PART IV

SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA

(1945 TO 1980)
10.

The Consolidation of Communist Rule

(1943 to 1948)

**Liberation**

On 20 October 1944, at 6 a.m., the First Proletarian Brigade reported per telephone: “Kalemegdan is liberated. . . . The proletarians have taken the fortress by storm. The Germans fought over every stone, every bridge, every tunnel, every brick. As if for their Berlin.”¹ In this battle for Belgrade, 15,000 Wehrmacht soldiers and 3,000 partisans lost their lives.

Commanding General Peko Dapčević was shaken by the result: “It looked horrible. . . . Everything was covered with the bodies of German soldiers and officers, amid destroyed equipment that was smoldering away with blistering heat. . . . The smell was revolting! . . . Near Boleč lay a whole mountain of corpses—a gigantic heap of corpses. Nearby yet another. And that’s what you saw everywhere you looked.”² Yet soon life reawakened in the devastated city: people crawled out of their dwellings and celebrated that the war was finally over. Shortly afterward, Tito addressed the people from the former royal palace as their head of state. There was no question in his mind that the enormous sacrifice of the Second World War would inevitably have to lead to the development of socialism and the one-party rule of the CPY in Yugoslavia. He admired the Soviet Union, venerated Stalin, and firmly believed in the superiority of communism. Yet three hurdles blocked the path to this objective: the aggressor had to be decisively defeated, the political rivals neutralized, and recognition for the new regime obtained from the Allies.

Following the conquest of Belgrade, the Wehrmacht and its allies began their retreat. The Croat Ustasha, the Croatian Home Guard, and the Slovene Home Guard were disbanding. Ante Pavelić and Milan Nedić fled across the border. Mihailović’s Chetniks also retreated. Fiercely fought offensives finally secured victory for the People’s Liberation Army. By the end of 1944, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo were liberated; on 6 April 1945, the partisans entered Sarajevo, and on 8 May of that year they marched into Zagreb.
Yugoslavia was able to end its occupation on 15 May 1945, without any significant help from the Allies.

The communists had prepared well in every regard for the moment in which they took power. Back in May 1944, Tito had created the Department for the People’s Protection (OZNA, Odsjek za zaštitu naroda) under Aleksandar Ranković. This secret police, from which the State Security Administration (UDB) later evolved, compiled card files with the names of collaborators and war criminals. In Slovenia alone the number reached 17,000. They also created commissions to prosecute war crimes that were punishable by death. So-called courts of honor were set up to try those who had aided and abetted the occupational forces. Those found guilty were punished with disenfranchisement, expropriation, or forced labor. By the end of the war, the partisans had condemned thousands in this way to imprisonment, forced labor, or death.3

Tito ordered the quick and complete destruction of all “bandits.” As the partisans advanced, it was therefore common to “cleanse” the conquered areas of those who had supported the occupational regime and enemy troops. On its own initiative, the OZNA executed whoever they could catch. An American liaison officer reported in the fall of 1944 from Dubrovnik: “The inhabitants were living in a state of mortal terror. . . . The Partisan attitude was that anybody who stayed in town during the occupation and didn’t work in the Partisan underground was ipso facto a collaborator. The dreaded secret police was going to work and people were being taken from their homes to the old castle and shot every day.”4

In March 1945, an estimated 170,000 Croat Ustasha fighters and members of the Croatian Home Guard, 36,000 Serb and Montenegrin Chetniks, 18,000 Slovene Home Guard troops, and 7,000 of Nedić’s Serb soldiers had not yet surrendered.5 Tens of thousands of these fighters tried to flee to Austria to save themselves. In May 1945, an approximately 38-mile-long trail of 25,000 (British estimate) to 200,000 (Croatian statistic) soldiers and civilians moved toward the border, where their vanguard came up against British troops at Bleiburg and Viktring. Since Germany had surrendered on 7 May, the Allies felt that all ex-Yugoslav collaborators should be turned over to the partisans. Therefore, they were not permitted to advance into British-occupied territory. Anyone who did make it across was turned over by the British. The partisans issued an ultimatum for surrender to the forces stopped at the border, but the Ustasha commander let it elapse. So the People’s Liberation Army attacked. Just how many fighters and refugees then fled into the woods, were taken prisoner, died in rearguard battles, were executed or massacred can no longer be reliably reconstructed. Croat emigrants spoke later of hundreds of thousands of victims. Probably partisans executed up to 70,000 people through court martial. Another 60,000 died in the final battles.6
During this phase the communists systematically and extensively liquidated their military and political opponents—the “quislings”—out of conviction, embitterment, and revenge. “We are receiving terrible news,” reported a witness. “In Crnogrob there are mass graves. Trucks are bringing men with bound hands and feet every evening from the prison in Škofja Loka and no one ever returns. Every evening one hears shots from Crnogrob... Officially and publicly no one knows anything about it... At the same time, the OZNA goes about its own dirty business under the cover of night.”

In early July 1945, Tito gave the strict order to free all imprisoned “quislings” over the age of 35 who had not committed an atrocity. However, this order was not implemented at first. Not until the end of 1945 did he definitely put an end to the rampage by expounding emphatically that “no one is afraid of capital punishment any longer!”

Targeted “cleansing” actions were also carried out in the liberated areas once annexed by Italy. Immediately following Italy’s surrender in 1943, anywhere from 500 to 700 representatives of the fascist regime were executed. The partisans had the corpses of the murdered Italians dumped in the deep karst sinkholes of the region, where, as Jules Verne once wrote, “of that which is thrown in, certainly nothing ever comes out again.” In the spring of 1945, the bodies of hundreds, if not thousands of murdered victims followed. Named after the Istrian limestone sinkholes in which the murdered were thrown, these atrocities became known as foibe.

The terror at the end of the war eliminated the remaining military resistance on the ground, but it did not eradicate resistance in the heads of many. Instead, the violence provided grounds on which to fundamentally question the legitimacy of the new system, a system that apparently liquidated its enemies brutally and forced possible opposition to accept an unwanted state under the threat of force. In Slovenia and Croatia, the rift running through the society was particularly deep, where the re-establishment of Yugoslavia itself, regardless of its political system, found anything but consensual approval. Since the communist state neither acknowledged nor uncovered the injustice done in its name, commemoration of the atrocities near Bleiburg and the foibe became historical and political time bombs.

Creating a People’s Democracy
From the standpoint of the Western powers, it was all but certain in the fall of 1944 that Yugoslavia would drift into the communist camp. Above all, they viewed the alliance with Tito as a pragmatic solution because their chief priority was to bring about Germany’s unconditional surrender. Churchill hoped that once Germany had been defeated in Yugoslavia, the monarchical regime would be restored or a bourgeois multiparty democracy would emerge.
However, King Peter and his government were in a weak position due to the rapid surrender of the Yugoslav army back in April 1941 and his hasty flight into exile. The reputation of this government was badly tarnished, especially since the partisans had just proven that military resistance would have indeed been worth the fight. Although the monarch headed a government representing all parties, ideas for a postwar order were amorphous. The first Yugoslavia had never been able to truly consolidate itself as a state, and now recognized institutions no longer existed. Several of the king’s cabinets had crumbled over internal quarrels between Serb and Croat national politics, and the government was also being condemned for its support of war criminals. In other words, it was rather unclear what this government actually stood for—except anticommunism.

At Churchill’s behest, Ivan Šubašić, the former head of the Banovina of Croatia, became the leader of the exile regime in June 1944. The British and the Americans hoped that the bourgeois camp would thereby finally consolidate itself and be able to prevent a communist government at the last moment. Tito understood that international recognition of his power could only occur if he acknowledged his main legitimate rival, the royal government in exile. So he succumbed to Churchill’s urging to reach an agreement with Šubašić, which was signed on 16 June 1944 on the Adriatic island of Vis and expressed their mutual recognition and agreement on a procedure for moving forward. The decision about Yugoslavia’s future political system was to be postponed until after the war. The revolutionary leader was making a strictly tactical move when he publicly emphasized that he was primarily concerned with the liberation of his homeland and not the introduction of socialism. Back at home, he formed the Unified Popular Liberation Front (known as the Popular Front starting in August 1945), a broad alliance of communists, social democrats, monarchists, peasant-party members, and the bourgeoisie.

Tito’s primary aim was to neutralize his political competitors by affiliating them with him. His rivals hoped for a coalition of equal partners, but even then Tito considered such a coalition thoroughly absurd. In the end his strategy proved successful, not the least because the anticomunist opposition was hamstrung. The standing of the old parties had eroded during the war, and their leaders, like Vladko Maček, had long left the country. The government-in-exile did not return to Yugoslavia until late March 1945, so that not a single well-organized political force existed to counteract Tito’s influence, nor were there any credible alternatives to Tito’s federal-state solution for Yugoslavia. Many outstanding personalities, intellectuals, artists, and writers from all parts of the country began to publicly announce their support for the new state, which gave it the veneer of deeper legitimacy.

Tito proved to be a clever foreign policy strategist in that he played the conflicting interests between Churchill and Stalin against one another in order
to limit the West’s influence on the postwar order. He duped the British when he secretly boarded a Soviet military plane on 21 September 1944 in Vis and flew to Moscow to convince Stalin to send Red Army units to help liberate Belgrade. In doing so he foiled the impending British invasion of Yugoslavia, which would have been the only thing able to prevent the communist takeover. Stalin granted Tito this favor but then pursued his own realpolitik when he reached an agreement with Churchill in October of that same year at the Moscow Conference on dividing up Europe into spheres of influence. Romania was to be controlled to 90 percent and Bulgaria to 75 percent by the Soviets, while Greece would be to 90 percent under British control. The two major powers planned to equally divide control of both Yugoslavia and Hungary. Faced with this international constellation, Tito had no choice but to reach an agreement with Ivan Šubašić, the representative of the Yugoslav king, on 1 November 1944, in Belgrade to create an interim coalition government. This was constituted under Tito’s leadership on 7 March 1945. Šubašić became foreign minister, and eleven of the twenty-one ministers in this government were also not communists. Shortly afterward the Allies formally recognized the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (DFJ).15

Ideologically, the communists hunkered down and waited. They declared Yugoslavia to be a people’s democracy in which they were willing to share power with other political forces. Pro forma, 118 bourgeois representatives from the former Skupština, the prewar National Assembly of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, were allowed to be seated in the interim parliament next to members of the AVNOJ, the People’s Liberation Council formed during the war. The new leadership avoided using terms like “class struggle” or “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Instead they avowed their support for antifascism, “brotherhood and unity,” and even general humanistic values. Yugoslavia now had a hybrid political system in which elements of liberal parliamentarianism were combined with the one-party state that had been established during the war. However, with the passage in the summer of 1945 of a law on crimes against the people and the state, civil rights were limited, as were the freedoms of association, assembly, and the press. Despite the impending elections, communists already held key offices in all bodies. In reality, this phase of the people’s democracy bridged the transition from the country’s former bourgeois-capitalist system to its future socialist one.

Also at the middle and lower levels of the bureaucracy sat seasoned fighters from the People’s Liberation Army, who had the regime alone to thank for the positions they held. At the beginning of the 1950s, two-thirds of the leading personnel came from the working and peasant classes. Every second low-level civil servant and employee had little or no schooling.16 What this meant is exemplified in a decree from the Ministry for Forestry, which apparently felt it necessary in October 1945 to inform its civil servants of a few basic rules of
behavior, specifically that leftover food, paper, and cigarettes were not to be simply thrown out the windows, that spitting was not allowed in the hallways or stairwells, and that there was a purpose for and a proper way to use toilets.¹⁷

The elections for the constituent assembly took place in November 1945, in a climate of considerable instability; they could not be called either free or fair. Approximately 200,000 people were prevented from voting because they had cooperated with the occupational regimes. Furthermore, there was a separate ballot box reserved only for those voters casting ballots against the People’s Front.¹⁸ One British diplomat reported that the trend toward establishing a dictatorship was growing not because the population at large was convinced of communism as a form of government, but because the wartime and postwar experiences had made the people more receptive to a regime that promised order and security, even at the price of losing personal liberties and political decisions.¹⁹ Winning over 90 percent of the votes, the communist-dominated People’s Front list received a comfortable majority in the constituent assembly. When the bourgeois ministers pulled out of the coalition under protest in the late summer, they were in effect committing political suicide. On 29 November 1945, the parliament declared Yugoslavia to be a republic and banned King Peter from returning to the country.²⁰ Thus, the transformation to a one-party state occurred here far earlier than in the eastern states of Central Europe.

Tito prohibited all discussion, pro and contra, on the introduction of a multiparty system, even though it had also been occurring in his own party. In accordance with the classic Bolshevik view, he placed monolithic ideology and the one-party system combined with social justice over political pluralism. He was convinced that a democracy based on the Western model would only lead to the restoration of the old order, to ethnopolitical polarization, and to the collapse of the state. “If these [democratic] parties wish to have the people behind them, then they have to conduct strictly local politics for each of the respective peoples, and that would prevent the creation of a unified state. . . . If such [a party] would form in Slovenia for the Slovene nation, another in Montenegro, a third in Serbia, then in Macedonia and Croatia, this would lead to the fragmentation of the state, which would immediately fall apart.”²¹ Furthermore, the egoistical party bickering would block developmental policy based on industrial progress and social justice. Therefore, in 1946, the constitution of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (FNRJ) institutionalized the system of “people’s rule” (narodna vlast) with hundreds of elected people’s committees in cities and rural communities. The communists advocated direct democracy and instructed communities to enable “the direct involvement of the citizens in administering state business,” to abolish all privileges, and particularly to eliminate all forms of national and religious
hate. This definitely precluded a revival of the democratic multiparty system. Leading oppositional politicians were tried in court and their supporters threatened. All political power was concentrated in the Politburo of the CPY under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, who was simultaneously the head of the Yugoslav government.

As in other countries, the main war criminals were to be tried in court. However, Ante Pavelić escaped to Argentina, and General Nedić committed suicide in 1946 in pretrial detention following his extradition. Leading representatives of the collaboration regime in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, and Macedonia were charged, in a sense as surrogates for the old regime. Draža Mihailović, who had disappeared, was betrayed by one of his commanders, lured into a trap, and arrested in March 1946. He was executed on 17 July 1946 and buried in an anonymous grave.

Archbishop Aloizije Stepinac also had to answer to the court in the fall of 1946. The communists wanted not only to hold him accountable for his dubious role during the Second World War but also to use him to set an example against the Catholic Church, around which the nationalist opposition in Croatia was grouping at the time. In the fall of 1945, the bishops had issued a pastoral letter opposing the communists. The court convicted Stepinac of collaboration and the cover-up of war crimes and sentenced him to sixteen years imprisonment, which he served as house arrest. In addition to the tens of thousands of political oppositionists and supporters of the old regime who had fled, hundreds of Catholic clerics now went into exile out of fear of repression.

Tito himself repeatedly argued that it was better not to wallow in the wounds of the past but to build a positive, commonly shared perspective for the future instead. Once the war criminals were convicted, he offered a type of armistice to his opponents. “We extend our hand to all the misled,” he said in 1946. “We extend our hand to them over the innumerable graves, over these ruins, we forgive them! But we demand that they become loyal citizens of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia.” From this point forward, the communists preached the need to forgive and forget. In reality, however, very little was forgiven and nothing forgotten.

Nationalities and Neighbors
From a Croat point of view, one of Tito’s most notable achievements was the liberation of Istria and Dalmatia from Italian rule, which thus finally brought about the unification of all Croats. In September 1943, after Italy had collapsed, Slovene and Croat partisans declared “once and for all . . . that Istria is and remains Croatian territory.” Referring to President Wilson’s Fourteen Points and the right to self-determination, they declared reunification with the motherland.
Tito was aware that he would not be able to clinch the annexation of Istria through diplomatic channels with the Allies. Therefore, shortly before the end of the war, he had his troops quickly move into the claimed territory and march to Trieste, which had been a point of contention between Italians and Slavs since 1870 and now lay directly on the border between the spheres of influence that the great powers had so painstakingly negotiated in Yalta in February 1945.

The Trieste crisis marked the first major dispute in the emerging East–West conflict. The Western powers thought that Italy should be rewarded for its 1943 defection to their side, which is why they wanted the People’s Liberation Army to leave the region. Demonstrations of military strength in which Stalin eventually took the side of the British and Americans ended in June 1945 with a compromise. Yugoslav troops pulled out of Trieste while the surrounding territory was divided into Allied and Yugoslav zones of occupation. The Paris Peace Treaty of February 1947 turned Trieste and northern Istria into a neutral “Free Territory” under the protection of the United Nations. Zone A (Trieste city) was administered by a British-American military government, while Zone B (surrounding territory) was placed under Yugoslav military control. This provisional solution lasted until 1954, when the Free Territory was dissolved. The contested territories were divided between Italy and Yugoslavia.

The integration of Istria and Dalmatia into the Yugoslav state greatly concerned the Italians living there. The former rulers now became the ruled. Although they were not systematically driven off, as many as 200,000 Italian refugees left the area in several waves until the peace treaty with Italy was signed in 1947. Those who remained were given the status of a national minority with all the appertaining rights, including school instruction in Italian.

Besides the Italians, many ethnic Germans also left the country, the majority of them before the end of the war and on order of evacuation issued by the Coordination Center for Ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle) of the German Reich in the late summer of 1944. This sent hundreds of thousands of them out of the country. From the original population of half a million ethnic Germans, only about 200,000 remained by the end of the war. Many of these people became the victims of partisan retribution.

Because of their close collaboration with the occupational forces and especially because of the killing sprees perpetrated by the SS division “Prince Eugen” against partisans and civilians, the ethnic Germans were seen collectively as war criminals. When the partisans marched into the region where ethnic Germans lived, many of them were therefore mistreated, interned in camps, or executed as war criminals. The Soviets, who crossed the Danube in October 1944, deported about 30,000 German war prisoners and forced
laborers to Russia. Not until the end of 1949 did they release these deported people from the camps.\textsuperscript{31}

On 21 November 1944, the provisional Yugoslav government of the AVNOJ decided to confiscate “all property belonging to persons of German ethnicity, except those Germans who fought in the ranks of the national liberation army and in partisan units” as well as the property “of war criminals and their accomplices regardless of nationality.” Apparently the Yugoslav government had no specific plans to deport the Germans collectively; at least this was not an issue addressed during the Potsdam negotiations. A later attempt to have “the entire German minority” transferred to Germany was rejected by the Allies. The Yugoslav foreign ministry then concluded that deportation “will not be able to be solved in a legal manner in the foreseeable future.”\textsuperscript{32}

The Germans who did not leave Yugoslavia were put into camps, such as in Rudolfsgnad (Knićanin), Gakowa (Gakovo), and Kruschiwl (Kruševlje), and subjected to forced labor. Tens of thousands of them died as a result of deliberate abuse and the conditions there. When the camps were disbanded in 1948, the survivors were shipped off to Hungary and Austria. Roughly 62,000 Yugoslav Germans immigrated to West Germany in the 1950s as part of the effort to reunite families.\textsuperscript{33} Hitler’s rule thus brutally ended the centuries-long presence of the Danube Swabians in the region.\textsuperscript{34}

There were also open national questions in the southern regions of the country. The communists handled the old feud with Bulgaria and Greece over the “Macedonian question” by declaring the Macedonians in 1937 to be a people of equal standing and promising them in Jajce in 1943 that they would have their own republic. In other words, the communists conducted targeted nation building “from the top down,” in order to shape Macedonian national identity. Soon a standardized Macedonian language and orthography were established (on the basis of the dialect spoken in the Prilep-Veles region). Grammar books, dictionaries, and belletristic works were published. In the Bled treaty, Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian head of state, recognized the independence of the Macedonians in 1947. The province was meant as a bridge between the two friendly states.

The situation in Kosovo proved to be trickier. There the Kosovar communists had declared at the Bujan Conference at the turn of 1943/1944 that Kosovo had “always wished . . . to be unified with Albania.” Early in 1945, an uprising was put down of nationalists known as Ballists (after the name of the organization founded in 1942, Balli kombëtar) who advocated a Greater Albania. During the war they had collaborated with the German military government, which discredited them with the Western powers. Because the communists in Kosovo were never strong and many Albanians favored a Greater Albanian state, Tito was forced to toe a more conciliatory line.
Retrospectively, he sanctioned the deportation of the Serb colonists, which helped significantly to appease the Kosovars. Tito decided to make Kosovo and Metohija an autonomous region of the Republic of Serbia, as a sort of compromise between Serbian claims over the territory and Albanian desires for independence. For a while he even played with the idea of uniting the southern province with Albania, should the country join a confederation of Balkan states.

State and Nations in Socialism
On the basis of decisions by the AVNOJ in 1943 and modeled after the Soviet example, the constitution of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia and the two-chamber parliament it created were established in January 1946. The constitution recognized five coequal constituent nations of the new multinational state, namely the Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Macedonians, and Montenegrins. Not until the 1960s did the Bosnian Muslims advance to become the sixth such nation. Before that they had to declare themselves as being either ethnically undefined, Muslim Serb, or Muslim Croat. The negative experiences of the interwar period prompted the communists to expressly reject the idea of merging all these coequal peoples into a supranational Yugoslav nation. At the same time, it appeared to Tito to be just as important to thwart the dominance of the most populous people, namely the Serbs.

Article I of the constitution defined Yugoslavia as “a community of peoples equal in rights who, on the basis of the right to self-determination, including the right of separation, have expressed their will to live together in a federative state.” Moša Pijade, a member of the Central Committee, coined the pedantic interpretation that the right of secession had been exhausted once and for all by the decision to reestablish Yugoslavia in 1943, since the partisan war represented a type of implicit referendum in favor of the new state.

Each of these peoples received their own state, something that was important to the communists. From then on, Yugoslavia comprised six republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia. Within Serbia, two autonomous regions existed, Vojvodina and Kosovo. The situation was somewhat different only in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where there was no clear ethnic majority. In November 1943, the Bosnian communists had decided that this republic was “neither Serb, nor Muslim, nor Croat, but Serb, Muslim, and Croat all at once.” All three groups were said to be equal. For one, this stance recognized the individuality of the Muslims; for another, it expressly emphasized the multiethnic character of the republic.

Nor were the other republics ethnically homogeneous. For example, the Croats only made up 78 percent of that republic’s population, the Macedonians just 66 percent of theirs. As long as Yugoslavia remained intact politically, this was but a small problem. People were not faced with the decision of identifying
themselves either as the member of a certain ethnicity or as the inhabitant of one of the republics, because in Yugoslavia the two proved without any problem to be mutually compatible. In fact, federalism institutionalized multiple identities and loyalties: every person was the citizen of a republic and at the same time a Yugoslav citizen. Since all titular nations enjoyed the same rights across the entire territory of Yugoslavia, this put the importance of each republic’s borders into a different perspective. Tito hoped that this would connect people with one another instead of dividing them.

The alpha and omega of the Yugoslav system and its highest patriotic values were “brotherhood and unity”—solidarity among different yet related and coexisting peoples. Tito’s campaign slogan reflected the tradition of nineteenth-century pan-Slavic solidarity. The national anthem of Yugoslavia, “Hej, Sloveni” (Hey, Slavs), chosen in 1945, was an adaptation of the anthem of the pan-Slavic movement adopted at the Prague Slavic Congress of 1848. The concept of a federative democracy was also rooted in the nineteenth century in the thinking of the Serb socialists Svetozar Marković and Dimitrije Tucović, who in turn had been influenced by the Austro-Marxists.

Both the Enlightenment and Marxism taught that the social organization of humanity progressed through a series of transformations from tribes and clans to peoples, then nations, and finally to supranational formations. Therefore, from the communist standpoint, national identities did not have to be repressed since they represented a historically necessary stage on the path to socialism. In addition to peoples (narodi), ethnic minorities also thus enjoyed the right to be treated equally, to further their own distinct cultural development, and to use their language freely. Magyars, Albanians, and eight other groups were officially recognized as nationalities (narodnosti). Although they were also represented in the political bodies, they had a different status than the constituent peoples of Yugoslavia. The right to self-determination was argued to have already been fulfilled for the Kosovars through the existence of Albania and for the Magyars through Hungary. Therefore, they were not given their own republics and the right to secession. Minorities without national homelands, such as the Roma, Jews, and the Vlachs, were considered to be ethnic groups. They also enjoyed special protective rights. The optimistic expectation was that ethnic differences would disappear of their own accord as socialism progressed.

Socialism served as the main unifying force and the most important ideological adhesive in a state made up of various peoples. Patriotic education and a pan-Yugoslav consciousness were to thwart strife and succession and thus prevent civil war and fratricide from breaking out anew. However, Yugoslavia’s nationality policy remained a harrowing balancing act. On the one side, it provided room for national, religious, and cultural activities; on the other, it attempted to rigorously combat all forms of intolerance and chauvinism.
Cultural organizations, clubs and foundations, publishing houses, and religious societies were banned if they exhibited an exclusive ethnic preference. Three examples of such organizations were the Muslim Preporod (Rebirth), the Croat Napredak (Progress), and the Serb Prosvjeta (Education). Instead, society was to organize itself along multiethnic and citizenship lines, starting in the youth brigades, the Communist Party, the Antifascist Women’s Front, and the People’s Army. Yet it did not prove easy at first to diminish nationalism. Prejudices and the trauma of the war ran deep. Time and again passions rose to the surface, such as when a soccer game in Split in the early 1950s evolved into anti-Serb rioting. In Herzegovina, peasants demanded ethnically separate schools, and teachers refused to teach anything other than their “own” national history. Time and again, Tito had to implore his fellow countrymen to “keep brotherhood and unity as the apple of your eye.”

The majority of intellectuals initially engaged in the new state project. Important cultural and scientific institutions adopted the adjective “Yugoslav” in their names. The writer Miroslav Krleža founded the Institute of Lexicography and began the compilation of a Yugoslav encyclopedia in the early 1950s. Furthermore, all across the country publishing houses, movie theaters, and a writers association were formed. Building on the agreement reached back in the nineteenth century, linguists and writers worked out a shared standard language in December 1954 in Novi Sad. They concluded that Serbs, Croats, and Montenegrins spoke the same language in two variants, Ekavian and Ijekavian. Officially the language was called “Serbo-Croatian” or “Croato-Serbian.” Both ways of spelling, pronunciation, and alphabets, the Latin and the Cyrillic, were to be treated equally.

Universities and academies began to tackle the task of creating a common dictionary. Emblematic for the Yugoslav understanding of culture after 1945 was Ivo Andrić’s novel The Bridge on the Drina, which he had written during the interwar period. Andrić was not a communist, but his chronic of a Bosnian microcosm of different religions and civilizations masterly historicizes the longue durée of coexistence and conflict as the central experience shaping identity among Yugoslavs. In 1961, Andrić was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

“No Rest While We’re Rebuilding!”

Tito’s communist system represented the most ambitious and encompassing attempt up to that point to combat the excesses of capitalism through industrial progress and social justice and thereby to actually bring about modernity in Yugoslavia in the first place. It propagated the idea of a better world in which alienation and class conflict would be overcome in a modern societal order exhibiting great solidarity. In its pursuit of this ideal, the regime used
dictatorial means to accelerate the pace of modernization in the years immediately following the war.

As a result of their analysis of bourgeois economy and society, the communists undertook a massive project to promote progress that they developed as an antithesis to capitalist market economy. The core of the ideology consisted of the socialist theory of growth and labor. It aimed to achieve three major objectives: first, to generate employment and wealth without creating any of the negative side effects in society that capitalism had been producing since the nineteenth century. Second, the vicious circle of economic and political dependence on foreign powers was to be broken. Third, socialist society was to be better, happier, more just, and more humane. In order to achieve this, the political system resorted to classic Soviet means: substantial abolishment of private property, long-term economic planning and management by the state, and the dissemination of socialist attitudes, values, norms, and practices.

By the time the war ended, Yugoslavia faced immense demographic and material losses. More than a million people had died in the war; another 3.5 million had no roof over their heads. The country lay in ruins; 289,000 farms had been totally destroyed. Because the Wehrmacht had practiced a scorched-earth policy in which it systematically destroyed facilities, plants, businesses, and infrastructure as it retreated, one-third of Yugoslavia’s industry was damaged in 1945. Not one mine remained intact, and most of the roads, railway tracks, and bridges lay in ruins. This intensified exponentially the old problem of Balkan backwardness. By the end of the war, only 43.8 percent of the peasant households in all of Yugoslavia had an iron plow; another 18.2 only had a wooden one. The rest did not even own the most rudimentary agricultural machines. Large sections of the country did not have canalization or running water.

Under the motto “No rest while we’re rebuilding!” (Nema odmora dok traje obnova!), Yugoslavia undertook the great task of cleaning up and repairing. Until 1953, the country received $553.8 million in aid from various sources. Over $419 million came from the UN program for reconstruction and development alone, the highest amount awarded to any European recipient. Most of this aid was used to purchase food, clothing, and medicine.

However, what had a greater impact than this money on Yugoslavia’s immediate postwar reconstruction was the people’s optimism and initial élan. Hundreds of work brigades labored diligently. Youth helped with the harvest and reforestation, collected firewood, repaired roads and bridges, and built soccer stadiums, schools, and dwellings. Reconstruction was not just one great toil; for the youth, at least, it was also a huge party and the first important Yugoslav ritual of integration. “They were constantly celebrating. . . . They played instruments and danced as though they’d not been hard at work,”
noted one amazed observer. A total of 1.3 million young men and women worked more than 60 million voluntary and involuntary hours. Between 1945 and 1952, they built eleven railway lines, fourteen industrial plants, and the highway between Zagreb and Belgrade—the *autoput*—which was named “brotherhood and unity.”

Back in November 1944, the AVNOJ had confiscated over 80 percent of all private property in key economic sectors. Now, in November 1946, industry, banking, and the wholesale trade were officially nationalized. What remained in private hands were peasant farms, artisan workshops, and dwellings. At the same time, the expropriation of land holdings was sanctioned retroactively. The land reform and colonization law passed in August 1945 legalized the confiscation, limited peasant farms to a size between roughly 62 to 86 acres, and distributed land to small farmers and the landless poor. Those affected by the expropriation of about 39.5 million acres were, for one, banks, companies, churches, and monasteries, and for another, large landowners and ethnic Germans. The state gave nearly half of this expropriated land to about 300,000 veterans and landless poor. The rest was allocated to state-run enterprises and cooperatives. A second major reform followed in 1953 in which individual ownership was restricted to twenty-five acres for peasants and to 7.5 acres for people who farmed on the side. This reform put another 692,000 acres in the state’s hands.

Much like in the Soviet Union, the cornerstone of this new order was rapid industrialization advanced by the state. The secondary sector of the economy was to absorb the surplus labor from rural areas, satisfy the demand for consumer goods, and initiate self-sustaining economic growth. It was to be the lever with which to pry Yugoslavia loose from its backward social structure. In mid-1949, the state launched a campaign to mobilize the peasantry. Loyal party agitators spread out across the countryside, called meetings, and attempted to convince the village youth of the amenities of industrial work. Often the militia helped with recruitment: men were threatened at gunpoint, and women and children were locked up in dark cellars. One way or another, the campaign soon proved successful. Between 1945 and 1953, 1.5 million people left their villages and moved permanently to the cities. Another 800,000 became part-time industrial laborers and commuters.

Hand in hand with industrialization, the state sought to promote the socialist transformation of village life. Backwardness was to be combated, loans and modern agricultural technology provided, the level of education raised, and productivity increased. Unlike the situation in the Soviet Union, over 90 percent of the land was privately owned and change was to take place at a slower and especially at a voluntary pace.

In order to combat food shortages and to finance industrialization, a centralized purchasing system for agricultural products (*otkup*) was created in
which farmers were to sell surplus production to state agencies at low fixed prices, yet there was nothing voluntary about the system. Farmers felt burdened with an unacceptable hardship because, on the one hand, they had to sell their produce at disproportionately cheap prices but, on the other, could only buy industrial goods at high market prices. Numerous peasants circumvented the party dictate by withholding part of their harvest and selling it on the black market. Since the threat of arrest and severe sentences did not discourage this practice, the authorities were forced to issue an amnesty in the summer of 1946. The otkup turned out to be one of the largest flops in postwar history because the amount of produce delivered sank, the black market flourished, and the frustration of the authorities and the population at large grew.51

Pragmatism, Propaganda, and Socialist Values

These years of reconstruction and development were marked by exuberant enthusiasm and optimism. The rationalism of the Enlightenment, technological progress, and the ideology of socialism combined to generate the idea that humans could not only dominate nature but that entire societies could be thoroughly reformatted through rational criteria and aesthetic norms. State planning, scientific research, and expertise were to drive social transformation, as would the dissemination of modern values and norms. A major objective was to bring forth a new sort of person, one fitting the needs and requirements of industrial society. Health, education, prosperity, and social security were considered high aims worth working for and which required virtues such as a strong work ethic, discipline, punctuality, precision, and efficiency. These were core ideas of European industrial modernity stemming from intellectuals and social reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; they were not at all typical elements of communist ideology. In the early years, rhetoric consisted mainly of appeals to work more and harder.52

Although they harbored a strong belief in the power of the state to shape society, Yugoslavs remained fairly pragmatic. Contrary to the Soviet Union, the backward peasantry was not to be terrorized into entering this new age but rather persuaded of both short-term political and long-term transformative goals. Yet, communists had to take into account a variety of local cultures, value systems, and behavioral habits, and they were well aware that not all features of the Soviet example suited Yugoslavia’s conditions. Therefore, time-tested social practices were usually tolerated. At least at the top, the leadership relied on models and persuasion to advance their aims, but at the local level party functionaries still often resorted to coercion and the use of force. Education and socialist training were to help emancipate the people and to overcome all forms of idealism, mysticism, and religiosity. The new system thus rested on the supportive pillars of agitation and propaganda (agit-prop). The people’s consciousness was to be pulled from the moorings of their
traditional-patriarchal or conservative-bourgeois life worlds; their hearts and minds were to be won for the social revolution.53

Never before had the state invested so much in public education as it did after 1945. The highest priority was to combat illiteracy in the villages, to teach new health standards and practices, to enforce compulsory school attendance everywhere, and to set up public adult education centers, libraries, and cultural organizations. There are moving photographs of bright-eyed older men and women crowded onto the wooden benches of the village school in anticipation of learning to spell their first words. People were to be taught about health, hygiene, and women’s emancipation. Hundreds of new clubs for women, youth, sports, culture, leisure activities, and education suddenly sprouted up everywhere in the initial postwar years. They printed wall newspapers, flyers, calendars, and books and organized lectures, training courses, and events of every sort. Even theater and cinema were now to be accessible to the broad masses.

In addition to the sociocultural norms of the industrial age, the communists propagated specific socialist values: the Marxist ideology, humanism, open-mindedness, solidarity, equality between the sexes, and the “correct” way to live with regard to family life and morality. High priority was also given to other patriotic virtues such as loyalty to one’s homeland, love of liberty, fighting spirit, heroism, and naturally “brotherhood and unity.” The highest maxim of agitprop was to convey optimism and the joy of life as the country marched forward into a better and more just future.54

The regime showed less tolerance when it came to handling the religious communities. They were a thorn in the governments’ side for three reasons: first, all religion was considered the source of popular ignorance, nationalism, and chauvinism. Second, the clergy were suspected of being the uncompromising opponents of the communist order. Third, religiously based national identities hampered people from developing a feeling for a supranational Yugoslav state. For these reasons, the religious communities were given certain freedom to operate but remained under the close observation of the state.

Article 25 of the constitution guaranteed freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. Individual religious belief was tolerated but only as a private matter. The abuse of religion for political purposes and the incitement of ethnic hatred were unlawful. In their first few years in power, the communists took a hard line against the churches. Clergy were harassed, press censored, church property nationalized, congregational offerings to the church prohibited. Religious festivities such as Christmas, Easter, St. George, Passover, and Bayram remained holidays, but community activities were deliberately scheduled on these days, like school festivals, excursions, sports events, and volunteer work. While Jack Frost, St. Nicholas, and Santa Claus
were still allowed to thrive, the state was stricter about Islamic customs. It abolished the Sharia, closed religious foundations and schools, and banned the veiling of women, just as Turkey already had. Many communists were excluded from the party because they attended religious services at churches or mosques.\textsuperscript{55}

At first the religious communities were not willing to surrender their influence on schools, family policy, and moral values to the secular state without a fight. They raised a storm over civil marriage and religious instruction on a voluntary basis. The Vatican took a particularly aggressive stance by issuing a decree in 1949 that threatened excommunication to anyone who joined the Communist Party. When the pope took things a step further in 1952 and announced the appointment to cardinal of Archbishop Stepinac, who was a convicted war criminal and under house arrest, Belgrade broke off diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

The communists turned the old order on its head in ways other than secularization. Like the Soviet model, their dictatorship of development relied on technological progress, social justice, and rationality in everyday life. Subsequently, the combination of a faith in progress, planning euphoria, and forced modernization catapulted the Yugoslavs into a thoroughly new era. Epochal sociocultural innovations got underway, as was evident in people’s working lives, in relations between the sexes, in regional and social mobility, and with regard to attitudes and values. Yet, while existing culture could be influenced to a very significant degree, it seemed impossible to transform it completely. Anyway, the price for change was the forced relinquishment of all political pluralism: one-party rule halted bourgeois-liberal traditions and prevented all possible alternative systems for many decades.

Many people wanted to believe in the advantages of this new system. The birth of the people’s liberation movement that Tito fathered sustained itself through the heroism it demonstrated during the war and ultimately established itself throughout Yugoslavia without Soviet intervention. Therefore, the regime possessed an original legitimacy of its own, even if this was tarnished by the persecution of political enemies and tens of thousands of repudiated victims during the takeover of power. “Brotherhood and unity” built bridges in a country deeply torn by civil war, and without the energetic policy of industrialization that the communists enacted, many a region would have been left crawling at a snail’s pace toward European-level development. Still, the constitution was written in an attempt to reconcile diverging interests between distinct nations; individual civil rights did not count de facto. Direct democracy and socialist Yugoslavism soon proved to be a chimera.