

MATEJA REŽEK

Political Changes and the National Question in Yugoslavia in the Decade Following the Dispute with the Cominform 1948–1958

The dispute with the Cominform in 1948 was a dramatic experience for Yugoslav Communists. On the one hand, Yugoslav leaders rejected the Soviet accusations and relentlessly persecuted the supporters of the Cominform's resolution; while on the other hand, they made every effort to rectify the mistakes of which Stalin charged them, enforcing a large number of measures to prove their obedience to Moscow. Such behavior was dictated by ideological ties with the Soviet Union and the fear of armed intervention and a consequent loss of power. Aggressive Stalinist methods, especially collectivization, worsened the political and economic crisis that soon forced the Yugoslav leaders to search for new solutions. Moreover, the Yugoslav authorities were under pressure from the West to provide – in exchange for economic, political, and military aid – concessions in the form of democratizing the Yugoslav political order.

Determined to devise an alternative to the Soviet model of socialism, the Yugoslav leaders abandoned their rigid imitation of Soviet socialism at the beginning of the fifties and began an adventurous ideological search. Their main source was Marx, while they also drew secretly on works by less “orthodox” authors, particularly by the French utopian socialists. In contrast to Soviet centralism, they began to propagate Marx's thesis on the withering away of the state, which postulated that the functions of the state would be gradually taken over by the working class. They attempted to approach this ideal through the introduction of self-management and social property as well as through the decentralization and the transfer of certain powers from the federation to the republics. The idea of introducing self-management crystallized during endless debates among the most influential political leaders, especially Edvard Kardelj, Milovan Đilas, and Boris Kidrič. Đilas, subsequently a political dissident, wrote in his memoirs that Tito was always present during these theoretical discussions. “Our workers are not mature enough for that”, he apparently kept reiterating until, after persuasion by Kardelj and Đilas, he suddenly exclaimed enthusiastically: “That's it, that's what Marx is about – the factories to the

workers!"¹ The memories of these events by the leading ideologist of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), Edvard Kardelj, were somewhat different. According to Kardelj, Tito actively participated in the debates on the introduction of self-management and was even enthusiastic about the idea. He was alleged to have had some reservations only regarding the proposed change in the statute of the Communist Party and its renaming into the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, because he believed that these measures would weaken the party. After some persuasion, he apparently agreed to this as well, explaining his consent with his desire that the difference between the Yugoslav and Soviet Communist parties be externally visible as well².

Self-management was initially introduced into economic enterprises, although at the beginning the powers of the workers' councils were more or less symbolic. Virtually all economic policies remained under the control of the central institutions. The political leaders also decided to reduce the massive state apparatus. Apart from reaction, the worst enemy of socialism was considered to be bureaucracy that, if its wings were not clipped, would transform itself into a ruling social class. The critical reflections on the Soviet Union and Stalinism also gave rise to thoughts of separating the Communist Party from the state. Until that time, party and state functions were closely interlocked, which was evident in the fact that communists held practically all positions in state institutions.

The efforts of the Yugoslav leaders to devise an alternative to the Soviet system, to give Yugoslavia a new role in the international political arena, and, last but not least, to consolidate their own power, reached a peak at the Sixth Congress of the CPY in November 1952³. The developments there represented an important political breakthrough, while at the same time – as it turned out after less than a year – the Sixth Congress was one of the most controversial events in the history of the Yugoslav Communist movement. The Communist Party officially renounced of direct control and renamed itself the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY). Its fundamental task was defined as providing the masses with ideological guidance and education in the spirit of socialism, while the new name was supposed to emphasize the change and to outwardly promote the new role

¹ Milovan Djilas, *Pad nove klase. Povest o samorazaranju komunizma* [The Fall of the New Class. The Story of Communism's Self-Destruction] (Beograd 1994) 110.

² Edvard Kardelj, *Boj za priznanje in neodvisnost nove Jugoslavije 1944–1957* [The Struggle for the Recognition and Independence of New Yugoslavia 1944–1957] (Ljubljana 1980) 136.

³ *Borba komunistov Jugoslavije za socialistično demokracijo. VI. kongres KPJ/ZKJ* [The Struggle of the Communists of Yugoslavia for Socialist Democracy. The Sixth Congress of the CPY/LCY] (Ljubljana 1952).

of the party. The resolutions of the Sixth Congress reflected regained political self-confidence and the visionary spirit of the time, although both the determination and the preparations for a thorough reconstruction of society were lacking. As a result, the party's internal structure remained virtually intact. This structure was founded on the principle of "democratic centralism", according to which the minority was unconditionally subordinated to the majority and the lower-ranking bodies to the Central Committee, although somewhat freer discussion than before was tolerated within the party itself. The Sixth Congress of the CPY (LCY) endorsed the split with Stalinism and inaugurated self-management as the goal that the Yugoslav communists pursued for nearly forty years. The other resolutions, particularly those by which the party renounced direct leadership and declared its support for the separation of party and state were soon put to the test, which they later by and large failed.

At the Sixth Congress, the Communists concluded that decision-making regarding current policy would be transferred from the Communist Party to the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Yugoslavia (SAWPY), which grew out of the Popular Front in February 1953. The metamorphosis of the Popular Front also had foreign-policy implications. The West expected Yugoslavia to introduce measures for the pluralization of political life, but the communists were reluctant to share power with anyone. Perhaps this was why they decided to make a move that would appease Western criticism of the one-party system and at the same time enable them to remain firmly in power. Their lack of success in reshuffling the Communist Party and the Socialist Alliance was evident in the unwillingness of Western social-democratic parties to include the SAWPY in the Socialist International⁴. In the eyes of Western socialists, the SAWPY was nothing but a front for the Communist Party, not to mention the fact that the key positions in both political organizations were held by the same people. In addition, the state and party functions were still interlocked, although to a lesser extent, and the only genuinely autonomous institution was the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the LCY. The political reality regarding the implementation of the resolutions adopted by the Sixth Congress was clear from the fact that Josip Broz Tito was simultaneously Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the LCY, President of the SAWPY, President of the Republic, and Prime Minister (i.e. President of the Federal Executive Council), while other party leaders also sported sizable collections of noteworthy functions.

⁴ Mateja Režek, *Med resničnostjo in iluzijo. Slovenska in jugoslovanska politika v desetletju po sporu z Informbirojem* [Between Reality and Illusion. Slovene and Yugoslav Politics in the Decade Following the Dispute with the Cominform] 1948–1958 (Ljubljana 2005) 55–64.

At the beginning of the fifties, the tide of change also reached jurisdiction and criminal law⁵. The courts were given more independence and the new penal legislation restricted arbitrary exercise of power and moderated repression. Liberalization was most evident in the sphere of political penal repression. As a result, the number of political offences in the fifties decreased and the courts also pronounced milder sentences. In fact, the excessive use of repression was no longer necessary, because in the preceding years the authorities had gotten rid of most political opponents and the new ideology had already quite impregnated the minds of the people. Though the Yugoslav legal system and criminal law discarded some Stalinist dogmatism, the goal of an independent judiciary and respect for the rule of law lay still far ahead. The political leaders opened the door to democratization in word only and gave vague backing to the independence of the judiciary, while they allowed indirect political influence on the courts that could easily turn into direct political pressure.

The process of change following the dispute with the Cominform was formally finalized with the Constitutional Law adopted in January 1953⁶, which by and large superseded the Constitution of 1946. The political foundation of the system was determined to be self-management, whereas its material foundation was social property. The definition of the state's political order mentioned socialism for the first time. An important innovation was the abolition of the Chamber of Nations as an independent chamber of the Federal Assembly. Though the latter preserved its bicameral structure, the basis for the second chamber was no longer the national element but rather the class element. In other words, the second chamber of the Federal Assembly became the Chamber of Producers, while the Chamber of Nations was incorporated as a kind of a semi-chamber into the Federal Chamber, losing virtually all its influence. The Chamber of Nations thus became merely a formal expression of the multinational state, as its activity would have undermined the vision of the unity of interests of the Yugoslav working class. In this way, the Constitutional Law restricted the rights of the federal units and individual nations that had already been achieved (although only formally) and assumed that the national question in Yugoslavia was settled. The vision of the new Yugoslav federation was based on Marxist theory, according to which the federation was merely a transitional form of the state that would wither away once the united working class rose above national differences. In the words of Edvard Kardelj, the Yugoslav federation was supposed to develop into a "social community

⁵ Mateja Režek, *Jurisdiction and Political Penal Repression in Yugoslavia 1948–1959*, in: *East Central Europe – L'Europe du Centre-Est* (2002) 1–2, 73–87.

⁶ Uradni list FLRJ [Official Government Gazette of the FPRY] 3 (1953) 21–36.

of the new type in which language and national culture will become a subsidiary factor and thus no longer represent an obstacle preventing individuals from feeling as one with other working people, irrespective of what language they speak”⁷.

The early fifties brought about some radical shifts, particularly in the sphere of ideology. These shifts were then followed by modifications in daily practice as well, though these latter lagged significantly behind the changes in ideology. This was due to the fact that the Communist Party tolerated democratization only to an extent that still guaranteed its political monopoly. As early as 1953, the ideological and political boldness that pervaded the discourse of Yugoslav leaders in the period after the conflict with the Soviet Union was overshadowed by the fear of loss of power. In the Communist Party leadership, the views of hard-line policy proponents predominated. These considered democratization to be the beginning of the end of the communists’ rule. This political shift was triggered not only by Stalin’s death in March 1953 and by the prospects of a warming in relations with the Soviet Union, but also by the top leadership’s perception that the power of the Communist Party had weakened. The often inconsistent directives from the top led to confusion and a lack of discipline among party members, which resulted in apathy and public discussions about current policy as well as in the emergence of opinions that were not always in accord with the views held by the political leaders.

In the middle of 1953, political change came to a virtual standstill. Political tension and dissent that for some time had smoldered inside the party leadership were inflamed by the ideas of Milovan Đilas, the Secretary of the Executive Committee of the LCY. In a series of articles published in “Borba”, he denounced the right of the Communist Party to a political monopoly⁸. In January 1954, Đilas was forced to leave the Yugoslav political scene, though his removal was not followed by a purge on a larger scale. This was because the political leaders could not afford to stage a fierce confrontation with Đilas and his adherents, because in doing so they would have publicly disassociated themselves from the resolutions adopted by the Sixth Congress of the CPY (LCY). Their caution also resulted from their uneasiness about possible negative reactions from the West, which for some time had been watching with mistrust while the Yugoslav leaders tightened the reins in domestic policy and flirted with the Soviet Union in foreign policy.

⁷ Edvard Kardelj, O družbenih in političnih osnovah FLRJ in zveznih organih oblasti [On the Social and Political Foundations of the FPRY and Federal State Authorities] in: Problemi naše socialistične graditve II (Ljubljana 1955) 269–271.

⁸ These articles were published in “Borba” between October 1953 and January 1954.

In the middle of the fifties, the period of profound political changes was over. Fresh ideas about the further development of socialism were no longer tolerated, while some of the most radical ideas were simply erased from memory. Domestic liberalization tendencies came to a halt and, with the exception of the introduction of communes, was accompanied by very few innovations. The communal system was intended to consolidate the process of decentralization, but rather than self-managed units the communes merely became branches of the central power. The introduction of communes was also evidence that the national question had been underestimated, because the balance of power was formally transferred to local communities, which were sometimes strengthened even at the expense of the republics' power⁹. At the same time, tendencies towards recentralization became stronger, which soon caused the adoption of new laws on federal bodies. In the mid-fifties not much remained of the ideas of decentralization and de-bureaucratization, as central institutions regained strength and the number of state officials increased. Though it was true that centralization did not reach the level it had had before 1950, it unquestionably thrust into the remote future all visions of democracy and of the withering away of the state.

The apparent calm that characterized Yugoslav internal politics in the mid-fifties did not last long. Both the integration of the Yugoslav nations and the renewed push for centralization – especially with respect to the role of the federal authorities in directing the economy – once again opened up a key issue for the existence of Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav leaders clearly underestimated the national question and failed to deal with it for more than a decade. This was because they believed that the revolution and the formation of a federation permanently did away with the problem, because they feared that renewed nationalism would spark internal conflicts and lead to the collapse of the state, and, last but not least, because of their faith in the workers' internationalism. Old controversies among Yugoslav nations were, of course, not forgotten. As early as 1951, just before his political demise, the influential Slovene writer and politician Edvard Kocbek recorded in his diary the "horrific truth that there is such enraged hatred in Belgrade against the Croats and such enraged hatred in Zagreb against the Serbs that in the event of a war or state disorder both would shoot, slaughter, and torture each other like never before in their history [...]. Those who at least to some degree are able to think with their heads know that the cloak of excessive order and violent discipline hides a terrible disorder in which the germs of the most horrible human distress are littered.

⁹ Režek, *Med resničnostjo in iluzijo* 151–157.

We are all sleeping on a volcano that could erupt in the event of the slightest shake.”¹⁰

The communists believed that revolution, or class liberation, ought to be the precondition – and the formation of a federation the final solution – for resolving the national issue in Yugoslavia. In order to smooth over the animosities between the nations, they fell back on the magic formula of “brotherhood and unity”, and in the mid-fifties they added the call for “Yugoslavism”, and a (supra)national Yugoslav consciousness¹¹. In general the party leaders did not have in mind a fusing of the Yugoslav nations into one, but instead the emergence of a “socialist society of a new kind, in which language and national culture become a secondary factor”, as Edvard Kardelj said at the adoption of the Constitutional Law in January 1953.

Several times at the beginning of the fifties, Tito expressed the desire to unite the Yugoslav nations and to shape a common consciousness¹². Here it must be remembered that his standpoint defined official policy. He often spoke of the need to shape a Yugoslav consciousness in connection with the falling-out with the Soviet Union, and in doing so he praised the unity of the Yugoslav nations in the struggle with Stalin. His desire to unite the Yugoslav nations was at first a consequence of the aspiration to create a stronger state that would be able to withstand both internal and external pressures, although Tito soon began to warm to ideas of merging the Yugoslav nations. He liked to hold up Bosnia-Herzegovina as an example of national unity, which he saw as a microcosm of Yugoslavia. Accordingly – for example, in an interview in Sarajevo’s “Oslobođenje” in November 1953 – he said that Bosnia was a typical product of socialism, or the first product of socialism that did not rest on a national principle: “This is what I want: that in the future everything will be united once and for all, that national factors will weaken and disappear. For today we have a great number of things that are fusing our people into one. Our new economic system and our decentralization in fact signify a union of the people at a higher level, at socialist levels. National and religious factors and so on are gradually weakening and falling by the wayside, and before long will disappear.”¹³

¹⁰ Edvard Kocbek, *Dnevnik [Diary] 1951–1952* (Zagreb 1986) 47.

¹¹ Cf. Audrey Helfant Budding, *Serb Intellectuals and the National Question* (PhD thesis Harvard University 1998) 52–61; Paul Shoup, *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question* (New York/London 1968) 185–226; Mateja Režek, »Jugoslovanstvo« in mednarodni odnosi v Jugoslaviji v petdesetih letih 20. stoletja [»Yugoslavism« and Interethnic Relations in Yugoslavia in the fifties] in: *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 2 (2005) 133–145.

¹² Josip Broz Tito, *Nacionalno vprašanje in revolucija [National Question and Revolution]* (Ljubljana 1978).

¹³ Josip Broz Tito, *Govori i članci [Speeches and Articles] VIII* (Zagreb 1959) 364.

Between 1953 and 1957, Tito rarely broached the issue of Yugoslav consciousness, but it was fostered by others and it was left to each to interpret this “Yugoslavism” on his own. In the mid-fifties, the call for a Yugoslav consciousness became an organized campaign for closer cultural cooperation between the republics, and this soon became a campaign for the cultural unification of Yugoslavia¹⁴. The federal authorities intensified their insistence that cultural development in Yugoslavia should be uniform, reinforcing their demands with terms such as “Yugoslav culture” and “Yugoslav art” and, accordingly, with allusions to the creation of a Yugoslav nation that would subsequently serve as the foundation of national culture. The most fervent proponents of the cultural unification of the Yugoslav nations, which was one of the variants of “Yugoslavism”, were the Serbian intellectuals, its bitterest opponents the Slovenes. It was therefore no coincidence that the first public debate on this issue (1956) occurred between the Serb Zoran Mišić and the Slovene Drago Šega¹⁵.

In the meantime, the political leadership was still turning a blind eye to the growing national tensions, consistently reiterating that the past hatreds were unfamiliar and incomprehensible to workers and young people. This period is rather aptly characterized by Tito’s reflections as expressed in May 1957 in his interview for “Politika”. He stressed that the national and ideological unity of the Yugoslav nations were closely interconnected and dismissed warnings of growing national differences on the grounds that “they simply do not exist. There are only isolated cases of this, instigated by those that in the past were the protagonists of the fratricidal war among the Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, Macedonians, and our other nations. They are also incited by various other elements that we have failed to re-educate and that can never be re-educated.”¹⁶ In Tito’s opinion, the ties between the Yugoslav nations could be further strengthened by the press, a uniform educational policy, and writers whose “work today could take more account of the character of the Yugoslav community [...]. Of course, this does not

¹⁴ Aleš Gabrič, *Socialistična kulturna revolucija. Slovenska kulturna politika* [Socialist Cultural Revolution. Slovene Cultural Politics] 1953–1962 (Ljubljana 1995) 318–328; Aleš Gabrič, *National Question in Yugoslavia in the Immediate Postwar Period*, in: Jasna Fischer (ed.), *Jugoslavija v hladni vojni/Yugoslavia in the Cold War* (Ljubljana 2004) 403–448 here 418f.

¹⁵ Zoran Mišić, *Za jedinstveni jugoslovenski kriterijum* [For Unified Yugoslav Criterion] in: *Delo* 7 (1956) 242f; Drago Šega, »Kriterij« in resničnost [»Criterion« and Reality] in: *Naša sodobnost* 10 (1956) 957–960. See also: Budding, *Serb Intellectuals and the National Question* 61–67; Gabrič, *Socialistična kulturna revolucija* 322–323.

¹⁶ Josip Broz Tito, *Nacionalna enotnost in idejna enotnost sta nerazdružno povezani* [National Unity and Ideological Unity are Inseparably Interconnected] in: *Nacionalno vprašanje in revolucija* (Ljubljana 1978) 191–193.

mean that all specific features of development should be obliterated, because every republic has its own line of development. It is not good, however, to create some sort of special mentality or anything similar to that.”

Perhaps such interpretations of “Yugoslavism” stimulated Edvard Kardelj to republish his book “Razvoj slovenskega narodnega vprašanja” [Development of the Slovene National Question] in 1957. He added to the new edition a comprehensive foreword in which he defined “Yugoslavism” or Yugoslav consciousness and was the first among the party leaders to address the national question. In Kardelj’s opinion, the national issue in Yugoslavia – as a problem of the oppression of nations and hegemony – had been fundamentally resolved, although not all of its aspects had been eliminated¹⁷. Among the factors that in the future could affect relations and create national tensions, he cited classic bourgeois nationalism, unequal economic development within the state, nationalism as the consequence of hegemony by a large state, and bureaucratic centralism. The last could truly damage national relations, because its enforcement could give rise to resistance, thereby strengthening nationalism. Kardelj rejected “integral Yugoslavism”, which he defined as a negation of the Yugoslav nations with the purpose of introducing a single Yugoslav nation. Here he explicitly mentioned nationalism aimed at a greater Serbia under the guise of a Yugoslav image. Kardelj also saw the development of national relations as being affected by the unequal economic development within the state. Here he observed that it was just as wrong to preserve differences in development just as it was to hold back the more developed parts of the state until the less developed regions had caught up with them. Both practices would give rise to dissatisfaction and distort national relations while hindering advancement in the developed areas would also impede the economic development of the entire state. To resolve the national problem, in Kardelj’s opinion, the communists should continually bear in mind Lenin’s principle that it is necessary to fight the hegemony of central institutions as well as any expression of nationalism within one’s own nation. In addition, there must be an emphasis in the center on the right to equality as well as unobstructed and free national development, while among the individual nations there must be a broadening of the consciousness of socialist internationalism.

He further painted a vision of relations between Yugoslav nations that rested on the theory of Yugoslav socialist patriotism or the consciousness of the common interests shared by Yugoslav workers. In Kardelj’s interpretation, Yugoslav “socialist patriotism” was founded on respect for the

¹⁷ Edvard Kardelj, *Razvoj slovenskega narodnega vprašanja* [Development of the Slovene National Question] (Ljubljana 1957) XLVII.

independence and equality of all nations, and was therefore not in conflict with national awareness, but merely one of its internationalist supplements. Kardelj thus still believed in workers' internationalism, although, in contrast to his views from the early fifties, he was also aware of the unresolved, or unsatisfactorily resolved, national question that had begun to reemerge on the Yugoslav political scene. To this he added a definition of "Yugoslavism". He emphasized that "Yugoslavism" was not a matter of the artificial merger of languages and cultures, nor the creation of a new Yugoslav nation in the classical sense, "but was paramount for the organic growth and strengthening of the socialist community of working people of all of Yugoslavia's nations, for the affirmation of their common interests on the basis of socialist relations. Thus Yugoslavism not only does not disturb the free development of national languages and culture but, on the contrary, takes it as its basis. Thus the concepts of 'Yugoslav' and 'national' can only be set against one another if one or the other becomes nationalistic – that is, if Yugoslavism assumes the form of the bureaucratic centralism of a large state or what is known as 'integral Yugoslavism', or if the concept of 'national' takes on a closed-minded and reactionary nationalistic narrowness or the form of a struggle for the privileged position of a particular nation."¹⁸

In fact, everyone could find something for himself in Kardelj's foreword to "Razvoj slovenskega narodnega vprašanja". Accordingly, the Slovenes in particular took to heart his thoughts on the right to independent national development, as they did Kardelj's decisive rejection of "integral Yugoslavism" and unitarianism, while elsewhere they emphasized the sections in which he spoke of shaping a common Yugoslav consciousness. Kardelj also brought his definition of "Yugoslavism" to the CPY program, where entire paragraphs from the foreword were copied almost word-for-word in the chapter on national relations¹⁹. His view of the nationality issue and "Yugoslavism" was thus in agreement with the perspectives of the party leadership, although this did not mean the end of the discussion of Yugoslav consciousness. The issue remained active within the party for quite some time, and in 1961 Dobrica Ćosić and Dušan Pirjevec faced off in a famous debate on "Yugoslavism"²⁰.

Despite the relaxed tone and inconclusiveness of its foreword, the new edition of "Razvoj slovenskega narodnega vprašanja" did Kardelj more harm than good. Although he spoke of Yugoslav socialist awareness and

¹⁸ Kardelj, *Razvoj slovenskega narodnega vprašanja* LXIV.

¹⁹ *Sedmi kongres ZKJ* [The Seventh Congress of the LCY] (Ljubljana 1958) 433.

²⁰ More on this: Božo Repe, *Obračun s Perspektivami* [Reckoning with Perspective Review] (Ljubljana 1990) 143–160; Budding, *Serb Intellectuals and the National Question* 69–79; Gabrič, *Socialistična kulturna revolucija* 345–350.

denounced nationalism, the label of Slovene nationalism was soon stuck on him in Belgrade. He was seen as a latent nationalist even by Tito himself, who on one occasion allegedly said to his secretary that “when you get under his skin, Slovene nationalism spills out of him”²¹. Tito was even more direct in a conversation with Aleksandar Ranković at the end of the fifties or the beginning of the sixties, when he characterized Kardelj as “an unreformed nationalist from whom we can expect trouble”²². Kardelj was accused of excessive allegiance to Slovenia even earlier; thus, for instance, Milovan Đilas wrote in his memoirs that soon after the war “it could be felt that Kardelj exhibited greater interest in Slovenia than in other parts. Though he always criticized the Slovenes, he was inclined to them and worked towards Slovenia preserving some sort of a more autonomous status.”²³ That Kardelj incessantly criticized Slovene political leaders is upheld by the numerous records of the sessions of the highest-ranking bodies of the League of Communists of Slovenia (LCS), although many times his criticisms were the result of the political opportunism that was rather typical of him. Thus, for instance, in July 1953 he scolded the Slovene party leaders for not budging from their Slovene turf and explicitly ordered them to stop talking about Slovene national interests, because that way they only incited nationalism²⁴. He grappled with Slovene political leaders in a similar way on a number of other occasions, as in January 1958 when he lectured them that “individual cases of Serbian, Croatian, or Macedonian chauvinism can only be fought by fighting Slovene chauvinism. This was even more so as even communists in the highest bodies of the LCS often lower themselves to the level of street expressions when talking about the relations between the Yugoslav nations or the competencies and incompetence of other Yugoslav nations.”²⁵

The unequal economic development within the state also played a significant role in the development of national relations in Yugoslavia. This caused considerable tensions between the republic’s leaderships, which by the mid-fifties had already divided themselves according to developed and less developed in the struggle for funding from the federal budget. In the more developed republics, especially in Slovenia, resentment was felt to-

²¹ Jože Smole, *Pripoved komunista novinarja 1945–1980* [The Story of a Communist Journalist 1945–1980] (Ljubljana 1994) 141.

²² Aleksandar Ranković, *Dnevničke zabeleške* [Diary] (Beograd 2001) 127.

²³ Kako so se kalile republiške meje. Intervju z Milovanom Djilasom [The Forging of the Republic Borders. An Interview with Milovan Đilas] in: *Teleks*, 21 September 1989, 17.

²⁴ Arhiv Slovenije [The Archive of Slovenia, Ljubljana] (AS) 1589, box 1, Zapisnik VIII. plenuma CK ZKS, 20–21 July 1953, 22.

²⁵ AS 1589, box 7, Zapisnik VII. plenuma CK ZKS, 24–25 January 1958, 42.

wards the poorer republics, which were believed to be consuming vast amounts of money not always wisely spent. On the other hand, the poorer republics resented the developed republics, accusing them of buying cheap resources and then selling expensive products. The economic and political orientation of the Yugoslav party leadership also created tensions by giving precedence to developing the economy in less developed parts of the state while the more developed republics were to wait for the less developed to catch up. In the second half of the fifties, renewed centralization, especially the strengthening of the role of federal bodies in directing the economy, deepened the disagreement between the republics, while there was also a considerable lack of trust in the relations between republic and federal authorities. At the time the Slovene party leadership had not yet openly resisted centralism, but rather had rejected all “nationalist” and “chauvinist” tendencies that it had detected in discussions on assisting the less developed republics at lower party forums and among economists.

In the second half of the fifties, the Yugoslav party leadership also experienced a split unnoticed from the outside. Part of the party leadership was striving to increase self-management, decentralization, the strengthening of the republics, and a more practical policy for the less developed republics, whereas the other believed that the central authority was too weak and spoke of a strong policy, a strengthening of the central authority, and increased investment in the less developed republics – and, in its extreme form, the integration of the Yugoslav nations as well. The advocates of centralism and integration were convinced that the main risk to the existence of Yugoslavia was republic particularism, which was why some of them even proposed that the republics be eliminated, with communes assuming the role of the basic units of the state²⁶. It was especially the party leadership in Slovenia and Croatia that was oriented toward reforms, while the proponents of strengthening central authority came from Serbia, the economically less developed republics, and the federal administration. Tito did not openly support either line, although he clearly felt closer to the hard-line policy and centralism.

The process of decentralization in the early fifties inflicted a severe blow to centralism, though it soon regained ground. Re-centralization was also facilitated by some false steps by the federalists. Specifically, they believed that self-management would facilitate the exercise of national rights, but they failed to see that the introduction of the communal system and the removal of the Chamber of Nations as an independent chamber of the Federal Assembly left the republics increasingly less maneuvering space.

²⁶ VII. kongres SKJ. Stenografske beleške [The Seventh Congress of the LCY. Stenograph] (Beograd 1958) 566.

The discord among party leaders, which had so far remained hidden, became publicly known during the first large-scale workers' strike in socialist Yugoslavia²⁷. The strike at the Slovene mine in Trbovlje – which encompassed more than 5,000 workers, some of whom were also communists – strongly shook the belief that in socialism conflicts between the working class and its avant-garde are not possible. The strike ended without violence, although the party leaders in their closed circles often stressed that they had been ready to resort to arms. The analysis of the miners' strike evolved into a dramatic debate on political conditions in the state, and the issue of relations between the Yugoslav nations also surfaced. At the session of the Executive Committee of the LCY on 6 February 1958, Tito confessed for the first time that nationalism and chauvinism were spreading all over the country. The most eminent Serbian politician in the Yugoslav leadership, Aleksandar Ranković, put the blame for the accumulated problems on the uncoordinated leadership of the party. He emphasized that “politics must be run from a single place – the Central Committee of the LCY, rather than from six or more places”²⁸, thus hinting at the dissent between the six Yugoslav republics as well.

The party leadership was able to avoid open conflict among the proponents of various orientations at that time – but not for long, because the discord only deepened. Disagreement primarily took place in the area of economics, the development of self-management, and the democratization of the political system, whereas it was rarely expressed as a problem of unresolved national relations. However, this was manifested in the disagreement as well, because the representatives of the status quo also showed themselves to be centralists with regard to the national issue, while the adherents of decentralization sought a solution in increased federalism.

At the end of the fifties, national tensions increasingly occupied Yugoslav political leaders, as was demonstrated by the discussions at the Seventh Congress of the CPY (LCY) – where there was an indirect conflict between two opposing orientations regarding the regulation of relations between the republics²⁹ – and the new program of the LCY, which dedicated an entire chapter to the federation and national relations³⁰. The Yugoslav communists continued to believe that the national issue had been resolved in principle through the revolution and the formation of the federation, although

²⁷ Režek, *Med resničnostjo in iluzijo* 179–189.

²⁸ AS 1589, box 11, Stenografski zapisnik sa proširene sednice Izvršnog komiteta CK SKJ, 6 February 1958, 44.

²⁹ Gabrič, *Socialistična kulturna revolucija* 329–332; Režek, »Jugoslovanstvo« in mednacionalni odnosi v Jugoslaviji 142f.

³⁰ Sedmi kongres ZKJ 429–436.

they recognized that it remained open because of the remnants of nationalism, differences in economic development, and centralist and hegemonic tendencies. The recognition of the Yugoslav nations' individuality, equality, and right to self-management was written into the program as a fundamental principle of the party's national policy, and their unity was emphasized as well. The independence and equality of the nations could not, in the opinion of the writers of the program, be demonstrated solely through an equal political and legal position, but also in equal material conditions. This meant that political and legal equality had to be supplemented by economic parity as well, in which the program emphasized the acceleration of the economic growth of the less developed parts of the state as the main principle of economic policy. Brotherhood and unity were emphasized, as well as Yugoslav socialist patriotism as defined by Edvard Kardelj in the foreword to "Razvoj slovenskega narodnega vprašanja".

In the late fifties, the period of outright ideological and political unity of the Communist Party was in decline. Although political conditions remained seemingly calm, the party monolith began to crumble in 1958. The political leadership managed to prevent open confrontation between the "centralists" and "federalists", though it did so only for a short time. The conflicts escalated and the different interests collided in the early sixties when Yugoslavia found itself on the brink of political and economic crisis. A new, more turbulent era emerged. It was characterized by political disputes and incessant clashes of opinions over what course Yugoslavia should take; the debate was, however, inherent in socialism, the one-party system, and the common Yugoslav state.