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This article focuses on the pre-history of the Non-Aligned Movement and of the friendship between Pandit Nehru and Tito from Yugoslavia. It explores the various levels of contacts between Indians and Yugoslavs in the second half of the 1940s, among communists, diplomats, United Nations delegation members and participants of a Yugoslav trade delegation to South Asia. Special attention is given to the question why Yugoslavia was a rather uninteresting or even hostile country to India in the years immediately after the end of World War II, but grew to be an attractive partner in the aftermath of Tito’s break with Stalin, when the country tried to survive between the Anglo-American and Soviet blocs.

In their first ever joint statement, dated 22 December 1954 at New Delhi, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Josip Broz Tito, President of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, underlined the fact that both countries relied on powerful movements of national liberation:

‘3. The similarities of historic background and social and economic conditions of their respective countries and the fact that they have emerged as independent nations, through powerful movements of national liberation, have endowed their understanding of each other and of their countries with a deeper significance and given to their friendly relations a greater ease and facility.
4. Yugoslavia and India have devoted their energies, both in the domestic and international fields, for the promotion of peace and methods of negotiation and conciliation as a solvent of international conflicts and problems. (…)’
5. The President and the Prime Minister desire to proclaim that the policy of non-alignment adopted and pursued by their respective countries is not ‘neutrality’ or ‘neutralism’ and therefore passivity, as sometimes alleged, but is a positive, active and constructive policy seeking to lead to collective peace, on which alone collective security can rest. (…)’
The statement, reproduced here in its most important paragraphs, is a powerful declaration for an active and independent policy to promote peace in the world, three months before the start of the Bandung Conference in April 1955. It was the starting point of a ten year long cooperation and friendship between Nehru and Tito, and laid the foundations for the Non-Aligned Movement. However, relations between Nehru’s and Tito’s governments date back several years from their first direct meeting. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in December 1948, a long series of increasing contacts had taken place at various levels, which served to strengthen relations between the two countries. In the beginning, the two respective national liberation movements, praised in the joint statement, proved to be rather an impediment. The Yugoslav communists had denounced Nehru as a bourgeois accomplice of Anglo-American imperialism, whereas the Indian government distrusted the Yugoslavs because of their pro-Soviet agitation, also in India.

In the following, I endeavour to reconstruct the history of contacts between India and Yugoslavia during the second half of the 1940s, drawing on documents from Marshal Tito’s Cabinet (Kabinet Maršala Jugoslavije), preserved at the Museum of Yugoslav History (Muzej istorije Jugoslavije, referred to as MIJ) in Belgrade, and from the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. My main focus is to analyse how and why Indians and Yugoslavs became interested in a closer partnership. Taking the basic facts about the Indian freedom struggle as given, I first outline the rise of Marshal Tito as leader of the communist partisan guerilla in Yugoslavia. I then explore the relations between Indian and Yugoslav communists in the aftermath of World War II. The main part of this article discusses the consequences of the Tito-Stalin split in regard to India. Tito’s success in maintaining the independence of his country awoke the curiosity of Congress as much as it brought the initial CPI’s admiration to an end. On the other hand, the expulsion from Soviet protection forced Yugoslavia to look for allies in places where it had not expected them before.

This study is part of a research project at the University of Zurich (Switzerland), which explores the personal relationship of the three founders of Non-Alignment, Jawaharlal Nehru, Josip Broz Tito and Gamal Abdel Nasser, combining a historical-anthropological, ‘life world’ methodology with reflections from post-colonial studies and political history.1 ‘Life world’ is

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1 Swiss National Foundation Project No. 100012–117941/1 „Tito, Nehru, Nasser and the Non-Aligned Movement. Connected History of a Politicians’ Friendship 1948–1964“, University of Zurich <www.hist.uzh.ch/oeg >. The term ‘life world’, or ‘the world of life’, was first developed by philosophers such
a methodological concept putting the perspective of historical actors, in this case Pandit Nehru, Marshal Tito, and Colonel Nasser, into the focus of analytical attention. Literally speaking, the researcher attempts to look through the historical actor’s eyes, trying to learn how he or she might have seen his or her world, and by this method reconstructing the past. This includes a micro-historical view on the actor’s surroundings, beliefs and everyday life as much as attention to macro-historical developments in the political and socioeconomical field. Such an approach demands a high degree of self-reflection by the researcher, mirroring his or her own origins, environment, and socio-cultural imprint in the lives of the historical actors. To a certain extent, the project endeavours to translate into the past what Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, in her lecture at the University of Zurich on 16 February 2009, demanded from researchers: to learn from ‘the other’ instead of treating it as an object of research.

The Yugoslav background: Tito’s rise to power

Yugoslavia was founded in 1918, at the end of World War I. The National Council of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, which emerged from the ruins of the Habsburg Empire, decided to unite with the Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro, which had gained independence from the Ottoman Sultan a few decades earlier, in 1878. The declaration was signed in Geneva on 9 November 1918, and the Serbian King accordingly became King of the Serbs, Croats and Slowenens, later of Yugoslavia. The new state proved to be fragile. The peoples joined to form a new Yugoslav nation did not come to an understanding about the legitimation of the state and the division of power, with the Serbs tending to dominate the others by drawing on their already existing governmental infrastructure and the Croats feeling unsatisfied on principle as many wished for a state of their own (Goldstein 1999; Jelavich 1993, Pavlowitch 2002; Ramet 2006).

In World War II, the Germans overran Yugoslavia in April 1941, and the King and his government fled to Britain. Hitler divided the country into nine parts and imposed a repressive policy to subdue and exploit the territory for Nazi interests. A cruel war of everybody against everybody spread between German, Italian, Bulgarian, Hungarian occupators, monarchist

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as W. James and Edmund Husserl. German sociologist Jürgen Habermas introduced the division between the life world of individual actors and systems as the market, bureaucracy, or the legal system. Swiss-German historian Heiko Haumann insists on integrating systemic elements into the life worlds: Systems never act on their own, but through men. Haumann understands the life world as an interface, where individuals and systems multiply (Mišković 2008: 18–20). Pioneering studies using this approach have been conducted by researchers such as Carlo Ginzburg and Natalie Zemon Davis, who through microscopical reconstruction of individual’s lives such as the miller Menocchio’s, the impostor Martin Guerre’s or the geographer al Hasan al Wazzan’s vividly brought back into light the time these people had lived in.
and/or nationalist Serbian guerrillas, fascist Croatian militia and pro-Yugoslav communist partisans. More than a million or 6.4 per cent of the total pre-war population lost their lives (Gräovac 2007: 186). The Western allies initially supported the monarchist Serbian guerilla, the so-called chetniks (from četa: band). After the conquest of Italy in June 1943, they re-evaluated the party east of the Adriatic able to eliminate the most Germans: these were the partisans of Marshal Tito.

The British had already installed a military mission at Tito’s headquarters already some time ago.2 They were intrigued by his toughness and success. Despite their calculating rationality, they imagined him as a kind of Robin Hood, as Vladimir Velebit, a high-ranking partisan officer and later ambassador to Great Britain, remembers:

“Churchill was of a romantic nature, and Tito’s personality as a guerilla who had formed his own powerful army attracted him. At that time, he dedicated more attention to Tito and the Yugoslav partisans than to any other personality or European army fighting against fascism (except the Red Army). (…) Churchill imagined Tito as a kind of Robin Hood, fighting and leading his people in order to reconquer the throne for his King, who, empowered, had been chased out of his country. (…) Although he was a convinced anticommunist, he later recognised Tito and the partisans, because he was a realistic politician who foremost followed the interest of Great Britain and the aim to defeat fascism. (…)’ (Šuvar 2001: 460f.).3

By the second half of 1943, the partisan forces were by far the strongest army in the Western Balkans. At that point, Tito decided to institutionalise his People’s Liberation Movement as the only legitimate provisional government of Yugoslavia, skillfully communicating his intentions to the Soviets at the right moment and in a way they could not oppose. Tito was a most loyal follower of Stalin, but ambitious, self-reliant and also vain, always clean-shaven and carefully dressed even when living in the forests. He liked to copy Stalin’s forms and styled himself Marshal of the partisan army soon after the Soviet leader had received the title of Marshal of the Soviet Union (Pavlowitch 1992: 43). At the Tehran conference, Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt accepted Tito’s claim to power and granted him every possible aid and

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2 Commanders of the mission were Sir Fitzroy Maclean, a Scottish adventurer, soldier, diplomat and a role model for James Bond, and later on F.W.D. (later Sir William) Deakin, an Oxford scholar in the service of Winston Churchill, both of whom sent very favourable accounts to their superiors (Maclean 1980; Pavlowitch 1992: 41). Maclean remained attached to Yugoslavia during his whole life and entertained life-long personal friendships with Yugoslav officials. Šuvar 2001.

3 All translations from Serbo-Croatian by the author. The British seemingly combined their own legends and admiration for proud, romantic heroes with the so-called Kosovo cult, widely popular in the United Kingdom during World War I, which celebrates the suppressed Christian Serbian people liberating itself from Muslim Ottoman rule (Mišković 2008; Trgovčević 1999). The British fascination with Tito is well expressed in Sir Fitzroy Maclean’s writings (Maclean 1980). Maclean remained a close friend of Yugoslavia until his death in 1996 (Šuvar 2001). On orientalist views on the Balkans see Todorova 1997.
support. When he was almost captured by the Germans in May 1944, the Allied forces evacuated him to a British military base in the Adriatic and saved his partisan army back in the mountains of Bosnia. The British then put him under pressure to accept an agreement with Ivan Šubašić, a Croatian Peasant Party politician selected by the Allies to form the future Yugoslav post-war government. Tito formally declared he would not rise the question of the monarchy until after the war nor would he intend to force Communism upon Yugoslavia (Pavlowitch 1992: 44f.). Churchill, eager to secure this agreement and to meet the romantic guerilla fighter, came to Naples to talk to him in person. Tito was flattered, but he did not trust the British. His collaborators even feared for his life and did not want him to go in the first place. Churchill was disappointed at Tito’s (by English standards) crude appearance, but the agreement was confirmed. On 12 September, the exiled Yugoslav king in a famous BBC announcement appealed to all his subjects to support Tito. ⁴ But the latter was worried about the situation back on the mainland and secretly organised his evacuation to Moscow. Churchill was furious, but Tito’s plans worked: With Stalin, he discussed a military intervention in Serbia, cleverly arranging this operation as a formal Soviet request to enter Yugoslav territory, which resulted in a de facto recognition of the communist liberation movement. Was Tito informed that Stalin and Churchill had secretly agreed, during a meeting in Moscow in October 1944, to share their influence on Yugoslavia fifty-fifty? ⁵ Their talks were still in progress, when Tito’s troops, with Soviet help, conquered Serbia from the retreating Germans. Belgrade was liberated on 20 October, after a fierce battle which lasted several days. Pressed by the Allies, Tito and Šubašić agreed on a common provisional government on November 1. The war in Yugoslavia lasted seven more months, until the German capitulation of 15 May 1945.

Tito was celebrated in Europe as the only leader of an antifascist resistance movement who had won the war from his own strength. His ascendance to the leadership of Yugoslavia was undisputed: The western Allies asked for a nominal regency of the pre-war king and the inclusion of a few of his ministers. Tito disposed of this hindrance without much hesitation: Soon after the international recognition of the new state in March 1945, the communists organised an election campaign fashioned as a plebiscite for Tito and his movement. All candidates for the Constituent Assembly had to subscribe to the so-called Popular Front

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⁴ Vladimir Velebit and Churchill, both present at the meeting, both wrote about it in their memoirs. Šuvar 2001: 460; Pavlowitch 1992: 46. Tito refused to meet the king and never publicly revoked his intention to install Communism in Yugoslavia.

⁵ The meeting between Stalin and Churchill took place from 9 to 11 October, the common talks with American envoyee Averell Harriman ended on 18 October. Immediately after the end of the war, it looked as if the British had lost ‘their’ share entirely. But after 1948, Stalin did not attack Yugoslavia although the West did expect it. Moderna srpska država 2004: 266ff; Heuser 1989: 18.
(Narodni Front). Opposition parties declining to join faced obstruction. When they called for boycott, the communists had about 200,000 names deleted from the election registers. The Popular Front accordingly won more than ninety per cent of the seats of the Constituent Assembly (Steindorff 2007: 193). Its first act was to abolish monarchy and to proclaim the ‘Federal People’s Republic Yugoslavia’ (FNRJ). The new Constitution of 20 January 1946 closely followed the Soviet constitution of 1936. Tito took Yugoslavia under his firm control, assisted by his three close collaborators and deputies, Milovan Djilas, Edvard Kardelj, and Aleksandar Ranković. Yugoslavia was therefore the first European country to establish a socialist system according to the Soviet pattern. Its independent position granted the country high regard among the victorious Allied powers. As with the Congress in India, the powerful partisan liberation movement provided the new state with legitimation and identity.

**Early Contacts between Indian and Yugoslav Communists**

Yugoslavia was now ruled by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), which was part of the international communist network led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). National communist parties entertained contact persons or agents in as many of their brother parties as possible, and there was a lot of travelling and exchanging of delegations to explore and develop fields of cooperation and socialist brotherhood. In the case of communist-ruled countries like Yugoslavia, these bonds were cultivated parallel to official diplomatic ties. Tito, who in one person united the duties of president of the state, chairman of the CPY and head of defence, was in a position to control the CPY’s actions. Though they were organisationally different institutions, the division between party politics and official policy were not always maintained. In some cases this was intended, but sometimes the ideological enthusiasm of officials had to be checked by their superiors.\(^6\) Matters were different in India. The Communist Party of India (CPI) had left Congress in 1945 and acted more or less in conspiracy. Ridden by inner factionalism, it abandoned its Congress-friendly policy at the Second Congress in Calcutta in February 1948, immediately after Gandhi’s assassination. When Mao won the civil war in China in September 1949, the CPI leadership ‘declared war on the Indian state’, hoping for a red revolution, with the known desastrous results (Chandra/Mukherjee/Mukherjee 1999: 203–209; Guha 2007: 97).

\(^6\) This is demonstrated in a case from Yugoslav-Egyptian relations: Yugoslav envoyee to Cairo, Mr. Šahinpašić, acted as an advisor to the Egyptian communist party in his own authority, and went as far as to ask his superior Vladimir Velebit for governmental support. Velebit called him to order (Petrović 2006: 28, fn. 33).
The history of these international party contacts in the second half of the twentieth century waits to be written, but I would still like to deliver some evidence on Indo-Yugoslav party contacts that I found in Tito’s estate. The report of a CPY delegate sent to India in the aftermath of the Tito-Stalin break, documents that a number of Indian communist youths had been sent to Yugoslavia in the years immediately after the end of World War II. They participated in a Youth Working Action to build a railway line in Bosnia, in 1946 and 1947. A fateful incident took place in February 1948, when two Yugoslav propagandists helped to bring about the radical turn of the CPI at the secret Second Congress of the CPI in Calcutta. Vladimir Dedijer and Radovan Zogović were the only European guests at this meeting, acting in all probability on behalf of the Cominform (Information Bureau of Communist Parties), founded the previous year to unite all communist parties under Stalin’s control. Vladimir Dedijer, a leading CPY propagandist and Tito’s official biographer, delivered a speech on the Yugoslav partisans’ liberation struggle which was greeted with enthusiasm. He and his colleague openly supported the Stalinist hardliner B.T. Ranadive in his successful attempt to take the lead from secretary general C. P. Joshi and to prepare for revolution in India. Dedijer and Zogović had arrived from the Southeast Asian Conference of the World Federation of Democratic Youth in Burma, where they had incited the radical factions to insurgence. Burma, Malaya and Indonesia all experienced communist uprisings in 1948. CPY and CPI therefore entertained well-established contacts, when on 10 January 1948, Tito’s government sent a telegram to Delhi, via the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow, to congratulate Prime Minister Nehru on India’s independence. It is a copy of the first India-related document preserved in Tito’s archive, handed over to Nehru’s sister Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, then Ambassador of India in Moscow.

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7 Report on the talks with the Indian comrades following the Comintern resolution (1948) (MIJ: KMJ I–3-b/289).
8 Guha 2007: 96f; Heuser 1989: 25; Pirjevec 2008: 15f; Singh 1998: 143. Contrary to Iqbal Singh’s doubt, Pandit Nehru’s assessment to hold Moscow responsible for the CPI’s revolutionary turn was correct, as Dedijer and Zogović acted in accordance with the Cominform. See Nehru’s letter to V.K. Krishna Menon (Nehru 1987: 462). Dedijer later fell in disgrace along with Milovan Djilas.
9 MIJ: Kabinet Maršala Jugoslavije I–3–b/288. Telegram from the Ministry of External Affairs to the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow, 10 January 1948 ( ).
Tito’s break with Stalin

Yugoslavia’s position in the world sustained a sharp twist when in 1948, the country entered into conflict with Stalin. After 1945, Tito’s Yugoslavia had been the only country of Eastern and Southeastern Europe conducting an active, expansionist foreign policy. The CPY supported the Greek communists efforts to gain power, worked on an alliance with Bulgaria and Albania, and aspired to secure territory on the Northwestern border (Trieste, Carinthia), jointly inhabited by Slavic, Italian, and German speaking dwellers. Tito saw himself second only to Stalin and believed that it was his duty to be both sword and shield to the movement (Pavlowitch 1992: 54). But the Soviet leader did not approve of Tito’s external activities as they were out of his control and likely to cause trouble. In the spring of 1948, he first summoned Yugoslavs and Bulgarians to Moscow to scold them, then withdrew all Soviet advisors from Yugoslavia, and finally sent a list of accusations to Tito and his deputy Kardelj, culminating in the allegation of deviation (Dedijer 1984: 220–228; Rajak 2005: 156). Tito was deeply shocked, but he reacted in a cool way. He drafted a reply and called a meeting of the Central Committee, which decided to reject all charges even if it meant open conflict with the leader of world communism. Two members supported Stalin and were put to prison.10 Thus united, the CPY consequently refused to attend the Second Cominform conference in Bukarest on 28 June 1948, summoned by Stalin to discuss the Yugoslav case. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia was excluded from the Communist movement in absence, by resolution. This came as a total surprise to the West, where many observers believed it to be one of Stalin’s tricks. Britain and the United States had just increased the pressure on Tito and allowed the Italian government to take over the administration of Trieste, an open breach of the Paris treaty concluded the previous year (Pavlowitch 1992: 57; Rajak 2005: 156).

After the break with Stalin, Yugoslavia was in a desperate position. Tito and his colleagues were hurt to the core by the Soviet accusations. Apart from the threat of a military invasion and the purge of suspected Stalinists, the still war-damaged country faced serious financial problems: The Cominform damnation implicated a total economic blockade. According to Dedijer, Yugoslavia lost 429 million US$ within the first two years after the Cominform declaration, and registered 7.877 military incidents at the borders to Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania (Dedijer 1984: 461f.; Rajak 2005: 157f., Ramet 2006: 181).

10 Sreten Žujović and Andrija Hebrang were jailed in order to prevent their going to Bukarest. Hebrang, a leading Croat communist, was allegedly working for the Soviet secret service. According to Kardelj, Stalin wanted him to succeed Tito as leader of the CPY. He was killed in prison, Žujović was released in 1950. Dedijer 1953; Kardelj 1982: 116f.; Pavlowitch 1992: 55; Ramet 2006: 183. See also Cenčić 2001.
Seeking Support in South Asia

In its first distress, the CPY did all they could to convince their brother communist parties that the Soviet accusations were unfounded. The Yugoslav leadership published the correspondence between Tito and Stalin and sent delegations to fellow communist parties all over the world to explain their position. Reactions were fierce, the main argument being the question why the Yugoslavs had not attended the meeting in Bukarest. Tito’s deputy Kardelj remembers:

,'At first we hoped that at least some other communist parties would support us. One after the other, however, they surrendered to Stalin’s dictate. We had counted, for example, on Albania, but she was amongst the first to turn against us. We were counting on Hungary, with whom we had very good relations, but Rakosi wrote to us, „Not every cockerel can be king of his own dung heap“. Before long, the communist parties of Italy and France, and then of the whole world, united against us.’ (Kardelj 1982: 118f).

Moderate sympathy was the best they could get, a delegate to South Asia reported to Kardelj:

,'I have no experience with the communists in European countries in the discussions on the Cominform case. From what I have heard I conclude that the comrades in India (to whom I have spoken) behave differently. They have been very attentive and willing to talk. In the discussions, I have never felt a wish to insult or to slander. However, they were stubbornly insisting on our guilt.’ (MIJ: KMJ I–3-b/289. Report /?/ on the talks with the Indian comrades following the Comintern resolution, 1948, sheet 4f).

The Yugoslav delegate, whose name is not identified, does not state the exact date of his journey or the number of delegates he travelled with, nor does he give a list of the people he met. His visit may safely be dated in autumn 1948. He had received contact addresses of comrades in Bombay, Pondicherry and Bangalore, and stayed in Karachi and Delhi for two and a half months. When he arrived in Bombay, his contact persons had been in jail since May 1948. He went to the party headquarters and was received by V. Kaul, editor of ,Peoples Age’. Kaul was friendly, but insisted on the Yugoslavs’ guilt. The delegate gave him a copy of Kardelj’s speech at the UN General Assembly in Paris, and one of Tito’s at the Fifth CPY Congress, both in English. They did not meet again, as the delegate fell sick, but the arrival of the Yugoslavs was announced in the party press. Hereupon the delegate received an invitation from Tara Yajnik, a former member of an Indian youth delegation to Yugoslavia, who had

11 In English, see among others N.Y. Royal Institute of International Affairs 1949 and Dedijer 1953, and in German Tito 1949.
read about it in the newspapers (MIJ: KMJ I-3-b/298, p. 2). She treasured her stay in Yugoslavia, where she had contributed in a Youth Working Action (Omladinska Radna Akcija) to build new railway connections through Bosnia, probably from Sarajevo to Šamac, a project in which over 200.000 communist youth took part.\(^{12}\) The delegate went to her house accompanied by an English speaking member of his delegation. The CPI, not judging Tara’s communist education as ’ripe’ enough, sent a journalist from ’Peoples Age’ as a backing. The latter expressed his admiration of Vladimir Dedijer’s speech at the Asian Communist Congress in Calcutta in February 1948, but insisted on the Yugoslavs’ guilt:

‘This comrade was fond of talking and mentioned that he had been an active member for ten years. One could see that he had been closely following the discussion around the resolution. His main argument was, as usual, that we had not participated. Despite of my answer, he continued to insist that we should have gone there to explain our position. In the discussion, he reflected on Togliatti’s insistence on the impossibility to develop marxism outside the USSR, observing how this would affect society’s development from socialism to communism, as only in the USSR socialism really existed. As far as this insistence related to the development of marxism, he did not at all agree with Togliatti. Despite of his fierceness and stubbornness in the discussion, he displayed a wish, which I have also perceived with the other comrades, to differentiate as to the notorious facts, and to divide slander from truth. He fiercely interrupted the present comrade [Tara] when she mentioned our receiving our gold from the US as an argument against us, saying that there was nothing wrong on our side.\(^{13}\) At the end of our talk, the comrade [the journalist] said how much people in India respect our struggle. He very much talked about and praised Dedijer and Zogović. He talked about Dedijer’s lectures and how much they were sorry that he could not give a lecture in Bombay because of some injury.’ (MIJ: KMJ I-3-b/298, sheet 2f.).

The text shows how closely the Yugoslav communists followed the discussion about their expulsion, how eagerly they tried to explain their position, and how anxiously they tried to detect any sign of understanding and sympathy on the part of fellow communist parties. The document clearly marks the defensive in which the Yugoslavs found themselves. The only point which strenghthened their case in the eyes of their comrades seemed to be a moral one: their heroic liberation fight during World War II.

\(^{12}\) There were two huge Yugoslav youth working actions shortly after the war to build railway connections through devastated Bosnia, the first one from May to November 1946, with a participation of 62,268 adolescents, to build the section from Brčko to Banovići, the second one from April to November 1947 from Sarajevo to Šamac, where 217.234 youths took part. sr.wikipedia.org/sr-el/Omladinske_radne_akcije, accessed on 11 March 2009. See also Mihailović and Spasojević 1979.

\(^{13}\) ‘Our gold’ means the gold reserves of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia which the Allied powers had frozen after the German occupation of the country in 1941.
Disillusionment and Approach to the West

Vladimir Velebit, outlining Tito’s foreign policy after the War, states that the Yugoslav leadership went through a disillusionment after the unavailing vindication following the Comintern resolution:

‘In the beginning, up to 1948, he [Tito] was inclined towards the Soviet Union. According to the Soviet pattern, Yugoslavia obediently signed treaties of friendship with other East European countries. Within the United Nations, she always voted in accordance with the Soviet side. The only exception was the border conflict with Italy and Trieste, where she displayed some initiative and therefore some independence.’

(Šuvar 2001: 454f.).

The danger of the situation constrained the Yugoslav leadership to look for allies outside the communist world. The diplomatic staff was enforced, crude partisan manners polished, uniforms and working class shirts exchanged for more sophisticated clothing. Some of the best heads of the communist leadership took care of international relations. Edvard Kardelj took charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in August 1948 (until January 1953), and Aleš Bebler became his deputy. Leading Yugoslav diplomats were very aware of the impact their resistance to Stalin had on the other side in these acute initial years of the Cold War. Velebit believes that Churchill, fascinated again by Tito’s break with the Soviet bloc, overcame his prior disappointment and convinced his allies to integrate Yugoslavia into the planned North-Atlantic Pact (Šuvar 2001: 460f.). Kardelj wrote:

‘We were also hard at work in the West. There the climate of opinion had begun to change. As I have already said, the majority of Western countries thought that our days were numbered, and that either Stalin would destroy us or we would capitulate. But when this did not happen in the first couple of years, their attitude began to change and they showed an ever increasing readiness for contact with us. Without a doubt, the West was very interested in the way Yugoslavia was maintaining her independence, and was even counting on the possibility that she might join the NATO Pact in time.’

(Kardelj 1982: 128).

14 Negotiations with western powers to form a new Balkan pact with NATO members Greece and Turkey took place in the beginning of the 1950s. After Stalin’s death in March 1953, Yugoslavia looked for ways to withdraw and made clear she would not join NATO.
The fact is, Yugoslavia faced severe political and economical problems and had to do something about it. Western diplomats believed Tito capable of successfully resisting Soviet pressure, but they did not realise to what extent Yugoslavia suffered from the economic blockade until 1949 (Heuser 1989: 68ff., 84). The US decided to help Yugoslavia in order to make it an example and show the communist world how well and prosperously one could live outside Soviet control. The British just wanted to 'keep Tito afloat' as much as to demonstrate that it was possible for a communist regime to exist outside the Cominform, but they 'never quite ceased to hope for some gains for the British economy from economic relations with Yugoslavia' (Heuser 1989: 81f.). Three weeks after the Cominform resolution, the United States unfreezed the gold of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and along with Britain sold crude oil to the country. The United Nations General Assembly in Paris held from 21 September to 12 December 1948, supplied ample opportunities for diplomatic encounters. While the Cominform delegations ignored the Yugoslavs completely, Foreign Minister Kardelj publicly defended the Moscow line as if nothing had happened, 'lest we gave them an excuse for military intervention' (Kardelj 1982: 120). Among other things, Kardelj criticised Indian Prime Minister Nehru 'as a hypocrite, a front man for the hidden interests of Indian reactionaries, British colonialists, and foreign companies’ and denounced his Kashmir policy (Pirjevec 2008: 16). At the same time, the Yugoslavs used all opportunities to talk to the powerful of the west in private to explain their situation. Aleš Bebler asked the British for any kind of economic aid, adding that 'publicity given to aid measures would be embarrassing' (Heuser 1989: 83). Until the end of 1949, Yugoslavia received considerable credit and export goods both from Britain and the United States in order to substitute the denied money from Moscow. All these transactions were conducted in a discrete way, both to allow for Yugoslav wishes and to check parliamentary opposition in the United States and Britain. The US-British wedge strategy was in accordance with the planned Marshall Aid and the North-Atlantic Pact. Time was ripe for Tito to close the border to Greece, be it because the Greek communists supported Stalin’s side, as the Yugoslavs claimed, and/or under western pressure. Considering the massive concentration of Soviet troops at the borders to Cominform states, the allied occupation of Trieste now proved to be rather an advantage (Lees 1997: 67, 77f).
Nehru Invites Yugoslav Deputy Foreign Minister Aleš Bebler for a Talk

During the UN General Assembly in autumn 1948, Aleš Bebler received a letter from the Indian Ambassador to Moscow and leader of the Indian delegation, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, saying that Prime Minister Nehru wished to see him at his hotel apartment on the first of November, the day before his departure to India via Cairo (Gandhi 1992: 560). Nehru, during his stay in Paris, was doing the same as the Yugoslavs or other delegations at the General Assembly: He used the opportunity to meet as many fellow heads of delegations as possible (Singh 1998: 147). Bebler came accordingly to the Hotel George V, where he was received by Nehru, his sister and the Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry. Later on, Krishna Menon joined the party. The same evening, Bebler wrote a detailed report to 'Comrade Marshal’, recapitulating the whole visit. He was well aware of the attacks his superior had launched on Nehru in his speech at the Assembly and behaved very cautiously. The first and main topic was the establishing of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Krishna Menon wanted the agreement to be completed by a communique published the same day in Delhi and Belgrade. He reacted rather skeptically when Bebler avoided giving a direct answer regarding his visit to Yugoslavia. Bebler was embarrassed, because by fault he had not yet received authorisation from his Ministry to extend the invitation. The Indian side again was at a loss when the discussion turned to the question of rank of the diplomats to be exchanged, because there was a shortage of qualified staff. The Secretary General, with Nehru’s consent, proposed to name two ministers who would later be elevated to the rank of ambassador. Bebler rejected with the argument that almost all allied countries exchanged ambassadors, whereas former axis countries entertained legations only. The Indians joked one should introduce a ranking of ambassadors, as the rank of minister would soon die out. Nehru then wished to be informed about the Yugoslav trade delegation visiting Asia at that time and extended an invitation to come to India. His next question concerned the situation in Yugoslavia:

,'After that, Nehru asked what was happening in Yugoslavia, adding that he had requested my coming just for the reason to hear first-hand what is going on in our country and how things work there. I said that liberation from the occupator signified

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16 This was given as a reason to Mirko Sardelić, Foreign Ministry member of the commercial delegation to India during his reception by Nehru (MIJ: KMJ I–3–c/14. Reports of M. Mermolj and Mirko Sardelić on the work of the FNRJ Commercial delegation in Pakistan, in the Indian Union and Ceylon, 3 and 14 March 1949, sheet 36).

17 The Yugoslav Commercial delegation came to India the following December and was received by Nehru. India signed its first ever bilateral trade agreement with this delegation (MIJ: KMJ I–3–c/14).
revolution at the same time, and that this revolution explains for our nations’ take off in the economic and cultural elevation of the country. I gave some examples on the working enthusiasm and the masses’ craving for knowledge. I said that the basic strategical line of our government encompasses the progressive development of our country’s social structure towards socialism, isolating and economically liquidating the exploiting stratum, beginning with foreign capital in 1945 and arriving to the nationalisation of retail trade in the beginning of 1948. As this development is in accordance with the course of history, it is also in accordance with the appreciation of the masses, and therefore, our regime enjoys these masses’ firm support.’ (MIJ: KMJ I–3–b/288, p. 2).

Bebler gave Nehru the official dogmatic explanation about the situation in Yugoslavia, avoiding to touch on the conflict with the Comintern. He was keen to distract the discussion to other fields, namely the situation in India:

‘To pass to India, I mentioned that I had read his book „The Discovery of India“, and that from this lecture I had gained the impression that he and his group are patriot intellectuals with much sympathy for the broad working strata, and that for this reason one could expect a similar strategy. I then asked directly how he judged things in India. He said that in his country after liberation, the main problem from the British was unification, that this was aggravated by the separation of Pakistan, but that they still succeeded in liquidating all autocratic entities, and that today India proper is politically united. Concerning foreign capital, it had basically passed into the hands of Indian capitalists. Here I interrupted him, asking whether American capital would not actually take over from the British. He said some American companies had indeed turned up, but to such a small extent that it posed absolutely no problem.’ (MIJ: KMJ I–3–b/288, p. 2).

Nehru now wanted to know about the Yugoslav land reform, stating that the Indian state had to comply with such huge transfer sums to landowners that it was not able to pay. He smiled when he heard that the Yugoslavs paid ‘practically nothing’ to landowners. He then renewed the question about Yugoslavia’s foreign policy and relations with the USSR:

‘I asked him whether he had read the letters between the two party leaderships and he affirmed this. I then enquired which part of the problem was unclear to him. The following question was formulated in such an unclear way that I was forced to answer in a rather general way, namely that the cause of the conflict lay in two different conceptions about the relations between socialist countries, the Soviet conception being only understandable considering the USSR’s fear of an Anglo-American aggressive war. At this he was utmost astonished, saying that he does not believe in a war, because he is convinced that no people can wish for war. I mentioned the American financial capital which had drawn great profits from the last war. On this, he cited Foster Dulles, who had allegedly told him that America would be happy if a war

18 „The Discovery of India“ was translated into Serbo-Croatian by Slobodan Petković and published in Belgrade in 1952 by „Rad“ Publishing, which printed eight thousand copies of the book.
could be prevented. I replied that I do not believe this is the financial oligarchy’s opinion, which would probably push the world into war if the prospects for victory were fair. However, the democratic powers’ successes undo the plans of those who wish for war.’ (MIJ: KMJ I–3–b/288, p. 3).

Nehru’s pacifism and willingness to take people on their word obviously clashed with Bebler’s odd mix of pragmatism and dogmatism resulting from the double strategy the Yugoslav diplomats were pursuing at that period. The talk then proceeded to China and Bebler expressed his view that Mao’s victory might have a strengthening effect on India in regard to western powers. Nehru replied there was no western pressure on India, as the west had more pressing problems in Europe, but he did not believe that Mao and his troup would win. He characterized Southeast Asian communists as young, inexperienced people who had read the writings of the European Marxists, but had no eyes for the very different situation in their own countries. He believed a cooperation of nationalist and communist parties as impossible in Indonesia as in India. But he did not understand why the European communists rejected Marshall Aid, which was obviously useful for the European people. Bebler retorted that Marshall Aid was more in favour of America than of Europe, as one could see in the streets of Paris, full of American cars. Nehru observed that Bebler contradicted himself, having declared before that the Americans were heading for war, investing in Western European industry. Krishna Menon intervened, seconding Bebler in his belief that western Germany had already started producing weapons. Bebler insisted that the enormous sums the US distributed in Europe had just one aim: to bring it under American control.

The hour allotted to this talk was then over. Everybody took leave, and Nehru graciously accompanied his guest to the lift. Bebler ends his report with remarks on the behaviour of his hosts:

,In the course of the discussion, at the point where British and American capital was mentioned, the people present became nervous, and Mrs. Pandit said a short sentence in their language. When the technical secretary entered, she rose up and physically pushed him out of the door. When the talk turned to Mao Tse-Tung, she winked twice at Nehru thinking I did not see it, which only could be meant to caution him what he would say. Again, at the point where I spoke of American aggression, she got rather agitated and silently left the room. She therefore did not take part in the last section of the discussion nor did she return to take leave. The nervousness can be explained by the fact that Nehru’s apartment is located at the Hotel George V, the same place as the British delegation, and the Indians might have been afraid from interception.’ (MIJ: KMJ I–3–b/288, p. 5).
Are Bebler’s assertions about Indian nervousness regarding British-American capital and interception correct? He certainly spoke from his own Yugoslav experience when insisting on American aggressiveness. His attitude however might be judged alarmist: At that time, the western powers had already shown signs that they were willing to assist Yugoslavia, whereas the CPY leadership was still trying to appease Stalin by publicly defending the Moscow line. Nehru on the other hand was of course aware of the constant accusations from the Soviet bloc to be ‘some kind of a stooge of the Anglo-American bloc’ (Nehru 1987: 461). He was also informed about the Soviet interference at the CPI’s Calcutta conference, to which he attributed the Indian communists’ present ‘rebellious attitude’. But he believed the foreign delegates to be from Russia (Nehru 1987: 462). When talking to Bebler, he did not dwell on Yugoslav criticism as expressed in Kardelj’s speech and in some of Bebler’s hints. On the contrary, he must have found his guest personally agreeable and interesting; otherwise he would not have exerted himself to show him to the lift. It is interesting to read that at that moment, he did not expect Mao’s victory. Perhaps it is due to the fact that his personal sympathies were with the Chinese nationalists.

**Growing Convergence and Interest**

Nehru's talk with Bebler was fruitful. Four weeks later, on 5 December 1948, India and Yugoslavia officially declared their intention to establish diplomatic relations. At the end of the same month, Nehru received the Yugoslav Trade delegation headed by M. Mermolj and Mirko Sardelić. The agreement signed at the end of their stay was the first ever that India concluded with a foreign country. The Yugoslav side brought about the conclusion of a similar agreement with Pakistan, which in the first instance had not shown any interest, and a very friendly reception in Ceylon. Three members of the delegation were staying at the house of Governor-General C. Rajagopalachari, whose intervention was crucial in bringing the talks to a successful close. Mermolj on the other side had promised to sell a certain amount of corn to India despite contrary instructions from Belgrade and had to justify himself after his return: Yugoslavia was heading towards a food crisis due to the forced collectivization of agriculture, which reached its peak in 1950. Sardelić in his report to Foreign Minister Kardelj pointed out that the agreement with India was a great success, as there were several other delegations offering more attractive goods than what the Yugoslavs were able to sell.19

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In 1949, nothing was yet done to exchange ambassadors between India and Yugoslavia. India, however, followed the developments in Yugoslavia closely. In September 1949, the Yugoslav ambassador to Turkey wrote a report about his astonishing talks with Indian diplomats:

'The Ambassador of India David Shaman Lall shows a very great interest for our country and very much attention for Marshal Tito in all the meetings I had with him. (...) Yesterday the Secretary of the Indian Embassy (...) told me that not only his Ambassador, but also his country were interested in Yugoslavia and that they would like to have as much information as possible about the building up of our economy, about our five-year plan, about how its implementation is organised, about our youth and its organisation, and that they all would follow Yugoslavia’s development with much attention. He (...) wished to inform me that in the conflict Yugoslavia is going through at present, India’s sympathies are on our side and that they believe Yugoslavia is on the right track. He said that although other communist countries wish to disqualify Yugoslavia’s opinion as a kind of schism, they consider Yugoslavia’s position correct also from the ideologic point of view.’ (MIJ: KMJ I–3–b/290. Report of Ambassador Ljubomir Radovanović to the Foreign Minister, Ankara, 2 September 1949).

The election of both India and Yugoslavia into the Security Council of the United Nations in October 1949 provided ample opportunities for collaboration and to develop closer personal bonds between delegates. Aleš Bebler, again head of the Yugoslav delegation, made friends both with Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and with B.N. Rau (Pirjevec 2008: 17). Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit mentions Bebler repeatedly in her papers, for example in her report on her visit to Yugoslavia in summer 1954.20 Ambassadors were exchanged in April 1950. Yugoslavia sent her envoyee Josip Djerđja to Delhi directly. He was followed in 1952 by Tito’s later secretary general, Joža Vilfan, who established close bonds with Nehru, and a network of contacts with Delhi society (Pirjevec 2008: 18). Djerđja’s Indian counterpart Binay Ranjan Sen arrived in Belgrade on 25 April 1950 to offer his accreditation letter to Marshal Tito. He expressed his wish for a close and cordial relationship and wanted to take part in the 1 May celebrations.21 He was at the same time ambassador to Italy and stayed in Rome until his departure to his new post in Cairo. The Embassy of India in Belgrade was opened several years later, in autumn 1954, prior to Tito’s departure to India.

Conclusion

After World War II, the new communist regime of Yugoslavia was a devoted follower of Stalin. But contrary to the other European members of the Soviet bloc, it had gained power from its own strength. As the Congress in India, the partisan liberation movement provided the new state with legitimation and identity. Self-assured and ambitious, Tito and his group pursued an active and expansionist foreign policy and supported, among others, fellow communists in neighbouring countries such as Greece and Albania. In accordance with Moscow, they sent agents to far-away countries such as India and Burma to help rise communist revolutions there. Perhaps luckily for the later relationship, the foreign agitators at the CPI Congress in Calcutta 1948 were not identified as Yugoslavs by Nehru, who seems to have taken them for Russians.

Nehru’s curiosity in Yugoslavia was roused by Tito’s conflict with Stalin in summer 1948 and perhaps fostered by the difficulties his sister was facing as India’s ambassador to Moscow. At his first personal meeting with a Yugoslav official during the UN General Assembly in autumn 1948, he found his dialogue partner to be an intellectual who had read his ‘Discovery of India’, and whose open pragmatic comments repeatedly penetrated his basic dogmatic statements. Subsequently, Nehru invited and received personally the Yugoslav trade delegation to South Asia. With patience and negotiating skills familiar with the ways of the former Ottoman Empire a part of Yugoslavia had once belonged to, the delegation succeeded in concluding the first bilateral trade agreement with India, despite the competition from richer European countries.

India’s and Yugoslavia’s concurrent mandate at the UN Security Council from the end of 1949 onwards afforded excellent opportunities to learn to know each other as partners in the endeavour to remain unaligned and independent between the blocs. This experience was crucial for Yugoslavia to send some of her best diplomats to India, Josip Djerđja and later Joža Vilfan. It also laid the basis for personal friendships, such as Aleš Bebler’s to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and B. N. Rau.
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