

# Following the Footprints of Stalin: The Yugoslav “Dachau Trials” 1948

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In October 1946 news circulated in Slovenia that a man named Janko Puffer, charged with burning the glass factory he managed, had been sentenced to death as a saboteur. This in itself was not unusual as press reports about sentences against saboteurs, fifth-columnists and class-enemies were a frequent occurrence during that period. What stood out about Puffer was his past: Born as Hans Puffer into a Slovenian family in Graz, he had been an active communist and unionist before the war, had volunteered for the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, joined the Slovenian leftist Liberation Front (Osvobodilna Fronta) upon the outbreak of the war, and had after his subsequent arrest spent the years 1943 to 1945 imprisoned in the Dachau Concentration Camp. In short, it was very unusual to accuse someone like him as a saboteur.

Already in 1946, Puffer’s execution was put on hold and in mid-1947 the supreme court of the People’s republic of Slovenia revisited his case. In August of that year, the court engineered a connection between Puffer and a “subversive group” of so-called former Gestapo agents. This group allegedly consisted of Yugoslav communists imprisoned in Dachau during the war, who had served there as Kapos and prisoner functionaries and who supposedly had been trained by Gestapo to work undercover against the Yugoslav Liberation Movement.<sup>1</sup> This connection between old guard communist structures in Dachau and the Gestapo was the first step of what Oto Luthar termed as the purge “project” which will lead in April 1948 to eleven death sentences and in the

<sup>1</sup> With Dachau have been mentioned as well the camps of Buchenwald and Auschwitz.

next years to several other trials.<sup>2</sup> In the predominantly locally centered Slovene historiography, this and a number of subsequent trials are known as the “Dachau trials”, a term coined by historian Valdimir Dedijer in the ‘60s. In this paper we will focus only on the first and most spectacular trial that occurred in Ljubljana between April 20 and April 26, 1948.

The most notorious of the Dachau Trials is also commonly referred to as the “Diehl-Oswald trial”, named after the first two defendants, Branko Diehl and Stane Oswald. This paper will not focus on the question of guilt of the defendants.<sup>3</sup> Dušan Nećak, Ljubo Bavcon and Peter Kobe have already settled this question in the anthology *Dachauski procesi. Raziskovalno poročilo z dokumenti* [The Dachau Trials: a Research Report with documents], where they demonstrate that the defendants were charged without proof and were tortured to confess, removing all doubt about the set-up behind the trials.<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, all defendants had been rehabilitated by 1987.

Instead, this paper is interested in the political function of the trial – that in several ways resembles a purge – as a show trial for the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) and its political agenda at that moment in time. For this, it is necessary to focus on the charges in the trial as an “amalgam” – a cobbled together mixture of a whole range of accusations intended to lump in and accuse several groups together –,<sup>5</sup> created ad hoc in order to demonize the defendants and intended as a script<sup>6</sup> for the show trial.

<sup>2</sup> Oto Luthar et al., *The Land Between. A History of Slovenia* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2008) (hereafter cited as Luthar: *The Land Between*), 454.

<sup>3</sup> The survivor of the Trials, Boris Fakin, wrote under his alias, Igor Torkar, a novel about his experience with the trials: Igor Torkar, *Umiranje na rate: Dachauski procesi* (Zagreb, 1984) (hereafter cited as Torkar: *Dachauski procesi*). Another artistic work about the trials is the theater play of the writer and director Žarko Petan, *Žarko Petan: Dachauski procesi* (premier in Ljubljana November 24, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> The collection includes different essays which offer a deep and wide analysis about the proceeding of the trials, the Yugoslav punishment law adopted, the rehabilitation process of the convicts in the following decades. Cf. Dušan Nećak, “Dachauski procesi v kraju in času nastanka [The Time and the Place of the Origin of the Dachau Trials],” in *Dachauski procesi. Raziskovalno poročilo z dokumenti* [*The Dachau Trials: A Research Report with Documents*], ed. Martin Ivanič (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1990), pp. 53–89 (hereafter cited as Nećak: *Času*), 53–89; Ljubo Bavcon, “Poskus pravne in politične analize Dachauskih Procesov [Attempt of a Correct and Political Analysis of the Dachau Trials],” in *Dachauski procesi. Raziskovalno poročilo z dokumenti* [*The Dachau Trials: A Research Report with Documents*], ed. Martin Ivanič (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1990), pp. 125–155 (hereafter cited as Bavcon: *Poskus*), 121–124; Peter Kobe, “Uporaba kazenskega procesnega prava v dachauskih procesih [Application of Criminal Procedural Law in the Dachau Trials],” in *Dachauski procesi. Raziskovalno poročilo z dokumenti* [*The Dachau Trials: A Research Report with Documents*], ed. Martin Ivanič (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1990), pp. 107–117 (hereafter cited as Kobe: *Uporaba*), 107–117.

<sup>5</sup> Amalgam is a term used by Leon Trotsky to designate the Kremlin’s practice of lumping together different groups in order to accuse them together. Leo Trotzki, *Stalins Verbrechen* (Berlin: Dietz, 1990) (hereafter cited as Trotzki: *Verbrechen*), 202.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Georg H. Hodos, *Schauprozesse. Stalinistische Säuberungen in Osteuropa 1948–54* (Frankfurt a.M.:

As the German historian Manfred Zeidler pointed out in his study of the Minsk trials against war criminals in 1946, a show trial is first and foremost a show in which it is fundamental to demonize the defendants in order to legitimize the judicial process against them and conduct further purges.<sup>7</sup> We consider a show trial successful when the publicity of its proceedings and the demonization of its defendants succeeds in spreading fear and instilling obedience among those people who become afraid to fit into the amalgam of the charges it laid out.<sup>8</sup> In order to understand the amalgam behind the Diehl-Oswald trial and its script, it is, therefore, necessary to consider the particular political atmosphere in which it played out and the internal and international context of the spring of 1948.

In the presentation of his book “The Battle Stalin lost”, given in Ljubljana in 1969, the historian Vladimir Dedijer coined the expression “Dachau trials” as a reference to the better-known Dachau Trials held in the fall 1945 by the U.S. Military in Germany. He described the sequel of Yugoslav trials in 1948 as the only example of Stalinist show trials “ruled in Yugoslavia until that moment”<sup>9</sup> This term was intended as a provocation, highlighting the problem of a Yugoslav military court indicting former concentration camp inmates. Referring back to this provocation of Dedijer, this paper intends to show how the Dachau Trials “script” presented the accused as perpetrators akin to those of the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg.

Dušan Nećak describes the “Dachau Trials” explicitly as political trials against a group of defendants similar in their politics and charged with invented accusations. He, however, draws an important distinction between this Yugoslav show trial and the Stalinist show trials of the 1930s, especially in that the defendants of the Oswald-Diehl trial were not direct political rivals of the Yugoslav Communist leadership.<sup>10</sup> This view is further supported by Georg Hermann Hodos who describes the “Great Terror” of the Thirties in the Soviet Union, as a sequence of trials which served to centralize the power in the only Stalin hands (Alleinherrschaft),<sup>11</sup> and this was indeed not the case of the “Dachau Trials”. Ljubo Bavcon on the other hand emphasizes the Stalinist character

Campus Verlag, 1988) (hereafter cited as Hodos: Schauprozesse), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Manfred Zeidler, “Der Minsker Kriegsverbrecherprozeß vom Januar 1946. Kritische Anmerkungen zu einem sowjetischen Schauprozeß gegen deutsche Kriegsgefangene,” *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 52 (2 2004): 211–244 (hereafter cited as Zeidler: Kriegsverbrecherprozeß), 211-244.

<sup>8</sup> See Wendy Z. Goldman, *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin. The Social Dynamics of Repression* (New York, 2007) (hereafter cited as Goldman: Terror).

<sup>9</sup> Boro Krivokapić, *Dahauski procesi* (Belgrade: Prosveta Partizanska Knjiga, 1986) (hereafter cited as Krivokapić: Dahauski), 99.

<sup>10</sup> Nećak: Času, 53-89.

<sup>11</sup> Hodos: Schauprozesse, 14.

of the Diehl-Oswald trial by arguing that it was an attack against old communist structures and intended as a warning against their criticism – just before the official split between Tito and Stalin.<sup>12</sup>

Just a week before the trial Tito's entourage expressed in a letter to Stalin and Molotov of April 13, 1948 the aim to follow the steps of the Russian revolution, particularly those of the Stalin era, but to adapt the revolutionary theory to the Yugoslav context.<sup>13</sup> This quite confrontational statement shows that there was a political calculation behind the decision to hold the Diehl-Oswald trial in a particular sensitive moment and to sway the public opinion through it.

The aim of the article is to analyze the political message of the show trial and to analyze how the CPY used this message at a crucial historical moment to create legitimacy for its aims. The article starts with a brief description of the trial followed by the official position the Communist Party of Slovenia shared through the official party newspaper *Borba* wherein the Slovene Minister of Interior, Boris Kraigher, celebrated the victory of the CPY over the so called war criminals of Dachau and their agenda of sabotaging socialist Yugoslavia. This first part will have the function of statement in which Kraigher by evoking the evil connection between Gestapo affiliates, old communists, technical experts who sabotaged the new socialist Yugoslavia, aim to put under suspect any hypothetical dissident of the CPY leadership. The next parts of the article will go deeper into the analysis trying to define the group of dissidents. By using a trial proceed almost identical of the Shakhty trials of the late 1920ies in the Soviet Union, the trial functioned as a multiple warning against any criticism inside the middle-high cadres of the CPY about the development of the first five-year-plan. The Yugoslav technical experts had to collaborate with the industrialization plan of the new State in order to emancipate Yugoslavia from the economical control of the Soviet Union. With the centralistic reform of the people's councils (narodni odbori in Serbo-Croatian) which during the Liberation war became to have a leading political and administrative function in each village, region or city of Yugoslavia the central

<sup>12</sup> Bavcon: Poskus, 125-155. The definition of "Show Trials" given by Hodos as liquidation of Communists by Communists matches well with Ljubo Bavcon's these. See Hodos: Schauprozesse 14.

<sup>13</sup> "We are learning and taking the Soviet system as an example. But we are building socialism in our country by choosing the best form in accordance to our specific historical moment and to the international possibilities generated after the Liberation War. We are doing this, not with the aim to show that our way is better then one of the Soviet Union, or that we are inventing something new. This is just the result of the circumstances of our life." Translated by the author, original in Serb-Croatian April 13, 1948. The document is stored in the Yugoslav Archive in Belgrade (Arhiv Jugoslavije- AJ). Signature: AJ KMJ I-3-b/655.

committee of the CPY was afraid that the local leaders of the narodni odbori would have too much power and would potentially boycott the leadership of the Party. The trial served to sow suspicions just before the official split between Tito and Stalin. In particular the CPY members who didn't participate on the liberation war because of their imprisonment during World War Two were considered as a hotbed of dissidence. Finally, the trial is analyzed as one of the very few explicit trials against "red Kapos structures" both in the Western and the Eastern bloc.

The sources analyzed for the paper consist primarily of the newspaper coverage of the Diehl-Oswald trial, the correspondence between Tito and Stalin before and after the trial, and the until now never evaluated dossiers of the control statutory commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia as well as the memories of former inmates.<sup>14</sup>

## The Trial

On April 20, 1948 the streets of Ljubljana bustled with noise. Speakers directly on the streets transmitted the live coverage of Radio Ljubljana of the trial held in the big hall of the Tabor castle, the historical fortress and symbolic building of the town. It was a trial against alleged Gestapo agents, murders, spies and saboteurs.

In the crowded big hall of the Tabor, for six days fifteen defendants had to face the charge of high treason in front of the martial court without any possibility to prove their innocence.<sup>15</sup> In a what could only be called a farce of an interrogation, the defendants had to admit to being collaborators of the Gestapo during their detention in the concentration camp of Dachau, primarily due to their role as prisoner functionaries in

<sup>14</sup> The control statutory commission was the supreme disciplinary body within the Central Committee of the Communist party, who oversaw the party discipline of the party members and of the candidate party members. their observance of the political program, the state discipline and Party ethics. In particular, beside the publication Martin Ivanič, ed., *Dachauski procesi. Raziskovalno poročilo z dokumenti [The Dachau Trials: A Research Report with Documents]* (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1990) (hereafter cited as Ivanič: Dachauski procesi), in which are collected the documents of the Slovenian control statutory commission, I have analyzed the dossiers of the control statutory commissions of Serbia and Croatia.

<sup>15</sup> The Slovene *Slovenski Poročevalec* wrote on April 22, 1948 on page 2 in the headline: „The defendants admit that they have been Gestapo agents and that they share the responsibility for the crimes in the German extermination camps.“ Translated by the author, original in Slovenian; in the summary it was written: „several defendants had been spies and provocateurs even before the war“. On the same day the official newspaper of the CPY *Borba* titled on page 2: „the defendants admit their activities for the Gestapo and shamelessly describe the details of their criminal collaboration, i.e. murdering inmates in the camps and in the experimental stations.“ Translated by the author, original in Croatian. See also Bavcon: Poskus, 138.

the camp. They had been part of the “provocative” antifascist committee of inmates; a structure allegedly created by the Gestapo.<sup>16</sup> As part of their position in the prisoner administration, the defendants had had the power to decide who would be sent to a easier or heavier work camp, or to send inmates to the medical barracks, where they were subjected to medical experiments.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, they had to admit to continuing their so-called criminal activity after the war by collaborating with the secret services of an unspecified Western nation in order to sabotage the security and the industrial development of socialist Yugoslavia. The two people accused of representing the connection with the Gestapo were the Austrians Martin Presterl and Paul Gassler, both former volunteers on republican side in the Spanish war and inmates in Dachau. After the war Martin Presterl was traveling with his friend Hildegard Hahn in Yugoslavia as journalist and visited his surviving friends from the Spanish Civil War. Both were arrested charged of being spies. Hildegard Hahn, the only woman of the group, wasn't in Dachau. She was accused of being a Gestapo agent during the war and of having participated in denunciations of 70.000 Jews in Vienna who were then deported and murdered.<sup>18</sup> On April 26, 1948 the court issued death sentences against Branko Diehl – graduated engineer and inspector for the economy at the Control Commission of the Slovenian Republic –, Stane Oswald – graduated engineer, and assistant of the Ministry of Industry in Belgrade –, Karel Barle – graduated engineer, secretary for economic questions at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia –, Janko Puffler – director of a glass factory –, Boris Krajnc – graduated chemist and professor at the Ljubljana University –, Milan Stepišnik – graduated was? and director of a factory of metal products –, Vladimir Ličen – professor of chemistry and director of a chemist factory –, the Croat Oskar Juranić – lawyer and general secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade –, the Austrians Martin

<sup>16</sup> Admissions of Branko Diehl in the first day of the trial, quoted in Krivokapić: *Dahauski*, 39. The antifascist committees are often considered as underground resistance organizations of political inmates inside the concentration camps. The best known antifascist committee is that of Buchenwald. Celebrated in the GDR as resistance group against the Nazis, after the reunification of Germany the role of the Buchenwald committee has been relativized. See Lutz Niethammer, ed., *Der „gesäuberte“ Antifaschismus. Die SED und die roten Kapos von Buchenwald. Dokumente* (Berlin, 1994) (hereafter cited as Niethammer: *Antifaschismus*).

<sup>17</sup> The defendant Kranjc admit during the second day to have perpetrated letal medical experiments on other inmates. Krivokapić: *Dahauski*, 40. The admission has been collected by the accuse in the archives of the State Repatriation Commission of Yugoslavia, where Kranjc was named with Stepišnik as witness by Košir while he was giving evidence to the terrible action he was forced to do during his permanence in Dachau. *Ibidem*, 24 Košir wasn't sentenced to death, but died in the labor camp Goli Otok. *Ibidem*, 79.

<sup>18</sup> Hildegard Hahn denied all charges. *Dahauski procesi*, 443.

Presterl – teacher and journalist – with his friend Hildegard Hahn and Paul Gasser, worker.

With the exception of Hildegard Hahn, the defendants were communists of the old guard who had been active before World War Two, some of them even fighting in the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. They had been persecuted for their activities by the police of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, then by the Italian Fascists, by the Nazi Gestapo and imprisoned in the concentration camp of Dachau. In Dachau they had been employed in the administration of the camp as adjutants or kapos. After their liberation at the end of the war they were recognized as valid communists by the Yugoslav Communist Party and put in important managing and supervising roles in the new Yugoslav State. All, except Hildegard Hahn, were executed.<sup>19</sup>

After the Diehl-Oswald Trial of April 1948, other ten trials followed.<sup>20</sup> In these eleven "Dachau Trials" 7.380 Slovenes and 2.144 of other nationalities were involved.<sup>21</sup> In sum, 37 people were sentenced, of whom 31 were Slovenes, three Austrians, one German, one Croat and one Serb. Eleven people were executed.<sup>22</sup> The rest of the convicted were condemned to forced labor and released in the first half of the 1950s.

<sup>19</sup> "The martial court in Ljubljana has pronounced his verdict about a group of sabotaging spies... against our nation, [that] they are responsible for the pain of thousands of persons during their service in the work assignment (Germ. Arbeitseinsatz) in Dachau and Augsburg, and that they have served other imperialistic intelligent services abusing of their higher positions [in Yugoslavia] in order to damage our safeness and unity of Yugoslavia. [...] Diehl, Oswald, Juranič have shown that they are completely disrooted." "Vojni sud u Ljubljani izrekao je presudu grupi spijuna sabotera" [The Martial Court of Ljubljana has Pronounced the Verdict to the Group of Spies Saboteurs], *Borba*, April 27, 1948, 2.

<sup>20</sup> The trial to Jože Mavec and Franc Malenšek, in Ljubljana May 12, 1948; the trial to Mitija Sark, in Ljubljana May 22, 1948; the trial to Franc Žumer and Alojz Veršnik, in Ljubljana May 26, 1948; the trial to Janko Ravnikar, in Ljubljana July 20, 1948; the trial to Vladimir Kopač, Andrej Bohinc, Vilijem Brezar, Roman Vidmar, in Ljubljana August 9, 1948; the trial to Rezika Barle, in Ljubljana August 18, 1948; the trial to Ivan Ranzinger and Vekoslav Figar, in Ljubljana June 29, 1949; the trial to Jože Marčan, in Ljubljana September 9, 1949; the trial to Boris Fakin, Ludvik Mrzel, Marjan Petrak, in Ljubljana November 10, 1949, in Dušan Nečak, "Uvod," in *Dachauski procesi. Raziskovalno poročilo z dokumenti* [The Dachau Trials: A Research Report with Documents], ed. Martin Ivanič (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1990), pp. 7–21 (hereafter cited as Nečak: Uvod), 16.

<sup>21</sup> See Bavcon: Poskus, 135.

<sup>22</sup> In the first instance 16 death sentences have been pronounced (ten executions, five commutation in imprisonment and forced labor in the second instance and one death sentence in the second instance), three defendants died during the interrogations, three were released, fifteen defendants condemned to several years of imprisonment and forced labor, one of them died in the labor camp „Goli otok“. Branko Zihlerl, "Promemorija," in *Dachauski procesi. Raziskovalno poročilo z dokumenti* [The Dachau Trials: A Research Report with Documents], ed. Martin Ivanič (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1990), pp. 25–32 (hereafter cited as Zihlerl: Promemorija), 30.

## The Official Comment of the Party

The day after the convictions of the Diehl-Oswald trial Boris Kraigher, minister of Interior Affairs of the People's Republic of Slovenia, published an editorial in the official party newspaper "Borba" openly demonizing the defendants. Kraigher was the architect of the trials and the mass imprisonments of the second half of 1947.<sup>23</sup> By summarizing the charges, the article provides a political profile of the defendants and provides important context for understanding the trials.<sup>24</sup>

Firstly, Kraigher alleges that a not specified imperialist country pursued a strategy<sup>25</sup> of using former Gestapo networks to damage the Five-Year Plan of Yugoslavia.<sup>26</sup> Through clandestine sabotage of the Yugoslav industry, the group of agents supposedly tried to convince Belgrade that it was necessary to employ foreign advisers in order to modernize the economy of Yugoslavia. According to Kraigher, these advisors would then collect vital information about the development of the country.

Secondly, Kraigher painted the defendants as longtime dissidents of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). He alleged that they had been opposed to the decision to send volunteers to Spain – despite the fact that many of them had in fact been volunteers in Spain. He further accused them of vilifying the Soviet Union following the outbreak of hostilities between the USSR and Finland in 1939. He continued by leveling charges that during their imprisonment in Dachau, they were vital in sending 30 communists to certain death and topped it all off by trying to drive a wedge between the Yugoslav and Austria communist party after the war by way of defending bourgeois positions. Ultimately, according to Kraigher, they were bourgeois agents and spies.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Kraigher communicated in a letter to the Minister of Interior Affairs of Yugoslavia, Aleksandar Ranković, about the „Dachau connection“ in January 30, 1948, See Martin Ivanič, „Kronološki prikaz poteka in razveljavitve dachauskih procesov (1946-1986) [Chronology of the Course of the Dachau Trials and Their Revocation (1946-1986)],“ in *Dachauski procesi. Raziskovalno poročilo z dokumenti [The Dachau Trials: A Research Report with Documents]*, ed. Martin Ivanič (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1990), pp. 33–52 (hereafter cited as Ivanič: Kronološki prikaz), 37. The British ambassador Sir Charles Peaks noted in May 1948 that Kraigher was the direct responsible for the charges. See Ivan Kreft, *Spori in spopadi v spominih in dokumentih [Disputes and Conflicts in Memories and Documents]. Vol. 3* (Ljubljana, 1984) (hereafter cited as Kreft: Spori), 512.

<sup>24</sup> Gestapovci pred vojnim sudom [Gestapo Men in Front of the Martial Court], *Borba*, April 27, 1948, 2.

<sup>25</sup> There are no further specifications. Kreft suggests that by Gestapo the CIA is meant. Kreft: Spori, 314.

<sup>26</sup> He notes how the defendants “admitted“ that they used their high position in Yugoslav administration to sabotage and damage the Yugoslav industries, putting their men inside the factories in order to prevent reparation.

<sup>27</sup> This is the typical definition of enemies since the discord between Stalin and Trotsky. Trotskyists supposedly held dissident standpoints against the Party and followed a rather bourgeois and individual point of view. That's why they were considered potential capitalist agents.

To bolster this accusation, Kraigher quoted from a 1940 speech of Tito when he was nominated as secretary general of the CPY, after the old leadership was almost completely killed during the big purges by Stalin two years before: "in the last period they were carriers of bourgeois means in the Party and now they became agents and spies of the bourgeoisie in our Party. They became a foreign body inside the Party, who could not hide who was finally discovered. That was their development; the root of their actions lies in the time before the war. They always tried to impose their line against the line of the Party. Yet, this is no more a political process, but they are a common criminal band. This doesn't matter who they work for, but only that they play the role of the class enemy inside the working class and that they attack."<sup>28</sup> The Slovene minister finally concluded with a positive evaluation of the Yugoslav Communist Party which would be strengthened by the discover of this spy network.

Via the charges brought against the alleged dissidents, Kraigher summarizes the position of the CPY in April of 1948: The Western countries were enemies of Yugoslavia who wanted to sabotage the Five-Year-Plan. Loyalty towards the Soviet Union had been the priority of the party before the war (the Winter War and the Spanish Civil War) and would be after the war (friendship with the Austrian Communist Party). Furthermore, the CPY was politically successful by suppressing its internal enemies.

## **The First Aim of the Trials: To Make Sure the Technicians Implemented the Five-Year-Plan**

Regarding Kraigher's article: Did Yugoslavia really need foreign experts in order to implement industrialization? The scarcity of advisers and instructors had been already underlined by Stalin to Hebrang<sup>29</sup> in January 1945.<sup>30</sup> On that occasion, Stalin argued

<sup>28</sup> Translated by the author from the original in Croatian: Gestapovci pred vojnim sudom [Gestapo Men in Front of the Martial Court], *Borba*, April 27, 1948, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Andrija Hebrang was in charge of the delegation of the Yugoslav National Liberation Committee in January 1945; after the war he was nominated as Minister of Industry of Yugoslavia. After the presentation of the Five-Year Plan, he was expelled from the Party, arrested and one year later accused of being a Stalin informant.

<sup>30</sup> Referring to Yugoslavia's need of more officers Stalin stated that Yugoslavia had good officers before the war who then went into German captivity. Soviet military instructors to be send to Yugoslavia had to speak Serbo-Croatian. The Soviet Union would only send temporary advisers. „According to comrade Stalin, the Yugoslavs had a weakness to rely on advisers, but when the Yugoslavs know that the adviser would leave, they would know that they should learn themselves.“ From the „Record of I.V. Stalin's Conversation with the Head of the Delegation of the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia, A. Hebrang,“ January 09, 1945, History and Pub-

that in order to undertake the necessary transformation of the Yugoslav Liberation Army into a regular army, experts were needed. The army's reformation was crucial for the new Yugoslav Republic - military cadres, weapons, the navy and air force needed to be renewed. In May 1946, the Soviet Union offered to send advisers to help to organize officer improvement schools, to extract oil and to create an efficient aviation-engine industry.<sup>31</sup> The renewal of the army's weapon arsenal had to develop in parallel with the extraction of raw materials and their transformation. At the beginning of 1947, Belgrade announced the first Five-Year Plan.<sup>32</sup> Following the Soviet example, the CPY decided that industrialization, electrification and the general development of the infrastructure was necessary to realize Socialism.<sup>33</sup> The plan stressed the necessity to employ qualified workers, technical cadres and graduates in order to reach the target of the industrial production.<sup>34</sup> On 26 April 1948, the same day of the death sentences, the Vice President of Yugoslavia, Edvard Kardelj, pointed out the lack of money for experts and professionals and decried the complete absence of technicians in the

lic Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, f. O6, po. 7, p.53, d. 872, 1. 8-28. Published in Murashko, G.P., et al, *Vostochnaja Evropa*, vol, 1, 118-33. Translated for VWIHP by Svetlana Savranskaya. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118440> (accessed April 30, 2017).

Ivo Banac refers to the the lack of military officers and the necessity for Yugoslavia to reintegrate part of the graduates of the Yugoslav Royal Army, which was already underscored by Stalin on November 22, 1944 when he met with Subašić and Kardelj in Moscow. Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988) (hereafter cited as Banac: Stalin), 16.

<sup>31</sup> In „Yugoslav Record of Conversation of I.V. Stalin and the Yugoslav Government Delegation Headed by J. Broz Tito, 27-28 May 1946,” May 27, 1946, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Arhiv Josipa Broza Tita. Fond Kabinet Marsala Jugoslavije. I-1/7. L. 6-11. Original. Manuscript. Document obtained and translated into Russian by L. Gibianskii; translated into English by Daniel Rozas. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117099> (accessed May 3, 2017)

<sup>32</sup> In the same year began the nuclear program of the Institute of Nuclear Research in Vinča near Belgrade. German engineers could apply at the Yugoslav military mission in Berlin to work in Yugoslavia. Joseph Gutrath, an atomic expert applied for example in February 1948. It is unknown if he got the permission. Signature: AJ, A. CK. SKJ, IX, 86/III-14, T/10-1948.

<sup>33</sup> Tito describes in his speech at the General Assembly about the first Five-Year Plan on April 26, 1947, that the planned economy is strongly connected to the Yugoslav new social order. Without this order, the passage from private property to the planed economy is impossible to be realized. The old Yugoslavia was a colony for the capitalists of several countries, now after the nationalization of their proprieties it is necessary to speak about the Yugoslav national interests. In: *Plan quinquennal de développement de l'économie nationale de la République Fédérative populaire de Yougoslavie* (Belgrade, 1947), 9-21.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 80-81. See also the article published by the Royal Institute of International Affairs in August, 1948, P.A. Yugoslavia's Five-Year Plan: The Economic Background of the Cominform Split, in *The World Today*, Vol. 4, No. 8 (London 1948), 331-336. In 1950 the report of the CIA continued to stress shortage of technicians and skilled workers and the attempt of the Government to import foreign experts and to educate the masses. Central Intelligence Agency, *Information Report: Yugoslavia, Progress of the Five-year Plan* (1951), accessed February 19, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP82-00457R007500030004-9.pdf> (hereafter cited as CIA: Report 1951).

Republic's South compared to the North. Furthermore, he stressed that the experts of the northern cities wouldn't agree with the goals of the Five-Year Plan. Thirdly, the members of the CPY on the Republican level wouldn't agree with the rationalization of production.<sup>35</sup>

When Kraigher one day later in his comment on the trials emphasized the strategy of the defendants to force Yugoslavia to call foreign advisers by acting as saboteurs against the Yugoslav industry, he alluded to the disagreement within the CPY when it came to the Five-Year Plan. The defendants were professors and students of chemistry, chemical engineers and workers as well as middle cadres of the Communist Party and journalists. Last but not least they were from Slovenia, the most developed republic of the Yugoslav federation. In other words, they were the perfect example of what Kardelj criticized.

Here, the purpose of the show trial becomes clear: To force the technical intelligentsia and the local middle cadres to tow the party line regarding the Five-Year-Plan and the industrialization of Yugoslavia by creating a potential thread and send the message that no regional objections were going to be tolerated by the leadership in regard to this subject. In order to further illustrate this argument, I will compare these trials with another show trial, conducted in Moscow exactly 20 years before, when the prosecution of the first Soviet Five-Year Plan began (1928-1932).

The "Shakhty Trial" was the first big show trial in the Stalin era.<sup>36</sup> It was conducted in 1928 against a group of engineers arrested in the town of Shakhty in the Donbas area. The defendants were accused of conspiring with the German, French and Polish intelligence services and of sabotage against the Soviet Union, especially of the coal industry. Fifty Russians and three Germans were prosecuted. Eleven defendants were sentenced to death, of whom five were executed, while in the "Dachau Trials" eleven have been executed. Forty-four defendants were sent to prison. Two of the three Germans had been released, while in the "Dachau Trials" two of the three Austrians had been executed.

<sup>35</sup> Speech of Kardelj, published in "... [Speech during the control of the annual government budget for 1948], *Borba*, April 26, 1948, 1.

<sup>36</sup> The trial was conducted in the crowded House of the Unions of Moscow. The trial was filmed and shown cross the country. See the review of Cassidy, Julie A., *The Enemy on Trial. Early Soviet Courts on Stage and Screen*, Chicago 2000. In: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 2001 (online on <http://library.fes.de/fulltext/afs/htmrez/80146.htm>, accessed May 5, 2017).

In 1930 in the middle of the Five-Year-Plan another show trial was organized with the same target. The so called trial against the Industrial Party is often considered as a refinement of the Shakhty Trials in which several Soviet scientists and economists were accused and convicted of plotting a coup against the government of the Soviet Union. They stood accused of having formed an anti-Soviet "Union of Engineers' Organisations" or *Prompartiya* ("Industrial Party") and of having tried to wreck the Soviet industry and transport in 1926-1930.

In 1931, Stalin noted three "lessons" from the "Shakhty Trial". Firstly, after their military defeat, the strategy of the capitalist powers together with their class allies would have been to sabotage the industrialization within the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Soviet Union needed to be constantly vigilant against internal and external enemies. Secondly, the Shakhty affair would have demonstrated the weakness of the Communist industrial managers. They would have needed more authority and more knowledge. Lastly, it would have been necessary to train a large number of new specialists which was not only an industrial but also a political imperative: "the working class must create its own productive-technical *intelligentsia*". The State Engineer Institute would have failed in the preparation of the students. The Soviet industry needed engineers, who had both theoretical and practical experience.<sup>37</sup>

According to Fitzpatrick, with the "Shakhty Trial" all members of the „bourgeois intelligentsia“ became suspicious and, at the same time, the leadership of the party formed itself by connecting internal and external enemies.<sup>38</sup> Among historians the opinion is widespread that the "Shakhty Trial" inspired Stalin to led an attack against Bukharin, who was prosecuted eight to ten years later.

Bukharin had expressed his disagreement to the Five-Year Plan, considering it unrealistic and too radical for the people. He warned that the plan would fail if the political and social framework of the NEP was destroyed.<sup>39</sup> While Bukharin pledged the utilization of the old establishment's engineers, Stalin had the plan to build a new generation of experts under his obedience. Stalin and his entourage used the "Shakhty

<sup>37</sup> Stalin speeches of 1931 reported in: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934*, vol. 27, Cambridge Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511523595> (hereafter cited as Fitzpatrick: Education), 118-119.

<sup>38</sup> See Fitzpatrick: Education, 193.

<sup>39</sup> During the new economical policy (NEP) the Bolshevik leadership appreciated the work of "bourgeois specialists", but lower-level officials usually did not. See Fitzpatrick: Education, 83; Kendall E. Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin. Origins of the Soviet Technical Intelligentsia, 1917-1941* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400847839> (hereafter cited as Bailes: Technology), 84.

Trial" to discredit not only Bukharin's policy of social appeasement, but also Aleksei Rykov's presidency whose administration had engaged non-Bolshevik and non-Soviet specialists, and Mikhail Tomsky's supervision of the labor unions.<sup>40</sup>

## **The Second Aim of the Trials: A Warning Against the Old Communist Structures Before the Incoming Split with Stalin**

Political circumstances in 1948 Yugoslavia at least presented themselves as similar to the actors in charge as those surrounding the Shakhty Trial: On one hand the old Communists and the intelligentsia threatened to boycott the plan, on the other hand the lack of specialists was one of the most urgent problems the new State had to face up.<sup>41</sup> According to Haug, the CPY followed the same stages of development prescribed by the Marxist-Leninist doctrine formulated by Stalin, but at the same time was conscious of its unique historical experience, starting with the foundation of the people's Committees (Narodni Odbori) during the war and ending with the declaration of a Federal People's Republic on November 29, 1945.<sup>42</sup> Thus, in January 1946 Yugoslavia adopted a constitution largely inspired by the Soviet constitution of 1936. To Tito's entourage this presented the logical development of the rapprochement process alongside the Soviet Union.<sup>43</sup> But, at this point the USSR's and Yugoslavia's goals began to diverge.

Stalin was interested in a more democratic and inclusive form of government that

<sup>40</sup> Alex F. Dowlah and John E. Elliott, *The Life and Times of Soviet Socialism* (Westport, 1997) (hereafter cited as Dowlah/ Elliott: *The Life and Times of Soviet Socialism*), 72. The "Shakhty Trial", according to the historian Fontana, was an important step to "convince" the labor union and the working class to accept the policy of the Party. The first Soviet Five-year Plan was conducted without an adequate care of the primary needs of the workers. The workers of the Donbas area complained about the lack of safety measures, the long shifts and the tardy payments of overtime. Often, incidents happened because specific knowledge was lacking and political divergences inside the cadres of the planned industrialization took place. Delia Fontana, "Il Sindacato Sovietico dall' "Affare Di Šachty" All'VIII Congresso," *Studi Storici* 29 (3 1988): 737-758 (hereafter cited as Fontana: *Affare Di Šachty*), 737-758.

<sup>41</sup> Ivan Kreft noted in his memoirs, that that Yugoslav show trials, were considering their forms and consequences copies of the school edition of the Moscow Trials before the Second World War. Kreft: *Spori*, 303.

<sup>42</sup> See Hilde Katrine Haug, *Creating a Socialist Yugoslavia. Tito, Communist Leadership and the National Question*, vol. 24, *International Library of Twentieth Century History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012) (hereafter cited as Haug: *Socialist Yugoslavia*), 126-127.

<sup>43</sup> Kardelj quoted in Haug: *Socialist Yugoslavia*, 126.

would allow him to negotiate with England and the USA about the division of Europe drafted already in Yalta.<sup>44</sup> The CPY on the other hand saw itself as similar to the Bolsheviks after their revolution and therefore considered it unnecessary to share power with non-communist movements. In this sense the Yugoslav leadership saw itself to be on the same level as the Soviet Union but still used Moscow for political legitimacy.<sup>45</sup> For Tito's partisans the liberation of Belgrade in cooperation with the Red Army represented more than just the conquest of the „Winter Palace“. It was an opportunity to show to the Soviet Union their achievements of the National Liberation War. The friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in April 1945 and the decision to create Soviet-Yugoslav mixed companies in 1946 was perceived by Tito's entourage as the affirmation that Yugoslavia was sincere enough in its pursuit of socialism to be in a partnership with Moscow.

Stalin instead considered Yugoslavia as just another country which agricultural products and raw materials to be exploited.<sup>46</sup> He had no interest in the regional networking of Yugoslavia, nor to create a regional trade area for Yugoslav products.<sup>47</sup> For Stalin, the mixed companies served to exploit the Yugoslav territory. Moscow sent advisers and experts to Belgrade in order to control the Yugoslav territory, to prevent any autonomous military development on a regional level and any industrial development.

Yugoslavia on the other hand, used mixed companies as an incentive for the development of a national industry. To promote the trade of national products, Yugoslavia wanted to find a market in Eastern Europe without Western concurrency. Belgrade's regional strategy consisted of finding new partners for the import of raw materials and for the export of finished products. Stalin decided to call back all Soviet military advisers and instructors as well as all the civilian advisers and specialists from Yugoslavia on March 18, 1948: the official motivation adduced was that they were „surrounded by

<sup>44</sup> Mark Kramer, „Soviet Policy, and the Establishment of a Communist Bloc in Eastern Europe, 1941–1948,” in *Stalin and Europe. Imitation and domination, 1928–1953*, ed. Timothy Snyder and Ray Brandon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 264–294, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199945566.003.0012> (hereafter cited as Kramer: Soviet Policy), 264–294. Stalin's advises to include in the Yugoslav Army the royal officers have to be seen in this context. See Footnote 33.

<sup>45</sup> See Vojin Majstorović, „The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav-Soviet Alliance, 1945–1948,” *Past Imperfect* 16 (2010): 132–164, <https://doi.org/10.21971/P7160P> (hereafter cited as Majstorović: Rise and Fall), 132–164. For the ambition of the CPY to reach the Soviet level see Donal O'Sullivan, *Stalins „Cordon sanitaire“. Die sowjetische Osteuropapolitik und die Reaktionen des Westens 1939–1949* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003) (hereafter cited as O'Sullivan: Stalins „Cordon sanitaire“), 310.

<sup>46</sup> See Vladimir Dedijer, *Stalins verlorene Schlacht. Erinnerungen 1948 bis 1953* (Vienna, Frankfurt a.M., and Zurich: Europa, 1970) (hereafter cited as Dedijer: Schlacht), 69–88.

<sup>47</sup> The report of the Yugoslav trade representatives in Moscow from December 8, 1947 stressed the Soviet Union's disinterest to buy any Yugoslav products. Signature: AJ KMJ-I-3-b/646.

hostility". For the Central Committee of the CPY it was clear that from this moment on Yugoslavia had to walk alone.<sup>48</sup> In order to do so, the CPY thought it necessary to purge the party, unify the party line and turn on the screws on academics and experts.

In a letter to the Central Committee of the CPY from March 27, 1948 Stalin stated that the CPY's political program was lacking policies towards the class struggle. The leadership would not have taken any measures to push back the capitalistic elements among the peasantry and the urban society by which the CPY would have used an opportunistic stance already known from Bukharin. Stalin then criticized the political line of the CPY who would have tried to dissolve the party into the mass organization of the People's Front (Narodni Front) as well known as Social council of the working people of Yugoslavia (Socijalistički Savez Radnog Naroda Jugoslavije or SSRNJ). This would have been – so Stalin - like the attempt of the Menshevik group forty years ago.<sup>49</sup>

In the final report of the fifth council of the CPY in 1948 the Communist leadership of Belgrade counteracted that the CPY never gave up his leading function in relation to the People's Front, although a couple of months before, in September 1947, during the second Congress of the SSRNJ Tito defined the People's Front like "a new type of democracy, an instinctive people's democracy".<sup>50</sup> In reality the constitution of 1946 transformed Yugoslavia in a socialist land on the model of the Soviet Union. The local assemblies, or people's councils (narodni odbori), who had been the most important revolutionary subject during the war and enjoyed a large political autonomy on a territorial level even during 1945, were transformed with the general law about people's councils in 1946 (opći zakon o narodnim odborima) in primarily executive and administrations entities.<sup>51</sup> The same People's front, the mass organization of the working people of Yugoslavia, started to be subordinated to the targets of the Five-Year Plan and became, according to Branko Petranović, the transmission belt of the political decisions of the CPY.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> See Dennison I. Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment 1948–1974* (London, 1977) (hereafter cited as Rusinow: Experiment), 27-28.

<sup>49</sup> Stalin letter to the CPY of March 27, 1948. Signature: AJ KMJ I-3-b/655.

<sup>50</sup> In Sr-Cr "Naš Narodni front – to je demokracija novog tipa, istinska narodna demokracija" Josip Broz Tito, Referat na II kongresu NFJ, p. 14, cit. in: Katarina Spehnbjak, Narodni front Jugoslavije (SSRNJ - razvoj, programsko-teorijske osnove i procesi u društvenoj praksi 1945-1983) in: *Povijesni prilozi*, Vol.3, No.3, (Zagreb, January 1985), 9-82.

<sup>51</sup> SL FNRJ 43(1946).

<sup>52</sup> See Branko Petranović, *Politička i ekonomska osnova narodne vlasti u Jugoslaviji za vreme obnove [Political and Economical Principles of the People's Government in Yugoslavia in the Period of its Renewal]* (Belgrade, 1969) (hereafter cited as Petranović: Osnova), 105.

Although the Diehl-Oswald trials were ostensibly directed against the infiltration of Western powers within the party, they instead prepared the attack against Stalin. Looking to the correspondence between Stalin and Tito, which started in March 1948 and ended with the Soviet-Yugoslav split of May 1948, it is possible to assume that the trial has been an indirect answer to Stalin criticism of the CPY's policy. In fact, in the Diehl-Oswald trial, Tito's leadership concentrated its attacks against the most autonomous part of the People's Front, the Slovenian Liberation Front („Osvobodilna Fronta“) in order to avoid any trouble during the split.<sup>53</sup>

The reform of the narodni odbori was highly significant for the new Yugoslav society. In every Republic, region, town, neighbour and village of the country the narodni odbori had been created around the leaders who established their power during the Liberation war. The narodni odbori had a double function: To serve as both basic administrative unit and as local government assembly with significant political power. After the reform of 1946 they still represented a problem for the centralistic policies of Belgrade because of their clientelistic structures around the local leaders.

In post war Yugoslavia to get a job in a private enterprise or in a public office, to be assigned a house, to receive economical aid from the State, the people had to demonstrate that during the war they didn't act against the partisan movement by way of going through the process of being politically profiled (called in Serbian-Croatian *Karakteristika*). The *Karakteristike* were often compiled by the members of the local narodni odbor.<sup>54</sup> In the report of October 10, 1945 the Headquarter for the Repatriation for prisoners of war sent to the Ministry for People's Defense, the question of the „*Karakteristike*“ became to be very important for the reintegration of former prisoners of war. There were a plenty of people without any *Karakteristika* or with *Karakteristika* not written by a member of the Ministry of People's Defense. With the reform of the narodni odbori the Yugoslav Ministry of Interior started to evaluate every single *Karakteristika* ex novo.

<sup>53</sup> In this regard it is not a mistake to interpret the Dachau Trials as a continuation of the trials started already in June 1947 with the "Nagode Trial" against a group of Slovenian not communists intellectuals, who cofounded of the Osvobodilna Fronta. The OF was the Slovenian political resistance platform who included since 1941 a wide spectrum of antifascist positions (among others communists, social democrats, liberals, Catholics) and who joint the Antifascist Assembly of the Yugoslav popular liberation (AVNOJ) in 1943 but never dissolved itself into that structure.

<sup>54</sup> The report described the situation of returnees who didn't get a job nor from the State nor from a private enterprise because they hadn't a valid *Karakteristika* Cf. Report of the Headquarter for the Repatriation in AJ 50-119-701.

During the war narodni odbori had been created by among the antifascist Yugoslav emigration as well in France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria. In the German concentration camps similar structures developed during the detention and established after the liberation of the camps. Notorious are the Committees of Buchenwald and Dachau, led by former partisans, which at the end of the war fused with the international committees. These international connections paired with the importance of the narodni odbori in serving as local administration and politically profiling large swaths of the population established them and the networks running them – such as former fighters of the Spanish Civil War – as potential centres of destabilization in the eyes of the party leadership. However, in order to fully execute the politically split with the USSR, the Yugoslav party leadership needed to be sure that they were in absolute control of the party and its apparatus.

Juranić was the only Croat who was convicted during the trials. In his youth he was a member of the CPY and followed the line of the Croatian communists who were trying to find a political union between the communists and the left wing of the Croat Peasant Party (Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka, HSS).<sup>55</sup> For this activity he was imprisoned twice. He joined the International Brigades in Spain where he became Captain of Battalion. After the Spanish war he could not go back to Yugoslavia because of his former conviction. Imprisoned as former Spanish volunteer in the camp of Vernet in France he was forced by the Nazis to move to Germany in order to work, where he was arrested in 1943 by the Gestapo and imprisoned in Dachau. After the liberation of Dachau and its transformation into a Displaced Persons Camp he was responsible for justice affairs in the International Dachau Committee.<sup>56</sup> Juranić was one of eleven former Spanish volunteers convicted during the "Dachau Trials". It can not be ruled out that the trial was also an attempt to undermine the political clout of the Association of the former Spanish volunteers – a network of old and prominent political activists who had gained recognition in Yugoslavia and abroad as well as among the members of the CPY.

In his editorial, Kraigher painted the defendants as longtime dissidents of the CPY who opposed the decision to send volunteers to Spain, and moved to Spain acting

<sup>55</sup> The collaboration between the CPC and the HSS followed the international decision of the Comintern to establish popular fronts of all the antifascist political forces against the raising fascism. The document is stored in the Croat State Archive (Hrvatski Državni Arhiv – HR-HDA). Signature: HR-HDA 1801, Juranić, Kut. 51.

<sup>56</sup> We collected the information about Juranić activities in the Dachau International Committee in the fonds "Giovanni Melodia" at the Casa della Memoria e della Storia in Rome. (Without signature).

a political sabotage inside the lines and lastly at the<sup>57</sup> beginning of the World War II, they vilified the Soviet Union during the war with Finland.<sup>58</sup> Kraigher tracing a guideline through the most important milestones of the opposition of the CPY, reconstructed de facto the related successes of the actual leadership, giving legitimacy to the Great Purge of the whole CPY leadership acted by Stalin, in particular of the former leader of the CPY, Milan Gorkić (a protege of Bukharin), who was called to move to Moscow from Paris 1937 where he was organizing a Party conference in order to decide the role of the Slovenes and Croats in the participation in the Spanish war. With the death of Milan Gorkić Tito became the secretary of the CPY.<sup>59</sup>

## **The Effect of the Trial Beyond the Split Between Tito and Stalin: To Cast Suspicion on Former Deportees**

After the defeat of Germany the Yugoslav survivors of Nazi concentration camps, together with former Prisoners of War and forced laborers were free to go back to their homeland, the Democratic Federation of Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavian Repatriation Commission, founded in April 1945 and dependent on the Ministry of Social Policy of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, was organized in different “Staffs of Repatriation”. The tasks assigned to the Staffs of Repatriation were to organize the border crossings, to care about the health of the returnees, to register them and - most importantly - to check their activity abroad, since some of the returnees were suspected to be former collaborationist of the Axis powers.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> The question of the People’s Front split the Croat and Slovene Communist Parties and the Yugoslav Communist Party in matter federation. Should the Yugoslav comrades in Spain form a unique people’s front or should the single lands organize their selves as separate entities? Cf. Ivan Avakumović, *History of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Vol. 1* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1964) (hereafter cited as Avakumović: History), 136ff; Vjeran Pavlaković, *Yugoslav Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War* (Belgrade, 2016) (hereafter cited as Pavlaković: Volunteers), 22-32.

<sup>58</sup> The Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement produced a wave of disillusion and demoralization among several volunteers of the International Brigades, who started to openly vilify Stalin’s politics. See Arthur Koestler, *Scum of the Earth* (London: Gollancz, 1941) (hereafter cited as Koestler: Scum). About the Soviet war in Finland see Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010) (hereafter cited as Snyder: Bloodlands), 59-89.

<sup>59</sup> See Stefan Gužvica, “The Spanish Inquisition. Factional Struggles Among the Yugoslav Interbrigadistas,” *Istorija 20. veka* 37 (1 2019): 53–74, <https://doi.org/10.29362/ist20veka.2019.1.guz.53-74> (hereafter cited as Gužvica: Inquisition), 53-74.

<sup>60</sup> The Repatriation commission was led by a mixture of democratic and soviet principles reflecting the government coalition of the new State between liberal and communist forces: on one hand the commission acted following the humanitarian principles of first aid and a policy of welcoming in the land on the other hand the returnees were filtrated by the OZNA (acronym of „Odeljenje za zaštitu

With the foundation of the "Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia" on November 29, 1945 the Interior Ministry started a new revision of the testimonies of the returnees in preparation to the sequel of big show trials against former collaborators of the Axis and against political antagonists of the CPY token place in 1946.<sup>61</sup> The majority of the political inmates of the German concentration camps were not involved in these trials.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless their position in the Yugoslav society was until 1947 at least ambiguous.<sup>63</sup> Officially, they were considered as part, although a minor one, of the National Liberation war and would get official recognition like the „medal 1941“.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, the former combatant of the Liberation Army, who actually ruled the country considered them as people, who preferred to sit in the concentration camps instead to fight the enemy.<sup>65</sup>

Since the investigations around the Pufler affair and particularly after the discovery of the Dachau network (1947) the Control Commission of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (the former CPY) began a global re-examination of all active party members who had been members of the Yugoslav antifascist Committees, the illegal networks of solidarity and support between inmates inside the concentration camps and labor camps on German soil.<sup>66</sup> The report of

naroda" [Department for people's protection]), the security agency of Yugoslavia controlled by the CPY.

<sup>61</sup> The trial against the archbishop of Zagreb Alojzije Viktor Stepinac, the trial against the chetnik leadership (Dragoljub Mihailović) the trial against the Slovene nationalists of Leon Rupnik et al.

<sup>62</sup> The majority of the Yugoslav internees returned home in 1945. In the archives of the Repatriation commission in the Archive of Yugoslavia is noted that until December 1945 88.129 internees of Nazi concentration camps had returned. Cf. AJ 642-11-279.

<sup>63</sup> About the discrimination of former deportees in the Soviet Union see Pavel Markovič Poljan, *Deportiert nach Hause. Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im "Dritten Reich" und ihre Repatriierung*, vol. 2, *Kriegsfolgen-Forschung* (München and Wien: Oldenbourg, 2001) (hereafter cited as Poljan: *Deportiert*).

<sup>64</sup> The "medal 1941" (spomenica 1941) was a decoration for all the veteran communists who actively participated in World War II and the Yugoslav Liberation War. See Alexander von Plato, "Zweiter Weltkrieg und Holocaust – Realgeschichte und Erinnerung," in *Krieg. Erinnerung. Geschichtswissenschaft*, ed. Siegfried Mattl et al. (Wien: Böhlau, 2009), pp. 275–300 (hereafter cited as Plato: *Zweiter Weltkrieg*), 278.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted from the testimony of Vladislav Švarc deposited at Archive of the city Belgrade's under the signature Arhiv grada Beograda Zbirka memoarske grade i Banjičkog logora (1885), Švarc 1984. This testimony is just one of dozen which present similar statements we collected during my research on the repatriation of Yugoslav deportees, valid for my PhD-Project deposited at the Humboldt University of Berlin.

<sup>66</sup> In the archives of Belgrade (AJ A.CK SKJ, VII, Kut. XIII) and Zagreb (HDA 1220 CK SKH Kontrolno statutarna komisija 1945-1960) we found the dossiers of the control statutory commission of the Central Committee of the CPY in regards the political structures of Yugoslav inmates of the concentration camps of Mauthausen and Buchenwald, several labor camps in Norway and in Vienna, the Stalags of Osnabrück and Strasbourg (just a couple of isolated sheet of paper) and a special

1953 about the political activities of the Yugoslav communist militants in the work camps of Vienna laid out the reason of this re-examination: “The fact that they [the Yugoslavs] had been forced to stay in Germany is not enough to measure their moral and political attitude, whereas several former partisans who showed their bravery in the forest suffered since they were in Germany and their political and moral valor ebbed away, the majority of [Yugoslav] workers instead, since they came to Germany, felt deceived and betrayed, and started consequently to think safer and cleaner”.<sup>67</sup> In the final report about the work of the Control Commission from 1958 it is stated: “after the trial against the spies Diehl, Juranić and the others in Ljubljana, it was decided that the Central Committee of Slovenia had to examine the conditions inside the camps of Dachau, Mauthausen and Buchenwald and the moral of the people inside.”<sup>68</sup> This was decided because the majority of Yugoslav inmates were from Slovenia and because the Central Committee had already collected all the material for the trials.

The examination ended in 1954 and their report was sent to the Commission and to every Central Committee of each Republic. The final report stated that the Gestapo had infiltrated the camps with several person, particularly in the lines of the administration. The Commission concluded that former inmates who worked in the camp’s administration and members of the camp’s Yugoslav antifascist Committees could not become members of the League of Communists because their political morals could not be trusted. In contrast, all inmates who had not been involved with such organizations and demonstrated a positive political attitude might be recognized as CPY members since 1945.<sup>69</sup> Instead the reality was even worse. Several members of the Yugoslav antifascist Committees were sentenced to forced labor, mostly on the Yugoslav island Goli Otok and have been released (like the Dachau group) between 1953 and 1955. It is not possible to know how many former inmates have been involved in the investigation. But, if we consider that only for the „Dachau Trials” complex, have been interrogated 9524 persons, what is more than the 10% of the entire group of returned internees, we can suppose that the whole investigations involved most of them.

dossier about Spanish fighters who had a negative conduct in the French concentration camps. It remains to research if there has been other death sentences and how many people was sent to forced labor. How many people had been involved in the investigations remains as well unknown.

<sup>67</sup> In the Archive of Yugoslavia under the signature: AJ A. CK SKJ, VII, Kut. XIII/11.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem. Ivan Kreft means that Belgrade (Ranković) was interested in the Ljubljana trials but it was important that the trial shouldn’t reach the Yugoslav capital, in other words, it had to appear as a Slovene affair. Kreft: Spori, 312.

<sup>69</sup> In the Archive of Yugoslavia under the signature: AJ A. CK SKJ, VII, Kut. XII/4.

The political discrimination of former inmates of German concentration camps started with the trial of April 1948 and affected the whole of Yugoslavia.<sup>70</sup> The Dachau trials provoked a massive and widespread panic among the former inmates that profoundly reshaped their relationships in every institution and workplace.<sup>71</sup> A former inmate of Buchenwald, Milivoj Lalin, remembered in an interview conducted by Christian Schölzel in 2006, that during a meeting of the Yugoslav press agency's (Tanjug) correspondents in Belgrade in 1949 he found the courage to discuss the Dachau Trials with Tito. "I said 'Comrade Marshal, I was in the concentration camp, in prison in Italy, we fought against the Italians, we fought with SS soldiers, against them... against the army together, and when we came back, we had to face the Dachau trials. We were punished, suspected. I ask you, comrade Marshal, why?'. 'But I know, I know, I know all about that,' he said, 'but be patient, the comrades in this area will decide on this.' Nothing [laughs] was ever decided."<sup>72</sup>

## An Attempt to Polarize the Fronts in the Cold War

This article started with the assumption that the Diehl-Oswald have been Stalinist show trials what would exclude *a priori* that they have been demonstrative proceeding against war criminals, although the expression of public domain „Dachau Trials” might or will be misleading. But absurdly, if we decide to look at the Dachau Trials of Ljubljana as a trial against Nazi crimes, they would have been not only the trial where the convicts were only Kapos but the only Trial where so many not German Kapos have been sentenced to death.<sup>73</sup> The only exception is the proceedings of the American Military Tribunal at Dachau against five Spanish Kapos at Mauthausen in 1947. This

<sup>70</sup> This is the basic assumption of Boro Krivokapić in his book about the "Dachau Trials". He defines three other trials that were directly related to the "Dachau Trials". The trial of Vilko Divjak in Ljubljana on July 29, 1948, the trial to Albin Hofbauer, Vladislav Kandare in Split July 25, 1949 and the trial to Dušan Špindler, Maks Gašparič, Gizela Špindler, Pepca Špindler and Ivan Nemeč, in Ljubljana July 18, 1950. Krivokapić: *Dahauski*, 163-167. Actually, the trials against former inmates have been more than three, but only the „Dachau Trials“ were show trials.

<sup>71</sup> See Goldman: *Terror*, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Christian Schölzel, "Of Silence and Remembrance. Forced Labour and the NDH, and the History of their Remembrance," in *Life Stories of Forced Labourers in Nazi-Occupied Europe*, ed. Alexander von Plato, Almuth Leh, and Christoph Thonfeld (New York and Oxford, 2010), pp. 151–165 (hereafter cited as Schölzel: *Silence*), 159.

<sup>73</sup> Capital punishments of Kapos happened in the majority of trials against the Nazi surveillance of the concentration camps: so for example in the American big Dachau Trial, in the British Bergen-Belsen Trial or in the Soviet Sachsenhausen Trials in Berlin and in the first Soviet-Polish Stutthof Trial in Gdansk, but the Kapos convicted were always a minor part of a larger group of German SS surveillance soldiers.

trial is particular for a second reason as well: the defendants, one of them sentenced to death, were „red Spaniards“ former republican fighters of the Spanish civil war, who after the German invasion of France, had been arrested and deported to Mauthausen.<sup>74</sup>

Since the publication of the Dachau Report and the Buchenwald Report, both written a couple of days after the liberation of the camps by the OSS Section of the US Seventh Army<sup>75</sup> the worldwide opinion had knowledge about the “red triangle” networks in the administration of the Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps.<sup>76</sup> With the escalation of the Cold War began a demonization of the communist Kapos. When 1946 the anticommunist pamphlet of Donald Robinson „Communist atrocities at Buchenwald“<sup>77</sup> appeared on the American Mercury insisting on the guiltiness of German Communist Kapos, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany (CPG) was compelled to start a secret evaluation of culpability of their members who had been in Buchenwald. Because most of them covered important position inside the Party, the investigation was concluded undercover and no one was handed over to the US authorities.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> The trial, known as “The United States versus Lauriano Navas, et al.”, was a subsidiary of the Mauthausen parent case which was called “The United States versus Hans Altfuldisch, et al.” See Rosa Ana Alija-Fernández, “Justice for No-Land’s Men? The United States Military Trials against Spanish Kapos in Mauthausen and Universal Jurisdiction,” in *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trials*, ed. Kevin Jon Heller and Gerry J. Simpson (Oxford, 2013), pp. 103–121, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199671144.003.0005> (hereafter cited as Alija-Fernández: Justice), 103-121.

<sup>75</sup> “There are numerous reports about thefts, beatings, and killings, by political <<Kapos>> in different positions. When this stage was reached where prisoners persecuted fellow prisoners instead of preserving a sense of common solidarity, the success of the SS method of control was, of course, complete. [...] That so many formerly genuine political prisoners succumbed to this pressure and sank to a criminal level of existence was one of the real tragedies in places like Dachau”. In: *Dachau Report* p. 10-11 (available as PDF on <http://www.tankdestroyer.net/people/30-people/unitarticles/180-dachau-7th-army-official-report-may-1945> (accessed November 28, 2017). Cf. David A. Hackett, ed., *Der Buchenwald-Report. Bericht über das Konzentrationslager Buchenwald bei Weimar*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Beck, 2010) (hereafter cited as Hackett: Der Buchenwald-Report. Bericht über das Konzentrationslager Buchenwald bei Weimar).

<sup>76</sup> The red triangle was the badge used as symbol for inmates of the German concentration camps who were communist or communist sympathizers .

<sup>77</sup> “Sustained by the sacred egoism of their mission, by the thought of living to shape a Communist Germany, they lost their human idealism. They became hard, surviving not for themselves but in the name of the proletarian future of Germany and thereby justifying many extreme methods of survival .... ” The Army official responsible for disseminating the report concluded: “One thing is certain: There will have to be further investigation of the people of this and all concentration camps. Because the report makes it clear that in our search for decent, democratic elements which we can trust in Germany, we can not accept at face value all those people who were incarcerated for opposing the Nazi brand of fascism.” Donald Robinson, Communist atrocities at Buchenwald, *The American Mercury* (New York, October 1946), available as PDF on <http://www.unz.org/Pub/AmMercury-1946oct-00397> (accessed November 30, 2017).

<sup>78</sup> About the German Communist Kapos of Buchenwald at the beginning of the Cold War see Niethammer: Antifaschismus, 68-91.

In order to understand instead why the CPY openly sentenced to death ten former Communist function inmates of Dachau we have to keep in mind primarily the spirit of justice that animate the CPY in the post-war period. On the wave of the victorious Liberation war against the Fascism the CPY felt to be called to play a major role in the Defascistization of Europe.<sup>79</sup> Yugoslavia was on the first line concerning the collaboration with the international justice, showing from the beginning the will to be considered world wide as a major power. At the meantime Belgrade tried not only to share a message of freedom through Antifascism but had concrete geopolitical plans in regards the Balkan, Italy, Austria, Eastern Europe and the postwar Germany.<sup>80</sup> The crisis of Trieste and the consequent refuse from American and British side to hand over the Italian fascist criminals to the Yugoslav authorities froze the Yugoslav participation to the international justice.<sup>81</sup> From that point the Yugoslav politics began to be oriented exclusively towards Moscow. At the moment when the political divergences with Stalin became stronger, the CPY tried through the Diehl-Oswald trial, or more specifically through the first part of the conviction of the trials (that communists have been Gestapo agents who committed all kind of atrocities in the camps) to strike a blow to all the anticommunist political forces of the West. On the other hand, this statement might have put the eastern block under pressure because, how the example of the CPG shows, they were not prepared to make self-criticism on this point.

<sup>79</sup> About the Soviet perception of the Nuremberg Trials and the IMT justice see Francine Hirsch, "The Soviet Union, the Nuremberg Trials, and the Politics of the Postwar Moment," in *Political Trials in Theory and History*, ed. Jens Meierhenrich and Devin O. Pendas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 157–183, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139941631.006> (hereafter cited as Hirsch: Nuremberg Trials), 157-183.

<sup>80</sup> About Austria and the plans of annexation of Carinthia, see Robert Knight, "Ethnicity and Identity in the Cold War. The Carinthian Border Dispute, 1945-1949," *The International History Review* 22 (2 2000): 274–303, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2000.9640899> (hereafter cited as Cold War), 274-303; Stefan Karner and Peter Ruggenthaler, "Stalin, Tito und die Österreichfrage. Zur Österreichpolitik des Kreml im Kontext der sowjetischen Jugoslawienpolitik 1945 bis 1949," *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung*, 2008, 81–105, <https://kommunismusgeschichte.de/jhk/jhk-2008/article/detail/stalin-tito-und-die-oesterreichfrage-zur-oesterreichpolitik-des-kreml-im-kontext-der-sowjetischen-ju/> (hereafter cited as Karner/ Ruggenthaler: Österreichfrage), 81-105.

<sup>81</sup> Effie G.H. Pedaliu, "Britain and the 'Hand-Over' of Italian War Criminals to Yugoslavia, 1945–48," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39 (4 2016): 503–529, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009404046752> (hereafter cited as Pedaliu: Britain), 503-529.

## Conclusions

This paper analyzed the so-called “Dachau Trials”, a sequel of show trials held in Yugoslavia in spring 1948. The focus was put primarily on the most important one, the Diehl-Oswald show trial of April 1948. It targeted a group of former Concentration Camp inmates who had risen to prominent positions in the mid-cadres of the party after the war. Its defendants belonged to the technical intelligentsia as engineers, chemists and directors of factories. The trial portrayed and found them guilty as saboteurs of the Yugoslav Five-Year-Plan. The “amalgam” of charges against them combined accusations of political dissention from before the war, supposed collaboration with the Gestapo during their imprisonment in the camps, and accusations that they continued to work as spies for Western powers after the war. As result, eleven people were executed.

That the trials took place throughout 1948 was no coincidence. They served essentially as a preparation for the Tito-Stalin split, intended to strengthen the central leadership of the CPY by condemning structures and networks. These networks were viewed as potential centers of dissention during the split and so by painting them as Gestapo spies, a warning against any dissidence of especially the mid-cadres was issued. In his formal structure and in his targets the trial can be viewed as inspired by the Shakhty trial of the late Twenties arranged by the Soviet leadership during the development of the Five-Year Plan in the Soviet Union. In both cases, the aim of the trial has been an exemplary warning against the old communist structures and the industrial elites of the two most productive regions (Slovenia in Yugoslavia and Donbass in the Soviet Union) who boycott the harsh restrictions of the Plan in particular the complete nationalization of the industry and the state control over the production. Secondly, the article focused on the domino effect the Diehl-Oswald trial had on the whole group of survivors of the concentration camps. The connection, the shaped amalgam between the “Gestapo affiliation” past and their sabotage actions emerged in the Diehl-Oswald trial served as matrix to conduct more investigations around the whole group of former inmates of Dachau and brighter of several other concentration camps, labor camps and camps for prisoners of war.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup> In particular in his publication the Belgrade journalist Boro Krivokapić openly reports about the undeserved punishment against the defendants, and defines as target of the „Dachau Trials“, the brighter revision process against former inmates all around the country happened after the first trial. The author had not the possibility to prove this last statement, because he had at that time not access to a wide part of Yugoslav archives. Krivokapić: Darauski.

Finally, the paper analyzed the effects of the show trial in the frame of the Cold War. The conviction against a group of former communists inmates of a German concentration camp provided more suitable arguments to the anticommunist forces, who tried to find an equivalence between Stalin and Hitler also through the questionable role of the communist Kapos in the concentration camps.

To conclude the Diehl-Oswald trial ruled in Ljubljana in April 1948 for being the first purge inside the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) since the end of World War II, can be considered as a specific of the Yugoslav way to socialism in the post revolutionary phase and a nerdy application of Stalin's theory of „socialism in one land“ of 1925.<sup>83</sup> The trial has been an important turning point of the policy of the CPY. The political message shared through the media was that everybody who acted against the Five-year industrialization plan had to be considered as a public enemy: actually, a clear warning for the whole middle cadres of the CPY to accept the centralist decisions of the CPY. With the trial the leadership shown that the parameters of affiliation to the party were changed. Having been arrested during the war and put in a German concentration camps, having fought in the Spanish war or having been a veteran communist were no more significant parameters to determine the legitimacy of the Party members. Rather, exclusively the loyalty regarding the decisions of Tito's leadership determined this status. Pretty soon a second and huge wave of discrimination would have come down: to be a Stalinist will be a major and a more common guiltiness.

<sup>83</sup> This term is used by Avgust Lešnik, who defines the Yugoslav Communism as neostalinistic. Avgust Lešnik, "The Cominform Dispute of 1948 – A Dispute between two Different Models of Socialism?," *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje. Review for history and ethnography* 34 (2 1998): 287–302 (hereafter cited as Lešnik: Dispute), 287-302.

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