

SUMMARY

JOLE STANIŠIĆ, *OPEN LETTER TO THE COMMUNISTS OF ALL COUNTRIES*

Jole Stanišić's *Open Letter to the Communists of All Countries* is a publication which, in its original language version and in the Polish translation, features an extensive and multifaceted introduction, and reveals a shocking testimony to the Titoist terror played out on the stage of the 'Barren Island' (Goli otok). The document was written in 1959 and has never been published before. The genesis of Barren Island is linked to Josip Broz-Tito's conflict with Stalin. Yugoslav communists wanted to combine blind Stalinist orthodoxy in systemic matters with autonomy in regional policy, whereby the idea of a southern Slavic community with its historical and cultural potential seemed to the Yugoslav communists to a powerful tool for integration

Nazi Germany invaded Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941. In occupied Yugoslavia, the only political party with national reach was the well-organised Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ). The war also had the dimension of a civil war, in which communist partisans, in addition to troops from the fascist states, fought against Draža Mihailović's Chetnik Detachments, the Ustasha led by Ante Pavelić and other homegrown fascists. The military potential and the scope of public support for the Titoist guerrillas and their programme expanded, and victories on the battlefield were accompanied by successful efforts to create the institutional foundations of the new federal state. The Provisional Government of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia was formed by Tito on 7 March 1945 and recognised by the three major powers on 2 April.

Tito's policy in the Balkan Peninsula, which he pursued without consulting Stalin, was to create a broad federation of Balkan states. The Yugoslav leaders adopted a tenacious stance, rejecting all compromises and linking the question of preserving their power with the independence and unity of Yugoslavia. The conflict with Stalin set the Yugoslav authorities on the path to copying Stalin's system of terror, centralisation and bureaucratisation, and the struggle against the Yugoslav Stalinists assumed such proportions that the security organs gained complete and uncontrolled power over all social and state structures. On Tito's personal orders, verbal tort was equated with terrorism. Both high government and party officials, partisans decorated in the fight against the Nazis, and ordinary citizens, students and schoolchildren were arrested, and often casual passers-by fell victim to simple denunciation. It is difficult to establish the number of all functioning camps, but Barren Island, as the largest and longest running camp, has become a symbol of the Titoist system of repression. According to official figures, between 1948 and 1963 the Tito regime's security organs arrested 55,663 people who allegedly supported Moscow and the Eastern Bloc against Yugoslavia in various ways; 16,731 people served their sentences, incurring administrative and judicial penalties. Official figures put the death toll at between 343 and 394.

Barren Island camp became operational on 9 July 1949; it was expanded and next to it there was a special labour camp R-101 and a women's camp R-5. Backbreaking work, hunger, thirst, beatings and torture, and the lack of any means of personal hygiene made the stay on the Island an extremely arduous punishment. Numerous diseases appeared en masse and typhus epidemics broke out twice, in 1950 and 1951. Stratifying the prisoners was an important element in how the camp functioned and in exercising control over the inmates, as this stratification ensured internal monitoring of the inmates, facilitated more extensive surveillance of the mutually controlling inmates, thus ensuring that guards were less burdened by supervision duties. At the very bottom of the social ladder on Barren Island were the boycotters, mainly newly arrivals subjected to inhumanely gruelling practices. Boycotting and running the gauntlet were two forms of cruel torture to which inmates were subjected. Gangs were treated somewhat more leniently than boycotters because, since being reprieved prisoners, they had, in the eyes of the investigators at least, already embarked on the path of revising their views. The privileged group was the collective, i.e. the prisoners who managed to convince the investigators that they had performed sincere self-criticism and had entirely „revised their views”, while the most privileged were the activists, who, as supervisors, participated

in re-educating other prisoners, in particular, showing great zeal in beating, humiliating and oppressing the mob.

The language of the *Open Letter to Communists* ranges between three extremes, thus expressing the internal tensions of the message. The most visible is the pole of poeticism, which manifests itself in strong metaphorization, imbuing pronouncements with an orientation towards the internal organisation of the verbal message. Another feature of Jole Stanišić's language is its reference to the poetics of communist appeals, manifestos, agitational and propaganda texts and, to a lesser extent, to the Southern Slav folklore tradition. Stanišić applies a communist philosophy of history built around the struggle between good and evil, and in this Manichean vision, evil was personified by Tito and his apparatus of violence. The imprisoned are idealised as 'faithful sons of proletarian internationalism, sincere friends of the Soviet Union'. Stanišić's text has a regular structure: two-thirds of it is a description of the terror and degeneration of Titoism, while the remaining third is a manifesto of faith in communism, this writer and poet's credo, and a register of the duties of a poet-revolutionary. Jole Stanišić's message goes beyond what is usually called an appeal and a letter. The message he conveys is a kind of poetic credo, combining the words of the *Letter* with the imperative of courage, truth and beauty, but also of changing reality. Jole Stanišić's manifesto/*povelja* restores dignity to the tortured victims of Barren Island and sees in this collective the true, credible and courageous spokesmen for the idea of communism, who have not succumbed to revisionist deviation. Stanišić's dramatic outcry over the fate of the victims of Titoism does not undermine his *Letter's* credibility, authenticity and sincerity. It makes the reader, admiring the power of the word and the depth of humanistic commitment, the one who is to answer the question that Jole Stanišić leaves unanswered, namely, how is it possible to understand the phenomenon of a person so painfully experienced by totalitarianism and yet faithful to that ideology?

Translated by Rob Pagett