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**QUESTIONS OF
DEMOCRACY AND
COEXISTENCE
IN THE OPINION
OF SLOVENIAN
MARXISTS
1918–1941**

I

In 1918, when the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established, the Marxist ideological-political camp in Slovenia was represented by the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party (hereinafter the JSDS). The JSDS joined the new state community with modern and mostly democratic programme orientations, formed already in the Austrian period. Like other social democratic parties around Europe it represented

especially the interests of the working class with the goal of asserting the social rights and protection of workers from ruthless exploitation. It argued for the democratisation of the political system and for the political cohabitation of all citizens, as substantiated with the universal suffrage. In this regard it emphasised that the workers' movement could attain its goals in an evolutionary manner, with gradual reforms as well as legal and parliamentary means of the struggle for power in the context of the bourgeois democracy. In its opinion democracy had an evident political and social dimension.²⁷⁸

In the atmosphere of the social radicalisation after World War I, the workers' party in Slovenia, similarly as all around Europe, first differentiated and then, in 1920, split into the reformist (social democratic) and revolutionary (communist) part. The orientation of the new party, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) with Slovenian communists as its integral part, was determined by the Comintern guidelines. Immediately after the war as well as later, these encouraged revolutionary takeovers of power, as this was, among other things, set out in the "21 Conditions of Admission to the Communist International", which had a fatal impact on the differentiation of the global workers' movement.²⁷⁹

Both parties were based on a programme of a wide social and political transformation, stemming from the criticism of the existing capitalist system. Their immediate demands and goals were identical in many aspects. However, they differed significantly with regard to the path towards the realisation of the socio-political programme. This difference had a decisive impact on their outlook on the question of democracy and defined their positions in the socio-political space, since the willingness to cohabituate differed radically between these parties. The social democrats kept insisting that reforms leading to social changes should be undertaken in a parliamentary manner, in the context of the plural bourgeois democracy. Until the autumn of 1919 the JSDS also cooperated with the Catholic and Liberal Party in the National or Provincial Government of Slovenia, where it was represented by Anton Kristan²⁸⁰ and Albin Prepeluh,²⁸¹ while Kristan was also a minister in the Central Government.²⁸² The social democrats initially

278 *Zgodovinski arhiv Komunistične partije Jugoslavije. Socialistično gibanje v Sloveniji, 1869–1920*, V. Belgrade, 1951, pp. 5–10, 24–37, 119, 138.

279 Avgust Lešnik: *Razcep v mednarodnem socializmu (1914–1923)* [Division in International Socialism (1914–1923)]. Koper = Capodistria, 1994, pp. 230–239. *Komunistička internacionala. Stenogrami i dokumenti kongresa. Drugi kongres Komunističke internacionale*, 2. Gornji Milanovac, 1981, pp. 392–396.

280 Anton Kristan, the leading politician in the JSDS after 1917; Commissioner of Social Welfare in the National Government of the SHS in Ljubljana, 1918–1919; minister in the Government of the Kingdom of SHS, 1919–1920; member of the Provisional National Representation and the Assembly of the Kingdom of SHS, 1919–1922; later active in the economic field.

281 Albin Prepeluh was notably active in the JSDS after 1900 and he became one of the most highly regarded publicists. In 1921 he left the JSDS because of its unitarian and centralist opinions with regard to the national question and established the Association of Slovenian Autonomists.

282 Bojan Balkovec: *Prva slovenska vlada 1918–1921* [The First Slovenian Government 1918–1921].

substantiated the participation in the bourgeois governments with the difficult circumstances immediately after the war, which supposedly called for the greatest possible concentration of national forces. However, with the assertion of the more radical views within the party, this cooperation soon became one of the sources of internal conflicts, finally leading to the split of this party.²⁸³ Quite the opposite, the communists argued for a programme of revolutionary changes, based on the monopoly of the working class – the so-called proletarian dictatorship or political monism. They emphasised that socialism could not be implemented in the context of the bourgeois democracy and parliamentary institutions, but rather only by means of workers' councils, because only the Soviet authority could protect the "true proletarian democracy" and the leading role of the industrial proletariat, to which the role of the ruling class belonged. Nevertheless, until the final assumption of power the communists intended to take advantage of the political rights in the bourgeois state, while emphasising that the KPJ was a "fundamental opponent of parliamentarism as a means of class government" and that after the proletarian takeover of power parliamentarism would no longer be possible.²⁸⁴

Both fractions of the Marxist workers' movement talked about socialism, but understood it differently. It was characteristic of the communists that they had a fundamentalist understanding of socialism as a non-plural, totalitarian system, based on the dictatorship of a single social and political option. This already in its essence excluded parliamentarism and the possibility for cohabitation in general. On the other hand, the social democratic understanding of socialism did not reject the modern social institutions and achievements like parliamentarism and multi-party system, human rights and freedoms, market economy, rule of law, etc. Social democrats saw all of these suppositions of the modern society as indispensable in their perceptions of a socially just state.

However, certain variations and specific emphases are discernable in the outlooks of the individual prominent personalities of the social democratic persuasion. The original political thought with regard to the issue of democracy was, in the context of the JSDS, developed by Prepeluh. Already in his early essays he emphasised that democracy had two fundamental dimensions, i.e. the social and national dimension. These two ideas were the essential elements of his opinions with regard to politics and society in general, and they are most closely

Ljubljana, 1992, pp. 184, 185. Jurij Perovšek: *Slovenska osamosvojitve v letu 1918. Študija o slovenski državnosti v Državi Slovencev, Hrvatov in Srbov* [Slovenian Emancipation in 1918. A Study of the Slovenian Statehood in the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs]. Ljubljana, 1998, p. 81.

283 France Klopčič: *Velika razmejitev. Študija o nastanku komunistične stranke v Sloveniji aprila 1920 in o njeni dejavnosti od maja do septembra 1920* [The Great Demarcation. A Study on the Formation of the Communist Party in Slovenia and Its Activities from May to September 1920]. Ljubljana, 1969, pp. 39, 40.

284 Ibid.

interconnected.²⁸⁵ In Prepeluh's perception of democracy the ethical dimension was in the forefront as well, as he kept emphasising that democracy was not only a "material law, but especially a cultural emotion, a moral postulate in the spiritual life of the modern man. /.../ Therefore democratic sentiments are far more important than merely materially-envisioned socialist doctrines."²⁸⁶

In 1920, in one of his most important essays *Demokracija ali diktatura* (*Democracy or Dictatorship*), Prepeluh described the theoretical framework of his understanding of democracy and the related democratic nature of the state. In his analyses he established empirically that every class, once it attains the political power, "uses democracy for its own advantage, furthering its social agenda". Thus every democratic rule has its social contents. However, in democratic politics, in which all of the social strata participate, these contents are confirmed at democratic elections, where the majority decides. Therefore the nature of democracy may be bourgeois democratic, peasant democratic, or proletarian (socialist) democratic. We cannot only speak about democracy in the presence of harmony between the social and administrative or state power. Democratic states should rely exclusively on the existing social forces, and any violent redistribution of the state power, for example by means of the military, is unacceptable. If conflicts in the relationship between the state and society are obvious, we can only talk about a dictatorship. Prepeluh emphasised that Marxist socialism had always sought the support of democracy, that it wanted to take over the power only democratically, which is why the socialist parties endeavoured for universal suffrage and ascribed such a profound importance to the elections for the legislative and administrative corporations. He talked about the "dictatorship of democracy", which was what the socialist parties aspired to, but which was also substantially different from the Bolshevik dictatorship, "which may well call itself the dictatorship of the proletariat, but that does not make it true". He described the Russian system at the time as "despotic socialism", supported by a strong army but lacking the economic preconditions, which is why Russia had succumbed to a profound material poverty.

Alojzija Štebi,²⁸⁷ for a while a member of the JSDS, developed a special approach to the implementation of democratic principles. She endeavoured persistently to ensure that women attained the status of full citizens in the culturally very diverse Yugoslavia. She understood the women's movement as a part of the general social

285 Milan Zver: *Demokracija v klasični slovenski politični misli* [Democracy in the Classic Slovenian Political Thought]. Ljubljana, 2002, pp. 104–106.

286 Albin Prepeluh: Pismo socialni demokraciji [A Letter to Social Democracy]. *Demokracija*, 1918, No. 3–4, p. 46.

287 Alojzija Štebi, publicist, journalist, worked in various offices for social policy in Ljubljana and Belgrade as well as in the Feminist Alliance.

question and saw it “as a form of political, social and cultural work in order to achieve the ideals of socialism and humanism”.²⁸⁸ At the end of the war she published a booklet *Demokratizem in ženstvo* (*Democracy and Women*), outlining the women’s movement programme. She believed that the times were too serious to keep leaving women on the side-lines, and that they had to be stirred awake from apathy and encouraged to assert their political equality as one of the demands of the democratic age. In her opinion it was also necessary to overcome the belief that the merit of such demands, expressed by women, was “very problematic”. However, she saw women in the political arena differently from men. According to Alojzija Štebi, women should focus on the field of activities that “corresponded most to their most natural calling – motherhood”. In the time after the war women should especially become active in social matters, where they should replace the humiliating charity practices. Because of their maternal instincts they would, supposedly, successfully carry out a variety of tasks in the establishment of public life, participate in the state and municipal legislation and administration, all of this with the goal of strengthening the morality and enriching the life of the whole community. Štebi also believed that with their civil rights women would be able to remove the principle of force from the relationship between the nations, as this was supposedly still a heritage from the barbaric past. With this deepened insight into motherhood in its individual and social implications, the democratic society would supposedly ensure that its offspring would be able to apply the right to freedom properly and would not shirk the duties involved in this freedom.²⁸⁹

The various outlooks on democracy became apparent during the constitutional discussion. With his deliberations, Etbin Kristan was especially prominent among the Slovenian socialist leaders and deputies.²⁹⁰ We should underline his extensive discussion in the committee for the preparation of the constitution in February 1921, when the socialist parliamentary group presented its plan of the constitution as an alternative to the government proposal. On this occasion Kristan emphasised that the socialist parliamentary group had not prepared a so-called socialist constitution, because in view of the political division of power such a constitution would not have had any chance of being adopted. Therefore the constitutional plan allegedly only included the proposals which were more widely acceptable for all the groups aware of the social questions, which had to

288 Suzana Tratnik: Alojzija Štebi. In: *Pozabljena polovica* [The forgotten Half]. Ljubljana, 2007, pp. 194, 195.

289 Alojzija Štebi: *Demokratizem in ženstvo* [Democracy and Women]. Ljubljana, 1918, p. 1, 2.

290 Etbin Kristan, writer, editor, publicist, a leading personality of the social democratic movement in Slovenia before World War I. Elected into the Constitutional Assembly in November 1920; moved to the United States as Commissioner for Emigration in 1921 and stayed there.

be addressed systematically, not by means of charity.²⁹¹ He expressed his personal opinion that a new social order would sooner or later follow the existing capitalist system, but that the socialists took into account the realistic circumstances in which they did not have the majority for the implementation of their ideas, while they refused to support violent implementation. He emphasised that the working class would be victorious only when it was numerous enough and thus in the majority, which could only be achieved if tolerance prevailed within the working class itself. The latter was, obviously, aimed against the communists and commented on the differences in the methods of activities, which had divided the working class.

The socialist constitutional plan called upon the implementation of a gradual transition of the bourgeois into a socialist society and a constitutional resolution of the issues involving the most neglected strata. This was disputed intensely by the communist deputies, as such a plan was, in their opinion, in the interest of the bourgeoisie.²⁹² The socialist constitutional plan was based on the standpoint that the authority stemmed from the people, which implied a republican form of government in which the bourgeois parties would participate as well, therefore this would not yet be a socialist government. As far as the monarchy was concerned, the socialists opposed it in principle, not in order to oppose the concrete Karađorđević dynasty. Kristan emphasised that only a republican form of government could represent the foundations for the government in any democratic state in the 20th century, and that the state had to be sovereign in all its aspects. According to the socialists a state was not sovereign if it had to, for example, share the power with an organisation which was “not of this world”, that is, with the Church; especially if multiple religions existed in the said state. They argued for the separation of the state from all the churches and supported the freedom of religion and conviction. The separation should also include schools, because it could not be in the interest of the state to bring up Orthodox, Catholic or Muslim citizens, and so on. Instead it should be interested in educating free citizens, while tolerating all religions. They also rejected any participation of the churches in the political, economic and social field.²⁹³

Apart from the aforementioned demands the socialists also emphasised that the most vital part of the constitution was the one regulating the economic and social fields, and underlined that the state should be an organisation of all of its citizens rather than a protector of any of the individual classes. In their opinion, the efforts should proceed in the direction of reducing the class discord

291 *Stenografske beleške: rad Ustavnog odbora Ustavotvorne skupštine Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, I. Belgrade: sine anno, 11. sesija, 15 February 1921, p. 140.

292 *Ibid.*, pp. 141–142.

293 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

by gradually ensuring equal rights in the economic and social field, namely, organising the society in such a manner that the interests of the people should always come first. Kristan stressed that political democracy was most closely connected with the democracy in the economic field, argued for various forms of property, and ensured that private property would by no means be threatened in the socialist system.²⁹⁴ Also later he was engaged in the constitutional discussion about the issue of the separation of church and state as well as the related position of schools. He also brought the attention to the concrete examples of the breach of the right to strike and restriction of the freedom of press on the part of the authorities.²⁹⁵

The Slovenian social democrats also notably emphasised the role of the parliament. In their opinion the Assembly should reflect all groups of the people – that is, represent all of the strata and classes in the state. However, it could only play such a role if a suitable electoral system, encompassing the widest strata of the people regardless of gender, was implemented. They rejected the argument that women should not have the right to vote, because in case of their participation in the election the results would be more “reactionary” than they would otherwise be, because women would supposedly only vote for priests. Deputy Josip Kopač²⁹⁶ thought that women should simply be introduced into politics and educated, so that they would gradually vote in a “progressive” manner, and he also substantiated their right to equality with their self-sacrifice during the war. Thus he criticised everyone who had elevated this role of women during the war, but renounced their right to vote afterwards. Like many times before, in regard to the question of the women’s right to vote the social democrats established that as a parliamentary minority they had no possibility of influencing the adoption of the legislation. They were also disappointed because most of their proposals were rejected.²⁹⁷

During the constitutional discussion, Vladislav Fabjančič²⁹⁸ was especially notable among the Slovenian communist deputies. He criticised the current authorities and the situation in the country. His speeches quite directly announced the communist revolutionary goals, and he told the deputies of the government

294 Ibid., pp. 144–145.

295 *Stenografske beleške Ustavotvorne skupštine Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, I.* Belgrade, 1921, 35. redovna sednica, 21 May 1921, p. 6.

296 Josip Kopač, participated in the founding of the JSDS, member of its leadership, represented the Maribor district in the Constitutional Assembly until 1923, when he became the Head of the Workers’ Chamber for Slovenia.

297 *SBUSKSHS, II.* Belgrade, 1921, 50. redovna sednica, 13 June 1921, pp. 27, 28.

298 Vladislav Fabjančič, member of the regional leadership of the KPJ for Slovenia. As an advocate of the wider political cooperation and legal activities of the communists he was expelled from the KP in 1923.

parties: “A day will come when your power will come to an end as well. That will be the time for justice. Until then we will remain in the opposition, as your nemesis in the class struggle, because you are nothing but representatives of the capitalist class. Then the Soviet Republic of Yugoslavia as a part of the global Soviet Republic will rise. /.../ Your policy against the peasant and working-class proletariat is dissolving the foundations of the state and national unity, bringing down what you claim you hold most sacred. We, on the other hand, fight primarily for the liberation of the proletariat, the whole nation and the whole of humanity. I am convinced we will attain this goal in another way: through social revolution and establishment of the Federal Soviet Republic of the whole world.”²⁹⁹

The increasing influence of the communists, undoubtedly confirmed by the results of the elections for the Constitutional Assembly of November 1920 when they became the third strongest party, and their encouragement of revolutionary conditions shook the very foundations of the existing social system. For this reason the government adopted certain measures in order to prevent the political activities of the communists. With the *Obznana* (Announcement), published on 30 December 1920, the government prohibited any communist activities (with the exception of the communist deputies) during the session of the Constitutional Assembly and until the adoption of the Constitution in the effort to prevent general unrest, Bolshevism and bloody revolution, as this decree stated it.³⁰⁰ It has to be noted that despite the prohibition the communists still took part in the municipal elections in the spring of 1921, and the authorities did not cause any drastic problems for them. During the pre-election campaign the communist programme was often promoted with disguised language; the urgency of the struggle for the “final and ultimate victory of the proletariat” was emphasised; claims were made that “neither in the Parliament nor in the municipalities could the working and peasant people look for their solutions”; it was openly stated that the communists only took part in the municipal elections in order to make sure that the proletariat could “stir up a class struggle there as well and thus weaken and dissolve these instruments of slavery”.³⁰¹ When in the middle of 1921 certain individuals started resorting to the methods of individual terrorism, they provoked the government to prohibit the Communist Party with the State Protection Act of 2 August 1921.³⁰² Afterwards the Communist Party kept operating illegally, pushed to the brink of the society.

299 *SBUSKSHS, I*, Belgrade 1921, 27. redovna sednica, 10 May 1921, pp. 11–16.

300 Triša Kaclerović: *Obznana (29 December 1920)*. Belgrade, 1952.

301 Marjeta Adamič et al. (eds.): *Viri za zgodovino komunistične stranke na Slovenskem v letih 1919–1921* [Sources for the History of the Communist Party in Slovenia 1919–1921]. Ljubljana, 1980, pp. 242–245.

302 *Uradni list Pokrajinske uprave za Slovenijo*, 11 August 1921, Zakon kraljevine Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev o zaščiti javne varnosti in reda v državi.

However, the exclusion of the KPJ from the public life did not result in the strengthening of the JSDS. As it was, the JSDS was in a quite controversial position in the 1920s. It intended to consolidate its power and importance with its integration in an all-Yugoslav workers' party, which it carried out in the end of 1921 with the accession to the Socialist Party of Yugoslavia (SSJ). Thus it became the regional organisation of the SSJ for Slovenia, while on the other hand it split into several fractions in 1922 and 1923, which weakened its influence. If the social democrats received seven deputy mandates at the elections for the Constitutional Assembly in November 1920, they appeared at the National Assembly elections in March 1923 divided into four groups. As expected, they ended up without any mandates.³⁰³

As far as the programme was concerned, the new party did not depart from the programme points as outlined in the context of the JSDS, since the SSJ also demanded the implementation of socialism and thus a classless society in a peaceful manner. However, it underlined the conviction that the socialist idea could only be fully asserted if it managed to spread among the industrial workers, tradesmen and peasants, while the intellectuals and technical intelligentsia would also have to be convinced in order to introduce socialism. The permanent preservation of socialism could only be ensured in this manner, and only thus would it become "the wish of the vast majority of the working people".³⁰⁴

Although significant differences, contrasts and resentment existed between the communists and socialists, they were also capable of joint or even wider actions. Thus a resounding joint appearance of communists, Christian socialists and the Ljubljana fraction of the SSJ (the so-called Zarjani) in the context of the Alliance of the Working People (ZDL) took place at the Ljubljana municipal elections in December 1922, with the aim of preventing the victory of the liberals. In its pre-election appearances the ZDL demanded the implementation of the widest possible self-management of the municipalities, abolishment of the State Protection Act, freedom of association, assurance of decent life for all citizens, etc. Despite the profound indignation of the liberals against the "immoral" association in Ljubljana, the Workers' List won with a significant majority. In the beginning of 1923 the communists and the so-called Zarjani even established a separate Socialist Party of the Working People, which took part, even if unsuccessfully, at the National Assembly elections in March of the same year.³⁰⁵

303 Toma Milenković: *Socijalistička partija Jugoslavije 1921–1929*. Belgrade, 1974, pp. 31–35, 73–83. Mikuž, *Oris zgodovine Slovencev 1917–1941*, pp. 217, 227–230, 251.

304 Jurij Perovšek: *Programi političnih strank, organizacij in združenj na Slovenskem v času Kraljevine SHS (1918–1929)* [Programmes of Slovenian Political Parties, Organisations and Associations in Slovenia in the Time of the Kingdom of SHS (1918–1929)]. Ljubljana, 1998, doc. 28, pp. 112–115.

305 Janko Prunk: *Zveza delovnega ljudstva v Ljubljani za občinske volitve decembra 1922* [Alliance of the Working People in Ljubljana for the Municipal Elections in December 1922]. *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja*, 1971–1972, No. 1–2, pp. 202–204, 213–215.

The provincial organisation of the SSJ and the communists had some success in establishing connections between the socialist and communist trade union organisations. They took part in the Administrative Unit Assembly elections in 1927, while the SSJ appeared independently at the National Assembly elections in the same year and ensured the victory of Josip Petejan³⁰⁶ as the only representative of the Marxist parties in Slovenia in the National Assembly in the 1920s, after the adoption of the 1921 Constitution.³⁰⁷

II

The SSJ accompanied the introduction of the King's dictatorship in 1929 with the statement emphasising that the political crisis was the responsibility of the bourgeoisie, which had fought for the domination of certain groups for more than a decade in the context of their party politics. On this occasion the leadership of the party emphasised that "class-aware workers cannot be held responsible" for the situation in the state, but rather that this is the responsibility of "all our tribally-oriented bourgeois parties", which had led to the "catastrophe of constitutionality". At the same time the leadership urged their organisations to do everything necessary in accordance with the new legislation as to avoid the pressure from the "new political course of the state".³⁰⁸

The adaptability of the SSJ officials was already noticeable in the new Živković's³⁰⁹ regime, when they were prepared to participate in the municipal councils. The leadership kept assuring that their party "followed its envisioned path, because it is the right one", to which the communists responded with the question of which was the right path. As the political activities of the party were forbidden, the leadership called upon its adherents to accept the new situation in the state with the knowledge that democracy would return, and that they should pay even more attention than before to self-education and to the strengthening of the workers' awareness and mentality.³¹⁰

306 Josip Petejan, member of the Executive Committee of the JSDS since 1914; member of the National Council in Ljubljana in 1918 and member of the Provisional National Representation in Belgrade in 1919. After 1921 he worked at the district office for the protection of workers in Maribor and was the President of the social democratic Expert Commission for the Maribor district.

307 Mikuž, *Oris zgodovine Slovencev 1917–1941*, pp. 323–327, 344–348, 360–365. Milenković, *Socijalistička partija Jugoslavije*, pp. 244–248, 279–280, 318–320, 331–332, 364–365.

308 *Delavska politika*, 9 January 1929, Vsem somišljenikom!.

309 Živković Petar, Serbian general. After the introduction of the King's dictatorship in January 1929 he became the Vice President of the Government and the Minister of the Interior, and in the subsequent governments he was the Minister of the Army and Navy.

310 Anka Vidovič-Miklavčič: Socialna demokracija (socialisti) na Slovenskem v prvem letu diktature 1929 [Social Democracy (the Socialists) in the First Year of Dictatorship 1929]. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 1996, No. 1-2, pp. 22, 23.

The communist response to the introduction of dictatorship was completely different: under the influence of Comintern they consistently called the dictatorship a military-fascist dictatorship, encouraged by the French-British imperialism. The KPJ was the only party to respond with the call to an armed uprising. It announced a civil war initiated by workers, peasants, and nations oppressed by the Greater Serbian hegemony. It was unrealistic in its expectations that it would successfully organise the socially and nationally neglected strata into a united front “from below” and instigate a decisive action against the dictatorship regime with mottos like: “Land to hardworking peasants!”, “Against war!”, “For the alliance with the Soviet Russia!”, “For the dictatorship of workers and peasants!”, and “For the free union of worker and peasant republics in the Balkans!”³¹¹ After the introduction of the dictatorship the standpoint of the KPJ with regard to the inefficiency of the bourgeois democratic institutions was confirmed. The KPJ was convinced that the dictatorship would only deepen the pressing social and national issues, but it also saw the possibility for a revolutionary solution of social problems: the replacement of the military-fascist dictatorship with the dictatorship of workers and peasants.³¹² However, the efforts to organise an armed uprising and bring down the monarchy as an imperialist structure remained at the level of revolutionary rhetoric, as the communist resistance mostly consisted of propaganda in the form of disseminating flyers – only in Ljubljana seventeen extensive actions of this kind were detected by the police in 1929. The sectarian orientation of what had already been a weak and insignificant party isolated the communists even further and exposed them to severe repression of the authorities.³¹³

In the spring of 1930 the Slovenian part of the KPJ suffered mass arrests. The Party was completely paralysed for a year³¹⁴ by the arrests of the leading communists (Jakob Žorga,³¹⁵ Dragutin Gustinčič,³¹⁶ Dušan Kermavner,³¹⁷ etc.)

311 *Proleter*, March 1929, Vojno fašistička diktatura i naši zadatci.

312 *Ibid.*, Dva meseca otvorene apsolutističke diktature.

313 Lilijana Trampuž: *KPJ na Slovenskem v obdobju šestojanuarske diktature 1929–1934* [Communist Party of Yugoslavia in Slovenia in the Period of the January 6th Dictatorship 1929–1934]; *master's thesis*. Ljubljana, 1992, p. 4.

314 *Ibid.*, pp. 11–23.

315 Jakob Žorga, one of the founders of the Communist Party in Slovenia; in the 1920s member of the Central Committee of the KPJ and organisational secretary of the Central Committee of the KPJ. Imprisoned between 1929 and 1934 and again between 1935 until the German occupation. Murdered in the Banjica camp in Belgrade, 1942.

316 Dragotin Gustinčič, member of the Communist Party in Slovenia since its establishment. Member of the Central Committee of the KPJ since 1924; emigrated to the Soviet Union in 1931 where he, among other things, also lectured at the Communist University of National Minorities of the West. Co-author of the statement of the Communist Parties of Austria, Italy and Yugoslavia about the Slovenian national question (1934).

317 Dušan Kermavner was a part of the leadership of the Communist Youth in Slovenia in the 1920s, member of the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Slovenia and its secretary in 1928. Sentenced to five years in prison at two trials, in 1931 and 1933.

or their retreat abroad (France Klopčič,³¹⁸ Lovro Kuhar,³¹⁹ Viktor Koleša³²⁰). In the beginning of 1932 the gradual restoration of the shattered Party organisation began. The generation of young communists (Boris Kidrič,³²¹ Edvard Kardelj³²²) played an important role in the process of restoration, and they also took over the leadership of the organisation. The work of the communists in this period was oriented clearly towards the internal Party tasks, while outwardly their work was still restricted to propaganda activities. A lengthy severance of connections with the central leadership, which operated in Vienna and remained unresponsive to the specific needs of the Party in Slovenia (for example, the publication of literature in the Slovenian language), encouraged separatist tendencies in certain communists (i.e. separation from the KPJ and establishment of direct connections with the Comintern).³²³

The year 1933 represents a more noticeable milestone in the methods of the Party operations: at that time the Communist Party in Slovenia started gradually focusing on mass activities in the context of legal possibilities. The move towards the new orientation was reflected in the abandonment of the directive on the formation of illegal Party trade unions; discarding of the unappeasable attitude towards the social democratic workers (but not their leaders) or the establishment of a united front tactics with the workers regardless of their political

318 France Klopčič joined the communist movement as a secondary school pupil in 1920. He was a part of the leadership of the Communist Youth in Slovenia and Yugoslavia; between 1928 and 1929 the secretary of the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Slovenia. In 1930 he went to the Soviet Union, where he was imprisoned for the first time in 1930 for the period of two years due to the suspicion of counter-revolutionary activities and for the second time for the period of eight years during Stalin's purges in 1937.

319 Lovro Kuhar (pen name Prežihov Voranc), member of the KPJ since its establishment. He was politically active in Carinthia and became a member of the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Slovenia. After his emigration in 1930 he, among other things, worked as an instructor of a peasant committee with the Comintern and led the patronages for the assistance to the Yugoslav Communists. In 1936 he became a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the KPJ and organisational secretary, and between 1937 and 1939 he was one of the closest associates of Josip Broz. After his return to the homeland his influence in the Party waned completely.

320 Viktor Koleša, member of the Central Committee of the KPJ and member of its leadership in Slovenia at the time of the establishment of the communist organisation. Organisational secretary of the Central Committee of the KPJ between 1929 and 1930; went to the International Lenin School in Moscow; and joined the international brigades in Spain in 1936.

321 Boris Kidrič, member of the KPJ since 1928; sentenced to one year in prison in 1930; member of the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Slovenia between 1931 and 1934; secretary of the Central Committee of the Young Communist League of Yugoslavia between 1935 and 1936; and member of the Central Committee of the KPJ since 1940.

322 Edvard Kardelj, member of the KPJ since 1928, member and secretary of the Provincial Committee of the Young Communist League of Yugoslavia for Slovenia; imprisoned between 1930 and 1932; went to the International Lenin School in Moscow in 1935 and 1936; member of the provisional leadership of the KPJ since 1938; and member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the KPJ since 1940.

323 Trampuž, *KPJ na Slovenskem v obdobju šestojanuarske diktature*, pp. 25–32.

adherence; and in the search for an alliance with the peasants and the middle-class bourgeoisie with the assistance of the Slovenian National Revolutionaries organisation. The communists wanted to overcome their social isolation with the public declarations with regard to the boycott of the 1933 municipal elections, participation in the workers chamber elections and at the elections of the trade union organisers, as well as by organising the strike movement in the middle of the 1930s.³²⁴ In the context of the People's Front movement in the second half of the 1930s the communists demanded the democratisation of the political system and improvement of the socio-economic position of workers, small peasants and other weaker strata, while they addressed the widest public by emphasising anti-fascism and thus also attracting a part of the intelligentsia. With such political reorientation and with the appeals to democracy, simultaneously exhibiting the zeal so characteristic for the communists and taking advantage of various legal and semi-legal methods of operation, the KPJ started making its way into the public political life more prominently.³²⁵

However, if the communists wanted to enhance their public influence, it was important for them to define the national question as a complex political, economic and cultural problem with the social issue at its core, and its resolution as a common interest of the proletariat headed by the Communist Party, peasants, as well as a part of the bourgeoisie. Such a standpoint regarding the federal national programme had already asserted itself in the KPJ as early as in 1923.³²⁶ However, in the Party ranks is started to gain more momentum after the provincial conference in Goričane in September 1934. Thus the Party tried to persuade especially the peasants as the allies of the revolution. It rejected the opinion that as an internationalist workers' party it was not concerned with the resolution of the national question. Instead it started to see this issue as an important mobilisation and tactical resource.³²⁷ At the same time as the Slovenian communists, the Central Committee of the KPJ in Vienna and in the Comintern circles in Moscow addressed the Slovenian national question as well. This resulted in the statement of the Communist Parties of Yugoslavia, Italy and Austria in

324 France Filipič: *Poglavja iz revolucionarnega boja jugoslovanskih komunistov 1919–1939* [Chapters from the Revolutionary Struggle of the Yugoslav Communists 1919–1939, 2], 2. Ljubljana, 1981, pp. 105, 108, 110, 112, 125, 132, 150–151.

325 *Zgodovina Zveze komunistov Jugoslavije* [History of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia]. Ljubljana, 1986, pp. 120–124.

326 Jurij Perovšek et al. (eds.): *Razprava o nacionalnem vprašanju v KPJ leta 1923. Dokumenti o oblikovanju federativnega nacionalnega programa KPJ* [Discussion about the National Question in the KPJ in 1923. Documents about the Formation of the Federal National Programme of the KPJ]. Ljubljana, 1990. Janko Pleterski: *Narodi, Jugoslavija, revolucija* [Nations, Yugoslavia, Revolution]. Ljubljana, 1986, pp. 177–212.

327 Edvard Kardelj: *Zbrana dela. Prva knjiga* [Collected Works. Book One]. Ljubljana, 1989, pp. 289–313. Perovšek, *Samoodločba in federacija*, pp. 39–108.

April 1934 on the right of the Slovenian nation to self-determination, including the right to secede from the imperial countries and the right to its unification. The importance of taking the national question into account in order to ensure a successful organisation of the revolutionary struggle of the communists was also reflected in the decision of the Comintern that the Communist Parties of Slovenia and Croatia should be established in the context of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The goal of this reorganisation was to ensure a more effective political participation of the oppressed nations' communist parties as national parties in the sense of a counterbalance to other national parties. In this regard it was also explicitly underlined that the internal organisational structure of the united KPJ would not change in any sense, and that it would still be based on its centralist foundations. The decision on the establishment of the Communist Party of Slovenia (KPS) was then adopted at the fourth state conference of the KPJ in December 1934, but it was not implemented until more than two years later.³²⁸

In the political programme of the KPS, adopted at its founding congress in April 1937, the communists committed themselves to acting for the benefit of the entire Slovenian nation, for its unification, progress and freedom. The programme, formed in the shape of a manifesto, was a reflection of the People's Front policy of the communist movement and the growing fascist danger. It addressed the existential endangerment of the Slovenian nation due to the conquest aspirations of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany, and criticised the ruling Stojadinović³²⁹ – Korošec³³⁰ regime for aligning itself with Hitler and Mussolini while allowing the activities of the pro-fascist organisations in the state. The programme stated that the policy of the former Slovenian People's Party (SLS), headed by Korošec, worked against the interests of the Slovenian nation and characterised it as a policy of "being the decisive factor in the opposition between the Serbian and Croatian parties" and thus undermining the unity of the oppressed Yugoslav nations in their struggle against the Greater Serbian domination, centralism and terror, while exposing the Slovenian nation to the danger of "being left completely alone in its struggle for the national survival". It demanded the introduction of democratic freedoms, abolishment of the January 6th regime, termination of the economic exploitation of the Slovenian nation by the Greater Serbian centralism,

328 *Istorijski arhiv Komunističke partije Jugoslavije. Kongresi i zemaljske konferencije KPJ 1919–1937, II.* Belgrade, 1950, pp. 230, 231. Perovšek, *Samoodločba in federacija*, pp. 176–246.

329 Milan Stojadinović, Serbian politician and economist, member of the National Radical Party; President of the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia between 1935 and 1939; President of the Yugoslav Radical Association.

330 Anton Korošec, most important Slovenian politician in the First Yugoslavia. He held a variety of state and political functions: minister of various ministries, President of the Government in 1928; President of the SLS throughout this time; since 1936 also the Vice-President of the state-wide JRZ; in 1939 elected as the President of the Senate of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

as well as the convening of a democratically-elected Constitutional Assembly and Slovenian Parliament as a representative of the sovereignty of the Slovenian nation. It also called for a united and free Slovenia in a community of equal Yugoslav nations in the context of a federal state. The scope of the People's Front orientation is emphasised especially in the demand for the crucial "unification of all democratic political powers that care about the fate of the Slovenian nation", and in this regard the communists guaranteed that democracy and freedom of world view would be respected.³³¹

The KPS kept announcing the principles of the People's Front orientation until the pact Hitler–Stalin was concluded in August 1939. At that time the Comintern abandoned the anti-fascist People's Front orientation and demanded that the Communist Parties operate in the spirit of the pact. This demand was also accepted by the KPJ or KPS, which is why it stopped cooperating with its People's Front allies. The disputes between the communist and social democratic movement renewed and even intensified with the increasingly imperialist policy of the Soviet Union. The communists characterised the war as imperialist. Supposedly it was caused by the British and French imperialists and the "treacherous" Second International.³³² The assessment of the war as imperialist in character and the alliance between Germany and the Soviet Union as justified was fully expressed at the third conference of the KPS in June 1940 in Vinje. The KPS referred to the social democrats and other democratic parties or groups (Lončar's³³³ group, Christian Socialists, and especially Svetek's³³⁴ "left" social democrat wing) as the "agents" and "lackeys" of the Western imperialism as well as "war agitators" who had supposedly sabotaged the unity of the proletariat and the working people even in the time when the "struggle against fascism was still the main task". They also accused them of spreading "disgusting" propaganda against the Soviet Union. The conference expressed its distrust of all bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties, called for a consistent alignment with the Soviet Union, and expressed its conviction that a swift revolutionary momentum would be achieved. At the same time the conference, with a Bolshevik intensity, announced a resolute struggle

331 *Zbornik ob štiridesetletnici ustanovnega kongresa KPS* [Collection of Texts at the 40th Anniversary of the Inaugural Congress of the KPS]. Ljubljana, 1977, pp. 274–279. Janko Prunk: *Slovenski narodni vzpon* [Rise of the Slovenian Nation]. Ljubljana, 1992, pp. 274, 275.

332 *Zgodovina Zveze komunistov Jugoslavije*, pp. 144, 145.

333 Dragotin Lončar, as an adherent of the Masaryk's principles he consistently supported Slovenianism and social reforms. In 1921 he left the JSDS because of its unitarian and centralist opinions with regard to the national question and was one of the founders of the Association of Slovenian Autonomists. In the 1930s he was, among other things, active in the opposition peasant and workers' movement. He cooperated with the opposition democrat groups, but declined any cooperation with the communists. President of the Slovenska matica cultural society from 1920 to 1947.

334 France Svetek, syndicalist, among other things the Vice-President of the social democratic Expert Commission and publisher of the *Delavec* [Worker] gazette.

against the opportunistic and other tendencies in the Party ranks, which could weaken its resolve and undermine the authority of its leadership.³³⁵ Thus the role of the KPS in the second half of the 1930s was exceedingly ambivalent, as in its attitude to the other political subjects the Party acted in such a way as to simultaneously unite and divide.

Despite such a political change the KPS managed to further strengthen its influence in the months preceding the war. This was expressed in its encouragement of the strike wave in the second half of 1940 and the anti-inflation demonstrations, collection of signatures for the establishment of the Association of Friends of the Soviet Union, establishment of the workers' unity committees after the government had disbanded the trade unions in which the socialists and communists participated, etc. Soon after that it also renounced some of its sectarian standpoints from the conference in Vinje and concluded an action agreement with the Christian Socialists and the left wing of the Sokol organisation. Thus the foundations for the establishment of the Anti-Imperialist or Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation in April 1941 were set.³³⁶

Before the occupation of Yugoslavia the KPS also started changing its opinion about the character of World War II: it started emphasising the dangers of both imperialisms – the fascist and the so-called Western democratic imperialism – more equivalently. This became evident already at the fifth state conference of the KPJ in October 1940 in Dubrava near Zagreb. It once again started to underline the urgency of organising anti-war actions and abandoned the pacifist viewpoint it had adhered to after the conclusion of the Hitler-Stalin pact.³³⁷ At this conference Kardelj explained that the communists would defend their homeland, should this be in the interest of the revolution and the Soviet Union, which implied that the communists would defend the independence of the state with the assumption that the existing government would be brought down.³³⁸

After the conclusion of the Hitler-Stalin pact, the socialists stated that this drew a strict line between the socialists and communists, and that the policy of the People's Fronts is a policy of the past.³³⁹ In light of the increasing threat against the Slovenian nation they called for a national concentration. They stressed that

335 *Peta zemaljska konferencija KPJ: 19–23 oktobar 1940*. Belgrade, 1980, Resolucija 1. (correct: 3.) konference KPS julija 1940, pp. 274–283.

336 France Filipič: Politična usmeritev KPS od sredine 1940 do aprila 1941 [Political Orientation of the KPS from the Middle of 1940 until April 1941]. In: *Slovenski upor 1941. Osvobodilna fronta slovenskega naroda pred pol stoletja. Zbornik referatov na znanstvenem posvetu v dneih 23. in 24. maja 1991 v Ljubljani* [Slovenian Resistance 1941. Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation Half a Century Ago. A collection of papers at the scientific consultation on 23 and 24 May 1991 in Ljubljana]. Ljubljana, 1991, pp. 55–65.

337 *Peta zemaljska konferencija KPJ*, pp. 221–226, 235–236.

338 *Ibid.*, p. 204.

339 Mikuž, *Oris zgodovine Slovencev 1917–1941*, p. 520.

the general national issues should be solved in cooperation with all the classes, especially workers, peasants and intelligentsia.³⁴⁰ Shortly before the attack against Yugoslavia they emphasised expressly that they were not indifferent to the manner in which the domestic and foreign politics developed in these dangerous times. Therefore they welcomed the appeal of Dr. Kulovec³⁴¹ for the appeasement between the parties, because the socialists did not support the policy of “the worse the better”, which, of course, they stated with the communists in mind. They pledged to take part, just like in the years 1917–1919, in the consolidation of the circumstances for the good of the nation and the state, provided that the party passions were placated. However, they would do this on the basis of a total equality of “everyone who takes part in the decisions about all of the political, economic, social and cultural questions pertaining to all citizens, but especially the working people”.³⁴² They were in favour of the so-called mature democracy, where decisions were not only made by the ruling party, as the opposition also participated in the decision-making process and shared the responsibility in these fateful times.³⁴³

340 *Delavec*, 25 March 1939, *Narodna koncentracija*.

341 Fran Kulovec, priest, apart from Dr. Anton Korošec one of the most prominent leaders of the SLS. Member of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of SHS many times; Minister in several governments; and the political successor of Korošec after his death in December 1940. Died during the German bombing of Belgrade in April 1941.

342 *Delavska politika*, 8 February 1941, *Premirje in enakopravnost*.

343 *Delavska politika*, 22 February 1941, *Da si bomo na jasnem*.

