of gunfire during an assault. She not only brought food but also served as an important source of information, which she managed to gather from her connections. Vlado had the utmost trust in her. I often thought of her as his alter ego.

Kosana and Senka were not on good terms, which created a problem for Vlado, who unsuccessfully tried to reconcile the two. As fate would have it, a somewhat comical situation arose. Vlado was talking with Kosana in the living room when the doorbell rang, and “secret” Kosa, who wasn’t supposed to be seen, appeared. Vlado quietly hid Kosa in the bedroom and told her to wait. Kosana sensed someone had entered, but Vlado insisted no one had. Yet Kosana kept glancing toward the hallway:

“Someone came in!”

Vlado: “*No, they didn’t!*”

Not long after, the doorbell rang again — this time, it was Senka at the door. Now Vlado was in a panic. He told Kosana, “*It’s Senka. Go to the kitchen so you don’t run into each other, and leave quietly.*” Kosana went to the kitchen. Senka and Vlado continued talking in the living room. Kosana quietly left, satisfied that she had avoided Senka. Meanwhile, Kosa slipped out of the bedroom, left the food in the kitchen and quietly sneaked out as well.

Other significant events in the party also revolved around Kosana. An older couple, Bajo and Dušanka Lopušina, were devoted to the cause and the party. Bajo would get a nosebleed anytime he became agitated. He

had a massive reel-to-reel tape recorder with hundreds of musical titles, as well as a rich library. He spent his days reading and listening to music. He couldn't tolerate Kosana's reluctance to fully condemn Milošević. She tried to distinguish between Slobodan and Mira, placing the blame solely on Mira. When Bajo set off for a meeting where he planned to confront Kosana and settle the matter, his heart gave out. Dušanka blamed Kosana for hastening Bajo's death. Afterwards, Dušanka became even more motivated to support the party. Her apartment became a regular meeting spot for party gatherings and, later, a safe place for comrades from the revolutionary movements in Turkey and Kurdistan, who avoided staying in hotels due to police surveillance.

Another event involving Kosana was Drago Bulajić's reaction to Bajo's death and Kosana's unprincipled stance on Milošević and Mira. Drago, the son of Dr. Sava Kovačević, who led his son into the partisans and died at Sutjeska, marched barefoot into Belgrade with the partisans in October 1944, losing his shoes along the way. After the war, he joined the air force but retained some anarchistic views. In 1948, he threw down his cap and stomped on the five-pointed star, which landed him in Goli Otok. He lived alone, renting out his apartment to students for free, and made a living selling books. Drago sent a letter resigning from the party, citing his conflict with Kosana. His letter included the statement: "According to the well-known physical law that two bodies that don't get along can't

occupy the same space at the same time.”

I once stayed at Kosana’s apartment before she distanced herself from party activities, though she never formally left the party. I believe it was solely out of respect for Vlado. Kosana never married. She took care of her niece, who suffered from schizophrenia, and her son. While I was trying to sleep, Kosana’s niece kept wandering through the apartment, turning lights on and off repeatedly. Kosana finally snapped at her: “Stop walking in and out and turning the lights on and off. You’ll wake him up!” With a deep accent, I heard her reply: “That’s not a man.”

Three years later, when we no longer had contact with Kosana, Vlado informed me by phone that her niece had killed her with a knife.

What I appreciated about Kosana was her relationship with other female camp survivors and the respect she had for them. She would mention names like Novka Tmušić, Bosa Abramović, Brana Marković and Danica Srzentić with a special tone, full of warmth and a sense of female solidarity forged through the struggle of war and life in the camps. Kosana was the only one who would openly show her frustration with Vlado and raise her voice: “Listen, Dapčević!”

TWO-LINE STRUGGLE

After the wars in Croatia and Bosnia ended, the political scene in Serbia became increasingly polarized and the so-called opposition began to grow stronger. Although resistance to mobilization and frequent desertions existed earlier, the military defeats accelerated the process of uniting opponents to the regime. Dissatisfaction grew among the Radicals, led by Šešelj, because after the “Dayton Agreement,” Milošević sought to reduce the role of the significant radical Chetnik forces across the Drin. The war criminal Šešelj criticized the “Red Witch from Dedinje” at rallies, referring to Milošević’s wife. However, this conflict was short-lived, and the radicals once again became a pillar of the regime, especially with the escalation of the conflict in Kosova. Dissatisfaction also simmered among the so-called Serbian “soft Chetniks” and the so-called democratic liberal opposition. The broader populace, facing worsening economic conditions, was also growing discontented.

In our *Bulletin*, we outlined our position:

“The Party of Labour believes that, in an historical sense, there are no serious opposition forces in the Yugoslav territories. The common ideological denominator and concrete political activity of opposition parties contain the same fundamental components as those of the ruling parties. These are nationalism, anti-communism and economic programs that proclaim the complete restoration of capitalist relations. In this respect,

in none of the former Yugoslav republics are the differences between ruling and opposition parties of any deep ideological character. Differences arise on the terrain of immediate political interests and ambitions, in the clash of insatiable desires for power. In this area, their mutual confrontations are inevitable and ruthless. With the more radical escalation of war and the growing resistance to war, militarization and the numerous social consequences of the war, many opposition parties attempt to distance themselves from and 'forget' their own nationalist and fascist stances and shift the burden of guilt for the war and its horrors solely onto the ruling parties. This fact should be understood as the real beginning of political awakening among many direct and indirect participants in the Yugoslav war, and the slow maturation of a political opposition that would, in a fundamental ideological sense, distance itself from the ruling regimes."

Before the Party of Labour's Assembly, a minor conflict emerged within the party over two issues. The instigator was an interview Vlado gave to *Srpska reč*, a newspaper edited by Danica Drašković, the wife of Vuk Drašković, one of the main warmongers in the Yugoslav region and, at the time, the leader of a powerful opposition party that had begun to take positions contrary to the regime on national issues. During the interview, Vuk Drašković appeared "coincidentally," theatrically addressing Vlado: "Where have you been, greatest one?" He gave Vlado his new novel with a

personal inscription. On the way back, Vlado handed me the book: "*Here, read!*" I turned to Gile and passed it on: "Here, read!"

Some older party members felt that Vlado should not have given an interview to a pro-Chetnik publication. Vlado responded by pointing out that Danica Drašković wrote about the oppression of the Albanians in Kosovo, in a society that treated them not only from a nationalist position but also with chauvinism and even racism. He emphasized that even the smallest opportunity should be used to make our views heard: "*The stance on the position of the Albanian people reveals who the true revolutionary is and who is the mere chatter-box.*"

The second point of contention revolved around JUL, the party of Mira Marković, which received unprecedented media coverage in regime-controlled outlets, influencing the views of some of our members. We tried to explain that we had already addressed JUL in our *Bulletin*, where Milenko wrote that it was the last farce of "communism" in the region.

The text included the following:

"From the programmatic documents and political practices of the 'Yugoslav United Left,' it is impossible to discern where it truly stands on this wide ideological map. Whether this is a case of complete ideological confusion among the ideologues of this 'left' or mere opportunism, seeking to profit from the moment, one can only speculate! When one looks at the bombastic phrases by which this 'left' defines itself in relation to issues of class,

freedom, democracy, the meaning of epochal processes, etc., one sees the oft-repeated model of petty-bourgeois socialism.

“Thus, all the ‘leftist’ phrases about ‘peace among nations,’ about ‘a rich and culturally advanced society,’ about ‘fighting against violence,’ about ‘rectifying the confusion of values,’ about universal ‘access to education,’ about equality in consuming artistic creation and information, about ‘protecting nature and man within it,’ are moralistic posturing without understanding the fundamental constitution of the epoch and its essential causal relationships. As if, at some point in the history of leftist ideas, in the bourgeois epoch, the absolute demand and task for scientifically socialist foundations of the trans-bourgeois epochal project, i.e., the communist project, was not set!

“Its ideologues recite tempting phrases about ‘stopping the war,’ ‘maintaining peace’ in the ‘present Yugoslavia,’ about ‘integration processes among the South Slavic peoples,’ about the reconstruction of ‘that’ Yugoslavia into which (oh, what a pity!) ‘everyone who wants to live in it’ can enter.

“Let’s ask ourselves, gentlemen ‘communists’: who would truly want to live in a South Slavic community on your terms? Wasn’t it a happy day for each Yugoslav nation when they could free themselves from the iron grip of Belgrade, the Great-Serb military class, the intellectualism of the Memorandum and, in one word, the political model of Serbian dominance over the rest of Yugoslavia? Who will

ever express a desire to live in some new, great Yugoslavia while Serbia is dominated by the spiritual and political forces that destroyed Yugoslavia to create 'Great-Serbia'? Don't count on anyone's nostalgia for 'that' Yugoslavia while you represent Serbia!"

Vlado condensed it all into one sentence:

"This isn't about any leftist movement; it's just an ordinary interest group."

This was best demonstrated later, after the fall of Milošević's regime, when JUL members left politics and shifted into business, accumulating significant capital.

A few members left the party because they couldn't accept the party's stance on JUL.

Soon after, demonstrations erupted in Serbia, triggered by electoral fraud in local elections. Protests began in Niš and then spread to other cities. The most intense protests and clashes occurred in Belgrade, lasting over three months until Milošević, under external pressure (from Europe), conceded opposition victories in some cities.

The demonstrations showed that only a united opposition could effectively challenge the regime. These demonstrations, rallies, counter-rallies, marches, beatings by the police and the like revealed early signs of what would later be known as "colour revolutions," featuring "creative resistance," music, performances, giving flowers to police cordons, constant marches and blocking traffic, among other tactics.

At one counter-rally, Milošević's supporters began chanting: "Slobo, we love you!" To

which he ambiguously replied: “I love you too!”

FOR A SOVEREIGN MONTENEGRO

After the congress, we divided the party's activities. Vlado focussed on the issue of Montenegro, I handled Kosova, and the younger members dealt with problems in Serbia.

Vlado:

"The leadership in Montenegro, now divided, came to power on the wave of the so-called 'anti-bureaucratic revolution,' which was nothing more than the aggressive policy of the Great-Serb nationalists aimed at liquidating Montenegro's state sovereignty and incorporating it into the expansionist plans of the Great-Serb nationalists against the other nations of Yugoslavia. Not only did they succeed, with Montenegro being an active accomplice in the infamous war of aggression against Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but they also gradually dismantled the foundations of Montenegrin sovereignty, with the simple desire to turn Montenegro into just another region. This was accompanied by the rewriting of Montenegrin history and the denial of its national identity.

"However, the continued aggressive policy that hindered Montenegro's development and led to the economic blockade of Serbia and Montenegro by the rest of the world began to cause a differentiation of forces within Montenegro. A faction within the Montenegrin leadership, led by Milo Djukanović, gradually started to adopt a more independent stance against the absolute command role of the Great-Serb nationalists represented by

Slobodan Milošević and his wife. This struggle, which began on the economic front, moved to the political terrain and escalated over two years into a full-blown conflict.

“The result was that the forces aligned with Milošević and the Great-Serb nationalists, led by Momir Bulatović, clearly showed they were in favour of liquidating Montenegro as a state. In contrast, the other group, supported by the Montenegrin opposition, decided to defend Montenegro and what remained of its state sovereignty, and possibly to restore some elements of statehood that had been lost.

“Since the Party of Labour stands for the right of every nation to self-determination and the right to create its own state, we support this position, regardless of the personal intentions of those leading the current movement for Montenegrin equality. This stance is in the people’s interest and weakens the core of Serbian nationalism, led by Milošević.”

The conflict within the Montenegrin leadership further polarized Montenegrin society into two camps: Great-Serbs and sovereignists, with the ever-present question: “Are you for Milo or Momir?”

We decided to become actively involved in supporting Djukanović, recognizing that he now sought to openly free himself from dependency on the policies of the Belgrade regime and had almost entirely adopted the program of the Liberal Alliance in the fight for a sovereign Montenegro.

We stayed at the “Crna Gora” hotel, where most of the active players in the upcoming elections gathered. Vlado was busy all day,

showing boundless energy. We had dinner several times with the poet Jevrem Brković. Despite his theatricality and narcissism, it was clear he was a wise man. When Roćen, Djukanović's advisor, and others from that circle would arrive, I made an effort not to be present.

In my view, Vlado's role in 1998 in supporting Milo Djukanović in the fight for Montenegrin sovereignty was immeasurable. Through the media, Vlado insisted on sharpening the divide in Montenegrin society and advocating for a clear separation from Belgrade, encouraging the undecided to take a more definitive stance. For several years, there had been growing awareness that Montenegro had shamed itself by participating in the war against Croatia. As writer Mirko Kovač put it, "Montenegrins didn't die for ideals, bravery, but for ham and VCRs," often repeating: "From Cetinje the fairy cries, forgive us, Dubrovnik!"

In an interview on television, Vlado emphasized:

"We treated the Ustaše a hundred times more harshly than we did the Chetniks. In 1945, in just three days, we executed nearly 30,000 Ustaše near Maribor. But we captured the entire government of Draža Mihailović and none were sentenced to death. All were given prison sentences and released. Had we been stricter with them, the Serbian and Montenegrin Chetniks, there would be fewer now supporting Sloba and Momir..."

"I spoke with the Chetniks throughout the war through the sights of a rifle because of their

treacherous policies and open collaboration with the occupiers. And I will again, even though I'm 81 years old."

When Vlado appeared on Radio Bar, an incident occurred.

"They come here with three fingers raised, shouting 'This is Serbia!' It makes me want to pull out my gun and shoot!"

The editor jumped up and cut the broadcast. The audience reacted, accusing Vlado of inciting a fratricidal war. Vlado, furious that the interview was cut off, lashed out at the editor. She defended herself, saying she had to stop the broadcast because of the listeners' reactions. I sided with the editor and told Vlado, "You gave the enemy ammunition," which calmed him down somewhat.

Later, that incident was used in the municipal assembly by representatives of the Great-Serb parties, who referenced "Vlado's gun."

The elections passed, and Djukanović won. Montenegro began its journey toward independence.

"Milo Djukanović's victory saved Montenegro's statehood and the Montenegrins as a nation."

But then something happened that deeply affected Vlado. In his euphoria, he didn't sense the depth of Montenegrin intrigue. Those around him once led him to a table at the hotel to introduce him to an "older comrade."

Unwittingly, and with advancing cataracts, Vlado extended his hand and said:

“Vlado Dapčević.”

The man shook his hand and replied:

“Jovo Kapidžić.”

Vlado froze and turned away.

“I felt like the lowest of men.”

It was the hand of Jovo Kapidžić, Tito’s general, whose name was indelibly etched in the minds of every Goli Otok prisoner as one of the organizers and torturers. Although he had taken a completely correct stance on Montenegro in the 1990s, he was remembered as a man of questionable ethics, willing to do anything. However, the Milo regime “sided” with Jovo and not Vlado, which was entirely logical and expected. Just as later, Milenko Perović’s role, who had done so much for Montenegro’s identity, would be forgotten. It’s difficult to be more prominent, more deserving and to gain gratitude in Montenegro when everyone believes they deserve that spot. In a way, it both pained and pleased me because it only increased my class hatred and strengthened my conviction that it’s not the mafia, nor small and large capitalists, who can defend Montenegro’s identity, but only the communists.

Vlado, however, said that these were bourgeois politicians, and we had to work with them while they fought against war and for Montenegrin sovereignty: *“Later, we will become fierce enemies because we, first and foremost, fight for the workers’ movement and socialism.”*

I didn’t always travel with Vlado to Montenegro, so our comrade Slavko Višnjić

handled the technical arrangements for interviews. During one of Vlado's trips to Montenegro, another incident occurred, which his cousin Nana Dapčević told me about. Vlado had gone to buy newspapers and cigarettes. He always carried all his money with him. At the kiosk, he forgot his wallet with about two thousand marks and some Swiss francs. Naturally, it was gone when he went back. He returned to Belgrade after only a few days in Montenegro and told me he needed to go to Belgium urgently. From his face, I could tell something serious had happened. I thought it was something personal with Micheline and didn't press him further. But he was ashamed to admit what had actually happened.

THE CUBANS

Vlado was often invited to various meetings of representatives of communist parties, and he occasionally attended, usually in Germany. He was held in high regard among comrades abroad. On several occasions, he tried to mediate and bring together Turkish revolutionary parties, but there was a strong dose of sectarianism among them. They were firmly entrenched in their views, and no one was willing to compromise. At these gatherings, he also defended the Peruvian movement from attacks by reformists. Generally, in Western Europe, the movement was quite weak and infected with reformism.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the “fall of communism,” the fall of the regime in Albania, the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the rise of Chinese capitalism, there was no stronghold to rely on. Furthermore, the position of the Party of Labour was that during this period, we shouldn’t be relying on anyone. However, certain events led to the establishment of friendly, though not party, relations with the Cuban ambassador to Serbia, Omar Medina Quintero, and his family.

It all started with Omar’s arrival from Havana. He received a list of Cuba’s friends in Serbia, and on that list was the name of our internationalist. Omar later told us: “I asked a comrade from the Central Committee who gave me the list:

“Who is this person?”

“I don’t know. Ask Fidel.”

The internationalist invited me to go with Omar and his family to Kovačica, as Omar was a fan of naive art. That's how our acquaintance and friendship began. Omar was short, a mixed-race man with a beard, and looked older than his years. Having previously served in Yugoslavia, he spoke our language well and had a fantastic sense of humour. His wife Esperanza was white and much larger. They had two daughters, about ten years old.

Omar then met Vlado, and soon we began visiting each other regularly. From the outset, Vlado made it clear that we didn't want to establish any official party relations. Omar understood the stance of our party, so we never opened the topic of the "character of Cuban socialism." Omar responded that he had to represent the interests of his country and, for that reason, often needed a strong stomach to deal with local officials.

Once, the internationalist and I stayed overnight at Omar's residence. The next morning, Omar was getting ready for a reception and sought "advice" from the internationalist:

"Slobodan, should I wear a tie?"

"A tie?! Fidel and I don't wear ties, and you're thinking of putting one on!"

On the 30th anniversary of Che Guevara's death, we held exhibitions in Vrbas and Kragujevac featuring Che's photographs, with speeches by Omar and Vlado. The exhibitions were well attended, especially in Kragujevac.

On the way back from Kragujevac, Omar told us about the so-called hostage crisis in Lima, where comrades stormed the Japanese

embassy and were eventually killed by Peruvian forces with technical and other support from U.S. agencies. It was clear that Omar was well-informed.

Once, Vlado and Omar visited Vrbas, and we went to see the internationalist in Kruščić. Vlado also stopped by Bačko Polje to visit our comrade Slavko Grubač, who enjoyed making a spectacle of it, hanging a red flag on his house, setting a lavish table, gathering thirty locals and firing a gun when Vlado arrived. Vlado criticized the somewhat “Chetnik” atmosphere, but to no avail. Meanwhile, Omar told us how he had an almost 80-year-old father who lived in a remote rural area.

“When I moved to Havana and advanced in my career, I tried to convince my father to come, as the living conditions were incomparably better. But he refused, saying it was too boring there.”

Our friendship with Omar soon came to an end when he developed a blood clot in his leg and had to return to Havana for surgery. Before his departure, he invited us to a reception for a Cuban holiday. I didn’t feel like going, especially since it was freezing, but I went with my wife Ljiljana and the internationalist because of Omar. Radonja Vešović joined us. Vlado had no intention of attending the reception. Worse than the cold was when Šešelj appeared at the reception with his protégé Vučić, taking centre stage in the hall. We quickly left the reception and stopped by Vlado’s place to warm up.

“Well, those receptions are nonsense. Why did

you even bother going in such weather?"

Omar went for surgery and our connection with the Cubans was completely severed afterwards.

Before leaving, Vlado confided to Omar that he had lung cancer in its early stages.

KOSOVA

Vlado had a special connection with the Albanian people. There were many reasons for this. At one point, he attended high school in Prizren before being expelled from all the schools in Yugoslavia for his communist activities, where he came to understand the true plight of the Albanian people. Not to mention his escape from Yugoslavia to Albania, when an old, respected Albanian man played a key role in helping him and others cross the border successfully. His reception in Albania was significant, as the leadership under Enver Hoxha supported Vlado and Mileta Perović during their conflict with other exiled Cominformists, particularly later on ideological grounds, with Vlado supporting the Albanian comrades in their struggle against Khrushchev's revisionism.

“On the territory of the former Yugoslavia, after its disintegration, the issue of Kosova is a key question. It is both the condition and the beginning of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. It is not by chance, and it has often been said, ‘Everything started in Kosova, and everything will end in Kosova.’ Any attempt to prevent the Albanians in Yugoslavia, especially in Kosova, from deciding how and with whom they will live is doomed to fail.

“In fact, the first act that led to the breakup of Yugoslavia was Slobodan Milošević and his clique's destruction of Kosova's autonomy and the imposition of martial law there, which was accompanied by horrific persecution and humiliation of the Albanian people.

“When the regime in Serbia and Montenegro suffered a total military, political and diplomatic defeat, they invented a new deception, creating a new state — essentially to hold onto power for as long as possible. And just as the insane idea of creating a Greater Serbia, where all Serbs would live in one state, led to immense destruction and loss of life, this stubborn insistence on creating this kind of Yugoslavia will lead to even greater conflicts because, in the end, the essential issue that must be addressed — the position of the Albanians — will come to the forefront. Therefore, it is necessary to fight with all means to ensure that the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro do not leave their bones in Kosova in yet another terrible and dirty war.

“As for the Albanians, we have no intention of giving them, or anyone else, advice, but based on the experiences of peoples’ struggles around the world, I would say only one thing to the Albanians — that the freedom of the Albanian people and their ability to determine their future depends entirely on their own struggle and unity.

“In any case, we will be on the side of the just struggle of the Albanian people.”

In the August 1996 issue of our *Bulletin*, we discussed the Albanian question, and I wrote:

“Given the current situation, the regime in Belgrade aims to delay resolving the status of Kosova for as long as possible. The goal of buying time regarding Kosova is to, in the context of lasting peace, attempt to completely break the unity of the Albanian movement through aggressive propaganda and systemic measures, gradually reducing the issue of Kosova to a matter of internal Serbian affairs.

“The Albanian movement, which adopted Gandhian methods of struggle, patiently waiting for the end of the war and the resolution of the situation in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, has faced the powerful force of the Great-Serb regime and the West’s stated positions. Increasingly, the movement is confronted with the inevitable question of changing its methods of struggle. A more radical faction within the movement, which seeks to shift the focus of the fight back to Kosova itself, is gaining strength. Belgrade’s delays in negotiations contribute to the radicalization of the movement and the escalation of armed actions.

“The Party of Labour, as a Marxist-Leninist party, maintains a consistent internationalist stance on the position of the Albanian people in Kosova. The Albanian people have the right to self-determination, including secession and the creation of their own state — with the condition that, in achieving this right, the Albanian people should support all processes that lead to integration with Serbia, while the Serbian people should advocate for the Albanian people to achieve their goal. Therefore, the Party of Labour advocates for negotiations between the Belgrade regime and the Albanian movement in Kosova to begin as soon as possible, to peacefully resolve the existing issue. Should the Albanian people in Kosova succeed in achieving their goal and freeing themselves from Belgrade’s authority, they will face the same question the people of Serbia face. They will discover the misery

and cruelty of their own capitalists and political bureaucracy. At that point, those national flags will be no different from the hated nationalist flags of the regime in Belgrade. Then, the Albanian proletariat will have no choice but to raise the fallen red flag and extend a hand to the Serbian proletariat.

“Together, they will defend Serbia and Kosova from the onslaught of imperialists and their local lackeys. Together, with the other peoples of the Balkans, they will fight for the victory of the idea that the Balkans belong to the proletariat of the Balkan peoples.”

At the beginning of October 1997, peaceful protests by Albanian students provoked a brutal reaction from the Serbian police. In a video tape we received, we saw police arresting the student leader. We found out his name was Albin Kurti. At a meeting, we decided to establish contact with him and support the Albanian student movement.

We conducted campaigns for the return of Albanian students to schools and universities at the universities in Novi Sad and Kragujevac. We collected a few hundred signatures, which was surprisingly many, considering the prevailing attitudes in society about the rights of Albanians.

At the same time, I was preparing to go to Kosova. Vlado wasn't in Yugoslavia at the time. We left Vrbas in a van with four of us, with two comrades waiting for us in Kragujevac. It was late November 1997, and very cold. Just before Besiana in Kosova, our tire blew at five in the morning. We waited for a

tire repair shop to open, freezing in the van. In Prishtina, we blindly searched for the Velenija neighbourhood because we had heard that the University of Prishtina was now operating out of houses there. They pointed us to some houses, and we entered one with a few rooms and four tables. We were given tea, though there was a noticeable level of suspicion. But when we mentioned we were looking for Albin Kurti, the situation immediately changed. Soon, Kurti appeared and took us to another room.

We told him about our action and the petition of support. Kurti said he was a Gandhian by conviction and believed that peaceful protests could achieve the goals of the Albanian people. This surprised us a bit, and Comrade Raško Koprivica told him, “No people have ever gained their freedom through peaceful means, and neither will you.”

As we walked through Prishtina, I walked ahead with Albin, and I noticed that people showed him respect, greeting him as we passed. An elderly Albanian man with a cane stopped and bowed as we passed.

We continued maintaining contact with Albin, but the situation grew more complicated and tense. Armed actions began.

At that point, I decided to return to Kosovo to get a clearer sense of the situation. In doing so, I behaved completely unprincipled, non-party-like and uncomradely — I “betrayed” Vlado. The reason was simple — I knew he wouldn’t have approved of our trip in that situation. We left Belgrade for Prishtina

in the evening, Comrade Gile and I. Just as we were leaving, Albin called Vlado to ask if we had set off. Vlado was completely caught off guard.

In the bus, the presence of police was noticeable, and the atmosphere was hostile toward the Albanian passengers. We arrived in Prishtina earlier than expected. Dawn hadn't broken yet, and police officers patrolled the station with automatic rifles. We hid until morning and then connected with Albin. Albin took us to the university, where they had been allowed to return, but the rooms had already been turned into mobilization bases for fighters. On Albin's walls, instead of Gandhi, hung portraits of some Albanian movement fighters.

He took us to the headquarters of Adem Demaçi's party, the chief ideologist of the Albanian movement at the time, but they received us with suspicion and reservation, though they acknowledged knowing and respecting Vlado as a friend of the Albanian people.

Albin later briefed us on the situation, and it became clear to us that an armed conflict was inevitable.

The following week, we were to face the music. We had a meeting at Vlado's apartment with several of us present. Vlado lined me and Gile up, focusing particularly on me:

"You! You organized all of this!"

I tried to justify myself, not for the lack of principle, but by arguing that it was a necessity and that it was more on friendly grounds

than party grounds. But my arguments were unconvincing.

“And what if you had been arrested or killed there? What would have become of the party? It was completely thoughtless!”

Since he didn't know what else to say, he “fired off” a “party punishment.”

“For your punishment, you'll sleep on this table tonight.”

I accepted that with relief, knowing that the matter was closed, especially since he knew I sometimes slept on the floor anyway.

By that time, we had already begun printing our newspaper *Otpor*, which immediately provoked a reaction, with the pro-Chetnik newspaper *Pogledi* publishing: “The communists still support the Albanians.”

NATO BOMBARDMENT

Another war was approaching once again.

The Americans had given Milošević a grand welcome at Dayton in 1995, presenting him as a stabilizing factor while sweeping under the rug all the accusations they had previously levelled against him. After the signing of the Dayton Agreement, Milošević was given some time to resolve the issue with the Albanians in Kosova. However, resistance among the Albanian people to the de facto occupation and apartheid grew daily, leading to the formation of the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA). The political core of the KLA was largely made up of Enverist Marxist-Leninists who, due to both the collapse of socialism in Albania and the circumstances in Kosova, began to distance themselves from their previous ideological positions, prioritizing national liberation. In the early stages of the struggle, some of the fallen fighters were buried with *The Internationale*, and their guerilla salute was a raised fist.

Milošević's police and military crushed these initial forms of the KLA, primarily due to the superiority of Serbian forces and the KLA's inexperience in warfare. The KLA, with its hastily dug trenches and light weaponry, tried to engage in frontal battles against the Serbian army.

Our stance was clear: "In these difficult and historic moments for the Albanian people, the Party of Labour is on the side of the just struggle of the Albanian people. Milošević's

regime has started a war against an entire people, and that war will be lost.”

The defeated KLA forces largely withdrew into Albania. Then, a political shift occurred. The U.S. had earlier placed the KLA on its list of terrorist organizations. But now they sent their envoy, Richard Holbrooke, to Junik in Kosova to meet with KLA representatives and offer U.S. assistance. By accepting that help, the KLA also capitulated ideologically, having to abandon their previous ideology and symbols, and submit to the complete control of U.S. instructors. As a result, the balance of power began to shift in favour of the Albanians in Kosova, as they now had the most powerful protector.

In fact, the U.S. was trying to bring both the Belgrade regime and the Albanian movement under its control. The problem was the “great president” Milošević and the Great-Serb forces, who refused to make any concessions regarding Kosova, and the Albanian representatives were not willing to deviate from their basic goals in the fight for Kosova’s liberation. At the Rambouillet Conference in France, where both the Albanian movement and Belgrade regime were invited, no agreement was reached. Neither side was prepared to compromise.

The weekly newspaper *Evropljanin*, edited by Slavko Ćuruvija, published an open letter to Milošević, signed by him and the journalist Aleksandar Tijanić. Even though we knew of their previous ties to the Titoite regime’s security services and their ongoing contact with

Mira Marković (Milošević's wife), this was surprising. When I visited Vlado, he handed me the newspaper and asked me to read the open letter:

“You have handed over control of the state and social wealth to a select group of a hundred families who enjoy your support and protection. The officials of the state you lead demonstrate feudal extravagance, nouveau-riche arrogance amidst widespread poverty and misery, and your cronies run large companies...

“In your time, national prophets, vampires, charlatans and freaks have been stimulated by state media, glorifying death and war, all the while making sure not to die themselves... Crime has merged with the highest levels of government like nowhere else in Europe...”

Vlado asked: “*What do you think?*”

“Auu! That's bold!”

“*They have sentenced themselves to death.*”

The “honeymoon” and truce between Milošević and the Americans, which had lasted for a few years, essentially ended with his increasingly brutal actions in Kosova. America's interests were once again threatened due to the potential for a broader Balkan war, and they sought to prevent this at all costs.

In early February, we held a meeting of the party leadership. We assessed that war between Serbia and NATO was inevitable. We even considered the possibility that if, at the last moment, Milošević began restoring rights to the Albanian people in Kosova, thus avoid-

ing war, we would support such a move. Naturally, nothing of the sort happened, and we saw where things were headed.

We made the decision for part of the leadership to move to Montenegro, while the others would hide across Serbia, away from their residences, and await developments. Comrade Mića Petrović went deep underground, and Comrade Adrović was already abroad. This decision was dictated by our objectively small strength, but we also had information that there were suggestions to isolate all enemies of the regime in special camps. We were convinced that Vlado would certainly be on that list if one was being made.

We had no idea what kind of war it would be and had no other option but to go to Montenegro, which was against the war. At that time, we had no base in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was also exhausted from the war.

It was hard for me to leave Lilja and my two young children, not knowing how long we would be apart. Gile left his girlfriend behind. Everyone was leaving someone.

We travelled to Montenegro. Suljo Mustafić, then employed at Radio Bar and later the Deputy Speaker of the Montenegrin Parliament representing the Bosniak party, greeted us that evening. He explained that they had received instructions to preserve the radio station and evacuate out of the city in the event of bombing or other threats. He suggested that we retreat with the radio station into the hills around Bar, where we would be safe for a while.

Exhausted, I went to sleep. Suljo and Gile followed the news, watching as NATO planes took off from the Aviano airbase in Italy.

The next morning, Vlado told us we were heading to Cetinje. There, we settled in an abandoned house belonging to some of his acquaintances. Rumours were circulating around Cetinje, with talk of a possible intervention by the Yugoslav army to take over the government and drag Montenegro into the war.

Vlado spent his days walking around Cetinje, talking to people, and encouraging the formation of a Montenegrin army to oppose Belgrade's plans to involve Montenegro in the war and to preserve peace in the country. This initiative began to take shape.

At the same time, it became clear that this was a different kind of war than we had imagined. Bridges were being bombed, factories destroyed and civilians killed. We realized this was something else, that there would be no escalation or broadening of the conflict.

We spent our days lounging around. I grabbed a transistor radio and listened to the news every half hour. Vlado kept telling me, "*Throw that away!*" but I couldn't stop. Gile, in his usual hedonistic manner, made the most of every moment. He slowly took notes for some of his poems or prose. Vlado, as usual, was out all day. The two of us would go up to Orlov Krš daily, as a form of physical exercise. From there, all of Cetinje was visible, spread out like a map.

Early in the war, it was announced that Al-

bin Kurti had been arrested, and shortly after, Slavko Ćuruvija was killed. Despite everything, it was clear that the regime would soon capitulate — it was only a matter of time.

After nearly four weeks, we realized there was nothing left of the war we had imagined, nor was there any real danger to us. So, we decided to return.

The problem was how Vlado could leave the country, as naval blockades were in place. Suljo came to the rescue and used his connections to arrange for Vlado to leave Montenegro as a stowaway on a ship bound for Dubrovnik and then on to his family. Gile went to Kragujevac, and I headed back to Vrbas.

At the bus station in Podgorica, I met a group of Albanians fleeing from Mitrovica, heading to Bosnia. I could only treat one family to a meal and chat with them, though they were all anxious and scared. They told me there had been many casualties in their city.

As we drove through Serbia, the bus driver stopped just before Čačak, turned off the lights, and told us there was an air raid alert and that, by protocol, everyone should leave the bus. I was the only one who stayed behind to nap — sleep was more important to me than the possibility of bombs hitting the bus. However, when we entered Čačak, I saw firsthand what bombing looked like. The “Sloboda” factory was smouldering in ruins, completely destroyed. We continued to Belgrade, and then I managed to reach Vrbas by some back roads and ferries, as the bridges had been bombed.

There was general joy in the family. Everyone was talking at the same time. I started feeling guilty for having left them. Ljilja told me that some kind of collective spirit had taken over. All the neighbours were socializing, while before they had only exchanged formal greetings. There weren't any daily casualties or bombs, but they were constantly in the dark due to power restrictions.

It was during this time that I first felt fear during the bombings. One night, I heard a strange sound. I jumped out of bed and felt my hair stand on end. Then, a terrible explosion followed. We rushed outside the building. About two hundred metres away, everything was smoking from the missile strike and what was left of the bridge. The roofs of nearby houses were riddled with holes, and all the windows had shattered. Astonishingly, no one was killed. I went to my brother's house. They were all standing in the yard, terrified. In front of them was a piece of the bridge, over two hundred kilos of iron, that had passed through the roof like butter.

After the bombing ended and Kosova became a protectorate, I remembered a question I had previously asked Albin: "If you free yourself from the Belgrade boot, and another boot comes to Kosova, will you fight for the liberation of the Albanian people again?"

"Yes."

Albin and the other imprisoned Albanians were put on trial in Niš. Albin stood strong: "I do not recognize this court. The only court that can judge me is the court of my own

people.”

He was sentenced to fifteen years in prison.

“It doesn’t matter whether you sentence me or how long it is. Everything I did, I did voluntarily and with dignity. I am proud of that, and if I could, I would do it all again.”

After the fall of Milošević and external pressure, the new government freed Albin and the other Albanian political prisoners after two years.

THE FALL OF MILOŠEVIĆ

“The seriousness of the current opposition against Slobodan Milošević’s regime can only be discussed if all of the opposition unites on a common programmatic basis. Without that, rallies will achieve nothing, and anti-communist slogans will not lead to democracy. Anti-communism has always led to fascism, not democracy.”

After the NATO bombings, the situation in Serbia became increasingly complicated. Under the influence of his wife, Milošević decided to call early elections, seeking the people’s support after the defeat in Kosova.

In September 1998, we launched a youth magazine called *Otpor*, written by our younger members and sympathizers, like Slobodan Sadžakov, Marija Perković and others, mostly students. The symbol of a clenched fist appeared in the magazine’s header. A female student, who wasn’t a member of our organization, painted a graffiti of the fist with the word “Otpor” on the university building. She and a few other students were arrested, sparking a real uproar among the students. Less than a month later, someone had the idea to use that concept, along with our name *Otpor* and the fist symbol, in the fight against Milošević. The *Otpor* movement was formed, albeit with a stylized version of our fist. Despite some initial upheavals, the movement gained complete support from American agencies, with significant financial backing and training for its members, aimed at overthrowing

Milošević. Everything that happened with that movement later became a classic example of the so-called “colour revolutions,” which would mark the following decades worldwide.

It became increasingly clear that this was a battle on a much larger scale, and that someone had united the entire opposition, both nationalists and liberals, under the name Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS). Students and high schoolers were pushed into the *Otpor* movement, and a less compromised candidate, Koštunica, was put forward for the elections. At the same time, efforts were made to gain the support of the working class, especially in the “Kolubara” mining basin.

At that time, we had no information about whether there were efforts to win over the police and military.

Vlado was in Belgium during the elections. After the elections, all of Serbia came to a standstill and a confrontation loomed. The police completely blocked roads to prevent citizens from coming to the opposition rally in Belgrade on October 5. The opposition did not accept the announced results of the first round of elections.

I had gone to Belgrade earlier to avoid the announced blockades. The rest of our comrades from Vojvodina couldn’t make it, nor could those from Kragujevac. However, the people from Smederevo succeeded. I was with the crowd in front of the parliament building when tear gas was thrown, and citizens stormed inside and set it on fire. Among the first was our comrade from Belgrade, Ivica

Djurić. We were directed toward the television building, where police officers on the roof were firing tear gas. I was at the back of the building, near the fence, watching the events unfold. A man in an elegant suit stood next to me. At one point, I noticed that he was holding a pistol in his hand, pressed against his thigh. He then walked away. Nearby, a young couple sat on a bench, kissing, while another couple strolled by with their dog as if nothing was happening.

I headed towards Ruzveltova Street, and from March 27th Street, I saw a column of armoured vehicles with special forces heading toward the television building. I thought chaos was about to erupt. But in the distance, I saw the armoured vehicles stop. A crowd surrounded them. The special forces were talking to the people. I thought, "This is good."

Back at the apartment, exhausted, I just wanted to rest, but here came Milan Djurić from Smederevo, all proud. He said he had been involved in surrounding and blocking a police station. He saw some people had even gotten hold of weapons. I told him to wake me if Milošević sent in tanks. At one point, he woke me and said that some acquaintances from Smederevo were asking if they could stay in the apartment until morning. When I woke up in the morning, the people from Smederevo were gone. They had left bottles of whisky, coffee, chocolates and all sorts of things on the table.

Djurić said, "They were interested in something else."

“What?”

“Jewelry stores.”

The next morning, I left for Vrbas. There wasn't an intact shop window in sight. Everything was smashed, and a lot had been looted. In front of the city hall, people were dancing in a circle while politicians on the balcony urged them not to leave because it wasn't over yet. At the bus station, policemen from the provinces sat without their caps. Some held their heads in their hands, deep in thought. Back in Vrbas, some people I didn't particularly like were hugging me, drunk with victory. Milošević addressed the public and admitted defeat in the elections.

Under the influence of these events, we used the term “democratic revolution” in our party's public statement. However, during a meeting two weeks later, Vlado pointed out the error in that statement. There were about ten comrades at the meeting. Vlado called from Belgium and dictated the message. Milan Djurić listened and wrote it down.

**Phone conversation with Vlado Dapčević —
October 21, 2000**

“Every serious party, and I consider our party to be serious and to have proven itself so in every action, must always, especially during significant events, conduct a thorough analysis based on available facts and only facts — not on hearsay or wishful thinking. The question is, what happened in Belgrade in recent days? Was it a revolution, as the Western mass media claims, or a coup, as

Velimir Ilić, Slobodan Milošević and Šešelj say?

“When it comes to revolution, it is a relentless struggle between two classes for a fundamental change in social system. In the case of Belgrade, this was neither a class struggle nor a revolution. Rather, nationalist forces in Serbia, after their final unification around Koštunica, organized a coup that required the backing of a broader popular movement.

“In an interview with Velimir Ilić on October 12, 2000, it became clear that a high-ranking official from the Ministry of Internal Affairs came and informed him that there would be no shooting, and that they could enter the parliament and television building. After the first wave of demonstrators was repelled, a phone call was made and the police withdrew.

“What happened after the elections? Russia, which had supported Slobodan Milošević, found itself in a delicate situation, as all its troops in the area were placed on high alert. Putin and Ivanov did not want a civil war because Kosova Force (KFOR) troops would have entered Belgrade. Therefore, they sided with Koštunica and the DOS, counting on their nationalism, to prevent NATO from further expanding in the region. Serbia, in that sense, was of interest both to the West and to Russia. While Ivanov was negotiating, first with Koštunica and then with Slobodan Milošević, special paratrooper units moved toward Belgrade. When Ivanov heard this, he refused any further support for Slobodan Milošević.

“When it comes to the coup, only one person was removed — Slobodan Milošević — and only from his position. He and his associates have now

regrouped and taken full control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and part of the Yugoslav Army. In Serbia, there was no systemic change, only a change of individuals. After everything, the question arises: was our stance correct, or did we misjudge the situation? Our line was completely correct, and with the resources we had, we took the right position. Despite being a small party, we are the only working-class and revolutionary party in Serbia and Yugoslavia, based on proletarian internationalism, which we have consistently applied in practice. We have built significant political capital over the past period, and we must not jeopardize it over minor or major day-to-day events, nor should we cater to anyone's demands.

“On the other hand, the struggle between the DOS and Slobodan Milošević was essentially a battle between two nationalisms for power. One was inconsistent — Milošević’s — and the other was consistent, firm and unyielding, represented by the DOS. Given the current balance of power, the DOS’s decision to put forward Koštunica as their presidential candidate was smart and correct, because only he could unite all the nationalist forces in Serbia, which had been fragmented across different parties, to create a critical mass for the potential removal of Slobodan Milošević.

“Again, we need to be realistic about our political strength. We are still such a small party that, not only on a national level but even locally, no matter how engaged we are, we cannot influence shifts in power, not even at the level of a neighbourhood council. We must also acknowledge that neither we nor anyone else in the world knew that a split had formed within the police and military

apparatus. This was done completely covertly and in a coup-like manner. When I spoke with Role, I mentioned that we didn't know whether the apparatus was fracturing. The only visible conflict was between nationalist forces. We must seek out and recognize the details, no matter how small, that could mean a great deal.

"When everything started, our people performed excellently. This means that all of our comrades understood that members of the Party of Labour must be with the masses when they are in motion to change something and influence them as much as possible through words, actions and participation, focussing on what is fundamental to our minimum program — the elimination of the Great-Serb nationalist policy. At the same time, we should wisely use this opportunity to observe and establish closer contacts with young people, workers, students and others who stand out, particularly through their militancy and anti-nationalist stance."

Soon, these views were fully confirmed. Many would later point out that the much-needed "October 6" never happened.

In the general turmoil, and the demand to open police archives and allow citizens access to their files to see whether they were under surveillance and being followed, we decided to investigate. We wanted to find out if there was information on us and how much significance the regime had attributed to our strength. We also hoped to uncover any infiltrators in our ranks.

Gile quickly took advantage of this oppor-

tunity and went to the Kragujevac State Security office. The inspector handed him a folder with over 150 pages. He read through it until he got bored and began skipping parts. Most of it consisted of transcripts of our telephone conversations. I was referred to by the codename "The Instigator." During our planning for the trip to Kosova, it was suggested that constant surveillance and even video monitoring be put in place.

I didn't go to Novi Sad right away but waited another two weeks. In the end, I went and requested access to my file. In the hallway, I saw the former politician Mirko Čanadanović, who had been removed from his position during Tito's era and accused of liberalism.

I assumed he was there for the same reason.

However, by then, everything related to the opening of the files had been halted. The new government had decided that the current state of affairs regarding the files benefited them more than it harmed them. As a result, the issue of opening the files was mentioned less and less over time. All they gave me was a single sheet of paper containing a denunciation by a political prisoner from Sremska Mitrovica prison, from nearly thirty years ago. I was angry at myself for being naive, and even more so for agreeing to ask anything from them in the first place.

THE CIRCLE IS CLOSED

Returning to Montenegro was a real ordeal. Vlado mostly stayed in his hotel room. Some people came to visit him, but he no longer had the energy for the long conversations that were typical of him. The nights were particularly difficult because he kept waking up. In the hotel hallway, I would meet with our comrades, which gave me a bit of a break from the constant watch over him. Once, Vlado came out into the hallway after me, barefoot straight from bed and said, "*Where are you going? Don't leave me alone!*"

At that time, he received an invitation to visit Djukanović. He got ready, and I could see it meant something to him. He returned somewhat dissatisfied. He had expected more.

"I thought we would have a political discussion, but it all boiled down to formality."

Djukanović had thanked him for everything and gave him a watch.

In Belgrade, younger members would visit him during the week and make sure he wasn't left alone.

Whenever Vlado had previously set off for Belgium or anywhere else, he would pack his suitcase meticulously, with every little thing in its place. Now, he did it a bit carelessly. Passing by the Technical Faculty in a taxi, he pointed to the facade above again and said with a tinge of sadness in his voice:

"For a long time, there were bullet holes there from where the Ljotićites fired before the war. Later, they removed all of that."

At the airport, a flight attendant with a cart was waiting to take him away. I leaned down and kissed him. We didn't say anything; our eyes just welled up with tears. We knew we wouldn't see each other again.

In Belgium, Comrade Ismet Adrović and his wife visited him. The last contact was by phone. Almost in a whisper, Vlado said:

"I think it's the end."

When he was diagnosed with lung cancer, the doctor advised Vlado to stop smoking immediately.

"What will I gain from that?"

"Certainly, a few more months of life."

"I've smoked all my life, so I won't change that for just a few more months."

Vlado died on July 12, 2001 at the age of 84. On the same date in 1941, the decision to rise up in revolt was made, and the next day the people of Montenegro, as one, rose up against the Italian fascist occupiers.

"It was exactly three in the morning. I raised my rifle and said — Let's start, with luck."

Vlado's nephew Nikola from Belgium called me and told me that Micheline wanted to know if Vlado's wish had been to be buried in Montenegro. I confirmed it.

Later, the relatives, especially Ljubo and Rade Dapčević, got involved in organizing the funeral.

Radinja Vešović contacted me to say he was very sorry that he couldn't make such a long journey.

Some of the members travelled by car,

some by bus, train, while others were already in Montenegro. We from Vrbas spent the night at Pedja Simićević's place, in Aluge near Žabljak.

In Cetinje, at the chapel, Milenko arrived with his wife, Bosiljka. Milo Djukanović also came with his entourage. After that, we headed to Ljubotinj. There, we saw Vlado's birthplace, which had been burned down by the Italian fascists during the war, leaving only the charred stone walls. Now, only a few elderly women lived in the village, visited occasionally by their relatives from the city.

The path to the cemetery was quite inaccessible and overgrown with bushes. The relatives had made efforts to clear a narrow path and access. However, the coffin had to be carried to the cemetery, and local villagers from nearby areas helped to easily carry it. Along that path, behind the coffin, Micheline and Milena walked unsteadily. I can only imagine how they felt on that rocky terrain in the wilderness. Their feet had never before stepped on Montenegrin soil, especially not in such a remote place.

Montenegrin television also covered the event. I gave a speech, and Rade Dapčević, on behalf of the family, thanked everyone present. I struggled to find the right words, not wanting to sound sentimental, as it seemed that anything I said wouldn't carry enough weight and would be insufficient.

"Vlado Dapčević was a man of the 20th century. He was its attentive witness and a fierce participant. Through his life story, like

through a prism, all the hardships, sufferings and ideals that this century carried in abundance are reflected. Only from that perspective can one understand the life and fate of Vlado Dapčević. This is why all of Vlado Dapčević's struggles were the same, a continuous battle for something better, for something more human, for something more just, and he never wavered or faltered in this, with his boundless optimism, constant smile and incapacity for hatred. He was the salt of this earth because if it weren't for such people, for those rare grains of salt, the earth would become tasteless. The greatest among us has died. To us, his comrades, he was a leader, a teacher and a friend — a symbol and a guide. Let it remain so. Let us be grateful to Vlado Dapčević for pushing the boundaries of humanity..."

As Vlado himself said two years earlier:

"Everything I've been through tells me I will die in peace because, to the best of my abilities, I have done everything to make life better for the people. In such a struggle, when you fight against a stronger opponent, you have to pay the price. I think I've confirmed Marx's maxim when asked what happiness means to him, he replied, 'To fight!' I am a happy man because, throughout my life, I've had the strength, even now at 82, to fight for a better and more just society. And as long as I breathe, I won't stop fighting because that's the meaning of my life."

EPILOGUE

After Vlado's death, we felt the need to preserve his memory, as it seemed at that moment that everything would eventually fade into oblivion. Some comrades believed that without Vlado, the party could not survive, so they left us, while others became passive.

Meanwhile, in Montenegro, of course, no one suggested that Vlado should be honoured in any way. To all of them, he still remained on the other side of the class barricade.

We placed a marker on his grave, where he was buried in his grandmother's grave, who had passed away at the beginning of the 20th century. On a small plaque on the old monument, it read: *Vlado Dapčević, Revolutionary 1917-2001. Party of Labour.*

Martin Opančar from Hungary came to me and said he would like to visit Vlado's grave before he dies. We set off from Belgrade together with Comrade Dragan Džaković, who was in charge of staying in Vlado's apartment. In Podgorica, we were met by Nana Dapčević, who drove us to Ljubotinj, to the grave. Martin was thrilled and took several photos of the grave and all of us.

Before that, another event occurred that left a particular impression on me.

After Vlado's death, Kosa called me and told me that I knew why she couldn't attend the funeral, but that she would like to meet in Sušanj, near Bar. It was already autumn. She arrived, walking slowly, and we sat under the umbrellas by the beach.

It was a moment for silence and listening.

“I haven’t told you before, but he had a fiancée. She was a nurse. She stayed with the wounded. The Chetniks came and massacred everyone; the nurses were raped, then slaughtered, and had five-pointed stars carved into their chests. Dana and I loved him the most, each in our own way. We never told him that she committed suicide when he was kidnapped in Bucharest. She knew she would never see him again. She wrote a letter, lay down in the bathtub and slit her wrists. And me?... Well, we were never together...”

Then she took out a photo of herself as a partisan and placed it on the table, saying:

“Take it.”

She walked away slowly, just as she had come. I sat there for a long time, staring at the waves crashing on the shore, feeling as if each one took a part of me with it.

To show that we would continue even more resolutely after Vlado’s death, we organized a protest in front of the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade over the U.S. attack on Afghanistan. The police had banned the protest, but we didn’t back down. A line of police awaited us and armed special forces were inside the embassy.

We burned the American flag and threw firecrackers at the police. They arrested us — four of ours and one anarchist. Later, we were released.

With our younger comrade Sovilj, I went to Kosova to visit Albin. I wanted to see him after his time in prison and hear his current

thoughts and positions. Albin welcomed us into his apartment. He told us that his movement, *Vetëvendosje*, was made up not only of leftists but also of nationalists and liberals. Albin spoke of the crimes committed against the Albanian people but also acknowledged that at the end of the war, there were acts of revenge by the Albanians, mostly in villages, and primarily by those who had lost loved ones. I could see that his political stance was shifting and that he was becoming more pragmatic. However, his comrade Liburn told us that he had been a Marxist-Leninist and had also been in prison. After the war, when he was released, he saw many of his comrades who had previously declared themselves Marxist-Leninists, frequently visiting foreign embassies in Prishtina. He asked me to visit his sick father, who had expressed a desire to meet Vlado's comrade. But we were in a hurry to catch the bus to Belgrade. I often reproached myself later for not fulfilling the wish of the ailing man.

At the departure, as the bus was about to leave, we saw Albin and Liburn running towards us, carrying bags full of pastries and yogurt so we wouldn't be hungry on the way.

I opened the *Communist Manifesto* that I had received from Albin, which he had gotten from some anarchists in Belgrade. I remembered Vlado's words: "*When I read the Communist Manifesto, I felt like a communist.*" And I recalled his other words from a party assembly:

"Every person who works makes mistakes, and

so does Role. But thanks to Role, and to him alone, who worked diligently with Bolshevik consistency and persistence, our party has survived, and for all that, I tip my hat to him before all of you.”

MEMORIES

During one assembly of the Party of Labour, I suggested to the comrades that they decorate the hall with our flags, symbols and portraits of the classics: Marx, Engels and Lenin. However, Vlado arrived before the meeting started and firmly ordered, "*Take down this masquerade!*" We were all shocked and surprised, but only later did I understand the correctness and depth of his demand.

* * *

Vlado carried an Italian Beretta, a highly regarded pistol for which one gunsmith offered me the choice of two pistols from his arsenal in exchange. Whenever Vlado went to Belgium, he would leave it with me and I always carried it with me. When I travelled outside of Serbia, I entrusted it to Comrade Aneta for safekeeping.

In the end, that pistol was given as a token of appreciation to the Mustafić family from Bar, in gratitude for the help they provided to Vlado.

* * *

We visited Bogosav Živkov in Pančevo, Vlado's comrade, a small Romani blacksmith, but still as lively as fire. He and his family were overjoyed at our visit, but we were devastated by the poverty in which Bogosav lived.

Two years later, he fell ill. Vlado and Kosana went to visit him.

"He stared blankly, not recognizing us. Then,

in one moment, it was as if his awareness returned. His eyes blazed like in the old days, in the heat of battle. He lifted himself up in bed and began to sing The Internationale at the top of his lungs, so loud that the entire ward of the mental hospital echoed."

He died a few days later.

* * *

Vlado's comrade, Ferid "Fićo" Čengić, had been to Goli Otok twice.

Because of his contributions during the pre-war and wartime periods, he was elected the first post-war mayor of Sarajevo. Before the war, he spent six years in prison, and during the war, he was imprisoned and tortured by the Ustaše. He was later exchanged for a captured German officer. His wife, Nataša Zimonjić, came from the well-known Zimonjić family, as did the Čengić family. (The history of these two families, as well as the fate of Ferid Čengić and Nataša Zimonjić, could fill volumes.)

In one interview, Nataša said:

"Well, through the Zimonjić family, my dear child, I am related to those great royal and imperial families, and now, when I look back, I wonder how so many decades of my life after the Second World War passed, and that fact meant almost nothing to me? Life was different then. We were all the same. It didn't matter who came from a larger or smaller spring. Perhaps that is, in fact, the ideal of humanity, isn't it?"

"My sister Ksenija was a nurse in a parti-

san unit. The Chetniks captured and slaughtered her. My cousin was in Belgrade as a student. He was imprisoned in Banjica. Three days before the liberation of Belgrade, he was hanged.”

Fićo and Nataša’s eldest son, Goran, was an athlete and a member of the Bosnian national handball team. In the summer of 1992, he went to save his old neighbour, Professor Husnija Čerimagić, whom Veselin Vlahović Batko, later known as the Monster of Grbavica, came to take. Goran failed to save his neighbour, and Batko killed him as well.

Nataša spent her final years reminiscing and caring for her mentally ill son, Rodoljub. That responsibility kept her going. She had also lost her other son, Igor, who died of leukemia while still in high school. At that time, Goran dragged a huge stone from Jablanica for his brother’s grave. He told his mother that he had visited the quarry for days, watching the machinery work.

“As soon as that stone appeared, he knew it was the one he was waiting for. Then he worked on it himself, giving it shape. He was ecstatic about its beauty, just as he was with all beauty. Little did he know then that from 1999 onward, after they found the grave on Trebević, it would also mark his own resting place.”

Nataša had refused to abandon her husband, even when pressured to do so multiple times, starting in 1948.

“Fićo couldn’t bear the fact that former comrades were quickly becoming the ‘red

bourgeoisie.' I was thrilled when they opened warehouses where the communist elite could buy better goods with special coupons, and I immediately thought about whom I would get something for. But Fićo strictly ordered me not to go. He was driven by pure ideals and never wanted any privileges for himself or his family. He worked honestly and was deeply sensitive to injustice. You can imagine how he felt when Aleksandar Ranković, in front of Tito and the entire leadership at the time, here in Sarajevo, reproached him for having the most 'Turks' in the Committee. I was there at that dinner. Fićo jumped up, grabbed Ranković by the shirt and demanded an apology. Tito had to step in and separate them, but from that day on, our life was never the same."

After the war in Bosnia ended, the secret police archives were briefly opened. Nataša went to see what they had on Fićo. They gave her a few selected documents. From them, she concluded, as she had suspected earlier, that some of their friends had come to their home under orders from the party.

She decided she wouldn't tell anyone.

"Everyone will have to live with their own conscience."

After the war, Vlado sent our member from Bijelo Polje, Refik, to visit Nataša in Sarajevo.

A few years later, I brought Vlado the good news that the Monster of Grbavica had been arrested and was in prison in Spuž, Montenegro.

"Hmmm. Remember, remember the name of

that criminal. Once evil flares up, it's hard to stop."

But the criminal escaped from prison and fled abroad. Vlado was ill by then, and I didn't want to upset him with the news. Later, however, the criminal was once again captured and imprisoned in Bosnia. By then, Vlado was gone.

When Batko was finally arrested and tried, the 2013 verdict included: 31 murders, 14 disappearances of persons believed to have been killed by him, 13 rapes, and over 50 beatings and severe injuries.

He was sentenced to 42 years in prison.

During his extradition from Spain to Bosnia, Batko declared, "I killed more than a hundred Muslims and burned their bodies. And I don't regret it."

* * *

"As for that fool, Slobodan 'Boba' Mitrić, he was recruited back when he was in a correctional home in Kruševac. They gave him materials and sent him to Romania, to some of my comrades there. He introduced himself as a political prisoner from Yugoslavia and said he wanted to go to the West, asking for connections. They gave him my phone number. So when he was in Brussels, he called me. I was immediately suspicious. He spun some story. But since my comrades had given him the number, I agreed to meet him. Michelle was at work. Our apartment was on the third floor. From the peephole, I had a clear view of the hallway and the elevator. As soon as he stepped out of the elevator, I grew even more suspicious. I positioned a chair farther from me so I'd have

time to react. The moment he sat down and started talking, I knew he was lying. I told him to wait a minute while I went to the other room. I came back with my hand in my pocket, two fingers forward. I said to him: 'I'm going to kill you like a dog right here if you don't tell me who sent you, and you know I will.'

"Even though I didn't have a gun, I knew I couldn't shoot him, as it would have completely complicated my stay in Belgium. He turned white as a sheet, visibly shaken. He spilled everything, admitting that the police had tasked him with killing me whenever he had the chance. I told him to get up slowly and leave, warning him that if I ever saw him near, even across the street, I would shoot him. I later watched from behind the curtain to make sure he left.

"I didn't tell Micheline, as it would have upset her, but not long after, a Dutch police commissioner announced himself. Micheline was in a panic again. We let him in, and he informed us that Mitrić had been arrested in Holland following a shootout within the Yugoslav émigré underworld, where some were killed. Shots were even fired at the police. Mitrić was now asking me to confirm that he wasn't a criminal, but a political emigrant. I refused. Later, he wrote to me from prison, asking me to be a witness in his trial."

Slobodan Bob Mitrić, after being released from prison (he was originally from my neighbouring village, Bačko Dobro Polje), praised Vlado while simultaneously supporting Chetnik organizations. After Milošević's fall, there was even a newspaper serial where he described his work for the Yugoslav State Sec-

urity and his encounters with Vlado, claiming that he had abandoned the idea of killing Vlado once he realized who he was dealing with. He eventually died in an attic in Amsterdam, in utter poverty and madness.

“At that time, a fellow Yugoslav who ran a small restaurant helped me. My job was to maintain the toilets, clean the floors and tidy the tables after closing. I also had a small room where I lived. Buha, who later became some sort of minister under Radovan Karadžić, would occasionally drop by. Back then, he was a student in Paris. He would start provoking me, saying things like:

“Vlado, you’re a colonel, and now you’ve ended up scrubbing toilets.’

“I tolerated it a few times, but one day I grabbed that mop with the broom:

“Listen, Buha! If I get hold of you with this, it won’t end well for you!’

“He never showed up again. When I was kidnapped in Bucharest, and after they decided to sentence me to death, they read to me everything I had said back then. Thirty-something typewritten pages. All reports from Buha.”

“I stayed in these shelters in Paris. There were also some Roma families there who mostly didn’t work. One day, one of them won a huge amount of money in the lottery. They disappeared for almost a month. When they returned, I asked them where they had been. They said they’d been staying in hotels, eating, drinking and celebrating until they

spent it all.”

* * *

“While working on power lines and hanging on them, I got sick and developed a high fever. A Spanish worker saved me then. He brought me to my place half-dead and settled me in. When I came to a bit, I found some money in my pocket that he had left for me. Those Spaniards were the best comrades.”

* * *

Vlado had an unfulfilled wish to meet Djilas and engage in an “ideological showdown.” There was an attempt to organize a forum or meeting between the two of them, representing two opposite poles of Yugoslavia’s dissident movement. However, Djilas refused.

In his renunciation of the idea, Djilas fell further and further, always trying to justify his earlier positions, refusing to take personal responsibility, or downplaying and forgetting his role in certain events. Still, I believe Vlado retained some residual respect for Djilas from that earlier period, considering him the chief party ideologue. Djilas’s silence during the 1990s, his flirtation with nationalism and his funeral, complete with a throng of priests, put an end to everything and sparked a kind of pity in Vlado.

“I remember after the war, Djilas used to come by our house. We would often have discussions over dinner — him, me and Peko.

“One time, I told him:

“Djido, you’re just a messy intellectual.”

“Peko jumped to the ceiling and later told me:

“You’re crazy! Do you know what he could do to you?”

“But Djilas wasn’t the vengeful type, and he let it slide.”

* * *

“All those stories about women are fabrications. Just like the things they showed about me on TV.

“I always said — when did I have time for all that? Before the war, it was party work and arrests. During the war, the same thing. I had only one opportunity during the war, when we spent the night in a cabin and a comrade was lying next to me. I felt her closeness, hugged her around the chest and pulled her closer. But then I immediately thought — ‘What happens next?’ I’d have to tell everyone we were together and that I’d marry her. I didn’t carry any of the gear like other fighters, just a rifle with five bullets. The rest of the comrades helped me. In the morning, I got a blanket thrown in my face by that comrade...

“After the war, I worked like a horse until 1948. I was swamped with work. There were only opportunities during those receptions when I would go meet someone, but that was rare. One time, Tempo said in front of everyone: ‘Vlado, you’re a womanizer!’ What could I say but: ‘I’m not a pederast, so if the opportunity arises, sure.’

“Then came eight and a half years on Goli Otok, and right after that, the escape to Albania. Well, in the Soviet Union, there was plenty of that. Women there are warmer and freer than ours, and

besides, there were 20 million more women after the war. There was this engineer, a good man, who once asked me to go with him to his village. He hadn't seen his mother in a long time. I went with him to some remote place. We got off the bus and slowly headed towards the village. It was a summer night, and we were smoking as we walked. From the village, we heard singing. Those sad female voices — enough to stop your heart. They knew we were coming. And there, about fifteen women sat and sang around the table. There was hugging and kissing all around. He explained to me that only the elderly and children were left in the village. The young had gone to the city. All the other men had died on the front.

“Olja lived in Odessa, and she loved me very much. She was married, and her husband was on ocean liners and wouldn't come home for six months at a time. They had a son who was in elementary school. I lived there with her, and her husband knew. I tutored her son in math and other subjects. I was almost like a father to him. When I left the Soviet Union, I thought I'd never see her again, especially after the kidnapping in Bucharest. In the solitary confinement of the Požarevac prison, after ten years, I started losing my masculinity. I felt like a part of me was disappearing. When I got out, I decided to visit Olja in the USSR. A middle-aged man opened the door for me. At first, I thought he was her husband, but it turned out to be her son, now a physicist, who said his mother had just gone to the hairdresser. Behind him, an old man appeared, even older than me. That was her husband. Then Olja showed up. She hadn't changed a bit. The same! She looked at the

two of us. Two old men.”

* * *

“My grandfather was a priest. His wife died early. He was almost a hundred years old, and he would smoke and drink half a litre of rakija a day. He liked it best when I made him coffee. While I was making it, he’d ask me all sorts of questions since I was already in school.

“Vlado, do they teach you anything in that school of yours?”

“They do, grandpa.’

“What do you learn?”

“A little bit of everything, grandpa.’

“Have they taught you what the greatest sin in the world is?”

“Yes, grandpa. Do not kill, do not steal... do not commit adultery.’ (I listed what we had learned in religious studies.)

“Eee. You don’t know anything, you beast! The greatest sin is when a woman gives you signs that she wants to be with you, and you betray her. Look, I’m almost a hundred years old. I’ve forgotten all the women I’ve been with since your grandmother died early. But the ones I could have been with, but for various reasons I wasn’t — they come to me in my dreams every night and torment me. That’s the greatest sin, and you’d better remember it well. Now, go make some coffee. You make it the best.”

* * *

“Once, some woman from the village told my mother that my father was seeing someone in Cetinje. When he came home, my mother con-

fronted him about it. I was just a boy then. My father pushed my mother aside. I grabbed an axe and went straight for him. My mother grabbed my hand and took the axe away from me. I ran across the yard and went to my uncle's place. My mother came two days later to take me home, as if nothing had happened. From then on, my relationship with my father changed. It was as if he respected me more."

* * *

"Peko was a better footballer than I was. We even had a team in Cetinje back then. And he kicked me off the team. I was furious. I waited for him to come back. I hid behind the door with a club. I heard him whistling as he approached, clearly pleased with himself — they'd won. The moment he entered, I struck him across the back with the club, and he fell flat on the floor.

"You dare kick me off the team!"

* * *

"The National Liberation War of the Yugoslav peoples was great in terms of the ideas and goals it set, all of which were achieved. The main goal was to free the country from the occupiers and establish a community of equal nations. What it later turned into is another story, but the National Liberation War itself had an absolutely positive character. That's the judgement of history, and nothing can change that."

* * *

"I took my nephew Ljubo to Pljevlja. He was still in high school at the time. He was part of a

choir and had a voice like Caruso. That night, the Italians bombarded us with artillery. It was a terrible slaughter, and we were inexperienced. At one point, Ljubo started singing 'O Sole Mio.' Everything went silent. The Italians stopped firing and everyone listened. When he finished, the bombardment resumed. A shell hit, and I saw Ljubo blown apart right before my eyes. A ricochet hit me in the back of the head. In a daze, I wandered off, taking off my coat, barefoot in the snow.

"It was Djuro who saved me — he later became Tito's bodyguard, and he was a veteran of the Spanish Civil War. Djuro broke into a warehouse filled with sacks of salt. It was a flimsy shack that any shell would have torn apart. He built a proper bunker out of the sacks, and that's how we survived at that moment. Djuro later shielded Tito with his body and died on the Sutjeska, not like the lies they made up later. I saw Tito on the Sutjeska, angrily shooting at German planes from a rock, powerless."

* * *

"I knew Sava (Kovačević) from the pre-war period, and we were in prison together in Sarajevo. He was a true communist. After the war, people said and made up all sorts of things about him, true and false. It's true that we made those so-called leftist mistakes in Montenegro and Herzegovina, and that we alienated the people from us. But many of those actions were justified. You don't execute a kulak, and then he betrays you or shoots at you at the first opportunity. Most of them collaborated with the Italians and supported the Chetniks. There were some stupid decisions too.

We published a bulletin of the Provincial Headquarters for Montenegro, where we even printed lists of executed kulaks, and at the bottom, it said: 'To be continued.'

"I was assigned to lead a group to execute a kulak I knew. We went and waited for him outside his house. When he appeared, we shot at the roof of the house. Eventually, these actions were condemned as mistakes, but the damage had already been done.

"A doctor told me about Sava's death. He was involved in the exhumations after the war. People today write and lie about it. It was early morning, foggy. The fighters were demoralized, and Sava attempted another breakthrough. A German sniper shot him then. They covered him with some branches to avoid panic and continued the charge. The exit wound was in the back, but the bullet had entered beneath his moustache, so the entrance wound wasn't visible."

* * *

"On the Sutjeska, the German planes destroyed us. They had maps and bombed in a grid pattern, one area at a time with carpet bombing. I nearly died in one of their raids. I saw they had finished the previous valley and that we were next. We were on a path with cliffs on one side and a fifty-metre drop on the other — nowhere to escape. At the last moment, I spotted a thick branch jutting out over the precipice, half a metre below the path. I jumped onto it, knowing that only a direct hit would kill me. Half of those above me were killed.

"War is a craft, and you have to know how

to fight. Once, when we were mining a railroad at night, a Ustaše armoured train came. Everyone panicked and started running away from the train. One experienced fighter told us to run towards it. The Ustaše machine gun couldn't aim through the narrow slits at close range because of a dead zone. Those who ran away were killed."

* * *

"On Goli Otok, I realized that the Yugoslav leadership had completely crossed over to the other side and that, like all renegades, they took their vengeance most harshly on their former comrades. They carried out an unprecedented internal terror in the prison. A portion of the inmates were forced to become executioners, to beat, torture and humiliate their own comrades. The worst part about Goli Otok wasn't the daily beatings, the hunger, the thirst, the gruelling labour, or the lack of sleep — even though each of those was terrible on its own. The worst was the atmosphere. An atmosphere of horror that constantly hung in the air. In that atmosphere of horror, I came to the conclusion that those who commit such crimes must be fought against with everything, to the death."

* * *

"You can't live in this world without trusting people, even when you shouldn't trust them at all. Man is a social creature, and whether you like it or not, you have to live with others. How can you live with people if you don't trust them?"



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