The Communists and the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia, 1941-1946

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Brasenose College

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the University of Oxford

(Trinity term, 2000)

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Abstract One

This thesis examines the development of the Yugoslav Communists' approach towards the Catholic Church during the period of their takeover and consolidation of power from the outbreak of war in April 1941 until late 1946. In recent years, a comprehensive reappraisal of the Communist takeover has been going on in the countries of former Yugoslavia, and this work draws on this new scholarship, as well as on hitherto unused archival material. It examines the development of the Communists' popular front line during the war, according to which the Communist-dominated Partisan movement sought to appeal to non-communists, including Catholics, to join them in ousting the occupier. As such, this policy meant downplaying the Communists' revolutionary programme, which they never actually gave up.

The thesis examines in detail the application of the popular front policy among the Catholic Croats of Croatia and Bosnia, and among the Slovenes. It describes how the Communists avoided actions or pronouncements that would have offended the Church, attempted to have cordial relations with the Church hierarchy and encouraged the active participation of Catholic clergy and prominent lay people in the movement. The prime purpose of this was to reassure the Catholic population that they had nothing to fear from a Communist takeover.

However, the hostility between the two sides was not overcome, as revealed in the violence of the Communists towards many of the clergy during the period immediately before and after their takeover. Following this, the Communists' implementation of their revolutionary programme brought them into direct conflict with the interests of the Church, especially in their curtailing of the role of the Church in education and in their confiscation of Church property. Relations quickly degenerated into open confrontation, as the Church could not accept the limited role in society which the Communists were prepared to grant it.

Abstract Two

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the development of the Communist Party's approach towards the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia during the period of its takeover of power, from the outbreak of war in April 1941, through the period of the consolidation of its power in the immediate post-war period, until late 1946, when Archbishop Stepinac of Zagreb was tried and imprisoned. For most of the war, Communist policy towards the churches was based on the popular front line laid down by the Comintern, according to which Communists were to build an alliance of all patriots opposed to fascism, whatever their political, religious or national affiliation. While it was never intended that Communists would give up their ultimate revolutionary goals, this line nevertheless meant that those goals would be downplayed in order to emphasize the common struggle against the occupier. The Yugoslav Communists did, with varying degrees of success, seek to attract non-communists to their banner of national liberation, and this included attempts to appeal to Catholics. Following the end of the war, the new Communist regime quickly moved to implement its revolutionary programme. This brought it into conflict with the Catholic Church in several areas, leading to opposition from Church leaders.

In focusing on this apparent change in policy on the part of the Yugoslav Communists, this thesis examines the real motivation behind the coalition-building strategy developed during the war, and points to a consistency of purpose in the Communists' approach between the wartime and post-war periods. In recent years, a comprehensive reappraisal of the period of the Communist takeover has been going on in the countries of former Yugoslavia, with several new works focusing on Communist policy towards, among other things, the legal system, education and culture and economic reform, all of which issues are of relevance to the question of the Communists' relations with the churches. In addition, several new archival sources have recently been made available to the researcher.

Much work has been done on the Catholic Church among the Croat populations of Croatia and Bosnia during this period, but the large majority of it has focused on the relationship between the Church and the occupation authorities and the collaborationist regime during the war, and on the Communist persecution of the Church after it. Relatively little work has been focused on the relationship between the Communists and the Church. This thesis aims systematically to chart the development of the Communists' policy towards the Church and their relations, sometimes cordial, sometimes tense, sometimes hostile, during the period, drawing extensively on recently available documentary sources.

In contrast to Croatia, very little work has been done on the Catholic Church in Slovenia during this period. Slovenia saw a bitter civil war within the war, in which members of the Catholic clergy played a prominent part. Bishop Rožman of Ljubljana became embroiled in a determined resistance to the Communist-led Partisans, in which members of the lower clergy frequently took the leading role at the local level. Although the Slovene Communists dealt severely with those who opposed them, they nevertheless also followed the policy of the popular front, and in Slovenia, uniquely in Yugoslavia, they succeeded in co-opting an organized Catholic group, the Christian Socialist Movement, to their cause. Thus, Slovenia was witness to a complicated story of bitter strife between Church and Communist Party, of attempts by the Communists to establish relations with the Church hierarchy and with the lower clergy, and of relations between Communists and Catholics within the Communist-dominated Partisan movement.

The approach of the thesis can be summarized as follows: to examine the development of the Communist Party line, on popular front alliances in general, and its application to the Catholic Church in particular, describing both the Communists' theoretical approach towards religion and the practical significance of a policy designed primarily to ease their passage to power; to examine in detail the application of the popular front policy towards the Church and clergy, drawing heavily on documentary

sources; and to describe the change in the Communists' emphases in the final months of the war and in the post-war period, as their priority shifted from the neutralization of the Church as a potential enemy to the consolidation of their takeover, including the building of a new order based on revolutionary aims inimical to the Church.

The first part of the thesis presents a detailed examination of the relationship between the Communists and the Catholic Church during the Second World War. Chapter one examines the positions of the Communists and the Catholic Church towards each other. It begins with an examination of the development of the Communist Party line during the first year of the war, a period during which Communist policy was highly unsettled, switching between a hardline leftist emphasis on proletarian revolution and the alliance-building popular front policy. The first of these options was predicated on the expectation that the "imperialist war" would rapidly develop into a chain reaction of revolutions throughout East-central Europe. It was the line followed up until the German attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, following which Moscow pressed the Yugoslav Communists to build the alliances foreseen by the popular front policy, and again in the autumn and winter of that year, following Partisan reverses. Under pressure from Moscow, the Yugoslav Communists returned decisively to the popular front line early in 1942 (although the Slovene Party maintained the militant leftist line for a few months longer).

The chapter then goes on to examine the position of the Communists towards religion, from an ideological standpoint, as Marxists, as well as their pragmatic policy towards the churches, as a part of their strategy for gaining power. In their striving for power, they were prepared to put their revolutionary aspirations into second place, and to make compromises. This was, however, a temporary tactic. The Communists did not give up their wider revolutionary goals for a transformation of society which would bring them into conflict with the Church. Chapter one also discusses the attitude of the Catholic Church towards Communism and the options open to the Church when faced with a Communist takeover.

Finally, chapter one introduces the way in which the Communists sought to implement the popular front policy. The Partisan movement sought to reassure the Catholic clergy and faithful that the Church had nothing to fear from it, hoping thus to gain their acceptance and trust. Thus they avoided pronouncements or measures which would offend or alarm the Church, they allowed priests to continue to operate in areas under their control, and tried to establish cordial relations with senior Church figures. Further, they sought to encourage the active involvement in the movement of Catholic priests and prominent laymen, who could serve a valuable propaganda purpose in reassuring the Catholic population that they had nothing to fear from atheistic Communism.

Chapter two begins with a brief look at the position of the Catholic Church in relationship to the Nazi puppet Independent State of Croatia, under the Croatian fascist Ustashas, in order to provide the context in which relations between the Church and the Communists developed. However, it is not the purpose of this thesis to make a substantial contribution to the well-worn subject of the Catholic Church's relations with the Ustashas. Also for the sake of context, the chapter looks briefly at the Croatian Communists' policy towards the Croat national question, and how they confronted their main political rival in Croatia, the Croat Peasant Party (HSS).

The core of chapter two is a detailed analysis of the Croatian Party's implementation of its popular front policy. Although it had identified the HSS as its main rival among the Croats, the Party leadership feared that, with the HSS weakened by the war, the Catholic Church, which enjoyed enormous prestige in Croatia, would emerge as the principal defender of the Croatian national interest in its place. The party therefore sought to keep the Church in its place, well away from the political sphere. It went to great lengths to avoid antagonizing the Church, even though the Communists knew well that Stepinac and other Church leaders were bitterly opposed to them. The Croatian Party sought to avoid any suggestion that it would encroach upon fields which the Church considered its own in the social life of the country, such as education and marital matters.

In addition, this chapter looks at the efforts made by the Communists to appeal to members of the clergy, and the uses to which they put those whom they attracted to their movement. Particular attention is given to the role of Mgr. Svetozar Rittig, who became the most prominent Catholic clergymen in the Partisan movement. Passionately committed to the cause of Yugoslav unity, Rittig became a tireless propagandist on behalf of the Partisans. Appealing to clergy and faithful to take the Partisan side, and fiercely condemning those who opposed it, he nevertheless, like most clergymen who supported the Partisans, saw himself as defending the interests of the Church.

Rittig hoped to play a key role as an intermediary between the Church and the Partisan leadership, in order to put Church-state relations on a sound footing after the war. The Communists' main interest in Rittig was to manipulate him as a tool in their efforts to neutralize a powerful potential foe. As it turned out, he became so identified with the Partisan movement, that he was after the war shunned by most of the senior clergy, and was thus of little use to the Communists as an intermediary.

The position of the Catholic Church in Slovene society was very different to the corresponding situation in Croatia. The Church in Slovenia traditionally had a strong role in the political as well as the social sphere, and was thus the Communists' key competitor in their attempts to take power. Chapter three describes the descent into civil war in Slovenia, mainly as a result of the militant leftist line which the Slovene Communists pursued from late 1941 and through much of 1942. Embarking upon the liquidation of the "class enemy" in preparation for the expected revolution, the Slovene Communists attacked prominent figures in Ljubljana and at the local level, in the villages, including many priests. Defensive measures both among clericalist leaders in the capital and in the villages, where the initiative frequently came from the priests, led the opponents of the Partisans into increasingly close collaboration with the Italian and later German occupation authorities.

Despite this bitter struggle, which saw the Partisans and the Church in direct confrontation, the Communists nevertheless took steps to implement the popular front

policy and to appeal to the Catholic clergy and faithful in Slovenia as well. In Slovenia, the Communists operated within a front organization, the "Liberation Front" (OF), which included non-communists, among them the Christian Socialists. The Christian Socialists were committed to the goal of proletarian revolution and acknowledged the Communists' leading role in the OF. However, their desire for an independent profile led to friction with the Communists. Their activities were curtailed at the beginning of 1943, when they gave up any aspiration to their own organizational structure.

The Slovene Communists too appealed to members of the clergy, with varying degrees of success, depending in large measure on the differing natures of the occupation regimes in the various regions of Slovenia. For much of the war, their activities were focused on the Italian-occupied Ljubljana province, where, because of the bitterness of the civil war there, the Partisans' success in attracting the clergy to their banner was very limited. The opportunities were similarly limited in the German-occupied north of the country, where the occupation regime was particularly harsh, from which most of the clergy were expelled by the Germans, and where the Partisans found conditions for their operations very difficult for much of the war. Only in the Littoral region, which had been part of Italy during the inter-war period, and where the Partisans were regarded by most of the Slovene Catholic population and clergy primarily as a patriotic organization, offering unification with Slovenia and Yugoslavia, did the tactic of appealing to the clergy have any appreciable success.

The second part of the thesis deals with the Communists' takeover and consolidation of power from late 1944 through to late 1946. Chapter four shows how, towards the end of the war, the priorities of the Communist leadership changed, as they sought to complete their takeover, centralize their control of the Party, gain international recognition and begin to establish the contours of the revolution which they intended to implement. This period is examined in particular through the correspondence among the Communists leaders, which has been collected in several published volumes. This change in approach required the Communist leaderships in Croatia and Slovenia to

adapt to the new reality. This caused tension in Croatia in particular, where the local Party went much further than the central leadership had intended in making concessions to the Church.

As the position of the Partisans strengthened in the final phase of the war, the leadership no longer felt constrained to make compromises in order to appeal to non-communists. Its attitude to its rivals sharpened, especially towards the Catholic Church, as the Holy See and senior members of the clergy within the country became deeply involved in efforts to prevent a Communist takeover. However, despite this involvement, the Communist leaders remained prepared to reach an accommodation with the Church after the war, still seeing gains to be had from having a docile and compliant clergy. But the brutality with which they set about consolidating their power, which included the arrest and execution of numerous Catholic priests, and the speed with which they reneged on their promises not to harm the position of the Church, made any real accommodation impossible. Chapters five and six describe how the new authorities rapidly moved to curtail the Church's role in education and the range of its philanthropic activities, and to confiscate a large part of its property.

At the root of the problem were fundamental differences as to what the Church's role in society should be. The Communists' promises of freedom of religion effectively meant freedom to perform the purely religious functions of the Church, its sacraments and rituals. They gave no recognition to the role of the Church in the social life of the country, which for the Church was a crucial part of its mission. For their part, the Communists saw the Church's continued role in such areas as a threat to their attempts to build a new, revolutionary society, and they could not allow it. The thesis thus concludes that the wartime policy of the Communists to promote a popular front policy towards the Catholic Church was essentially an expediency. The two organizations remained, with the exception of a few individuals, hostile to each other, and given that they were to a considerable degree competing for the same space in the life of the people whose allegiance they both claimed, an accommodation that would have been satisfactory to

both sides could not be reached.

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List of Abbreviations

AVNOJ	Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia
BG	White Guard (Partisan name for Slovene opponents of Communists)
CK	Central Committee
DFJ	Democratic Federal Yugoslavia
FNRJ	Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia
HRSS	Croat Republican Peasant Party
HSS	Croat Peasant Party
JNOF	United National Liberation Front (Communist -dominated Yugoslav front organization)
JRZ	Yugoslav Radical Union
KPH	Communist Party of Croatia
KPJ	Communist Party of Yugoslavia
KPS	Communist Party of Slovenia
MVAC	Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia (Italian name for local anti-Communist forces)
NDH	Independent State of Croatia (wartime German puppet state)
NKOJ	National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (Partisan government in waiting)
NOO	National Liberation Committee
NOP	National Liberation Movement
NOR	National Liberation War
NOV i POJ	National Liberation Army and Partisan Units of Yugoslavia
NRH	People's Republic of Croatia
OF	Liberation Front (Communist-dominated Slovene front organization)
OSS	Office of Strategic Services (American intelligence service)
OZNA	Section for the Defence of the People (Yugoslav Communist secret police)
SKH	League of Communists of Croatia
SKOJ	League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia
SLS	Slovene People's party
SNOO	Slovene National Liberation Committee
SNOS	Slovene National Liberation Council
VOS	Security and Intelligence Service (Slovene Communist secret police)
ZAVNOBiH	Territorial Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Bosnia and Hercegovina
ZAVNOH	Territorial Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia
ZKS	League of Communists of Slovenia

Introduction

Much has been written about the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia during the Second World War, especially about the Church in Croatia and the Croat-inhabited areas in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Much has also been written about the Communist-led Partisan movement during the war and the Communist takeover that immediately followed it. However, in the literature on these subjects, relatively little has been devoted to the specific question of the relationship between the Communists and the Catholic Church during this period. This thesis aims, through the use of primary source material and published collections of documents, as well as of the existing relevant literature, to shed greater light on this theme. It is intended that this exercise should also contribute to an understanding of Communist policy towards their rivals and opponents more generally during the period of their seizure and consolidation of power in Yugoslavia.

In tackling this theme, the thesis concentrates on the situations in Croatia, Bosnia and Slovenia. The first reason for this is that it was in these areas that Yugoslavia's Roman Catholic population was concentrated. In the east and south of the country, meanwhile, Christian Orthodox or Moslem populations predominated. Smaller Catholic populations did exist elsewhere, among the ethnic Hungarians, Germans and Croats in the northeast of the country, in Vojvodina, and among the ethnic Albanians in Montenegro and Macedonia. In the Boka Kotorska area (in present-day Montenegro, near to the border with Croatia) there was a small population of Croat Catholics, as well as some Catholics who identified themselves as Serbs. But it was in the west of the country that Catholics predominated, and it was there that the key developments in the relationship between the Church and the Communists unfolded.

Another reason for the thesis's geographical focus is that, as will be explained later, it was in the western and central areas of the country where, because of the nature of the occupation regime, the conditions for insurgency were the most conducive for much of the war. In large areas of Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia, the Communist-led Partisan

movement was particularly active. It was in these areas that the Partisans came into contact with the Catholic Church, it was there that the Church presented a rival to the Communists' ambition to seize power, and it was there that they developed their policies towards the Church. In areas to the east and the south, where the Partisans were less active for much of the war, where the Catholic population was relatively smaller and where the Catholic Church did not appear such a threat, the Communists' engagement with the Church and with Catholics was less active.

The principles underlying the Communists' approach to the Catholic Church applied also to the other significant Christian Church in Yugoslavia, the Orthodox Church. For much of the war the Partisans were relatively less active in the Orthodox heartland of Serbia, and many of the Orthodox clergy in Bosnia and Croatia were hounded out by the extreme Croat nationalist Ustasha regime put in place by the Germans. Nevertheless, the Partisans came into contact with Orthodox clergy and, as this thesis will describe, applied the same policy of seeking to co-opt compliant priests to their cause as with the Catholic clergy.

The policy of enlisting the loyalty of clergy to the emerging new regime and of confining the Church to a restricted sphere outside of the political and social domains was to be the same for both churches. However, a key difference which from the Communist perspective made the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia appear a much greater threat was that it was part of the wider Catholic Church organization, with its hostility towards Communism. As the thesis will show, the Catholic hierarchy's insistence on the primacy of the Holy See in matters concerning the Church's position in the state was a key reason why the Communists regarded the Catholic Church as a particularly grave threat to their takeover and their revolutionary aims.

A considerable literature exists on the Catholic Church in Croatia and Bosnia during the war. However, most of it has concentrated on the relationship between the Church and the Ustashas in those areas. Much less has dealt with the Church and the Communists. Stella Alexander's *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945* (Cambridge,

1979) was a notably balanced account of the relationship between the Communist regime and the main Christian Churches during the post-war decades. However, the majority of the literature has been polarized between two opposed positions, with Yugoslav Communist and much of the Serbian historiography taking a strongly critical position towards the Catholic Church, while Croat émigré and other anti-Communist literature took an equally strong line in favour of the Catholic Church.

The Communist Yugoslav literature followed the findings of a commission set up by Croatia's Communist-led authorities to investigate the crimes of the occupiers and their domestic allies. Published in 1946, at a time when relations between the new regime and the Church hierarchy in Croatia had sunk into open conflict, two sets of published documents set out to demonstrate the alleged guilt of many of the Croat Catholic clergy of collaboration with the occupation regime and complicity in its crimes. These were the "Documents Concerning the Anti-national Work and the Crimes of a Part of the Catholic Clergy" (*Dokumenti o protunarodnom radu i zločinima jednog dijela katoličkog klera*, Zagreb, 1946) and the record of the trial of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac of Zagreb, selectively edited to exclude speeches by Stepinac and his defence lawyer (*Sudjenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini, ustaško-križarskim zločincima i njihovim pomagačima,* Zagreb, 1946). In 1952, at a time of particular tension between Yugoslavia and the Holy See, a collection of documents concerning the relationship between the Vatican and the wartime quisling regime in Croatia was published (*Tajni dokumenti o odnosima Vatikana i Ustaške "NDH",* Zagreb, 1952).

These collections of documents set the tone for numerous other works on the role of the Catholic Church in Croatia during the Second World War. Notable among these was a lengthy volume by Viktor Novak, *Magnum Krimen: Pola vijeka klerikalizma u Hrvatskoj*, which was first published in Zagreb in 1948. Novak's book, however, did more than merely renew the indictment against the Church. Setting out to present a comprehensive examination of the role of the clergy during the War, it also contained extensive material on the activities of members of the clergy who opposed or resisted the Ustashas. Other,

more recent works that continued the anti-Catholic line, concentrating on the controversial figure of Stepinac, are Branimir Stanojević's *Alojzije Stepinac: zločinac ili svetac: (Dokumenti o izdaji i zločinu)*, which was first published in Belgrade in 1985, with a second, enlarged edition the following year, and Ivan Cvitković's *Ko je bio Alojzije Stepinac?* (Sarajevo, 1986).

On the other side of the argument, numerous authors who saw the role of the Catholic Church in a positive light also tended to concentrate on Stepinac. Richard Pattee's *The Case of Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac* (Milwaukee, 1953) contained translations into English of numerous relevant documents and correspondence. Pattee presented Stepinac as a figure who had adopted a highly moral stance towards the Ustashas, condemning their racist ideology and trying to defend their victims, but who fell victim after the War to the relentless campaign of the Communists against the Church. Another notable defence of Stepinac was written by Aleksa Benigar (*Alojzije Stepinac, hrvatski Kardinal*, first published in Rome in 1974). Benigar's account benefited from his access to the diary of the parish priest of Krašić, Stepinac's birth place, where the Zagreb Archbishop spent the last years of his life following his release from prison, under house arrest in the home of the parish priest. The diary contains numerous details of Stepinac's own account of his relations with the various political regimes under which he lived. Stella Alexander's sympathetic biography of Stepinac (*The Triple Myth: A Life of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac,* New York, 1987) draws heavily upon Benigar.

Since the end of Communist rule in 1990, the literature published in Croatia concerning the wartime role of the Church has tended to continue the pattern of defensiveness regarding the activities of the clergy, while re-appraising the history of the period to stress the persecution of the Church and the clergy by the Communists. Stjepan Kožul's *Spomenica žrtvama ljubavi zagrebačke nadbiskupije* (Zagreb, 1992) concentrated on the sufferings of the Catholic clergy at the hands of the Communists. Jure Krišto's history of the Church in Croatia during the Second World War (*Katolička crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, 1941. – 1945*, Zagreb, 1998) defended the Church

and the overwhelming majority of the clergy against the attacks of Communist and Serbian historiography

While this thesis will, for the sake of context, briefly discuss the response of the Catholic Church and clergy to Ustasha rule, it is not the intention to make a substantial contribution to what is already a well-worn subject. Rather, this thesis concentrates on the relationship of the Church and clergy with the Communists. The relatively small amount of literature that has dealt specifically with the Catholic Church's relationship with the Communists in Croatia has also tended to be confined within the pattern initiated in the first years of Communist rule of being either highly critical or defensive of the Church's role during the period.

An important work on the activities of the clergy from the Communist standpoint was Branko Petranović's article on the period of the Communist takeover and consolidation of their power ("Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera protiv sredjivanja prilika u Jugoslaviji: mart 1945 - septembar 1946.", in *Istorija XX veka: zbornik radova*, Belgrade, 1963). Interpreting the activities of part of the clergy during this period as a conscious, deliberate attempt to undermine and contribute to the overthrow of the newly installed Communist regime, Petranović gave a detailed account of the troubled development of relations between the two antagonists. More recently, Dragoljub Živojinović (*Vatikan, Katolička Crkva i Jugoslovenska vlast, 1941-1945.*, Belgrade, 1994) combined a highly critical portrayal of the Church's wartime role with an appreciation of the attack which the Church experienced upon its interests, organisation and clergy during and immediately following the Communist takeover.

An important source on the activities of the Catholic clergy during the War is Ćiril Petešić's *Katoličko svećenstvo u NOB-u, 1941-1945.* (Zagreb, 1982). With detailed research, Petešić sought to counter the negative image of the Catholic clergy's wartime role, built up through decades of propaganda in the Yugoslav media, by claiming that actually significant numbers of priests supported the Partisans. In adopting this strategy he was arguing within the terms laid down by the Communists. He accepted the

assumption that a good priest was one who "remained faithful to the people" and supported the Partisans. He simply tried to show that there were many more such priests than had hitherto been believed. As already noted, Viktor Novak had earlier acknowledged the "positive" attitude of many members of the clergy. As an antidote to the negative propaganda against the Catholic clergy that had been the staple in Yugoslavia for so long, Petešić's book was useful. However, as this thesis will show, in seeking to suggest that a significant proportion of the clergy actively supported the Partisans, the book is misleading.

On the Communist takeover and the development of their policies more generally, there are a number of works. These include Mark Wheeler's chapter on Yugoslavia in *Resistance and Revolution in Mediterranean Europe, 1939-1948* (London, 1989) edited by Tony Judt; Jill A. Irvine's *The Croat Question: Partisan Politics in the Formation of the Yugoslav Socialist State* (Boulder, 1993); Ivo Banac's *With Stalin Against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca and London, 1988); Vojislav Koštunica and Kosta Čavoški's *Party Pluralism and Monism: Social Movements and the Political System in Yugoslavia, 1944-1949* (Boulder, 1985) and Aleksa Djilas's *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919-1953* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991). While not specifically concerned with the Communists' policy towards the Church, these works expose the development of the Communists' approach to their seizure of power and the attainment of their revolutionary goals, and of their policy towards their rivals and opponents. They are thus important in setting the context for the main theme developed in this thesis.

Both on the development of Communist strategies in general and on policy towards the Catholic Church in particular, the thesis draws extensively on the very large number of volumes of documents published during the post-war decades. These include two series of volumes on the Partisan war, the *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda*, published in Belgrade over several decades, and *Izvori za istoriju SKJ. Serija A, Tom II: dokumenti centralnih organa KPJ,*

NOR i revolucija, 1941-1945, published in Belgrade during the 1980s. In addition, collections of documents were published concerning the Second World War in individual Yugoslav republics and regions. These include, on Croatia, *Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobodjenja Hrvatske: zbornik dokumenata.* 1943-1945 (Zagreb, 1964-1985); and on Slovenia, *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije v Sloveniji. March 1941 - June 1943* (Ljubljana, 1962-1989). Other published collections of documents include the collected works of Yugoslavia's Communist leader, Josip Broz Tito (*Sabrana djela*, Belgrade, 1982).

The profusion of published collections of documents concerning the Second World War and the Communists' seizure of power, which in most cases do not appear to have been selected to fit the political exigencies of later periods, is a valuable resource for this thesis. The correspondence among Communist figures, reports from the field to the Party leadership and instructions back to the field present fascinating insights into the thinking of the Party. Such documents illustrate the development of the Communists' policies, the motivation behind them and the conditions which Communist activists found on the ground. The frequent references to the Church and clergy in these documents present a detailed picture of the changes in attitude of the Communist leadership towards the Church.

On the Church and clergy in Slovenia during the period covered by the thesis, there is less secondary material than is the case for Croatia. Just as the literature on the Church in Croatia during the Second World War has tended to focus on the person of Stepinac, so in Slovenia much attention has focused on the wartime role of the bishop of Ljubljana, Gregorij Rožman. And as with Stepinac, much of the literature on Rožman has been sharply polarized between opposing viewpoints regarding his wartime activity.

Following the war, a published account of the trial of Rožman and others, in absentia in the case of Rožman, who had fled the country, sought to demonstrate his wartime treachery (*Proces proti vojnim zločincem in izdajalcem Rupniku, Rösenerju, Rožmanu, Kreku, Vizjaku in Hacinu*, Ljubljana, 1946). This thesis uses the original record of the

trial, which is kept in the archive of Slovenia's Ministry of the Interior. Metod Mikuž, the most prominent Catholic priest actively to support the Partisans in Slovenia, wrote a number of pieces against Rožman and other clergy who opposed the Partisans. Among these is a history of the Slovene clergy's relationship with the Partisan movement, written during the war, which is kept in the archive of the Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino in Ljubljana. From the opposite standpoint, Jakob Kolarič's *Škof Rožman: duhovna podoba velike osebnosti na prelomnici časov*, written in exile and published in Klagenfurt in 1967 - 1979, is an uncritical eulogy to Rožman. Rožman himself answered the charges against him in *Škofa Rožmana odgovor,* dated 30 September, 1946, and published in Klagenfurt.

An interesting insight into Rožman's wartime role is provided by his secretary of the time, Stanislav Lenič ("Pogovor s škofom dr. Stanislavom Leničem" in *Nova Revija*, 67-68, Ljubljana, 1987). While Lenič remained loyal to the memory of Rožman, he acknowledged that the bishop had been at the centre of efforts to oppose the Partisans, putting it down to the pressure of others and Rožman's political naiveté. A more recent, balanced and useful account of Rožman's wartime role and of the trial against him is France Martin Dolinar's "Sodni proces proti Ljubljanskemu škofu dr. Gregoriju Rožmanu od 21. do 30 avgusta 1946" (*Zgodovinski časopis*, nos. 1-3, 1996, Ljubljana). On the post-war period, a biography of Rožman's successor as bishop of Ljubljana, Anton Vovk, by Ludovik Ceglar (*Nadškof Vovk in njegov čas, 1900-1963: 1. del*, Klagenfurt, 1993) provides a useful narrative, as well as insights into the thinking behind Vovk's response to Communist rule.

That the secondary sources on wartime Slovenia have been considerably thinner than is the case for Croatia and Bosnia is in part a reflection of the fact that while the main dramas of the Partisan struggle for much of the war played themselves out in Bosnia and the neighbouring regions of Croatia, Slovenia was somewhat on the periphery, fighting its own war, isolated from events elsewhere in Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, the war in Slovenia was a bitter and brutal one, and the leading Slovene

Communist on the central, Yugoslav Party politburo, Edvard Kardelj, took care to keep the Slovene Party in line with central party policy. Kardelj performed the same function regarding the Croatian Party. His prolific correspondence, available in published collections of documents, including instructions to the field, reports to Tito and letters to other senior leaders, provides a key resource in researching the development of Communist policy, including towards the Church and clergy in Slovenia.

A long-time standard history of the war in Slovenia, from a Communist perspective, is Metod Mikuž's *Pregled zgodovine nob v Sloveniji*, published in Ljubljana in 1960 and after. More recently, Jera Vodušek Starič's *Prevzem Oblasti, 1944-1946.* (Ljubljana, 1992) provides a detailed and more balanced analysis of the period of the Communist takeover. Also useful is a paper presented by Vodušek Starič at a conference in Moscow in 1994 on *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1945-1950: a Reassessment*, entitled "The Making of the Communist Regime in Slovenia and Yugoslavia."

Another useful resource used in this thesis is the memoirs of individuals who took part in the wartime events, sometimes as key players who were witnesses to important occurrences, or in other cases providing fascinating testimony of experiences on the ground. Notable among these is Milovan Djilas's *Wartime* (London, 1977), which as well as providing the insight of a senior Communist leader, offers a flavour of the atmosphere of the times, the pressures, the dilemmas and the confusion that often characterised the reality of life during the war. Similarly effective in evoking the atmosphere on the ground is Franklin Lindsay's account of life with the Partisans in German-occupied Styria, in northern Slovenia (*Beacons in the Night: with the OSS and Tito's Partisans in Wartime Yugoslavia*, Stanford, 1993). Josip Edgar Leopold-Lavov, in his *Kartuzija Pleterje in partizani, 1941-1945: spomini* (Ljubljana, 1977), provides a telling account of the fine line that had to be trodden by a monastery that in different times played host to both Partisans and occupiers.

Memoirs of key players in the events of the period include those of Jakov Blažević (*Mač a ne mir: za pravnu sigumost gradjana*, Zagreb, Belgrade, Sarajevo, 1980), who was the prosecutor in Stepinac's trial. Vladimir Dedijer, in his *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita* (Vol. 2, Rijeka, 1981) collected reminiscences from numerous key figures, including the observations of leading Communists and their allies on matters concerning the Church. The Serbian Orthodox priest and chaplain to the Partisan Supreme Command early in the war, Vlada Zečević, provided valuable information about the Partisans' attitude towards the Churches and religion in the so-called Bihać Republic in north-west Bosnia in late 1942 - early 1943 ("Poverenje naroda", in *Bihačka Republika, 4/9/1942-29/1/1943,* Book 1, *Zbornik članaka*, Bihać, 1965).

The thesis also draws on various unpublished memoirs and private papers, some of which make an important new contribution to our understanding of the theme in question. The memoirs (*Uspomene*, transcripts of conversations with his wife, Sonia Bićanić) of Emilio Pallua, are a valuable and hitherto unused source. Pallua was a lawyer and a prominent lay Catholic who spent the war in Zagreb. Appalled by the Ustashas, as a staunch Catholic he also in principle abhorred Communism. However, concluding that there was no choice but to make the most of the reality of a Communist takeover, following the War he joined Croatia's Religious Commission and tried to use this position to defend the Church as best he could. Closely connected with Stepinac and with Mgr. Svetozar Rittig, the most prominent Partisan priest in Croatia, Pallua's testimony of the war and post-war years provides a valuable addition to our knowledge of the position of the Catholic Church during this period.

Other memoir material used extensively in this thesis includes the papers of Rittig. These include copious writings, notes, speeches, letters and other documents written by Rittig during and after the war, and kept in the Croatian State Archive. Rittig's papers give an illustration of the Communists' wartime policy of appealing to Catholics and members of the clergy in action. A key contribution that this thesis aims to make to our understanding of the Communists' relationship with the Catholic clergy is to explore the

Communists' strategy of using compliant members of the clergy, such as Rittig, to further their aims, by seeking to persuade the Catholic populace that they had nothing to fear from Communist rule. To achieve this aim, the thesis draws on hitherto unused papers from Rittig's archive.

The papers of Ivo Politeo, who defended Stepinac, which are also kept in the Croatian State Archive, have also provided useful insight, as have the papers of Lojze Ude, kept in the Arhiv Slovenije, in Ljubljana. Ude undertook an initiative to stop the strife between the Slovene Partisans and their domestic opponents during the war, before joining the Partisans and heading the Slovene Religious Commission. Part of his correspondence, especially related to his attempted mediation, is published in *Moje mnenje o položaju: članki in pisma, 1941-1944.* (Ljubljana, 1994). The thesis draws on previously unused letters by Ude that illustrate the difficulty in trying to play a meaningful role as head of the Religious Commission at a time, late in the war, when the Communists' priorities were shifting away from the coalition-building strategy, emphasizing instead the takeover of power and the implementation of their revolution. Another new and useful insight into the events before and immediately after the Communist takeover is provided by the reports of the acting French Consul in Zagreb, André Gaillard, to Paris. Gaillard had been in Zagreb throughout the war and had extensive connections with political and Church figures.

The thesis draws on other archival sources in Zagreb, Ljubljana, Belgrade, Paris and London, several of which provide a fresh contribution to the theme of this thesis. The archive of the Hrvatski Institut za Povijest (part of the Croatian State Archive) contains the documentary records of the ZAVNOH (Territorial Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia), which include wartime reports from the field and correspondence with senior clergy. Additional reports on the situation on the ground are found among the records of the local National Liberation Committees. The archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia is particularly useful, as it contains reports that gave the true impressions of Communist activists, including in some cases regarding

the Church and the clergy, without any propaganda content. The archive of Croatia's Religious Commission (in the Croatian State Archive), which was headed by Rittig and to which Pallua also belonged, contains copious, previously unused material on the difficulties facing the Church following the end of the war. Grievances from members of the clergy, of the Church hierarchy and ordinary faithful were most often passed to the Commission.

Similarly useful archival material on Slovenia is found in the Arhiv Slovenije, including the archive of the Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino. This includes documents of the Slovene Religious Commission, of the SNOS (Slovene National Liberation Council), and of the Christian Socialists, allies of the Slovene Communists, as well as reports concerning the position of the clergy in Slovenia. The archive of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia contains minutes of meetings of the Slovene Party politburo after the war, including its deliberations on the activities of the clergy in Slovenia. The archive of the Archdiocese of Ljubljana contains the circulars issued by the bishop (unlike the Zagreb Archdiocese, the circulars of the Ljubljana diocese have not been widely reproduced in the secondary literature).

An important resource in Belgrade is the archive of Josip Broz Tito, which contains Tito's correspondence with foreign and domestic officials. This archive contains a small amount of highly interesting material on the theme of this thesis, including correspondence with Rittig which is revealing on the deliberations of the leadership regarding the position of the Catholic Church in the new Communist order. The Arhiv Jugoslavije contains records of the central authorities concerning the Church, including documents of the federal Religious Commission.

The Archives of the French Foreign Ministry and of the British Foreign Office (in the Public Records Office) contain interesting perspectives from French and British officials in Yugoslavia. In addition to the reports of Gaillard in Zagreb, the post-war French ambassador in Belgrade, Jean Payart, provided very perceptive and well-informed reports. A report by Evelyn Waugh to London on the position of the Catholic Church in

Yugoslavia is interesting if, according to the British ambassador in Belgrade, somewhat tendentious.

The thesis has not drawn directly on archives of the principal wartime occupying powers, Italy (until 1943) and Germany. The Slovene Interior Ministry archive contains a substantial collection of useful Italian documents (with Slovene translations), many relating to the activities of the clergy, which have been drawn on in the thesis. Vasa Kazimirović's *NDH u svetlu nemačkih dokumenata i dnevnika Gleza fon Horstenau, 1941-1944.* (Belgrade, 1987) and Josip Kolanović's "Nadbiskup Alojzije Stepinac u izvješćima njemačkog poslanstva u Zagrebu." (in *Fontes: izvori za hrvatsku povijest*, no. 2, 1996) provide interesting insights from the perspective of the German Plenipotentiary General in Croatia, Glaise von Horstenau.

The thesis also draws on a considerable body of work published in former Yugoslavia since the end of Communist rule in 1990. In several books and numerous articles, historians have re-appraised the period of the Communist takeover, with fresh looks at a number of areas relevant to this thesis. Recent research on Communist policies on education and agrarian reform and on the use of the courts, sheds new light on matters which touched crucially on the interests of the Church. The research of Katarina Spehnjak, in Croatia, on the Communists' use of education as a tool of mobilization is especially valuable (including "*Prosvjetno-kulturna politika u Hrvatskoj, 1945-1948.*", in Č*asopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 1, 1993, Zagreb). New light on the Communists' agrarian reform has been shed by Zdenko Čepič, in Slovenia (including "Agrarna reforma po drugi svetovni vojni - značaj, učinki, posledice", in *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, nos. 1-2, 1992, Ljubljana).

Also on the immediate post-war period, Nada Kisić-Kolanović, in Croatia, has made a considerable contribution, including her survey of the big trials in Croatia in that period, "Vrijeme političke represije: "veliki sudski procesi" u Hrvatskoj, 1945-1948." (in Č*asopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 1, 1993, Zagreb). Zdenko Radelić ("Komunisti, križari i Katolička Crkva u Hrvatskoj 1945. – 1946. godine" in *Dijalog povjesničara – istoričara 2*,

Zagreb, 2000) has discovered new material suggesting the Communists' determination to demonstrate the treachery of Stepinac by fair means or foul after the war.

On the wartime period, Kisić-Kolanović's *Andrija Hebrang: Iluzije i obrežnjenja, 1899-1949*, Zagreb, 1996) sheds further light on the role of Croatia's wartime Communist leader, Andrija Hebrang, whose policy towards the Catholic Church brought him into conflict with Tito. Zdenko Čepič ("Nekoj stopinj revolucije v pluralni dobi Osvobodilne fronte" in *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, nos. 1-2, 1998, Ljubljana) has carried out research on the development of the Slovene Communists' policy towards their allies in the Slovene front organization, the Liberation Front. Also on the Slovene Communists' allies, Bojan Godeša ("Krščanski sociajalisti in ustanovitev enotnih sindikatov", in *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, nos. 1-2, 1998, Ljubljana) has thrown further light on the Christian Socialists' attempt to find a distinct identity through the trade unions.

It is the aim of this thesis, by drawing on such recent scholarship by historians working in former Yugoslavia, as well as on the extensive use of new primary source material, to explain the relationship between the Communists and the Catholic Church during this crucial period. It is a relationship that has received relatively little scholarly attention to-date. Through a detailed presentation of the development of the relationship, the thesis aims substantially to increase our understanding of the twists and turns that it went through. The evolution of Communist policy towards the Church during the war was a complicated process, influenced by heterogeneous factors within the country and outside. This thesis will chart that evolution, as well as the responses of the Church and clergy to the Communists. The research presented by this thesis will also portray in detail the application in practice of the Communists' policies on the ground. The thesis will show that, throughout the period and through all the changes in approach by the Communists towards the Church, their goal remained unswerving: to acquire and consolidate power and to implement their revolutionary programme. The Church was expected to fit in with this goal or suffer the consequences.

Part One

Wartime

Chapter One

The Onset of War

The first Yugoslavia, which existed between the two world wars, from 1918 to 1941, was from its inception an unhappy state. Never managing to accommodate the national aspirations of its various constituent peoples, it lurched from crisis to crisis during the 1920's, until, in 1929, King Alexander did away with parliamentary rule, attempting to impose from above a unity and Yugoslav identity which the political parties had failed to deliver. While the royal dictatorship did indeed succeed in bringing a semblance of stability to the country, the fundamental problems remained unresolved.

Political life in inter-war Yugoslavia was poisoned by chronic divisions, which were drawn primarily on ethnic lines. Yugoslavia had been forged out of the South Slav lands of the former Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. In the east and south of the country was the territory that before the First World War had comprised the Kingdom of Serbia, from which royal Yugoslavia inherited its Karadjordjević dynasty. In 1918, Serbia united with the small mountainous Kingdom of Montenegro, to the north of Albania. While both Serbia (which included present-day Macedonia) and Montenegro were predominantly Christian Orthodox by religion, they contained substantial Moslem populations, including the ethnic Albanians who formed a majority in Kosovo, and also Serbo-Croat speaking Moslems. Roman Catholics predominated in the northern and western regions, in Slovenia and Croatia. In between was Bosnia and Hercegovina, with its mixed Serbian Orthodox, Bosniac Moslem and Croat Catholic populations. The smallest of these three groups, the Croats predominated in western Hercegovina, inland from neighbouring Croatian Dalmatia, and were also scattered around central and northern Bosnia.

While Slovenia, in the north-west corner of Yugoslavia, was relatively homogeneous, Croatia was also characterised by diversity, geographic as well as ethnic. The long Dalmatian coastline, with its history of Venetian, and latterly Austrian, rule, was distinct in landscape and culture from the northern, continental regions, including Zagorje, the area around the capital, Zagreb, and the fertile plains of Slavonia, whose historical ties were with Hungary. Croatia's large Serb, Orthodox minority was concentrated in particular in the Krajina (frontier) regions along the border with Bosnia, in some areas forming a local majority, especially in the Dinaric regions inland from northern Dalmatia. But there was also a significant urban Serb population in Croatia, including in Zagreb.

Another area which needs to be taken into account is the large area over the border in neighbouring Italy, the Julian region and Istria, which had been incorporated into Italy following the First World War. In the Julian region, Slovenes formed a large majority of the population, although its main prize, the port of Trieste, had an Italian majority. To the south, in Istria, Croats predominated in the east, including the city of Rijeka (Fiume), while Italians predominated in the west. The Second World War was to give Croats and Slovenes another chance to claim these nationalist irredenta.

In inter-war Yugoslavia, The Serbs of the former Kingdom of Serbia were politically dominant. Among the Croats, there had been no consensus about joining Yugoslavia, and the reality of a state dominated by Belgrade rapidly brought disillusion even to those who had initially greeted the new state with enthusiasm. Thoroughly disgruntled, for most of the inter-war period Croatia's political leaders withdrew into indignant opposition, often refusing to participate in institutions from which they felt profoundly alienated. The less numerous Slovenes, seeing in Yugoslavia protection against potentially predatory neighbours in Italy and Austria, adopted a pragmatic approach. The dominant Slovene political party, the Slovene People's Party (SLS), threw in its lot with Belgrade, forming a part of Yugoslavia's ruling coalition during most of the inter-war years. The strength of the SLS's position in Yugoslavia depended on the sour relations between the country's Serbs and Croats, enabling Slovenes to hold the balance.

Finally, in 1939, the Regent, Prince Paul, impressed by the enduring political strength of the Croat Peasant Party (HSS), the dominant party in Croatia, and alarmed by the prospect of having to lead a divided country into war, appointed a new Prime Minister, Dragiša Cvetković, and instructed him to come to terms with the Croatian political leadership and seriously to address Croatian grievances. This led to an agreement, or "Sporazum", between Cvetković and the leader of the HSS, Vladko Maček, to form an autonomous Croatian unit within Yugoslavia, with wide-ranging powers, while Maček joined the Yugoslav government.[1]

But in spite of the hopes that the "Sporazum" might provide a satisfactory solution to the question of Croatia's position in Yugoslavia, it proved not to be so. Firstly the Serbian opposition parties, which had up until then joined with Maček and the HSS to form a United Opposition to the royal dictatorship, were embittered by what they regarded as a double betrayal. Maček was accused of betraying democratic principles by joining the government, while the government was accused of betraying Serbian interests by agreeing to the formation of an autonomous Croatian province that included large areas with substantial Serb populations. In fact the "Sporazum" resulted in bitter recriminations between Serbian and Croatian politicians such as had not been known during the period of relative harmony of the United Opposition. Meanwhile, in Croatia, the "Sporazum" was followed by widespread discrimination against the Serb population, while the activities of extreme Croat nationalists, who were not satisfied with the achievements of the "Sporazum", were stepped up. Maček, despite his solid support among the rural population, failed to act to ensure that the "Sporazum" would succeed, and so Croat-Serb relations actually became more poisoned than they had been before.[2]

The failure of the "Sporazum" to provide a framework within which Serb-Croat relations could be set on a satisfactory footing was indicative of the wider problem of how

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[1]Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka* (Zagreb, 1983), pp. 16-17.

[2]Aleksa Djilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919-1953* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991), pp. 130-135.

to satisfy one of the two largest peoples in Yugoslavia without alienating the other. Finally, the first Yugoslavia lacked the basic consensus behind its organization and political system, and even its existence, which is necessary for any state to function satisfactorily.

When Yugoslavia was attacked by Germany in April 1941, following a coup in Belgrade in response to the signing by the government of the Tripartite Pact, the country collapsed very quickly. While there were various reasons for the poor showing of the Royal Yugoslav Army in the brief April War, not least among them was the fundamental weakness of a state behind which its citizens were not united. Indeed, there were instances of Croat units deserting and refusing to fight, and when German troops arrived in Zagreb they received a rapturous welcome from crowds which thronged the streets, greeting them as liberators.[3]

Following its destruction, the territory that had been Yugoslavia was parcelled out among its neighbours, the German Reich, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and Italian-controlled Albania, while what remained of Serbia was placed under direct German occupation. On the territory which today comprises most of Croatia, all of Bosnia and part of Vojvodina an Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska - NDH) was formed under the Croatian fascist Ustasha movement, led by Ante Pavelić. A defining feature of the Ustashas was their virulent hatred of Serbs, and they quickly set about the violent persecution of the Serb population in the areas that they had been allotted. Much of Dalmatia, meanwhile, was annexed to Italy.

Slovenia was partitioned among the neighbouring Axis powers, and there was no Slovene equivalent of the NDH. The northern part of Slovenia was incorporated into Germany, while the southern part, including the capital, Ljubljana, was annexed by Italy, forming the so-called Ljubljana province. In addition, a small area in the eastern corner of Slovenia, known as Prekmurje, was annexed by Hungary.

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[3]Vladko Maček, *In the Struggle for Freedom* (New York, 1957), pp. 230-231.

The Development of a Communist Party Policy, 1941-1942

In seeking to explain the approach of the Communists towards the Catholic Church, it is first necessary to examine the development of Communist policy towards non-Communists in general, and towards the churches in particular. Special attention needs to be paid to the nationalities question in Yugoslavia, which the Communists explicitly connected to the religious question. For Communists, religious and nationalities policies were part of the same whole, with considerable overlap, and should not be separately elaborated.[4]

The leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) had to grapple with these questions amidst the hurly-burly and confusion of war following the carve-up of Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941. The reality in much of the country that summer was a state of anarchy, as a mass spontaneous revolt against the occupation spread throughout Serb-inhabited areas, partly in response to the terror which the Ustashas quickly inflicted on the Serb population in Croatia and Bosnia, and partly as a means of redeeming wounded Serbian pride following the easy defeat of Yugoslavia in April.

The Germans, with extremely brutal methods, restored order in Serbia itself by the end of 1941, but they never deployed sufficient forces fully to subdue the mountainous central and western areas of the country, Bosnia, Montenegro and the Krajina regions of Croatia, while the Italians and the quisling forces of the NDH proved not to be up to the task. To the Germans, Serbia was important because of the communication lines which ran through it to the southern Balkans, and the minerals which they hoped to extract there, but in spite of periodic attempts to pacify the western regions of the country, they were never such a priority for them.

Thus it was that in much of the country there was a vacuum into which insurgent organizations could step. The most important of these were the Communist-led Partisan

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[4]Pedro Ramet, *Cross and Commissar: the Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR* (Bloomington, 1987), p. 38.

movement and the royalist forces of Draža Mihailović (often known as Chetniks). Mihailović, an officer in the Royal Yugoslav Army, was appointed Defence Minister by the royal government in exile in London, as well as Commander of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland. As such he was, for much of the war, recognized by the Allies as the legitimate leader of the resistance in Yugoslavia. However, the Royal government, paralysed by the same national divisions which had crippled it before the war, soon became tiresome to its British hosts, and Mihailović's connection to it ceased to be to his advantage. Apart from that, the largely Serbian nature of his movement and the perception that he stood for a restoration of the substantially discredited pre-war regime rendered him unattractive in the eyes of most of the non-Serb majority of the country, and his largely passive "wait and see" attitude in the face of the occupiers made him an easy target for criticism for the more active Partisans.[5]

The HSS similarly failed to present a viable alternative to the Communist-led National Liberation Movement. Many followed the example of Maček in adopting a passive stance, refusing either to cooperate with the occupation forces or to advocate resistance to them. Some of the other senior figures in the party went into exile, where they devoted themselves to squabbles with their counterparts from the Serbian parties. Others, on the right of the party, threw in their lot with the Ustashas, while many on the left later sided with the Communists. In any case, with Maček passive, the HSS offered no effective alternative to either the Ustashas or the Communists and, like Mihailović, waited for the expected Allied victory, in the hope that they would then receive support for their goals.[6] The Ustashas themselves, meanwhile, through their savagery, succeeded in discrediting their brand of strident Croatian nationalism in the eyes of many Croats, thus aiding the attempts of the Partisans to rehabilitate the idea of Yugoslavia in Croatia.

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[5]Aleksa Djilas, *The Contested Country*, pp. 144-147.

[6]Jill A. Irvine, *The Croat Question: Partisan Politics in the Formation of the Yugoslav Socialist State* (Boulder, 1993) (hereafter Irvine), pp. 100-102.

In Slovenia, the leadership of the SLS also adopted a policy of waiting for events. There was a smaller strand, gathered around the Liberals, which was loyal to Mihailović and committed to the restoration of Yugoslavia. In the spring of 1942, various pre-war political parties and factions, led by the SLS, put their earlier differences behind them and formed the Slovene Alliance, as the political organization of the anti-Communist forces. Like Mihailović, the HSS and the Yugoslav government in exile, the Slovene Alliance advocated a policy of waiting upon an Allied invasion of the Balkans. In the meantime, it avoided actions that would provoke Axis reprisals against the population, aiming to keep its organization intact in preparation for the hoped for arrival of the Allies. However, in response to attacks by the Slovene Partisans' against both the Italians and Germans themselves and upon their domestic Slovene opponents, anti-Communist forces, including the Catholic Church, were drawn into increasingly active collaboration with the occupiers. In the struggle against the Communist Partisans, the Slovene Alliance placed itself behind existing anti-Communist formations and sought actively to participate in efforts to suppress the Partisans.[7]

It was in the context of this failure of the various non-communist political forces to provide leadership to those who wished actively to resist the occupiers, or to provide a vision of a post-war order which would address the specific grievances of all the Yugoslav peoples and put an end to the fratricidal strife into which they had been plunged, that the Partisans stepped into the frame. They presented themselves as the only force that could drive the occupiers out of the country, punish those who had collaborated with them, and build a new Yugoslavia which would address and solve the problems which had beset the country's first incarnation.

The process by which the KPJ arrived at a coherent policy regarding its conduct of the war and its takeover of power was not, however, a smooth one. There had been

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[7]Jera Vodušek Starič, "The Making of the Communist Regime in Slovenia and Yugoslavia" (presented at a conference on *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1945-1950: a Reassessment*, Institute of Slavonic and Balkan Studies, Moscow, 1994), pp. 4-5; Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: the Chetniks* (Stanford, 1975), pp. 222-223.

many vacillations during the inter-war period, and these continued after the outbreak of war. These vacillations were in part caused by factionalism within the Party, but a major cause of confusion lay in the fact that the Party, like all other Communist parties in this period, was obliged to follow the line emanating from Moscow through the Comintern.

The Comintern had for many years prior to the Second World War attached great importance to the national question, seeing in it great revolutionary potential. From 1928 until 1935, the line was to stress the national aspirations of the oppressed nations. In the case of Yugoslavia this meant support for the break-up of the country, encouraging the radical nationalist movements in, for example, Croatia and Macedonia. After 1935, the line changed in response to the perceived threat from fascism. Now the priority task for all Communists was to contribute to the defence of the Soviet Union, the one Communist state. So the countries of East-Central Europe were no longer to be seen as weak creations of Versailles, ripe for revolution, but were rather to be bolstered as buffers between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Thus, the Yugoslav Communists were now required to promote a Popular Front of all patriots opposed to fascism. This meant that Communist ideology was to be underplayed, as the party sought to attract non-Communists to the cause. Although national self-determination remained Party policy, Communists would no longer actively campaign for the break-up of Yugoslavia.[8]

At this time the leadership of the Yugoslav Party was in the hands of enthusiastic proponents of the Popular Front line. However, following Stalin's purges of the second half of the 1930's, which decimated the ranks of Yugoslav Communists, control passed to a distinctly leftist leadership under Josip Broz Tito, whose commitment to the Popular Front was far less clear. After the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939, and until the attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, the line was again "Leftist". Popular Front alliances were rejected, as with the outbreak of the "Imperialist War" the Party was ordered to base its work on strictly class foundations. What Tito did provide was a new

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[8]Ivo Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca and London, 1988) (hereafter Banac), pp. 60-63.

discipline, creating a tightly organized, centralized Party on the Leninist model, such as Yugoslavia had not known until then.[9]

Following the collapse of the country in 1941, the tension between the line being pushed by Moscow and the leftist inclinations of most of the KPJ leadership resulted in a great deal of confusion. In May 1941, Tito enunciated a policy of revolution on the back of the defeat of the Axis powers. Collaboration with the Allies was abandoned and the transitional, "bourgeois-democratic" phase of the revolution was to be by-passed. Tito was assuming a quick victory as part of a chain reaction of proletarian revolutions throughout East-Central Europe.[10]

In the summer of 1941, following the German attack on the Soviet Union, and under pressure from Moscow, this policy was reversed. The people were urged to unite "regardless of political conviction and religious creed, and drive out the detested invaders", just as the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States had united against fascism.[11] Again under pressure from Moscow, approaches were made to Mihailović in an attempt to forge a common front. However, this line did not last either. In the autumn of 1941 the Partisans were driven out of Serbia. Various factors combined to suggest to the KPJ leadership that the anti-fascist struggle was yielding to class war: there was evidence that Mihailović was both collaborating with the Germans and receiving support from the British; yet while Soviet forces won victories before Moscow, it appeared that they were not receiving help from the British. The line now was "sharper class differentiation", a symptom of which was the formation of the First Proletarian Brigade, the nucleus of a new mobile force that would supplement the locally based Partisan units and spearhead the revolution.[12]

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[9]*ibid.* pp. 66-78.

[10]Mark Wheeler, "Pariahs to Partisans to Power: The Communist Party of Yugoslavia" in Tony Judt (ed.), *Resistance and Revolution in Mediterranean Europe, 1939-1948* (London, 1989) (hereafter Wheeler), pp. 126-127.

[11]*ibid.* p. 132.

[12]*ibid.* pp. 137-138; Milovan Djilas, *Wartime* (London, 1977), pp. 118-119.

This "Leftist" line brought severe criticism from Moscow. The KPJ leadership was condemned for giving the Partisans too much of a Communist character, especially in the formation of the proletarian brigades, and for failing to unite all who wished to fight against the occupiers. This confirmed conclusions that the Yugoslav leadership had already drawn, and in the spring of 1942 the "left sectarian" line was repudiated in favour of the primacy of anti-Axis struggle, the banner to which all patriots were to be drawn. Party dominance was to be maintained, but that dominance, and also Communist ideology, would be downplayed. While rivals were still to be liquidated, it would be as agents of the Axis rather than as class enemies.[13]

The KPJ was to maintain this line until the end of the war. It placed emphasis on resistance to the occupiers, and was all-Yugoslav in character, stressing the "brotherhood and unity" of the Yugoslav peoples, while at the same time tailoring its approach to the specific circumstances in each part of Yugoslavia and appealing to the aspirations of each individual nation. This policy was described by Tito in an article in the Party newspaper, *Proleter*, in December 1942:-

> The words "National Liberation Struggle" would be just a phrase - even a fraud, if they did not include, apart from their general Yugoslav sense, a national sense for each people separately, if they did not mean, as well as the liberation of Yugoslavia, at the same time the liberation of the Croats, Slovenes, Serbs, Macedonians, Albanians, Moslems and so on, if the National Liberation Struggle did not, in its content, bring liberation, equality and brotherhood to all the peoples of Yugoslavia. In that is the essence of the National Liberation Struggle."[14]

Religion and the Church in the Communist Scheme

The Communists' attitude towards the churches was based in part on a theoretical, Marxist approach towards religion, and in part on a pragmatic understanding of how their religious policy could contribute to a successful seizure of power. In principle it was the view of the Communist leadership that religious freedom was necessary in order to

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[13]Wheeler, pp. 142-143; Milovan Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 143.

[14]Article by Tito, "Nacionalno pitanje u Jugoslaviji u svjetlosti narodno-oslobodilačke borbe", in *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodno-oslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda* (hereafter Zbornik), Series II, Book 7, pp. 112-119. First published in *Proleter*, No. 16, of December 1942.

prevent the politicization of the churches.[15] This was in accord with Lenin's view that, while religion needed to be fought, with the elimination of the exploiting classes it would fade away anyway. Therefore the anti-religious struggle need not be over-emphasized, thus avoiding the risk of dividing the proletariat. As religion would disintegrate, it could in the meantime be granted certain "bourgeois" rights and privileges, while on the other hand the need to fight a rival necessitated restrictions.[16]

Communist regimes viewed religious organizations as potential political rivals, but they sometimes saw them as potential policy tools. Thus, policies towards the churches were usually more than merely restrictive. Communist regimes took an active stance towards religion, taking into account broader political objectives. For example, while they would certainly seek to erode the bases of popular devotion to religion and the churches, they would simultaneously seek to control and manipulate religious organizations and clerics, with a view to gaining benefits for their regime.[17]

For the Communists the key element in the regulation of the relations between Church and state was separation. It was not considered appropriate that the Church should have any influence in the social or political fields. The Church should be restricted to the strictly spiritual sphere, and it should not have authority in, for example, education and marital matters. Once separation had been effected, all churches would be equal and none specially favoured.[18] The way in which separation was implemented was, however, always very unequal. For their part, Communist states sought closely to control church publications and construction, and frequently tried to interfere in appointments.

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[15]Manojlo Broćić, "The Position and Activities of the Religious Communities in Yugoslavia, with Special Attention to the Serbian Orthodox Church", in Bohdan Bociurkiw and John W. Strong (ed.), *Religion and Atheism in the USSR and Eastern Europe* (London, 1975) (hereafter Broćić), p. 358.

[16]Gerhard Simon, "The Catholic Church and the Communist State in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe", in Bociurkiw and Strong, *Religion and Atheism in the USSR and Eastern Europe*, (hereafter Simon), pp. 193-194.

[17]Ramet, *Cross and Commissar*, pp. 4-5.

[18]Broćić, p. 354.

Especially important was to separate religion from nationalism. As religious affiliation and national identity coincided closely in Yugoslavia, the task of eroding religious affiliation was all the more difficult. Communist fears concerning the influence of the churches were particularly heightened in Yugoslavia, because of its being a multi-national state. Because they presented themselves as historical guardians of particular peoples the churches were regarded as strongly divisive factors.[19] Separation was thus deemed necessary in order to avoid future conflict. Thus the objectives of the Communists' policies towards the churches were to restrict church life to the rituals of a cult, to limit their influence in society, to control their activities and to obtain the loyalty of leading Church figures.[20]

However, the realization of the Communists' ideas on the position of the churches in the new society that they intended to build was something that would have to wait until after the war. In the meantime, the key to understanding the attitude of the Yugoslav Communists towards the churches is to appreciate that until they were firmly in power everything was subordinated to the acquisition and retention of that power. In this they were following the example set by Lenin in 1917. It was a pragmatic approach, allowing for a great deal of flexibility. It enabled them to seek tactical alliances, such as with Mihailović in 1941 and, as will be described later, in 1943 with Božidar Magovac, pre-war editor of the HSS paper, *Slobodni Dom,* who tried to reach an accommodation with the Communists. And it enabled them to make promises that they did not intend to keep once in power, such as wartime assurances that there was no intention to implement a Communist revolution after the war. This was the essence of the Popular Front policy that was applied consistently from the spring of 1942. Such a policy was also pursued with regard to the churches.

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[19]Ramet, *Cross and Commissar*, pp. 13 and 40.

[20]Simon, pp. 196 & 198.

For the Communists the feelings of the people, whether it be their national aspirations or their adherence to their faith, were something that they could manipulate in their quest for power, and something that they should avoid offending unduly until they had achieved power. Principles and ideology could temporarily be put aside. In order to win over the mass of the Croat and Slovene populations they concealed their real attitude towards the Catholic Church behind a false front of conciliation, with offers of collaboration against the common enemy.[21] Towards the end of the war, Fitzroy Maclean, a British envoy to the Partisan leadership, reported to the British Foreign Office on his expectation that the Partisans' conciliatory attitude towards the churches would give way to a harsher attitude once they were firmly established in power and would no longer need to have such regard for public opinion.[22] But during the war the Communists went to great lengths to appease and attract Catholic clergy and laity.

In an article published in *Proleter* in 1936, Tito urged that Communists and Catholics should unite in the struggle between the two main forces in the world, "fascist and Democratic." He acknowledged that many Catholics did not identify with either side, but suggested that Catholics and Communists had much in common, both of them basing themselves among the poor, so that cooperation should not be excluded. He urged that they should put aside their irreconcilable philosophical differences and unite to defend themselves against the common peril. Therefore, "so as to make it easier for them to join the front for peace, freedom and progress, we [Communists] must stop all that could offend their religious feelings."[23] This piece, with its stress on putting differences aside so as to unite against the common foe, clearly implied that an alliance with the churches was tactical and temporary.

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[21]Dragoljub R. Živojinović, *Vatikan, Katolička Crkva i Jugoslovenska Vlast, 1941-1958* (Belgrade, 1994) (hereafter Živojinović), p. 62.

[22]Report of Maclean of 25 December, 1944. Public Records Office (hereafter PRO), FO371/48910, R1262.

[23]Text of article, *Komunisti i Katolici* given in Ćiril Petešić, *Katoličko svećenstvo u NOB-u, 1941-1945* (Zagreb, 1982) (hereafter Petešić), pp. 7-10.

Early in the war, a piece on the "Fundamental Principles..." of the movement, written by the veteran Communist Moša Pijade in February 1942, stressed that all, without consideration of political or religious belief or nationality, must be welcome, so long as they were "honest patriots."[24] The AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia), set up by the Partisan leadership as a proto-government in the autumn of 1942, laid down the basic equality of all citizens regardless of religious belief or affiliation, guaranteeing freedom of conscience and religion.[25]

It was, however, clear from an early stage that there were to be strict limits to this freedom of religion. In an article in January 1943, Edvard Kardelj asserted that the promise of religious freedom was not temporary, was not just for current circumstances, but was a fundamental, immutable Communist principle. But the limits inherent in the Communists' position became plain when Kardelj went on to explain that while Marx and Engels taught that religion was a private matter, the "revolutionary proletariat" must not allow reactionary forces to use religion to serve their anti-national aims. He cited the Soviet Union as a practical example of how the separation of Church and state could resolve the question of the Church's place in society. However, he declared that the Church apparatus would be cleansed of "anti-national speculators" who were stabbing the people in the back while pretending that they were defending religion. There would be a settling of accounts with such "criminal elements in priest's garb." That did not, he went on to claim, mean a settling of accounts with religion itself. It is clear, however, that this freedom of religion was to exist only within the limited bounds that the Communists were prepared to allow it, according to their interpretation of the separation of Church and state. Kardelj finished with a promise that no priest who remained faithful to the people (with whom he, like all Communist leaders, identified the Communist-led National Liberation Struggle) would be harmed or prevented from going about his priestly

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[24]Petešić, p. 23.

[25]Slobodan Nešović, *Stvaranje nove Jugoslavije, 1941-1945* (Belgrade, 1981), pp. 309-310.

functions. Rather, they would be welcomed as comrades in the struggle. But, he concluded ominously, other, treacherous priests would receive the fate that awaited all traitors.[26]

The broad interpretation of the meaning applied to the word "treachery" can be seen in a report by Vlada Zečević, an Orthodox Priest, shortly after the foundation of AVNOJ at Bihać, following which he was appointed head of the Religious Affairs Section of AVNOJ. While insisting that the clergy must be free to minister to the religious needs of the people, he, like Kardelj, insisted that religious activities must not be used as a mask for actions against the National Liberation Struggle. He added that "it is necessary that religious officials carry out their office and use their influence upon the people solely in the spirit of the National Liberation Struggle."[27] These were the terms under which "religious freedom" was permissible. For the priest who did not adhere to these conditions there awaited the fate alluded to by Kardelj.

The development of the Partisans' struggle in Croatia and Slovenia, and of their relationship with the Catholic Church, followed the broad patterns described above in relation to the KPJ leadership. The Communist Parties of Croatia and Slovenia (KPH and KPS respectively) were affected, during the early months of the war, by the same fluctuations in policy between the hardline "leftist" stance, with its emphasis on immediate proletarian revolution, class war and liquidation of the class enemy, and the Popular Front policy, with its stress on coalition building. In both Croatia and Slovenia the Communists sought to appeal to and to reassure Catholics and members of the Catholic clergy.

However, the Croatian and Slovene Communists worked in very different environments, both in terms of the domestic political configuration and the nature of the

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[26]Edvard Kardelj, "Komunistička Partija, Vjera i Crkva", in *Put nove Jugoslavije: Članci i govori iz narodnooslobodilačke borbe, 1941-1945* (2nd edition, Zagreb, 1949), pp. 315-320.

[27]Undated report by Zečević, written shortly after the AVNOJ meeting in Bihać in November 1942, on the relationship of the Partisans to religion and on the relationship of religious officials to the National Liberation Struggle, in Nešović, *Stvaranje nove Jugoslavije*, pp. 152-153.

occupation regime. There was a considerable difference between the positions that the Catholic Church had traditionally held in society in Croatia and Slovenia, and that too was to contribute to a very different unfolding of the relationship between the Church and the Communists in Croatia and Slovenia.

In Croatia, Stepinac had since before the war forbidden his clergy involvement in politics and with political parties. In Croatia, it was the HSS, with its tradition of anti-clericalism, which was seen by the Communists as their main rival. As to he Church, the KPH's priority would be to keep it in its traditional sphere, outside of Croatia's political life.

By contrast, the Catholic Church in Slovenia had a tradition of intimate involvement in the political life of the country. There, the Church was closely associated with the conservative SLS, which had been the dominant party throughout the inter-war period, and several members of the clergy were active in its ranks. Indeed, the party was led, until his death in 1940, by a Catholic priest, Mgr. Anton Korošec. The SLS participated in Yugoslav governments for much of the inter-war period. It was through the SLS that the Catholic Church in Slovenia pursued its political agenda, in opposition to Liberalism and Social Democracy. The Church also extended its influence throughout Slovene society through the schools, the University, banks and Slovenia's highly developed system of cooperatives and the administration.

The key role of the Church and clergy in Slovenia's political life would be maintained during the war, in opposition to the Communists. Thus the Communists' preference for avoiding conflict with the Church, at least until they were firmly in power, was much harder to apply in practice in Slovenia than in Croatia. In Slovenia, the struggle against the anti-Communist forces gathered around the Slovene Alliance unavoidably meant confronting much of the clergy, including Bishop Rožman.

Another important difference in conditions between Croatia and Slovenia was in the nature of the occupation regimes. In Slovenia, its territory carved up and annexed to neighbouring powers, opposition to the Partisans was essentially on political grounds,

based on antipathy to Communism. In Croatia, The Communists' task was further complicated by the fact that many Croats regarded the end of Yugoslavia and the formation of the NDH positively. Thoroughly alienated from the inter-war Yugoslav State, which, from their perspective, had not only discriminated against Croats, but also against the Catholic Church, few of them, including members of the clergy, mourned its passing.

The perceived inferior position of the Catholic Church within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was symbolized by the failure, in 1937, of the Concordat agreement with the Holy See, which the Yugoslav government had signed in Rome in 1935. Due to pressure from a campaign against the Concordat by the Serbian Orthodox Church and nationalistic Serbian politicians, it was not ratified by the Parliament, and was withdrawn in October 1937.[28] A movement that stood not only for Communism, but for the restoration of Yugoslavia, was thus from the outset particularly handicapped in any attempts to reach an accommodation with the Catholic Church in Croatia.

The Church and Communism

The response of the Catholic Church to the Communists in Yugoslavia was also based in part on a principled position. The Communists were handicapped in any attempts to establish contact with members of the Catholic hierarchy in Yugoslavia by the well-established antipathy of the Church towards atheistic Communism. But, having to come to terms with the unwelcome prospect of Communist rule, the Church too was forced to adopt a certain pragmatic approach.

The Catholic Church's hostility towards Communism dated back to Pope Pius IX (1846-78) in the middle of the nineteenth-century. This anti-Communist line was explicitly stated by Pope Pius XI (1922-39) shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, in his encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*, promulgated on 19 March 1937. Declaring that atheistic Communism was "in its very essence evil", aiming to upset the social order and

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[28]Stella Alexander, "Croatia: The Catholic Church and Clergy, 1919-1945", in Richard J. Wolff and Jörg K. Hoensch (ed.), *Catholics, the State and the European Radical Right* (Boulder, 1987), pp. 38 & 48-50.

to undermine the foundations of Christian civilization, it forbade any cooperation with it. The principle objection to Communism was its atheism. A Communist regime was in general tyrannical and oppressive, but most importantly, it oppressed religion and the Church.[29]

There were, however, limits to the extent to which the Church was prepared to oppose Communism. Since the 1920s, Pius XI had insisted that priests should stay out of politics, concentrate on the Church's spiritual foundation, avoid compromising it by identification with any party and secure it from what Anthony Rhodes has called the "whims of transient political systems."[30] When the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, the Holy See resisted calls to pronounce the war a crusade. The Under-Secretary-of State, Mgr. Tardini, pointed out that while Communism was the greatest enemy, it was not the only one, and the Holy See could hardly regard the swastika as the symbol of a crusade (Pius XI had attacked Nazism in an encyclical, *Mit brennender Sorge*, at about the same time as *Divini Redemptoris*).[31]

Nevertheless, under Pius XII (1939-58), the Church's antipathy towards Communism was undoubted. In a wireless speech just after the attack on the Soviet Union, he said that:

> Certainly in the midst of surrounding darkness and storm, signs of light appear which lift up our hearts with great and holy expectations - these are those magnanimous acts of valour which now defend the foundations of Christian culture, as well as the confident hope of victory.

Archbishop Constantini, head of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, prayed for the "brave soldiers" fighting "in that immeasurable land in which Satan appears to have found his representatives on Earth."[32]

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[29]Ivan Cvitković, *Ko je bio Alojzije Stepinac* (Sarajevo, 1986), pp. 13-16; Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Balkan Babel: Politics, Culture and Religion in Yugoslavia* (Boulder, 1992), p. 124.

[30]Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators, 1922-1945* (London, 1973), pp. 14-15.

[31]*ibid.* pp. 195-210 and 256.

[32]*ibid.* pp. 257-258.

This hostility to Communism was certainly shared by most of the senior clergy in Yugoslavia. Stepinac followed Pius XI's line that the Church should stay out of politics. The Church's position was that it could live under whatever political system, so long as it could go freely about its work.[33] In the case of a Communist takeover, however, it was no longer a question about interfering in politics, as the fundamental interests of the Church were at stake. For the Church, the advent of Communist rule would be a disaster. In a pre-war article, the Croatian Catholic paper *Katolički List* had described the Church's attitude, borrowing words from *Divini Redemptoris*: "Communism is in its very essence evil. Therefore the person who values Christian culture will not cooperate with [Communists] in a single thing."[34] Stepinac had made his undying hostility to Communism quite plain. Jakov Blažević, who had the opportunity to read the official diary of the Zagreb Archdiocese, which contains regular entries by Stepinac himself, cited an entry by Stepinac following a meeting with Maček in October 1939, in which he said that a Communist victory would be a "catastrophe" for Croatia, which should be resisted with all vigour, in which the Church would give its full moral support.[35]

Faced with an impending Communist takeover, the Yugoslav bishops were in a dilemma. While some did involve themselves in efforts to avert a Communist takeover, as that takeover became reality the need to protect their institutions and their role in society required them to engage in a dialogue with the new authorities at some level. As Sabrina Petra Ramet has written:-

> There is a curious duality in Catholic tradition. On the one hand, terrestrial life is treated as having distinctly secondary and instrumental importance, and Catholics are exhorted to endure present sufferings patiently, in hopes of heavenly reward. On the other hand, the Church long ago developed a tradition ascribing great value to the earthly institutions of

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[33]Jure Krišto, "Katolička Crkva u II Svjetskom Ratu" (in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 3, 1995, Zagreb), p. 470.

[34]*Katolički List* (24 April, 1937), quoted in Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Balkan Babel: Politics, Culture and Religion in Yugoslavia* (Boulder, 1992), p.124.

[35]Jakov Blažević, *Mač, a ne mir: za pravnu sigurnost gradjana* (vol. 3 of *Svjedočanstava revolucionarna*) (Zagreb, Sarajevo, Belgrade, 1980), p. 164.

> the Church, and a concomitant interest in any temporal matters that affect its institutional interests.[36]

For their part, the Communists attached considerable importance to the establishment of relations with the higher clergy. This was the key to settling the relationship between Church and state in the immediate post-war period, and their aim was to neutralize what they saw as a possible foe. Until the closing phase of the war, coming into contact with the bishops was difficult, but the Communists did make approaches to some, and established some form of contact with several of them. The opportunities for contacts depended on the vicissitudes of war and the extent of the territory held by the Partisans.

Nevertheless, in accordance with the Popular Front line, the Communist leaders at least sought to avoid measures or actions that would antagonize the Church. As described earlier, the Communists envisaged that the separation of Church and state would mean that the Church's influence in such areas as education and marital matters would be severely restricted, thus denying the Church the central position in Croatian society to which it had been accustomed. Clearly the bishops would look negatively upon such an outcome. Thus, for much of the war the Communists did not insist upon the separation of Church and state, considering it inopportune to implement it until they were established in power, and had less reason to worry about the opposition of the Church.[37]

The range of options open to the Church leaders was limited. While the Church had considerable moral authority among the Croats and Slovenes, the ability of its leaders to influence the outcome of events was slight. The bishops had little choice but to make the best possible terms with a Communist government, and to operate within the framework offered. Based upon the conciliatory tones adopted by the Communist leaders and the promises that freedom of religion would be respected, Church leaders would try to reach some kind of accommodation with the new authorities. However, the options of the

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[36]Pedro Ramet (ed.), *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies* (Durham, North Carolina, 1990), p. 3.

[37]Živojinović, p. 62; Petešić, pp. 16-17.

Yugoslav bishops were further limited by the necessity that any formal agreement on the regulation of the position of the Church in the country would have to be agreed with the Holy See, which, as we have seen, was implacably opposed to Communism.

As described earlier, the compromises of the Popular Front policy were always seen by the Communist leaders as a temporary expedient to help smooth their path to power. Once firmly in power, they were determined to implement their revolution. As this thesis will show, that would inevitably mean attacking the position of the Church. Faced with this, the bishops could opt for a quiet, conciliatory approach, salvaging what they could for the Church. Or they could conclude that little was likely to be achieved by this, and opt for confrontation. But the power to shape events was with the Communists, and not with the Church.

The Church and the Popular Front

Notwithstanding the inevitable difficulties that the Communists would face in approaching the Church and the narrowness of the terms within which they were prepared to grant religious freedom, the Partisans sought in several ways to gain the trust, or at least the acceptance, of the clergy and faithful. Priests and churches continued to operate in areas under Partisan control. A decision was taken to appoint chaplains to Partisan units. Efforts were made to attract clergy who were sympathetic to the Partisans, and to use them for propaganda purposes. Measures which would encroach upon spheres that the churches considered their own were avoided. As far as possible, pronouncements or declarations that might offend the churches were also avoided. And efforts were made to establish cordial relations with senior church figures.

The leading Communist and member of the Politburo Milovan Djilas has written of the Party leadership that "no one denied the tradition and vital meaning of religion and of the divine service for the people, or their benefit for the Partisans."[38] Thus Zečević, in his

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[38]Milovan Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 201.

report in Bihać cited earlier, insisted that the clergy must be free to go about their duties, and that Church property must be protected. Throughout the war much was made of the fact that churches continued to operate and religious festivals were celebrated in Partisan-held territory. The Partisan press, in October 1941, quoted a parish priest who greeted liberation by the Partisans, asserting that no obstacles had been put in his way.[39] Much attention was paid to the celebration of Christmas.[40] Mladen Iveković, a member of the Executive Committee of AVNOJ, explained the significance of the celebration of Christmas in Bihać in 1942:-

> Right in the middle of the war, in the centre of the first Partisan state, the new authorities wanted to show that it did not enter their heads to behave in a sectarian or leftist manner towards religious feelings. That was not, of course, any kind of momentary or tactical concession to Catholicism or Clericalism, but the principled position that the National Liberation Movement had adopted towards religion in general. Religious rites were performed in the churches and mosques freely and without hindrance.[41]

Of course, the real importance of the celebration of Christmas appears in the first sentence. It was about making an impression. As to the assertion that this was not a mere tactical move, the clue as to what this really meant is in the last sentence. Religious freedom meant that religious rites could be performed in the churches. The full range of other activities which the Church was accustomed to being involved in, in the social sphere of the life of the people, was not to be included in this religious freedom. The granting of religious freedom was strictly limited, and the motivation for it was political, to gain acceptance among the people, who would otherwise be fearful of "atheistic Communism."

Zečević was rather more forthright about the real importance of allowing Christmas to be celebrated without hindrance in Bihać. He, together with Ivan Ribar, the President of AVNOJ, and some other "comrades" attended the Catholic Christmas Midnight Mass, choosing a church whose priest was reckoned to be more "progressive" than the other

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[39]Petešić, pp. 21-22.

[40]*ibid.* pp. 47-51.

[41]Cited in Petešić, p. 48.

Catholic priests. He explained the reason for such efforts to make a good impression on the religious believers in Bihać thus:-

> These contacts and discussions cleared the way to a better mutual understanding. From these activities the people saw that the National Liberation Movement had the same attitude towards all faiths. And that, again, made possible a more extensive mobilization of new fighters for the ranks of our units.[42]

Even Tito made his contribution to the Christmas spirit. In a speech to the Fourth (Krajiška) Division on 7 January 1943 (the Orthodox Christmas) he noted that they were celebrating Christmas in better circumstances than the previous year, and foretold that they would celebrate the next Christmas in yet better conditions, freely, on their own soil.[43] This observance of religious feasts continued throughout the war. For example, a Croatian Partisan newspaper from the coastal, Primorje region, *Primorski Vjesnik*, appeared in April 1944 with the words "Happy Easter" printed across the face of the front page.[44] On 24 December 1944 the Commander and Political Commissar of a Partisan Battalion sent Vladimir Nazor, a renowned poet and figurehead leader of the Croatian Partisans' political movement, ZAVNOH (the Territorial Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia), greetings for the "People's holiday of Christmas and New Year."[45] In addition, the Partisans often took pains to see to it that the religious needs of the population were satisfied. On one feast of the Virgin Mary they brought the parish priest from the parish of Brštanovo, in the diocese of Split, to Postinje to celebrate Mass, as the local parish priest had fled to Sinj.[46]

Near the end of the war, Evelyn Waugh, one of the British liaison officers with the Partisans, sent a lengthy report on the Catholic Church in the Partisan-controlled areas

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[42]Vlada Zečević, "Poverenje naroda" in *Bihačka Republika, 4/9/42-29/1/43*, Book 1, *Zbornik članaka*, (Bihać, 1965), pp. 228-229.

[43]*Zbornik*, Series II, Book 7, pp. 270-273.

[44]*Primorski Vjesnik*, 6 April, 1944.

[45]Hrvatski Državni Arhiv (hereafter HDA), Arhiv Hrvatskog Instituta za Povijest, Zagreb (hereafter HIP), ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, Kut. 17, NV-17/1963.

[46]Ivica Mlivončić, "Držanje vjerskih krugova u vrijeme narodnooslobodilačke borbe", in *Split u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi i socijalističkoj revoluciji, 1941-1945* (Split, 1981), p. 1070.

of the country to the Foreign Office. In it, he described how the traditional feast of St. Blaise was celebrated in Dubrovnik on 3 February 1945 on the instructions of ZAVNOH. The Bishop of Kotor, who was also Apostolic-Vicar of Dubrovnik, was persuaded to preside, in spite of the recent killing of fourteen priests in Dubrovnik. Waugh's report revealed the dual policy of the Partisans towards the Church. On the one hand this episode showed their desire to maintain the appearance of tolerance towards religion, while their attitude towards members of the clergy whom they perceived as enemies was harsh. Waugh adds that hopes for improved relations between the Church and the Partisans were quickly dashed, as the day after the festivities fifteen theology students were drafted into the Army.[47]

Further evidence of the desire of the Communist leadership to reassure Catholics, as well as people of other faiths, was the decision to appoint chaplains to Partisan units. An order of 23 June 1942, signed by Tito as Army Supreme Commander, decreed the establishment of "religious officials" in the brigades, so as to fill a demonstrated need. They would be identified by the wearing of a cross (or a half-moon in the case of Moslems) on their uniform, and would also wear the five-pointed star, the distinguishing badge of the Partisans, on their cap. Their duties would be to keep records of fallen Partisans, to popularize the National Liberation Struggle and the Partisan units among the people in the regions through which they passed, and to minister to all the religious needs of the people, upon demand and without pay. A supplement giving detailed instructions as to the recording of the deaths of Partisans was signed by Zečević as "Religious Officer to the Supreme Command."[48]

Several priests supported the Partisans and helped them, and a few actually joined them. Such priests were put to good use by the Communist leadership, as they had great propaganda value. This was the real purpose of the involvement of priests in the

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[47]Report on the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia by Evelyn Waugh, up to 1 March, 1945 (hereafter Waugh report). PRO, FO371/48910, R5927.

[48]*Zbornik*, Series II, Book 4, pp. 403-404.

movement. As the decree itself implied, the key gain to be had from involving clergymen in the Partisan movement was the appearance that the Partisans respected the Church. It was very useful to have a few pliable priests who could reassure the people that the position of the Church in the emerging new state was assured. The main point was not that they should minister to the spiritual needs of the Partisan soldiers, although they did sometimes do that. Their principal value lay in their effectiveness as instruments of propaganda. Propaganda on behalf of the Partisans was particularly convincing when it came from the mouth of a clergyman. They were the best possible weapon for countering the warnings from the Ustasha authorities and from some among the bishops that the Partisans were led by atheistic Communists committed to the destruction of the Church.

In addition to the use that pro-Partisan clergy were put to, another way in which the clergy could be enlisted into the task of reassuring the population as to the Partisans' attitude towards the Church and the clergy, was through the holding of meetings of clergy, and the issuing of declarations by them. The advantage of these was that a larger number of clergy, many of whom were at best lukewarm towards the Partisans, could be engaged in the propaganda effort.

Zečević began organizing priests' conferences during the period of the Partisans' stay in Bihać in late 1942. He described the purpose of a meeting of the Serbian Orthodox clergy in Srpska Jasenica on 15 November 1942 thus: "The aim of the meeting was that the priests should be more actively included in the movement, thus considerably broadening the base of the uprising."[49] The declaration of the meeting called upon the Serbian people and clergy and all patriotic and freedom-loving people and clergy of other faiths to join the "holy national liberation struggle." It commented favourably on the position of the Orthodox Church in Russia, and noted how priests, following the victorious Partisan units, had been able to renew the Church life of the

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[49]Zečević, *Poverenje naroda*, p. 227.

Serbian people, and had never been freer in carrying out their priestly duties.[50] This piece clearly reveals the Partisan strategy, to present the position of the churches and the clergy in the areas under their control in the best possible light, and to appeal to the clergy to join them.

At about the same time, Zečević also held two conferences for the Islamic and Catholic clergy, one in Bihać and one in Cazin, at which three Catholic priests were present. He reported that:-

> I explained our position towards religious faiths and officials, and called upon them sincerely and honestly to join the national liberation struggle, and regularly to explain to the people the need for the armed unity of the Serbs, Croats and Moslems in the struggle against the occupiers, the Ustashas and the Chetniks.[51]

Another important means by which the Communists sought to regulate their relations with the Church was through the formation of the Religious Affairs Commissions. Among the plans for the formation of a proto-government in Bihać, which were shelved following objections from Moscow, was a proposal that one of the commissions of the government should be for Religion.[52] It seems, however, that a religious section, responsible to the Executive Committee of AVNOJ, was established during the period in Bihać in late 1942. As we have already seen, Zečević wrote a report on behalf of the Religious Section on 26 December 1942.[53] It is not clear that this section functioned after the Partisans retreat from Bihać in early January 1943. Throughout much of 1943 the priority of the Partisans was the desperate struggle to survive in the face of efforts by the Germans and their allies to wipe them out. Purely political considerations regained their prominence only in the second half of the year, and it seems that the Religious Section was quietly forgotten for a time.

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[50]*Izvori za istoriju SKH.* Series A, part 2, *Dokumenti centralnih organa KPJ, NOR i revolucija, 1941-1945* (hereafter *Dokumenti centralnih organa*), Book 8, pp. 686-689.

[51]Report, signed by Zečević, of the religious section of the Executive Committee of AVNOJ, dated 26 December, 1942, in Nešović, *Stvaranje nove Jugoslavije*, pp. 150-151.

[52]Petešić, p. 34.

[53]Nešović, *Stvaranje nove Jugoslavije*, pp. 150-151.

By the end of the year, however, the formation of a Religious Commission was back on the agenda. At the first session of NKOJ (the new government established by the second session of AVNOJ in Jajce in November 1943) and the Presidency of AVNOJ on 3 December 1943, Tito's proposal that a Religious Commission should be founded under the Presidency of AVNOJ was adopted.[54] On this model the various territorial liberation committees (such as ZAVNOH in Croatia) established their religious commissions in 1944.

Thus the Communist leadership hoped not only to avoid antagonizing the clergy and to gain their passive acceptance of Partisan rule, but where possible to encourage the active involvement of members of the clergy in the movement. They made strenuous efforts in this direction among both the Croat and the Slovene clergy, encountering severe obstacles in both cases. As described earlier, the conditions under which both the Communists and the Catholic Church operated in Slovenia and the Croat-inhabited lands of Croatia and Bosnia during the war were very different. The approach of the Communists to the achievement of their goals, and the degree of their success, in these two regions should therefore be dealt with separately.

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[54]Petešić, p. 43.

Chapter Two

The War in Croatia and Bosnia

In implementing their popular front policy in Croatia, as already mentioned, the Partisans had to deal not only with widespread suspicion or hostility towards Communism, but with the fact that the proclamation of an independent Croatian state was widely popular. Disillusion with the Ustasha regime quickly set in, and it was the HSS that the KPH identified as its most dangerous longer-term rival. It was against the HSS and Maček that it focused its attacks for most of he war. However, the KPH did not ignore the potential threat from the Catholic Church. Recognizing the prestige of the Church, the Communists' priority was to keep it well away from the political sphere.

For the sake of context, this chapter begins by discussing the responses of the Catholic Church and clergy to Ustasha rule. It then goes on to describe how the KPH applied the popular front policy in Croatia. The policy of the KPH towards the Catholic Church broadly followed its approach to its political rivals in the HSS. Aiming to isolate enemies, it sought to co-opt pliable figures willing to contribute to the Partisan cause. This chapter describes the functions to which the Partisans put compliant members of the clergy. It goes on to show that the Communists were unable to throw off their suspicion of the Church, and that relations with the clergy on the ground were frequently much more difficult than their propaganda sought to portray.

The Catholic Church and the NDH

The NDH presented particular dilemmas to the Catholic Church, as the Ustasha leaders professed to be staunchly Catholic and stoutly anti-Communist, promising to give the Church a special place in the state. However, these proffered advantages had to be set against the brutality of the Ustasha regime and the risks inherent in being too closely identified with it.

Stepinac greeted the proclamation of the NDH with an exultant and immoderate circular on 28 April 1941, whose tone was indicative of the heady nationalism of the time, which the Archbishop and much of the Croatian clergy shared, and of the close connection between Croatian nationalism and the Catholic Church:-

> The times are such that it is no longer the tongue which speaks, but the blood, with its mysterious link with the land, in which we have glimpsed the light of God, and with the people from which we spring ... And who can reproach us if we, as spiritual pastors, add our contribution to the people's joy and rapture, when full of deep emotion and warm gratitude we turn to God the Almighty? For however tangled the web of today's fateful developments; however heterogeneous the factors which influence the course of events, it is nevertheless easy to see the hand of God at work.[1]

To Stepinac it seemed especially fortuitous that the advent of the new Croatian state came at the time of the celebrations to mark the thirteen-hundredth anniversary of the link between Croatia and the Holy See. This appeared to be further evidence of the working of Divine Providence.[2] Two days after the leading Ustasha, Slavko Kvaternik, had proclaimed the NDH, and before the Yugoslav armed forces had capitulated, Stepinac paid him a visit, and on 16 May 1941 he visited Pavelić, who had arrived in Zagreb the previous day. Other bishops also publicly welcomed the formation of the NDH, including Archbishop Šarić of Sarajevo, Bonefačić of Split, Pušić of Hvar, Srebrnić of Krk, Burić of Senj and Akšamović of Djakovo.[3]

Stepinac also took steps to try to facilitate the recognition of the NDH by the Holy See, sending his recommendation to the Vatican to that effect via an official of the nunciature in Belgrade, who passed through Zagreb on his way to Rome. He pointed out to Pavelić that the Holy See had not received an official approach regarding recognition. However, his efforts were to no avail, and in a letter of 11 July, 1941, the Vatican Secretary of State, Maglione, explained that the Holy See would follow its normal practice of not recognizing border changes in wartime. The Holy See sent a

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[1]Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen: pola vijeka klerikalizma u Hrvatskoj*, (2nd edition, Belgrade, 1986), p. 550.

[2]Alexander, "Croatia: The Catholic Church and Clergy", 1919-1945, p. 52.

[3]Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, pp. 555 and 561-567.

representative to the episcopate in the NDH, rather than to the Government, which Stepinac regarded as de facto recognition, but not de jure.[4]

However, Stepinac's initial exultation at the formation of the NDH was soon replaced by disappointment. The surrender of much of the Dalmatian coast to Italy, a condition for Axis support of the Ustasha takeover, dampened the spirits of most Croats, and Stepinac was reportedly devastated.[5] Reports of Ustasha outrages against the Serb population soon reached Zagreb, and Stepinac protested immediately upon hearing of a massacre in Glina on 14 May, appealing that steps be taken to ensure that such occurrences would not be repeated.[6] In a series of letters to the Ustasha Minister Artuković and to Pavelić during the spring and summer of 1941, Stepinac complained about the harshness of anti-Semitic legislation, and especially about the application of it to Jewish converts to Catholicism.[7] The tone of these protests has caused criticism, as it appears that Stepinac was mainly concerned for people who had converted to Catholicism or who had "Aryan characteristics."

Also during the summer of 1941, Stepinac clashed with the Ustasha authorities over the issue of conversions to Catholicism. The authorities issued, on 15 May 1941, a decree simplifying the procedure for conversions that had been inherited from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[8] In fact the motivation behind this was clearly to assimilate part of the Serb community in the NDH as Croats, as was made explicit by the Ustasha Minister Mile Budak in a speech on 22 June 1941, in which he stated that one third of the Serbs in the NDH would be expelled, a third exterminated, and the remaining third

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[4]Citing entries in the diary of the Archdiocese. *Tajni dokumenti o odnosima Vatikana i ustaške "NDH"* (Zagreb, 1952), pp. 31-37; and Jure Krišto, *Katolička Crkva i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, 1941. - 1945.* (Zagreb, 1998), p. 142.

[5]Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 20.

[6]HDA, Rukopisna ostavština Dra. Iva Politea, predmet: Stepinac Dr., kut. 55 (hereafter Politeo), doc. 408.

[7]HDA, Politeo, docs. 133; 135-136; 405-407; 409.

[8]Stella Alexander, *The Triple Myth: A Life of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac* (New York, 1987), p. 75.

converted to Catholicism.[9] Conversions were carried out under threat, and indeed, conversion was in some cases not sufficient to save the hapless Serb peasants. In a circular of 15 May 1941, in articles in the Catholic weekly paper *Katolički List* of 3 June and 11 June, and in a letter by Auxiliary Bishop Lach on 16 July, Stepinac made it clear that the methods being used by the authorities were unacceptable, that genuine conversion can only be on the basis of free-will, and that the process of conversion must be in the hands of the ecclesiastical authorities, without interference from the State.[10]

Following the Bishops' Conference of 17-20 November 1941, Stepinac sent a letter to Pavelić, in which he insisted that conversions must be exclusively in the province of the hierarchy, and that they could only be valid if carried out according to "principles of dogma". He also urged that the civil rights of the Orthodox population should be respected, and that crimes against them or their property, or against Orthodox Church property should be punished severely. He cited a letter of 18 August 1941 from Bishop Mišić of Mostar regarding the atrocities being committed by the Ustashas in Hercegovina, complaining that such brutality was actually damaging the Catholic cause.[11]

It had taken Stepinac some time to appreciate the scale of what was taking place, and to realize that his dream of an independent Croatia was going badly wrong. But during 1942 and 1943 he increasingly criticized the behaviour of the Ustasha regime, his attacks becoming steadily more pointed and direct. In numerous sermons Stepinac made clear his opposition to ideologies based on race.[12] He provoked the ire of the

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[9]*Hrvatski Narod*, 26 June, 1941, cited in Alexander, *Church and State*, p. 22.

[10]Carlo Falconi, *The Silence of Pius XII* (London, 1970), pp. 275-286; Alexander, *Church and State*, pp. 26-27.

[11]Richard Pattee, *The Case of Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac* (Milwaukee, 1953) (hereafter Pattee), Doc. LII, pp. 384-395.

[12]For example, in sermons in May 1942 and October 1943. HDA, Politeo, docs. 79 and 84-86.

Ustasha regime by such statements. In November 1943, he was publicly attacked by the NDH Minister of Public Instruction, Julije Makanec, in an article in *Nova Hrvatska*.[13]

In addition to these general criticisms of fascist ideology, in letters to leading Ustasha officials Stepinac condemned specific occurrences. For example, in a letter to Pavelić of 26 May 1942, he protested at the expulsions of the population of Kordun.[14] Other interventions on behalf of Serb victims of the Ustashas included a protest at the shootings of Serb hostages shortly after the foundation of the NDH; a protest at the deportations of Serbs from the Sisak area on 20 June 1941; a protest at the plunder of Serb property in Pakrac in September 1942; and an intervention on behalf of persecuted Serbs in Crkveni Bok in October 1942.[15] It was, however, always Catholics who were his first concern. In a letter to Pavelić of 24 February 1943, he protested at the murder of seven Slovene priests, who had been expelled by the Germans to Croatia, at the Ustasha death camp at Jasenovac, describing it as "a crime that cries out for vengeance from heaven". Jasenovac itself he described as "a shameful stain on the honour of the Independent State of Croatia."[16] When presented with evidence of the unworthy behaviour of Ivo Guberina, a priest under his jurisdiction, he wrote to him in March 1943 informing him that he was barred from priestly functions on account of his behaviour, which had been "contrary to his priestly calling, and to the scandal of the faithful."[17]

The Ustasha leadership became increasingly infuriated by Stepinac's conduct towards their regime. The Papal delegate in Zagreb, Abbot Ramiro Marcone, was approached by Pavelić with a request that Stepinac be withdrawn.[18] There were even

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[13]HDA, Politeo, docs. 87-88.

[14]HDA, Politeo, doc. 100.

[15]Included in a memo of October 1946 from the Archbishop's palace in Zagreb to Stepinac's defence lawyers, Ivo Politeo and Matko Katičić, listing facts and documents in defence of Stepinac, HDA, Politeo, doc. 238.

[16]HDA, Politeo, doc. 108.

[17]HDA, Politeo, doc. 442.

[18]Included in a memo of October 1946 from the Archbishop's palace in Zagreb to Stepinac's defence lawyers, Ivo Politeo and Matko Katičić, listing facts and documents in defence of Stepinac, HDA, Politeo,

rumours of plans to arrest or otherwise dispose of him. During a visit to Rome he met the renowned Croatian sculptor, Ivan Meštrović, who reported that, as Stepinac was leaving, a messenger from the Jesuit General warned him of a plot against his life. Stepinac replied fatalistically that "either the Nazis will kill me now, or the Communists later."[19]

Stepinac's disillusion with the Ustashas was so great that, according to one source, he was even ready to entertain the idea of a restoration of Yugoslavia. Stanislav Rapotec, a young Slovene landed in Yugoslavia by a British submarine in early 1942, found that secret Serb and Jewish organizations in Zagreb regarded Stepinac highly. In a series of interviews with Stepinac, Rapotec found that he was receptive to the idea of a restored Yugoslavia, though organized as a federation. Upon meeting Stepinac, Rapotec at once told him who he was and that he represented the Yugoslav Government-in-exile. Stepinac declared that he was very pleased that a Yugoslav Government emissary had come to see him, he assisted Rapotec in obtaining documents, and he promised to help in setting up a channel for funds for Serb refugees from the NDH. As to his relations with the Ustasha regime, he asserted that these were merely formal, that he could not break with the regime, as then he would not be able to help anyone: "I could have withdrawn demonstratively, and gone into a monastery, and after the war I would have emerged to enjoy a martyr's reputation, but in so doing I would not have improved things, and would actually have made them worse for those who are in need of help."[20]

However, although by 1943 Stepinac's relations with the Ustashas were very bad, some members of the Catholic clergy were deeply compromised by their support for, and even participation in, the activities of the Ustashas. Rapotec, while exonerating Stepinac, stated that the Catholic Church had played a sad role in the NDH, especially in regions of mixed population: "On it falls the dreadful responsibility for one of the greatest shames

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doc. 236.

[19]Ivan Meštrović, *Uspomene na političke ljude i dogadjaje* (Zagreb, 1993), pp. 334-335.

[20]Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Unconventional Perceptions of Yugoslavia, 1940-1945* (New York, 1985), pp. 79-99.

of twentieth-century civilization. One hundred thousand graves of innocent victims will bear eternal witness against these 'preachers of love'."[21]

In particular, the clergy have been accused of complicity in the forced conversions of Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism. Because some Catholic priests cooperated in carrying out conversions, the clergy have been accused of supporting the spiritual climate in which Ustasha terror was perpetrated.[22] Certainly the clergy included enthusiastic supporters of the Ustashas, including a number who were Ustasha functionaries, such as Fr. Božidar Bralo in Sarajevo, Fr. Petar Berković in Knin, Fr. Ilija Tomas near Čapljina and Fr. Dragutin Kamber in Doboj.[23]

The most notorious of the Ustasha priests, Fr. Vjekoslav Filipović, a Bosnian Franciscan from near Banja Luka, actually participated in massacres of Serbs. In 1941, he helped the Ustashas in his area by identifying the Serb inhabitants, who were then slaughtered. Under the name Miroslav Majstorović he later served in Jasenovac, where he is reported personally to have carried out murders.[24] In his report to the Foreign Office, Waugh, an ardent Catholic, intended to defend the Church in Croatia, but Majstorović he denounced as a "ruffian". Others whom he condemned as active Ustashas included Fr. Jole Bujanović and a Fr. Brkljanić.[25] The Bosnian Franciscans in general have often been singled out for particular criticism, as relatively large numbers of them supported the Ustasha cause. Waugh was severe in his criticism:-

> For some time the Croat Franciscans had caused misgivings at Rome by their independence and narrow patriotism. They are mainly recruited from the least cultured part of the population, and there is abundant evidence that several wholly unworthy men were attracted to the order by the security and comparative ease which it offered. Many of these were sent to Italy for training. Their novitiate was in the neighbourhood of Pavelić's headquarters at Sienna, where Ustasha agents made contact with them and imbued them with Pavelić's ideas. They, in turn, on returning to their country, passed on his ideas ...

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[21]*ibid.* p. 90.

[22]Branko Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera protiv sredjivanja prilika u Jugoslaviji (Mart 1945 - Septembar 1946)", in *Istorija XX veka: zbornik radova* (Belgrade, 1963), p. 264.

[23]Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, 1941-1945* (2nd edition, Zagreb, 1978), pp. 218-219.

[24]Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, pp. 645-650.

[25]Waugh report, PRO, FO371/48910, R5927.

The Ustasha supporters among the clergy went up to the highest level. Archbishop Šarić of Sarajevo openly adhered to them, having been in contact with Pavelić since before the war.[26] Maček noted that many Catholic clergy "adopted the bloody Ustasha party with lamentable eagerness."[27]

The numbers of clergy who supported the Ustashas should not be exaggerated, however. Among the secular clergy (those who did not belong to a religious order) there were very few. The Archbishop's palace estimated that of roughly five hundred priests in the Archdiocese, about fifteen were Ustashas and thirty were sympathizers. The noted Ustasha priest Vilim Cecelja said that the Ustashas blamed Stepinac's prohibition on political activities by the clergy for this.[28] That is not to say that many of the clergy did not welcome the formation of the NDH. But that is something entirely different from being a supporter of the Ustashas or of their genocidal policies. Waugh stressed that "the great majority welcomed the new regime and attempted to work loyally under it, even when disillusioned, performing their parochial duties and taking no active part in politics."[29]

As to the forced conversions, it is clear that many priests who carried them out did so in order to save the lives of those they were converting. Rapotec spoke warmly of Bishop Akšamović of Djakovo, who had frankly told Serbs in his diocese that if they wished to join the Catholic Church in order to save their lives they could do so.[30] There are a number of documented examples of clergy who carried out conversions solely to save lives. A Slovene priest, Fr. Franc Žužek, in Glina, where one of the most notorious massacres of the war had taken place immediately after the Ustasha takeover, carried

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[26]*Dokumenti o protunarodnom radu i zločinima jednog dijela katoličkog klera* (Zagreb, 1946), pp. 27-28.

[27]Maček, *In the Struggle for Freedom*, P. 235.

[28]Included in a memo of October 1946 from the Archbishop's palace in Zagreb to Stepinac's defence lawyers, Ivo Politeo and Matko Katičić, listing facts and documents in defence of Stepinac, HDA, Politeo, doc. 236.

[29]Waugh report, PRO, FO371/48910, R5927.

[30]Pavlowitch, *Unconventional Perceptions*, p. 99; Others were less charitable in their estimation of Akšamović's motives in this appeal than Rapotec. *Dokumenti o protunarodnom radu i zločinima jednog dijela katoličkog klera*, p. 55.

out conversions only so that people could obtain the necessary documents. Serbs confirmed that he had explained to them that after the war they could choose whichever faith they wished. On one occasion he obtained the release of a group of Serbs by asserting that they were Catholics.[31] Fr. Zlatko Sivrić, a Bosnian Franciscan, gave Serbs false papers stating that they had been converted.[32] Another parish priest, Fr. Dragutin Štimac, who spoke out publicly against Ustasha persecution of the Serbs, and was hanged by the Germans in 1943, carried out conversions as the best way to help the Serbs in his area, but he considered those conversions to be only formal.[33] Emilio Pallua, a prominent Catholic layman who after the war became secretary of the Croatian Religious Affairs Commission, was strongly against the conversions, but, he said, Church people, such as the Zagreb canons, Bakšić, Slamić, Lončar and Borić, regarded it as a matter of sparing lives, and merely a formal conversion. Even Rittig, who was to be the most prominent Catholic priest to join the Partisan movement, carried out formal conversions in 1941, before his flight from Zagreb to Italian-occupied Dalmatia. Pallua was one of those whom Rittig mandated to instruct the converts, but he regarded the conversions as being invalid and just "on paper", though he did not consider it wise to tell that to most of the converts.[34]

So the negative picture of the role of the Catholic clergy in Croatia and Bosnia during the Second World War is not so simple. One can, however, point to certain ambiguities. For example, there was clearly a disingenuousness in the protestations of some of the clergy that they had behaved correctly over the matter of conversions. Many saw the chance to gain converts as a great opportunity for Catholicism and for Croatia, and, while disapproving of the use of force, grasped that opportunity. The approach to the issue of conversions varied among the bishops. Like Stepinac, Bishop Mileta of

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[31]Petešić, pp. 89-94.

[32]*ibid.* p. 113.

[33]*ibid.* p. 193.

[34]Emilio Pallua, *Uspomene*. Transcripts of conversations with his wife, Sonia Bićanić (hereafter Pallua).

Šibenik interpreted the rules governing conversions strictly. In response to requests from his priests, Mileta refused to give a general approval for conversions. Each case was to be considered individually and each candidate must show that they were making a fully informed, free choice. The Ordinaria was to be kept informed. Mileta ordered caution, as it was clear that Orthodox believers were not converting out of conviction, but "because they are forced, and because they are afraid in the present conditions." [35] In contrast, in 1942, Bishop Šimrak, the Greek Catholic Bishop of Križevci, urged his clergy to take the historic opportunity for conversions.[36]

On 22 March 1942, a Fr. Kučmanović from Karlovac wrote, in response to a request from the Archbishop's See, a report regarding the large number of converts in the area. He claimed that as far as he knew no one had been forced to change their faith, and that the priests in the area were acting in accordance with the directives of the Church hierarchy.[37] Yet it must have been clear to anyone that the surge of conversions following the onset of Ustasha terror against the Serb population was no coincidence. Fr. Andjelko Gregić from Borovo wrote in December 1942 to the Serbian Orthodox priest of the town, who had fled to Serbia, and with whom he had clearly been on friendly terms before the war. He lamented all that had happened, acknowledging that large numbers of Serbs had converted out of fear for their lives, and that the rules laid down by the episcopate had not been followed. Yet even he suggested that there was a positive outcome, in the achievement of the unity of the faith.[38]

Even Stepinac's attitude reveals this ambiguity. Committed as he was to the idea of an independent Croatian State he paid too little attention to the hand that had offered the chance for that State to become a reality, and tended, much of the time, to be overly

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[35]Jure Krišto, "Vjerski prijelazi u NDH - primjer Šibenske biskupije." (in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 2, 1997), pp. 239-246.

[36]Herbert Butler, *The Sub-Prefect should have held his tongue, and other Essays* (London, 1990), pp. 277-278, quoting the diocesan magazine.

[37]HDA, Politeo, doc. 415.

[38]Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, pp. 697-698.

indulgent towards the Ustasha authorities, even when it was clear what a savage reign they had inflicted on the areas under their control. The post-war French ambassador in Belgrade, Jean Payart, described Stepinac's position towards the Ustashas as equivocal, in that despite his clear anti-Nazi position, "profound spirituality and elevation of thought", he could not but be sensible to the opportunities offered by a regime which professed to be very Catholic and which offered collaboration.[39] Clearly the wartime situation was full of dilemmas for the Catholic bishops.

Appalled by the excesses of the Ustashas, Stepinac's attitude towards them was nevertheless ambiguous. Stella Alexander wrote that "the ambiguity of his relations with the Ustasha authorities arose out of the fact that they were Croats and Catholics, members of his flock; they could be appealed to, the erring ones could be reproved and chastised."[40] There was no such ambiguity, however, in his attitude towards the Communists, in spite of the great efforts on their part to reach an accommodation with the Church, and to attract Catholics to the Partisan movement.

The Communists and the Croat Question

The policy of the KPH towards the Catholic Church needs to be seen in the context of its general approach in seeking to attract Croats to its cause. KPH leader Andrija Hebrang sought to persuade Croats that the KPH alone was fighting for Croat national aspirations, Croatian sovereignty and statehood, in union with the other Yugoslav peoples. Following the policy of the Popular Front, he aimed to create as broad a front as possible, under the leadership of the KPH.[41]

However, the Party in Croatia initially had a problem, in that its main areas of operation were in the Krajina regions, with their very substantial Serb population, and

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[39]Letter of 21 September, 1946. French Foreign Ministry Archives, Paris, Série: Europe, 1944-1960/Yougoslavie (hereafter FM, Paris), vol. 30, docs. 238-241.

[40]Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 2.

[41]Banac, pp. 84-85.

most of the Partisan fighters were Serbs. This was not surprising. In 1941, the Partisan leadership found itself having to react to and try to direct and gain control of what was in fact a largely spontaneous uprising in the Serb-inhabited areas of the country. In the spring of 1942, Tito took the decision to move the centre of Partisan activities up to north-west Bosnia and the neighbouring regions of Lika, Banija and Kordun in Croatia precisely because in these areas there was a ready-made rebellion by the Serb population waiting for someone to offer it leadership. To Croats, the Partisan movement often seemed like a Serb organization, and indeed, for the first two years of the war this impression had considerable foundation. Thus the Croatian Party leadership had a problem in trying convincingly to persuade the Croat population that they stood for Croatian national aspirations when in fact most of their fighters were Serbs.[42] The problem of how to attract Croats to the movement was Hebrang's preoccupation during his time as leader of the Croatian Party. He had to strike a fine balance, so as to avoid alienating the Serb Partisans, upon whom the movement depended for much of the war, through his stress on Croat concerns.[43]

In seeking to persuade Croats that the KPH alone could be trusted to struggle for the achievement of Croatia's traditional national aspirations, the KPH repeatedly attacked the HSS for betraying the Croatian cause by its passivity in the face of the Axis occupation and its links with the Yugoslav (which the KPH characterized as "Great Serbian") Government in exile.[44] Attempts were made during the summer of 1941 to reach an understanding with the HSS leadership. This was during the brief period between the attack on the Soviet Union and the Partisans' falling out with Mihailović, when attempts were made to build a genuine Popular Front. However, Maček persisted in rejecting any cooperation with the Communists, continuing his passive attitude

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[42]Irvine, pp. 114-120.

[43]*ibid.* pp. 170-173.

[44]*ibid.* p. 135.

towards the occupation.[45] For Hebrang, Maček represented, because of the devotion of most of the Croatian population to him, the main threat to the Communists' hopes of taking power in Croatia after the war, and he was therefore subjected to frequent ferocious attacks in the Croatian Partisan press for his supposed treachery to the Croat cause.[46]

At the same time Hebrang sought, with his emphasis on Croatian national concerns, to attract ordinary HSS supporters and members, trying to build up a mass following among the Croatian population, hitherto loyal to Maček and the HSS, and to entice more Croats to the Partisan movement. In the summer of 1943, ZAVNOH was formed as a proto-government for Croatia, which would include non-Communists, and would be the font of Croatia's restored state sovereignty. While ZAVNOH down-played Communism, promising to respect private property and not to introduce major economic or social reforms, a major theme was to stress a claimed continuity between the ideology of the radical peasantist leader and predecessor of Maček as leader of the HSS, Stjepan Radić, and the ideas of the KPH, claiming that Maček was not only a traitor to Croatia but also a traitor to the ideals of Radić.[47]

Efforts were also made to co-opt pliable leading figures from the HSS to the Partisan movement, hoping thus to neutralize the HSS as an effective competitor. Also in 1943, an HSS organization within ZAVNOH was set up under the leadership of Magovac. This HSS organization, the Executive Committee of the HSS, was to operate strictly within the framework of the Communist-dominated movement, and would not be allowed to form cells at the local level, being expected to operate solely through ZAVNOH, something that would lead to great friction between Hebrang and Magovac. The revived *Slobodni*

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[45]*ibid.* pp. 121-122.

[46]*ibid.* pp. 147-148.

[47]*ibid.* pp. 148-150.

Dom was to be another mouthpiece for the Partisans, laying stress on the alleged treachery of Maček and other HSS leaders.[48]

The themes that underlay Hebrang's policy towards the HSS also determined the attitude of the KPH leadership to the Catholic Church. In summary, these were to isolate leaders who were perceived as a real or potential threat to the Communist takeover of power; to attract ordinary Croats by stressing traditional Croatian concerns and aspirations, and avoiding adopting positions or acting in a way that would antagonize them; and to co-opt pliable leading figures to the Partisan movement, thus neutralizing them as potential competitors, and drawing support away from other figures who were less well disposed towards the Partisans.

The Church and the Popular Front in Croatia

Hebrang had identified the HSS, and Maček personally, as the Communists' main competitor, and had concentrated the fire of the Party on him. Indeed, the HSS was seriously weakened during the war, although this had more to do with its own passivity and general ineffectiveness than with the attacks of the Communists upon it. The fear of the Croatian Communists was that, with the HSS weakened, the Catholic Church might start to assume the role of the defender of the Croatian national interest in its place. It was seen as a potentially formidable opponent.[49] Their policy was therefore born of caution. They recognized the enormous authority that the Church traditionally wielded in Croatia, and that its strength and prestige had not been damaged during the war. So attacks on the Church hierarchy were avoided, as were encroachments into spheres which the Church regarded as its own, in the social life of the country, together with any political changes that the Church might regard as a challenge to its role. The priority was

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[48]*ibid.* pp. 152-160.

[49]*ibid.* pp. 193-194.

to avoid offending the Church, and to leave it to its sphere, well away from the political scene.

As to the lower clergy, in accordance with Tito's directive that priests should be enrolled in the Partisan movement, several were appointed as military chaplains. Zečević, in a speech in November 1942, referred to six religious officers, apart from himself, who were attached to particular brigades.[50] They were, however, all Orthodox chaplains, and it appears that, in spite of Tito's decree, Catholic priests were not appointed to Croat Partisan units. It seems that, at least in 1942, this was not for lack of will. Zečević, in the same speech cited above, made the following appeal to the Catholic clergy:-

> The ranks of the "NOV i POJ" (National Liberation Army and Partisan Units of Yugoslavia) are full of Croats, and from day to day those ranks are becoming more and more solid and firm. Therefore it is the duty of the Catholic clergy, at the last minute, to be with its people and to join the Partisans, so that tomorrow they won't be asked where were they today, as the Croatian people will cast traitorous priests away from itself. Catholic Priests! The Croatian people is calling you - come to your people in the Partisan units.

The leading Croatian Communist and head of the first post-war Croatian Government, Vladimir Bakarić, has confirmed that there were no chaplains in Croat units.[51] Evelyn Waugh noted in his report that, from what he had seen, the statement that there were official chaplains in the Partisan Army was incorrect. He had seen no evidence of them in the areas of Croatia where he had been, although he had heard that there were chaplains in Slavonia.[52] Rittig noted that a Slovene priest, Fr. Janko Petan, was chaplain to the 40th Army division, in Slavonia.[53] However, given Bakarić's testimony, it seems likely that Petan's case was fairly isolated.

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[50]Speech by Zečević to a conference of Serbian Orthodox priests in Srpska Jasenica, 15 November, 1942. *Bihačka Republika, 4/9/1942-29/1/1943*, Book 2, *Zbornik dokumenata*, (Bihać, 1965), pp. 439-442.

[51]A letter from Bakarić of 7 October, 1976, cited by Vladimir Dedijer in "Istorijska gradja iz narodnooslobodilačke borbe, 1941-1945. O Prosvjetiteljskoj ulozi Svetoga Save", in *Sava Nemanjić - Sveti Sava, istorija i predanje* (Belgrade, 1979), p. 470.

[52]Waugh report, PRO, FO371/48910, R5927.

[53]Document regarding Petan's wartime record, dated 26 July, 1945. HDA, Komisija za vjerska pitanja izvršnog vijeća NRH (hereafter VK), kut. 3, doc. 302.

Nevertheless, although it seems that priests were not appointed to Croat Partisan units on a formal basis, many of them did fulfil a variety of functions within the Partisan movement. They carried out funerals and even weddings of Partisans in liberated territory, and there were instances of them presiding over the taking of oaths by Partisan units.[54] A photograph has survived of Fr. Kuzma Jedretić from Istria blessing the national flag, complete with the five-pointed star in the centre, for a Partisan unit.[55]

Foremost among the Croatian Partisan clergy was Rittig. Rittig had been prominent in Croatian Church and political life since before the First World War. In his youth he had for a time been secretary to Bishop Strossmayer of Djakovo, from whom he inherited his commitment to the idea of Yugoslav unity. He entered the Croatian Sabor (diet) in 1908, and was a Zagreb town councillor from 1917. Also in 1917, he travelled to Switzerland to establish contact with the Yugoslav Committee, a group of mainly Croatian émigrés who had spent the war lobbying among the western powers for Yugoslav union. In 1918, he was a member of the National Council in Zagreb, which brought the Yugoslav-inhabited territories of the Habsburg Monarchy into union with Serbia, and in 1919 was a delegate to the Interim Assembly in Belgrade. Following the assassination of King Alexander in 1934, he was one of the signatories of a memorandum to Prince Paul regarding Croat alienation from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. As parish priest of St. Mark's church in Zagreb from 1917, he used the wealth of the parish to build and restore numerous other churches. He was also a noted champion of the Glagolitic (Old Slavonic) liturgy.[56]

As a staunch advocate of Yugoslav union, he found himself in a difficult position upon the Ustasha takeover in 1941. In an effort to save himself he initially spoke in favour of the NDH, but that did not help him. At the end of June 1941 one of Pavelić's secretaries warned the Archbishop's palace of Rittig's impending arrest. Stepinac passed

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[54]Petešić, pp. 27-30.

[55]*Danica Pučki Kalendar* (Zagreb, 1962), p. 55.

[56]For biographical details about Rittig see Petešić, pp. 130-136, and *Danica Pučki Kalendar* (Zagreb, 1962), pp. 51-53.

the warning on to Rittig, who immediately left for Italian-occupied Dalmatia. While he was there he came into contact with local Partisan sympathizers. He was also an old friend of Ivan Ribar, the President of AVNOJ. Following the Italian capitulation in the summer of 1943 he once again had to flee, and so he joined the Croatian Partisan leadership in Otočac.[57]

Rittig had come to see the Partisans as the only group capable of reuniting the country and putting an end to the fratricidal strife that had torn it apart since 1941. He thus committed himself wholeheartedly to the movement. As a member of ZAVNOH he took on the role of a kind of coordinator on religious questions, and as an intermediary between the Catholic clergy and the Partisans.[58] He also hoped to perform a more exalted role as intermediary between the Church authorities and the Partisan leadership, to interpret each side to the other and thus help set relations between the Church and the new regime on a sound footing.[59] He was a busy propagandist, devoting a great deal of energy to the writing of speeches and sermons, articles for the Partisan press, pamphlets, and numerous tracts and letters to the clergy. His major concern was for the clergy, as he tried to deflect them from what he saw as the errant path that many of them had been following, and to persuade them to "stand with the people", which meant, of course, to support the National Liberation Movement.

There were two major strands in the propaganda that he directed at the clergy on behalf of the Partisan Movement. One was to reassure them that the Church would not be persecuted under Communist rule. Thus he stressed that freedom of conscience would be respected, that the Church would be able to go about its work, in such fields as religious education, without hindrance, that private property and the sanctity of the family

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[57]Pallua

[58]Petešić, p. 145.

[59]In a note under the title "Da li je narodni oslobodilački pokret u stvari komunizam?" ("Is the National Liberation Movement in fact Communism?") in HDA, Rukopisna ostavština Svetozara Ritiga (sic) (1874-1961) (hereafter Rittig), kut. 2, 2/2, Rittig referred to his duty to remove all causes of difficulty between the Partisan movement and the Church.

would be guaranteed. The other strand was to attack those clergy who had supported the Ustasha regime, or who had acted passively, trying to stand aside from the fray, appealing to them that they must declare themselves for the Liberation Movement "before it is too late."

Rittig insisted that the Partisan struggle was justified according to Christian principles. He refuted the argument of some clergymen, based on the notion that according to the laws of war there is a duty of obedience to an occupying power, that the Partisans were engaged in an inadmissible rebellion against the legally constituted authorities. The idea that the Ustasha regime might constitute a legal government he dismissed out of hand, concluding that "in the name of Christian morality we categorically protest against the deluded view of those priests who wish to connect the Christian conscience with obedience to a pro-Nazi authority."[60] Rittig also asserted that the Church had nothing to fear from the Partisans, as "built into the foundations of the new Yugoslavia are the natural rights of man, the freedom to use national names, freedom of conscience and religion, the principle of private property and freedom of personal initiative, the sanctity of the family."

He claimed that the Communists had changed, and that there was therefore nothing to be afraid of in the prominence of the Communists in the Partisan movement:-

> Don't you see how Communism has passed its revolutionary phase? Communism is no longer anarchism. Already Lenin was not what Marx had been, and Stalin has gone further, and is today a crucial participant in the ethical and political renewal of the world. Don't you see that in Communism are found the seeds of Christ's Gospel? We do not hesitate to say that the economic and social order of Soviet Communism is closer to the Gospel than was Medieval Feudalism or modern Capitalism.[61]

Together with attempts to reassure the clergy, Rittig set out in stark terms the other side of his appeal to the clergy, with strongly worded attacks on those priests who had supported the Ustasha regime:-

> With the greatest pain in our soul we must recognize that among the young clergy were some Ustasha cut-throats, to the scandal of the whole world and the shame of their calling.

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[60]HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2. Piece entitled "Braćo svećenici!" ("Brother Priests!").

[61]HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2. Letter entitled "Katoličkim svećenicima Hrvatske" ("To the Catholic Priests of Croatia").

> What man of human feelings is not shocked by that? A man can err, and a priest can err, but a cut-throat priest is a criminal above criminals. A cut-throat priest is a new Judas Iscariot. The Church will give the people full satisfaction for the great scandals of these cut-throats. Already many of them have been cast out of their orders and off the holy altar, but the Ustasha authorities have not allowed their names to be published. When blessed peace comes to the world and to our country, the first duty of the Church will be to undertake a severe and thorough cleansing of these Ustasha cut-throats from the ranks of the clergy.[62]

In this extract it can be seen that, alongside the bitter attack on the Ustasha priests, was an attempt to distance the Church itself from them. The Church itself repudiated those priests. The main point for Rittig was that the Church must unambiguously condemn such priests, and thus protect itself from any insinuation that the Church itself was incriminated by Ustasha crimes and by the opposition of individual clergy to the Partisans. In this piece, as in many others, Rittig set alongside "traitorous priests" the example of the priests who had "remained faithful to their people." Thus, although he had fully committed himself to the Partisan cause, Rittig sought to defend the position of the Church. It was a one-sided position, as his idea of what it meant to foster good relations between the Communists and the Catholic clergy meant primarily to persuade the latter to accept the justice of the cause of the former.

This need for the clergy to take a definite stand in the conflict was a theme that Rittig repeatedly returned to. In another piece, in which he attacked deluded priests who fell for the notion that Pavelić was a good Christian, and lamented the fact that some priests had actually participated in Ustasha crimes, he wrote to his "brother priests, you who are remaining silent, don't you feel within yourselves the need to speak out and remove from yourselves and from your Church the doubt that you have been accomplices ...?"[63]
In making these appeals to the clergy to speak out, Rittig frequently tried to impart a sense of urgency. The Partisans would be arriving soon, and there was a need for haste in coming out in favour of them. During 1944, he stressed that the victory of the Partisans was assured, that a new world was being built, and that the old times would not return. He assured the clergy that they had no reason to fear religious persecution,

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[62]HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2. Part of an undated, untitled piece by Rittig.

[63]HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2. Piece entitled "Braćo svećenici!" ("Brother Priests!").

that the Partisans would only move against those who had sided with the occupiers or with the Ustashas, but they could not afford to stand aside from the fray.[64] In order to protect themselves and their Church they must make their position clear. This was in line with the general position of the Partisans in the closing months of the war. No longer prepared to tolerate any ambiguity, they deliberately polarized the situation in Croatia, presenting a straight choice. Any who did not support them would be counted among their enemies and would reap the consequences. Thus behind Rittig's warnings of the need for the clergy to declare themselves for the Partisans was a clearly implied threat.

With this dual approach, reassurances on the one hand and attacks on members of the clergy who opposed the Partisans on the other, Rittig constantly harked back to his own pet themes, the age old dreams of Panslavism and of Yugoslav unification, which were now being realized. He laid great stress on his romantic notions of the traditions of the popular Croatian clergy, standing with their people in times of strife, whose example those clergy who supported the Partisans were now following. And he lamented the failure of the majority of the Croatian clergy to live up to these noble traditions.[65]

To a detached reader, his style seems verbose, his romanticism, with its lofty ideals, naive, unconvincing and tiresome. Yet it appears that he was popular among the Partisans. The published collections of speeches from the sessions of ZAVNOH record that his speeches were received enthusiastically. Evelyn Waugh confirmed this, saying that at Partisan headquarters "he is treated with notable respect", and that "he appears at all official functions, where his speeches are popular."[66] Clearly his message was in tune with the mood among the Partisans. He was, however, a controversial figure. Many Catholics were scandalized by his identification with the Communist cause. Indeed, it does seem that he was in reality manipulated by them as a useful and obliging tool in

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[64]HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2. A collection of hand-written drafts under the title "Manifest svećenicima" ("Manifesto to the Clergy").

[65] For example, his speech to the second session of ZAVNOH, in *Drugo zasjedanje ZAVNOH-a (12-15 Listopada 1943), stenografski zapisnici*, pp. 17-18.

[66]Waugh report, PRO, FO371/48910, R5927.

their endeavours to neutralize the opposition of the Catholic Church. The respect and affection they afforded him has to be seen in the light of the Popular Front policy to gain the adherence of pliable figures from organizations, especially the HSS and the Catholic Church in Croatia, which were perceived as potential threats. Rittig genuinely sought, in his own way, to defend the Church. Waugh, despite his concern for Rittig's politics, concluded that he was a sincere priest, and described him as a "valuable link between [the Partisans] and decency."[67] However, his naivety is clear from another passage of Waugh's report:-

> The writer of this report spoke to Mgr. Ritoig (sic.) on many occasions; Mgr. Ritoig refrained from criticism of his superior, the Archbishop of Zagreb, whose position he is said by his enemies to covet, praised the moral virtues of the Partisans, and expressed the belief that they would be won back to Christianity under a liberal democratic regime. It was the opinion of the writer that Mgr. Ritoig was a devout and honest man; it should be added that this is not the universal opinion.

There were other clergymen who supported the Partisans, but considerable regional variations need to be taken into account. In certain areas of Croatia there was an unsurprising predisposition among people and clergy to support an organization which aimed at the overthrow of the pre-war order. This was especially so in Istria, where the Croat population had endured two decades of Italian domination and persecution, and saw in the Partisans a nationalist organization struggling for their right to join Croatia and Yugoslavia. One Istrian priest, Fr. Zvonimir Brumnić, recalled that "Almost all the priests in Istria (the Croats) actively helped the NOP (National Liberation Movement)."[68]

The situation in Istria changed radically following the Italian capitulation in September 1943, but even before then the KPH had moved its organization into Istria. A complication was that officially the Italian Communists had jurisdiction in Istria, but by the summer of 1942, urged on by the Comintern, Croatian Partisan units had been formed there. In March 1943, the KPH established a Provincial Party Leadership in Istria, and, following the foundation of ZAVNOH, a District National Liberation Committee was also

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[67] *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, edited by Michael Davie (London, 1976), pp. 582 and 586.

[68] Petešić, p. 88.

formed. As the Italian Communists in Istria were inactive, by the time of the Italian capitulation Istria had only one active underground organization, and that was the KPH. Following the capitulation was a brief period during which the Partisans took over throughout most of the Julian region, but during September and October the Germans moved in and imposed their authority.[69]

The first contacts between the Partisans and the Istrian clergy also began before the capitulation. Fr. Josip Štifanić, described as being among the clergy who were closest to the Partisans in Istria,[70] was contacted by the Partisans in 1942. He provided them with intelligence, hosted meetings in his flat, and served as a link between different organs of the Partisan movement, which his freedom of movement enabled him to do.[71]

Following the Italian capitulation, the District National Liberation Committee for Istria proclaimed, on 13 September 1943, Istria's inclusion in Croatia and Yugoslavia, and this was confirmed by ZAVNOH a week later.[72] On 25 September, at a meeting in Pazin, the Committee was up-graded to the status of a Regional Committee. Among the members of the Committee was Štifanić. Present at the meeting were two other priests, Brumnić and Fr. Josip Pavlišić. In October 1943, Štifanić was elected a member of ZAVNOH.[73] Clearly the participation of the clergy was something which the Istrian Partisans valued. Leading Croatian Communist Jakov Blažević (who would later be the prosecutor in the trial of Stepinac) noted his appreciation of the positive attitude of the clergy in Istria towards the Partisans:-

> The Croatian priests have influence over the people, because, during the most difficult times of Fascist oppression, they were, through the Church, the bearers of at least some

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[69]Bogdan C. Novak, *Trieste, 1941-1954: the Ethnic, Political and Ideological Struggle* (Chicago, 1970), pp. 66-71.

[70]Minutes of a meeting of the Regional National Liberation Committee for Istria, 20-22 March, 1944. HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 11, NV-11/1035.

[71]Petešić, pp. 85-86.

[72]Bogdan C. Novak, *Trieste, 1941-1954*, p. 101.

[73]Petešić, pp. 84-87.

> national consciousness and resistance, and, at the moment of the capitulation of Italy, one can say that they completely cooperated with us.[74]

In an internal Party document (in other words one that was intended as a realistic appraisal of the situation, and which did not have any propaganda purpose), the Agitprop of the Regional Committee of the KPH for Istria also expressed its appreciation of the helpful role that the clergy could play: "The Croat masses are almost completely for our movement, especially now, when it seems that the priests too have decided openly to come over to us."[75]

In fact, there was some suspicion on the part of the Istrian Partisans towards some members of the clergy, by no means all of whom were willing uncritically to fall in with the Partisan line. Brumnić himself was frequently regarded with a good deal of doubt and dissatisfaction. However, in general the Partisans in Istria enjoyed much better relations with the Croatian clergy than in other regions, and the numbers of priests who actively supported them were unusually high there. Once the initial impact of the Germans' imposition of their authority had worn off, many of the clergy, some of whom had been cautious for a time, began to seek links with the Partisans:-

> A part of the clergy in Istria which, following the German offensive, naturally distanced itself from the NOP and began to pursue a policy of peace, is increasingly seeking contacts with the NOP. Whereas they previously said that they couldn't collaborate with the National Liberation organizations, nowadays they would rather adhere to them.[76]

It was reported that one Fr. Herak was invited to join a National Liberation Committee or ZAVNOH, but that he declined, saying that it would be better that he should work on the ground, outside the organization, maintaining that he would thus best be able to serve the movement. It was affirmed that "Herak helps and works for the NOP. He even promotes the NOP in the Church."[77] Fr. Ferdo Šenk was said to have cooperated with

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[74]Report by Blažević on the situation in Istria, dated 1 December, 1943. HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 7, NV-7/504.

[75]Report of 12 October, 1944. HIP, Fond CK KPH (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia), KP-42-VI/3677.

[76]Minutes of a meeting of the Regional National Liberation Committee for Istria, 18-20 February, 1944. HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 9, NV-9/731.

[77]*ibid.*

the Partisans for a long time. It was noted that the clergy allegedly did not think highly of him, but the Partisans thought he was "very good." A Fr. Barković also promised to help the Partisans and it was said that he was "close to the people, and he cooperates with the National Liberation Committees."[78]

It seems that the Partisans were also quite successful in attracting priests from other coastal regions. Rittig received a letter from a member of the Regional National Liberation Committee for Hrvatsko Primorje (the coastal region south of Istria), which stated that every district committee in the region contained priests, and that the clergy were supporting the Partisans. He cited the examples of Fr. Mate Moguš (who, as we shall see, later fell foul of the Communists) and Fr. Andrija Rački, adding that he could not name all of the priests involved in the Liberation Movement, as those in occupied territories would suffer as a result.[79] Ćiril Petešić lists several other priests from Hrvatsko Primorje who he identified as having cooperated with the Partisans, some of them as members of the regional committee of the JNOF (the front organization), others by allowing the Partisans to use their flats.[80]

There were also priests in Dalmatia who cooperated with the Partisans. As in Istria, this is in large part explicable by the fact that much of Dalmatia came under Italian occupation until the capitulation in 1943, so that here too the Partisans could appeal to some as a patriotic movement. Again, Petešić has identified several who supported the Partisans. One particularly important service that members of the clergy were able to render was in allowing their houses, and sometimes even churches, to be used as shelters for Partisans and as stores for provisions and weapons. In this they took advantage of the fact that priests were usually regarded as above suspicion, as in principle opposed to Communism. Petešić has uncovered evidence of arms being

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[78]*ibid.*

[79]Petešić, p. 146.

[80]*ibid.* p. 147.

hidden by priests on the Dalmatian islands of Brač and Hvar. The Italians frequently felt it necessary to arrest members of the clergy for disseminating propaganda against them. For example, in August 1941 Fr. Ante Oštrić was prohibited by them from leaving his parish or gathering the people. He had contacts with the Partisans, and accepted leaflets from them. In 1943 he became President of the Local National Liberation Committee. Fr. Franc Fišter cooperated with the Partisans from the Spring of 1942, and was later interned by the Italians.[81]

Another priest from the coastal region who actively supported the Partisans was a Fr. Salacan, who, Petešić records approvingly, joined the Local National Liberation Committee for the Dubrovnik Littoral in the summer of 1944, and was elected to the District Committee for Dubrovnik shortly afterwards. A different perspective on his behaviour was provided by Evelyn Waugh, who described how Salacan "deserted his parish in Kotor without the authority of his bishop, joined the Partisans, served them as a propaganda officer, and has been rewarded with a place on the governing committee of Dubrovnik and the directorship of the Dubrovnik wireless station."[82] In the example of Salacan, we again see the value that the Partisans attached to members of the clergy for propaganda.

The clergy in Bosnia was overwhelmingly Franciscan. As already mentioned, they became infamous for their support of the Ustashas on account of the active participation of some of their number in some of the worst Ustasha atrocities. However, this image of the Bosnian Franciscans does not give the full picture. Not all of them supported the Ustashas, and some of them sided with the Partisans. Early in the war, the superiors of a number of Franciscan provinces in the NDH met in Zagreb to issue instructions to members of the order regarding the new situation. These were shortly afterwards reaffirmed by the head of the order in Rome. They were not to join the Ustashas or to

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[81] *ibid.* pp. 211-217.

[82] Waugh report, PRO, FO371/48910, R5927.

participate in the persecution or expulsion of Serbs or Jews; they must have no part in forced conversions, and were not to take over any Orthodox parish, even if offered to them by a bishop; they must protest about any abuses by the authorities.[83] Any who disobeyed these instructions were subject to expulsion, as happened to Majstorović-Filipović in April 1942.[84]

Among the Bosnian Franciscans who supported the Partisans, the most notable was Fr. Josip Markušić from the Franciscan house in Jajce. The diary of the house in Jajce includes entries by Markušić, which reveal, among other things, his disappointment at the proclamation of the NDH and his disgust at the massacres of Serbs. By November 1943, by which time he had had a good deal of contact with the Partisans, he had come to see the Communists as the force that was most likely to lead the country out of the morass. He was invited to attend the meeting of AVNOJ in Jajce in November 1943, and described Tito as genial and popular.[85]

Petešić also lists several Bosnian Franciscans whom he has identified as being well-disposed towards the Partisans. Fr. Bono Ostojić was a delegate to the AVNOJ meeting at Jajce, and also at the third session of ZAVNOBiH (the Bosnian equivalent of ZAVNOH) in April 1945. Fr. Miroslav Milošević was a member of the first illegal National Liberation Committee in Vareš.[86] A letter from a unit of Partisans to Fr. Srećko Franjkić demonstrates that he was the President of his local National Liberation Committee. The letter laid out his duties and told him that he should keep in contact with its members, even though he would not personally be able to attend meetings. In another letter, the Partisans informed him of their concerns regarding the attitude of the local Croat population towards them. They called him to a meeting, at which Moslem clergymen

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[83]Petešić, pp. 200-201, citing Marko Oršolić, *Angažirani svećenik, simpozij u povodu 100. obljetnice rodjena fra Josipa Markušića*, pp. 158-184.

[84]Petešić, p. 265.

[85]Petešić, pp. 201-205, citing Oršolić.

[86]Petešić, pp. 205-206.

were also present, at which he was told that men must be mobilized and food supplied, and was warned that attacks upon the Partisan army would not be tolerated. He was told to pass on this warning to the Croat population, many of whom had fled to the woods, or had been shooting at the Partisans.[87]

It is certainly fair to say that, in general, support for the Ustashas was more widespread and opposition to the Communists fiercer among the Croat population in Bosnia, especially in Hercegovina, than was the case in other Croat-inhabited areas of the country. This was reflected among the Franciscan clergy as well. Relations between the Partisans and the Catholic clergy in Bosnia were especially fraught, and many of the most serious cases of Partisan violence against the clergy took place in Bosnia. However, as the examples cited above demonstrate, in Bosnia too the Communists welcomed the cooperation of priests who were inclined towards the Partisan cause, and there too there were some among the clergy who were prepared to fit in with their plans.

Some areas of Croatia saw only very limited Partisan activity until quite near the end of the war. This was the case in Slavonia and in the Zagorje region around Zagreb. However, even in such areas, there were priests who actively supported the Partisans. For example, Fr. Franjo Didović became a member of the Regional Committee of the JNOF for Slavonia while Fr. Josip Kocković was a member of the Regional Committee for Moslavina.[88]

Among the Partisan clergy in Croatia during the war were a number of Slovene priests who were expelled from the German-occupied areas of Slovenia soon after the occupation. Fr. Janko Petan has already been mentioned. He was deported to Croatia in 1941, and during the next two years he served in four different parishes. He became known as an opponent of the Germans and of the Ustashas, and, accused of helping the Partisans, finally joined them in September 1943. He continued to carry out his priestly

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[87]*ibid.* pp. 168-171.

[88]Petešić, pp. 222-229; and Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, p. 1096.

duties in Partisan-held territory.[89] He too carried out propaganda work on behalf of the Partisans. Together with another Slovene priest, Fr. Ivo Javornik, he produced a pamphlet, which was published by the Regional National Liberation Committee for Slavonia, entitled *The Destruction of the Church of the Mother of God in Voćin*, which was ruined in a German bombardment in May 1944. In it, the two Slovene priests called upon the clergy and all Croatian Catholics to join the National Liberation Struggle, and thus "to defend religious freedom and Catholic sacred objects in our dear Croatian motherland."[90]

Some priests paid with their lives for supporting the Partisans. Fr. Karlo Ćulum, from Dalmatia, helped the Partisans from an early stage, and encouraged people to join them. In May 1943 the Ustashas killed him.[91] Petešić lists several others. These included a priest near Karlovac who was shot after he read out news from the Partisan radio station in church. In January 1943, Fr. Karlo Ivančić was shot after Mijo Stepinac (brother of Archbishop Stepinac, and a member of his local National Liberation Committee) took refuge in his house. Fr. Dragutin Jesih was shot near Sisak after the Ustashas discovered Partisan weapons in his flat.[92]

So it is clear that there were priests throughout the Croat-inhabited areas of the country, in Croatia and in Bosnia, who actively supported, cooperated with and, in a few cases, even joined the Partisans. They were put to good use, providing shelter for Partisans, hosting meetings and hiding arms and provisions. They served on the committees that formed the government apparatus set up by the Partisans during the war. Their most valuable service, however, was as instruments of propaganda. Merely by being seen to support the Partisans they performed a great service. By speaking and

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[89]Petešić, pp. 115-118.

[90]*Danica Pučki Kalendar* (Zagreb, 1962), p. 57.

[91]Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, p. 1094.

[92]Petešić, pp. 192-199.

writing in favour of the Partisans they leant credibility to claims that no one had anything to fear from a Communist takeover.

One should not exaggerate their significance, however. Petešić, in his book, collected a great deal of evidence concerning the anti-Axis, anti-Ustasha and pro-Partisan activities of many members of the clergy, but he goes too far. A mistake which he repeatedly makes is to appear to equate anti-Ustasha or anti-German actions or sentiments with support for the Partisans. Clearly it did not follow that a priest who helped the Serbs or Jews in his area, or who was against the Ustashas, was a follower of the Partisans. Yet Petešić repeatedly cites the examples of such priests, giving no evidence of their having ever been pro-Partisan, but making no distinction between them and the small number of priests who did actively support the Partisans.

As shall be shown, the Partisans mostly regarded the clergy with suspicion, and often with hostility. The contribution to the cause of those priests who supported the Partisans was much appreciated, and attempts to appeal to the clergy, and thus to reassure the Catholic sentiments of the Croatian population, were given a high priority, but the Communists had no illusions as to the numbers of priests who favoured them. They knew that the best they could hope for from most of the clergy was grudging acceptance, and that those priests who were altogether hostile to them were more numerous than those who supported them.

Following the example of Zečević in Bihać in late 1942, further efforts were made to organize priests' meetings. Thus, in November 1943, three priests, Frano Antunović, Jurica Meštrović and Ambroz Miletić, invited priests in the region of Biograd, in Dalmatia, to attend a meeting on 30 November in Filip-Jakov. Each invitation was addressed to a "Priest and Patriot", and reported that the three priests had, on 11 November, formed an initiative committee to organize the meeting. The invitation expressed the hope that "the comrade priests will grasp the importance of this conference, participate in it, and unambiguously define their position towards today's National Liberation Struggle as Croatian popular Roman Catholic clergy." They signed themselves with a "comradely,

brotherly greeting", and in a postscript suggested that any "comrade-priest" who was prevented by good reasons from coming could send another person to represent him, and declare his position in a letter. In this letter one can see the pressure being placed upon the clergy at that time to declare themselves openly and unambiguously. No excuses were acceptable.[93] The meeting was held, and a statement was issued in the name of the clergy of the Biograd area, stressing the duty of the clergy to serve God and people, to stick with the people "for better, for worse", and to join in the struggle for the freedom and equality of the Croat and Serb peoples in a free Croatia.[94]

Clearly the meeting in Filip-Jakov was a staged event, for pure propaganda purposes. The priests who attended were not really active participants in any meaningful sense. Another declaration whose sole purpose was its propaganda value was issued a month later in the nearby town of Nin. Titled "A Declaration of the Catholic clergy and teachers of Northern Dalmatia", and dated 29 December 1943, the statement purported to be in the name of twelve priests and eight teachers. It stressed their loyalty to the National Liberation Movement, and expressed joy at Croatia's entry into the federal Yugoslav community, as an independent state, enjoying complete religious and national freedom. It condemned traitors, and appealed to those in the service of the occupiers, Ustashas and Chetniks, and who had not committed crimes, to join the liberation struggle.[95] A newspaper article in the Partisan press attacked "dirty speculators", among them some "reactionary" priests, and contrasted them with the "honest clergy of northern Dalmatia", who had issued a declaration that "they would, together with their people, struggle until the final destruction of odious fascism, and the settling of accounts with all those who had worked to the harm of the national liberation struggle."[96]

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[93]HIP, Narodnooslobodilački odbori Hrvatske, NV-177/324.

[94]HIP, Narodnooslobodilački odbori Hrvatske, NV-177/325.

[95]HIP, Narodnooslobodilački odbori Hrvatske, NV-177/326.

[96]*Primorski Vjesnik*, 23 January, 1944.

However, the length that the Communists were prepared to go to to enlist the clergy can be seen from the admission by Dušan Brkić, of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the KPH, that the priests and teachers had not actually signed the declaration, but had in fact issued a leaflet against the Partisans and in favour of the Ustashas. He noted that that area was under the very strong influence of the Ustashas on account of the "increase in activity on the part of the clergy." Clearly the reality was often very different to that which the Partisans wished to portray.[97]

A declaration by priests on the island of Krk responded to critics of their relationship with the Partisans. Asserting that they wanted to clear up their relations with the Church hierarchy and the rest of the clergy, they explained that "the place of the whole clergy is with the people, just as it is with the Church." They appealed to the bishops and to their "brother priests" not to look upon them as politicians, but first of all as priests and spiritual fathers who "lead our lives in the people and with the people."[98]

Some priests' meetings did, however, contain more than a propaganda element, giving priests a chance to discuss their concerns, and addressing the question of relations between the clergy and the Partisan authorities. On 21 February 1945, a meeting of priests from Gorski Kotar was held under the auspices of the Religious Affairs Commission of ZAVNOH. It issued a statement of the conclusions of the meeting. Given the exceptional circumstances, which made communications with their Ordinaria impossible, they elected Fr. Antun Brnad, with the prior agreement of their bishop, to join the Religious Commission. His sole task would be to represent the interests of the Church with the "People's Authorities" until it became possible for the authorities to come into contact with the legitimate representatives of the Catholic Church. Also, so as to improve their connections with the "People's Authorities", they chose Fr. Ivan Butorac to be a religious delegate to the JNOF for Gorski Kotar. They finished by affirming that they

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[97]Report by Brkić to the CK KPH, 1 July, 1944. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 19, p. 130.

[98]HIP, Narodnooslobodilački odbori Hrvatske, NV-177/327.

stood "with the people in its struggle for freedom, and with today's People's Authorities." Telegrammes with greetings were sent to Tito and to ZAVNOH, and one to their bishop, Burić of Senj, in which they expressed their "obedience and filial devotion." Clearly this statement reflected the real concerns that would have been troubling most ordinary clergy much more honestly than the propaganda pieces cited earlier. Their first purpose was to represent their interests and those of their Church with the authorities, rather than to act as a mouthpiece of the Partisans to the rest of the clergy. Of crucial importance to them was their loyalty to their bishop.[99]

An even clearer example of a priests' meeting being used as a forum for the clergy to air their concerns was a joint meeting of Catholic and Serbian Orthodox clergy, which issued a statement on 30 October 1944. It started with the usual declaration of loyalty to the new authorities, and condemnation of "criminal traitors." But the bulk of the declaration was devoted to a defence of the views and interests of the churches, their clergy and faithful. It stated that "we are witnesses to the fact that the great majority of the people desires that the Church into which they were born remain their teacher and sacred mother, as it has been until now." Priests who had committed crimes should pay individually, like all others, but they appealed that the authorities should take into account canon law when judging priests. The Church authorities should be kept informed, so that actions against priests would be seen as being in the spirit of human and divine justice, and not out of hatred. They expressed hopes for fruitful cooperation between the churches and the authorities, and stated that representatives of the churches in the Commission for Religious Affairs should freely represent the needs of their Church and believers.

They emphasized the decisions of AVNOJ regarding the freedom of conscience, religion and private property, and expressed confidence that there was no intention to weaken the role of the churches in the national life by abolishing religious education in

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[99]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 39, NV-39/4152-1.

schools and church weddings. They were convinced that the authorities genuinely sought the cooperation of the clergy, even if they did not always agree with them. While acknowledging that intolerant people existed among the clergy, they insisted that that was never approved of. They asked that all should have equal rights, and recommended that the clergy trust the Partisan leaders, as this was the best way to defend the interests of the churches.[100]

Church meetings were also sometimes held for the ordinary faithful. The Agitprop section of the District National Liberation Committee for Banijá reported in August 1944 that, for the Catholic population, three such meetings had been held. It noted with satisfaction that political meetings were better attended than these church ones, "even if we did also use the church ones for propaganda purposes." At the meetings "representatives of the JNOF spoke, and denounced dilettantish groups."[101] Clearly such meetings were purely for propaganda.

So it appears that during the war priests' meetings in Partisan held territory did not have to be simply propaganda exercises. There were limits of course. The meetings cited above professed their loyalty to the emerging new authorities, and they did not criticize them. What they did contain were appeals. Both the statement issued by the priests of Gorski Kotar and the statement of the Catholic and Serbian Orthodox clergy stressed that the first duty of the priests who served on the Religious Commission was to their Church and clergy. Both revealed the concern of the clergy to maintain correct relations with their bishops. They were not going to be used as pawns in any attempt to divide the junior clergy from the hierarchy. So on the one hand we see how the Communists manipulated meetings of the clergy for their propaganda aims, while on the other the possibility remained, at that time, for the clergy to resist attempts to manipulate it and to maintain a degree of independence.

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[100]HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2.

[101]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 13, NV-13/1319.

Indeed, the pro-Partisan clergy often attempted to defend the Church. As we have seen, Rittig sought to defend the Church by distancing it from the activities of members of the clergy who supported the Ustashas or opposed the Partisans. As we shall see, in the very last phase of the war the attitude of the Partisan leadership towards the Church sharpened. No doubt worried by this development, Rittig appears to have toned down his attacks on members of the clergy who had supported the Ustashas, minimizing their numbers, and to have given greater priority to attempts to defend the Church.[102] In December 1944, he reacted sharply to an article attacking Bishop Srebrnić which had appeared in a Partisan newspaper the previous month.[103]

A particularly strong defence of the Church came in a "Letter from representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church with the NOP in Croatia" to the Presidency of ZAVNOH, dated 19 October 1944. It insisted that the churches could not be held responsible for the sins of some individuals, and appealed that the apparent discrimination in favour of non-believers should be avoided. It urged against the separation of Church and State, and stressed that the cooperation of the churches was necessary in the rebuilding of the country.[104]

As regards the formation of a Croatian religious affairs commission, as early as January 1944 the Regional National Liberation Committee for Dalmatia reported that it had formed a Religious Section.[105] At a session of the Executive Committee of ZAVNOH on 13 April 1944 it was decided that Rittig would be a member of a Religious Commission under ZAVNOH, together with one Orthodox priest from Croatia and one lawyer.[106] The decision to form the Commission was taken at the third session of the

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[102]HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2. In a later draft of a letter to the clergy, "Braćo svećinici" ("Brother priests"), he altered a passage attacking priests who supported Pavelić so as to emphasize that there were very few of them.

[103]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 16, NV-16/1817.

[104]HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2.

[105]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 9, NV-9/643.

[106]*ZAVNOH, Zbornik dokumenata, 1944, II (od 1. siječnja do 9. svibnja)* (Zagreb, 1970), p. 417.

ZAVNOH Presidency, on 25 August 1944.[107] The tasks of the Commission were to ensure the free and unhindered carrying on of religious rites by all of the religious communities in Croatia; to examine and fix, in all areas of public and private life, the relations between the church and state authorities; and to investigate the collaborationist activities of a part of the clergy, and their incitement of hatred between Croats and Serbs.[108] It is interesting to note that the freedom of religion is explicitly identified as being the freedom to perform religious rites, a far narrower interpretation of its function than the Catholic Church was accustomed to.

In fact the Religious Commission was not at all active before the end of the war. Rittig noted that Petan joined it in October 1944.[109] However, at the fifth session of the ZAVNOH Presidency, on 29 January 1945, it was noted that they needed to "activate the work of the Religious Commission", which should "investigate and take care of the needs and wishes of believers of the various faiths on the ground."[110] Petešić notes that it met very little, mostly advising the ZAVNOH Presidency on matters touching relations with the Church, such as religious education and divorce.[111] Of course, Rittig was very active. But it would seem that for the most part he was operating independently, and that the Commission was not constituted formally until after the end of the war and the Communist takeover, by which time it was operating in a very different environment.

We have already seen how Rittig repeatedly stressed that such things as religious education and the sanctity of the family would not be jeopardized by a Partisan victory. The tone of the declaration by the Catholic and Serbian Orthodox clergy cited earlier, including its reference to religious education and church weddings, suggests that they

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[107]*ZAVNOH, Zbornik dokumenata, 1944, III (od 10. svibnja do 31. prosinca)* (Zagreb, 1975), p. 260.

[108]According to a draft decision on the founding of the Commission. HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 11, NV-11/1012.

[109]HDA, VK, kut. 3, doc. 302.

[110]*ZAVNOH, Zbornik dokumenata, 1945, IV (od 1. siječnja do 25 srpnja)* (Zagreb, 1985), p. 110.

[111]Petešić, p. 45.

had their doubts as to the intentions of the authorities, and were worried. That was in October 1944, but for most of the war it is true that the Communists did avoid measures that would aggravate the Church.

A report on the work of the Religious Section of AVNOJ in December 1942 stated that religious schools should be allowed to continue to work, and that while their position towards the National Liberation Struggle should be controlled, there should be no interference in questions of faith and education.[112] A second report said that "religious education for Catholics, Moslems and Orthodox, without hindrance, is approved. Also approved is that pupils of religious education may attend religious schools in their free time, if such schools exist and can function independently."[113] Here was a major compromise of normal Communist principles. That religious education should be allowed at all was a concession, and that religious schools could operate independently under Communist rule showed the extent of their desire to appease the Church. The only stipulation this report made was that religious education "must be taught in the spirit of religious tolerance, religious discipline, and with due respect for other religions."

The sensitivity of the issue, and the determination of the Church to defend its position, was shown in a letter from Bishop Josip Srebrnić of Krk to the President of AVNOJ, Ivan Ribar, of 7 October 1943. Referring to the promises of AVNOJ that it would not touch the position of the Church, he complained that religious education was no longer a compulsory subject in schools in areas under Partisan control, and that priests were being required to submit the programme of religious education for approval by the authorities. This, he asserted, did touch the position of the Church, as religious education had always been compulsory, and the programme had only ever been required to be submitted to the competent Church authority. He asked that steps be taken to remedy the situation, so that the Church could retain what naturally and by tradition belonged to

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[112]Nešović, *Stvaranje nove Jugoslavije*, pp. 165-166.

[113]*ibid.* pp. 171-174.

it.[114] Srebrnić received a reply from the ZAVNOH Secretariat, dated 10 November 1943, which insisted that the children of parents who did not wish them to receive religious education must not be forced to do so. Officials responsible for education must be able to supervise the programme, because:-

> Bitter experience in this difficult national liberation struggle has shown that we must exercise full control over all those persons who come into contact with our youth, because, as you probably know, among our Catholic clergy are found very many national enemies, who have exploited their position as priests and teachers of religious education.[115]

In this exchange of letters can be seen the crux of the issue, as the battle between the very different visions of society that the Church and the Communists represented was being fought out over the minds of the young in the classroom. Nevertheless, the letter from ZAVNOH assured Srebrnić that no hindrance would be placed in the way of children whose parents wished them to receive religious education.

Another issue with which the Church was very much concerned, and concerning which the Communists recognized the need for sensitivity for the duration of the war, was that of marriage and divorce. Again, these were matters which, according to the principle of separation of Church and State, the Communists would expect to lie in the domain of the latter. Divorces were, on occasion, granted by the Partisan authorities.[116] The difficulties inherent in the Communists' position on this were expressed very clearly in a letter by a lawyer, Ante Mandić, to the ZAVNOH Presidency of 20 April 1944. He had been appointed to a kind of supreme court under ZAVNOH, and was not satisfied, as he foresaw all manner of political complications:-

> For example, the question of divorce! The word is: "do not in any way touch the rights of the Church!" And on the other hand the right to divorce is one of the basic principles of the NOP!
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> We have hundreds and hundreds of Catholic couples who have split up, whose marriages are, according to Canon Law, indissoluble, and who cannot therefore be divorced, as marriage is a holy sacrament. Should one, according to the new principle of the NOP, dissolve these marriages, and thus provoke a severe conflict with the Catholic

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[114]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 7, NV-7/463.

[115]*ZAVNOH, Zbornik dokumenata, 1943, I* (Zagreb, 1964), p.519.

[116]For example, a decision of the local National Liberation Committee for a village near Bihać to grant a divorce to a Moslem couple. *Bihaćka Republika*, Book 2, p. 473.

> Church, or give priority to Canon Law, at the expense of the proclaimed principle regarding divorce, and thus deny to Catholic Croats that right which is given to an Orthodox Serb?[117]

Later on in 1944, ZAVNOH was to go much further in its attempts to appease the Church. It decided that religious education should be compulsory in elementary schools, that there should be no civil marriage, but only church marriages, and that divorce should be prohibited. As we shall see, this was to be the cause of a sharp conflict between the Croatian and central, Yugoslav Party leaderships. But the policy pursued by ZAVNOH and the Croatian Communist leadership is plain: to avoid conflict with the Catholic Church at all costs, steering clear of any measures that might provoke the bishops into open opposition.

Following the Italian capitulation, the Partisans had the chance to come into direct contact with some of the bishops in the coastal areas. We have already seen that Bishop Srebrnić of Krk wrote to Ivan Ribar, and received a reply from ZAVNOH, concerning religious education in the autumn of 1943. Ribar also visited Srebrnić twice in September of the same year, once in the company of Zečević, and once with Rittig.[118] Zečević said afterwards that he was saddened by his meeting with Srebrnić. He knew that he was against the Partisans, and found him cold and reserved.[119] Ribar and Rittig tried to assure Srebrnić that the emerging "People's Authorities" had no intention of touching the historical position of the Catholic Church, and that they sought good relations with the Church authorities. They asked him if he could release any of his priests to act as military chaplains in the Partisan Army.[120]

These meetings were also used for propaganda purposes. The Partisan press reported that a contributor (probably Rittig) had visited Srebrnić, who had said that "the people of our islands have looked upon the National Liberation Movement from the

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[117]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 10, NV-10/832.

[118]Petešić, p. 137.

[119]Stanko Mladenović, *Pop Vlada Zečević* (Belgrade, 1975), p. 252.

[120]Rittig, "Odgovor krčkom biskupu, na njegovu osudu oslobodilačkog pokreta" ("Reply to the Bishop of Krk, to his condemnation of the Liberation Movement"), HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 41, NV-41/4639.

beginning as a struggle for freedom from foreign oppression. Therefore that movement has won over the mass of the people..."[121] Given that Srebrnić was, as we shall see later, to be one of harshest critics of the Partisans among the bishops, it is highly unlikely that he actually said those words. Zečević's report of his reserve towards them is much more likely to have reflected the real tone of the meetings. This was most likely one of Rittig's attempts to defend the Church by seeking to portray it as being supportive of the Partisans, probably exaggerating things that Srebrnić actually did say, and filling in some gaps himself.

At about the same time, the Partisans came into contact with Bishop Miho Pušić of Hvar. On 28 November 1943, there was a conference of the National Liberation Committees of Hvar, at which Pušić and some other priests were guests. Later some members of the committees returned the visit. Pušić thanked them for their concern for the clergy, particularly in providing food, and he promised the loyalty of the clergy, especially in case that the Partisans might have to withdraw from Hvar.[122] Also at this time, Rittig visited Bishop Viktor Burić of Senj.[123]

In the summer of 1944, the Partisans again came into contact with Pušić. On 15 August of that year, he wrote to ZAVNOH, complaining about the fact that religious education was not compulsory in schools, and expressing his disappointment that the National Liberation Movement was not living up to its promises that it was based on democratic principles and would respect freedom of conscience and religious belief. He received a reply from the President of ZAVNOH, Vladimir Nazor, dated 4 September 1944, promising to raise the matter with the ZAVNOH Presidency, assuring him that the local educational authorities must be acting in accordance with the decisions of AVNOJ

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[121] *Primorski Borac*, 3 October, 1943; *Naprijed*, 29 September, 1943, as recorded in Petešić, p. 137.

[122] Drago Gizdić, *Dalmacija 1943* (1962), pp. 807 and 884.

[123] Petešić, p. 149.

and ZAVNOH, and asking him to acquaint himself with the whole spirit of the liberation movement, so as to avoid misunderstandings and disagreements.[124]

In spite of Pušić's obvious misgivings regarding the Partisans, Rittig seems to have identified him as a bishop who was relatively well-disposed towards the movement, or at least relatively non-hostile. He decided to send copies of the declaration of the Catholic and Serbian Orthodox clergy to all the Catholic bishops, together with a commentary on it, in which he appealed to the Church authorities to work to find an accommodation with the emerging state authorities. He warned that priests would not be exempt from the punishment of those who were responsible for crimes. They should accept that as the hard truth, and be assured that no innocent priests would be harmed. The Catholic Church and clergy must give satisfaction for the crimes of Catholics against innocent Serbs. They should prepare material for the defence of the clergy, but should not allow the position of the Church and innocent clergy to be determined "by the fate and appalling errors of some fanatical Church officials." The onus for establishing good relations between Church and State he clearly saw as lying with the Church, which should do all that was necessary to avoid aggravating the internal situation, not grieving for the past, but cooperating in the building of the future.[125]

He selected Pušić, the first bishop whose diocese had been liberated, for a special role, writing him a letter in which he complimented him on his "worthy" behaviour during the war. He recommended the contents of the declaration of the clergy, and appealed for his help in efforts to establish a modus vivendi between the Church and the emerging new authorities. He referred to the visit of the leading Slovene Christian Socialist and member of NKOJ, Edvard Kocbek, to the Holy See, and to the formation of the religious commissions as causes for optimism that relations between the Church and State authorities could be put on a sound footing, and as evidence of the good will of the

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[124]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 13, NV-13/1387, and kut. 38, NV-38/4138.

[125]HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2.

Partisan leadership. Finally he asked Pušić to sign the declaration or, if he did not consider that appropriate, at least to translate it and to send it to the Holy See, with comments on his hopes for good relations between the Holy See and the new Yugoslav authorities.[126] It seems that this letter was sent to Pušić (in spite of a note on it saying that it was not), as a letter from Rittig of 30 November 1944, probably to Vladimir Bakarić, who was by that time secretary of the KPH, noted that it had been sent, and that copies of the letter to all the bishops had been sent to Pušić and to the Archbishop's See in Zagreb.[127]

Rittig also managed to keep up his links with people in Zagreb, through indirect means, and these included contacts with the Archbishop's See. After the war it emerged that he had been in regular contact with Canon Nikola Borić. Borić noted that he had kept Rittig informed about the situation in Zagreb, and these contacts were confirmed by Canon Pavao Lončar, who had also been aware of them.[128] It was through Borić that Rittig sent the letter to all the bishops and the declaration of the Catholic and Serbian Orthodox clergy. In a letter of 15 November 1944, Borić informed Rittig, whom he addressed as "Tonček", that he had passed the letter to the "Spiritual See." He also noted that he was trying to acquire some salt and petrol for him, and asked if he had been receiving his salary regularly, and also his post, which they forwarded to him.[129]

Emilio Pallua noted that he had kept in contact with Rittig through Borić. At the beginning of 1944, Rittig invited Pallua to come to Partisan-held territory. Pallua declined on account of his family, but he discussed with Stepinac the implications of the impending Communist takeover. Stepinac gave Pallua dispensation to make contact with

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[126]HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2.

[127]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 16, NV-16/1789.

[128]HDA, VK, kut. 1, unsigned letter to Rittig, dated 19 January, 1996, document 10; and a letter from Borić to Rittig, document 268.

[129]HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2.

the Communists, with the proviso that he must not become a member of the Party.[130] After the war, Stepinac recalled that the Partisans had made contact with him. In 1943, a Partisan emissary asked him if he would be Military Vicar for the Partisan forces, as he had been for the Royal Yugoslav Army. Stepinac replied that he would accept the offer if he was appointed to that position by the Holy See.[131]

The Partisans also made contact of one form or another with a number of other bishops. Bishop Jerolim Mileta of Šibenik contacted Rittig concerning religious education, and asked the Holy See to give him jurisdiction in areas of other dioceses which were under Partisan control, and whose clergy were unable to keep in contact with their own bishop.[132] In a Lenten pastoral letter of 4 February 1945, Mileta gave thanks for "our brave fighters", who "with unprecedented self-sacrifice are on the front, defending and winning freedom for our exhausted people."[133] In November 1944, ZAVNOH corresponded with Bishop Kvirin Klement Bonefačić of Split, regarding the use of the building of the seminary of his diocese as a Partisan hospital.[134] In the spring of 1944, Bishop Santin of Trieste, an Italian who would be a bitter opponent of the Communists and of Yugoslavia, met a Partisan near Pazin, in Istria, who greeted him in a friendly manner, and invited him to visit a nearby Partisan stronghold. Santin accepted the invitation, and met a senior Partisan officer who, he said, treated him politely, and explained that they only killed traitors, and did not destroy churches unless they had to.[135]

Of great importance from the point of view of the clergy was the question of what to do when it became difficult to maintain contact with their bishop, when they were on the

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[130]Pallua.

[131]As told by Stepinac to an American lawyer in 1952. Živojinović, p. 86.

[132]Petešić, p. 149.

[133]HDA, Rittig, kut. 4, 2/3 II.

[134]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 38, NV-38/4138.

[135]Petešić, pp. 82-83.

other side of the front line from him. We have already seen that a meeting of the clergy of Gorski Kotar in February 1945 elected one of their number to represent the interests of the Church until it became possible for direct contact to be re-established with their bishop and how Mileta applied to have jurisdiction over areas of other dioceses under Partisan control. The Slovene priest, Petan, sought and received the approval of the Archbishop's See in Zagreb to carry out his priestly functions.[136] Akšamović gave jurisdiction to the Partisan priest Fr. Franjo Didović, who did not leave his parish without permission.[137]

The Partisans' dealings with the bishops were not always happy. On 17 October 1944, Srebrnić issued a circular forbidding his priests any cooperation with the Partisans:-

> It should be clearer than the sun to anyone of good will and sound mind that the Partisan movement, the so-called movement of national liberation, is, for all practical purposes, completely dependent upon the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and that it serves that party in the implementation of a Communist order among the South Slavs. From that follows that it is not permitted to any Catholic or believer to participate in or help this organization in any way.[138]

He referred to *Divini Redemptoris* in support of this stand, and reminded his priests that three of their number from his diocese had already been killed by the Partisans. He forbade any connection with the Partisans on the part of his priests, on pain of suspension. Rittig was much vexed by this public pronouncement against the Partisans. He noted that it made the Church's position more difficult, and was a crucial factor in determining the "incorrect attitude" of many of the clergy towards the Partisans.[139] He also published pieces in defence of the Partisans, refuting Srebrnić's arguments.[140] It would seem that Srebrnić was particularly compromised by his connections with the

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[136]*ibid.* p. 117.

[137]*ibid.* p. 149.

[138]HDA, Rittig, kut. 4, 2/3.

[139]Notes by Rittig. HDA, Rittig, kut. 2, 2/2.

[140]Most notably, a piece entitled "Odgovor krčkom biskupu, na njegovu osudu oslobodilačkog pokreta" ("Reply to the Bishop of Krk, to his condemnation of the Liberation Movement"), HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 41, NV-41/4639.

occupiers, and later with the Ustashas. A report by an Ustasha official, Vladimir Židovec, of 21 June 1944, noted that Srebrnić had requested that a permanent garrison be stationed on Krk, to protect the population from the Partisans.[141] His opposition to the Partisans was particularly open, but was certainly shared by others among the bishops.

The Croatian Communists were well aware that most of the bishops and clergy were, despite whatever mask some of them might put up, essentially hostile to the Partisans. But in their contacts with the Church, in their courting of sympathetic clergy, in their occasional contacts with members of the hierarchy and in their care to see that normal Church life continued unhindered in areas under their control, their main audience was the Catholic Croat population, whom they sought to reassure that they had no intention to attack the Church or religious belief.

Communist - Catholic Relations in Practice

In spite of the Popular Front policy and of all the promises of the Communists and their front organizations (AVNOJ, ZAVNOH etc.) that they had no intention of harming or hindering the Church, the reality on the ground was frequently very different. The Communists did not always manage to conceal their deep suspicion of and hostility towards the Church and the clergy. Apart from that, the frequent occurrences of hostile activities against them on the part of many members of the clergy did not make relations easy, and often elicited a sharp response from them. Their courting of Rittig and other pro-Partisan priests, and the emphasis placed on the positive attitude of part of the clergy towards them notwithstanding, they had no illusions as to the attitude of most of the clergy, which they knew was by and large negative.

Early in the war, following the retreat of the main Partisan body from Užice, and before the Popular Front policy had finally and definitely been adopted in the spring of 1942, the "left sectarian" line followed by the Communists meant that they were less

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[141]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 15, NV-15/1732.

cautious towards the Church than was to be the case later on. Thus, in December 1941, the Regional Committee of the KPH for Dalmatia reported that they had carried out two attacks on parish houses, and had "liquidated" a parish priest. They acknowledged that this did not make a good impression on the Bishop of Split, who, as a result, attacked the Partisans in the press.[142]

In a report of 27 October 1942 on his observations in the area around Glamoć and Mrkonjić Grad, in Bosnia, Zečević pointed out the negative consequences of the hostile attitude of the local Party functionaries towards the clergy:-

> The Krajina comrades struggle against the Church, and have behaved incorrectly towards the clergy, to the detriment of the national liberation struggle itself. They have not managed to differentiate between the traitorous activity of nearly all Serbian priests and the popular religion of the people itself. That generalization has also applied to the Moslem and Catholic clergy, and as a result the fear of religious officials has been transmitted to the masses of the simple-minded faithful. That has harmed us a lot, and will harm us further, because the ignorant people are still exposed to the lies of the enemy.[143]

Hostile attitudes towards the clergy, as described here by Zečević, appear to have been very common, and priests were frequently regarded with suspicion. In September 1941, a report from the Regional Committee of the KPH for Dalmatia blamed its failure to win over the population of the Sinj area on the fact that "the Ustashas and the Sinj priests have succeeded in convincing the peasants that the Partisans are Serbian Chetniks."[144] In April 1942, the Croatian Communist official Anka Berus, in a report on the situation in Hrvatsko Primorje and Gorski Kotar, bemoaned the fact that the population was inclined towards the HSS, with its policy of waiting on better times, and were in addition under "the unusually strong influence of the clergy and the Church."[145] Such attitudes could still be found in the same area near the end of the war. In a report from the District National Liberation Committee for Gorski Kotar on the situation in December 1944 it was noted that "individual priests spread Ustasha influence through various "religious"

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[142]Report to the CK KPH of 20 December, 1941. HIP, CK KPH, KP-6/55.

[143]*Zbornik*, Series II, Book 6, p. 308.

[144]Report to the CK KPH of 19 September, 1941. HIP, CK KPH, KP-3/17.

[145]Report to the CK KPH of 1 April, 1942. HIP, CK KPH, KP-3/17.

organizations, studying the Ustasha press at the meetings of those organizations, and maintaining contacts with non-liberated territory."[146] Meanwhile a report from the Regional National Liberation Committee for Slavonia noted that:-

> In the towns we have the greatest difficulty with the clergy, which is often the centre of reaction, and very well connected. In Požega they wrote a slogan, while in Daruvar they held a vote as to whether there should be a crucifix in the school or not. In Virovitica, on the feast of All Saints, they even invited the people to pray for dead Ustashas and Germans. Many of our comrades rose to their provocations, and engaged in useless discussions on religion etc. We put a stop to that.[147]

Even in Istria, where, as we have seen, relations between the Partisans and the clergy were relatively good, there was suspicion towards the clergy, including towards priests with whom the Partisans were cooperating. Bishop Santin claimed that priests were forced to host meetings, that the Partisans did not trust the clergy, but that they wanted them to join their movement, and that Istrian priests lived in fear and privation.[148]

One priest with whom the Istrian Partisans had a lot of contact was Fr. Zvonimir Brumnić, who has already been mentioned. In a meeting of the Regional National Liberation Committee for Istria on 23 January 1944, it was noted that Brumnić had "promoted a policy of peace in church." He had been given a warning by the Partisans, to which he replied that those were the instructions from the high Church authorities. A group of priests headed by him was accused of using "the same words as the occupier." After being warned about this, Brumnić promised that he would in future act only according to the directives of the Partisans.[149] At another meeting, in February 1944, two members of the Regional Committee for Istria reported a meeting they had held with Brumnić to discuss matters concerning the clergy. It was noted that they had information that he not only promoted a policy of peace, but that he had read out a German decree against the Partisans in church.[150] He was also accused of black market activities,

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[146]Report of 17 January, 1945. HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 37, NV-37/3840.

[147]Report dated 15 December, 1944. HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 17, NV-17/1913.

[148]Letters from Santin to the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Maglione, cited in Petešić, pp. 81-82.

[149]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 9, NV-9/660.

[150]Minutes of the meeting. HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 9, NV-9/731.

although it seems that he merely distributed food which had been seized from the Italians, and which the Partisans considered their own, to the inhabitants of a village which had been burned by the Germans.[151] Brumnić's complicated relations with the Istrian Partisans would seem to reveal the difficulties experienced by priests in areas which often changed hands, and in which they were having to deal with different sides in the conflict. One of the members of the Regional Committee who had met him noted that Brumnić had explained that "the priests say that they find themselves in a difficult position these days, as on one side the fascists hate them, while on our side they are regarded with suspicion.[152]

It seems that the Communists were unable to cast off their hostility to the Church, even though the Party line told them that they should do so. Djilas noted the burning by the Partisans of Šćit Monastery, at Prozor in Bosnia, which had allowed the Ustashas to use its belfry as a post from which to shoot at the Partisans. He added that "as a rule the Partisans never touched churches. But they were more than happy that the necessity of destroying the Ustashi meant burning down a monastery, rather than just a secular building."[153]

Instances of violence against members of the clergy by the Partisans were common. Evelyn Waugh noted a number of cases in his report to the Foreign Office.[154] Often priests simply disappeared, such as happened to Fr. Ivo Kranje in December 1941, and to Fr. Ante Cvitanović during the night of 28 November 1944, after he had been accused of being an Ustasha informer.[155] Waugh also cited cases of priests who were killed while going about their parish duties. The parish priest of Vojnić-Gardun was shot outside his

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[151]Report by Jakov Blažević on the situation in Istria, dated 1 December, 1943. HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 7, NV-7/504.

[152]Minutes of the Regional Committee meeting in February 1944. HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 9, NV-9/731.

[153]Milovan Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 192.

[154]The following examples are taken from Waugh's report, PRO, FO371/48910, R5927.

[155]Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, p. 668.

church in September 1942, and the parish priest of Podgradje was called out to attend a sick person during a night in August 1942, and was shot on his doorstep. In May 1944, Fr. Ivan Romac was shot on his way to Mass. Still others were tried by "Peoples' Courts", and many, especially later on, were tried and executed in secret by OZNA (the secret police). Priests who were executed were usually described as Ustashas, collaborators or informers.

In some cases their accusers no doubt had cause, although suspicion towards the clergy appeared sometimes to verge on paranoia. Waugh was particularly incensed by the case of Fr. Petar Perica, a Jesuit from Dubrovnik, against whom there was no evidence of any political activity, who was shot in November 1944. Upon making enquiries Waugh found that he had been accused of instigating Ustasha massacres in the confessional, as a known Ustasha went to confession to him. Against such an accusation a Catholic priest had "no defence except silence." A similar case was that of Fr. Ante Pavlov, who was accused of betraying someone to the Italians in the confessional, and was shot by the Partisans. Petešić asserts that Pavlov had previously cooperated with the Partisans.[156] There were other cases of priests of whom it was claimed that they had helped the Partisans, but who were later "liquidated". Fr. Ante Zjajčić was said to have supplied arms to the Partisans, but was later killed as a traitor. Petešić claims that the parish priest in Svitovac constantly cooperated with the Partisans, but he was shot after he was accused of directing the Ustashas to some fleeing Partisans.[157]

The difficulties experienced by many priests in coping with the complicated situation in areas which were not fully under the control of any particular side have already been alluded to in the case of Istria. Djilas noted the ambiguous position of frontline areas. Of a visit to Slavonia he wrote that "it was all an unheard of, inconceivable jumble, the kind

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[156]Petešić, pp. 197-198.

[157]*ibid.*

that only real life could concoct: by day the Ustashi ruled, and by night the Partisans."[158] In Moslavina the situation seemed even more complex: "Consisting of low, gentle uplands near Zagreb and other towns, this free territory extended as far as the enemy's vigilance or our own vanguards permitted. That territory could change at any time, and it expanded considerably at night."[159]

In such situations it was very hard for priests to avoid falling foul of one side or another. The District National Liberation Committee for Lika reported that a priest who had earlier helped out in an Ustasha mobilization, was now seeking contact with them, and guarantees that would enable him to receive the Partisans, so that he would not have to flee.[160] One can find conflicting testimonies regarding the attitude of several priests. The Partisans in Hercegovina expressed doubts about Fr. Paško Barić, but at other times there were good reports about him.[161] Fr. Mate Moguš, from Hrvatsko Primorje, who had been praised for his cooperation with the Partisans, was sentenced to death after the war for having earlier supported the Ustashas.[162]

A particularly good example of the ambiguous situations in which the clergy frequently found themselves is provided by the diary of Fr. Ivo Suić, a parish priest in a village near Zagreb. He came into contact with the Partisans as early as 1941 and 1942. They often called at his house, usually at night, and usually for food. He also received visits from Ustasha officers, and he entertained them as well. To questions as to why the Partisans had not taken him away, he replied that he received them too, as they also had guns, and there was no one there to protect him from them. He gave money and food to the Partisans, and in 1943 they sought information from his parish registers. On one

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[158]Milovan Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 323.

[159]*ibid*. p. 328.

[160]Report of 1 January, 1944. HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 11, NV-11/956.

[161]Petešić, p. 101.

[162]Letter of 5 November, 1945 from Rittig to the Supreme Court of Croatia, appealing for clemency. HDA, VK, kut. 4, doc. 914.

occasion, a Partisan asked him about his political views, in reply to which he pointed to a crucifix. A senior Partisan officer scolded the questioner for asking about politics of someone who was not concerned in that. He noted that the Partisans did not object to his saying a midnight Mass for Christmas 1943. In 1944, he managed to excuse himself from administering the Ustasha oath by saying that he did not wish to intrude upon the competency of the military chaplain. The Ustashas were suspicious of him after some of them were killed by the Partisans outside his house, while the house itself was not attacked, although there were Ustashas inside as well. Following that incident, several of his parishioners were arrested, and Pavelić himself came to the village. Suić refused to ring the bells, but he introduced himself to Pavelić, and gave him a tour of the church. He pleaded with Pavelić for the arrested parishioners, assuring him that they were not Partisans, although he knew that some of them were. At the end of 1944 and early in 1945, he appealed to the Archbishop's See to intervene to prevent the Ustashas from using his church tower as a machine-gun emplacement.[163]

Suić was treading a very fine line. The suspicions of the Ustashas regarding his contacts with the Partisans might have resulted in his being arrested. In the summer of 1944, the Partisans warned him that his arrest by the Ustashas was imminent, and recommended that he come over to them. On the other hand, in spite of his cooperation with the Partisans, if he had been required to administer the Ustasha oath, the Partisans might very well have killed him. Certainly the use of his church tower as a gun emplacement would have been a good enough reason for a fatal visit by OZNA, even though it had not been with his permission.

So the picture of the attitudes of the ordinary clergy during the war was extremely complex. Most clergy undoubtedly welcomed the formation of an independent Croatian state, but few were supporters of the Ustasha movement. Mostly they just tried to carry on with their duties as normally as possible. In some areas, notably among the

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[163]Petešić, pp. 173-185.

Franciscans of Hercegovina, there was much greater support for the Ustashas, while the strong anti-Communism of the Catholic Church led many to collaborate with any who opposed the Communists, be they Italians, Germans or Ustashas. On the other hand, disgust with the savagery of the Ustashas led some into opposition to them, and some of those cooperated with the Partisans. In some areas, which were not included in the NDH, but were part of Italy, or were annexed to Italy in 1941, some priests supported the Partisans as a patriotic organization. This was notably the case in Istria, but was also the case with some of the Dalmatian clergy. Dalmatia was particularly polarized, as all of the different forces in this many-sided war, Italians, Germans, Ustashas, Chetniks and Partisans, passed through at various times. Many of the most active campaigners against the Partisans among the clergy could also be found there. Even Rittig acknowledged that there were many "traitorous priests" in Dalmatia.[164]

In a response to Waugh's report on the position of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia, the British ambassador in Belgrade, Sir Ralph Skrine Stevenson, took issue with several points. He thought that Waugh had minimized "quite arbitrarily" the role played by the clergy in the Ustasha movement. He considered that given the collaborationist record of the clergy in some Dalmatian towns (he cited Dubrovnik and Makarska) and in Hercegovina, the execution of a number of priests by the Partisans "was generally expected, and was not considered as an atrocity." He accused Waugh of omitting passages from the testimonies which provided the source of most of his report (which had been translated into English by one of the embassy staff), in which the Dubrovnik clergy said that the NDH was vital to the existence of the Catholic Church, and was a bulwark against Communism, and that because of that many of the clergy had played an active part in the Ustasha movement.[165]

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[164]Minutes of a meeting of the Territorial Committee of the JNOF for Croatia, 24 January, 1945. HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 37, NV-37/3898.

[165]Stevenson's comments on Waugh's report, dated 2 May, 1945. PRO, FO371/48910, R5927.

However, if Stevenson was inclined to accept that the Partisans had good reason to be dissatisfied with the clergy, clearly the Germans had not been satisfied with the attitude of the clergy towards them. In April 1944, they held a meeting of fourteen priests in Imotski, at which they reminded them of the need to serve Croatia and the German authorities, as the German army was the protector of the Catholic Church against the Communists. Later on, some of the priests held a secret meeting, at which it was noted that none of them worked against the Partisans.[166]

As this chapter has shown, the wartime situation was one that was full of ambiguities, uncertainties and fears for most of the clergy. The choices were often difficult, and could lead to fatal consequences. Yet they were pressurized from different sides to come down unambiguously one way or another, and those who would choose to stay out of the fray and just get on with their pastoral duties were often not allowed that choice.

The Communists recognized the importance of the Church and the clergy to the Croat population. Fearful that the Church could be a formidable opponent, they sought to neutralize it. However, as this chapter described, their policy towards the Church was an active one, seeking to use and manipulate members of the clergy as propaganda instruments. Their success in winning over members of the clergy was limited, and the perception of the Church as a potentially hostile force remained. As the war approached its end, pressure on the clergy would be stepped up, as the Communists increasingly demanded unambiguous allegiance.

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[166]Petešić, p. 100.

Chapter Three

The War in Slovenia

The central position of the Church and the clergy in the social and political life of Slovenia meant that they were the main force to be reckoned with by the Communists in their attempt to seize power. This was unlike the situation in Croatia, where the Communist leadership identified the HSS, with its traditions of anti-clericalism, as the main competitor. Whereas in Croatia Hebrang chose to avoid confrontation with the Church, hoping that the Church could be kept in its traditional place, outside the political domain, in Slovenia confrontation with the Church was almost unavoidable for the Communists, given that the Church was itself at the centre of political life there.

This chapter describes the development of the Communists' relations with the Catholic Church under the varying conditions in the German- and Italian-occupied areas of Slovenia and the Slovene-inhabited territory that had, since the First World War, been part of Italy. It describes the unfolding civil war in Slovenia, as the violent policy of the Slovene Partisans against their opponents led to a reaction from anti-Communist Slovenes, with Catholics in the forefront. The chapter considers the extent of the involvement of Rožman in resistance to the Communists. It also describes the attempts at mediation between the Communists and their opponents, as well as persistent efforts by the Communists and their allies to open a dialogue with Rožman.

A special feature of the war in Slovenia was the inclusion in the Communist-led front organization of a distinct, organized Catholic group, the Christian Socialists. This chapter charts the ups and downs in the relationship between the Communists and the Christian Socialists. This relationship illustrates the uses to which the Communists hoped to put Catholic allies in their movement and also the limitations on the level of cooperation that they were prepared to entertain with their Catholic allies. The chapter also shows the importance that the Communists in Slovenia, as in Croatia, attached to appeals to the clergy, as well as the limited success that they experienced on the ground in this respect.

Occupation and Civil War

In the German-occupied areas the occupation regime was especially harsh, as the occupiers sought to Germanize the population, snuffing out any traces of Slovene presence and individuality. After a visit to Maribor immediately following the occupation, the chief of the Nazi SS, Heinrich Himmler, decreed that all "alien" elements must be removed from Lower Styria, and that "all educated Slovenes must be evicted."[1] Prominent figures, intellectuals and priests were rounded up in the early period of the occupation, and expelled to Croatia or German-occupied Serbia, if they did not first manage to escape to the Italian-occupied Ljubljana province, where the regime was much less severe. For the population that remained there was a reign of terror, in which any defiance or opposition to the German writ was met with ruthless brutality.

In such circumstances, the possibilities for insurgent organizations to form and operate were very limited for much of the war. Although the Partisans did operate in the German-occupied areas of the country, they did not hold areas of liberated territory, in which they could move about freely and openly, until quite late on. They were mostly restricted to operating in small groups, hiding in the forests, depending upon the support of the Slovene inhabitants of remote farms, occasionally combining to launch attacks against isolated German outposts or the German lines of communication, and then quickly retreating to their hideouts.[2]

The Catholic Church was also severely constrained, as much of its clergy had been expelled. The Germans identified the Church and clergy as having a central position in Slovene life, in protecting and nurturing the Slovene identity. In their attempts to wipe out the Slovene identity in the areas which they had taken over, they could not tolerate such

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[1]Miloš Ribář, "Nacistični ukrepi zoper duhovščine lavantinske škofije", in *Zbornik ob 750-letnici Mariborske škofije, 1228-1978* (Maribor, 1978) (hereafter Ribář), pp. 50-51.

[2]A good description of the life of the Partisans in Styria is provided by Franklin Lindsay, an American OSS agent, who spent much of 1944 with them. Franklin Lindsay, *Beacons in the Night: with the OSS and Tito's Partisans in Wartime Yugoslavia* (Stanford, 1993) (hereafter Lindsay).

a competitor, and so they eliminated it. Thus, in the summer of 1941, more than three hundred priests were expelled from the Maribor diocese, most of them being settled in Croatia.[3] In addition, the use of the Slovene language in church services was prohibited, as only Latin and German were allowed. In order at least to partly make up for the shortfall in the number of priests in his diocese, the bishop had to bring in German priests.[4]

The Bishop of Maribor, Ivan Tomažič, found himself in a nearly impossible position. His attempts to reverse the decisions regarding the expulsion of the clergy and the prohibition of the use of the Slovene language in church having failed, he was left almost alone in his palace, isolated and no longer in real control of the ecclesiastical affairs of his diocese. The canons and other priests and attendants had been expelled, leaving just one Cathedral parish priest. While making his protests to the new German authorities, he nevertheless adhered to the teaching of St. Paul that authorities come from God. Therefore, although wrong, the occupation authorities must be obeyed, and he promised them his loyalty.[5]

It was upon this principle that he based his attitude to the Partisans, who began to operate in the summer of 1941. In December 1941 he issued a circular, in Latin, telling his priests that they should avoid illegal or subversive activities and connections with such activities. Miloš Ribář suggests that Tomažič issued this circular under pressure from the occupation authorities, although Tomažič himself told the Germans that he did it of his own volition, after they had reproached him regarding the support being afforded by his clergy to the Partisans. For most of the war, Tomažič simply kept a low profile, and he avoided overt participation in opposition to the Partisans. Later in the war, Fr. Franc Blatnik, from the Ljubljana diocese, visited Tomažič, and tried to persuade him to

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[3]Ribář, pp. 49-59.

[4]*ibid.* pp. 59-62.

[5]*ibid.* pp. 71-72.

support the Slovene quisling forces, the "Domobranstvo", in the same manner as the Church authorities in Ljubljana province. Tomažič rejected this, insisting that conditions in Maribor were different to those in Ljubljana. Towards the end of the war, on 25 January 1945, Tomažič issued a pastoral letter condemning the Communists, referring to his letter of December 1941 and to *Divini Redemptoris*.[6]

So the general picture of Tomažič's attitude in the war is of a bishop trying his best to get by in appallingly difficult circumstances, following the line of his Church's Canon Law regarding the duties owed to an occupying authority, and, while adhering to the anti-Communist line handed down from Rome and shared by most in the Catholic Church, avoiding direct involvement in any activities against the Communist-led resistance to the occupier. In this, his behaviour was similar to that of Stepinac and in marked contrast to the line adopted by the Bishop of Ljubljana.

It was in the Italian-occupied Ljubljana Province that the Partisans' activities were focused for much of the war, and they quickly found themselves in conflict with the Catholic Church there. As in other parts of Yugoslavia, the Communists were initially quite inactive, restricting themselves to preparations. This was in line with the policy up until the German attack on the Soviet Union, which saw the war as an Imperialist venture in which Communists should not concern themselves directly.[7]

They had, however, even at this early stage, already organized a front organization, including other, non-communist groupings, under their control. Its name, the Anti-Imperialist Front, reflected the line being pursued at that time, that in the imperialist war the centres of reaction were to be found in London as well as in Berlin. This front built on contacts that had already been made in the months before the outbreak of war. In the summer of 1940, a group of left-wing intellectuals had formed the Society of the Friends

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[6]*ibid.* pp. 72-73.

[7]Vodušek Starič, "The Making of the Communist Regime in Slovenia and Yugoslavia", pp. 2-3.

of the Soviet Union.[8] In addition, the leftist wing of the Christian Socialist movement had already made contact with the Communists before the war. In the spring of 1940, a conference of leading Christian Socialists was held to discuss the need for a "united bloc of working people." It was decided to approach the Communist Party, talks were held, and cooperation established.[9] These, joined also by the Sokoli (Falcons), a patriotic sports organization, and individuals from some other parties made up the Anti-Imperialist Front, which after the German invasion of the Soviet Union changed its name to the Liberation Front (Osvobodilna Fronta - OF).

Now the line was to emphasize the breadth of the coalition of patriots against the occupiers. More will be said about the nature and composition of the OF and the development of the Popular Front policy later on. For the time being it is enough to be aware that from the beginning the Communist leadership expected that, whatever the slogans, real control of the Front would be in their hands. This limited the possibilities for bringing more groups into the united Front. In September 1941, the Communists sharpened their stance towards those who did not join the OF. All of those who formed other organizations were declared to be harming the liberation movement, and were thus national traitors. It was not to be permitted that anyone should fight the occupiers outside of the OF.[10] This attitude on the part of the Communists quickly led to disagreements within the OF. Liberal groups also objected that the Communists were insufficiently committed to the restoration of Yugoslavia, and they defended the legitimacy of the Yugoslav Government in exile, refusing to believe stories reaching Slovenia from Serbia

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[8]Stephen Clissold, *Whirlwind: an Account of Marshal Tito's rise to Power* (London, 1949), p. 165.

[9]Undated piece entitled "Kratek zgodovinski oris skupine krščanskih socijalistov" ("A Brief Historical Survey of the Christian Socialists"). Arhiv Slovenije, Inštitut za Novejšo Zgodovino, Ljubljana (hereafter INZ), PC - IO OF, fasc. 441/VI.

[10]Ljubo Sirc, *Between Hitler and Tito: Nazi Occupation and Communist Oppression* (London, 1989) (hereafter Sirc), p. 27.

in the autumn of 1941 concerning the alleged treachery and collaboration of Mihailović. Finally, at the end of that year the OF expelled the liberal groups.[11]

This sharpened stance on the part of the Communists quickly took on a more violent aspect, which was also connected with the shift of the Yugoslav Party back to a more militant leftist line at the end of 1941. The Slovene Communists had already adopted a more militant approach when, on 1 January 1942, instructions were sent to them from the central Yugoslav leadership, warning that the forces of reaction were consolidating. They were rebuked for concentrating so much effort on seeking to appeal to reactionaries, for hiding their links with the Soviet Union, for equating Moscow with London, for submerging the Party within the OF. They should not be making concessions to reactionaries within the OF, but should concentrate on preserving unity among the masses, and isolating them from reactionary elements.[12] Now the Popular Front was to be built from below, among "the masses", and not from above, in cooperation with the "reactionary" leaders of other parties.

The Slovene Communists zealously embarked upon class war. In mid-August 1941 they had set up a Security and Intelligence Service (VOS), the first of its kind in Yugoslavia. At the end of 1941, VOS started a campaign of violence against any it considered as traitors, which meant anyone opposed to the OF.[13] They included the liquidation of the class enemy, in the expectation that proletarian revolution was at hand. Prominent early victims included the pre-war leader of the Chetnik organization in Slovenia, killed in December 1941, and the industrialist Avgust Prapotnik, killed in February 1942.[14] It included numerous attacks on and killings of opponents at the local level, including members of the clergy.[15]

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[11]Vodušek Starič, *The Making of the Communist Regime in Slovenia and Yugoslavia*, pp. 3-4.

[12]Wheeler, p. 139.

[13]Vodušek Starič, *The Making of the Communist Regime in Slovenia and Yugoslavia*, pp. 3-4.

[14]Clissold, *Whirlwind*, p. 168.

[15]Vodušek Starič, *The Making of the Communist Regime in Slovenia and Yugoslavia*, p. 6.

The killings and the polarization enforced by the militant Communist line elicited a response from anti-Communist Slovenes. This response led many into collaboration with the occupation authorities. In it, the Catholic clergy and Bishop Rožman of Ljubljana played a prominent role. The extent of Rožman's role has been a cause of much controversy, and there are still matters which remain uncertain and in the realms of speculation. His trial, "in absentia", after the war, as a traitor and collaborator, was clearly a show trial, with a propaganda purpose, but there was nevertheless much substance in the evidence put before the court which it is difficult to refute.[16] Rožman's response to the case against him,[17] in which he denied almost all of the charges, is a valuable testimony, but is not always credible. Parts of it are contradicted by other evidence, including the testimony of other Church figures.

According to the Communist account, Rožman was involved in open collaborationist activity from the very start. The indictment at the trial stated that shortly before the Axis attack on Yugoslavia there was a meeting of leading figures of the SLS, at which a division of responsibilities was agreed, which would be put into practice in the event of the expected occupation of the country. According to that plan some, including Rožman and the Ban (Governor) of the Dravska Province (i.e. Slovenia), Marko Natlačen, would stay behind, and would cooperate with the occupiers. Meanwhile others would go abroad and make contact with the Allies. These included Miha Krek, leader of the SLS and a pre-war member of the Yugoslav Government, Alojzij Kuhar, also of the SLS and, like Korošec, a Catholic priest, and Fr. Franc Gabrovšek. Thus they hoped to ensure their position whatever the outcome of the war. According to this account, the two groups kept in contact through the Vatican, which was, naturally, in regular contact with Rožman.[18]

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[16]A record of the trial and copies of documents which were presented as evidence are held in the Archive of the Slovene Ministry of the Interior - Ministarstvo za Notranje Zadeve (hereafter MNZ).

[17]*Škofa Rožmana odgovor*, dated 30 September, 1946, Klagenfurt, and sent to the Pope, it was published in *Zbornik Svobodne Slovenije*, 1965, and also released as a pamphlet, which latter is cited here.

[18]MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, p. 3.

That such a meeting did indeed take place was confirmed by Franc Snoj, a leading SLS figure who later in the war sided with the Partisans. He himself was present at the meeting, and he listed other participants. He did not, however, include Rožman in his list. Gabrovšek was one of the participants, and was indeed one of those who it was decided should go abroad.[19] Rožman himself denied any involvement in such a meeting, or even knowledge of it, insisting that he never participated in any political meeting. He did, however, confirm one part of the meeting, in that he acknowledged having given Gabrovšek permission to leave the Bishop's palace indefinitely.[20] It is improbable that he and Gabrovšek did not discuss the reason for the latter's departure, and thus his denial of all knowledge of the meeting seems unlikely, even if he was not actually present.

Rožman also denied having had any connections with Krek via the Vatican, or that he ever received any instructions of a political nature from Rome. But this assertion is contradicted by a secret report of the American intelligence service, the OSS, that in November 1944 Rožman sent a request to Krek, in Rome, via a secret channel. He allegedly requested that Krek pass on a message to the Pope regarding Communist terror in Slovenia, and appealing that he intervene with the British and Americans to ask that they occupy Slovenia, and that they not cooperate with the Partisans at all.[21]

The Communist account claims that Rožman began his open collaboration with the occupation forces shortly afterwards, when on 22 April 1941 he visited the Italian High Commissioner in Ljubljana, Emilio Grazioli, and promised the full cooperation of the clergy. Further, he was accused that, in a letter to Mussolini of 3 May 1941, he expressed joy at the inclusion of Slovene territory in Italy, and promised unconditional loyalty and cooperation.[22] These accusations were certainly at variance with the truth.

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[19]Minutes of a meeting on 12 August, 1946, at which Franc Snoj gave his testimony at the Public Prosecutor's office. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, pp. 3124-3127.

[20]*Škofa Rožmana odgovor*, p. 3.

[21]Secret OSS report, dated 1 December, 1944, in Serbo-Croat - presumably a translation. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 3, p. 3581.

[22]MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, pp. 22 & 53.

Rožman's secretary, Stanislav Lenič, has asserted that far from welcoming the Italians, Rožman avoided them when they first arrived, remaining hidden in his palace. It was the arrival of refugees from the German-occupied zone that prompted him to make contact with the Italians, so as to seek help for them. But the Italians surrounded the visit with full pomp.[23]

Rožman insisted that the visit, and Grazioli's return visit, were just customary courtesy calls. The report which appeared in the press came from the High Commissioner's office, and he was not given the opportunity to influence or correct it. The report of the visit which appeared in the diocesan newsletter (giving the date of the visit as 20 April) did indeed record the promise of cooperation, referring to the stipulation of Canon Law regarding the obligation of obedience to the authorities, which originate with God. But it stressed the Italian promise of free cultural development for the Slovene population.[24] As to the greeting to Mussolini, he had actually sent a text to Grazioli to be forwarded. The text that was passed on, and which appeared in the press and in the indictment, was composed at the High Commission, and was, he claimed, in terms such as he would never have expressed. The original stressed Italian guarantees of freedom of religion and the use of the Slovene language. As such, he saw it as an indirect protest against the very different behaviour of the Germans in the areas they had annexed.[25] Indeed, the text of the original letter, as provided to the court by the Vicar-General of the diocese of Ljubljana, was different from the one which was published, appealing for free development in the cultural and religious spheres, promising loyalty, and blessing the efforts of the authorities for the good of the people,[26]

In fact, Rožman's early behaviour did not reveal any enthusiasm for the occupation. According to Lenič, he regarded the Italians as a lesser evil than the Germans, but an

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[23]"Pogovor s škofom dr. Stanislavom Leničem", (in *Nova Revija*, 67-68, 1987), p. 1931.

[24]*Škofijski List*, 31 July, 1941. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 3, p. 3399.

[25]*Škofa Rožmana odgovor*, p. 4.

[26]MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, pp. 3111 & 3118.

evil nevertheless.[27] As to the Germans, he poured out his despair concerning the fate of that part of his diocese which had fallen under their occupation in a circular of 24 October 1941. Most priests and monks had been expelled, their property seized, and the people left without their pastors, without the sacraments, without spiritual guidance.[28]

However, as noted earlier, things changed markedly as a result of the aggressive course adopted by the Communists towards the end of 1941 and in the spring of 1942. This outbreak of guerrilla activity roused conservative elements in Slovenia. There was resistance to the Communists in the countryside, as Village Guards were formed to defend the villages against Partisan attacks, and, unlike most other parts of Yugoslavia, in Slovenia the Partisans were a powerful urban force, carrying their war into the heart of Ljubljana.[29]

In the villages, prominent figures and anyone perceived as an opponent by the Communists were vulnerable. Priests were especially targeted. From an early stage, even before the appearance of organized resistance to them among the population, the Partisans referred to opponents as the White Guard (Bela Garda - BG), and they identified the Church and clergy as having a prominent role. Thus, in a report of December 1941, the Slovene Communist leaders reported that the BG was supported by "Bishop Gregorij Rožman and the whole Church apparatus."[30] During his trial Rožman was accused of presiding at meetings in his palace of committees of the Village Guards, and of ordering his clergy to set up the Guards in their parishes.[31]

In reality, the Village Guards were often set up in response to Partisan attacks on prominent villagers and priests. Lenič noted that there was no possibility of cooperation

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[27]"Pogovor s škofom dr. Stanislavom Leničem", p. 1931.

[28]MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 3, pp. 3440-3449.

[29]Clissold, *Whirlwind*, pp. 166-169.

[30]Letter from Boris Kidrič and Franc Leskošek to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CK KPJ). *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 2, p. 258.

[31]MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, pp. 25-26.

between the Church and the OF given that so many people were being killed in the villages at that time. He asserted that there would have been no Village Guards, no BG and no "Domobranstvo" (Home Guard - the Slovene auxiliaries formed after the German takeover following the Italian capitulation, to be distinguished from the Croatian "Domobranstvo" - the regular NDH army) if it was not for that bloody beginning, which was the main determinant of relations between the OF and the Church.[32] This was also acknowledged by a Partisan officer, Tone Svetina, who recalled that:-

> The population, although religious, had been in its heart for the insurrection, but then political and military mistakes were made. Many people were murdered quite needlessly, and others were mysteriously disappearing... Not only the priests, but the Partisans themselves helped to create the White Guard.[33]

There can be no doubt, however, that members of the clergy did indeed frequently play the crucial role in the formation of the Village Guards. Metod Mikuž, a priest from Ljubljana, and one of the very rare priests who actively supported the Partisans, wrote a history of "The Slovene Clergy and the Liberation Front" before the end of the war. In it he tried to explain why it was that most of the clergy were opposed to the Partisans, while strongly condemning them for it. He gave the impression of a clergy that was manipulated by "clericalist" leaders, and led down the path of "treachery." He records that the anti-OF agitation by the clericalists was such that by the spring of 1942 there was no priest either in Ljubljana or in the countryside who did not know that the OF was Communist, and that they must defend themselves against it. Mikuž also implicitly acknowledged the violence of the Partisans against the clergy, noting their fear that the Partisans represented a real threat to their own lives.[34]

Mikuž described how the priests went about setting up Village Guards. The men of a village would be asked to remain behind after Sunday Mass. Then they would be addressed, often by a stranger to them, concerning the threat to their livelihoods, homes

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[32]"Pogovor s škofom dr. Stanislavom Leničem", p. 1932.

[33]Cited in Sirc, p. 31.

[34]Metod Mikuž, *Slovenska Duhovščina in Osvobodilna Fronta*, p. 6. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 516a/I.

and faith from the Communists. Thus they should organize for their self-defence. They should accept arms and other supplies from the Italians, even though they would ultimately use them against them when the British arrived. Joining the Village Guards was also offered as a means of avoiding internment, as the Italians would then leave them alone. He explained the effect on the peasantry of being told from the pulpit to defend themselves against the Partisans, especially when they knew of the liquidations of priests. Thus they could easily come to believe in the martyrdom of the clergy and the "Communist banditry of the OF."[35]

As noted earlier, it was not only in the villages that there was a response to Partisan activities, as the Slovene Alliance was formed by leading pre-war political figures to oppose the Communists. Rožman was accused of playing a central role in this as well, of initiating the formation of the Alliance.[36] This he also denied, insisting that he neither initiated nor participated in the move, although he did welcome it.[37] Leading Slovene figures started to organize in order actively to counter the threat from the Partisans, and in so doing they sought to co-ordinate their actions with the Italian authorities. A key figure in these developments was Lambert Ehrlich, a professor at the theology faculty in Ljubljana. Ehrlich mobilized young men of the students' organization of Catholic Action, "Straža", as zealous opponents of the OF, who assisted the Italians in arrests and house searches.[38]

In February 1942, a conference was held, which produced a list of proposals for the Italians, with the aim of formalizing cooperation. In particular, the participants sought permission to destroy the "Communist menace" themselves, as the Italians were proving incapable of doing it, and to organize the youth, so as to deliver them from the "danger of

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[35]*ibid.* pp. 8-9.

[36]MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, p. 25.

[37]*Škofa Rožmana odgovor*, p. 3.

[38]Report from the CK KPS to the CK KPJ, 16 May, 1942. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije v Sloveniji*, Book 2, pp. 75-77.

extremism." The Italian report on that meeting asserted that it was held at the bishop's palace, and that the leadership of the committee that was established was taken on by Rožman, as someone who could be a "representative of all classes of the Slovene people."[39]

Again Rožman denied all involvement, claiming that there was no such meeting at his palace.[40] Indeed Rožman denied any part in almost any political meeting (he acknowledged having been present at one in the spring of 1942 and one just before the end of the war). And yet Lenič said the following:-

> Representatives of various parties gathered around him [Rožman], as there was at that time in Ljubljana no more obvious political leader. Ban Natlačen had somehow withdrawn into the background. The other parties, the Democrats and the Liberals, had greater confidence in Rožman than in Natlačen, and they came to him with the request: you are the only one who can unite us at this moment, and help us, that we may all survive together. And thus they somehow obliged Rožman to become the appointed leader, the national leader in Ljubljana at that time, although we know that Rožman was never by nature nor by inclination any kind of politician.[41]

Lenič, as a senior Church figure, was in general defensive of Rožman. But having been secretary in the bishop's palace during the war, he knew as well as anyone what was actually happening, and he did not seek to deny Rožman's political involvement. Rather he excused him on account of his lack of political sense and his clumsiness. Whichever meetings Rožman did or did not attend, Lenič's testimony confirms that he was indeed included in discussions with the political leaders who in 1942 were trying to find ways of countering the Partisan threat. Lenič confirms the reports of Italian intelligence and of the Slovene Partisan leadership concerning Rožman's involvement.

At the beginning of April 1942, Ehrlich presented the Italians with a memorandum proposing cooperation over security and intelligence. So that they could help in the destruction of the Partisans, the Slovenes should be allowed their own intelligence service, in the form of an "Academic Formation". The Slovene police should be armed,

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[39]From an Italian report on the meeting, contained in a memorandum of 17 February, 1942. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 2, pp. 3139-3143.

[40]*Škofa Rožmana odgovor*, p. 5.

[41]"Pogovor s škofom dr. Stanislavom Leničem", p. 1931.

and should come under the control of a higher Slovene police authority, to be appointed by the Italian authorities in consultation with leaders of the previous Slovene administration. A Civil Guard and Village Guards should be allowed, and should come under military control.[42]

According to another Italian document, there was another meeting at the bishop's palace at about the same time, which also discussed how to help the Italians to restore order and to destroy the OF.[43] The report, described as coming from "usually well informed sources", described a plan devised at the meeting to send a letter to Rome, listing the mistakes of the Italian administration in the Ljubljana Province. These were that they allowed many officers of the former Yugoslav Army to remain in Ljubljana; that they allowed Slovene refugees from the German zone of Slovenia into the Ljubljana Province; that they did not introduce identity cards; that they allowed radio equipment to remain in private hands; that their propaganda was inadequate; that they had kept Slovenes in the State administration, the police, postal service, railways etc. This story was further supported by a report from Italian military transport concerning a priest travelling to Rome to see Maglione, on orders from Rožman.[44]

Unsurprisingly, Rožman denied that there was such a meeting, or that such a letter was sent to Rome.[45] And indeed, the story does seem unlikely. Firstly, the only record of the meeting and the letter comes from Italian documents. The original has not come to light. The report on the priest travelling to Rome does not mention the content of the letter he was carrying, and so there is no real evidence that he was carrying the letter which is alleged to have resulted from that meeting.[46]

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[42]Metod Mikuž, *Pregled zgodovine nob v Sloveniji* (vol. 1, Ljubljana, 1960), p. 337; MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, p. 57.

[43]Letter of 10 March, 1942 from Orlando to Robotti, in Italian, with a Slovene translation. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 2, pp. 3144-3147.

[44]Report of 12 March, 1942, in Slovene - presumably a translation. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 3, p. 3454.

[45]*Škofa Rožmana odgovor*, pp. 6-7.

[46]Mikuž, *Pregled zgodovine nob v Sloveniji*, (vol. 1), pp. 333-335.

Secondly, it does seem strange that the leading Slovene politicians or Rožman would have composed a letter with that content. At a time when they were trying to persuade the Italians to allow a bigger role in the administration of the province and the maintenance of security to be taken on by Slovenes, would they have objected to the fact that Slovenes had continued to be employed in the administration and in the state sector? Would Rožman, who had taken steps to care for refugees from the German occupied zone, really have objected to their having been allowed into the Ljubljana Province?

Upon receiving the report, General Mario Robotti, commander of the Italian XI Army Corps, noted that he had been asking for those measures to be implemented for some time.[47] And indeed, action followed shortly afterwards. Yugoslav Army officers were interned, identity cards were introduced, radios were confiscated and numerous employees in the postal service, railways etc. were arrested and interned.[48] But finally, it has not been established that these actions were a result of a request from the Slovene leaders. It is a matter for speculation, but the fact remains that the content of the alleged letter does not fit at all into the general picture of the way that things were moving at the time.

Rožman did acknowledge participating in a meeting at the end of April or the beginning of May 1942. Representatives of three parties asked him to hold a meeting at his palace, to discuss the situation under the occupation. He agreed to chair the meeting, so as to reduce the risk to the others, who believed that the Italians would be unlikely to move against Rožman. According to Rožman, they drafted a memorandum regarding the misdeeds of the occupiers, which he presented to the High Commissioner, who was furious, threatening to arrest the representatives of the political parties. Rožman claimed

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[47]*ibid.* p. 334.

[48]MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, p. 24.

that this meeting, far from being an act of collaboration, was rather an act of resistance to Fascism.[49]

But although many of the accusations directed at Rožman may not have been justified, even if he was not present at all of the meetings in which he was alleged to have participated, and although the alleged letter to Maglione in Rome may not have been as Italian intelligence reported it, his protestations that he was not involved in discussions on cooperation with the Italians in suppressing the OF in the spring of 1942 are not credible. Such moves to establish cooperation were made, and it was Ehrlich of the theology faculty, members of Catholic Action and of the clericalist SLS who played the leading roles. Lojze Ude, who later joined the Partisans, but was at this stage uncommitted and critical of both sides in the unfolding civil war, condemned the treachery of "Ehrlich's Roman Catholic Fascists".[50] Numerous documentary sources show that neither the Italians nor the Partisans had any doubt that Rožman was himself involved in these moves, and Lenič's testimony confirms that he was included in the political machinations of the time.

However, Lenič's portrayal of Rožman as a politically naive man is also confirmed by other sources. There was at least one other meeting of leading figures from the political and cultural fields in either August or September 1942, at which Rožman presided. Rožman denied that there was such a meeting, insisting that the only such meeting which took place was the one in April or May.[51] However, more than one source speaks of the later meeting, and they agree that Rožman was present. However, far from being a key figure in formulating a response to the Partisans and in developing a policy on links with the Italians, it seems that Rožman was very much under the influence of others.

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[49] *Škofa Rožmana odgovor*, pp. 5-6.

[50] Letter to the Executive Committee of the OF (IO OF) of late April 1942. Lojze Ude, *Moje Mnenje o Položaju* (Ljubljana, 1994, edited by Boris Mlakar) (hereafter Ude), pp. 24-25.

[51] *Škofa Rožmana odgovor*, pp. 5-6.

Vladimir Šuklje was invited by Rožman to attend a meeting in August 1942, regarding the demand of the Italian military leadership that resistance movements must be stopped. Rožman gave an introduction, and summed up the proceedings at the end. Others gave their views, some, such as Natlačen, favouring organizing resistance to the Partisans, and others against it. Rožman's contribution did not add anything to the debate.[52] Viktor Damjan spoke of a meeting in September 1942, which may in fact have been the same meeting, in spite of the confusion over the date. He lists other participants, including Šuklje and Natlačen, as well as other key figures on the Partisans' list of their enemies, such as leading SLS figures Albin Šmajd and Ivan Avsenek, the latter of whom was a prime mover behind he Slovene Alliance. Damjan noted Rožman's anxiety, and judged that "he was personally not independent, was extremely sensitive, and under continual pressure from his much more active political surroundings."[53]

A similar appraisal of Rožman was given by Andrej Gosar, a professor at Ljubljana University and a leading figure in the so-called "Sredina" ("Centre"), which tried to stay aloof from the civil war, opposing the methods of the Partisans, while also disapproving of collaboration with the occupier. He described a meeting at which there was a lecture, after which Rožman gave his views on the Communists, saying that the time had come for Slovenia to have martyrs for the faith. Gosar came away with the impression that Rožman was under pressure from those around him.[54]

So the impression given by these testimonies, which confirm the view of Lenič, is of a weak, indecisive and impressionable man, bitterly opposed to Communism, but politically naive, who was drawn into the political manoeuvrings of those who sought to counter the Partisans through collaborationist activities. It seems that the impression shared by the Partisans and the Italians that Rožman was the key figure was mistaken,

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[52]Report on interrogation of Šuklje on 3 December, 1945. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, p. 3132.

[53]Report on interrogation of Damjan, 6 August, 1946. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, pp. 3128-3129.

[54]Minutes of a meeting at the Commission for the discovery of criminals of the occupation and their accomplices, 5 December, 1945. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, p. 3120.

that he was in fact more of a tool in the hands of others, and that he did not take the initiative.

He was, however, a willing accomplice. There is evidence that following the meeting in August or September 1942, to which Šuklje and Damjan referred, a memorandum, in Rožman's name, was sent to Robotti, containing suggestions on how order could be maintained.[55] It suggested that armed guards, under Slovene leadership, whose commanders would be appointed by the military authorities, should be created in the villages. These guards would be used exclusively against subversive elements. They would be able to establish order more effectively than the army, whose soldiers did not know the people or speak their language, and who had failed to track down rebels who had hidden in the woods or in the villages. The formation of such units would also increase the trust of the population in the Italian authorities. Of course, such units, the Village Guards, already existed, as Robotti noted, remarking that they did an excellent job, both from the military and from the political standpoint.

The memorandum also proposed that units should be formed under the command of former Yugoslav officers which would operate in the woods, preventing the formation of Partisan groups there (further pointing to the unlikelihood that the alleged letter sent to Rome, with its criticisms of the Italian authorities for their failure to intern Yugoslav officers, was authentic). As to Ljubljana, the memorandum proposed that an armed Slovene secret police should be formed, which would in six weeks be able to find, seize and hand over to the authorities all dangerous elements. They would also be able to avoid instances in which the innocent suffered with the guilty, as happened when the Italians punished the families of subversives, resulting in hostility towards the Italians, which helped the Partisans.

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[55]Memorandum from Rožman to Robotti of 12 September, 1942, and Robotti's comments upon it. In German, from the Archives and Records Service, Washington DC, microcopy T-821, roll 252, with Slovene translation. MNZ, a 4th file on Rožman, pp. 3825-3829.

This memorandum, though in Rožman's name, may well have been principally a result of the initiative of others. In the closing passage, Rožman noted that General Roatta, commander of the Italian Second Army in occupied Yugoslavia, had demanded that the people must choose between order and Bolshevism. This would seem to confirm the connection between the memorandum and the meeting noted by Šuklje and Damjan, as Šuklje noted that the meeting was held following the demand of the Italian generals to Rožman that resistance movements must be suppressed. The memorandum concluded that "we have chosen order, and propose what according to our humble opinion is the only effective and sure way, in active collaboration with the authorities, to maintain complete order." Robotti, having noted the good work being done by the Village Guards, agreed that it would be a good idea to increase their number and to accept the collaboration offered.

Rožman's hostility towards Communism cannot be doubted. Lenič attested that for Rožman, *Divini Redemptoris*'s prohibition on cooperation with Communists was crucial.[56] In his public pronouncements, Rožman increasingly abandoned caution as the level of violence increased. On 16 March 1942, Franc Župec, a leading member of the "Straža" organization and of the student body set up by the Italians, was assassinated by the VOS in Ljubljana. Two days later, Jaroslav Kikelj, president of the students' organization of Catholic Action, was also killed.[57] Rožman himself conducted Kikelj's funeral, and his oration included the words "thanks be to God for the first Martyr that he has been pleased to give to our Catholic Action. As with that he has given us the guarantee of blessed success." And he prayed that "the martyr's blood of the fervent apostle of Catholic Action will awaken ever more numerous and more fervent ranks of young apostles."[58]

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[56]"Pogovor s škofom dr. Stanislavom Leničem", p. 1932.

[57]Mikuž, *Pregled zgodovine nob v Sloveniji* (vol. 1), p. 335; note on Župec and Kikelj in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 2, p. 34.

[58]Report in *Slovenski dom*, 22 March, 1942; MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, p. 60.

By this time, Rožman and the clergy had been identified as implacable foes by the Partisans. In a report to Tito just after the assassinations of Župec and Kikelj, Kardelj noted that:-

> The Bishop of Ljubljana pronounced two students - denunciators and Italian agents who have recently been liquidated by the security service of the OF - as Christian martyrs, and now leads a bitter campaign against the OF and the KP [Communist Party], hand in hand with a wave of fierce Italian terror, which now covers the whole of the "Ljubljana Province." The priests and church readers curse the OF, and call down divine vengeance upon it ...[59]

The civil war into which Slovenia had plunged became still more bitter. On 26 May, Ehrlich was killed in Ljubljana.[60] In July 1942, the Italians launched an offensive to clear Partisan-controlled areas, in which Slovene auxiliaries took part.[61] The Slovene Communists reported that the clergy played a key role in organizing resistance to the Partisans. In September 1942, Kardelj reported to Tito on the activities of "bands" in the pay of the Italians, fighting the Partisans in the name of King Peter, which "patrol through the villages, most often with an armed priest at their head, alongside a Yugoslav active officer."[62] A few days later Kardelj wrote to leading Communist Ivo Lola Ribar that the BG was now armed, and given a freer hand by the Italians. They presented themselves as followers of the exiled Government in London and of King Peter, but needed to cooperate with the Italians in the meantime, in order to destroy the Partisans.

> In the main it involves reactionary clericalist elements, with priests at their head, and connected with them also open followers of Mihailović, who are closely connected with the clericalists. They have formed the so-called "Slovene Legion", the "Legion of Death", the "White Legion" etc. They are quite openly in with the Italians, they drive their lorries, and have armed patrols through the villages and through the city of Ljubljana, killing followers of the OF, terrorizing the population etc. The main leaders are the priests, who, themselves armed, patrol at the head of these bands.[63]

Mikuž described the involvement of the clergy in the offensive against the Partisans during the summer and autumn of 1942. As well as organizing the formation of Village Guards, they denounced OF activists and sympathizers, wounded Partisans and people

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[59]Report of 29 March, 1942. *Zbornik*, Tom II, book 3, p. 271.

[60]Note on Ehrlich. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 1, pp. 215-216.

[61]Clissold, *Whirlwind*, pp. 170-173.

[62]Report of 20 September, 1942. *Zbornik*, Tom II, book 6, pp. 130-138.

[63]Letter of 26 September, 1942. *Zbornik*, Tom II, book 6, pp. 171-177.

whom they simply regarded as dubious.[64] Numerous Italian documents also speak of the involvement of members of the clergy in the fight against the Partisans. A notable example was Fr. Blatnik, of the Salesian order. Several Italian documents speak of a Fr. B, who passed them information regarding people who were working for the Partisans, who were then arrested. It is apparent from a hand-written note on one of them that Fr. B was Blatnik.[65] It was Blatnik who carried the alleged letter for Maglione in March 1942.[66] He travelled to Rome with a boy who had been placed in a Salesian institution in Ljubljana by the Communists as a spy, but who had then revealed the truth of how he came to be there.[67] It was also Blatnik who visited Bishop Tomažič in Maribor and tried to persuade him to undertake propaganda on behalf of the Domobranstvo.

In August 1942, General Tadeo Orlando, commander of the "Granatieri di Sardegna" division, wrote a report to the command of the Italian Eleventh Army Corps regarding the demands of the clergy. They expressed the wish to cooperate in anti-Communist actions, and especially sought authorization for their freedom of movement, so that they could carry out their tasks and cooperate in the work of pacification.[68] In another report, Orlando described a speech by a local curate on the occasion of a public holiday: "In his speech he compared the efforts of the Italian army in the cause of peace and civilization with the foul and criminal acts carried out by the Communists."[69]

In a letter in September 1942, Robotti wrote regarding the desire of the Slovene clergy to be issued with arms: "The priests of the region, who are for the most part the founders and leaders of the units of the MVAC [Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia, as the

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[64]Mikuž, *Slovenska Duhovščina in Osvobodilna Fronta*, p. 7. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 516a/I.

[65]Three Italian memoranda dated May 1942. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 2, pp. 3162-3167. An undated memorandum refers to Blatnik. File 2, pp. 3280-3281.

[66]Mikuž, *Pregled zgodovine nob v Sloveniji* (vol. 1), p. 333.

[67]MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 2, pp. 3280-3281.

[68]Report of 5 August, 1942, with Slovene translation. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 2, pp. 3182-3183.

[69]Report of 30 August, 1942, with Slovene translation. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 2, pp. 3184-3185.

Italians called the Village Guards] have expressed the wish to be armed with revolvers."[70] In October 1942, a group of local noteworthies from Sodražice, including the mayor and the parish priest, sent an appeal to the High Commissioner, asking for help in their defence against the Partisans, either by sending a unit there or by returning local men who had been interned, and arming them.[71] In November the parish priest of Žimlje, near Ig, sent a letter to the command of the Second Army, asking that the men who had been interned in August be returned. All of them were anti-Communist, and could be armed, as in other districts, to fight against the Partisans.[72]

The Partisans frequently took violent measures against members of the clergy. Later in the war, a group of leading OF figures admitted to the Prior of the Carthusian monastery at Pleterje that there had been many killings of priests and Catholic believers at the beginning, putting it down to haste, clumsiness, personal revenge and criminal elements. They blamed the excesses on what they described as a lot of "scum" ("izmečkov") in the Partisans at that time, who were out of control. But they acknowledged that "traitors" were certainly liquidated.[73] In reality the violence of that time owed most to the radical line of the Communist leadership.

Rožman was also accused of having had a direct involvement in the organization and recruitment of Village Guards, intervening to secure the release of men from internment, so that they could serve in the Guards. The prosecution in his trial cited a letter from one Avguštin Karner, appealing that Rožman secure his release from internment, so that he could join the White Guard, and "fight with our boys and men against those godless Communists ... for Christ the King." The indictment stated that

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[70]Letter of 1 September, 1942, with Slovene translation. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 2, pp. 3186-3188.

[71]Letter of 29 October, 1942, with Slovene translation. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 2, pp. 3210-3214.

[72]Letter of 12 November, 1942, with Slovene translation. MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 2, pp. 3220-3222.

[73]Account of a meeting of Josip Edgar Leopold-Lavov with leading OF figures Josip Vidmar, Marjan Brecelj, Edvard Kocbek, Metod Mikuž and Vito Kraigher. Josip Edgar Leopold-Lavov, *Kartuzija Pleterje in Partizani, 1941-1945: spomini* (Ljubljana, 1977) (hereafter Leopold-Lavov), pp. 104-105.

Rožman did intervene, and that Karner was released.[74] That he wrote to Rožman, it was alleged, demonstrated that it was widely believed that Rožman was the organizer of the BG. Rožman acknowledged that he did receive the request from Karner. He claimed that he was suspicious of it, and tore it up. Therefore, that the court had a copy meant that there must have been a duplicate, confirming his suspicion that it had been a deliberate attempt to ensnare him. He denied that he ever intervened on behalf of people who wanted to join the Village Guards.[75]

Rožman made no secret of his hostility towards Communism, but he insisted that a distinction needed to be made between the ideological, spiritual struggle against atheistic Communism, which was seen as a threat to the Catholic Slovene people, and armed defence against the Communists. Given that opposition to religion was in the essence of Communism, it was the duty of every priest to oppose it, on the basis of Christian moral teachings, and to warn of its danger. But he denied that he or the Church were involved in actual armed defence, which the people turned to in 1942 when the Communists started removing opponents and "taking up arms against their anti-Communist fellow countrymen."[76]

Whatever the extent of his involvement in actual resistance to the Partisans, as the polarization in Slovenia became sharper and the civil war more bitter, Rožman joined the "spiritual and ideological struggle" with increasing resolution. He made a lengthy and detailed attack in a "Pastoral Letter on the Danger of Atheistic Communism", issued on 30 November 1943.[77] It was an especially fierce attack, and Rožman seems by this time to have forgotten any responsibility on the part of the occupiers for the afflictions of the Slovenes, identifying the Communists as the cause of all their troubles:-

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[74]MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, p. 64.

[75]*Škofa Rožmana odgovor*, pp. 8-9.

[76]*Škofa Rožmana odgovor*, pp. 14-15.

[77]Copy of letter at MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 3, pp. 3424-3427.

> Who is it, dear faithful, who has plunged you into such misfortune that the people is threatened with the danger of destruction? It is the most dangerous enemy of Christian peoples: *atheistic Communism*, which has deceived many among us with national slogans, and behind the mask of the Liberation Front and the National Liberation Army tries to seize power, so as finally to accomplish their bloody revolution and organize society according to atheistic principles, as it has done everywhere where it has been able, if only temporarily, to come to power. It is the chief culprit for all the woes which it has either directly caused itself, or indirectly provoked.

He defended himself against the criticism that this pastoral letter might be inappropriate meddling in affairs which should not concern a bishop: "The struggle against atheistic Communism is not political, but a *religious matter*, as it concerns the faith and God, the most fundamental truths of every religion, and especially of our Christian faith." After a detailed exposition of the Church's view of the dangers and falsehoods of Communism, supported by citations of the words of various Popes, Rožman issued, under the heading "All as One - to the Fight", a call to the Catholic laity and to Catholic organizations to join the struggle: "God and his Church expects of all of these that they will take the lead among our people in an earnest and resolute struggle against the greatest danger of our time ..."

This call upon the Catholic faithful perhaps shows where Rožman saw the line between the "ideological struggle", in which the Church was bound to involve itself, and active participation in armed struggle. It was apparently permissible for the Church and clergy to call the faithful to arms, to show them where their duty lay as faithful Catholics. Clearly at some level Rožman believed that he and his clergy had a role in providing leadership, in showing the Slovene people the correct course in face of a threat to the Church as well as to society in general.

So in the course of 1942 and 1943 Rožman, a large proportion of the Catholic clergy, and leading Catholic lay people had become involved in a bitter civil war, pitting them against the Communist dominated OF and Partisans. Initially it was in response to the militant and violent course adopted by the Communists at the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942, but they quickly came to view the Communists as their principal enemy, and were thus drawn into close collaboration with the Italian occupiers. The militant leftist line adopted by the KPJ leadership for a few months from the end of 1941

until the spring of 1942 was implemented with particular vigour and ruthlessness in Slovenia (as was also the case in Montenegro and Hercegovina), and it is therefore not surprising that the civil war was particularly bitter there. There were however many who were disturbed by the spectacle of Slovenes expending their energy on fighting each other while the country was occupied, and attempts were made to bring the two sides together, to sort out their differences.

Attempts at Mediation

It seems that there were some contacts between the OF and the Slovene Alliance as early as the summer of 1942, but that these came to nothing.[78] Kardelj wrote to Lola Ribar in September 1942 that the OF's intelligence service had learned that some nationalists and clericalists had received instructions from London that they should enter into discussions with the OF. He also noted that Radio Free Yugoslavia (which was based in the Soviet Union) had spoken of "approval of some kind of negotiations among the Slovenes", although he knew nothing about that. He went on to say that such developments could help them "in smashing the White Guard, which is trying to unite all those outside the OF." Clearly Kardelj was not thinking of any serious negotiations with the OF's opponents.[79]

Further efforts were made the following year. A key figure in these was Lojze Ude, who was later to join the Partisans, but was at this stage still uncommitted. Ude was a left-leaning intellectual who had had contacts with the Communists before the war, but had fallen out with them over their support for the Nazi-Soviet pact. Early in the war he opted for resistance to the occupying forces, but he was worried that the rash actions of the OF were achieving little and doing a lot of damage, causing a rift among the

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[78]Boris Mlakar, "Lojze Ude kot kritični spremljevalec osvobodilne fronte" (hereafter Mlakar), in Ude, p. 160.

[79]Letter of 26 September, 1942. *Zbornik*, Tom II, book 6, pp. 171-177.

Slovenes. He warned of the risk of civil war, which would lead to collaboration.[80] In a letter to the Executive Committee of the OF at the end of April 1942, while condemning the traitorous activities of Ehrlich's group, he appealed for an end to the shootings of traitors, and that the OF should rather seek to win support through persuasion.[81]

Ude was in contact with a diverse range of people during the first two years of the war. These included leading members of the OF. In late 1941, the leading Slovene Communist Boris Kidrič stayed in his house, and he was also in touch with Edvard Kocbek of the Christian Socialists. He also maintained contacts with individuals from other groups, including the "Sredina", and with Albin Šmajd of the SLS. He had been in regular contact with Šmajd from the autumn of 1941 until the spring of 1942, when it became clear that they were on different sides in the developing civil war, and relations between them ceased. Ude supported the OF, while strongly criticizing the tactics of its leaders, especially the Communists.[82]

Again it was an initiative from outside of Slovenia which prompted further moves towards reconciliation, when in February 1943 Slovene spokesmen in London, especially Kuhar, started calling for national unity and an end to conflicts. Ude responded first by turning to several priests. He pointed out to them the admonishments coming from London, but they replied that they had other secret instructions. They would not say from where they had received these instructions, but Ude thought it possible that they came from the Vatican. It is interesting that Ude chose to go to members of the clergy in his search for reconciliation between the parties to the civil war. Clearly he recognized that the clergy were key players in the battle against the Partisans. But seeing that he was not going to make any progress with them, he decided to reopen contact with Šmajd.[83]

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[80]Mlakar, in Ude, pp. 155-159.

[81]Ude, pp. 24-25.

[82]Mlakar, in Ude, pp. 159-161.

[83]Details of Ude's efforts to negotiate a truce from a report by him, dated 20 August, 1943. Ude, pp. 103-110.

He met Šmajd on 7 April 1943, and found that he was interested in discussing peace. However, in spite of this encouraging beginning, things did not proceed smoothly. He wrote a series of letters to Šmajd. The first of these, of 21 April 1943, warned of the terrible harm being done to the Slovene people by the civil war. It appealed that things be seen in the light of the agreement between the western Allies and the Soviet Union and the call for unity from the Slovene leaders in exile. Finally it set out conditions that would have to be fulfilled before contact could be made with the OF, and conditions which the OF itself would have to fulfil. They must cease attacks on each other, they must stop handing people over to the Italians, and the OF should stop forced mobilization and avoid occupying inhabited areas or carrying out actions that could bring the Italians down upon the population.[84]

Šmajd spoke to Ude as a representative of the SLS, but the picture was more complicated than Ude was at first aware. In fact Šmajd represented only one part of the SLS, and the discussions within the Slovene Alliance on the possibilities for a truce included other initiatives apart from Ude's. Šmajd was not in the leadership of the Slovene Alliance, in which the SLS was represented by Miloš Stare. The Slovene Alliance had to take account of the demands from London, and prepared draft proposals for an agreement with the OF. A first draft proposed complete unity, while a second settled for mutual tolerance. In mid-April 1943, Šmajd received another offer of mediation, from the Christian Socialist Janez Marn-Črtomir, who told Šmajd that there existed within the OF a real will for agreement. The leadership of the Slovene Alliance received from London, via Rome, the suggestion that if the possibility of an agreement existed, both sides should stop the killings and collaborate, with the aim of bringing Slovenia into a federal Yugoslavia. The Alliance was ready, but did not expect any result, believing that only pressure from Moscow would make an agreement possible. There

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[84]Ude, pp. 68-75.

were also approaches to Rožman by some members of the "Sredina" and the OF.[85] The leading Christian Socialist, Edvard Kocbek noted that "the White Guard clergy has started to signal the wish for reconciliation among Slovenes."[86]

Ude received no immediate response to his letter of 21 April, and when an article appeared in the newspaper *Jutro* on 2 May 1943, rejecting any truce with the Communists, he took it as a reply to his letter.[87] In response, Ude wrote Šmajd another letter, upbraiding him for not meeting him again, as they had agreed, and attacking the article in *Jutro* as a completely unsatisfactory response.[88] Šmajd immediately visited Ude, and assured him that he had nothing to do with the article in *Jutro*, and that it did not represent the views of those on behalf of whom he was speaking. He promised that an official response would shortly be forthcoming.

At the end of May, the Slovene Alliance received a new demand for unity from London. On 5 June Šmajd visited Ude again, and informed him that his group was ready for talks. He stressed that the desire for negotiations did not arise out of any weakness on their part, and that they could defend themselves if necessary. It was the need for unity in approaching the question of Slovenia's borders which was uppermost in his mind. Ude had a number of further meetings with Šmajd, the last of them on 24 August 1943, but finally there was no agreement.[89]

In fact, given the attitude of the Communist leaders, there was no chance of agreement being reached. The Partisan press attacked Šmajd even while the discussions were going on.[90] The Communists still saw such approaches as they had the previous summer, as an opportunity to undermine their domestic enemies. Mira Tomšič,

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[85]Mlakar, in Ude, pp. 161-162.

[86]Letter dated 15 June, 1943. Arhiv Slovenije, Privatni arhiv L. Ude (hereafter AS, Ude), šk. 3.

[87]Ude's report of 20 August, 1943. Ude, p. 105.

[88]Letter of 3 May, 43. AS, Ude, šk. 46, file 615.

[89]Mlakar, in Ude, p. 162, and Ude's report of 20 August, 1943, pp. 105-108.

[90]As noted by Ude in a letter to Šmajd of 29 July, 1943. Ude, pp. 89-90.

a leading figure in the Ljubljana Party, reported the approach from Ude and Šmajd in a letter to the Executive Committee of the OF on 12 May 1943. In July Kidrič informed Kardelj, adding that: "We, of course, will do everything for their [the BG's] further disintegration, including through such offers, that is through the exploitation of such offers."[91] To Tomšič he was even more explicit:-

> In principal it is obviously impossible for us to soil ourselves with negotiations with the BG leaders. But we should certainly exploit their difficulties, maintaining indirect links with them with the aim of further disorganizing their ranks. In the case of complete capitulation an amnesty of such people is certainly also possible.

A session of the Executive Committee of the OF on 28 June 1943 approved Kidrič's instructions to Tomšič, and agreed that they would have no direct negotiations. They would, however, arrange a meeting with Ude and Jože Dolenc, who had assisted Ude in making his contacts.[92] The leading Christian Socialist Tone Fajfar wrote in his diary of Šmajd's attempt to make contact with the OF through Ude, who, he said, believed in the illusion that there could be reconciliation.[93] Reconciliation was far from the minds of the Communists and their allies in the OF.

Šmajd also wrote a report on his contacts with the OF, which he sent to Krek in London, reporting that the negotiations were in deadlock, and asking for instructions on how to proceed further. But Krek only received the report after a long delay, by which time the Italians had capitulated and the civil war had entered a new phase. Ude did not give up his mission at once, and in September 1943 he finally went to Partisan territory, hoping to have discussions with Kidrič and Kocbek on the matter. But he found that they avoided the subject, and with the Italian capitulation the Partisan leaders had no more thoughts of negotiations, thinking only in terms of a military solution.[94]

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[91]Letter of 22 June, 1943. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 7, pp. 600-605.

[92]Minutes of the session and letter from Kidrič to Tomšič of 22 June, 1943. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 7, pp. 666-667.

[93]Mlakar, in Ude, p. 163.

[94]*ibid.* pp. 163-164.

But although the Communist leaders had no intention of engaging in serious negotiations with their foes in the Slovene Alliance, among the clericalists of the SLS and the various forces which they knew collectively as the White Guard, they were open to contacts with non-Communists who could be fitted into their schemes. The policy was to draw malleable groups and individuals into their organization, without giving them any real power. They sought to divide such elements from those whom they regarded as their implacable enemies, thus undermining them, and causing them to disintegrate, just as Kardelj and Kidrič had explained. This was in line with the policy of the Popular Front, whose expression in Slovenia was the formation of the OF.

The Liberation Front

As described earlier, the OF had been formed early in the war. Its aim was to include as wide a range as possible of organizations and individuals within a front organization controlled by the Communists. It did not enjoy a smooth development, as the policy of the dominant Communists towards it was unsettled during the first two years of its existence. In August 1941, Kardelj reported enthusiastically on a plenum of the OF which took place in July:-

> The Christian Socialists have gathered all that is positive of the remains of the JRZ [Yugoslav Radical Union] ... So, without any exaggeration, the majority of the Slovene people is in the OF. The authority of the Party is enormous ... Cooperation within the OF is really sincere ... the conditions for work are excellent - everyone against the occupiers, everyone helping us."[95]

While front organizations were set up elsewhere in Yugoslavia, nowhere else did this happen as early as was the case with the OF in Slovenia. Djilas noted that only in Slovenia was the participation of non-Communists more than symbolic, but even there it was only so at the beginning. He explained that they never had "the influence, much less the organizational strength or militancy of the Party." But he recognized the value of including other groups and individuals, in that they "broadened the base of the uprising." Djilas stressed that the Communist Party had particular strengths which gave it the edge

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[95]Report from Kardelj to Tito, 2 August, 1941. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 1, pp. 178-183.

over others in the OF. It was "the most ideological, the most resolute, the best organized, the most realistic."[96] Josip Vidmar, a leading independent figure in the OF, also acknowledged the organizational strengths of the Communists in explaining how it was that they took the lead in the OF from the beginning: "It [the Communist Party] put at the disposal of the liberation struggle all its organizational experience, its whole organization, its technical expertise and all its knowledge regarding illegal and conspiratorial activities."[97]

Like others among the leading non-Communists in the OF, Vidmar accepted many of the Communists' convictions. Djilas noted that he was not a Marxist, but that "he accepted the revolution as a historical opportunity for the Slovenian people, while he looked upon Marxism as the most significant modern social teaching, albeit a defective one."[98] Djilas described him as a liberal, a patriot and "a fierce opponent of clericalism and fascism." The leading Christian Socialist Tone Fajfar identified even more strongly with the Communists' cause. In 1943 he declared to a meeting of OF activists that the aim of the Christian Socialists was a classless society, which was achievable only through social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus their place was with the Communist Party, the "avant-garde" of the revolutionary proletariat. He asserted that Christianity must not be an obstacle to the realization of these aspirations. As to the role of the Christian Socialists in the OF:-

> Right from the beginning the role of the Christian group was mapped out: to win the Slovene Christian masses for the liberation movement. We were called to destroy the old danger of reaction among the Christian people, above all to destroy their connections with clericalism. Our role was to instil in the Christian masses a new revolutionary social consciousness ...[99]

Given the powerful position of the Catholic Church within Slovene society and political life, the participation in the OF of the Christian Socialists, prominent Catholics

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[96]Milovan Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 335.

[97]Speech by Vidmar, 28 April, 1943. AS, Ude, šk. 46, file 705.

[98]Milovan Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 334.

[99]Minutes of a meeting of OF activists, 28-30 April, 1943, paper by Fajfar. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 6, pp. 326-334.

and local Catholic activists, was very useful to the Communists. They could give the OF a legitimacy among the bulk of the population which the Communists could not hope to achieve alone. Kidrič fully recognized the value of the participation of the Christian Socialists: "In the current situation, with armed attacks by the White Guard, and its demagogy about the Catholic Faith, the Christian Socialists are for us a real 'gold mine.'"[100]

Fajfar was not alone among the Christian Socialists in sharing many of the revolutionary aims of the Communists. Early in the war, Kocbek asserted that:-

> The Christian group in the OF represents all those Slovene Christians who have, in face of the new insights and tasks of mankind, decided to remain Christians, and who, upon the occupation of Slovenia, as one of the founding groups, helped found the OF, on the basis of immediate resistance to the occupier and the revolutionary aspiration for a new Slovene order.[101]

Later on Kocbek described the significance of the Christian Socialists as lying in the fact that they provided a "counterweight" to clericalism, creating a progressive alternative within the Catholic camp, which could draw support away from the official Catholic leadership.[102] Kocbek's commitment to sincere cooperation with the Communists within the united front was clear. Djilas commented that Kocbek had a vision of a socialist, popular Catholicism, but that its prospects were weakened by the appearance of the collaborationist White Guard, which was based among the Catholic population:-

> The Catholics who joined the OF were assimilated, engulfed and absorbed. The dissolution was in progress of those social and national visions of a Catholicism which Kocbek had evidently seen as something popular and Slovenian, and this was his personal tragedy.[103]

The sincere and equal cooperation which many Christian Socialists like Kocbek sought was less easy during the Communists' militant leftist period, during which the KPS was required to place more emphasis on the Party, and not to make concessions

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[100]Report on the OF to the CK KPJ of 14 December, 1942. *Jesen 1942; korespondenca Edvarda Kardelja in Borisa Kidriča* (Ljubljana, 1963) (hereafter *Jesen 1942*), pp. 575-589.

[101]Untitled piece from the autumn of 1941. Edvard Kocbek, *Osvobodilni Spisi*, volume 1 (Ljubljana, 1991), p. 20.

[102]Circular no. 6 to the Christian activists in the OF, 11 January, 1943. Kocbek, *Osvobodilni Spisi*, volume 1, pp. 256-266.

[103]Milovan Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 336.

for the sake of coalition building. The KPJ leadership switched back to the Popular Front line in the spring of 1942, but, judging from the rebukes from the central party leadership for the alleged "sectarianism" of the Slovene Party, it took the Slovene Communists a little longer to fall back into line with the Popular Front policy.

There was friction between the Communists and the Christian Socialists, with many of the latter finding it difficult to accept their subordinate position within the OF and objecting to the violent methods being used by the Communists. The head of the Slovene Partisans' main command, Franc Leskošek, reported to the central Party leadership in May 1942 that:-

> As to our relations with our allies, there has also been a bit of a crisis, which we have satisfactorily overcome. Various lawyers among the Catholics in the OF began to follow the policy of the "Sredina", and to push for the development of their group into a party. With the help of workers among the Catholics in the OF we overcame the resistance of the Catholic group to the liquidation of White Guards, insisted that the group formulate a public stand against the "Sredina", and brought about a reorganization of the leadership of the group, so that the lawyers were excluded.[104]

In order to impose greater discipline on the Christian activists, and to bind them more closely into the OF, it was decided in the Summer of 1942 to start a weekly circular, which would keep the activists on the ground informed and in line. The emphasis in these circulars was on discipline and the need to concentrate efforts on undermining the BG. This discipline should be based on two foundations:-

> Recognition of the absolute correctness of the ideas and programme of our group and of the OF, and recognition of the need to carry it out resolutely and efficiently, with all vigour. In particular it is necessary that the secretaries warn that all the activists must unconditionally trust the leadership ...[105]

But, as Leskošek had noted in May, not all of the Christian activists accepted such tight controls easily.

A report from an activist in the field in July 1942 complained bitterly about atrocities and liquidations carried out by the Partisans in his area, some of which were motivated by "social" considerations (meaning the elimination of the class enemy). The local curate, who had run the clericalist organization in the area, was among those killed. As a

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[104]Report of 16 May, 1942. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 2, pp. 75-77.

[105]Decision of the Christian Socialist leadership to start the circular, and instructions regarding the second

result of such actions by the Partisans the BG was strengthened, leading to fighting in which fifteen people were killed, including two priests. The injustices being carried out only served to harm the movement, losing it sympathy in the eyes of the people. Apart from that, he objected that "we Catholics in the OF have not in collaborating with the OF given up our moral and religious principles. The end does not justify the means." He also alluded to his dissatisfaction with the inferior role played by the Communists' partners in the OF: "Where are the political commissars of the Christian Socialists and the Sokols? Up until now we have not heard anything about them."[106]

So the methods and high-handed manner of the Communists clearly caused considerable resentment among some of the Christian Socialists. Although the Communists never intended to give anything approaching an equal role to the other groups in the OF, the Communist leaders had nevertheless come to the conclusion that their tactics had been counter-productive. In an article in July 1942 on the role of the Communist Party in the OF, Kidrič warned of the danger of "sectarianism" in the dealings of some Party members and organizations with their partners in the OF.[107]

In an article which appeared at the same time, Kardelj also warned against sectarianism. If they did not stay in tune with the mood of the people the Party risked becoming a sect, isolated from the masses. To Kardelj, the avoidance of sectarianism did not mean that real concessions would be made to the other groups in the OF, or that they would be allowed an equal role in determining its direction. On the contrary, he insisted that activists must understand that the OF was not a coalition of parties, but rather a popular mass movement, composed of a whole range of groups and individuals. Only the Communist Party, with its leading role, was to be allowed its own, separate organization. He went on to explain that it was natural that not all within the OF or among

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and third issues. INZ, PC - IO OF, fasc. 441/VI.

[106]Report from the field, dated 18 July, 1942, appended to the instructions for circular no. 3 of the Christian group in the OF. INZ, PC - IO OF, fasc. 441/VI.

[107]Article in *Delo*, no. 4, July 1942, "Položaj osvobodilne borbe in naloga partije". *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 2, pp. 423-426.

the masses had reached the level of maturity to be able to "understand and accept the correct political line of our Party and leadership in the OF."[108]

The avoidance of sectarianism meant that there should be greater sensitivity to the views and attitudes of non-Communists than had been the case during the recent period of "leftist" militancy. Communists would have to be patient in carrying out their revolutionary aims, and avoid alienating the people, a large majority of whom had no desire to see any kind of Communist revolution. This was the essence of the Popular Front policy, and it was based on pragmatism, not on any sincere intent to share power with the Communists' partners and fellow travellers.

The damaging effects of the militancy of the Slovene Communists continued to worry Kardelj. In August 1942, he informed Lola Ribar that he had replaced all of the commanders and political commissars in Slovenia on account of their sectarianism: "There have, for example, been cases of our "vojvode", as we have christened certain of our commanders and political commissars, arresting and even shooting the activists of our allies, the Christian Socialists, causing the whole crisis in the OF."[109] By October 1942 Kardelj seems to have been satisfied that the crisis caused by the leftist sectarianism had passed. In a report to Tito he was optimistic:-

> Conditions among the leadership of the OF are fairly good. From time to time we quarrel a bit with the Christian Socialists, but mainly about insignificant matters. I expect that the OF will remain firm among its leaders ... On the ground relations between our activists and our allies are for the most part very good, although in some cases - for which our sectarians have mostly been to blame - there are still a lot of tensions.[110]

Kardelj was satisfied that activists on the ground were OF people first, rather than Christian Socialists, Communists etc. Of course, this was disingenuous of Kardelj. He had made it clear that the tactic of stressing the OF was a mere expediency, and he had no intention that Communists would submerge themselves in it. For the moment Party

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[108]Article in *Delo*, no. 4, July 1942, "Odločen boj proti sektaštvu". *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 2, pp. 427-430.

[109]Letter from Kardelj to Lola Ribar, 12 August, 1942. *Zbornik* , Tom II, book 5, pp. 271-279.

[110]Report from Kardelj to Tito, 7 October, 1942. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 7, pp. 547-559.

discipline required of its members that they work through the OF and avoid offending their collaborators in the OF. But their first loyalty was still to the Party.

But for the time-being efforts were made to appease the Communists' partners, especially the Christian Socialists. A larger amount of freedom was conceded to other groups in the OF, and it was even agreed that at some stage posts would be established for three assistant political commissars in the army - one for each of the three main groups (though this never actually happened).[111] One way in which the Communists tried to improve and strengthen their relationship with the Christian Socialists was through the embryonic Trade Union organization 'Workers' Unity', in which both groups participated.[112] The resolutions of a conference of 'Workers' Unity' in November 1942 revealed the strain in attempting to reconcile the desire to appease the Communists' partners with the insistence on the leading role of the Party:-

> The basic condition of 'Workers' Unity' is the complete equality of all its participating constituent parts, and also the individuals in the group. In that regard the group of Christian Socialists affirms and acknowledges the KPS's role as the 'avant-garde' of the proletariat, while the KPS and the free professional organizations recognize the class standpoint and revolutionary spirit of the Christian Socialists, which has been expressed in their participation in the struggle of the National Liberation Movement.[113]

Indeed, this strain could not be sustained. Whereas the Communists saw the formation of 'Workers' Unity' as a tactical move designed to appeal to Christian Socialist workers, the Christian Socialists themselves saw it as a vehicle for the fulfilment of their pre-war ambitions.[114] Hardly had the Slovene Party turned from its "leftist" line than it once again re-appraised the relations among the different groups in the OF, and especially with the Christian Socialists. In mid-December 1942, Kidrič wrote a lengthy report on the OF, and Kardelj sent Tito an even lengthier one on the situation in Slovenia, much of which was also devoted to the OF. Kidrič was satisfied that the

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[111]Vodušek Starič, *The Making of the Communist Regime in Slovenia and Yugoslavia*, pp. 7-8.

[112]As affirmed by Kidrič in a report on the OF to the CK KPJ of 14 December, 1942. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 575-589.

[113]Theses and resolution of the conference of "Workers' Unity", Ljubljana, 7 November, 1942. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 263-266.

[114]Bojan Godeša, "Krščanski socijalisti in ustanovitev enotnih sindikatov" (in *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*,

leading role of the Party in the OF had been in every sense realized. He noted the recent crisis, caused by the "opportunistic tendencies" of the Christian Socialists and the sectarian response of the Party's activists too that, but steps had been taken to put things in order. The Christian Socialists acknowledged the leading role of the Communist Party, and had renounced any notion of forming their own party. But he was not content.

It seemed to him that in spite of their assurances to the contrary, the Christian Socialists were nevertheless developing into a new party, and there were frequently tensions with them in the field. They were pro-Soviet, and continued collaboration with them ought to be possible. But he feared that at the decisive moment the "bourgeoisie" might use the Christian group as a focus around which to gather the forces of reaction.[115]

Kardelj had similar doubts. He made what may have been a shrewd judgement as to why relations with the Christian Socialists had gone through a difficult period in the summer of 1942, noting that at the time of the summer offensive by the Italians and their Slovene collaborators the Christian Socialists seemed to lose faith in the ultimate victory of the Communists. That the Communists had prevailed had restored their belief, and now the unity of the OF was considerably stronger. The leading non-Communists promoted the OF line and recognized the Party's leading role. But he was still concerned. There had recently been many discussions with the Christian Socialists, who had been warned that the forces of reaction would try to break the unity of the OF through them. The Christian Socialists had given assurances that they would not allow that, and that they would go with the Communists all the way to the Soviet revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat etc.[116] But the Communists soon decided that such assurances were insufficient.

In January, the central KPJ leadership sent Lola Ribar to Slovenia, with the task of strengthening the ties between the central and Slovene parties. Lola Ribar

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nos. 1-2, 1998, Ljubljana).

[115]Report on the OF to the CK KPJ of 14 December, 1942. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 575-589.

[116]Report from Kardelj to Tito, 14 December, 1942. *Zbornik*, Tom II, book 7, pp. 55-101.

acknowledged that the policies of the Slovene Party had had positive results, in that the stress on the OF had broadened the movement. But he warned that this had undermined the role of the Party, which was not leading the struggle. The fight against sectarianism had led to mistakes in the opposite direction, and now the people did not recognize the Party as the leader of the OF. He criticized "rotten democracy" in the army.[117] This confirmed the fears which had been expressed by Kidrič and Kardelj in December. So the policy of appeasing the Christian Socialists was now reversed, as the Communist leaders moved to deny them any capacity for independent action, and to institutionalize their own leading role.

The Christian Socialists, having taken heed of the warnings referred to by Kardelj, and seeing that the Communists were not satisfied with the way that things were developing in the OF, took steps to try to meet the Communists' objections. In the sixth issue of the circular to the activists of the Christian group in the OF in January 1943, Kocbek stressed that the Christian Socialists did not seek, and would not seek, to form their own party. The times demanded united political action, not competition between parties in a coalition. The partners in the OF had issued a declaration on the freedom of opinion and religion, and the upholding of those principles need not be dependent upon the existence of an organized political force, as Christianity did not depend on having a Christian political formation. He also warned of the danger that, having formed their own party, differentiated from other progressive groups on the basis of their beliefs, they might slip back into some kind of clericalism, which was such a strong tendency in the tradition of Slovene Catholicism.

Kocbek also addressed the question of why the Communists did not adhere to the principle that the various groups within the united front would not maintain their own, separate political organizations? Firstly they were part of an international Communist Party, and thus could not unilaterally renounce their party organization. Secondly, they

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[117]Vodušek Starič, *The Making of the Communist Regime in Slovenia and Yugoslavia*, p. 8.

were the first force to rise against reaction, and the only one which consistently stood against it. Therefore they had earned their "avant-garde" role among the progressive forces. The Christian Socialists had joined the Communist Party in the liberation struggle, and had to recognize its right to continue as a party, while foregoing that right themselves.

Kocbek then turned to the question of the organization of the Christian group in the OF. They remained an independent group, united in their political and cultural outlook. He defended their right to remain independent on the basis of the "new humanism" which he saw as being at the root of what the "progressive forces" in Slovenia were trying to achieve, and of the special and important contribution that the Christian group made to the OF, in countering the influence of the reactionary Catholic camp, and demonstrating that the place for the Christian was with the progressive forces in the struggle for the new order. So the Christian Socialists had decided:-

> on the one hand to renounce a mass political organization, that is, a political party, but on the other hand to organize, as a Slovene political, progressive force, and as Christians, in an independent group, which as an elite organization, with its own leadership, is restricted to the recruitment and instruction of activists.

Kocbek went on to stress again that the Christian Socialists worked for a united political organization of all progressive forces, which he saw becoming a united political party after the liberation. They had their own leadership, executive committee, regional secretaries and activists. He emphasized the need for discipline among the activists, which included the possibility of sanctions by the leadership.[118]

But while Kocbek was careful to assuage the fears of the Communists, there was nevertheless much there that merely confirmed their suspicions. It might indeed have seemed that in the independent group, with its own leadership and activists, there lay the seeds of a new political party, in spite of assurances to the contrary. This is certainly the view that Kidrič took, and so the talks with the Christian Socialist leaders continued, including, it would seem, the application of considerable pressure. By the middle of

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[118]Circular no. 6 to the activists of the Christian group in the OF, 11 January, 1943. Kocbek, *Osvobodilni Spisi*, volume 1, pp. 256-266.

February an agreement was reached. While it was dressed up in positive terms as a logical step in the development of the liberation struggle, it in fact represented a complete capitulation by the Christian Socialists to the Communists, as they gave up any pretence of independence.

Shortly before the promulgation of the agreement, Kidrič wrote to Mira Tomšič in Ljubljana, informing her about it. While he accepted the assurances of the Christian Socialist leaders that the tendency of their group to develop into a party was against their will, that tendency had nevertheless become more noticeable in recent times. He was especially concerned by the attempts of the leadership of the Christian group to renew the group's organization, its control over its activists, with its own discipline etc. He probably had Kocbek's circular, cited above, in mind. Clearly Kocbek's attempt to soothe the fears of the Communists had not worked. They wanted much more than he had realized. Kidrič referred again to the fear that the forces of reaction would try to retrieve their position through manoeuvrings within the OF itself, focused on the Christian Socialists. He did not imagine that the Christian Socialists in the OF would make contact with the exiles in London, but the fact remained that the reactionaries would seek to exploit any weakness in the liberation movement, and they could not be blind to the possible consequences of the tendencies they had noticed within the Christian group.

Among his complaints was that the Christian Socialists increasingly worked for themselves rather than for the OF; that they tried to turn the committees of "Workers' Unity" to the advantage of their group; that their activists were frequently hostile to the Communist Party, trying to compete with it, insisting on adopting their own positions, and spreading their organization; that their line on the ground increasingly came into conflict with the line of the OF, for example in their attempts to win support for themselves among the peasantry; that they accused the Party of having an incorrect policy towards the peasantry, being too much inclined towards the proletariat, reflecting their attempt to build their own class base for their own political party.

The leadership of the Party had decided to take firm measures. They demanded that the Christian Socialists either liquidate their group's political organization in practice, or else openly declare that they were a party. Kidrič noted that if they had chosen the latter option, the Communist Party would not have ceased collaboration with them within the OF at that stage of the liberation struggle, but they would rapidly have been obliged to liquidate their party on the ground.[119] No doubt the Christian Socialist leaders were aware of this, and they agreed to the Communists' demands under pressure. Finally they probably felt that they had little choice, as, having become so enmeshed in the Communist dominated movement, they would have had no prospects at all if they had distanced themselves from it. To fall out of favour with the Communists would have been dangerous indeed.

Shortly afterwards, Kardelj informed Djilas that he and Kidrič had had "long and painful discussions" with Vidmar and Kocbek to convince them to accept the leading role of the Party.[120] Thus, however the agreement was presented to the followers of the OF, it is plain that the Christian Socialist leaders fought hard to try to preserve their independence. Kocbek's circular of January 1943 clearly revealed an attempt to hang on to as much as possible. It did not work. The pressure applied to Kocbek at this time is also suggested by an assertion by Ljubo Sirc that Kocbek later described how the Communists "forced themselves upon the others [Christian Socialists] as real leaders", and spoke of the "silent terror" applied by the Communists as they persuaded their allies to accept the agreement.[121] Kocbek clearly felt that he had been misled. Much later he claimed that early in the war the OF had been conceived as a real coalition, in a phase leading towards a merger ("spajanje") of its partners. He also had the impression that up until early 1942 the OF was not thinking in terms of the resurrection of Yugoslavia,

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[119]Letter from Kidrič to Tomšič, 17 February, 1943. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 5, pp. 457-461.

[120]Milovan Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 334.

[121]Sirc, p. 34.

speaking only of the Slovene people, and that the KPJ was truly federal.[122] In these impressions he was certainly mistaken, and his disappointment at the course which the OF took from 1943 was a result of his misunderstanding of the nature of the Communist Party.

The agreement was promulgated on 1 March 1943, and is known as the "Dolomite Declaration", after the range of hills near Ljubljana where the Slovene Partisan leadership was based at the time. It was signed by representatives of the KPS, the Christian Socialists and the Sokols. It expressed satisfaction with the achievements made possible by the cooperation of the three groups up until then, but the coming tasks required still closer unity. That was how the complete submergence of the other groups within the Communist dominated OF and their loss of independence was presented.

The declaration affirmed that the OF was a united, popular, political and national organization, with a united leadership. The KPS had the leading role in the movement, as the "avant-garde" of the most progressive Slovene class, the proletariat, as the only party not compromised since the occupation, and on account of its leadership in the liberation struggle. As such, the KPS must develop its organization throughout Slovenia, and in all areas of Slovene public life. The other groups of the OF undertook not to form their own political parties or organizations, as this was unnecessary, given that their national, political and social aims were identical to those of the Communists. The Christian Socialist group represented the expression of the conversion of the Slovene Catholic masses to a progressive national and social position. The Christian Socialists renounced any organization of their own activists, who would work exclusively for the OF. The leaders of the Christian Socialists retained the ideological leadership in the conversion of the Catholic masses to progressive positions.[123]

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[122]Conversation between Kocbek and Vladimir Dedijer in 1961, recorded in Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, volume 2 (Rijeka, 1981), p. 1213.

[123]"Dolomite Declaration", 1 March, 1943. *Zbornik*, Tom VI, Book 5, pp. 185-189.

Each of the three groups also issued a circular to its activists, explaining the declaration. The one issued by the Central Committee of the KPS expressed satisfaction at a "great political success for our Party." It stressed that the declaration did not affect the cooperation with all patriotic groups within the OF, nor did it deny them their autonomy. There must be no sectarianism in relations with their partners. It merely ensured that the OF would remain a united, popular organization, and guaranteed the "avant-garde" role of the Party.[124]

The tone of the circular produced by the Christian Socialists was very different to that of the earlier one in January. Much of it was vague and general. In it Kocbek contrasted the record of the Communists with that of the traditional parties and of the churches. The former had been the first to raise a protest against social injustice, had formed a vigorous, disciplined movement of the working masses of the world, and had provided leadership in the liberation struggle when the traditional parties had failed the Slovene people. The Catholic Church could not provide moral and political leadership, on account of its past failings. Finally, near the end, Kocbek turned to the Dolomite Declaration, noting that the leadership of the Christian group had repeatedly warned that the job of the activists was to strengthen the OF, and not to strengthen a part of it at the expense of the whole. He briefly explained the declaration, addressing his remarks to the leadership's "former activists", asking them to continue as dependable political workers, as Christians and as revolutionaries.[125]

Thus was the demise of the only independent Catholic group to have allied itself with the Communists in Yugoslavia. While the Communists did seek to include Catholics, including members of the clergy, in their movement elsewhere in Yugoslavia, in Croatia and Bosnia, the case of the Christian Socialists in Slovenia was special. There they were not only admitted to the Partisan movement because of their usefulness as instruments

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[124]Circular of the KP KPS of 1 March, 1943 on the application and interpretation of the "Dolomite Declaration." *Zbornik*, Tom VI, Book 5, pp. 190-194.

[125]Circular no. 9 to the activists of the Christian group in the OF, 1 March, 1943. Kocbek, *Osvobodilni Spisi*, volume 1, pp. 291-298.

of propaganda on behalf of the Communists, as was more or less the case in Croatia. While it is true that they never achieved a position approaching equality with the Communists in the OF, they were nevertheless an independent group, with their own activists, participating in the Liberation Front.

There were various reasons why this phenomenon came about only in Slovenia. The Slovene Communists were much quicker in putting into practice the Popular Front line of the Comintern, with its insistence on the need to build an alliance of patriots opposed to fascism, than was the case elsewhere, and in Croatia the Communists were less successful in finding groups that were prepared to cooperate with them. The conditions did not exist in Croatia for the appearance of an organized Catholic political group in alliance with the Communists. In Croatia the tradition of political Catholicism was very weak. There had been right-wing Catholic groups in the 1920s and 1930s which had tried to play a part on the political stage, but they had made little impact, and finally Stepinac had suppressed them, insisting that there was no place for organized Catholic political action.[126] In Croatia, the anti-clericalist HSS reigned supreme.

In Slovenia conditions were very different, with a strong tradition of political involvement on the part of the Church and of Church organizations. As already noted, Kocbek and Fajfar had been quite explicit in asserting that the task of the Christian Socialists was to provide an alternative to the reactionary Catholic political camp. In a sense, and in spite of their attacks on clericalism, the Christian Socialists were a product of the same Slovene political tradition and culture, a Catholic grouping involved in the political sphere.

The Communists were glad to have them on their side. In Slovenia the Catholic Church and lay Catholic social and political organizations were the Communists' bitterest opponents in their bid for power. It was thus even more important to them than it was to their Croatian comrades to counter the influence of the Church on the people by

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[126]Alexander, *Croatia: The Catholic Church and Clergy, 1919-1945*, p. 48.

attracting Catholics to their cause. In Slovenia they went further, co-opting a specifically Catholic political grouping. After the Dolomite Declaration, the Christian Socialists were emasculated as an independent force, but they nevertheless served their purpose, in demonstrating to a suspicious public that there was a place for Catholics in the Communist dominated movement. But it was not only through the Christian Socialists that the Slovene Communists sought to reassure the religious feelings of the people. As in Croatia, they also appealed to members of the clergy.

The Partisans and the Catholic Clergy

The Communists had identified the Catholic clergy as being among their bitterest foes in Slovenia from an early stage. Nevertheless, they and their partners in the OF produced a stream of propaganda to try to appeal to those members of the clergy who were perhaps not fully committed to the anti-Communist struggle, to reassure them, and to divide them from the "White Guard" forces in which priests played such a prominent part. As Kocbek noted in his circular to the Christian activists, it was particularly important to counter the influence and propaganda of the clergy, the Church hierarchy and the clericalist establishment. Maks Šnuderl, a leading member of the OF in Ljubljana, noted that a declaration of the OF in February 1942 that the religious feelings of Catholics would be respected and that freedom of religion would be guaranteed, was issued because anti-Communist propaganda was being carried out "under the banner of religion."[127]

Senior Communists repeatedly emphasized the importance of directing propaganda at Catholics, and especially at the clergy, as their influence over their flocks was crucial. In a letter to the Executive Committee of the OF in December 1942, Kardelj told them that they must step up their propaganda regarding the position of the OF towards religion and the Church. In that regard, they should use the Christian Socialists, and should draw

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[127]Speech by Šnuderl to second session of SNOS, 9-10 September, 1946. AS, Predsedstvo SNOS-a, šk. 14, file 2.

attention to the position in the Soviet Union. In particular he suggested that a conference of priests should be convened, which would issue a declaration welcoming the OF, and giving their suggestions and advice. They should enable the clergy actively to participate in the movement.[128] In a letter to Tone Toman, a Christian Socialist and leading member of the OF in Ljubljana, in January 1943, Kardelj instructed him to "develop agitation and propaganda to the utmost." He particularly stressed work among the clergy.[129] In August of the same year he told the Central Committee of the KPS that they should "make contact especially with the clergy".[130] Another example was the instruction from the District Committee of the KPS for Materija-Bistrica to its local committees and agents to distribute the literature of the OF to all of the parish priests, and especially the literature that was aimed specifically at the clergy. It mentioned "Slovenska Revolucija", the organ of the Christian Socialists, and a circular by Mikuž, the chaplain to the Main Command of the Slovene Partisans.[131]

There were certain key themes which appeared repeatedly in the propaganda material directed at the clergy and at Catholics generally. Traitorous members of the clergy, especially Rožman, were attacked. Condemnation of the use of religion as the basis for propaganda against the OF and the Communists was a particular preoccupation. The hold of the clergy over much of the population was potentially a great threat to the Communists' progress towards power, and they had to counter it or, if possible, channel it into support for their own movement by winning members of the clergy to their cause. For the same reason the clergy were reassured that the OF, the Partisans and the Communists did not threaten religion or the Church, and that priests and Catholic faithful whose conduct was blameless had nothing to fear. Those who kept silent and stood aside were also at fault, and should declare themselves for the OF.

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[128]Report of 14 December, 1942. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 508-514.

[129]Letter of 5 January, 1943. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 5, pp. 45-46.

[130]Letter of 12 August, 1943. *Zbornik*, Tom II, Book 10, pp. 189-197.

[131]Instructions dated 25 March, 1943. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 6, pp. 107-112.

An article which appeared in December 1941 contained many of these elements. It was directed at the clergy, and written from the point of view of clergymen cooperating with the OF (although it is not clear that it was actually written by a priest). The article listed the woes of the Slovene people, and concentrated particularly on the sufferings of the Catholic Church and faith under the occupation:-

> In Slovene schools our youth learns in a foreign language, a new religion is forced upon them, the most vulgar pagan religion known to History. In our churches the sanctuary lamps are extinguished, the bells and organs are silenced, the divine service has ceased, and God's words are no longer proclaimed. Our people die without the holy sacraments, are buried without a blessing. Our priests have been expelled from their parishes, imprisoned, humiliated, trampled and derided.

This was quite a remarkable piece, appearing as it did in the organ of a Communist dominated movement. It continued in the same vein, pointing out how the Germans had violated the religious freedom of the people and the rights of the Church, how "godless Nazism" had de-christianized Germany, and was now the grave of Catholicism and the Slovene identity. And while conditions in the Italian occupied part of the country were undoubtedly much better than under the Germans, the aim was the same, to denationalize the Slovene people. In order to resist the threat to the Slovene identity and to the freedom of religion, unity among the Slovene people was essential. It appealed to the tradition of the Slovene clergy, that it stood with its people, and so should they now cooperate in the liberation movement: "You must be aware that you do the faith and the Church great harm if in these momentous times for the nation you, in whatever way, try to use your influence, or even the faith, to weaken the national resistance and its unity."[132]

Attacks on the alleged treachery of a large part of the clergy were very common. The "Easter message of the Catholics in the OF" in 1942 attacked as nonsense the idea that collaboration with the occupier could be justified on the grounds that it was to save the faith. Rožman was singled out, attacked for his connections with the occupier and his

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[132]Article entitled "Slovenski duhovščini" ("To the Slovene Clergy"), in *Osvobodilna Fronta*, December 1941. AS, Ude, šk. 46, file 704.

role in the initiative to form the BG.[133] In another piece, later on in the war, traitorous members of the clergy were blamed for the "anti-national" behaviour of part of the Catholic people. Rožman was accused of misusing the religious feelings of the people, of spreading the lie that religion was under threat, and of calling for a crusade against the OF, as if it persecuted the Church.[134]

1943's New Year circular of the Christian group in the OF also attacked collaborators who exploited peoples' religious feelings, "pharisee like Christians" presenting themselves as the defenders of religion, and using papal encyclicals to support their "Hitlerite anti-Communism".[135] OF propaganda stressed that it represented no threat to the faith. For example, "Slovenska Revolucija", the organ of the Catholic group in the OF, carried a declaration that the OF guaranteed that it would everywhere respect the religious feelings of the people, and allow their free expression.[136]

Alongside these assurances and attacks on priests who opposed the OF were repeated appeals to the clergy to declare themselves openly for the OF. Thus a piece that appeared in mid-1942 bemoaned the fact that "the one group which has not responded to the call to the community in the national liberation struggle in large numbers is the Slovene clergy." It referred to all the means which the leadership of the OF, and especially the Catholics in the OF, had employed to appeal to the clergy to cooperate with the OF, in the Partisan press, through circulars, in radio broadcasts, with invitations to meetings. But the results were unsatisfactory. They had stressed the guarantees of freedom of religion, but still there was no response. They had warned of the consequences if the clergy deliberately obstructed the Slovene people's revolution, or even joined the forces ranged against the people. They had appealed to the need for

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[133]Kocbek, *Osvobodilni Spisi*, volume 1, pp. 75-87.

[134]Piece entitled "Beseda slovenskim katoličanom" ("A Word to the Slovene Catholics"). INZ, PC - IO OF, fasc. 441/VI.

[135]INZ, PC - IO OF, fasc. 441/VI.

[136]*Slovenska Revolucija*, 20 May, 1942. INZ, PC - IO OF, fasc. 441/VI.

national unity. But those clergy who cooperated with the OF had seen no change. The majority of the clergy wilfully remained outside of the OF, and had lately even begun to join the "band-wagon of national and social reaction." It went on to insist that the time had come when members of the clergy must make their position clear, one way or the other. If they opted for the people's forces, but had some doubts and hesitations, then they should put those within the OF, and their criticisms would be welcome. If they chose those who were against the people, then they should make that clear.[137]

Thus the OF leaders were deliberately insisting upon a clear cut polarization, and were in effect intensifying the civil war, which by the time of this letter was already raging. This deliberate polarization was also to take place in Croatia, but it happened much earlier in Slovenia. Whereas in much of Croatia the clergy were mostly able to stay above the fray until quite late on, going about their normal duties and as far as possible avoiding antagonizing the warring factions, the clergy in Slovenia were being required to take sides from an early stage. That was the nature of the civil war in Slovenia, in which the Church and the clergy were deeply involved. With Bishop Rožman taking a robust stand against the Partisans and many priests taking a leading role in the battle against them, the option of staying silent was not to be allowed to the clergy by the OF leaders.

In a later piece, this choice was again put in stark terms. Apart from the priests who collaborated with the occupier, there was a second group, "who stay silent and, as if they are blind, do not see the occupier's violence." Priests who had collaborated with the occupier must recognize their crime and accept the punishment of the people. Such a recognition could mitigate the punishment, and enable them to be "morally cleansed". Apart from open opponents of the OF, this piece referred to "Catholics who try to obstruct the national liberation struggle, who wait, or quietly make pacts with the occupier." This so-called "Centre" ("Sredina"), while they could not be equated with the national traitors, were going down a path which led to the same treachery. For them too

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[137]Piece entitled "Slovenski katoliški duhovščini" ("To the Slovene Catholic Clergy"). Kocbek, *Osvobodilni Spisi*, volume 1, pp. 154-158.

it was "the last moment" to join the struggle.[138]

Efforts to appeal to the clergy also included attempts directly to include priests in the Partisan movement. In this the Slovene Partisans followed the example being set by the central leadership. Zečević's work as chaplain to the Supreme Command and head of the Religious Section of AVNOJ during the period of the Bihać Republic, taking the initiative in trying to win over the clergy in the area, visiting them and holding meetings, made a positive impression upon Kardelj, who in a report to Leskošek in December 1942 noted that:-

> In connection with the proclamation of the Orthodox clergy, and their position at the Supreme Command, it has come to my mind that we should also establish a priest as an officer for religious affairs at the Main Command. I think that that would be a devilish blow to the White Guard if we could succeed. Apart from that it would bring us far closer to the masses.[139]

As luck would have it, Mikuž had recently come from Ljubljana, had approached the Partisans and signalled his desire to join them. Leskošek wrote to Kardelj in early November that Mikuž had arrived. Kocbek knew him, but did not know what his position was.[140] Kardelj had already heard about Mikuž, and informed Leskošek that he was good, but would be of more use in Ljubljana. He told Leskošek to visit Mikuž, to reassure him, and to send him back. Very revealing of the dangers faced by members of the clergy in areas of Slovenia where the Partisans were active was Kardelj's warning to Leskošek that he should make sure that the Partisans did not liquidate Mikuž.[141] Kardelj changed his mind about sending Mikuž back to Ljubljana. His letter to Leskošek in December 1942, with its enthusiasm about the possible advantages to be gained from having a chaplain, also suggested that they should at once bring Mikuž to their territory. A reliable patrol should be sent for him, to which it should be explained "that it concerns an ally, and not someone to be arrested."

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[138]"Beseda slovenskim katoličanom" ("A Word to the Slovene Catholics"). INZ, PC-IO OF, fasc. 441/VI.

[139]Report of 1 December, 1942. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 485-488.

[140]Report of 7 November, 1942. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 269-272.

[141]Report of 22 November, 1942. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 424-428.

During the period of the Bihać Republic, Kardelj was especially interested in promoting the OF among the clergy. In his letter to the Executive Committee of the OF, shortly after the letter to Leskošek, he devoted several paragraphs to the need to appeal to the clergy, and again mentioned the advantage of appointing Mikuž as religious officer with the Main Command, who would be especially responsible for relations between the army and the Church. That would be "a powerful blow to the BG, and the best proof of the democratic relationship of all the groups in the OF to religion and the Church." He added that Mikuž would be brought to the Partisans under conditions which they would agree with him.[142] His function would be to work for them.

As Kardelj had noted, the existence of Partisan chaplains could make a very favourable impression upon the Catholic population. The Communist leaders hoped that this would bring immediate practical benefits. Kidrič wrote to Leskošek that:-

> It would be good if we could employ that priest [Mikuž] here, about whom Kr. [Krištof - Kardelj] wrote. An illegal priest, who could say Mass for the peasants, which they long for terribly, and could at the same time agitate for the OF and for Partisan mobilization, would, in the conditions we have here, help enormously in the national uprising.[143]

This report shows that there was a lack of priests in Partisan controlled-territory in Slovenia.

The formal decision to appoint chaplains to Partisan units in Slovenia was taken by the Executive Committee of the OF on 12 January 1943. The main Command appointed Mikuž as its chaplain on the same day.[144] In joining the Partisans, Mikuž was going very much against the flow, in the context of the confrontations which had frequently seen members of the clergy taking the lead in resisting them during 1942. It caused some stir. The District Committee of the OF for Ribnica - Velike Lašče reported that people had initially thought that Mikuž had been abducted and shot by the Partisans. When they

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[142]Report of 14 December, 42. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 508-514.

[143]Report on the position in Upper Carniola, 1 December, 1942. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 495-497.

[144]*Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 5, p. 145.

heard that he had joined them voluntarily, they said that he was one of the worst priests. The report added that that was "obviously as a result of propaganda from above."[145]

Apart from the benefit that could accrue simply from the fact that there was a priest with the Partisans, Mikuž was also active as a propagandist on their behalf. An important example was a pamphlet he wrote, in which he attacked the attempts to portray national traitors as "martyrs for the faith." On the other hand "our martyrs" died for love of the people, at the hands of the enemies of the people.[146] In March 1943, Radio Free Yugoslavia broadcast a declaration by Mikuž, in which he said that Catholic priests were participating in the struggle, but that some had joined the traitorous BG bands of Mihailović, and were fighting under the banner of a crusade against Communism, in the name of Christ the King. Thus the forces of reaction were putting the Catholic faith in the service of the occupier. He declared that Slovene Catholics would not be divided from their brother Communists. They were convinced that:-

> our joint liberation struggle is just, and is in accord with the demands of Catholic morality. We know that in the future too complete freedom of conscience and religion is guaranteed to us. Slovene Catholics have, in cooperation with the Communists in the struggle, seen through the diabolical lie of the enemies of the Communist Party.

The declaration concluded that the eyes of honest Catholics looked to Stalin and the Red Army.[147]

But though the Slovene Partisans recognized the value of attracting members of the clergy to their banner, their success was limited. There was considerable regional variation in this picture, which reflected the variety of experiences in the different zones of occupation. Unsurprisingly, they had particular problems in the Ljubljana Province, where the civil war, the involvement of much of the clergy in it and the frequently violent response of the Partisans to them made it unlikely that many priests could be attracted to the OF, or persuaded that it did not represent a threat to the Church.

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[145]Report of 12 January, 1943. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 5, pp. 159-161.

[146]AS, Ude, šk. 46, file 703.

[147]Declaration of 3 March, 1943 for Radio "Slobodna Jugoslavija", which was based in the USSR (in Russian, with Slovene translation). *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 5, pp. 34-37.

Ćiril Petešić, in his attempt to portray most of the Catholic clergy as having actively supported the Partisans, lists few examples in the Ljubljana region. Apart from Mikuž, he lists Stanko Cajnkar, a professor in the theology faculty in Ljubljana, who went to liberated territory in 1944, and Andrej Ilc, who was appointed as Vicar-General for the areas under Partisan control by Rožman. Petešić also records that a group of Franciscans supported the Partisans, and that the Carthusian monastery at Pleterje was a Partisan stronghold.[148] The Prior, Josip Edgar Leopold-Lavov, first came into contact with the Partisans in the spring of 1942. They stored supplies at the monastery, and used it for workshops and shelter, and Partisan patrols frequently called there for refreshment.[149] The monks also carried out religious services for the Partisans, who called upon one of them to conduct the funerals of their dead whenever possible. Leopold cites a request from a political commissar to the "comradely monastery at Pleterje" to send a priest to a Partisan funeral.[150]

The example of Pleterje illustrates the problems and dilemmas faced by the Catholic clergy during the war. Having enjoyed good relations with the Partisans during the summer and autumn of 1942, when the monastery was temporarily in liberated territory, the Italians arrived in November 1942, and were quickly followed by the BG. Indeed, the area repeatedly switched hands as the tide of the war ebbed and flowed. In December 1942, the Partisans issued an open letter to the monastery, warning that they could not take responsibility for any damage that would be caused if they were forced to attack it, to destroy what had become a BG stronghold. In a letter to Leopold, they said it would upset them to have to destroy the monastery, which had given them such support, but if the BG did not withdraw they would have to do so. The Partisans did attack Pleterje in February 1943, and caused extensive damage.[151] Following that, the monastery

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[148]Petešić, pp. 72-74.

[149]Leopold-Lavov, pp. 14-29.

[150]*ibid.* p. 93.

[151]*ibid.* pp. 72-84.

continued to have regular contact with both the Italians and the Partisans, who usually came at night. The Italians knew about their contacts with the Partisans, and sometimes searched for them there. Leopold explained that the Partisans broke in by force.[152]

But such relations between the Partisans and the clergy were not the norm. Mikuž noted that when the Partisans started to control areas of liberated territory in the spring of 1942, their first contacts with the clergy were not happy, as the latter had already been informed from Ljubljana as to "who and what are the Partisans", and no amount of persuasion or demonstration to the contrary could change their view. The Partisans were Communists, they represented a direct threat to the lives of priests and to the faith itself.[153] Clearly the fear was real enough, as during the period of the Italian offensive of the summer and autumn of 1942, in which several members of the clergy played a prominent role, many priests fled their parishes in Partisan-controlled areas. Upon the Italian capitulation, when the Partisans briefly controlled large swathes of formerly Italian-occupied Slovenia, an even larger flight took place, as the clergy was gripped by what Mikuž described as a "real panic-stricken fear", and even priests who had never done anything against the OF fled to the relative safety of Ljubljana, which the Partisans did not take.[154]

Mikuž described how, following the capitulation, the parishes were empty. But some priests, in time, returned. There they began to behave "loyally", but not satisfactorily from the OF's point of view. They attended meetings and accepted positions in the local authorities set up by the Partisans, the National Liberation Committees (NOOs), and in the Red Cross. But they did not, on the whole, become active supporters of the Partisan movement. They did not give sermons in the "national spirit", and did not teach their

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[152]*ibid.* pp. 95-96.

[153]Mikuž, "Slovenska Duhovščina in Osvobodilna Fronta", p. 6. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 516a/I.

[154]*ibid.* pp. 7 & 12-13.

flocks that "the struggle for the liberation of the country and obedience and loyalty to the people's authorities were things commanded by God."[155]

This dissatisfaction with the clergy included a general suspicion that they were unreliable, even when apparently cooperative. It was a suspicion in part based on experience. Mikuž noted that even those members of the clergy who had secretly sympathized with the aims of the OF, and who did not join those who collaborated with the Italians during the 1942 offensive, were brought into line by other priests, so that the Partisans could not count on them.[156] In particular he complained about the behaviour of priests who, following the Italian capitulation, were brought to a meeting at Kočevje, where they signed a declaration "regretting everything and promising everything", and then began to "pelt the OF with mud and, upon the German offensive, fled to Ljubljana."[157]

Mikuž noted that some of the priests who had signed that declaration in Kočevje had been captured at Turjak. Many of those who had been resisting the Partisans had taken refuge in the fortress of Turjak following the Italian capitulation. The Partisans used artillery taken from the Italians to capture Turjak, together with some seven hundred defenders, including two dozen priests and seminarians. Many of those captured were killed. [158] According to Mikuž, some of the clergy captured at Turjak were spared and brought to Kočevje, in the hope that they could, by being persuaded to issue a declaration in support of the OF, be used for propaganda purposes. Given the extreme bitterness which had come to characterize the civil war, as revealed by the events at Turjak, it was hardly surprising that these priests, having done what was required in order to save their lives, took the first opportunity to get away from their Partisan foes.

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[155]*ibid.* p. 13.

[156]*ibid.* p. 7.

[157]*ibid.* p. 13.

[158]Clissold, *Whirlwind*, p. 174; Tomasevich, *The Chetniks*, pp. 225-226.

As testimony to the failure of the Partisans to attract many priests to their banner stands a report from the Executive Committee of the OF to the Supreme Plenum of the OF in Ljubljana in May 1943. It reported the decision to appoint chaplains in the army, asserting that every Partisan who wished to attend Mass was permitted to do so. But in spite of the repeated invitations of Mikuž, no other priest had come forward to join the army, on account of the official opposition of the senior Church circles in the Ljubljana Province.[159] Leopold reported that the Professor of theology, Janez Fabijan, who sympathized with the OF, suggested a priest who might be willing to become a chaplain. Leopold visited the priest, who said he would gladly do so if only Rožman would not suspend him. He also feared that the Partisans might liquidate him. Finally he did not go.[160]

Despite the lack of success of their attempts to win over the clergy, the Communists persevered, using pressure if sincere cooperation was not forthcoming. The example of the priests brought to Kočevje from Turjak was not unique. The secretary of the District Committee of the KPS for Baška Dolina reported that a Partisan patrol visited Fr. Peter Šorli, and he had signed a statement undertaking that he would "in no way impede the Slovene people in their struggle for freedom."[161] Yet this was the same Fr. Šorli whom Maks Rejc, a Party activist, regarded as an organizer of the local BG.[162] Šorli, of course, denied the accusations against him, but it is nevertheless clear that his promise not to obstruct the OF was not out of any commitment to it. The secretary of the Party in Baška Dolina, who obviously took his efforts to appeal to the clergy seriously, also reported having met two other "honest" priests who, he asserted, supported the Partisans in their sermons.

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[159]Report of 8 May, 1943, from Vidmar and Kidrič. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 7, pp. 72-79.

[160]Leopold-Lavov, pp. 108-109.

[161]Report of 6 February, 1943. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 5, pp. 370-372.

[162]Report from Rejc of 7 February, 1943, on the OF organization in the Baška and Tolminsko areas. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 5, pp. 375-379.

As noted earlier, the conditions in the German-occupied part of Slovenia, in Styria, were very different. The majority of the clergy had been expelled, and the Partisans' presence was, for most of the war, far less widespread than was the case in the Italian-controlled regions. There were therefore fewer opportunities for the Communists and the clergy to come into contact with each other there. Kardelj noted that, given that there were few Slovene priests left in the German-occupied zone, they were trying to despatch one or two OF priests there, who would work illegally, saying Mass etc., and countering any actions by the BG. But there were very few of them, and he did not expect great results.[163]

But some contacts there were. Miloš Ribář considers that Bishop Tomažič issued his circular of December 1941, instructing his clergy to avoid involvement in subversive activities, after the Germans complained that the clergy were supporting the Partisans. He has also noted that, following that warning, priests continued to be arrested and even shot for their connections with the Partisans. The support of part of the clergy for the Partisans was in part a result of the fact that in Styria the OF was the only Slovene alternative to the German occupiers for much of the war.[164]

Fr. Mihael Grešak was arrested and shot by the Germans in Celje in July 1942 for his connections with the OF. Fr. Izidor Završnik was arrested several times for his work for the OF. He was tortured, and was shot in Maribor in March 1943. Fr. Ivan Povh joined the Partisans in July 1944. In December of the same year he was arrested with ten others, and was found to be carrying Partisan identity papers. He and the others were all shot.[165]

Several priests who were expelled from the German occupation zone to Croatia joined the Partisans there. Jože Lampret had left Slovenia even before the start of the

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[163]Report from Kardelj to Tito, 14 December, 1942. *Zbornik*, Tom II, book 7, pp. 55-101.

[164]Ribář, p. 72.

[165]*ibid*. p. 64.

war. Since his days as a student in Celje and in the seminary in Maribor he had been politically active, forming a Christian Socialist group, and coming into contact with the Communists. Having fallen foul of the police and the Church authorities in the Dravska Banovina (Slovenia), he moved to Croatia, and found a place in Lika. There he came into contact with the Partisans early in the war, and joined them in 1942. In 1943, a Slovene delegation visiting the Croatian Partisans invited him to return to Slovenia, which he did.[166]

On 1 October 1943, there took place in Kočevje an assembly of the OF, which was designed as the first representative national body of the new Slovenia. Lampret was among the speakers, in what was another clear attempt to demonstrate that the Church and clergy would be respected in the new Slovenia. Lampret later also joined the Slovene National Liberation Council (SNOS), which was formed early the following year.[167] Kardelj referred to him in a letter to Leskošek in May 1944, by which time he had moved back to his native Styria, where he was chaplain to the Fourteenth Yugoslav Army Division and a member of the Regional Committee of the OF for Styria.[168]

Another priest who joined the Styrian Partisans was Franc Šmon, who had been connected with Lampret's political activities before the war. Šmon was in touch with the OF from 1942, and provided them with intelligence. He joined the Partisans in June 1944, and was chaplain of the Fourth Operational Zone, which covered Styria. As such he ministered to the religious needs of Partisans and the civilian population in areas through which they passed. He also, like all priests who joined the Partisans, had an important propaganda role. He addressed meetings, explaining why he had joined the Partisans, and he prepared a prayer book, which included notes on the relationship

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[166]Petešić, pp. 61-64.

[167]Clissold, *Whirlwind*, pp. 174-175; Petešić, p. 64.

[168]Letter of 6 May, 1944. *Zbornik*, Tom II, Book 13, pp. 48-51.

between the people's authorities and the Church, between religion and Socialism and between the eastern and western churches.[169]

An eloquent description of the role of the clergy in the Partisans is provided by Franklin Lindsay, an American OSS agent who spent much of 1944 with the Partisans in Styria. He described the work of a priest who travelled with the Styrian Partisans, almost certainly either Lampret or Šmon:-

> A Slovene priest who had joined the Partisans was an important part of the effort to win the support of the peasants. He often travelled with us, and heard confessions and conducted services in the little chapels as we moved through the mountain hinterlands. He also spoke at political meetings organized by the Agitprop section to counter the peasant fears of Communism. I had the feeling he was on a very short tether and was given detailed instructions on the Party line before each meeting.[170]

In the Slovene Littoral, the conditions were different to those in either the Ljubljana Province or the German-occupied areas. As with the Croat population of Istria to the south, a great many Slovenes in this region regarded the Partisans primarily as a patriotic organization, which gave them the chance to throw off the burden of Italian rule and join with Slovenia and Yugoslavia. The Slovene Communists were quicker than their Croatian comrades to the south to cross the pre-war border into Italy, moving in during the summer of 1941.

Although jurisdiction in the area formally belonged to the Italian Party, the Slovene Communists justified their actions by referring to an agreement reached in 1934 between the Yugoslav, Italian and Austrian Communist parties, which recognized the Slovene right to self-determination. Early in the war, the Italian Communists were less well organized than their Slovene neighbours, who helped them materially and with communications. Umberto Massola (Quinto) of the Central Committee of the Italian Party spent much of 1940 and 1941 in Ljubljana as a guest of the Slovene Party. Before leaving for Italy he agreed that the OF could operate in the Slovene Littoral, though he

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[169]Petešić, pp. 62-65.

[170]Lindsay, pp. 109-110.

insisted that Italian Communists in the region should remain under the jurisdiction of the Italian Party.

In fact, only the KPS and the OF were organized in the Slovene-inhabited areas of the Littoral, while in the coastal towns, such as Trieste and Koper, both parties existed. The Comintern confirmed this arrangement. In January 1942 a declaration by the Italian Communist Party recognized the right of the Slovenes to self-determination and unification, although it did not specify the extent of Slovene territory. Another advantage that the Slovene Communists enjoyed here was the lack of opposition to them in the rural districts, in that, in contrast to the Ljubljana Province, Slovene non-communist political and cultural organizations had long been suppressed in fascist Italy.[171]

The Slovene Partisans had more success in attracting members of the clergy to their banner in the Littoral than within the pre-war boundaries of Yugoslavia. One of the most notable clergymen to support them in the region was Ivo Juvančič, a professor at the theology faculty in Gorizia. He explained that in areas in Italy national liberation came before social revolution.[172] In 1943 he roused the ire of Bishop Santin of Trieste, whose diocese was also served by the faculty in Gorizia, for his alleged support of the Partisans. A report written in Ljubljana on the clergy in the Trieste diocese recorded that, according to well informed sources:-

> it [the clergy] is very confused by the absurd agitation of Dr. J [Juvančič], who, with his leaflets and letters, has caused unbelievable confusion in the ranks of the clergy. To his influence and the menace of the OF can be attributed the fact that now it is a rare priest who dares to come out against the Partisans.

Juvančič denied the accusations, but he was required to write a letter condemning atheistic Communism. But in another paper entitled "Christ and the Galilean Liberation Movement" he plainly advocated passive resistance to an occupier. Juvančič asserted that he was against the participation of the clergy in politics, although they could be in contact with he OF and support the Partisans, so long as they did not accept functions in

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[171]Bogdan C. Novak, *Trieste, 1941-1954*, pp. 58-66.

[172]Ivo Juvančič, "Goriški Nadškof Carlo Margotti in narodnoosvobodilni boj", in *Goriški letnik, zbornik goriškega muzeja*, no. 3, 1976, p. 156.

the OF. It is however unclear as to whether he was committed to the Partisans. He certainly opposed the Italians, but he also acknowledges having had links with the "Sredina."[173]

For their part, the Communists appreciated the support they received from the clergy in the Littoral. In a report in February 1943, an agent of the Regional Committee of the KPS for the Littoral wrote that "the clergy is compactly for the OF, the only exception being a parish priest who has been in contact with Ljubljana."[174] Kardelj compared the situation as regards the clergy in the Littoral favourably with other areas of Slovenia, noting that "If one can believe our activists in the Littoral, the great majority of the priests there are for the OF, and are very hostile towards the White Guard and the priests in the Ljubljana Province who have gone over to the White Guard."[175] In a propaganda piece, directed at the clergy later in the war, the "great majority of the priests of the Slovene Littoral" were again praised for having "remained faithful to their people and stood in the first ranks in the struggle against the worst Fascist oppression" and for having made their contribution in bringing the people of the Littoral to the OF.[176] Priests who cooperated with the Partisans in the Littoral included Fr. Jože Petrič, who was a chaplain in the Gorizia area. Fr. Ivan Črnetič was chaplain to the Yugoslav Army's Ninth Corps.[177]

Mikuž, in a piece in February 1943, congratulated the clergy of the Littoral for their "enthusiasm for our holy cause of liberation", and for helping to "redeem" the "true Catholic faith" which the clergy of the Ljubljana diocese had "disfigured." He went on, however, to appeal to the clergy of the Littoral not to be seduced by propaganda, even if it came from people in priests' garb, that "the Liberation Front wants to destroy all religion, as it is nothing but Communism in disguise." They should tell their parishioners

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[173]*ibid.* pp. 160-163.

[174]Report of 7 February, 1943. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 5, pp. 373-375.

[175]Report from Kardelj to Tito, 14 December, 1942. *Zbornik*, Tom II, book 7, pp. 55-101.

[176]"Beseda slovenskim katoličanom" ("A Word to the Slovene Catholics"). INZ, PC - IO OF, fasc. 441/VI.

[177]Petešić, p. 80.

about the OF, should advise them to support and join the Partisans, and should themselves become chaplains in Partisan units. They should not follow the example of their colleagues in Ljubljana "down the path of Judas Iscariot." This piece clearly reflected a fear that while the clergy of the Littoral, isolated from the rest of Slovenia for two decades, instinctively favoured a Slovene national movement, they could be open to influences from other quarters.[178]

This fear also appeared in instructions sent by Kardelj to the Regional Committee of the KPS for the Littoral in April 1943. His comments on the clergy and on the Christian Socialists also reflected the preoccupations of the Slovene Communist leaders at that time, shortly after the Dolomite declaration. In spite of the "more or less sincere cooperation of one part of the clergy with the OF", they would undoubtedly be "the basis on which reaction will tomorrow place its cards." They therefore had to work at dividing the clergy from the BG and especially from the "Sredina", and further activate priests who were sympathetic towards the OF in concrete work for the Partisans. They must "be awake to all occurrences which could tomorrow develop into an open threat to the OF."[179]

Later on, the Communists noted variations within the region of the Littoral, noting that the supporters of Mihailović, the "Blue Guard", had established links with the Catholic "Sredina" in Gorizia, while in Trieste, where the "Sredina" had never gained a foothold, the forces of reaction had been overcome.[180] At the very end of the war, large numbers of Mihailović supporters, Serbs as well as Slovenes, gathered in the Littoral region, hoping to link up with the British forces which were advancing northwards through Italy. A report on the situation at that time noted the role played by the Vatican in

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[178]Letter of 20 February, 1943 from Mikuž to the clergy of the littoral. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 5, pp. 510-511.

[179]Instructions of 6 April, 1943. *Zbornik*, Tom II, Book 9, pp. 31-36.

[180]Report from the CK KPS, 6 June, 1944. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 18, pp. 50-55.

supporting efforts to prevent a Yugoslav takeover of the Julian region, and that it was using the local clergy:-

> While the Slovene clergy in the Littoral did in previous years participate in the national liberation movement, or at least tolerate it with benign neutrality, there has lately been a definite change. That change, which is revealed in an expressly negative orientation on the part of the clergy of the Littoral towards the national liberation movement, support for the occupier and speculation regarding help from the western Allies, we must not attribute to any possible incorrect attitude of the national liberation movement towards the clergy. The change is a clear consequence of the Vatican's systematic activities.[181]

So in the Littoral too, although relations were certainly much easier than in the Ljubljana Province, the Communists were distinctly wary of the clergy. This was the general picture in Slovenia. Although a handful of priests did support and join the Partisans, and they were put to good use in the work of propaganda, the Communists were always suspicious and cautious in their dealings with them, even with priests who had never done anything overtly hostile towards them. In Slovenia, unlike in Croatia, the Church and clergy were identified as a key active enemy, not just as a potential one, and in such a situation passivity on the part of the clergy was difficult and, from the Partisans' point of view, insufficient.

A key element in the efforts of the Slovene Communists to gain acceptance among the clergy was their attempts to establish links with Bishop Rožman, and at least to win his neutrality in the conflict. This was especially difficult, given the principled hostility of the Catholic Church towards Communism and the fact that so many members of the clergy fell foul of the Partisans during the developing civil war. Clearly their endeavours were ultimately unsuccessful, but the perseverance with which they stuck to the task is interesting. It indicates the importance which they attached to the Church hierarchy, their appreciation of its influence, and their belief that in order to win acceptance among the lower clergy and the Catholic faithful the attitude adopted by the bishop was crucial. Mikuž noted that "the OF would have succeeded in winning over the clergy only if it had

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[181]Report entitled "Trenutna situacija na Primorskem" ("The Current Situation in the Littoral"), written just before the end of the war. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 451/II.

managed to win over the bishop and the higher clergy, whom almost all the clergy would have followed like sheep. The OF did try with the bishop, but without success."[182]

Rožman's indecisiveness and openness to the influence of others has been mentioned earlier. The OF leadership perceived a certain hesitancy in his attitude towards them early in the war, which they sought to exploit, in the hope of winning him back from the clericalist political leaders under whose sway they believed he had fallen. Mikuž speculated about Rožman's attitude towards the OF, that at first he was open to all, but believed that resistance to the occupiers was futile and dangerous because of their strength, but that gradually he came under pressure from people such as Ehrlich and Natlačen, and began to doubt the justice of the OF's cause. This doubt was confirmed by the stories he was receiving from the first liberated territory in the spring of 1942 of killings, and attacks upon the clergy etc. According to Mikuž, he was still willing to accept that the intentions of the OF were good, but he did not believe that they would liberate the people, and it seemed to him that they had lost control over their members on the ground.[183]

Of course, Rožman would hardly have looked favourably upon the Communist element in the OF leadership. He was, as almost all senior clergymen, consistent in his anti-Communism. But early on in the war the OF was presented as a genuine partnership, and Rožman was struck by the fact that many people whom he regarded as good had joined the OF. Lenič noted that Rožman was often torn within himself on account of that, although he was clear that it was impermissible to cooperate with Communists.[184]

It was on the basis of this perceived indecisiveness and hesitancy that OF leaders considered it worthwhile to contact Rožman and to put their case before him. Efforts to

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[182]Mikuž, "Slovenska Duhovščina in Osvobodilna Fronta", p. 4. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 516a/I.

[183]*ibid.* p. 15.

[184]*Pogovor s škofom dr. Stanislavom Leničem*, p. 1932.

establish contact were made early on. During his trial it was noted that the Executive Committee of the OF sent him two letters in 1941, explaining the significance and aims of the liberation movement, and seeking the cooperation of the clergy. The Christian Socialist group sent him two similar letters at about the same time. No response was received. Rožman was also asked to receive a representative of the OF, but again did not respond.[185]

Following these early approaches, efforts to contact Rožman appear to have been less intensive, and this would seem to coincide with the period of the militant leftist line, which lasted among the Slovene Communists from late 1941 through the summer of 1942. The Partisan newspaper, *Slovenski poročevalec*, in April 1942, published an open letter to Rožman, attacking him for declaring that Župec and Kikelj were martyrs and for supporting the occupier, which had lately introduced the taking of hostages. The letter asked how was this in accord with his Christian conscience? But this open letter was no attempt to establish contact or to reach an understanding with him. It was rather more of a public attack, designed to undermine his standing among the Catholic public.[186]

Towards the end of 1942, after the Italian offensive of that summer, when the Slovene Communists had abandoned their "left sectarian" line and the emphasis was once again upon forging alliances, fresh attempts were made to contact Rožman.[187] Kardelj and Kidrič reported to the Executive Committee of the OF in October 1942 on the confusion among the BG following the assassination of Natlačen by the VOS, and that there was no one who could wield such authority as he had, except for the bishop. Thus the BG were pressurizing Rožman, in the hope of using him as the ultimate authority,

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[185]MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, p. 69. France Martin Dolinar refers to a letter of 30 November, 1941 from the Executive Committee of the OF to Rožman. "Sodni proces proti Ljubljanskemu škofu dr. Gregoriju Rožmanu od 21. do 30. avgusta 1946." (in Zgodovinski časopis, nos. 1-3, 1996, Ljubljana, hereafter Dolinar). part 3, pp. 417-418.

[186]*Slovenski poročevalec* of 28 April, 1942. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 2, pp. 34-35.

[187]MNZ, Proces Rožman, file 1, p. 69.

and were gathering around him "rather against his will". Kardelj and Kidrič recognized that Rožman was hesitating.[188]

The report went on to note that the Christian Socialists, who had sent four letters to Rožman,[189] had held back a letter to him, considering that the time for another letter was wrong, so soon after the killing of Natlačen. Kardelj and Kidrič disagreed, and noted that the Communists had themselves made indirect contact with Rožman. They had had to refute rumours that they intended to shoot him, which had been fuelled by a letter which someone (either a "BG provocation" or "some hot head") had sent him. They did not expect any concrete result to come of their contacts, except that perhaps Rožman's hesitancy would become even greater.

Boris Ziherl, secretary of the Commission for Agitation and Propaganda of the CK KPS, reported to Kardelj a few days later that he had three intermediaries who were in contact with Rožman. It seems that these were Stane Mikuž (brother of Metod Mikuž), Karla Mrak-Bulovec and Anton Brecelj.[190] They were all of the view that he was not a bad man, but very open to bad influence. Ziherl had strongly denied that the threatening letter, mentioned above, came from them, and had given guarantees regarding "liquidations." The intermediaries all had the impression that Rožman did not believe that any from the OF intended him harm. Brecelj had noted that he had lately started to waver a little. It was reported that he had, in a sermon on the Feast of Christ the King (in October), indicated that Germany was the "source of godlessness", which had been cut out by the censor in the published version.

This view that Rožman was hesitating, and that there was still a chance that he could be persuaded to look more indulgently upon the OF, persisted for some months longer. As noted earlier, Kardelj was, at the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943,

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[188]Report of 28 October, 1942. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 120-128.

[189]Note on the report by Kardelj and Kidrič of 28 October, 1942. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 125-126.

[190]Report of 31 October, 1942. *Jesen 1942*, pp. 147-149. A note on p. 147 lists the three intermediaries. Brecelj, a member of the supreme plenum of the OF, had actually died in Ljubljana the previous month, as noted in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 3, p. 423.

particularly enthusiastic about the possibilities for fruitful contacts with the clergy. In his lengthy report to Tito in December 1942 he noted that a conference of priests was being prepared in Slovenia. But the conference did not take place, reportedly because Rožman was still hesitating openly to take the side of the occupiers, and it was put off while they waited upon his final position.[191]

When Metod Mikuž arrived in liberated territory, he took up the task of trying to win over Rožman. Mikuž wrote to Rožman on 11 January 1943. He described his impressions of the Partisans, rejecting as lies the negative portrayal of them which was given in the press in Ljubljana. He gave great stress to their moral uprightness, refuting stories of orgies within the Partisan ranks. He emphasized the guarantees of freedom of religion, asserting that these were being put into practice, as he was given freedom to carry out his priestly duties. Regarding the matter of liquidations, he acknowledged that some had been carried out for revolutionary motives, and were thus regrettable and not in line with the "ethical norms of the OF." But other liquidations were justified and carried out according to proper legal procedures. He insisted that the struggle of the OF against the occupier was just.

Mikuž particularly requested that Rožman authorize the appointment of chaplains to Partisan units. He guaranteed secrecy, but sought that the pastoral work of Partisan priests should be in harmony with Church law. He also promised that his involvement in the appointment of Partisan chaplains would not be used to show that the Partisans were supported by the bishop. He suggested that it would be most practical if the Partisans were to suggest priests as chaplains, whose appointment could then be confirmed by Rožman. Finally Mikuž asked to be sent the materials required for administering the sacraments, adding that they could be handed to the deliverer of the letter (who was

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[191]Report from Kardelj to Tito, 14 December, 1942. *Zbornik*, Tom II, book 7, pp. 55-101. Note on why the conference not held is at p. 80.

Stane Mikuž). He concluded with an assurance that at stake was the good of the Slovene people and the Catholic faith.[192]

Mikuž later recorded Rožman's responses to his overtures, brought to him in reports of the conversations which the intermediaries had with the bishop.[193] These show that Rožman was initially at least open to discussion, but that his attitude hardened. On 21 January 1943, he said that it was senseless for a small people to resist the imperial powers, and that only secret preparations for the final reckoning could be countenanced. He believed that the OF leadership intended well, although some individuals were out of control. On 26 January, he announced that he was very concerned about Mikuž, and prayed for him a lot. He said that he understood Mikuž's actions, because the Partisans also had souls, but he would not be involved in politics. On 6 February, he said that he did not believe the reports in the press about Partisan atrocities against Catholic Slovenes, but neither did he believe stories about crimes of the BG, and demanded proof of them.

So up to this point Rožman had still not given a definite response, and this lack of a negative reply prompted the OF leaders to offer him the chance to visit Partisan-held territory to meet with members of the Executive Committee of the OF and the Main Command. They proposed a way in which it could be done in complete secrecy, so that Rožman would not be compromised. Invitations were sent in the name of the CK KPS and of the Main Command. On 11 February, Rožman gave his response to the intermediary who had carried all these messages, again Stane Mikuž (as is clear from a note at the bottom of the report that Metod Mikuž's letter had had to be censored, as he had used the word "brother").

The report of this, referring to Rožman as "Šef" ("the Boss") noted that when Rožman read of the proposed visit he immediately declared "but that is a suggestion

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[192]Letter from Mikuž to Rožman, 11 January, 1943. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 5, pp. 117-121.

[193]Mikuž, "Slovenska Duhovščina in Osvobodilna Fronta", pp. 16-17. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 516a/I.

before which my mind completely comes to a stop." His full antipathy towards the Communists then came out, as he asked what good would such a visit do? What could they tell him about the deaths of people killed by the Partisans? He declared that he had proof that the Partisans tortured people. He compared the situation in Slovenia with that in the Soviet Union, saying that claims that religion was not persecuted there had been shown by the Holy See to be untrue. The report shows that there was a lively argument, during which the OF's agent came to the conclusion that Rožman had "no idea about conditions in the Soviet Union, still less about Communism, still less about true democracy." In any case, Rožman was not persuaded by his arguments, but he did not give an immediate negative response, requesting time to decide.[194]

Rožman gave his reply on 17 February, and it was negative. He said that his reasons were based on principle, and that he had again heard things that meant that he could not think well of the OF, namely that it was enough for a man to be a member of Catholic Action for him to be killed, although Catholic Action was not a political organization (he acknowledged that Catholic Action "struggles ideologically against atheistic Communism", but not "in a political and organized way"). Stane Mikuž added that "You know the bishop well, so you will also know how hesitant and under influence he is ... you know how impossible it is in conversation with him to keep to the subject, whatever it is."[195]

Others were also in contact with Rožman. Kocbek wrote to him just after Mikuž, on 20 January 1943. He upbraided Rožman for his indecision, complaining that he was giving the appearance that there was a conflict between him and the OF. He did not accuse Rožman of intentionally opposing the OF, but rather rebuked him for allowing himself to fall under the influence of those who "can no longer represent Catholicism among the Slovenes." Listing some of the grievances of the OF against him, Kocbek

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[194]Report is at MNZ, Rožman, file 3, pp. 3544-3545.

[195]Mikuž, "Slovenska Duhovščina in Osvobodilna Fronta", p. 17. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 516a/I.

asked whether he was aware that "you have connected your own and the episcopal fate with such a traitorous and criminal circle among the Slovenes?" He appealed to Rožman to break with the clericalists gathered around him, to forbid his clergy participation in the BG, to send clergy to the Partisans, and to condemn the excesses of the occupier.[196] This letter was also handed to Rožman by Stane Mikuž, and, according to him, Rožman received it positively.[197]

It seems that Rožman was quite prepared to meet and talk to representatives of the OF, but February 1943 marked a decisive watershed in these contacts. Rožman wavered no longer, and had decisively rejected any accommodation with the OF. For their part the OF abandoned any hope of trying to prise Rožman away from their enemies. In reality, as has been shown, Rožman had been closely involved with those who were engaged in the struggle against the Partisans since early 1942, so the chances of persuading him to change course were remote.

Not long afterwards, Rožman turned against Mikuž, about whom he had earlier voiced concern. In a newspaper interview in April 1943, Rožman responded to a question concerning Mikuž that "among twelve apostles there was one traitor, and among seven hundred holy priests there was found only one." He refuted the claims of Mikuž and Kocbek that the Partisans had some support among the clergy. As to Mikuž's position as chaplain, those who appointed him had not the authority to confer such spiritual powers.[198]

Indeed, shortly afterwards, in June 1943, Rožman suspended Mikuž. This was discussed at a session of the Executive Committee of the OF on 28 June. The suspension was accepted as valid, and Mikuž would appeal in the regular way. In the meantime, they sent a protest to Rožman, ordered a protest campaign against the

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[196]Kocbek, *Osvobodilni Spisi*, volume 1, pp. 267-273.

[197]Per note in *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 5 p. 330.

[198]Interview with Rožman in *Slovenec*, 10 April, 1943.

decision, and decided, as a response, to publish a pamphlet "To the Slovene Clergy", with articles by Mikuž and the OF leaders, Christian Socialists, Communists and Sokol. The letter of protest described the suspension as an act against the liberation movement as well as against Mikuž personally. It declared that they had done all that they could to avoid a division between the "Slovene people" and the "official Church". However, they still accepted that his hostile attitude was a result of the slanders and pressures of others. They asked him to lift the suspension. [199]

So, in spite of all their criticisms, the OF leaders were still trying to hold a door open for Rožman, giving him the benefit of the doubt that he was simply under bad influence. Kidrič had, slightly earlier, acknowledged that their main attacks were concentrated on the Italians and the BG rather than Rožman.[200] Indeed, although attacks on him continued, and were stepped up, the channels of communication were kept open. In July 1943, Leopold was invited to hold discussions with a group of leading OF figures, to discuss a trip to Rome he had just made, during which he had an audience with the Pope. Although Leopold had declined to hand a memo to the Pope on behalf of the OF, they still hoped to be able to put him to use.

The meeting was held at the house of a parish priest, Fr. Franc Šmit, who, Leopold noted, appeared to have good relations with the Partisans. In attendance were Vidmar, Kocbek and Mikuž, as well as other senior OF figures, Marijan Brecelj, the OF's organisational secretary, and Vito Kraigher. Among other things, they expressed a desire to meet Rožman, and asked Leopold to try to arrange it. In a clear indication that Leopold had reservations about the Partisans, in spite of his support for them, he sought reassurances regarding their treatment of the Church and the clergy, but he agreed to carry out their assignment. On 28 July 1943, he visited Rožman. Rožman rejected any possibility of his cooperating with the OF, because "they speak in a different way, and

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[199]Record of the decisions of the IO OF, taken at a meeting on 28-29 June, 1943, and the text of the letter of protest. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 7, pp. 666-671.

[200]Letter from Kidrič to Kardelj, 22 June, 1943. *Dokumenti ljudske revolucije*, Book 7, pp. 600-605.

think and behave in a different way." He did not trust them, and feared they would kill him. His conversation with Leopold again showed his desire to please whoever he happened to be with. He initially excused his unwillingness to meet representatives of the OF by saying that it would be impossible to evade the Italian detectives who protected him. And he softened his attitude towards Mikuž, saying that he could administer the sacraments, if there was no other priest available. But he firmly refused the offer of a meeting.[201]

Even in 1944, the OF still had channels of communication with Rožman. Kidrič informed a meeting of the clergy of the Črnomelj deanery in April 1944 that all of their contacts with Rožman, since the summer of 1941, had failed. He noted that their intermediary was Fr. Janko Arnejc. It was decided to send Rožman a request that Fr. Andrej Ilc be given ecclesiastical authority in the area, which was under Partisan control, as Vicar-General for Bela Krajina. Rožman was informed that the clergy were not hindered in going about their work, and priests who had been interned in their houses had been released by an order of the District Committee of the OF for Bela Krajina. They were free to travel about the deanery, and some had permits to travel throughout liberated territory. The letter was sent to Rožman through OF channels, and he replied on 7 June, naming Ilc as Vicar-General.[202]

Coming at this late stage in the war, it appeared that Rožman's stance may have been softening, and that perhaps he was getting ready to accept the reality of life under a Communist Government. That impression also came from other sources. Mira Svetina Vlasta, commissar of the CK KPS with the Executive Committee of the OF for Ljubljana, wrote the following report in a letter in September 1944:-

> There is talk of a letter which some high person abroad has sent to the bishop. The conjecture is that it was Snoj. Thus, so it is said, a new wind is blowing in the bishopric, and one of the fanatical canons has allegedly said that they must prepare to work in a

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[201]Leopold-Lavov, pp. 99-108.

[202]Lojze-Jože Žabkar, "Cerkev med NOB na osvobojenem ozemlju (ob 40-letnici verske Komisije in generalnega vikariata za Belo Krajino)", (in *Mohorjev koledar*, 1984) pp. 94-96.

> Communist Yugoslavia. That declaration did not, allegedly, have a hostile ring. We will soon look into the situation.[203]

So the Communists had not completely given up on Rožman, even at that late stage. On 19 August 1944, another OF figure, Izidor Cankar, wrote to Rožman asserting that the Partisans were not Communist and that there would not be a revolution. Rožman replied to Cankar on 20 October 1944, saying that everything he did was for the good of the people.[204] During these latter stages of the war the situation in Slovenia changed dramatically, and the attitudes and priorities of the Communist leaders also changed, as will be discussed below. But their attempts to appeal to the clergy and to draw them into the struggle did not cease. Rather they were re-activated with new vigour.

Attempts to gather the clergy under the OF banner through the holding of priests' meetings had been made even in the earlier stages of the war. As noted earlier, Kardelj strongly pressed for the holding of such a meeting at the end of 1942. Mikuž noted a failed priests' conference which took place when the Partisans first established an area of liberated territory in 1942, in the presence of some members of the Executive Committee of the OF. He attributed its failure to the hostility towards the OF which the clergy had learned from Ljubljana.[205]

Efforts to include the clergy in the Partisan movement were renewed in 1944, especially with the formation of a Religious Affairs Commission, in accordance with the decision of December 1943 to form a central Religious Commission under the auspices of AVNOJ. As has already been mentioned, in October 1943 there took place in Kočevje an assembly of the OF, as a representative body which would send Slovene delegates to the AVNOJ session in Jajce, expressing Slovenia's desire to enter into the new federal Yugoslavia. A few months later, in February 1944, this body, the Slovene National

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[203]Letter to the CK KPS of 19 September, 1944. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 20, pp. 53-60.

[204]Dolinar, part 3, p. 427. An undated letter from Rožman, recorded as being to Ivo Cankar, in Serbo-Croat translation, may be the letter of 20 October 1944. MNZ, Rožman, file 3, p. 3579. Referring to Kuhar's appeal for unity, Rožman described such unity as impossible. Nevertheless, it is interesting that he was prepared to engage in a friendly discourse with an OF figure even then.

[205]Mikuž, "Slovenska Duhovščina in Osvobodilna Fronta", p. 6. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 516a/I.

Liberation Committee (SNOO) was upgraded at the first session of the Slovene National Liberation Council (SNOS). Among the decisions of this session was one to form a Religious Commission under SNOS. Kidrič explained the decision to found the Commission in his speech:-

> In view of the fact that the national traitors shamelessly attribute an anti-religious standpoint to our national liberation movement it is necessary to establish a Religious Commission of the Presidency of the Slovene National Liberation Committee. The tasks of the Religious Commission will be twofold: firstly the foundation and operation of a Religious Commission should again guarantee the unhindered carrying out of divine worship and the full realization of religious freedom, and secondly the Religious Commission should settle all questions between the Slovene peoples' authorities and the Church.[206]

The published decision to found the Commission added that it should research the relationship between the Church and peoples' authorities up until that time, and should advise the authorities on matters concerning the Church.[207] This dual role, to guarantee religious freedom and to assist the authorities in matters concerning the Church clearly held out the possibility of ambiguity in cases of dispute between the religious and state authorities, especially given that the meaning of religious freedom was not defined and was understood differently in different quarters. The direction that the Commission would take depended in large measure on who would be chosen to head it.

In fact there was a delay in implementing the decision to found the Commission. Clearly the Communist leaders still attached importance to the clergy, but they had greater priorities. Kidrič's speech to a priests' meeting in April 1944 has already been mentioned. Boris Mlakar has noted a speech he made to a meeting of the clergy of Bela Krajina, which was probably the same one. He declared that "we will win even without you, although we would like to settle the relations between Church and State." Kocbek pressed for the Commission to be constituted, and in May 1944 warned Marijan Brecelj

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[206] *I. zasedanje Slovenskega Narodno Osvobodilnega Sveta. Boris Kidrič o graditvi narodne oblasti in slovenske državnosti v okviru federativne Jugoslavije: referat na I. zasedanju SNOS, dne 19/2/1944*, (publication of the Presidency of SNOS, 1944), p. 16.

[207] *Prvo zasedanje slovenskega narodnega osvobodilnega sveta: sklepi in odloki*, (Ljubljana, 1945), p. 20.

that things were being allowed to slide as regards the clergy. When the Commission was finally formed, its leadership was entrusted to Lojze Ude.[208]

Since going to Partisan territory in September 1943, his attempts to promote discussions on an end to the civil war having failed, Ude had been drawn into the Partisan movement, being involved in the spheres of culture, international law, Slovene border questions and the Commission for the investigation of the crimes of the occupiers and their accomplices. But Ude had nevertheless maintained his independence. When Kidrič asked him, in August 1944, to be President of the Commission he said that "a Communist would not be suitable, neither a Clericalist, while the Liberals would start a cultural struggle. But you, as a Slovene democratic nationalist, would know how to accommodate these opposites and maintain the correct course."[209] Ude's approach to his work as President of the Commission was very different to that of Rittig, his counterpart in Croatia. He set out seriously to carry out the tasks which the Commission had been assigned, and did not intend to be any kind of puppet of the Communists.

He quickly got down to work, inviting district committees of the OF to send representatives to a meeting in Črnomelj to discuss the work of the Commission.[210] The meeting was held on 13 September. In his report to the meeting, Ude made harsh criticisms of the clergy, the majority of whom, including the high Church functionaries, had, he said, taken the side of the occupiers against the people. As a result, he acknowledged, there had been actions against individual priests, and some churches had been damaged because they were used for military purposes. But, he asserted in a lengthy discussion of the relationship between Communists and religion, there would be no anti-religious campaign. Though Communism was atheistic, it was in principle against the persecution of religion, and the Slovene Communists were determined not to do

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[208]Mlakar, in Ude, p. 166.

[209]*ibid.* pp. 164-166.

[210]Letters of 9 September, 1944 from Ude to three district committees of the OF. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 526/V.

anything that would divide the Slovene people. Thus, he insisted, the establishment of the Commission was not a mere tactical move on the part of the Communists.[211]

The priests who were present were alarmed at the harsh view of the clergy expressed by Ude, and Fr. Stanko Cajnkar, who later became a member of the Commission, reproached him for only speaking of the faults on one side, and saying nothing of the faults of the OF.[212] Clearly Ude was constrained to follow the basic OF line, and, after all, he was a supporter of the OF, in spite of his critical approach. But his work for the Commission soon led to tensions, especially with OZNA, the secret police.

The holding of a session of the Commission was delayed, Brecelj saying that they needed to wait for the word from Belgrade. Belgrade had recently been liberated, and the central Party leaders were increasingly seeking to centralize the movement and to bring all of the regional Party organizations into line with a centrally determined policy. As for the question of Church - State relations, they wanted to leave that until after the war.[213]

Ude was indignant at this reliance on Belgrade. In a letter to the Presidency of SNOS in November 1944, concerning Church-State separation, he urged that Slovenes should settle the question of Church-State relations themselves, so as to be able to take account of the particular conditions which existed there, which were different from the rest of predominantly Orthodox Yugoslavia.[214] Ude felt that he was being hampered in his attempts to set the work of the Commission in motion. In February 1945, he wrote to the Presidency of SNOS, enclosing a copy of the report on the work of the Commission which he had intended to present to its first session, which had still not taken place. He complained that the various organs of the Slovene peoples' authorities were not cooperating with the Commission, and were not responding to requests that it be

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[211]Report to a meeting of priests and OF activists of Bela Krajina, 13 Sept, 1944. Ude, pp. 132-152.

[212]Mlakar, in Ude, p. 166.

[213]*ibid*. pp. 166-167.

[214]Letter of 26 November, 1944. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 458/IV.

informed about matters which concerned the Church. Part of the problem was that the Commission, not having held a session, had not received approval of its statutes. The absence of a clear direction in the policy towards the Church, for which they were waiting on Belgrade, was also a problem.

Ude was particularly concerned about the attitude of OZNA, which, he asserted, "obviously has very incorrect ideas as to the tasks of our Commission. It obviously thinks that we understand our role as being to save, at any price, those priests who have occasion to come into contact with it." He insisted that the Commission must be informed of any case where a priest had given OZNA cause to proceed against him.[215] Finally, the first session of the Commission was held on 19 February 1945. It discussed various issues of relevance to relations with the Church, but its main task was to discuss the statutes of the Commission. A point which provoked particular discussion was the provision in the original draft claiming the right of the Commission to intervene in cases brought against priests. Mikuž said he had the impression from Brecelj and Kidrič that the Presidency of SNOS was against that. So it was decided to reduce the claim, so that it would only include the right to see the documents related to cases. Mikuž suggested that if it was necessary to intervene in a case, they could still do so, without any need for the right to be stipulated expressly.[216]

The question of whether it was in the Commission's competence to intervene on behalf of priests who fell foul of the emerging new regime remained sensitive. Later, just before the end of the war, Ude reported to the Presidency of SNOS concerning the problems the Commission was experiencing.[217] He complained that both Church circles and organs of the peoples' authorities seemed to have a mistaken view of the Commission's role: "Each of them sees in the Religious Commission an institution

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[215]Letter of 7 February, 1945. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 526/V.

[216]Minutes of the session of the Religious Commission of 19 February, 1945 and copies of the statutes of the Commission. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 458/IV.

[217]Letter of 22 April, 1945. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 451/IV.

primarily established for the benefit of the Church, to defend its interests in face of the organs of the Slovene peoples' authorities." Thus it was that priests had persistently turned to the Commission, although it soon became apparent to them that the Commission would be of no help. Ude noted that that probably meant that "the Religious Commission no longer enjoys the confidence of the clergy which it had enjoyed at the beginning." Neither did the organs of the authorities trust the Commission. As to OZNA, which clearly did not wish to have any contact with the Commission, he despaired. He did not see any point in further efforts to get a response from them.

The difficulties which Ude and the Commission were experiencing were symptomatic of the time. The changing situation in the closing stages of the war resulted in a marked shift in emphasis on the part of the Yugoslav Party leadership. This in turn affected their attitude towards the Church. In general there was a sharpening of the Communists' attitude towards the Church and clergy, making for a very difficult and frustrating environment for the Commission to work in.

This chapter has shown that in much of Slovenia the Communists' relations with the Catholic Church and clergy were highly fraught, due both to the particularly harsh policy of the Communists towards their opponents early in the war and the active part played by members of the clergy in resistance to the Partisans. Nevertheless, in Slovenia too efforts by the Partisans to appeal to the clergy and bring them into the service of their cause had some, all be it very limited, success. However, the coalition-building strategy was strictly limited, and was not to be at the expense of the Communists' absolute control of the Partisan movement, as was starkly demonstrated by the treatment meted out to the Christian Socialists.

Part Two

The Communists Come to Power

Chapter Four

From Popular Front to Closed Door, Summer 1944 - Spring 1945

By the summer of 1944, the Communist-led National Liberation Movement was in a commanding position. With victory in sight, it was making the switch from being an insurgent organization to a proto-government, consolidating its grip on the country, forming permanent institutions and preparing to set up a one-party revolutionary regime after the war. Tito's main concerns now were to gain international acceptance and recognition, and to consolidate the Party's position within the country.

This chapter describes how this shift in emphasis on the part of the Communists went hand in hand with a sharpening of the central leadership's stance towards the Catholic Church. With victory at hand, the time for compromises with potential rivals was over. This change had a profound impact on the direction in which Hebrang was leading the Croatian Party. It led to a sharp dispute between him and the central Party leadership, in which the question of policy towards the Catholic Church loomed large.

As the Communist takeover approached, particularly alarming for the KPJ leadership was the involvement of senior Catholic clergy, including Rožman and Stepinac, in efforts to forestall their progress to power. And as the Yugoslav Partisans prepared to push into the Julian region and Istria, they also had to reckon with opposition from the Holy See. The chapter analyses the shift in Communist policy towards the Church in the last phase of the war and the extent of the senior clergy's involvement in the final showdown.

A particular priority in mid-1944 was the need to establish Partisan control in Serbia, without which the Communist hold on power would be insecure. In Serbia, the movement was in a very different position from that which it had experienced in Croatia and

Slovenia. Since the suppression of the Serbian uprising against the occupation during the summer and autumn of 1941, the Partisans had been a negligible force there. They did not have the opportunity to prepare the ground for their takeover with political activities, such as they had developed with great care in the western parts of the country. The takeover in Serbia was effectively a military operation, an invasion, as with the help of arms supplied by the western Allies and with direct Soviet support in the liberation of Belgrade, the Partisans destroyed Mihailović's forces in the summer of 1944.

A key element in Tito's efforts to gain international recognition was an agreement with Ivan Šubašić, the last Prime Minister of the Yugoslav Government in exile (and Ban, or Governor, of Croatia before the outbreak of war), concerning the formation of a new government, to include uncompromised members of the old political parties as well as members of the Communist-controlled AVNOJ. Accordingly, Tito became head of the first post-war government, with Šubašić as Foreign Minister. In addition, Tito agreed that no decision would be taken regarding the future of the Monarchy in Yugoslavia until after a referendum had been held on the subject.[1] The common element in these agreements was that Tito was trying to present a moderate face for the benefit of the western powers, to pretend that he was not seeking to establish a Communist dictatorship, but intended to set up a democratic regime in which non-Communists would have every opportunity to participate.

Thus care was taken by the Communists to hide their revolutionary goals. The emphasis was on the breadth of the movement, as Kardelj reminded the Slovene leadership in a letter of July 1944, when he warned them to avoid sectarianism.[2] In August 1944, an amnesty was declared, to encourage people to transfer their allegiance to the Partisans.[3] However, the central leadership was becoming concerned at the

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[1]Irvine, pp. 184-185.

[2]Letter to the CK KPS of 29 July, 1944. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 18, pp. 353-361.

[3]Jera Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem Oblasti, 1944-1946* (Ljubljana, 1992), p. 56.

tendency of the Slovene and Croatian leaderships to follow their own paths, which was not in accord with its desire, in the second half of 1944, to centralize the movement. In Slovenia, this concern revealed itself in Kardelj's repeated reproaches to the leadership for alleged nationalism. In June 1944, Kidrič was temporarily suspended on account of a loan which the Slovene leadership had decided to accept from the Allies, thus appearing to undermine the prerogatives of the central leadership. He redeemed himself only by writing a self-critical letter to Kardelj.[4]

In Croatia, while the KPH did, under Hebrang, have some success in developing a broadly based movement, his emphasis on purely Croat concerns and tendency to act independently of the central, Yugoslav, leadership brought him into conflict with Tito during the latter phase of the war. It was not that the central leadership was completely out of sympathy with the line being pursued by the Croatian party. Indeed, it was acknowledged that it had had considerable success in building a broadly based movement, in confronting the HSS, and in establishing a framework of political institutions under the auspices of ZAVNOH. At a meeting of the Central Committee of the KPH on 24 March 1944, Vladimir Bakarić, apparently with Tito's blessing, attacked Hebrang's tactics in dealing with the HSS. Kardelj, who was present, declared that it was hard to criticize KPH policies, because they were so successful.[5]

Given their lack of a firm political base in Serbia, the Communists needed to show sensitivity to Serb concerns, not wishing to stir up resentment toward themselves while they were still unsure of their hold on the situation there. In a letter to Hebrang in August 1944, Kardelj explained that in this last phase of the war their line could not be as decisive as it otherwise should be, as the situation in Serbia was not yet resolved.[6] The effort to win mass support in Croatia and to undermine the HSS no longer had such a

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[4]*ibid*. pp. 80-82.

[5]Irvine, p. 181.

[6]Letter from Kardelj to Hebrang of 8 August, 1944. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 19, p. 87.

high priority. Tito no longer saw the need to make compromises in order to attract the supporters of the HSS. Now it was the unitary nature of the new state that needed to be emphasized, so as to appease the Serbs, with their concern for the large Serb populations outside of Serbia, in Croatia and Bosnia.

It was a confusing time for Hebrang, who failed to grasp the consequences of the changes in the wider situation in Yugoslavia as a whole for the tactics of the KPH in Croatia. Still thinking primarily in terms of the political struggle with the HSS, he was distressed by the apparently conciliatory attitude being taken as regards the Monarchy, fearing that it would appear to the mass of Croats that the National Liberation Movement was in fact going to return the old order in Yugoslavia, complete with the King, Serbian hegemony etc.[7] Similarly, he found it hard to appreciate that he should tone down the attacks on Maček so that it would not appear to the Western Allies that the Communists were in fact excluding their main competitor in Croatia. Kardelj explained to Hebrang that these apparent concessions were for external consumption only and would not affect the reality of power on the ground,[8] but still Hebrang found it hard to make the leap in imagination from thinking in terms of internal Croatian politics to the wider question of the international acceptance of Communist rule in Yugoslavia.

Apart from this, the central leadership decided in the second half of 1944 that it could no longer tolerate Hebrang's general tendency to pursue an independent line in Croatia. Tito's alarm at Hebrang's tactics had been growing steadily throughout 1944. In January of that year, he ordered Hebrang to tone down the attacks on Maček and Magovac, and not to let parochial Croatian concerns damage the entire Partisan movement and the Yugoslav State.[9] In April, he accused Hebrang of "nationalist

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[7]These fears expressed in a letter from Hebrang to Kardelj of 18 August, 1944. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 19, p. 161.

[8]Letter from Kardelj to Hebrang of 8 August, 1944. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 19, p. 87.

[9]Irvine, p. 178.

deviations" and of failing to emphasize Croatia's link with Yugoslavia strongly enough in Party propaganda.[10]

But although Tito insisted that attacks on the HSS and Maček should be avoided, he did not want the KPH to make any concessions to non-Communists on fundamental questions of ideology. Yet in the summer of 1944 it seemed that such concessions were being made. At issue was how far Hebrang was prepared to go to avoid antagonizing the Catholic Church. We have already seen that it was Party policy to avoid unnecessary confrontations with the Church, not wanting an open conflict with the Church hierarchy until the Communists were ready for it. Among the issues of crucial importance here was the Catholic Church's role in social matters, such as education and marriage. Up until the summer of 1944, there had been limits to the concessions that the Communists were prepared to make to the Church. It had been understood that religious education would be a voluntary subject in schools, and that civil marriage and divorce would be introduced. Then Hebrang made a sharp turnaround.

As regards marriage, on 17 June 1944 the Justice section of ZAVNOH issued draft directives on matters concerning divorce.[11] It was a very cautious document, stressing that there was no wish to interfere in the purely internal affairs of the Church or its views on marriage. It acknowledged that a marriage is for life, but recognized that if it breaks down to the extent that it threatens the well-being of those involved, then divorce can follow. The right of the state authorities to supervise marital matters was established. The directives dealt with the detailed procedures of how a divorce may be obtained. They included the stipulation that if both parties agreed to bring their grievances before a Church court, they could do so. If one party wished to go before the People's District Court, then that court should try to reach a decision which was in harmony with that of the Church court. The decision of the People's Court would, however, take precedence.

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[10]*ibid.* p. 181.

[11]*ZAVNOH, Zbornik dokumenata, 1944, III*, pp.86-93.

Ferdo Čulinović, who, as head of the Justice section, signed the directives, later maintained that the section had drawn them up after receiving oral instructions from the Executive Committee of ZAVNOH.[12] However, at the third session of the ZAVNOH Presidency on 24 - 25 August 1944, Hebrang vetoed this draft proposal, ordering that divorce should be forbidden, and that a campaign against divorce should be undertaken.[13] Kardelj was present on the first day of this session of the ZAVNOH Presidency, and he only narrowly prevented the passing of legislation requiring church marriages. During the discussion of the Justice section's draft directive on divorce Hebrang proposed that "no kind of civil marriage should be recognized, and all should continue to marry in church, because in Croatia only church marriages can be recognized."[14]

Kardelj went on to note that Rittig welcomed Hebrang's proposal with enthusiasm, putting him in a very uncomfortable position. But Kardelj nevertheless opposed it, and eventually his suggestion that no decisions concerning marriage or divorce should be taken yet was accepted. Clearly that did not prevent Hebrang from including the decision to ban divorce among the final decisions of the session, which were agreed after Kardelj had left.

Another decision of this session of the ZAVNOH Presidency, also taken after Kardelj had left, was that religious education in primary schools should be compulsory.[15] This really brought matters to a head. Firstly it seemed like a wholly unwarranted concession to the Catholic Church. Apart from that, both Kardelj and Tito had explicitly said that religious education was not to be compulsory.[16] Tito was furious. On 15 September

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[12]Note on the text of the directives. *ZAVNOH, Zbornik dokumenata, 1944, III*, p. 87.

[13]*ZAVNOH, Zbornik dokumenata, 1944, III*, pp. 259-260.

[14]Letter from Kardelj to Tito of 30 September, 1944. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 20, p. 43.

[15]Decision announced in *Naprijed*, 4 September, 1944.

[16]Recalled by Kardelj in his letter to Tito of 30 Sept, 1944. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 20, p. 43.

1944, he sent Hebrang a message which severely upbraided him, and revealed his hostility to the Church:-

> It really surprised me that you could have adopted such a decision in ZAVNOH, that in Croatia religious education should be introduced as a compulsory subject. This is a very stupid error, for which you and the other comrades, above all, bear responsibility. No democratic country has religious education as a compulsory subject in its schools. Endeavour by every means to withdraw this decree. The Vatican is in any case very hostile towards us, and works full steam to damage us, gathering and supporting all the anti-national elements in Yugoslavia. With such a rotten concession you will not serve our national liberation struggle or our sons at all, but will rather introduce regressive elements into the achievements of our struggle.[17]

Another decision which brought on Tito's wrath was the decision to set up a Croatian telegraph agency, which went against the centralization of the movement that Tito was trying to impose as the war drew to its close, as he tried to establish the patterns of the intended post-war order. On 17 September, he sent another message to Hebrang, impatiently ordering him to halt the work of this agency, and demanding an immediate response to his criticisms regarding the introduction of compulsory religious education. Hebrang replied the same day, denying responsibility for the telegraph agency, and informing Tito that its work had been stopped. Regarding the decision on religious education, he said that another senior member of the Croatian Party, Pavle Gregorić, was on the way to explain the decision personally.[18]

Tito was not satisfied, and on 18 September sent a message to Kardelj, ordering him to go to Croatia to evaluate the situation:-

> Go at once to Croatia. Really unbelievably ridiculous things are being done there. First, ZAVNOH adopted a decision making religious education a compulsory subject in schools. Secondly they have set up some kind of telegraph agency, "TAH". All this shows that separatist tendencies are very strong, even, it seems, among our comrades. We must not jest about it, as we shall have to take very severe measures. I consider Andrija [Hebrang] responsible for it all. Look into it, and if Andrija maintains such views, we shall have to remove him as secretary of the central committee.[19]

On 30 September 1944, Kardelj wrote his report. Apart from its passages on religious education and marriage and divorce, cited above, it contained a comprehensive indictment of the whole range of Hebrang's policies. He was accused of Croatian

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[17]Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela*, volume 23 (Belgrade, 1982), p. 146.

[18]*ibid.* p. 162, and note at p. 286.

[19]*ibid.* p. 180.

nationalism, of insensitivity towards the Serbs in Croatia, of laxity in his relations with the central Yugoslav leadership, and of regarding Yugoslavia as a mere necessary evil. He concluded with a recommendation that Hebrang be removed and replaced as secretary of the Croatian Party by Bakarić.[20] Tito agreed, and sent Kardelj and Djilas to effect Hebrang's removal. While it was presented in a positive light, and Hebrang was given a senior post in the government in Belgrade, Djilas recalled that he was unhappy. His new responsibilities "did not even approach the status of an authoritarian leader of a people. Hebrang could only be such a leader, or a malcontent."[21]

At the root of the dispute were Tito's and Hebrang's differing views of what federalism should mean. Tito at this time followed the ideas of Stalin on the national question, that a state that is federal in form would in fact be under central control through a centralized, disciplined single Communist Party. For Hebrang, federalism meant that Croatia and the Croatian Party would enjoy real autonomy. This also meant that the Croatian Party would decide on policy towards its rivals, whether they be the HSS or the Catholic Church, as it saw fit.

Tito had tolerated Hebrang for a long time. In the earlier stages of the war the Partisan movement and the Party organization had, of necessity, to be decentralized to a certain extent. Hebrang had pursued a policy which was essentially in tune with the Party's coalition-building line, while attacking Maček unremittingly. But by 1944 the situation had changed. By now in a commanding position, in control of large areas of territory, it was possible for centralized Party control to be extended over the regional Party organizations. Tito was frequently concerned that Hebrang was jeopardizing the Partisan movement as a whole in his pursuit of a policy that concentrated on Croatia and ignored the larger Yugoslav framework. That he tolerated him for so long no doubt had much to do with the success of Hebrang's policies within the Croatian context. But after

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[20]*Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 20, pp. 40-51.

[21]Milovan Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 410.

the agreement with Šubašić, AVNOJ's and the KPJ's position was significantly strengthened, and Hebrang's approach threatened the centralization of Party and State.

Clearly Hebrang had gone further than was intended by the central Party leadership in his attempts to keep peace with the Church. In his proposals regarding religious education and marriage and divorce at the third session of the ZAVNOH Presidency, he went much further than the Partisans had until then, and it was too much for Tito to stand. However, it was also an inopportune time for Hebrang to be making such concessions, as this was a period in which Tito was in any case sharpening his attitude towards the Church and becoming less inclined to compromise. We have already seen his hostility to the Vatican as a centre of "reactionary" forces seeking to undermine the Partisan movement in his angry message to Hebrang of 15 September 1944. This was in part another example of Hebrang's failure to keep up with the changing situation in the closing stages of the war, and to adapt his policy in Croatia to the requirements of the wider Yugoslav circumstances.

The shift in Tito's attitude towards the Catholic Church in the summer of 1944 can be seen in the story surrounding Kocbek's mission to Rome. Kocbek was sent to Rome by Tito and Kardelj, with the intention off countering the influence of Croatian and Slovene Catholic groups there. His brief was to inform the Holy See about the position of the liberation movement towards the Catholic Church, and to seek to change the Vatican's position towards Yugoslavia. In order to improve relations with the Holy See, Kocbek was mandated to promise that NKOJ would recognize the pre-war juridical position of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia. Kocbek was to present a memorandum to the Holy See, and before doing so sent a copy of it to Tito for approval.[22] Tito's response, of 26 August 1944, revealed a sharp change in attitude towards the Catholic Church since Kocbek had received his initial instructions in May.[23] Sharply critical of the Church

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[22]Živojinović, pp. 86-92.

[23]Edvard Kocbek, *Osvobodilni Spisi*, volume 2, pp. 97-98.

and clergy in Yugoslavia, it stated that no guarantees had been made regarding the internal position of the Church, and insisted that the onus was on the Church to correct itself. Tito threatened to make changes in the position of the Church under pressure, and without consulting the Holy See. These instructions effectively made Kocbek's original mission impossible to carry out.

Tito's sharpened attitude towards the Catholic Church was in part another result of the changing position of the Partisans, internally and internationally. He no longer felt it was necessary to make concessions. But it also revealed his fear of the damage that the Church could do. Kardelj wrote scathingly about Kocbek's efforts to the Slovene Party leadership, accusing him of naiveté for believing that anything could be gained from the Vatican. He also feared that it could have dangerous consequences, and cautioned against giving any quarter to the clergy:-

> Evidently our standpoint against the clergy was not too sharp, as Catholic Reaction is generally trying to strengthen itself on our positions. Any hesitation in that regard, or relaxation in the face of such tendencies as Kocbek is trying to promote could only be dangerous in the current situation, and would lead to a new concentration of Reaction.

Kardelj's concluding remark on Kocbek's mission invites reflection on the temporariness of the wartime efforts to achieve an accommodation with the Church: "In the whole thing the only positive outcome is that tomorrow we will be able to say to the Vatican and the whole Catholic hierarchy here, which will try to consolidate its position: too late. We sent you Kocbek when it was the time for that, but now it is too late."[24]

During 1944, the Slovene Communists too had to adapt to the changing priorities of the central Party leadership, as it prepared for its seizure of power. In the autumn of 1944, the central leadership was insisting on a much greater degree of Party discipline and close adherence to its line. There were particular reasons as to why the situation in Slovenia was especially sensitive. As the end of the war approached, a major preoccupation of the Communist leaders was with the rush to secure the claim to territory in the Littoral, and close attention was therefore paid to the activities of the

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[24]Kardelj to the CK KPS, 1 October, 1944. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 20, pp. 162-170.

Slovene leadership. The fear was that the western Allies might make a landing in Istria, and thus thwart Yugoslavia's ambitions in the whole Julian region, and perhaps even interfere in the implementation of the revolution.[25] Allied liaison officers noted the anxiety of the Slovene Partisans on this account, and the resulting uncooperative attitude towards them.[26]

In this tense atmosphere there was a general sharpening in the attitude of the Communists towards all their foes, as they adopted a "closed doors" policy, according to which those who had not declared for them were to be regarded as enemies of the new order that they were now engaged in building.[27] The Catholic Church was a particular object of their fear. The American OSS agent, Franklin Lindsay, keenly observed the changes among the Slovene Partisans. In late 1944, they halted offensive operations against the Germans. The BG, its morale high, was more aggressive, carrying the war to the Partisans, under German direction: "The Germans had effectively mobilized the conservative Catholics of Slovenia against the Partisans by playing on their fears of Communism, the advancing Red Army and Soviet occupation."[28]

It seemed that Catholicism was again being used to mobilize opposition to the Partisans. Worse still, it appeared that the Church itself was intimately involved in efforts to prevent a Communist takeover. Rožman sent a message to the Pope, with the intention that it should be passed on to the Allies, seeking intervention to prevent a Communist takeover in Slovenia.[29] The Vatican dimension was particularly to be feared, as the Yugoslav Communists assumed that their attempts to expand at the expense of Italy would be vigorously resisted by the Holy See. It was in this context that the more

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[25]Vodušek Starič, *The Making of the Communist Regime in Slovenia and Yugoslavia*, pp. 17-18.

[26]Lindsay, pp. 13; 111; 155; 180.

[27]Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem Oblasti*, pp. 6-9.

[28]Lindsay, pp. 213-214.

[29]Clissold, *Whirlwind*, p. 223.

hostile attitude towards the Holy See, which was revealed by the fate of the Kocbek mission, emerged during 1944.

The sharpened attitude towards the Church also frustrated Ude's efforts to carry out the tasks set the Religious Commission. It was in the remit of the Commission to advise the authorities regarding the settlement of questions affecting relations with the Church. Thus the Commission sought to examine such issues as the separation between Church and State and religious education. Ude tried to enter into correspondence with the relevant sections of SNOS on these issues.[30] They were discussed at a session of the Commission on 16 April 1945, a lengthy report of which was sent to the Presidency of SNOS.[31] But Ude found that little interest was being shown in the work of the Commission. His frustration boiled over in his letter to the Presidency of SNOS on 22 April 1945 (cited earlier), when he suggested that the Commission, in its present form, was not suited to carry out the functions which had been set it.[32]

The Communist leaders had decided to deal with the question of relations with the Church after the war. The situation had changed since the decision to found a Religious Commission in February. Policy towards the Church was no longer primarily about winning the support or acquiescence of the clergy. Now it was about establishing the conditions for the Communist regime which the leadership was already starting to build. Slovenia too was having to adapt to this new reality, even though a large occupation force still remained there. The Communists had a policy on matters appertaining to the Church. For example, in February 1945, Kocbek, who had been moved to Belgrade and appointed Minister of Education following his debacle in Rome, wrote to the Education Section of the Presidency of SNOS regarding religious education, which was to be a

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[30]e.g. Letter of 7 February, 1945 to the Education Section; letter of 8 February, 1945 to the Internal Affairs Section. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 458/IV.

[31]Report dated 17 April, 1945. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 451/IV.

[32]INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 451/IV.

voluntary subject.[33] The leadership was also clear that the sphere of the Church's activities should be severely restricted. But the Religious Commission was being bypassed. It was not considered appropriate that these matters should be open for discussion at that stage, and certainly not at the level of the emerging federal units. The point was to develop a uniform, centralized policy, and at a time which the central leadership considered was correct.

The determination of the leadership not to allow the Slovene Religious Commission to take any initiative may also in part have been a reaction to the experience in Croatia. Kardelj had played the central role in removing Hebrang and bringing the Croatian Party into line, and he was determined that the same thing would not happen in Slovenia. In a letter to the Slovene leadership in October 1944, he commented on the Croatian decision to make religious education a compulsory subject:-

> Bear in mind that that decision was completely wrong, and reject all attempts in any way to cite that decision in Slovenia. You should adopt a decisive stand in favour of the division of Church from state. Obviously there is no need to speak of that, to take decisions etc. That is the line. According to that line you should resolve everything by means of administrative regulations, without formal decisions. In one of your papers (probably in the Littoral's *Partizanski Dvevnik*) I read that the school year in the Littoral began with the usual "Holy Mass". If such a stupidity occurred on the ground, at least do not report it in our papers. Warn the Littoral people at once of that fact, and do not allow yourselves to be drawn down the path of such political posturing. You must adhere to our old decisions, namely that religious education is only for those whose parents wish it, and not in school hours, but separately. Do not underestimate that, as later on it could come back to haunt us.[34]

This passage clearly demonstrates that the Communists had by this time no interest in Ude's or the Commission's work. By the time it was constituted, in the autumn of 1944, circumstances had changed so as to make it obsolete. It also shows that the Communists were no longer interested in making gestures to appeal to religious feelings. Earlier in the war the traditional Mass to start the school year was just the sort of thing to which they gave great prominence.

By the end of the war, the harsher direction of the Communists' post-war policy was already defined in general terms, while they wished to leave the specifics until after the

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[33]Letter of 5 February, 1945. INZ, PC - SNOS, fasc. 451/II.

[34]Kardelj to the CK KPS, 14 October, 1944. *Dokumenti centralnih organa*, Book 20, pp. 275-280.

war was over. They would then deal directly with the Catholic hierarchy themselves, without the need for the mediation of a Religious Commission.

The increasingly polarized situation made for a bitter climax to the war in both Croatia and Slovenia. The acting French Consul in Zagreb, André Gaillard, who had been there throughout the war, noted that by the summer of 1944 news of Partisan excesses and the approach of the Russians had raised feelings of terror. He noted that Croats were in a state of confusion, not knowing which way to turn, with both sides demanding their absolute allegiance. Many of them did not dare to cross over to the Partisans up until the last. Gaillard described the affect of this polarization on the Croatian population thus:-

> The Croats did not know how to choose any more between what they considered two evils, one almost as bad as the other: Ustasha tyranny or the unknown of the Communist dictatorship of Marshall Tito. The hope, nourished through months and years, of English help evaporated. The Croats were going to confront their destiny alone: Pavelić in Zagreb, with Ljuberić the killer, with Jozo Rukavina and all the persecutors; a few kilometres away, the Partisan troops, to whom the popular rumour attributed infamies similar to those of the Ustashas.[35]

As the war reached its conclusion, the sharpening of relations between the Church and the new Communist authorities became even more explicit, as the Ustashas and the collaborationist regime in Ljubljana sought to enlist the hierarchy in their efforts to stave off a Communist takeover. There were various schemes afoot to resist the Partisans, all of them based upon the premise that the western Allies would not allow a Communist takeover in Yugoslavia.[36] The Ustashas sought to persuade the Allies to send a military mission to Croatia.[37] Pavelić, Maček and Stepinac received a memorandum from General Leon Rupnik, the collaborationist commander of the Slovene "Domobranstvo", and Rožman, proposing common action to continue the war and to bring about a situation which would provoke Allied intervention. They appealed that Maček, as the internationally acknowledged legitimate representative of the Croats, be included in a

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[35]Reports by Gaillard of 3 June and 18 August, 1945. FM, Paris, vol. 30, docs. 11-48.

[36]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", pp. 270-271.

[37]Stephen Clissold, *Croatian Memoirs, 1938-1947* (unpublished), p. 187.

Committee of National Resistance of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.[38] The Ustasha General Moškov reported that, just before the end of the war, two Slovene priests arrived in Zagreb and visited Maček. He was told by another leading Ustasha, Rukavina, that they were seeking that a Croatian force should be sent to join the Slovenes trying to halt the Partisan advance towards Ljubljana.[39] It has also been reported that representatives of Mihailović met Pavelić in April 1945 and brought a letter to Stepinac, urging that, whatever divided them, all his efforts should be directed to the struggle against Bolshevism.[40] Certainly a representative of Mihailović did visit Zagreb near the end of the war, and had contacts with the Ustasha authorities. Gaillard alleged that they signed an agreement on military cooperation.[41] At his trial, Mihailović recognized his signature on letters to Pavelić and Stepinac, dated 15 April 1945, but he claimed that the letters were not his, and that he was in the habit of giving out blank pieces of paper with his signature on them.[42] Stepinac also denied the authenticity of the letter, although his secretary, Ivan Šalić, remembered that Mihailović's representative had visited Stepinac.[43]

Stepinac was accused of being actively involved in efforts to present a more acceptable face of the NDH to the western Allies, stressing Croatia's traditional cultural links with Europe. Pope Pius XII reportedly expressed interest in a proposal to preserve the NDH under Maček, viewing Croatia as a staunchly Catholic country and a bulwark against schismatics and Communism.[44] A campaign in the Ustasha press asserted that

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[38]*Sudjenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini, ustaško-križarskim zločincima i njihovim pomagačima* (Zagreb, 1946), pp. 49-52.

[39]Bogdan Krizman, *Ustaše i treći reich* (Zagreb, 1983), pp. 316-318.

[40]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", p. 270; Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Nezavisne Države Hrvatske* (Zagreb 1994), p. 201.

[41]*Sudjenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini*, pp. 53-54; Reports from Gaillard of 20 May and 3 June, 1945. FM, Paris, vol. 30, docs. 5-27.

[42]Josip Hrnčević, *Svjedočanstva* (hereafter Hrnčević), pp. 189-190, citing the official record of Mihailović's trial in 1946.

[43]*Sudjenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini*, p. 75.

[44]Carlo Falconi, *The Silence of Pius XII*, PP.346-351.

all European, anti-Bolshevik forces, the Ustashas, HSS and Catholic Church, should stand together.[45]

It was in this context that five of the bishops (those who were able to reach Zagreb) issued a pastoral letter in March 1945, in which they defended themselves for having acknowledged the desire of the Croatian people for their own state, and condemned materialistic Communism.[46] The letter was seen by the Communists as connivance in the attempts of the Ustashas to preserve themselves, particularly as the initiative for the conference came from senior Ustashas, who also made the arrangements to bring the bishops to Zagreb. At the same time, the Ustashas were encouraging others, such as Zagreb University and other religious communities, to issue similar declarations, the purpose of all of them being to appeal to the western Allies, to demonstrate that most Croats did not wish to return to a Yugoslav state. An Ustasha functionary, Vladimir Židovec, described how the statements were translated into several languages for distribution around the world, and how Radoslav Glavaš, who was responsible for religious affairs in the NDH administration, told him that Stepinac's secretary, Stjepan Lacković, was especially anxious for confirmation that the bishops' letter had been sent abroad.[47]

It seems that Stepinac's involvement went beyond declarations and propaganda, although it should be stressed that his efforts on behalf of the NDH did not imply support for the Ustashas. Certainly he favoured an independent Croatian state, and the looming Communist takeover ended any ambiguity regarding his commitment to the maintenance of that state. A Communist takeover represented a threat to the Church, and therefore Stepinac's strictures against interference by the Church and clergy in politics no longer applied. It was only the imminence of the Communist takeover which finally brought him

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[45]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", pp. 266-267.

[46]Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, pp. 1038-1041.

[47]Krizman, *Ustaše i treći reich*, p. 311; Živojinović, pp. 84-85.

out clearly against them. The German Plenipotentiary General in Croatia, Glaise von Horstenau, noted in 1943 that Stepinac refused to instruct his clergy to speak against the Communists in their sermons, observing also that at heart Stepinac was on the side of the Allies.[48]

Jakov Blažević shrewdly recognized that the distance which Stepinac placed between himself and the Ustashas for most of the war was in part due to his continued recognition of Maček as the legitimate leader of the Croatian people, and appreciation of Maček's policy of waiting, remaining untainted by collaboration with the Germans or the Ustashas until the expected victory of the Allies would enable him to re-emerge. Thus, Blažević suggested, the disagreements between Stepinac and Pavelić were in part due to divergent interests, with Pavelić dependant on the Axis, while Stepinac was looking to a future after the defeat of the Axis. But as the end of the war approached, the conflict became irrelevant, as the Ustashas too realized that the only hope for the preservation of an independent Croatia was to turn to Maček, as a leader who might curry some favour in the West. This was a policy in which Stepinac could participate.[49]

Stepinac seems to have taken a keen interest in the idea of re-orientating the NDH towards the West, which was first seriously discussed in 1943. In the summer and autumn of that year, leading Ustasha representatives opened contacts with HSS representatives to discuss the possibility of broadening the government to include HSS members. The main figure in these talks on the Ustasha side was NDH minister Mladen Lorković, while their collocutors on the HSS side were Avgust Košutić and Josip Torbar. The talks foundered, as the HSS was unwilling to risk compromising itself by entering into a formal coalition with the Ustashas, arguing for a non-party government of technocrats, which was unacceptable to the Ustashas.[50]

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[48]Vasa Kazimirović, *NDH u svetlu nemačkih dokumenata i dnevnika Gleza Fon Horstenau, 1941-1944* (Belgrade, 1987), p. 280.

[49]Jakov Blažević, *Mač, a ne mir*, pp. 36-41.

[50]Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, pp. 278-281.

The contacts were reopened the following year. A key element in both the earlier and the later talks was the part to be assigned to the NDH army, the Croatian Domobranstvo, which the HSS hoped would play a key role in the final stages of the war. This was especially important to the HSS leaders in the context of the contacts which they were simultaneously maintaining with the Croatian Partisans, and in which Košutić was once again the key figure. In order to have any kind of bargaining position in those talks, the HSS needed to have a military force at its disposal. The talks with the Ustashas in Zagreb were thus vital in the wider context of the talks with the Partisans.[51]

Pavelić himself authorised the renewed talks in 1944, in which Lorković again took the lead on the Ustasha side, together with the NDH defence minister, Ante Vokić. On the HSS side, the leading figure was Ivan Farolfi, while Košutić was kept informed. The talks envisaged an abrupt shift away from the Axis camp, in which a change in government in Zagreb, supported by the Croatian Domobranstvo, would be accompanied by approaches to the Allies. Following Romania's switch to the Allied side in August 1944, Lorković and Vokić stepped up their plans. However, the plan was foiled when Pavelić, who had been kept informed about the progress of the talks, but who was unwilling to acquiesce in a plan which pre-supposed his ouster, moved to stop it. In consultation with the German minister in Zagreb, Siegfried Kasche, he had Lorković and Vokić arrested, purged the Ustasha ranks and rounded up numerous HSS figures.[52]

The extent of Stepinac's interest in these events is uncertain. There were reports from both German and Partisan intelligence sources that he was pushing the idea of a Danubian union of Catholic states during 1943. Certainly it seems that Stepinac was kept informed about the various political machinations in 1944, and that his counsel was sought. Torbar apparently kept him informed about events, and he was in indirect contact with Košutić. On 28 August, just before Pavelić moved against Lorković and

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[51]Jozo Ivičević, "Politički program ratnoga HSS-a i 'puč Vokić-Lorković'" (in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 3, 1995, Zagreb) (hereafter Ivičević), pp. 494-495.

[52]Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, pp. 289-293; Ivičević, pp. 494-495.

Vokić, he held a long discussion with Vokić.[53] The Partisans had been aware that something was afoot in Zagreb, and near the end of August, Hebrang informed the central leadership that a coup was being prepared, adding that "Stepinac has gone to Rome via Switzerland. He is carrying a proposal from the Mačekists, a section of the Ustashas and allegedly even Pavelić himself." In an article in September, he wrote concerning the attempted coup that it involved sections of the Ustashas, Mačekists, Domobran officers and clergy.[54] Rumours that Stepinac had carried a proposal to the Vatican had been circulating in Zagreb for some months,[55] and were brought up again at his trial after the war, when an alleged report of very doubtful authenticity was produced.[56] However, although there is doubt as to the extent of Stepinac's active involvement, it is clear that he took a lively interest in the political manoeuvres to forestall a Communist takeover.

It seems that Stepinac's involvement was stepped up at the very end of the war. Just before the arrival of the Partisans, he visited Maček in the company of Moškov. There are various reports as to what they discussed. Maček recalled only that Moškov pleaded with him to flee, and at Stepinac's trial his defence lawyer claimed that they discussed how to avoid bloodshed when the Partisans arrived in Zagreb.[57] These accounts only give a very incomplete picture. The Ustasha government had concluded that they would have to try to include Maček and the HSS if they were to persuade the British and Americans to look differently upon the NDH. The Ustasha minister Alajbegović reported during his interrogation that they informed Pavelić of their opinions, and that he asked them to send Stepinac to talk to Maček, and thus it came to their

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[53]Krišto, "Katolička Crkva u II Svjetskom Ratu" (in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 3, 1995, Zagreb), pp. 470-471.

[54]Nada Kisić-Kolanović, *Hebrang: Iluzije i otrežnjeja, 1899-1949* (Zagreb, 1996), p. 104.

[55]Krišto, "Katolička Crkva u II Svjetskom Ratu" (in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 3, 1995, Zagreb), p. 470.

[56]Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, pp. 162 and 170.

[57]Maček, *In the Struggle for Freedom* pp. 258-259; Pattee, Doc. B, p. 218.

meeting. Stepinac came away saying that Maček desired to talk to his people from the HSS, and he took trouble to make sure that this should be enabled.[58]

Stepinac's critics regarded this visit as a last desperate effort at mediation between the Ustashas and Maček to try to persuade the latter to take over the reigns of the NDH.[59] Indeed, the idea that at such a critical moment Stepinac would have confined his discussion with Maček to the Partisan arrival is not credible. Maček had been in isolation for most of the war, and his first desires were for information as to the state of affairs and for contact with his old political associates. It seems that Stepinac was, as usual, not prepared to engage directly in the various political manoeuvrings. In that he was always consistent. But seeing Maček as the legitimate political leader of the Croats and the man best placed to hold back the Communists, it was only natural that he should have been willing to help him to accomplish that task.

At about the time of his visit to Maček, Stepinac was, at Pavelić's initiative, offered the leadership of a regency government. According to Židovec, Stepinac found such political involvement difficult to contemplate. Nevertheless, Židovec believed that the reservations of Stepinac and Maček were not the most important reason for the failure of plans to form a new government. The key problem was that they did not see any guarantee of intervention or support by the British and American forces.[60] In any case, Stepinac's refusal of the regency did not diminish the belief among Communist leaders that he had been intimately involved in efforts to save the NDH. The concealment in the Archbishop's palace of NDH documents and the personal belongings of some high Ustasha officials suggested to them that he was taking care of them until an expected Ustasha return, even though Stepinac actually informed Bakarić about the matter at their first meeting, and Šalić confirmed it in writing to the Religious Commission.[61]

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[58]Krizman, *Ustaše i treći reich*, pp. 314-316.

[59]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", p. 271.

[60]Krizman, *Ustaše i treći reich*, pp. 312-313.

[61]Memorandum by Šalić of 6 June, 1945. HDA, Politeo, doc. 157.

Marcone's secretary, Giuseppi Masucci, was much more directly involved in attempts to save the NDH. On 2 May, he discussed the situation with Stepinac until late. The following evening he discussed with Pavelić how to reach an agreement with the British, so that they would occupy Zagreb and prevent a Communist takeover. On 5 May, he had been ready to go by aeroplane to the Allies, to invite them to come to Zagreb and to assure them that they would meet no resistance, but Marcone forbade him to go.[62]

As the war came to a close, desperate efforts were also made by the Communists' foes in Slovenia to avoid their takeover. As we have seen, these included attempts to forge an all-Yugoslav anti-Communist front. Since the Germans had replaced the Italians in the Ljubljana Province and the Littoral in late 1943, a collaborationist administration had operated under the leadership of Rupnik, whose main goal was to avoid a Communist takeover. Rožman and much of the clergy were also accused of close involvement in this later collaborationist activity. In particular, Rožman was attacked for his participation at ceremonies to swear in recruits for the Slovene Domobranstvo in April 1944 and January 1945, in the presence of senior members of the German military.[63] Indeed, the German commander in Ljubljana, General Ervin Rösener, confirmed that Rožman had supported German policies.[64] In June 1944, presumably with Rožman's approval, a priests' conference was held in Ljubljana, which issued a statement denouncing Communism, and asserting that they would help those whose duty it was to maintain security, order and peace in the country, and to fight against Communism.[65]

In the last days of the war, there was an attempt to effect a transfer of power from the Germans to a National Council, made up of representatives of various Slovene parties. Rožman acknowledged that he hosted a meeting of the National Council on 28

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[62]Giuseppe Masucci, *Misija u Hrvatskoj* (Madrid, 1967) (hereafter Masucci), pp. 195-196.

[63]MNZ, Rožman, file 1, p. 86; Boris Mlakar, "Domobranska prisega", in *27. zborovanje slovenskih zgodovinarjev: zbornik* (Ljubljana, 1994), pp. 114-116.

[64]Minutes of the interrogation of Rösener. MNZ, Rožman, file 1, pp. 3130-3131.

[65]Foreign Office Research Department report of 28 June, 1945. PRO, FO371/48911, R11125.

April 1945, at which Rupnik was also present.[66] The hope was that with the Domobranstvo and help from the western Allies, they could resist the approaching Partisans. But it was to no avail, and Rožman fled rather than face the Partisans.

As these various machinations to prevent a Communist takeover were going on, the Croatian Communist leadership, now under Bakarić, rose to the challenge, caution gone, openly recognizing the Catholic Church, at least substantial elements in it, as a competitor and an enemy. Bakarić had spent a good deal of the war with the central Party leadership, his views were close to Tito's, and he could be relied upon to adhere closely to Tito's line. In a special session of the ZAVNOH Presidency in Split on 14 April 1945, which formally constituted the first post-war Croatian government, he spoke at length about the treachery and crimes of the clergy, attacking the bishops for allowing the Church to be used by the Ustashas in their preparations to continue the struggle. He nevertheless insisted that there would be no attack upon the Church, and that no innocent priest would be harmed.[67]

To emphasize that attempts to reach an accord with the Church had not yet been abandoned, Bishops Pušić of Hvar and Mileta of Šibenik were present at the meeting, together with a representative of Bishop Bonefačić of Split.[68] The Yugoslav news agency, Tanjug, reported that Mileta made a short speech of welcome to the new Croatian government, wishing it success in the name of the Dalmatian bishops.[69]

This chapter has shown how, with a Communist takeover imminent, the inherent rivalry between the Communist Party and the Catholic Church came into sharper focus. As the Partisans approached Zagreb, a brutal settling of accounts with large numbers of the clergy was already under way. However, the Communists had not yet abandoned their efforts to reach an accommodation with Church leaders. The commitment of both

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[66]*Škofa Rožmana odgovor*, pp. 13-14.

[67]*ZAVNOH, Zbornik dokumenata, 1944, IV*, pp. 625-626.

[68]Alexander, *Church and State*, p. 51.

[69]HIP, ZAVNOH Predsjedništvo, kut. 41, NV-41/4550.

sides to reaching that accommodation was about to be put to the real test. With Rožman gone, the focus of attempts to arrive at an understanding between the Church and the new regime moved decisively to Zagreb and the President of the Conference of Bishops of Yugoslavia, Stepinac.

Chapter Five

Confrontation between Church and State in Croatia, 1945-1946

Despite the sharpening of relations between the Communists and the Catholic Church in the last phase of the war, after the Communist takeover a period of settling in ensued. The heightened antagonism of the Communist leadership towards the Church was tempered by a continued awareness of the potential gains to be had from a conciliatory approach. The Church was to be given a second chance. The outcome would depend on the response of Church leaders. They could quietly accept a limited existence within the new Communist order or, if they chose defiance, a confrontation could be expected.

This chapter describes the early attempts at conciliation in Croatia after the war and the deterioration in relations as it became apparent that the terms on which the new regime was prepared to reach an accord amounted to an attack on the very bases of the Church's accustomed role in Croatian society. It discusses the reasons for the mounting antagonism of the regime towards Stepinac during 1945 and 1946, which finally led to his trial and imprisonment.

Early Attempts at Conciliation

On 8 May 1945, the Partisans entered Zagreb. In the town there was much uncertainty and foreboding, but Gaillard, who was regarded by other foreigners as the best-informed person in Zagreb,[1] noted that the fear was mixed with a certain hope; "the ice was broken." He reported that the uncertainty lasted for two weeks, as life was "suspended" in the town, all commerce halted. Only OZNA was active, confirming fears that the new regime would indeed be one of terror.[2]

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[1]Clissold, *Croatian Memoirs*, p. 166.

[2]Reports by Gaillard of 20 May and 18 August, 1945. FM, Paris, vol. 30, docs. 11-27 and 34-48.

Emilio Pallua noted that they sought out any who had served in the Domobranstvo, and that those they caught were mostly killed, arbitrarily, and without any written record. A little later the Government arrived from Split, and some of the forms of legality were established. At least people were no longer seized and killed without any formalities, although that too continued in some what Pallua calls "insurrectionary areas", where priests continued to disappear. He believed that the Minister of the Interior in Zagreb was not responsible for that, but rather over-zealous elements on the ground.[3]

The Communist leaders now had various priorities. Firstly they had to consolidate their control of the country. The conviction existed among the various anti-Partisan groups that the struggle would not end with the war itself. All were determined to continue the fight. The remnants of the Ustashas, trying to escape to Austria, had it in mind to replace German assistance with that of the western Allies. Such a strategy depended on a break between the western Allies and the Soviet Union, and an outbreak of armed conflict between them.[4] At the time this seemed to many to be a very real possibility, particularly in Yugoslavia, given the great tension between British and Yugoslav forces in Trieste, which lasted until the latter withdrew on 12 June.[5] This issue, and the prevention of any attempt by their Yugoslav opponents to take advantage of the situation, was the top priority for several weeks after the end of the war. Thus it was that the liquidation of their domestic foes was carried out so ruthlessly in this period.

The Communists also sought to establish a certain normality, to restore order and to begin to govern. Up until the autumn of 1945 the Yugoslav Government included members of the pre-war parties, according to Tito's agreement with Šubašić. According to this, a provisional government was to operate until the holding of free elections to a Constituent Assembly. This exercise in power sharing was not to Tito's liking, and was in

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[3]Pallua, tape 2, pp. 34-36.

[4]Jozo Tomasevich, "Yugoslavia during the Second World War", in Wayne S. Vucinich (ed.), *Contemporary Yugoslavia: Twenty Years of Socialist Experiment* (Berkeley, 1969), pp. 111-112. (hereafter Vucinich).

[5]Bogdan C. Novak, *Trieste, 1941-1954*, pp. 161-200.

any case only cosmetic. In order to ensure absolute Communist control Tito sought to marginalize this "legal" opposition, effectively restricting all political activity outside the Popular Front organization, which was Communist dominated.[6]

In spite of assurances during the war that the Partisan movement was about national liberation, and not about Socialist revolution, it was quite clear that the Communists were intent on taking power and implementing their programme in their own way. Whatever the promises made at the time of the agreement with Šubašić, that was merely for external consumption. The Communists did not intend to give any other political forces any quarter in matters of substance. There would be no liberalization that might allow the pre-war parties to thwart the revolutionary aims of the Communists.[7] They sought to undermine opponents, portraying them as wartime collaborators, and used the armed forces, police and judiciary as instruments with which to achieve their political monopoly.[8] In Croatia, they were helped in their aims by the fact that Maček had fled. With him gone, the remnants of the HSS disintegrated rapidly. With other HSS leaders and supporters arrested or killed, the erosion of the party, which had gone on throughout the war, was completed. And with the Domobranstvo destroyed in the spring of 1945, there was, in the absence of outside intervention, no force left to offer real resistance to the Communist aims.[9]

Having consolidated their grip upon the country, the Communist leaders could start to implement their revolutionary programme. There was no doubt of their intent. For example, Kardelj made it clear early on that there could be no compromise as regards nationalization.[10] Of particular significance to the Church was to be the application of land reform. This was justified on social grounds, to give land to those who tilled it, while

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[6]Woodford D. McClellan, "post-war Political Evolution", in Vucinich, pp.121-124.

[7]Branko Petranović, *Političke i pravne prilike za vreme privremene vlade DFJ* (Belgrade, 1964), p. 136.

[8]Aleksa Djilas, *The Contested Country*, pp. 152-153.

[9]Irvine, pp. 235-236.

[10]Banac, pp. 21-23.

doing away with the last vestiges of feudalism through the expropriation of large estates. It was, however, clear that there was a considerable political content. During the discussions of the reform in the provisional assembly, much of the debate was devoted to the need to connect the peasantry with the proletarian revolution, and to give them a stake in it. It was thus a part of the new regime's consolidation of its power and of the revolution it was implementing.[11] Of great importance to the long-term consolidation of the new order was the reform of education and control over the sphere of cultural activities, through which the Communists intended to break the vestiges of the old order and perpetuate the revolution.[12]

The Communist rulers aimed to impose their control over all aspects of public life, and to suppress all autonomous institutions in society.[13] Thus several aspects of their programme inevitably impinged upon the realm of the Catholic Church, which was accustomed to a central role in the life of the country. As noted earlier, Fitzroy Maclean had reported in December 1944 that he did not expect the Communists' conciliatory attitude towards the churches long to survive the end of the war. He observed that while Tito was keen to establish an understanding with the Catholic Church, he insisted that war criminals and collaborators must be punished and that the churches would not be permitted any political influence. Maclean concluded that "it is safe to assume that any deviation from this on the part of either individuals or religious communities will eventually lead to a curtailment of their activities, especially once the movement is firmly established in power and need have less regard for public opinion."[14]

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[11]Zdenko Čepic, "Agrarna reforma po drugi svetovni vojni - značaj, učinki, posledice" (in *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, nos. 1-2, 1992), pp. 173-176; Zdenko Čepič, "Agrarna reforma in politika" (in *27. zborovanje slovenskih zgodovinarjev: zbornik*, Novo Mesto, 1994), p. 125.

[12]Katarina Spehnjak, "Prosvjetno-kulturna politika u Hrvatskoj, 1945-1948" (in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 1, 1993, Zagreb) (hereafter Spehnjak), p. 74.

[13]Nada Kisić-Kolanović, "Problem legitimeta političkog sustava u Hrvatskoj nakon 1945". (in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 3, 1992, Zagreb), pp. 177-178.

[14]Report of 25 December, 1944. PRO, FO371/48910, R1262.

In their early contacts, both the Catholic Church leaders and the new authorities in Croatia were feeling their way, neither side sure of its strength. Just before the arrival of the Partisans in Zagreb, Tito had ordered the chief of the Army's counter-intelligence service to arrest Stepinac (some officials have stated that the possibility of liquidating him was discussed). Bakarić, however, was reportedly against the move, fearing the effect it would have on the public mood in Croatia. However, on 15 May the order for Stepinac's arrest reportedly came from Belgrade, and Aleksandar Ranković (a Serbian communist, who, with Djilas and Kardelj, made up the inner circle of power around Tito) ordered the collection of material about his hostile activities.[15] Stepinac was arrested on 17 May.

The new regime rapidly moved to eradicate the social influence of the Church, local authorities taking over buildings and seminaries, while in some areas local Party functionaries encouraged peasants to take over Church lands without waiting for any legal sanction.[16] The Archbishop's palace experienced repressive measures for several days, with cars requisitioned, telephone lines cut and the arrest of Stepinac. Such menacing steps were matched by efforts at conciliation, which revealed the hesitancy of the authorities. Bakarić was personally hostile to Stepinac, regarding him as pro-Ustasha, and believing that there was little likelihood of cooperation with him, but only conflict.[17] Nevertheless, unsure of the Party's grip on power, he recognized the damage that too harsh a policy towards Stepinac could cause. The authorities thus drew back from the repressive measures and reaffirmed their commitment to religious freedom.

On 2 June 1945, a delegation of senior Croatian clergy, led by the Vicar-General, Bishop Salis-Seewis, met Tito and Bakarić. Both sides were conciliatory, while clearly

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[15]Ivan Mužić, *Pavelić i Stepinac* (Split, 1991), pp. 83-84. (hereafter Mužić); Jure Krišto cites an article by Ljubo Boban in *Danas* (Zagreb, February 1992) concerning the orders to arrest and collect material against Stepinac. *Katolička Crkva I Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, 1941. - 1945. (Zagreb, 1998), pp. 18-19.

[16]Kisić-Kolanović, "Problem legitimeta...", p. 181.

[17]Per letter from Bakarić to Dedijer, cited in Dedijer, *Novi Prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, Vol. 2, p. 563.

stating their positions. Salis hoped that the Government would put into practice its expressed principles of freedom of religion, and would allow the Church to carry out its mission. Tito was critical of the attitude of the clergy during the war, but expressed the view that matters concerning religion should be settled through discussion rather than by decree, and asked that the clergy should prepare a detailed report on their view of how relations between Church and State should be settled. He added that, however much they might disagree with him, they must not interfere in the consolidation of the state. Tito also expressed the view that the Catholic Church should be more national and more independent of Rome (about which more will be said below).[18]

Following this meeting, Stepinac was released, and on 4 June he met Tito himself. Stepinac emphasized that only the Holy See could make decisions regarding relations between church and state, and recommended a concordat, or at least a "modus vivendi" on the pre-war Czechoslovakian model. Tito again alluded to his desire that the Church should follow a more independent, "national" course, expressing his fear that the Holy See was not well inclined towards Yugoslavia, and his wish that the Church should support the efforts of the State regarding the question of Trieste.[19]

Although these first contacts were cordial, there were already signs that positions were being staked out, and the contours of future disagreements were taking shape. Tito saw Stepinac as a strong opponent and, preoccupied as he was with the confrontation in Trieste at that time, feared that he might take advantage of the difficulties of the new regime and the possibility of intervention by the western Allies to confront it on the domestic front as well. This was indicated by his response when one of Salis's delegation, Mgr. Živković, told him that Stepinac lacked a political nose, which explained the anti-Partisan letter of 25 March. Tito replied that, on the contrary, he had a very good

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[18]Aleksa Benigar, *Alojzije Stepinac, hrvatski kardinal* (2nd, improved and enlarged edition, Zagreb, 1993) (hereafter Benigar), pp. 461-466. Bakarić later confirmed that Benigar's account of the meeting is correct, Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, Vol. 2, p. 563.

[19]Benigar, pp. 467-469.

one.[20] Tito saw the threat as very real, and evidently feared that Stepinac could exploit it, and would be prepared to do so.

As to Stepinac's meeting with Tito, it seems that it was tense. Afterwards, Stepinac told Pallua that he had found Tito very charming,[21] but neither he nor Tito was content with its course or its outcome. The Chief Federal Public Prosecutor, Josip Hrnčević, was waiting to see Tito when Stepinac emerged from the meeting, and reported that he was visibly excited, while Tito was clearly dissatisfied.[22] Stepinac later declared that they had spoken "man to Man".[23] The senior Communist Vladimir Velebit, who enjoyed close relations with western diplomats in Belgrade, confirmed that there was a sharp confrontation between Tito and Stepinac.[24]

For a time the show of cordial relations continued, and the developing confrontation was hidden from view. Stepinac attended the celebration of the "day of the uprising", a major date in the Communist calendar, appearing alongside Bakarić and other Croatian leaders.[25] For their part, the Croatian authorities were keen to avoid harming relations with the Church unnecessarily. In August 1945, the Regional Committee of the KPH for Dalmatia informed the KPH Central Committee that they did not intend to accept an invitation to send an official representative to the procession in Split to mark the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, but that they would send someone to the celebration in Sinj, as the Lady of the Assumption was the patron of the Sinj region. The Central Committee responded that they should send representatives to both Split and Sinj, so as not to exacerbate tensions with the clergy.[26] But with large numbers of priests being

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[20]Pallua, tape 2, pp. 29 & 36.

[21]Pallua, tape 2, p. 38. Numerous world leaders and celebrities attested to Tito's charm.

[22]Hrnčević, p. 193.

[23]"muški smo razgovarali". Mužić, pp. 84-85.

[24]Remarks by Velebit at a dinner at the American embassy in Belgrade, reported by the French ambassador, Jean Payart in a telegramme of 9 February, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, doc. 152.

[25]Pallua, tape 3, p. 1.

[26]HIP, Organizaciono-instruktursko odjeljenje CK SKH, telegramme despatches (hereafter telegrammes),

arrested and tried or summarily executed, and with the new regime beginning to implement its programme, a conflict could not be avoided. In the face of an attack upon the Church, Stepinac was not timid or cautious. He would face down the enemies of the faith or suffer a martyr's fate.

Relations Deteriorate

In their letter of 24 March 1945, the five Croatian bishops had clearly recorded their hostility to "materialistic Communism".[27] Stepinac did not believe that there was any real possibility of an accommodation between the Church and a Communist State, but, on the basis of the wartime promises of the National Liberation Movement regarding the freedom of religion, there appeared to be some grounds for hope that relations could be set on a good footing. The bishops were prepared to give the new regime a chance, to see if a satisfactory accommodation could be reached. Thus they stressed the promises of the Partisans in their early meetings with the authorities, which had begun with the contacts made by the Dalmatian bishops shortly before the end of the war.

In spite of his grave doubts, Stepinac too was ready to acknowledge the new authorities, to deal with them and to try to reach agreement with them. But he had little hope of accomplishing anything. In an interview in 1953, he said that "The Catholic Church in our country still remains firm. An agreement which would have any lasting meaning is impossible without the Holy See. She is always ready for agreement with all people of goodwill, but never by fiat. That is a term unknown in the dictionary of the Catholic Church." When pressed as to whether the Church could reach an agreement with the State, Stepinac replied: "This is not to be printed ... It is just between you and me. It will not! That is to say, Communism, in order to reach an agreement, would have to renounce its main principles. It will not do that. Therefore there will not be an

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inv. br. 2214, knj. 1. Despatch no. 967, from Regional Committee of KPH for Dalmatia to CK KPH, received 11 August, 1945, and reply of 12 August, 1945, despatch no. 969.

[27]Victor Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, pp. 1038-1041.

agreement."[28] Stepinac expressed similar views shortly after the Communist takeover. On 6 June, two days after his meeting with Tito, he told Masucci of his grave concern at the anti-religious measures of the Communists, and his lack of confidence in their promises.[29]

As relations between the Church leaders and the Communist authorities sharpened during the summer months of 1945 there were certain key issues for the Catholic Church. Most important were the treatment of the clergy by the authorities; the upbringing and religious education of the young; and the application of land reform to Church property. Among other issues were the questions of civil marriage and divorce; Catholic publications; the takeover by the authorities of religious buildings and the hindrance and harassment of religious orders; and the question of priests' pensions.

In their letter of March 1945, the bishops protested "before God and mankind against the systematic murder and persecution of innocent Catholic priests and faithful, most of whom lived truly saintly lives, which the haters of the Church have ended by illegal sentences, based upon fictitious crimes."[30] Indeed, arrests of members of the clergy were widespread, on a wide variety of pretexts, such as having cooperated with an Ustasha official, or for helping someone to flee the country.[31] In a letter to Bakarić on 21 July 1945, Stepinac objected to the large number of priests being held in prison, to the conditions in which they were held, and to the procedures of the military courts before which they appeared. They were not allowed to call defence witnesses or to cross-examine prosecution witnesses, sometimes not knowing the nature of the accusation until they actually appeared in court. He cited the cases of several who he

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[28]Interview with a journalist of the Associated Press news agency, quoted in Benigar, pp. 672-673.

[29]Masucci, p. 205.

[30]Victor Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, pp. 1039-1040.

[31]Pallua, tape 2, p. 39.

considered had suffered injustice. He concluded that these courts had lost all credibility and become "organs of mass terror."[32]

The proceedings at these trials, and the executions which often followed them, were frequently very rapid. Where possible, attempts were made to mount some kind of a defence, and to appeal against the sentence. The desperation of the situation is revealed by a letter from Stepinac to the Presidency of the Croatian Government on 3 August 1945, in which he appealed for mercy to be shown to two priests who had been sentenced to death, whose alleged crime was not even known to him. In the same letter he appealed on behalf of Fr. Petar Kovačić from Zagreb, who had in fact already been killed on 6 July. He was sentenced to death for having received a decoration from Pavelić, for having carried out the conversion of an Orthodox to Catholicism, for allegedly speaking out against Communism, and for having warned parents not to allow their children to go to unsupervised all-night entertainments. How could a sentence of death for such alleged crimes accord with Tito's assurance that nothing would happen to people who had not "bloodied their hands", asked Stepinac? The arbitrariness of the "justice" being meted out at the time is indicated by the fact that Kovačić was initially sentenced to six years imprisonment, appealed against the sentence, and then saw it increased to death.[33]

These trials were different in character from the later show trials. Rather than political lessons, these were swift and ruthless retribution against those who had collaborated with the enemy during the war, and been responsible for their crimes.[34] Under this pretext, thousands of people were killed simply because the new regime saw in them potential opponents. In terms of scale the violence fell especially heavily on the

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[32]Nada Kisić-Kolanović, "Pisma zagrebačkoga nadbiskupa Alojzija Stepinca Predsjedniku Narodne Vlade Hrvatske Vladimiru Bakariću godine 1945", (in *Croatica Christiana*, no. 29, year XVI, Zagreb, 1992), pp. 143-155.

[33]HDA, VK, kut. 3, doc. 404; Stjepan Kožul, *Spomenica žrtvama ljubavi zagrebačke nadbiskupije* (Zagreb, 1992), p. 70.

[34]Stella Alexander, *Church and State*, p. 62, and *The Triple Myth*, p. 122.

Croatian Domobrani, upon whom a real slaughter was visited immediately following the end of the war.[35] Numerous priests were caught up in the violence, often summarily executed, in secret by OZNA, without even the form of a trial. One Fr. Pašiček from Vrapče wrote how, having been arrested, he was nearly lynched. A "People's Mass Meeting" had been planned, with the intention of judging him and hanging him on the spot. It had, however, been decided to hand him over to a "higher authority" after all.[36]

Djilas has described the atmosphere of revenge mixed with revolutionary ardour which prevailed at the end of the war in seeking to explain this mass extermination. OZNA continued with the killings "according to its own often local and inconsistent criteria" until late in 1945, when Tito finally cried "enough" (Djilas did not believe, however, that such mass collective retribution could have been undertaken without approval from the top).[37] For many Partisans, it was a matter of just revenge for the persecution of the Serbs in the NDH, for which the clergy were widely believed to hold a major share of the responsibility. The repression of the Catholic Church was thus particularly ruthless in Yugoslavia.

In August 1945, Stepinac addressed a letter to Bakarić on the subject of religious education. He objected to the fact that religious instruction had been abolished in the higher classes of the secondary schools and reduced to an optional one hour per week in the lower classes and in the elementary schools, and to the proposed abolition of private schools. Thus, he protested, "the Catholic Church has been deprived of nearly every possibility of educating its faithful, children and young people."[38]

The question of religious education was of vital interest to both sides, lying as it did at the heart of the battle for the allegiance of the Croatian people. The Communists saw the education system as one of the most important elements in their transformation of

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[35]Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem oblasti*, pp. 229-246.

[36]Undated letter regarding Pašiček. HDA, Rittig, kut. 4, 2/3, file I.

[37]Milovan Djilas, *Wartime*, pp. 448-449.

[38]Kisić-Kolanović, "Pisma zagrebačkoga nadbiskupa", pp. 158-165.

society, and the Ministry of Education kept a very tight control on the appointment of teachers, especially in the first year following the end of he war. It was to be an education infused with ideology. A crucial aspect of this was the "struggle against mysticism", which meant an anti-religious campaign.[39]

This question was a constant preoccupation of the bishops, who complained bitterly to the authorities, as in Stepinac's letter cited above, and acted to counter the measures taken by them. Thus Stepinac issued a pastoral letter on 14 June 1945 concerning religious education and the Christian upbringing of the young. He forcefully reminded parents, including citations from Canon Law and an encyclical of Pope Pius VI (1775-99), of their duty to ensure that their children receive a Christian upbringing. This was an inalienable right, "which takes priority over every right of the national or state community". He continued that:-

> In our homeland, in opposition to divine and natural law and against the explicit decrees of the Holy Church and all the Christian traditions of the Croatian people, religious instruction has been completely abolished in the higher classes of the secondary schools, while it is voluntary in the lower ones and in the primary schools, upon which the parents of the children have to decide.

He warned parents that they were obliged to seek religious instruction for their children, as was their right and duty.[40] In its tone and content, and in the fact that it was a pastoral letter, aimed at all of the faithful of the diocese, the letter represented an open challenge to the education policy of the authorities, and it clearly revealed the very great importance which Stepinac attached to this question. He returned to it repeatedly, emphasizing again in a circular to the clergy of 6 July 1945 that parents must be sure to opt for religious instruction in the schools, as the authorities allowed them to do, and that no self-appointed individuals should be enabled to decide otherwise.[41]

A major concern of the Church was that the existing regulations allowing religious education were not always implemented as intended at the local level, and a variety of

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[39]Spehnjak, pp. 74-77.

[40]Copy of letter at Arhiv Josipa Broza Tita, Fond kancelarija Maršala Jugoslavije (hereafter JBT), II - 10/6.

[41]HDA, Politeo, docs. 70-71.

means were used to hinder the work of the catechists in practice. In principle, catechists were to be state employees, appointed with the approval of the local authority for primary schools and of the Ministry of education for secondary schools.[42] The reality was frequently different, although there were considerable regional variations. In Zagreb, catechists complained that they were not paid, and that by being voluntary and usually in the last hour of the school day religious education had been debased.[43] Further, teachers in some schools sent pupils home immediately before the religious education class, and told them that it was best not to attend.[44] Another means of obstruction was to object to some priests being catechists on account of their alleged political activities, as was the case with Fr. Ivan Trstenjak, a parish priest near Daruvar, who was accused of agitating against the People's Front and of having links with armed opponents of the regime.[45]

Obstruction of religious education appears to have been a particular problem in Dalmatia. Andjelko Buratović of the Religious Affairs Commission reported in August 1945 that in Šibenik it was obstructed by a variety of means. One headmaster would not allow teachers to register whether parents desired children to receive religious education or not, insisting that parents should come individually to him. There were cases when parents who did so were roundly rebuked by him. In cases when parents had opted for their children to receive religious education, teachers sometimes came into the class and invited the children to leave, telling them they were not obliged to attend.[46]

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[42]Spehnjak, pp. 95-96.

[43]Letter of 20 October, 1945 from catechists in Zagreb to the Religious Commission. HDA, VK, kut. 4, doc. 846.

[44]For example, complaint of 20 September, 1946 from the Vicar-General of the Zagreb diocese. HDA VK, kut. 7, doc. 1576.

[45]Letter from the NO for Daruvar to the Religious Commission of 24 June, 1946, following complaint from Lach of 20 May, 1946. HDA, VK, kut. 7, doc. 1072.

[46]Report to the Religious Commission of 29 August, 1945. HDA VK, kut. 3, doc. 574.

Bishop Bonefačić of Split made frequent sharp complaints to the authorities regarding religious education. In a letter of 28 August 1945 to the Religious Commission, he complained that in the school year 1944-1945 no school in the town of Split had lessons in religious education, although almost all parents had opted for it and the bishop's Ordinaria had repeatedly raised the matter with the town authorities. Outside of Split, in the villages, the priests had been able to hold classes in religious education, but experienced a great deal of harassment. In some cases, teachers were required to remain in the class to supervise during religious education lessons, and some of them dismissed the pupils when the catechist arrived.[47]

Things did not improve in the following school year. On 14 May 1946, the Croatian Ministry of Education issued instructions regarding the appointment and conditions of employment of teachers of religious education.[48] On 30 May, Bonefačić wrote to the Religious Commission asserting that he did not expect this regulation to make any difference in practice, any more than earlier decisions of the Education Ministry. In the area around Sinj there had been no religious education since the autumn of 1944, as various artifices had been employed to avoid it. In the Trogir district it was taught in some places, until in May 1945 the local authority had issued an instruction to teachers not to allow religious education, as "it is not necessary today to hold lessons in religious education in the schools, nor prayers before or after the lessons." Since then it had not been taught. Bonefačić noted that it was especially the recently appointed teachers (i.e. appointed on ideological grounds) who hindered religious education, while some local officials intimidated priests to keep them from teaching. In Split itself there were catechists, but they worked unpaid, and most of the more experienced ones had not been accepted. In the secondary schools certain "progressive" pupils posted attacks on

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[47]HDA, VK, kut. 3, doc. 625.

[48]HDA, VK, kut. 7, doc. 861.

the catechists on the notice boards, which the school authorities allowed in the name of freedom.[49]

As will be described later, in the course of 1946 even the show of tolerance towards the Church was increasingly abandoned, and Bonefačić's contention that the fine promises made in Zagreb made little impact on the ground received further confirmation. One priest from his diocese complained that someone (the priest specified that the person was an Orthodox, i.e. a Serb, indicating the feeling of many Croats that persecution of the Church was linked to ethnic antagonism) had told him not to enter any school or to teach religious education any more, and claimed that it was the order of the People's Committee in Split. In fact there was no such ban directly from the authorities, but the priest concerned thought it dangerous to continue to teach.[50]

Not all areas experienced such obstruction. Buratović wrote in November 1945 that in the Krk diocese and in the Sušak deanery catechists were not hindered in any way.[51] It remained, however, a very sensitive matter. Both the Communists and the Church were thinking in terms of a long-term struggle for the realization of their vision of society, and the upbringing of the young was thus a key battle ground.

As relations between the two sides became more and more fraught in the course of 1945, this battle came out into the open. In a speech in Dubrovnik in July 1946, Tito, in a fierce attack on the clergy, explicitly stated the crucial place which the struggle for the youth had in the Communists' attempts to build their new society. He appealed to the Communist youth organization to uproot the influence of the clergy and of reaction, and not to allow them to engage the youth in the service of "this black force" which struggled against the regeneration and well-being of the new Yugoslavia: "We must save our

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[49]HDA, VK, kut. 7, doc. 992.

[50]Letter from the priest of 30 July, 1946, to Bonefačić. HDA, VK, kut. 7, doc. 1282.

[51]HDA, VK, kut. 4, doc. 943.

youth, as cunning and perfidious reaction, which receives its instructions from abroad, and which tries to halt the path of our History, wants to tear it from us."[52]

The bishops felt obliged to respond to this assault, and in a circular of 27 August 1946 asserted the right of the Church, in harmony with parents and schools, to bring up children in the Christian spirit. Thus one hour of religious education was insufficient, but rather the whole education must be infused with Christianity, so that the schools, family and Church together form a "sanctuary consecrated to a Christian upbringing."[53] The bishops concluded with an assurance that they did not seek conflict with the authorities, but, bearing in mind the purposes for which the Communists wanted to use education, it is clear that their positions were wholly unreconcilable.

Another important bone of contention concerned the application of agrarian reform to Church property. Stepinac petitioned the Presidency of AVNOJ on this issue on 10 July 1945, having read in the newspapers that a law on agrarian reform was being prepared. He asserted that the Church was not against land reform in principle, and the bishops' conference had in 1919 recognized the justice of the liquidation of large estates. But the lands which the Church possessed were the minimum that was required for the Church to be able to maintain itself. It served for the upkeep of seminarians, the central Church institutions, colleges etc. Agrarian reform, coupled with the separation of Church and State, would leave the Church without income, and would amount to persecution.[54]

The following month the law was passed, its contents fulfilling Stepinac's worst fears. Among a series of protest letters, on 17 August 1945 he wrote to Tito and Bakarić, complaining that his letter of 10 July had been ignored, and that he had found out about the law only from sketchy newspaper articles. He repeated his contention that by means of its properties the Church supported its clergy, offices and institutions. He was

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[52]Reported by Payart in a letter of 31 July, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 190-192.

[53]HDA, VK, kut. 1, doc. 216, pp. 3-9.

[54]Copy of the letter passed to Tito by Moša Pijade. JBT, II - 10/5.

particularly aggrieved by the fact that Tito's promises that matters touching upon the affairs of the Church would be settled by consultation had not been kept. The law on agrarian reform revealed, he complained, "that the Catholic Church in this state has become an entity without rights, exposed to the constant blows of a premeditated, systematic persecution, all under the guise of freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and respect for private property."[55]

He made similar complaints in letters to the President of the Provisional People's Assembly in Belgrade and to Tito on 20 August 1945. In the letter to Tito he drew particular attention to the lack of consultation of the Church on this matter and a whole series of other measures, asserting that he had tried to put the Church's view, but that this had not been given any consideration. He finished his protest at the law on agrarian reform with a warning that it could only harm relations between Church and State, for which the Church was in no way responsible. The urgency of the matter is indicated by the fact that four days later he sent another protest to the Presidency of the Provisional People's Assembly by telegramme.[56]

On 1 September 1945, Tito replied to Stepinac, explaining that both in the preparation of the law on agrarian reform and in the discussion of it in the Provisional Assembly there had always been complete agreement that church lands must be included. He added, in an ideological tone which appears surprisingly inappropriate in a letter to a man whom he must have known would be unconvinced, that this unanimous view was the "result of the mood of the broad peasant masses." He refuted Stepinac's assertion that he had broken his promise made to the senior representatives of the clergy in June, claiming disingenuously that he had been awaiting a report from the

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[55]JBT, II - 10/5 and Kisić-Kolanović, "Pisma zagrebačkoga nadbiskupa", pp. 165-169.

[56]Letter and telegramme to the Presidency of the Provisional People's Assembly at Arhiv Jugoslavije (hereafter AJ), Fond 15, Prezidijum narodne skupštine FNRJ, fasc. 20/348. Letter to Tito at JBT, II, 10-5.

bishops' conference, which had unfortunately not yet been held. He again expressed his hope that the Church and State could agree on questions relating to their relations.[57]

Stepinac's reply reminded Tito of the letters he had sent to the competent state authorities and to Tito himself, explaining the Church's objections to the law on agrarian reform. Thus the Church had made every effort to ensure that matters concerning the Church would be dealt with in consultation between Church and State. Stepinac particularly picked Tito up on his assertion that the law arose out of the mood of the "broad peasant masses". The "gentlemen" who had framed the law were not peasants, but senior Communist Party members. He revealed that he had taken trouble to know his enemy, citing Stalin's *The Foundations of Leninism*, with its espousal of the leading role of the Party and exclusion of any spontaneity on the part of the masses. Further, he informed Tito that in parishes around Zagreb where the authorities had not waited for the law to begin dividing the Church's lands, the peasants had resisted such measures. He finished with a warning that the Church would never be reconciled to this unjust law.[58]

Such complaints were rejected by the authorities. The interests of the Church had not been ignored, they asserted, as ten hectares had been left to each church, and thirty to those of special historical or cultural significance, in addition to thirty hectares of forest. That the needs of the Church had been considered, it was contended, was shown by the fact that the original limit of five hectares and twenty for historical institutions had been raised. The view was that the Church had not acquired its properties through its own work, and therefore the Community had the right to take them without compensation. The Church, it was contended, exaggerated the extent to which its material basis was damaged by the reform, and it would still be able to perform its spiritual function.[59]

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[57]JBT, II - 10/5.

[58]Undated copy of Stepinac's letter at AJ, fond 144, Savezna komisija za verska pitanja (hereafter SKVP), fasc. 1/4.

[59]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", pp. 286-289 and 290-291.

The bishops and religious institutions tried to avoid the reform. Having vigorously protested against the measure in principle, they proceeded to try to defend the interests of the Church as best they could within the confines of the law as it stood. Bishop Akšamović of Djakovo led the way, appealing against the application of agrarian reform to the property of his diocese in a letter to the Ministry of Agriculture of 11 September 1945. Akšamović was more flexible than most of the bishops in his dealings with the Communist authorities, hence his readiness to adapt to the new reality and to work within the limits and possibilities set by them. This flexibility was evident in his finishing the letter with the usual Partisan slogan (which appeared at the bottom of all their letters) "Death to Fascism - Freedom to the People". It would have been hard to imagine Stepinac employing such means to ingratiate himself with the authorities.

Akšamović appealed that the great historical significance of the Djakovo See (Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer had been one of his predecessors) for the Croatian people should be taken into account, and that it should be treated as a special case. Indeed, he claimed to have been told by the President of the Federal Assembly in Belgrade that special arrangements would be made for the cathedral in Djakovo. He pointed out that the law envisaged that the reform would be carried out in the federal units upon the basis of laws framed in those units, based on the federal law. As no such law had been passed in Croatia, he believed that the authorities there were acting prematurely and contrary to the intentions of the federal authorities in Belgrade. He concluded with a reference to all the institutions for which the diocese's property provided.[60]

Contained in Akšamović's appeal were elements which were common in many other appeals in late 1945 and early 1946. In March 1946, the Zagreb Archdiocese made a detailed appeal against the decision of the city Commission for Agrarian Reform of the previous month regarding its properties. It too emphasized the perceived injustice of not

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[60]HDA, VK, kut. 3, doc. 603.

treating the Archdiocese as an institution of special historical significance.[61] The seminary of the Zagreb Archdiocese also claimed to be an institution of special significance. It was supported in its claim by Rittig (at the request of Stepinac), who claimed in a letter of 10 February 1946 that it deserved such special treatment as the first high school in Croatia. The city Commission for Agrarian Reform chose to see this as meaning that it was an educational, and not a religious institution, and therefore not entitled to any special treatment. The seminary hastily sought to extract itself, insisting that it was a religious establishment, and should be allowed the maximum for a religious institution of special significance. It also claimed to be a social institution, providing for 120 - 160 seminarists, most of them from poor backgrounds.[62]

The Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Zagreb complained to Rittig on 10 November 1945 that peasants, urged on by the local authorities, had already started parcelling out land and livestock even before a decision on expropriation had been taken. Their Provincial had written to Bakarić, pointing out that their land was farmed entirely by the sisters (i.e. it was owned by those who tilled it) and fed 300 members of the order. She also pointed out the work that the order did in the fields of education and hospitals, and asked that the order be afforded special treatment.[63] Akšamović made a similar appeal on behalf of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Djakovo, who also worked their land themselves. The Provincial of the order complained bitterly that the order had already lost seven buildings, without compensation, and that while the Presidency of the Croatian Government had promised that the convent in Djakovo would not be taken

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[61]Decision of 26 February, 1946 and appeal of 13 March, 1946 at HDA, VK, kut. 6, doc. 731. Detailed documentation from February to August 1946 regarding the application of agrarian reform to the Archdiocese is at HDA, VK, kut. 7, doc. 1290.

[62]Appeals by the seminary of 15 February and 12 March, 1946, HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 301 and kut. 1, doc. 47. Letters of support from Rittig at HDA, VK, kut. 4, doc. 827 and kut. 5, doc. 423.

[63]Letter to Bakarić of 14 Sept, 1945, HDA, VK, kut. 3, doc. 688; letter to Rittig of 10 Nov, 1945, HDA, VK, kut. 4, doc. 944; letter to Ministry of Agriculture of 5 Feb, 1946, HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 191.

over, it had been announced that it would be turned into a children's home. The loss of its mother house, she concluded, would represent the persecution of the order.[64]

Stepinac also employed more guileful means of avoiding the reform. Taking advantage of the fact that each parish would be left a maximum of ten hectares, on 31 August 1945 he announced the creation of a new parish at Zaprešić, just outside Zagreb, dividing it off from the parish of Brdovac, and the division of the property between the two parishes accordingly. There followed, during September 1945, several other decisions regarding the creation of new parishes.[65] As we shall see later, this measure to avoid the reform met with a very vigorous response. Seeing the strength of the objections of the Communists to this tactic, Stepinac sought to show that the formation of new parishes was not just aimed at avoiding the reform, but was part of a policy going back to before the war of increasing the number of parishes in the Zagreb Archdiocese. Thus, in a notice regarding the formation of a new parish at Gjurmaneo on 12 October 1945, he stressed that it had been considered for forty years.[66] Stepinac had indeed been very active in founding new parishes before the war, but few were fooled by the assertion that there was no special reason for so many to be created just at the time when agrarian reform was about to be implemented.[67]

Stepinac's assertion to Tito that the application of agrarian reform was entirely contrary to the mood of most of the Croatian peasantry was quite justified. Maurice Rivoire, who replaced Gaillard at the French Consulate in Zagreb, noted that in accusing the Church of trying to avoid agrarian reform, the Communists were seeking to appeal to the interests of the Croatian peasantry and to break their attachment to their Church and

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[64]Letter of 22 Feb, 1946 from Akšamović to the Ministry of Agriculture, HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 326; and of 22 Feb 1946 from the Provincial of the order to the Ministry of Social Policy, HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 339.

[65]Decisions regarding the creation of fifteen new parishes, at HDA, VK, kut. 5, docs. 590, 592-595, 636-642, 686, 721-722.

[66]HDA, VK, kut. 4, doc. 922.

[67]Maurice Rivoire of the French Consulate in Zagreb had no doubt that the accusations of the authorities on this point were justified. FM, Paris, vol. 34, doc. 72.

to their priests. From the information he had it appeared that the Croatian peasants were refusing the benefits of agrarian reform when it was Church land that was its subject, and that cases where greed won the day were rare.[68]

On 17 March 1946, a mass meeting was held in the school at Sv. Klara, which was attended also by people from the surrounding district. Its purpose was to draw up a list of those interested in agrarian reform, but the assembled local inhabitants decided that Church property should not be touched, and demanded that the crucifix which had been removed from the school wall should be replaced. In this case the will of the peasantry counted for nothing, as on 2 May 1946 the parish priest complained to the Religious Commission that the appeal of the local people had been ignored.[69] The Communists were aware that the application of agrarian reform to Church land sometimes met with resistance, believing that the peasants were being encouraged to refuse land taken from the Church.[70] Some priests were accused of using more direct means of resistance, such as Fr. Stjepan Mlinarić, who was accused of brandishing a pistol at an official responsible for agrarian reform.[71]

The Church authorities took the issues of the treatment of the clergy, religious education and agrarian reform especially seriously, because in each of these cases it appeared that the Communists were threatening the Church's ability to carry out its mission in a fundamental way. But a number of other issues were the subject of repeated complaints by the Church. One such was the ability of the Church to publish religious publications. Upon the end of the war the religious press practically ceased to be. The Religious Affairs Commission received numerous appeals for intervention to obtain permission for religious publications, or for paper or printing facilities to be made

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[68]Letter from Rivoire of 27 January, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, doc. 140.

[69]Minutes from the meeting, HDA, VK, kut. 1, doc. 323; letter of complaint from parish office, HDA, VK, kut. 6, doc. 747.

[70]Kisić-Kolanović, "Problem legitimeta", p. 182.

[71]Letter from Zlatko Kuntarić to Pallua of 6 Sept, 1946 on the subject, HDA, VK, kut. 1, doc. 208.

available. In July 1945, a request was made for permission for a fortnightly Catholic paper, as there were no Catholic papers. Rittig recommended the request, suggesting that Canon Pavao Lončar should be editor, as he would ensure that it would be "in the correct spirit" from the "political point of view".[72]

A heavy blow to the Church was the confiscation of a printing house, "Narodna tiskara dioničarskog društva u Zagrebu", which had served the Archdiocese, and a majority of whose shares had been transferred to the Church just before the end of the war. The courts took the view that the transfer was void, as it had taken place during the occupation, and the confiscation proceeded, as part of the property of a man sentenced to forced labour.[73] As a result the official news bulletin of the Zagreb Archdiocese was in serious difficulties, as other printers would not print it. In May 1946, Rittig, increasingly exasperated by the range of harsh measures taken against the Church, complained that the laws on press freedom were not being adhered to, and that "reactionary circles" abroad had been handed an apparently true argument against the State, that freedom of religion and the press did not exist.[74]

Another issue which concerned the Church was that of civil marriage and divorce. On 5 July 1945, Stepinac issued a circular on the subject, in response to the introduction of laws on civil marriage and on the settling of marital disputes before the civil courts. To be read out in all churches, it set out the Church's position in stark terms. Catholics could only be validly married in a Catholic Church by a Catholic priest; only the Church's matrimonial courts could have jurisdiction in marital matters; a consummated Christian marriage is indissoluble and for life; any marriage contracted by Catholics outside of the Church is mere concubinage.[75] Here too Stepinac was setting a challenge to the

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[72]Request of 20 July, 1945 from "Naša Draga Svetišta", supported by Stepinac in note of 21 July, 45, and by Rittig in letter of 26 July, 1945. HDA, VK, kut. 3, doc. 313.

[73]Correspondence on the matter at HDA, VK, kut. 1, doc. 22 and kut. 5, doc. 210.

[74]Letter of complaint of 29 March, 1946 from Canon Nikola Kolarek to the Commission, and from Rittig to the Presidency of the Croatian Government of 24 May, 1946. HDA, VK, kut. 6, doc. 557.

[75]HDA, Rittig, kut. 4, 2/3, file II.

Communists and to their efforts to build a new, transformed society according to their precepts. Rittig also opposed the law on marriage, warning that it would offend the religious feelings of the people, and suggesting that while the wishes of those who desired a civil marriage should be respected, "marital matters fall within the religious sphere, and marriage is a sacred religious rite."[76]

The question of the pensions of retired priests was a persistent concern of the Church throughout 1945 and 1946, with numerous petitions being delivered to the Religious Commission. The roots of the problem lay in the long delay in regulating the question of pensions in general, the regional variations in the way in which the clergy had been treated before the war and confusion over which government body was responsible for the issue. Priests in some areas did receive payments part of the time, while others received nothing, causing hardship for many. The Religious Commission engaged in lengthy and complicated correspondence with various ministries, both Croatian and Federal, on the matter. Although it appears that confusion was the main cause of the problem, an exasperated Ivan Tremski of the Commission wrote to the Federal Ministry of Finance on 21 June 1946 that "finally it is also of urgent importance from the political point of view to resolve this question satisfactorily, as the wretchedness in which these persons find themselves offers an opportunity to reactionary elements to speak of the persecution of faith and the Church."[77]

The ability of many Church institutions to carry out their work was hindered by the takeover of numerous of their buildings in the period shortly before and after the end of the war. Thus the Provincial of the Dalmatian Franciscans complained in September 1945 that their house in Split had been partly occupied by the authorities since January of that year, making the normal life of the house impossible, and damaging the

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[76]Speech by Rittig regarding the Law on Marriage. HDA, VK, kut. 1, doc. 67.

[77]HDA, VK, kut. 7, doc. 1009.

buildings.[78] The diocesan seminary in Split was used as a military hospital after the war, as was part of the Zagreb Archdiocese's High School, while the Archdiocese's boarding school in Slavonska Požega and the Franciscan seminary and High School in Varaždin were taken over by the Army.[79] The authorities emphasized that these takeovers of Church property were to fulfil a temporary need and, for example, promised that the Franciscan house at Samobor would be quit by the Army as soon as a suitable alternative was found.[80] But the issue was still present in 1946, many buildings being taken over permanently. In March 1946, Rittig warned that nothing aggravated feelings more than the takeover of religious buildings.[81]

There were other measures too which hampered the Church's ability to function as it was used to. In February 1946, Salis asked the Religious Commission to intervene regarding the prohibition by the authorities of the collection of food for the seminaries. In April 1946, the superior of the Franciscan house in Zagreb appealed that they be exempted from the order of 5 February 1946 forbidding the collection of alms, as that was their only means of living, the way they had always lived and the way laid down in their rules. In July 1945, a parish priest in Zagreb wrote to the Religious Commission that he was experiencing problems in gaining access to a hospital to administer the sacraments.[82] In July 1945, Stepinac ordered that all religious associations (including Catholic Action), except for the charitable organization Caritas, be closed. This followed a request from the authorities for membership lists for all religious organizations. Rather than risk compromising members, Stepinac dissolved the organizations.[83]

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[78]Letter to Bakarić of 24 September, 1945, HDA, Rittig, kut. 4, 2/3, file I.

[79]Petitions regarding these at HDA, VK, kut. 3, doc. 760; kut. 4, doc. 851; kut. 3, docs. 791 and 792.

[80]Letter from the Presidency of the Croatian Government to the Religious Commission. HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 401.

[81]Letter recommending that the Jesuit philosophical institute not be remove from its building. HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 480.

[82]Letters to the Religious Commission at HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 278; kut. 6, doc. 740; kut. 3, doc. 501.

[83]Alexander, *Church and State*, p. 63. Letter from Stepinac to the Ministry of the Interior of 26 July, 1945, informing them of the measure, HDA, VK, kut. 3, doc. 330.

In a letter of 26 October 1946, the provincial of the Franciscan Province of the Holy Redeemer, in the Dalmatian hinterland and the coastal area around Makarska, poured out the range of misfortunes which had been visited upon the province since the Communist takeover. Numerous of their houses had been partly occupied by the local governments, their educational establishments had been lost, travel to their parishes in neighbouring dioceses had been blocked and the collection of alms, on which they depended, had been forbidden. Thus the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom had little meaning for them, as they were being denied all possibility of exercising it.[84]

In all these complaints the Church leaders rarely received redress from the authorities. Bakarić later confirmed that Stepinac had been wasting his time in writing his series of protest letters during the summer months of 1945: "Those protest letters were for the most part stupid and they almost never related to matters which we would have been able to correct (except for the occasion when they attacked him with eggs)."[85] The Communists did not accept the validity of most of the complaints of the Church leaders. In a brief reply to Stepinac's lengthy exposition of the grievances of the Church of 21 July 1945 (much of which was devoted to the arrests and executions of priests and others), Bakarić acknowledged that he had justification on some points, although on others he was badly informed or they simply held different points of view.[86] In general, and on all of the key issues, the views of the two sides were widely at variance.

Though Bakarić could acknowledge that there had been some excesses and mistakes, in general the view was that innocent priests and Catholics were not attacked, but collaborators and participants in war crimes. As to criticisms that freedom of religion and religious education were being denied, it was claimed that measures adopted by the new regime did not traverse the line which had already been established in modern civil

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[84]HDA, VK, kut. 7, doc. 1495.

[85]Per letter from Bakarić to Dedijer, cited by Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, p. 564. The reference to the eggs relates to an assault at Zaprešić in November 1945, discussed below.

[86]Letter from Bakarić to Stepinac of 26 July, 1945. Pattee, p. 442.

societies, that Church and State should be separated, and religion should be a private matter. As to Church property, the churches themselves were not touched, and some land was left to the Church. Other Church buildings and establishments had been requisitioned for military and other purposes, with the intention that they would be returned. If there were excesses, with good will these could have been sorted out. The root of the problem, as the Communists saw it, lay in the unwillingness of Stepinac to compromise and his lack of belief in the possibility of reaching an accord with the new authorities.[87]

It has been suggested that the Communists' conciliatory attitude towards the Church immediately after the war, stemming from a desire to settle relations with the Church as quickly as possible, actually prompted the Church leaders to press the new regime regarding those matters in which the Church was interested. According to this view, Stepinac's stance at his meeting with Tito on 4 July 1945 amounted to a rejection of the olive branch which Tito had offered to the delegation of the senior clergy two days before. In particular, Tito was disappointed by Stepinac's insistence on leaving the resolution of all important matters regarding relations between Church and State to the Holy See. This led Tito to the conclusion that agreement with the Catholic Church on terms that he could regard as acceptable was not possible. This view was confirmed by the apparently uncompromising stance which Stepinac adopted in his protest letters, which allegedly presented maximal demands that exceeded the needs of the Church.[88]

To Stepinac, it seemed that the Church was being subjected to a premeditated attack, which was seriously damaging its interests and its ability to operate. Further, it appeared that all of his suggestions and proposals in the months following the Communist takeover had been ignored. In September 1945, the Conference of Bishops of Yugoslavia met in plenary session. This was the occasion which Stepinac chose to

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[87]Hrnčević, pp. 231-232.

[88]Živojinović, pp. 132-136.

raise the stakes, and to issue his most severe and public protest yet. As the conference got under way on 17 September 1945, Masucci noted that: "given the fact that the religious situation throughout Yugoslavia demonstrates that the Communists' intention is to strengthen their atheistic transformation, the bishops have decided that it is necessary publicly to express their opinion and to rise up in defence of the faith.[89]

The authorities were keenly interested as to what conclusions the conference might reach, and were clearly nervous. On 19 September, Masucci noted that Rittig was very worried that the stand that the bishops were adopting would damage relations between the Church and the State. He presented Masucci with his suggestions as to what line the bishops should adopt (Masucci noted that no notable Church figure would receive Rittig), who passed them on to Stepinac.[90] Also, while the conference was in progress the authorities let Stepinac know that the Church's confiscated printing facilities would be returned. Stepinac saw in this an attempt to persuade the bishops to soften their approach, but he was not deflected, reportedly commenting to the bishops "gentlemen, we are not so gullible."[91]

The conference addressed a letter to Tito and a circular to the clergy. Most provocative, however, was a pastoral letter, to be read in all churches. While starting and finishing on a conciliatory note, stressing that the Church did not seek to interfere in the political life of the country and that it only sought a lasting solution to the question of its relations with the State, the substance of the letter was a forthright exposition of the full range of the Church's grievances against the State. It referred to 243 priests dead; 169 imprisoned; and 89 missing. It insisted that the bishops did not intend to shield guilty priests, and acknowledged that there were some who, through their extreme nationalism, had gravely sinned, and deserved to answer before the temporal courts. But their

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[89]Masucci, p. 222.

[90]*ibid.* pp. 223-224.

[91]Reported in the diary of Josip Vraneković, the parish priest in Krašić, in whose house Stepinac was confined from his release from prison in 1951 until his death in 1960. Cited in Benigar, pp. 499-500.

number was small, and the accusations against the greater part of the clergy represented a campaign of lies to besmirch the Church in the eyes of the people. Further, the Church was being prevented from fulfilling its mission by the loss of its press, property and institutions, and of its means of educating the youth. The letter condemned the "materialistic spirit" being propagated, and all ideologies and social systems based not on the principles of Christian revelation, but on "the hollow foundations of a materialistic, godless philosophy." The letter finished with a list of the Church's demands, starting with the words "therefore we seek, and we shall never, under any conditions, back down..."[92]

The letter thus represented an open challenge, setting terms which were clearly unacceptable to the Government. Many have criticized Stepinac for adopting such an openly confrontational stance, seeing it as unwise given that the balance of power was so clearly in favour of the authorities, and that they were obviously determined to implement their programme in spite of any opposition from the Church. It is probable that not all of the bishops would have adopted such a course, and indeed the Communists sought to show that some of them were against it. In his response to the letter, at a Press Conference on 6 October 1945, Bakarić regretted that it contained certain signatures which should not be there[93]

In thus seeking to point to divisions among the senior clergy regarding the pastoral letter, the Communists drew particular attention to a bishop outside of Croatia, the Archbishop of Bar, in Montenegro, Nikola Dobrečić. He was placed under considerable pressure by the Montenegrin authorities (far greater than was experienced by any bishop in Croatia) to disassociate himself from the letter, which he had signed, and the press throughout Yugoslavia reported that he had condemned it and refused to have it read in the churches of his diocese. This alleged statement by Dobrečić was greatly

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[92]Copy of letter at AJ, fond 144, SKVP, fasc. 1/3.

[93]Report on the press conference at FM, Paris, Vol. 34, docs. 33-34.

exaggerated, and the British Consul-General in Zagreb reported that Dobrečić denied condemning the letter.[94]

The Communists also made efforts to prevent the reading of the letter in churches in Croatia. In a report received by the Croatian Central Committee on 20 October 1945, the Regional Committee of the KPH in Dalmatia reported that it had still not been read in churches in Dubrovnik. A delegation of prominent citizens, including the President of the town People's Council, had gone to the bishop and asked him not to read it. They reported that he had said that he would not, and that he would know how to justify himself to his superiors.[95] In another despatch, sent at the same time, they reported that the letter had been read in very few places in the Zadar area. They cited a case where believers (allegedly) walked out of the Church while the letter was read, and the priest attacked them as enemies of the Church and of the faith. The real origin of this protest might be indicated by an instruction from the Central Committee that "spontaneous protests" of the people should be organized against the letter. The Dalmatian Committee also reported that there had been a meeting of priests to discuss the matter, and that there had been talk of the Church staying out of politics, and of a boycott.[96]

It is impossible to know how wide the circulation of the letter was. Many priests were clearly very nervous about reading it. Stepinac acknowledged to the British vice-consul in Zagreb that he feared that by reading the letter priests rendered themselves liable to arrest.[97] Gaillard noted Yugoslav press reports that some priests in Varaždin and Banja Luka refused to read it, and that in many churches the hands of the priest trembled as he

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[94]Šerbo and Jasmina Rastoder, *Dr. Nikola Dobrečić, Arcibiskup barski i primas srpski, 1872-1955 (život i djelo)* (Budva, 1991), pp. 127-128; press reports and Dobrečić's denial of them in reports from British Embassy in Belgrade of 29 October and 14 December, 1945, PRO, FO371/48912, R12462/1059/92 and FO371/59429, R68/68/92.

[95]HIP, telegrammes, inv. br. 2214, knj. 2, despatch no. 1351, from Regional Committee of KPH for Dalmatia to CK KPH, received 20 October, 1945.

[96]HIP, telegrammes, inv. br. 2214, knj. 2, despatch no. 1352, from Regional Committee of KPH for Dalmatia to CK KPH, received 20 October, 1945; despatch no. 1459 of 20 October, 1945, from CK KPH to Regional Committee of the KPH for Dalmatia.

[97]Letter of 10 October, 1945 from FWD Deakin in Belgrade. PRO, FO371/48912, R18199.

read it.[98] Both the fear of the clergy and the importance attached to the letter by the authorities demonstrate that the bishops' conference and the letter it issued represented a decisive turning-point.

To the Communists it seemed much more than a list of complaints and criticisms aimed at settling relations between Church and State. Its tone and content appeared to represent an ultimatum and a call to resistance to their authority.[99] While there were still contacts between the authorities and the Catholic hierarchy after this, serious attempts at conciliation were practically abandoned, and the situation was one of more or less open confrontation. Indeed, the Communists later cited the September pastoral letter as the key event which led to Stepinac's arrest and trial.[100]

Stepinac was fully aware of what a serious challenge he had thrown down to the regime. But he did not regret it, saying later that "if we had been silent, they would have struck at us still more heavily. They would have forgiven me everything, if only it had not been for that, for them, unhappy letter. They would even have forgiven me that if I had later recanted it. But free me, oh God, from such reasoning."[101] From his point of view it must have seemed that his worst fears about Communist rule were coming true. His objections that the authorities had not honoured Tito's pledge to settle matters concerning the Church through consultation were justified. In a later letter to Tito, Stepinac explained his understanding of the problems regarding relations between Church and State:-

> It is clear that an understanding cannot mean that the Church always yields its rights and its conditions for life, and that under the appearance of religious liberty it calmly confirms the violation of its rights and the conditions of its freedom to carry out its work. That would not be an understanding, but a submission, and that a humiliating submission, to principles which refuse to the Church the right even to liberty and existence.

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[98]Report of 29 October, 1945, FM, Paris, vol. 34, doc. 61.

[99]Hrnčević, pp. 230-231.

[100]Hrnčević, pp. 207-208; at his trial Stepinac's secretary, Ivan Šalić was told by the prosecutor, Jakov Blažević, that it was the letter which had brought him to the dock. *Sudjenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini*, p. 80.

[101]Vraneković's diary, cited in Benigar, p. 502.

He denied that the poor state of relations between the Church and the State had anything to do with the Church's attitude towards the new Yugoslavia. It rather concerned the attitude of the Communists towards religion in general, and towards the Catholic Church. The Church was being restricted to its strictly religious functions, the clergy constantly attacked, slandered and judged from a political standpoint, with the intention of separating it from its people. What, he concluded, then remained to the Church?[102]

In Stepinac's analysis can be seen the fundamental problem, that the Church and the authorities based their approaches upon completely different assumptions about what matters legitimately concerned the Church. Stepinac could not accept the Church's being excluded from the social life of the country and restricted to purely spiritual, ritual functions. His conclusion suggests he had decided that there was little left to lose.

For Rittig it was a bitter disappointment. He had watched his hopes for good relations between the Church and the State ebb away in the six months since the end of the war. Most of the promises which he had made on behalf of the new authorities regarding the position of the Church had quickly been broken. And yet at the end of the war he had had high hopes that he and the Religious Affairs Commission which he headed could play a positive role in settling relations between the two sides. His position was delicate from the start. Having identified completely with the Partisan struggle during the war he was regarded with suspicion by many among the clergy. Pallua asserted that Stepinac had approved his and Rittig's participation in the Religious Commission, but he acknowledged that the Commission was hampered in its work by the fact that the senior clergy would frequently not receive Rittig.[103]

As we have seen, Rittig did frequently use his position to try to defend the interests of the Church, regularly intervening on behalf of Church institutions, publications and

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[102]Copy of letter from Stepinac to Tito, dated 24 November, 1945. AJ, fond 144, SKVP, fasc. 1/4.

[103]Regarding Stepinac's agreement to Pallua and Rittig's work, Pallua, tape 2, p. 30; tape 3, pp. 3 and 26; hierarchy's avoidance of Rittig, Pallua, tape 2, p. 38.

priests against whom the authorities were proceeding. The senior clergy were quick to turn to the Religious Commission when seeking intervention in their cause, while petitioners of all kinds found that among the authorities only Rittig and the Commission were accessible.[104] Mostly the interventions of Rittig and other Commission members failed, but occasionally Rittig achieved a positive result. In October 1945, he appealed to the Ministry of Education that the high school of the Zagreb Archdiocese be exempted from the law abolishing private schools, as its main purpose was to provide a secondary education for future Catholic priests. Shortly afterwards the Ministry announced that it had accepted this recommendation (the rector of the school nevertheless complained that its work was still hindered by the fact that part of the school was being used as a military hospital).[105]

But the fact that the Commission had to cope with so many petitioners and intervene so frequently with the authorities was merely symptomatic of the poor state into which relations between the Church and the State had sunk. Rittig had hoped for much more than this, and had ambitions that the Commission would play a much more exalted role, as a mediator between the two sides in reaching an overall settlement. Immediately after the war, taking his cue from all the promises which the Partisan bodies had made during the war, he assured Church figures that they would enjoy full freedom. Rather his fear was that Stepinac would oppose the new regime.[106] Rittig participated at the meeting between Tito and the delegation of the senior clergy on 2 June 1945, and it clearly filled him with hope, seeing in it as he did an offer of cooperation from Tito, a chance to let bygones be bygones, and an opportunity for the Church leaders to grasp, for the Church's position in the new state to be satisfactorily settled.

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[104]Pallua, tape 2, p. 37.

[105]Letter from Rittig to the Ministry of 3 Oct, 1945 and response of 15 Oct, 1945; letter from the rector of the school to the Commission of 25 Oct, 1945. HDA, VK, kut. 4, docs. 834 and 851.

[106]As Rittig explained to Masucci on 26 May, 1945. Masucci, p. 202.

It quickly became apparent that his hopes were not being fulfilled. Towards the end of July, Masucci complained to him about all the problems being experienced, with priests being arrested and shot and Catholics living in fear, particularly drawing attention to an attack on Stepinac, Salis and Marcone on Belgrade radio on 21 July. Rittig said that he would bring the matter up with the authorities, but accused the Church leaders of responsibility for the increase in tensions for having rejected the chance to reach an agreement with the Government. On 20 August, Masucci again complained to Rittig, who promised to put the facts before Bakarić.[107]

In a letter to the Presidency of the Federal Government (the President of the Government was Tito) of 25 August 1945, Rittig elaborated the sorry state of relations between the Church and the State. This letter showed that he recognized that the fault was not all on one side, and that he was aware that the actions of the authorities were pushing the Church hierarchy into a confrontational posture. His line was to remind the Government of the earlier promises regarding freedom of conscience and religion, and to praise Tito extravagantly for having demonstrated such magnanimity in his meetings with the senior clergy at the beginning of June. He then expressed his disappointment that things had not happened in practice as Tito had foreseen, pointing to elements on both sides which had not followed Tito's example, but were rather re-opening old wounds.

Rittig specifically criticized the mass arrests and concentration camps, the executions, the lack of freedom and equality before the law, and appealed that a spirit of reconciliation should reign, and that all contrary trends should be silenced in the media. He referred to the stream of petitions and circulars emanating from Stepinac as evidence of the deep pessimism in which the episcopate and clergy were sunk, and pointed out that some of Stepinac's complaints were justified. He warned that a resolution of the conflict with the Church was urgent, as otherwise he was fearful regarding the impending September bishops' conference. He warned that the Church leaders could not solve the

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[107]Meetings with Rittig on 23 July and 20 August, 1945. Masucci, pp. 216 and 219.

problems on their own. There was a need to rebuild confidence and to put aside mutual recriminations. He finished this letter clearly taking the side of the bishops, asserting that they were loyal citizens, but:-

> In their spirits they are confused and mistrustful, because in the new state system there exists a certain strand which, contrary to explicit laws concerning the freedom of conscience and of religion, by its conduct hinders the free religious, moral, educational and social activity of the Church, and which by the latest proposed law on agrarian reform, which has been introduced without the prior agreement of the Church, even threatens the material survival of the Church, its institutions and clergy.

He concluded with an appeal that the high state authorities root out elements which tended towards the sabotaging of relations with the Church, so that only Tito's line would reign.[108]

This letter demonstrates that Rittig sincerely sought to defend the interests of the Church under the new regime, and his exasperation with the authorities for failing to live up to their promises. It also suggests a certain naive belief that Tito was equally sincere, and that Tito had the same things in mind as he did when he spoke of the freedom of religion. In sharing the approach of the bishops to the question of the Church's role in society, Rittig was clearly first of all a man of the Church. But given his belief that Tito had genuinely offered the bishops a historic opportunity for a settlement, which they had rejected, he could not but see the final responsibility for the poor state of relations as being with the hierarchy, and with Stepinac personally, for allegedly failing to respond to Tito's invitation to settle things through dialogue.[109]

His identification with the regime was undimmed, and, his criticisms not withstanding, in his sermon at a Midnight Mass in St. Mark's Church to see in the new year of 1946, addressing the assembled Communist dignitaries as "comrades", he described the year just finished as the greatest in a thousand years of the History of the South Slavs. A new world was being built on the foundations of social justice, liberty and

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[108]HDA, VK, kut. 1, un-numbered document.

[109]This was the interpretation he offered to Auxiliary Bishop Lach of Zagreb. Minutes of discussion between Rittig and Lach on 21 November, 1946. HDA, VK, kut. 1, doc. 327.

equality. He called for the "People's Authorities" to be judged kindly, and for patience.[110] His attitude towards the Church leaders at times seemed to be one of contempt. In a speech to the Federal Constituent Assembly on 24 January 1946, he bemoaned the fact that many of the Croatian clergy had not been with the National Liberation Struggle during the war, but appealed that the churches not be blamed "for having as their leaders, at the most crucial moment, men unworthy of them."[111] In reply to a letter from Stepinac in November 1945, asking him to forward a petition to Tito, Rittig rebuked him for adopting a form and manner which only made the difficult relations with the State worse. He would not accede to Stepinac's request.[112]

In the same letter to Stepinac, Rittig also expressed his hope that the expected arrival of a papal representative would lead to an improvement in the relations between Church and State.[113] This was a hope which was much repeated among the staff of the Religious Commission. In a letter of 29 October 1945, probably from Pallua to Fr. Božo Milanović, an Istrian priest who enjoyed good relations with the authorities and with the Religious Commission, much hope was expressed that the work of the Commission would enjoy success, especially as the Holy See was to establish contact with the Yugoslav Government. With the Holy See involved in their efforts to settle Church-State relations, they need not fear any condemnation of the Commission by the Church.[114]

As the months passed in 1946, Rittig seems to have lost all patience with the line being pursued by Stepinac. In this he was in tune with Tito in seeing the removal of Stepinac as a pre-requisite for a settlement of Church-State relations. Following the arrival of the Holy See's representative in the country, Rittig wrote to Tito on the subject

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[110]Report by Rivoire, FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 126-130.

[111]HDA, Rittig, kut. 9, 2/10.

[112]Stepinac to Rittig, 23 Nov, 1945, and reply of 26 Nov, 1945, HDA, VK, kut. 4, doc. 1022.

[113]Payart reported on 30 October, 1945 that the Yugoslav Government had accepted the Holy See's proposal to send a delegate. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 62-64.

[114]Letter of 29 October, 1945, addressed to "Reverend Father", in the name of Rittig, and referring to the writer's and Rittig's recent visit to Istria. HDA, Rittig, kut. 4, 2/3, file I.

of Church-State relations. The letter reveals that Rittig had been in frequent contact with Tito, and that Tito had declared that the question of the Archbishop of Zagreb was crucial, and would have to be urgently resolved. Rittig expressed understanding of his point of view, and suggested that the papal legate should be told that Stepinac should be removed as soon as possible from Zagreb, and that the Holy See should appoint others to take over the administration of the Archdiocese. He suggested that the duties should pass to a trio of canons, uncompromised by the Ustashas, proposing Dočkal, Rožić and Bakšić. It should be impressed upon the Holy See that the appointment should not be made without prior consultation of the state authority. Further, the sees of bishops who had fled at the end of the war, Šarić of Sarajevo, Garić of Banja Luka and Rožman of Ljubljana, should be declared vacant, so that they could be filled according to criteria which would ensure that no bishop or priest "soiled by Ustashism" could carry out public Church services.

This letter, which is crucial in revealing the thinking of Rittig and the authorities regarding the resolution of the conflict between the Church and the State, also shows how Rittig's position, as a priest who had taken the side of the Partisans, had led to the conflict with the Church hierarchy being for him, in part, personal. The Partisan priests were, he asserted, to a greater or lesser degree, out of favour with the hierarchy. This was "a matter of the internal discipline of our Church, but also of our personal honour". He appealed for Tito's understanding and help, that in the discussions with the papal representative he bear in mind the wishes of the Partisan priests, "and not allow their elimination in this great work". He suggested that he, as representative of the Partisan clergy, let the Holy See know how the Catholic episcopate had in large part gravely failed in its pastoral duty during the National Liberation Struggle, and had, in its behaviour towards the People's Authorities since the war, caused great harm to the people and to the good name of the Church.[115]

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[115]Letter from Rittig to Tito of 4 February, 1946. JBT, II - 10/7.

Rittig's alienation from the Church hierarchy went still further, and in a speech reported in the press on 1 July 1946, he blamed the hierarchy for failing to respond to Tito's offer the previous summer, and thus causing much unpleasantness. He also attacked the fanaticism of some younger priests, who after the liberation continued to maintain contacts with émigré Ustashas and to harm the interests of the Church and the people. But he still looked hopefully to the Holy See, and to a state law to regulate Church-State relations, which he believed could resolve matters, given goodwill on both sides.[116] Later the same month, Payart reported that "Mgr. Rittig, whose ambition the regime uses, no longer enjoys any credit in Catholic circles". Payart added that Rittig's speech would have resulted in his suspension if Stepinac had not feared the persecution that would result.[117]

In the summer of 1946, the Religious Commission was much preoccupied with preparing a Law on Religious Communities, by which Rittig set such store in his speech, researching the literature on the subject and examining the arrangements in place in other countries, such as the Soviet Union and France.[118] In trying to play a leading role in framing such a law, Rittig hoped to be able finally to take for the Commission the cherished role of settling relations between Church and State. He certainly had the good of the Church in mind. Believing that Stepinac's approach was fatally flawed, he was doing his best to win as good a solution as possible for the Church.

But he had still not grasped that from the point of the authorities his role and that of the Commission was not to take any active part in making policy or framing laws. The role of the Commission included advising the authorities on matters concerning religion and mediation with the Church hierarchy. But the Communists had no intention of letting that interfere with the implementation of their programme. They wanted to keep the

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[116]*Vjesnik*, 1 July, 1946.

[117]Report from Payart of 31 July, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 190-192.

[118]For example, the report on the work of the Commission in August 1946 and plan for September put the work on the proposed law in first place. HDA, VK, kut. 7, doc. 1428.

Church quiet, but they would not make concessions to it on fundamental issues. To many it was clear that Rittig had simply been manipulated by the Communist leaders in their desire to ease their passage to power by neutralising a potential enemy. A memorandum of the French Foreign Ministry in early 1947 suggested that the Yugoslav authorities aimed "to use profitably the weakness of character and somewhat wavering doctrine of Mgr. Rittig."[119]

When Rittig tried to contribute to the framing of the constitution in January 1946, so as to make it more favourable to the Church, he was ignored. He tried to soften the division of Church and State (which is discussed below), to enshrine the right to religious education and to include an acknowledgement of the validity of church marriages, but the report on the proceedings merely noted that he had opposed the relevant sections, had abstained in the votes on them (which were otherwise unanimously passed) and that his proposed amendments had been presented too late.[120]

Rittig's position was invidious. Clearly his task was frequently demoralizing. For example, in June 1946 the lawyer Zlatko Kuntarić sent Pallua a request for Rittig to intervene in the case of Canon Nikola Borić, who had been given a prison sentence for sheltering a young man who had attacked an army officer. He also sent him a copy of a personal appeal from Borić to the Presidency of the Federal Government. Borić was closely acquainted with Rittig, and it was he who had been Rittig's contact in Zagreb during the war. Yet Rittig felt unable to help him, writing a minute on the document that "at this time, 20/7, with relations so strained, there is no point in signing a petition for an amnesty, where there is no hope for that".[121]

He keenly felt the difficulty of his position. In a speech in January 1947, regarding Croatia's draft constitution, he declared that "my position as a priest, Comrades, in the

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[119]FM, Paris, vol. 35, 125-132.

[120]Speech by Rittig on the draft constitution, HDA, Rittig, kut. 9, 2/10; report in *Politika* 29 Jan, 1946.

[121]Letter form Kuntarić of 17 June, 1946, enclosing copies of the verdict in the case and Borić's appeal. HDA, VK, kut. 1, doc. 268.

National Liberation Struggle, was hard, and today it is not easy".[122] He and other members of the Religious Commission provoked much resentment by appearing to fit into the regime's plans. In October 1946, just at the time when Stepinac's trial was reaching its climax, the Commission's office boy received a visitor, who found only his wife at home, but asked where Rittig and Pallua lived, and warned that Rittig should take care for the next couple of days, or something would happen to him. At that time Rittig also received anonymous postcards from critics.[123]

But he believed that his course was right and necessary. In a draft letter, written in February 1947 (apparently to a senior Czech clergyman) he explained his view that Stepinac had failed to take advantage of Tito's offer to settle matters by agreement, and his belief that the authorities were sincere in declaring their commitment to religious freedom and good relations with the Church. Regarding Stepinac, he dismissed the notion that he was guilty for the crimes of the Ustashas, but at stake was not just Stepinac and relations between the Catholic Church and the State, but relations between the Croatian Catholic people, and all Catholic Slavs, with the eastern, Orthodox Slavs.[124] For Rittig with his passionate Panslavism, his sense of a mission and a historical opportunity in forging the unity of the Yugoslavs in particular, this was crucial.

Given his lack of standing among the clergy, Rittig was unable to play the role for which he had hoped. The hierarchy would not avail themselves of his services as a mediator in any of the bigger questions regarding the Church's relations with the State and its place in society, only using him for interventions regarding the local problems being experienced by individual people and Church institutions. The authorities had hoped to use Rittig as an intermediary in their efforts to settle relations with the Church,

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[122]HDA, Rittig, kut. 9, 2/10.

[123]Memorandum by Pallua of 11 October, 1946 regarding the warning, HDA, VK, kut. 1, doc. 243; postcards at HDA, VK, kut. 1, docs. 244 and 245.

[124]HDA, Rittig, kut. 12, 4/3.

but ultimately discarded him, concluding that the poor regard that the hierarchy had for him meant that he was of little use.[125]

The Clergy's Alleged Wartime Collaboration

As the confrontation developed, references to the wartime stance of the Catholic hierarchy and clergy were increasingly heard. For example, at a press conference in December 1945, Bakarić brought up allegations of links between the Archbishop's palace and remnants of the Ustashas still at large in Yugoslavia, stating that this was a continuation of the wartime bond between the Catholic hierarchy, the Ustashas and the occupiers.[126] During Stepinac's trial, one of the main purposes of the prosecution was to present Stepinac and other members of the clergy as collaborators with the Ustasha regime and as sharing responsibility for their crimes.[127] Clearly this was intended to blacken Stepinac's and the Church's image.

Stepinac's defenders vigorously refute such charges, but the crucial point here is not whether Stepinac's wartime behaviour was all that it might have been, but what attitude the post-war Communist authorities took towards it. Most of them did believe that his response to the Ustashas was inadequate and that he was guilty of collaboration. Djilas asserted that there was enough incriminating material "even according to criteria milder than those of Communists and revolutionaries." However, the fact that it took the authorities a year and a half to move against him, and that in the meantime attempts were made to seek an accommodation with him, clearly suggests that this was not a principal reason for his trial, and that it was other considerations which determined the authorities' increasingly hostile attitude to the Church; that the issue of wartime collaboration was simply added to the list of charges against him in order to make it more

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[125]Nada Kisić-Kolanović, "Vrijeme političke represije: 'veliki sudski procesi'" u Hrvatskoj, 1945-1948. (in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 1, 1993, Zagreb), p. 5.

[126]*Vjesnik*, 16 December, 1945.

[127]*Sudjenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini*

convincing.[128] Whatever the Communist leaders thought of Stepinac, they had nevertheless hoped to do a deal with him, which would have fitted into the new Communist order a Church which was restricted, humbled and controlled, and which was potentially a useful tool of state policy. It was Stepinac's failure to play the role assigned to him in the new order which explained the regime's hardening towards him. Worse still, he actually represented a threat, as Nada Kisić-Kolanović has observed:-

> One thing is certain, that the problem of Stepinac arose at a time when it had become clear that the Catholic Church could become a more significant rallying-point for anti-Communist mal-contents. The subsequent identification of Stepinac as a collaborator served both his political elimination and the elimination of Croatian anti-regime factions.[129]

Failure of the Church to Play the Role Assigned it

At his meeting with the senior Croatian clergy on 2 June 1945, Tito expressed his wish that the Catholic Church in Croatia should be more "national" and independent of Rome. There has been considerable controversy as to what Tito meant by this, and it has frequently been suggested that this question was at the heart of the dispute between the Communists and the Catholic Church in the immediate post-war period. This is what Tito is reported to have said:-

> For my part I would say that our Church should be more national, more adapted to the nation. Perhaps it is a little strange to you now that I stress nationality so strongly. Too much blood has flowed, I have seen too much suffering on the part of the people, and I want the Catholic clergy in Croatia to be more deeply nationally connected with the people than it is now. I must openly say that I do not claim the right to denounce Rome, your supreme Roman institution, and I will not do that. But I must say that I regard critically the fact that it has always inclined more towards Italy than towards our people. I would like to see the Catholic Church in Croatia, now, when we have all the conditions for that, have more independence. That is what I would like, that is the fundamental question, the question which we would like to solve, and all other questions are secondary, and can be easily resolved.[130]

Many have interpreted this speech as a request that the Church's ties with Rome be severed, and have suggested that Tito may have been hinting at a deal whereby the

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[128]Milovan Djilas, *Vlast* (London, 1983), pp. 32-35.

[129]Kisić-Kolanović, "Vrijeme političke represije", p. 13.

[130]Benigar, p. 463. Bakarić confirmed that Benigar's account of Tito's speech was accurate in a letter to Dedijer of 11 February, 1980, Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, p. 563.

Church would escape repression if it accepted the offer.[131] Branko Petranović insists that it was never intended that the Catholic clergy should repudiate their obligation to the Holy See in religious matters, but that it reflected "the experience that the Vatican is always inclined towards Italy rather than towards Yugoslavia."[132] This was of great relevance at the time, given the bitter controversy with Italy over Istria and Trieste, which profoundly affected relations between the Yugoslav authorities and the Catholic Church in the post-war period. Petranović complained that the clergy failed to make a distinction between their obligation to the Holy See in spiritual matters and their obligation to the state in temporal matters, attempting to introduce the Holy See as a factor in the internal affairs of the country, thus lessening the supremacy of the state and giving the Catholic hierarchy a status external to the state.[133] Zdenko Čepič noted, regarding the Church's opposition to agrarian reform, that it sought to present it as a political, rather than a social issue, and tried to transfer it into the realm of inter-state relations between Yugoslavia and the Holy See.[134] Ramet considers that Tito probably did intend a break with Rome, given the consistency with which Communists in other East European countries pressed such a course upon Catholic hierarchs.[135]

There is evidence on both sides, and determining Tito's exact intentions is impossible. Clearly the link between the Church and Croatian nationalism was something which worried him. In his meetings with the clergy he focused on the national question. His fear was that as an independent force, subject to an unfriendly leadership outside of the country, and as a potential rallying point for Croatian nationalists, the Church could represent a threat to the regime's consolidation of its power.[136] Some of those in the

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[131]Irvine, p. 239.

[132]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", pp. 278 & 281.

[133]*ibid.* p. 279.

[134]Čepič, "Agrarna reforma in politika", p. 126.

[135]Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, p. 124.

[136]Kisić-Kolanović, "Problem legitimeta", p. 185.

higher echelons of power in Croatia at the time have suggested that he might indeed have been thinking of a break with Rome. Bakarić said that Tito's main concern in settling the relations between the Church and the State was that the Church in Yugoslavia should be more independent: "He wanted to make it independent of Rome, even if only in as much as it would receive its own primate (this is what he stressed in conversation with us)".[137]

Particularly controversial was the statement by Jakov Blažević, who as Public Prosecutor in Croatia handled the prosecution of Stepinac, in an interview in 1985 that "that trial of Stepinac was forced upon us. If Stepinac had been a little more elastic, there would have been no need for a trial. And he imposed it, because he was a politically limited person." The interviewer then suggested that Tito had sought of Stepinac that he separate the Catholic Church in Croatia from Rome, to which Blažević replied in the affirmative.[138] This led to a polemic during the following month in the Catholic and secular press in Croatia. Blažević, reacting angrily to suggestions in the magazine *Danas* that he had been contributing to the trend of calling into question Tito's legacy, insisted that Tito had only wanted Stepinac to distance the Church in Croatia from the Holy See's policy.[139]

Ivan Meštrović claimed that it was Stepinac's refusal to break with Rome which the Communist leaders held most against him. He reported a conversation with Djilas in New York, when he asked about the Stepinac case, to which Djilas allegedly replied that "we would not have had anything against his Croatian nationalism, but we could not endure his fidelity to the Roman Pope". Meštrović quoted another senior Yugoslav Communist (apparently the ambassador in Washington, Vladimir Popović) as saying that Stepinac was a man of clean character who stood by his principles, but that there was just one

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[137]Per letter from Bakarić to Dedijer, cited by Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, p. 563.

[138]Interview in *Polet*, 15 February, 1985, quoted in Branimir Stanojević, *Alojzije Stepinac, zločinac ili svetac* (second edition, Belgrade, 1986), pp. 66-67.

[139]Articles in *Danas*, nos. 158 and 159, 26 Feb and 5 Mar, 1985, and *Polet*, 1 Mar, 1985.

thing that they had against him:- "His Croatian nationalism would not have bothered us, and if only he had proclaimed a Croatian Church we would have raised him to the heavens". Djilas later denied to Ivan Mužić that he had said what Meštrović had attributed to him concerning Stepinac, and so Meštrović's testimony must be treated with caution. Djilas himself wrote that, according to his judgement, Stepinac "was always, and remained a faithful pastor of the Vatican", though Mužić chooses to accept Meštrović's word.[140] These various contradictory statements from leading Communists suggest that Tito may have been vague as to his exact intention, but the idea that he did intend a break with Rome has been persistent.

Stepinac also feared that this may have been Tito's intention. In his sermon for the feast of Saints Peter and Paul on 29 June 1945, he laid great stress on the need to remain faithful to the Pope, the successor of St. Peter.[141] In a letter to Bakarić at the beginning of August, Stepinac accepted the former's assurance, in a speech of 28 July, that there was no intention on the part of the government of interfering in the dogma and internal affairs of the Church or of alienating the clergy and faithful from Rome.[142] Yet in a circular of 27 August 1945, the Catholic bishops showed that their fears were far from being laid to rest:-

> Our faithful know well that there is no Church where there is no Peter. The strength and firmness of the Church is founded upon the rock of the papacy. The breaking of relations with the Pope in Rome would mean the liquidation of living Christianity and the destruction of Catholicism in Yugoslavia. Those who advise us to loosen our ties with Peter's See in Rome know that well. We will not listen to them. All attacks on the papacy will be for us an awakening and a warning to bind ourselves yet more closely and intimately with the father of Christianity on the seat of Peter.[143]

It seems that Stepinac's fear that the Communists were aiming at a break with Rome remained with him, as from his house arrest in Krašić he wrote to a priest regarding the

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[140]Ivan Meštrović, "Stepinac - duhovni heroj: nekoliko refleksija o Stepincu, povodom desetogodišnjice njegove osude", (in *Nova Revija*, Buenos Aires, 1956), reproduced in Vinko Nikolić, *Stepinac mu je ime: zbornik uspomena, svjedočanstava i dokumenata* (Zagreb, 1991), pp. 446-447. Djilas's denial and note that the other senior Communist source was Popović, Mužić, pp. 90-91; Djilas's opinion of Stepinac, Milovan Djilas, *Vlast*, p. 32.

[141]JBT, II - 10/6.

[142]Letter of 2 August, 1945, cited in Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, pp. 124-125.

[143]HDA, VK, kut. 1, doc. 216.

later attempts of the authorities to form priests' associations, with the aim of dividing the lower clergy from their bishops. He warned that this was part of a move towards a break with Rome.[144]

But the available evidence does not point conclusively to an active intent on the part of the Communists to engineer the formation of a national Church and its break with Rome. It is clear that Tito hoped that by loosening the ties between the local hierarchy and Rome he could bring the Church under the closer control of the State. Certainly he found it extremely galling that his attempts to reach an agreement with the local Church on his terms were thwarted by the insistence of Stepinac that he must deal with the Holy See. The evidence that the Holy See had actively opposed the spread of Communism in eastern Europe, had lobbied hard against his regime among the western Allies and openly supported Italy in the dispute over the Julian regime (which questions will be discussed below) all inclined him to hostility towards Rome and to look negatively upon the loyalty of the Church in Yugoslavia to Rome.

In his speech to the senior representatives of the clergy on 2 June 1945, he explicitly ruled out any notion of denouncing Rome as the supreme centre of the Catholic Church. His emphasis was on political matters, specifically regarding the Holy See's inclination towards Italy over Yugoslavia. Indeed, this was the thrust of the whole policy of the Communists towards the Catholic Church in the immediate post-war period. They showed little interest in the strictly religious functions of the Church, its dogma, the performance of Church rites etc. Their interest in the Church was as a potential political opponent. At issue was its loyalty to the regime. Thus Tito's assertion that he did not seek the separation of the Church from Rome nor to question the competence of the Holy See in matters of faith and dogma is plausible.

Following Stepinac's conviction in October 1946, Bakarić asserted that all they wanted was that the Church satisfy the religious needs of the people and adhere to the

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[144]Mužić, p. 93.

people's political and national tendencies and desires, and no others.[145] That meant, of course, that the Church should not question the line of the Communists in matters of politics and national interest. Rittig, in his important letter to Tito in February 1946, took the same view. The "nationalization" of the Catholic Church meant that Croatian Catholics would have their own hierarchical organization, analogous to that of the Serbian Orthodox Church, with the Archbishop of Zagreb (who should not be Stepinac) as primate. But that would not, he insisted, mean a break with Rome, but merely that the Croatian primate would enjoy the powers of other primates, such as the one in Hungary.[146] As noted earlier, Rittig had been in frequent contact with Tito regarding Church related issues, and his views reflected Tito's thinking. Rittig was muddled in his notions regarding the position and supposed independence of primates in other countries, and displayed his usual naivety in imagining that such a solution was realistic. No doubt Tito was more astute. But the letter does suggest that Tito was indeed not expecting a full break with Rome.

Tito's vagueness concerning what exactly was meant by a "more national Church" may have been deliberate. Hostile to the Vatican, desirous of bringing the Church under the closer control of the State, determined to press ahead with a revolutionary policy which he knew the Church would regard as seriously prejudicial to its interests and aware that the Church was fundamentally opposed to his regime, he may have been simply floating the idea of a national Church to see what the response of the bishops would be. The Church, unsurprisingly, was not prepared to comply with a strategy aimed at bringing it under the control of the Communist State, Stepinac insisting that according to Canon law only the Holy See was empowered to settle the question of the Church's relations with the State.[147]

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[145] *Vjesnik*, 15 October, 1946.

[146] Letter of 4 February, 1946, JBT, II - 10/7.

[147] Record of Stepinac's meeting with Tito. Pattee, Doc. LXV, P.424.

In fact, by introducing the idea of a more independent Church, Tito merely sowed confusion and increased mistrust among the Church leaders. The often expressed idea that Tito offered Stepinac a deal, whereby the Church could escape persecution if he agreed to distance himself from Rome, is misleading. Tito was determined to implement his revolutionary strategy whatever the Church did. He wanted to obtain the bishops' loyalty and to neutralize their opposition, but he had little to offer them. Proposing a more "national" Church was thus an opportunist's ploy, and there was never any possibility of a break with Rome.

As discussed earlier, the key element in the Communists' vision of the settling of relations between Church and State was separation. However, in the circular issued to the clergy by the Bishops' conference of September 1945, the separation of Church and State was explicitly rejected. Believers are children of God and members of the State, so there are issues, such as the upbringing of children and marriage, in which both Church and State are interested. It repeated that the best way to regulate relations between Church and state was by a concordat with Rome.[148] The Church's opposition to the concept of separation in principle was based on historical experience, as Stepinac explained to Bakarić in a letter on the subject of education. Referring to the "forced separation" of Church and State in France in 1906, followed by the persecution of the Church, Stepinac asserted that if that was what was intended for Yugoslavia, it would represent "an open cultural struggle against the Church".[149]

At the heart of the problem was a fundamental disagreement as to what matters legitimately concerned the Church. Communists aimed to restrict the churches to their strictly religious functions and rituals, and to exclude them from society.[150] The Church, on the other hand, conceived its role in much broader terms. In a petition to the

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[148]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", p. 298.

[149]Letter of 11 August, 1945. Kisić-Kolanović, "Pisma zagrebačkoga nadbiskupa", pp. 158-165.

[150]Simon, p. 198.

authorities in January 1946 regarding the new constitution, Akšamović explained the Church's position.[151] Guarantees of the freedom to perform its strictly religious work and rites were insufficient, as this recognized only one small sphere of its activity. The Church must be able freely to promote all of its aims, including religious education in schools at all levels, the right to found its own, confessional schools, and to maintain its philanthropic institutions. Otherwise the freedoms guaranteed by the constitution were illusory. He warned that under the constitution being drafted the Church, its clergy, institutions and property lacked a secure legal status, enabling them to be attacked outside of the law.

At a practical level, the attempt to exclude the Church from the social sphere was accomplished by the Law on associations, meetings and other public gatherings of 25 August 1945, under which all associations and societies were supposed to register. The law did not encompass religious communities as such, whose freedom to operate was to be guaranteed by the constitution, but disagreement arose over church institutions which the authorities did not regard as being by their nature religious, but which the Church regarded as an essential part of its work and of its mission.

Particularly instructive in this regard was the case of Caritas, a Catholic charitable organization. The Croatian Interior Ministry invited Caritas to register under the law, and to alter its statutes to bring them into line with it. This Caritas refused to do, insisting that as a Church organization, whose work was an integral part of the Catholic life, it should not be covered by a regulation designed for secular societies. The Ministry responded by banning the work of Caritas altogether, asserting that the activities of the Church in the social, educational and cultural spheres could not be regarded differently from the work of secular bodies in the same fields. Such functions were, in modern societies, mainly carried out by secular organizations, and Church organizations involved in them must be

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[151]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", pp. 307-309.

subject to the same regulations. Caritas's assertion that "good works" were an essential and inalienable task of the Catholic Church was thus irrelevant to the case.[152]

The effect of this law was felt by other institutions too. Thus, for example, the local authorities in Osijek banned the continued work of the Society of the Sisters of Mary of the Miraculous Medal, a nursing order. This was because it had failed to register under the law on associations, which it was obliged to do, as its work fell outside of Church functions, and it was therefore not a religious society as such. Here too the Religious Commission pinned its hopes on a law on religious communities. Tremski claimed, in a letter to the Interior Ministry, that the Society did not register under the law on associations because it was waiting for the law on religious communities to be passed. The law on associations should not apply to religious establishments, which were allowed by the constitution to carry out their work freely. If the decision in Osijek were accepted, then all monasteries, parishes, dioceses etc. could be considered illegal.[153] Thus Tremski expressed the same fear as Akšamović regarding the lack of legal protection afforded to the Church.

Rittig tried to propose a compromise. In December 1945, Bishop Srebrnić wrote to the Commission regarding the demand of the local authorities that all religious associations should be registered, or else legal proceedings would be initiated against their officers. Srebrnić rejected this as unwarranted interference in Church affairs. Rittig suggested that a distinction should be made between societies of Catholic Action which were social in nature, which should come under the law on associations, and purely religious societies, which should come under the forthcoming law on religious communities. But, as terrorist elements were hiding behind religious organizations, they should come under the law on associations until the law on religious communities was

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[152]Letter from the Interior Ministry of 2 March, 1946, announcing the banning of Caritas; protest letters from Caritas to the Religious Commission of 1 April, 1946, and to the Croatian government of 5 April, 1946. HDA, VK, kut. 6, docs. 563 and 620.

[153]Letter from the Internal Affairs section of the locality of Osijek to the Society; complaint from the Society to the Religious Commission; letter from Tremski to the Interior Ministry of 5 July, 1946. HDA, VK, kut. 7, doc. 1075.

passed, and in the meantime their statutes should be respected.[154] Here again, Rittig was trying to defend the Church within the confines allowed by the Communists. To most in the Church his approach seemed little better than capitulation.

Stella Alexander has described the discourse between the bishops and the authorities after the war as a "dialogue of the deaf."[155] The idea of separation of Church from State may, according to Dragoljub Živojinović, have been modern and legitimate, but that legitimacy was undermined by the underlying aim of the Yugoslav Communists in implementing it, which was to reduce an organization which could have constituted a centre of opposition.[156]

Clearly there was not even the minimum consensus necessary for the two sides to be able to reach an accommodation. From the Communists' point of view it was particularly irritating that they could not reach an agreement with the local Church because of the repeated insistence of the bishops that such an agreement regarding relations between Church and State could only be reached with the Holy See. This made the task of reaching an accommodation and pacifying the Church on their terms much harder for the Communists. It appeared to them that the pernicious influence of the Vatican was sabotaging their efforts to order Church-State relations as they would wish.

Certainly the Holy See's attitude towards the new regime in Yugoslavia was hostile. The British minister to the Holy See, Sir Godolphin d'Arcy Osborne, wrote that "with no country were Vatican relations so bitter as with Yugoslavia".[157] Even before the end of the war the Holy See was receiving reports from Yugoslavia, and used them as the basis of appeals to the western Allies to intervene.[158] Attempts to rouse the western powers to

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[154]Srebrnić to the Commission, 6 Dec, 1945, enclosing letter from his local authorities of 30 Nov, 45; letter from Rittig to the Interior Ministry of 5 Jan, 1946. HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 164.

[155]Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 128.

[156]Živojinović, p. 148.

[157]Osbourne's annual report for 1945. PRO, FO371/60803, ZM868/868/57.

[158]Živojinović, pp. 95-97.

action in Yugoslavia continued after the war, with appeals regarding the position of the Church in Yugoslavia generally, and the controversy over the Julian region in particular.[159] But the Communists' resentment that the influence of Rome was thwarting their efforts to come to terms with the local hierarchy was not entirely justified. The Holy See's petitions to the western Allies were in large part based on reports from the clergy inside the country. Indeed, one report just before the end of the war asserted that the Holy See had proposed to appoint a chaplain to the Partisans, and to establish relations with them, but that they had been dissuaded by objections from Croatia and Slovenia.[160]

Following their takeover, the Communists found particular cause for complaint in the conduct of the representative of the Holy See in Yugoslavia. They had little to complain, however, about Abbot Marcone, who had been the Holy See's representative with the Catholic episcopate in the NDH. Bakarić contrasted Marcone's demeanour favourably with that of Stepinac, finding that the former "behaved correctly", was critical of Stepinac and had a pleasant conversation with Tito. Bakarić's good opinion did not extend, however, to Marcone's secretary, Masucci, who he described as an intriguer and a liar.[161] Such impressions were confirmed by British diplomats in Belgrade and Zagreb, who reported that Marcone's efforts on behalf of Ustasha victims were well-known, that he had expressed dismay at the anti-Communist pastoral letter of 24 March 1945 and that he was critical of the wartime stance of many of the Croat clergy. Meanwhile, in September the British vice-consul in Zagreb reported that Masucci had asked whether it was true that the British were helping dissident Croats in the woods, that he was clearly looking for support against the regime and was "an unreliable intriguer".[162]

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[159]*ibid.* pp. 120-127.

[160]Minute by RGD Laffan of the British Foreign Office, on report dated 26 February, 1945, citing Mgr. Tardini of the Vatican Secretariat of State. PRO, FO371/48910, R2992.

[161]Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, p. 563.

[162]Reports from British Embassy in Belgrade in July 1945. PRO FO371/48911, R9875 and R10313; FO371/48912, R12502, and one in September 1945, FO371/48912, R15604.

Shortly after the end of the war, Marcone left Yugoslavia (Masucci stayed longer). Following the agreement that the Holy See would appoint a delegate to Yugoslavia, Rittig hoped that Marcone would be returned "with full powers" to negotiate on behalf of the Holy See. Rivoire noted that such a notion was "strange to anyone who knows the habits of the Vatican, presaging serious misunderstandings".[163] In fact, the post went to Mgr. Joseph Hurley, an American bishop and experienced Vatican diplomat.[164]

It would seem that Hurley's mission had a dual purpose. One was certainly to defend the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia. The other had a broader significance within the whole framework of the Vatican's response to the Communist takeovers in Eastern Europe. Franklin Gowen, the secretary of the American mission to the Holy See, saw it as a feeler towards that part of Europe which had fallen under the sway of the Soviet Union. Hurley acknowledged to him that the mission was not just of a religious nature, but that he would follow the political situation and relations between Tito and Stalin, and enable the Holy See to prepare for a possible future improvement in relations with the Soviet Union. American military intelligence reckoned that the Holy See was interested in Soviet affairs, seeing Soviet domination in Catholic countries, even on the borders of Italy, as a threat. It saw the Catholic Church as under attack, the last opponent of Communism and defender of Christian culture in areas under Soviet control. It was engaged in a struggle, and needed intelligence from that part of Europe. Thus part of Hurley's brief was to monitor the situation in the region, and to help the Vatican formulate its approach to the Soviet Union and other countries under its control.[165] Payart speculated that Yugoslavia's acceptance of Hurley's mission might have signalled a discreet line of rapprochement on the part of Moscow, assuming that it was with Moscow's approval, and was not in fact an assertion of independence from Moscow by

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[163]Letter of 28 December, 1945. FM, Paris, vol. 34, doc. 113.

[164]Živojinović, p. 153.

[165]*ibid.* pp. 154-155.

the Yugoslav leadership, given that Moscow's campaign against the Vatican continued.[166]

There was little chance of Hurley's mission achieving success. While Payart found Hurley "accessible to modern ideas" and capable of "reconciling dogmatic rigidity with practical liberalism", he noted that, following his first meeting with Tito, Hurley was sceptical as to the chances of compromise with a Marxist government (though Hurley too noted Tito's affability). According to Rivoire, Hurley saw Communism as the root of evil, the enemy.[167] Hurley told the British ambassador, Stevenson, that the Vatican was in no hurry to come to terms with the Yugoslav regime. Giving the lie to Communist claims that the hierarchy's main grievance was the loss of the Church's property, and that it was merely protecting its own interests, Hurley asserted that the regime would be mistaken in thinking that the Holy Father would be content with a "sop" such as the restitution of some property or state payment of the clergy. The Church would get by financially (as the Communists suspected it could): "The essentials of any arrangement with the regime were freedom of religious life, including the right of the Church to educate her children and of every Catholic to practice his religion in all spheres, without fear or hindrance."[168]

In his scepticism as to the possibilities for reaching an agreement with the Yugoslav regime, Hurley was in line with the thinking at the Holy See. Mgr. Montini of the Secretariat of State (the future Pope Paul VI) told Gowen that he had little confidence in the mission's chances. A month after Hurley had arrived in Yugoslavia, Pope Pius XII told an American diplomat that there was a "real reign of terror" in Yugoslavia, and suggested that "perhaps a little demonstration of strength" was needed. The American envoy to the Holy See, Myron Taylor, found that the Pope was not ready for cooperation

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[166]Report dated 30 October, 1945. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 62-64.

[167]Telegrammes from Payart of 6 February and 9 February, 1946, and letter from Rivoire, 8 April, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 147, 152 and 160.

[168]Letter from Stevenson of 11 March, 1946. PRO FO371/59429, R4620.

with the Yugoslav government, seeing the Church as being engaged in a struggle against the expansion of Communism.[169]

The Yugoslav authorities were also doubtful as to whether anything positive would come out of the Hurley mission. Tito told FWD Deakin (the first British liaison officer with the Partisans' Supreme Command during the war, who was briefly posted to the embassy in Belgrade after the war) that the Yugoslav chargé d'affaires at the Holy See (who had been part of the Royal Yugoslav legation there) had been told to prepare the way for direct talks, but there had been no result. He expected little of an American bishop, unversed in the conditions in Yugoslavia (i.e. who would not share his view of the compromised role of much of the clergy during the war).[170] In their meetings, Tito focused on his dissatisfaction with Stepinac, who he asked to be removed, while Hurley listed the range of the Church's grievances.[171] With no common ground between them, both inflexible on crucial issues, there was little chance of any understanding being reached.

Indeed, the Communist leaders soon came to view Hurley's presence as actually making things worse, believing that he was instrumental in hardening the attitude of the hierarchy, in maintaining the discipline of the clergy and preventing attempts to draw away any who might have been more open to compromise on the tough line initiated by Stepinac. Certainly Hurley approved Stepinac's stance, and encouraged its continuation. This became more important after Stepinac's arrest, when, the Communists believed, Hurley actually took over the real leadership of the Yugoslav episcopate, so as to ensure that it kept to the combative path of the Pope and of Stepinac.[172]

Tito's angry response to the September pastoral letter illustrated the gulf that separated them. He was not interested in addressing the grievances of the bishops, but

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[169]Živojinović, pp. 154 and 158-159.

[170]Telegramme from Deakin of 1 February, 1946. PRO FO371/59429, R1737.

[171]Živojinović, pp. 157-159.

[172]Kisić-Kolanović, "Vrijeme političke represije", p. 21; Živojinović, pp. 160-161.

rather attacked them, concentrating on their wartime stance. He accused them of double standards, in that they declared themselves ready to sacrifice themselves now, but had not issued a pastoral letter against the killings of Serbs in the NDH, implying that they had been silent then not from fear, but because they supported the Ustashas. When he had promised not to interfere in the Church's internal affairs he had expected the bishops to take a lead in expiating the shame which the Ustashas had brought upon Croatia.[173] Clearly he understood the question of an accommodation with the Church solely in terms of the limited role which he was prepared to permit it. Any other rights to which the Church was accustomed were not up for discussion.

Alleged Subversive Activities of the Church

Even before the Partisans entered Zagreb, their attitude towards the Catholic hierarchy had been soured by the alleged involvement of the bishops in the various schemes to preserve the NDH, as the Ustashas sought to retrieve their position with the help of the hierarchy, as already described. It also appeared to the Communists that the higher clergy continued in its attempts to undermine them after they had taken power, making the Church a focus of opposition to the regime. Although western intervention to prevent a Communist takeover did not materialize, Pallua recorded that many in Zagreb were still expecting it for months after the war. According to him, Stepinac was among them, counting the whole time on something illusory.[174] As noted earlier, Tito was much preoccupied with this possibility at the time of his meetings with the delegation of the clergy and with Stepinac at the beginning of June 1945, when the crisis over Trieste was at its height and the possibility of a clash with the British seemed real. Blažević later

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[173]*Borba*, 25 October, 1945.

[174]Pallua, tape 2, pp. 29, 36 and 39.

asserted that all of the major trials in the immediate post-war period were aimed to stop the Communists' enemies from, with the help of the west, defeating the revolution.[175]

The Trieste issue hung in the background of Church - State relations in Yugoslavia for more than a year after the war, and the Communists took the threat of outside intervention very seriously, as well as any inclination on the part of their internal enemies to try to take advantage of it. Petranović observed that:-

> The clergy gained the impression of the temporariness of the new state from the tension between the great powers, which was reflected also on this territory, particularly in the strain in relations between the DFJ [Democratic Federal Yugoslavia] and the Anglo-Saxon powers in connection with the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army from Trieste.[176]

Petranović supports this contention by referring to a conversation in January 1946 between the French Consul in Zagreb and the Dominican Provincial. The former warned that the policy being pursued by the Church of confrontation with the regime was mistaken, but the latter replied that the chaotic circumstances of the post-war period made it the best time to strike a blow against the regime.[177]

Such expectations that the regime could prove to be only temporary were widespread among the clergy. In February 1946, the Croatian Interior Ministry warned that some priests were spreading hostile propaganda and false news of imminent foreign intervention.[178] A Religious Commission memorandum noted that the clergy was still expecting a new war.[179] This impression was confirmed by a Croatian priest who was in Rome after the war:-

> There was widespread optimism, he said, and a firm belief that the western powers would soon launch a new war against Communism, and topple Tito's regime. The Ustashi high

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[175]Kisić-Kolanović, "Vrijeme političke represije", p. 4.

[176]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", p. 275.

[177]*ibid.* p. 276, citing the archive of the Supreme Court of Croatia, fasc. V. The present author did not find this document, the Supreme Court archive having been moved and rearranged since Petranović conducted his research. Neither are any reports on the conversation to be found in the French Foreign Ministry archive. The report is, however, consistent with Rivoire's expressed concerns regarding the combative stance adopted by the senior clergy.

[178]Letter of 5 February, 1946 to the Religious Commission, HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 265.

[179]Undated. Related to preparations for a trip to Rome. HDA, Rittig, kut. 7, 2/6.

> command thought that their exile would end almost as soon as it had begun, and with western help they would return to create another "independent" Croatian state.[180]

It seems that the exiled Ustasha leaders were encouraged in this belief by the attitude of western intelligence services and Vatican officials. American intelligence operatives reported that their British and French counterparts were convinced that a war with the Soviets was imminent, and were therefore giving succour to any anti-Communist East Europeans, including Ustashas.[181] One report gives a vivid impression of the attitude of at least elements within the Catholic Church:-

> In the eyes of the Vatican, Pavelić is a militant Catholic, a man who erred, but who erred fighting for Catholicism. It is for this reason that [Pavelić] now enjoys Vatican protection... The extradition of Pavelić would only weaken the forces fighting atheism and aid Communism in its fight against the Church.[182]

The Yugoslavs, who had good intelligence as to the movements of Ustasha leaders after the war, saw the failure to extradite Pavelić (who spent some time in the British zone of Austria before moving on to Rome) as evidence that he and his supporters were being used by the British and the Vatican in an anti-Communist crusade. In this, the British intelligence service was pursuing a line which was out of step with official Foreign Office policy, which was to hand over all proven Ustashas to Yugoslavia. The Vatican was also at the centre of a network which organized the escapes of numerous East European Fascists, including Croats, in the immediate post-war period. A central figure in these efforts was Fr. Krunoslav Draganović, a Croat priest from Bosnia, who operated from the Croatian College of St. Jerome in Rome.[183]

The extent of the involvement of senior Vatican figures in the activities of Draganović is uncertain, though they must have been aware of them, and they at least tolerated them benignly. Various Catholic and Ustasha sources in Rome, including Mgr. Milan Simčić and Ivo Omrčanin, a former NDH official, asserted that Draganović was close to

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[180]Mark Aarons and John Loftus, *Ratlines: How the Vatican's Nazi Networks Betrayed Western Intelligence to the Soviets* (Heinemann, 1991), p. 124. Interview with Mgr. Milan Simčić.

[181]*ibid.* pp. 52-56.

[182]*ibid.* p. 83. Quoting from the CIC (Counter Intelligence Corps) file on Pavelić.

[183]*ibid.* pp. 74-85; 89-95; 99-112.

Montini, and that Montini was aware of his network. Simčić dismissed the notion that Montini had any contact with Pavelić, and it seems that he was not connected with the arrangements for Pavelić's concealment and flight.[184] But the goings-on in the Vatican at the time undoubtedly fuelled the suspicion of Communists towards the Catholic Church within Yugoslavia.

Whatever his feelings about the involvement of the clergy in politics, Stepinac found himself being cast in the role of focus of the opposition in Croatia after the war. The HSS was not able to mount an effective opposition. Members who tried to act independently of the Communist-dominated front organization were harassed, while large numbers of its supporters were disenfranchised on the pretext of having been compromised by cooperation with the Ustashas. Maček was continually attacked in the press, while the Communist initiated Executive Committee of the HSS was upgraded and re-named the Croat Republican Peasant Party (HRSS), and given more of an appearance of a genuine party. The HSS leaders were fragmented, with some such as Šubašić trying to work within the Popular Front, and another group around Radić's widow, Marija Radić, trying to campaign outside it. Šubašić's failure to unite those opposed to the KPJ was part of the problem. He refused to protect HSS leaders such as Magovac and Košutić who had tried to come to terms with the Communists but had fallen foul of them before the end of the war. He soon went the same way. Šubašić also failed to cooperate meaningfully with the Serbian opposition around Milan Grol and the newspaper *Demokratija*, although they had much in common and were experiencing many of the same problems.

But what ever the weaknesses in Šubašić's approach, ultimately the Communists were never going to allow him seriously to undermine their plans. He was prevented from going to Paris for discussions with Maček, and a few days later, objecting that Tito had failed to carry out the provisions of their agreement, he resigned and advised HSS followers to reject the Popular Front list at the elections (which were announced on 6

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[184] *ibid.* pp. 85 and 113-118; Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: the First Modern Pope* (Harper Collins, 1993), pp. 209-210.

September 1945, and took place on 11 November). By the end of September, it was clear that the HSS would not be able to oppose the Communists, and, in common with the Belgrade opposition, its leaders called for a boycott of the election.[185]

With other opponents thus emasculated it was really only the Catholic Church, the one legal independent institution, which remained to provide a focus for opposition for those who would obstruct the Communists' plans. Indeed, Stepinac's protests at this time went further than strictly religious matters, as he objected to violations of freedoms and injustices.[186] And it was through religious questions, such as votes to retain religious education, and through demonstrations of devotion to Stepinac himself, as a symbol of opposition to the new regime, that people were best able to express their dissatisfaction with Communist rule. Gaillard reported that "if in the strictly political domain no open resistance manifested itself, religious questions revealed clearly the wishes of the majority of the population." He clarified the meaning of the expressions of attachment to Stepinac thus: "Attachment to the Church, certainly, but especially hostility to the political regime".[187]

As noted earlier, Stepinac was extremely sceptical as to the chances of achieving an agreement with a Communist regime, and the Communists quickly confirmed his fears. Thus, in his determination to defend the Church, it was very easy for him to slip into the role of opposition figurehead. Pallua, of whom, unlike Rittig, there was never any doubt that his loyalty was to the Church rather than to the regime which employed him, begged Stepinac not to place himself in the first ranks of the opposition.[188] Pallua feared Stepinac's hastiness, as in the case of the rector of a junior seminary, most of whose

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[185]Irvine, pp. 241-249; Clissold, *Croatian Memoirs*, pp. 166-167.

[186]Kisić-Kolanović, "Problem legitimeta", pp. 178 and 182-183.

[187]Report by Gaillard of 18 August, 1945. FM, Paris, vol. 30, docs. 34-38.

[188]Pallua, tape 2, pp. 29-30.

space had been taken over, but who was reluctant to go to Stepinac, fearing his hasty reaction.[189]

But Stepinac believed that there were questions regarding which the Church had a right to raise its voice, as he explained in a circular in September 1944: respect of the person as a free and independent individual; freedom and respect for religion; freedom and respect for every race and nation, including the inalienable right of national minorities to live and prosper; and the right to private property, as the basis of the freedom of the individual and the independence of the family.[190] There was, immediately after the end of the war, a great deal of anxiety in Zagreb, with all the arrests, disappearances etc. Stepinac undoubtedly saw it as the Church's right to speak out on these matters, and on measures directed against the Church, such as restrictions on religious education and land reform. But the collection, by the staff of the Archbishop's palace, of lists of detainees, and Stepinac's opposition to the rulings on religious education and land reform were seen by the Communists as attempts falsely to portray the Church as being under attack, and thus to galvanize opposition to the regime.[191]

In his sermons and circulars at this time, Stepinac frequently referred to the difficult conditions, seeing them as punishment from God. In a circular in July 1945, he stressed the need for people to pray and keep up their devotions in the new, difficult circumstances. Priests should stay in contact with their flock, but should beware of any risk of being denounced by malicious people. They should stick strictly to their pastoral duties, and avoid any allusion to worldly matters in their sermons, preaching only the teachings of Christianity and the word of the apostles. It would be better if they could write out their sermons, and read them word for word, so that they could later produce

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[189]Memo from Pallua to Rittig, 5 November, 1945. HDA, Rittig, kut. 4, 2/3, file I.

[190]Circular of 14 September, 44. HDA, Politeo, docs. 66-69.

[191]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", pp. 282-283.

the text if they were called to account. Any injustices or actions against Church property or the priests themselves should be reported to the Zagreb See.

> Brother priests! Whatever befalls us, let us not lose heart, as if trials and afflictions come our way, the Lord is near us. Thus in our daily prayers, especially in the holy Mass and in the breviary, let us cry to the Lord, that these days be shortened and that the sun of God's mercy shine upon us and upon our faithful."[192]

Unsurprisingly, the Communists regarded such a portrayal of a clergy under threat as extremely provocative. The prayer that these days be shortened was especially menacing, appearing to confirm that Stepinac and many of the clergy hoped that Communist rule would be short-lived. There were other such provocations. In September 1945, a Zagreb religious newspaper contained the following passage: "What the human race has considered inviolable has been destroyed in our souls, and new facts have arisen which are quite foreign and unknown to the human soul ... Around us ruins, in us emptiness. Revolution in the world, in our souls despair."[193] The article went on to suggest that the only salvation lay in spiritual regeneration, but it was clear that the passage was a thinly veiled lament at the state of worldly affairs.

The annual pilgrimage from Zagreb to the shrine at Marija Bistrica in July 1945 was the occasion for a popular outpouring of devotion to the Church and to Stepinac, and of opposition to Communist rule. Masucci wrote that it was a sight to bring tears to the eyes.

> The whole of Zagreb gathered in the shadow of the Catholic Church to bear witness before everyone that they are faithful children of Catholic Croatia, of that people whom one holy Pope proclaimed the "rampart of Christianity", and which even at the price of the spilling of its blood wishes to remain so.
>
> The appearance of Archbishop Stepinac was greeted with a thunderous "Long live the Archbishop!"[194]

The pilgrimage attracted tens of thousands of people, and in the course of the procession there were instances of pro-Ustasha demonstrations. Stepinac gave a sermon in which he repeated many of the themes of his sermons and circulars at that

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[192]Circular of 6 July, 1945. HDA, Politeo, docs. 70-71.

[193]*Dobri pastir*, 23 Sept, 1945, quoted by Deakin, 3 Oct, 1945, PRO, FO371/48912, R17283.

[194]Masucci, p. 213.

time, stressing the difficult conditions, which were a punishment from God for having forgotten him and for being sunk in sin.[195] Stepinac was not a demagogue, but in the circumstances the Communists regarded his words as inflammatory. Many of the pilgrims were from the families of those who had been killed or arrested, or had disappeared. The authorities were not yet sure of their control of the situation, and this show of mass discontent was a serious shock to them.[196]

Allegations of miracles, such as apparitions of the Virgin Mary calling for a halt to the bloodshed, also irritated the authorities, who saw them as attempts to incite unrest among the people.[197] In a speech in July 1946, Tito attacked the clergy for using apparitions as a means of attacking the regime, asking "but where were these saints when the children of our country perished by the thousands? Where were they when our people needed saving?"[198] Bakarić later attacked the unscrupulous use of propaganda by the clergy, such as the vulgarization of the Fatima visions. He singled out Akšamović as the only bishop who had spoken out against the use of miracles to trouble the people.[199]

So the Communists accused Stepinac and other members of the clergy of using a range of methods to foment discontent and encourage opposition. Indeed, independent observers who were far from being sympathizers of the Communist regime perceived that Stepinac increasingly adopted a confrontational posture towards the authorities. Rivoire described him as the one "militant", whose defiance contrasted with the cautious reserve of the opposition. After Stepinac's letter to Tito of 24 November 1945, Rivoire

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[195]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", p. 283.

[196]Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, pp. 122-123.

[197]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", p. 283.

[198]Reported by Payart, 31 July, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 190-192.

[199]*Vjesnik*, 29 January, 1947.

remarked that "battle lines" had been drawn, and that if Tito's reaction was violent, he would merely be playing the game of the "combative prelate" ("ce prélat bretteur").[200]

Of course, the greatest complaint of the authorities was over the September pastoral letter. An article in the Croatian press described it as the "programme of Fascist Reaction".[201] Coming as it did at a sensitive time, shortly before the holding of elections to the Constituent Assembly, and when political opposition figures were calling for a boycott, it seemed to the Communists that the letter was part of a coordinated effort to step up the pressure on them, as a deliberate attempt to discredit the regime and to incite opposition to it.[202]

To the Communists it seemed that the hostile activities of the clergy within the country went beyond the mere sowing of discontent and encouragement of opposition. In the late summer of 1945, a number of exiled Ustashas infiltrated back into Yugoslavia, linking with groups which had remained in the country (known as "Križari" - "Crusaders").[203] One of the main accusations in the trial of Stepinac was that he "participated directly in the work of these terrorist organizations, whose headquarters is the Archiepiscopal Palace."[204] In fact, the term Križari was applied to a variety of types of disturbances, some of them more organized than others. The Communists often used it, seeking to link the Catholic Church with HSS figures such as Marija Radić and Košutić's wife, Mira Košutić, in an organized movement to oust them from power. There were groups which used the name, operating under the slogan "in the struggle for Christ against the Communists" ("u borbi za Krista protiv komunista"). Most of them relied on

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[200]Reports from Rivoire of 17 Nov and 20 Dec, 1945. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 75 and 97-98.

[201] *Vjesnik*, 19 December, 1945.

[202]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", pp. 295-298.

[203]*ibid*. p. 299.

[204]The indictment against Stepinac. Pattee, Doc. A, p. 189.

the help of the population, especially the families of killed Ustashas or domobrani, for food and warnings of moves against them.[205]

Small, isolated and uncoordinated, these groups never presented a real threat, although the Communists made much of them. A report from the British consulate in Zagreb in the summer of 1946 said that much was being made of the Križari, but that their activities were exaggerated. But it acknowledged that: "disturbances are taking place in many villages as a result of the disappearance or arrest by night for unknown reasons of peasants who are outspoken in their hostility to the regime. Reprisals are taking place, and Communists have been murdered."[206] Communist sources noted killings of Party workers and burnings of the buildings of village Peoples' committees and cooperatives by "bandit groups" supported by the clergy. They referred to contacts between the clergy, Ustashas and Križari, and the formation of groups of believers to prevent the harassment of the clergy.[207]

Certainly some priests were in direct contact with Križari groups. Thus Fr. Eduard Žilić, a Bosnian Franciscan, reported that it had been established that Fr. Sclafhausen had helped the Križari.[208] A letter to Rittig in June 1946 described the situation in Djakovo, including the "reactionary activity" of the monastery there and of certain priests who had not accepted the new order. In such activities the relatives of killed and exiled Ustashas played a prominent role.[209] At his trial, Fr. Ivan Čondrić from Sarajevo admitted that in August 1945 he set about organizing links between those who were opposing the regime, including people in the woods. He saw the circumstances as right, given the

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[205]Kisić-Kolanović, "Vrijeme političke represije", pp. 21-22.

[206]Report of 5 June, 1945. PRO, FO371/59532, R9233.

[207]Nada Kisić-Kolanović, "Problem legitimeta političkog sustava", p. 183.

[208]Religious Affairs Commission memorandum of 25 January, 1946. HDA, VK, kut. 1, doc.15.

[209]Letter from one Lukić of 24 June, 1946. HDA, VK, kut. 1, doc. 170.

widespread dissatisfaction, and based his work upon the expectation of armed British intervention.[210]

There were also direct links between the Križari and individuals in the Archbishop's palace. Stepinac's secretary, Šalić, the catechists Josip Šimečki and Josip Crnković and Fr. Djuro Marić, who stayed in the Archbishop's palace for a time after the war, were in contact with various Ustashas, and helped bring them into contact with each other and with Križari groups. They supplied false papers and organized the collection of materials for those groups. In October 1945, a ceremony was held in a chapel in the palace to bless a flag for a Križari group.[211] However, it has been speculated that this incident may have originated as an OZNA ploy to ensnare the palace staff, and that it was OZNA that actually ordered the flag. The flag was alleged to have been ordered for a Križari group led by Martin Mesarov, a former HSS official. However, Mesarov had already been arrested, and there was no Mesarov group.[212]

When the leading Ustasha, Erih Lisak, returned to Yugoslavia he went straight to the palace, contacting Šalić and Stepinac. Lisak acknowledged that he went to the palace in search of information about the situation in the country, but denied that he talked to Stepinac about the Ustasha - Križari groups in the woods. He received information from Šalić and Masucci, including a summary of the September pastoral letter.[213] What was particularly incriminating from the point of view of the authorities was that Lisak's visit coincided with the Bishops' conference in September 1945. It seemed that rather than a coincidence, this was part of a premeditated plot to bring as much pressure as possible upon the regime at a particularly sensitive time; that the pastoral letter was intended to

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[210] *Sudjenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini*, pp. 108-110.

[211] *ibid.* pp. 12-18.

[212] Zdenko Radelić, "Komunisti, Križari i Katolička Crkva u Hrvatskoj, 1945. - 1946. godine." (in *Dijalog povjesničara - istoričara 2*, Zagreb, 2000).

[213] *ibid.* pp. 38-45.

incite the populace to a rebellion which would coincide with the stepping up of Križari activities.[214]

Stepinac later disassociated himself from the events at the palace. He insisted that he had not known who Lisak was until he actually met him, and that they had not discussed anything to do with the Križari. He had been unaware of the existence in the palace of a depot for supplying the Križari, or of a channel for Ustashas arriving in the country. It was without his knowledge or approval.[215] It seems unlikely that Stepinac was directly involved in the activities in the palace, although he was surely aware of them. Šalić recalled that when he told Stepinac about the blessing of the flag he disapproved on account of the danger.[216] The important point is that the authorities were not convinced. They found further cause for suspicion in the fact that an emissary of Milan Grol visited the palace.[217] This seemed to justify their fears of a wider coordinated plot to undermine them, in which the opposition in Serbia and Croatia were linked, with the threads leading to the Archbishop's palace in Zagreb.

Another piece of evidence used by the Communists against the clergy at the time concerned the finding of a horde of Ustasha loot buried in the Franciscan house in Zagreb. The contents included jewellery, gold teeth etc. pillaged from Ustasha victims during the war. The Communists had suspected that there was something hidden there, but the Franciscans had denied it until, in January 1946, it was dug up in the presence of the provincial and other friars. To the Communists it seemed that this treasure was being kept safe until the expected return of the Ustashas, and for the financing of Križari activities. Zagreb Franciscans were also accused of sheltering Ustasha priests trying to

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[214]Petranović, "Aktivnost rimokatoličkog klera", pp. 299-300.

[215]Stepinac's circular of 17 December, 1945, responding to accusations made by Bakarić in *Vjesnik*, 16 December, 1945. HDA, Politeo, docs. 485-486.

[216]*Sudjenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini*, pp. 71-72.

[217]*ibid.* pp. 79-80.

escape the country, and of helping to supply and to provide connections between Križari groups.[218]

The clergy were accused of generally affording moral support to the Križari, and of organizing and supplying them through monasteries and parish offices, with all contacts being centred upon the Archbishop's palace. The authorities strove to demonstrate Stepinac's overall responsibility for this, even if there was no evidence of any direct involvement on his part. Thus, at Stepinac's trial, a statement made by Fr. Modesto Martinčić, provincial of the Franciscans in Zagreb, who was one of Stepinac's co-defendants, was quoted, in which he claimed that the attitude and statements of Stepinac was one of the main reasons why some priests incited and participated in armed actions.[219] At his trial in August 1946, Fr. Dragutin Gazivoda spoke in a similar vein:-

> The position of Stepinac towards the people's authorities was one of the basic reasons why the lower clergy adopted such a position, because the communications and directives which were coming from Stepinac himself were such that they were intended to drag the whole clergy into an open struggle, a really hostile position towards the current authorities and the programme of the present government. It is my personal opinion that if the representative of the Church in Croatia had taken a more moderate position, a position of cooperation, the lower clergy would have followed.[220]

While this statement was clearly made by a man before a rigged trial, pressurized and anxious to save himself, its content cannot be entirely dismissed. Stepinac, seeing the Church under attack, did adopt a confrontational posture towards the regime. He shared the hopes of many in Croatia at the time that a change in the international situation could result in the fall of the regime in Yugoslavia. As we have seen, he did, for various reasons, find himself at the forefront of the opponents of the regime in Croatia. His hostile attitude towards the regime was clear to all, including members of the clergy who were more actively involved in trying to bring about its downfall. Insecure as they still felt at this stage, the Communists saw an international plot involving the "western

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[218]*ibid.* pp. 18-23; report on the finding of the treasure from Rivoire, 31/1/46. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 141-145.

[219]*Sudjenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini*, p. 6.

[220]*ibid.* pp. 84-85.

imperialist powers", the Vatican, the émigré Ustashas, and the remnants of the "internal forces of reaction", to undermine and overthrow the regime.[221] Although they undoubtedly believed that Stepinac was guilty of the charges laid against him, the important thing was the threat which he represented.

The Campaign Against Stepinac

Following the September pastoral letter, real attempts at reaching an accommodation were effectively abandoned. There was a brief lull following the letter, with Bakarić still inclined towards caution, recognizing the influence of the Church among most of the Croatian people, and wishing to avoid antagonizing them unduly with a full offensive against the Church. Thus his first reaction to the letter, at a press conference on 6 October 1945, was relatively restrained in tone. He denied that the Church was persecuted, insisted that every effort was made to satisfy the religious needs of the people, and claimed that the demands of the Church leaders were already being addressed. He claimed that, the letter, with its pro-Ustasha spirit, notwithstanding, there had been progress in settling Church-State relations. But Tito seems to have concluded that a clash with Stepinac was unavoidable, hence the much sharper and more menacing tone of his response of 25 October, as already noted.[222] According to Djilas, following the pastoral letter Tito, both in public and in private, signalled a much tougher stance towards the Catholic Church, and Bakarić followed.[223]

Following Tito's lead, Bakarić took up the cudgels in his press conference of 15 December (mentioned earlier). There followed a shrill press campaign against the higher clergy, and Stepinac in particular. Strongly featured in these were the clergy's alleged Fascist leanings, wartime collaboration and complicity in Ustasha crimes, as well as

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[221]Alexander, *Church and State*, p. 117.

[222]Irvine, pp. 240-241; reports on Bakarić's press conference, FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 33-34 and 43; Tito's response, *Borba*, 25 October, 1945.

[223]Milovan Djilas, *Vlast*, p. 33.

references to the post-war goings-on in the Archbishop's palace. They included warnings that Stepinac would have to answer for his crimes. The attacks also included gross caricatures with, in the words of Rivoire, "no regard for taste".[224] Another central feature of these attacks was repeated accusations that the bishops were trying to avoid the agrarian reform, to preserve their privileged lives at the expense of the just aspirations of the peasantry to acquire more land. For example, in one article Stepinac was accused of showing more mercy towards Lisak than towards Croatian peasants who wanted Kaptol (the Zagreb street where the Cathedral, the Archbishop's palace and various other Church institutions are situated) land. Thus the Communists sought to undermine the high regard in which the Church was held among the large majority of the Croatian people (a tactic which, according to Rivoire, did not succeed).[225]

The annoyance of the authorities at the avoidance of agrarian reform by increasing the number of parishes, each of which would be entitled to the legally permitted minimum of land, has already been mentioned. Their opposition to this tactic turned violent. At the beginning of November 1945, Stepinac received a warning from an OZNA officer that if he went to the opening of a new parish at Zaprešić, just outside Zagreb, he would be attacked.[226] Stepinac ignored the warning, and on 4 November went to Zaprešić as planned. As he arrived, his car was attacked by a mob, and pelted with stones and eggs. Reports as to what exactly happened were different on the two sides. Stepinac quickly withdrew, but after he left there was a confrontation in which the parish priest was beaten up and shots were fired, for which the priest was blamed, an accusation hotly denied by Stepinac, who claimed that the gun was planted on him. Stepinac wrote a sharp

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[224]Examples in *Vjesnik*, 19 Dec and 11 Nov, 1946; radio broadcast from Belgrade, 1 Jan, 1946, reported at FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 118-122; report from Rivoire of 20 Dec, 1945, FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 97-98.

[225]Article in *Vjesnik* of 11 Jan, 1946; letter from Rivoire of 27 Jan, 1946, FM, Paris, vol. 34, doc. 140.

[226]Benigar, p. 505.

complaint to Bakarić concerning the incident, and in a circular to the clergy explained that in future he would remain in the palace.[227]

At this time there were also orchestrated demonstrations in Zagreb, calling for the arrest of Stepinac. Meanwhile posters appeared in the streets in the same vein. It was widely expected that the arrest of Stepinac was imminent.[228] Tito, it appears, was still hoping that there might be another way. Hurley arrived in January, and Tito pressed him to have Stepinac withdrawn, warning that if he were not, then he would be arrested.[229] Hurley offered Stepinac the chance to leave, telling him that the Pope would receive him "brotherly" if he decided to come to Rome, and would stand behind him if he decided to stay.[230] Stepinac was determined to remain.

In the spring of 1946, the press campaign abated. Payart reported that the Church was still persecuted, though by more subtle means, through attacks on its source of renewal, the seminaries. Deprived of their property, they were now forbidden to take collections. The authorities also tried to encourage dissidents among the lower clergy, though with little success. The campaign against Stepinac ceased in Belgrade, while in Zagreb it was relegated to the inside pages of the newspapers. But the dossier had only been filed, and could be reopened at any time.[231]

A French Foreign Ministry memorandum on the state of religion in Yugoslavia noted that the Communists were aware of the popularity of Stepinac, and of the attachment of the peasants to their priests. While the separation of Church and State and the agrarian reform certainly diminished the Church's temporal power in the long term, in the meantime its prestige and influence had if anything been increased by the attacks of the

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[227]Account of the incident at Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 134; letter from Stepinac to Bakarić of 10 November, 1945 on the attack, Kisić-Kolanović, "Pisma zagrebačkoga nadbiskupa", pp. 171-174; Stepinac's circular of 7 November, 1945, HDA, Politeo, doc. 481; government's account in *Vjesnik*, 7 November, 1945.

[228]Telegramme of 19 January, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, doc. 138.

[229]As Tito told a delegation from the American churches on 3 August, 1947. JBT, I - 2 - a/72.

[230]Information given to Pallua by Canon Slamić. Pallua, tape 3, p. 3.

[231]Telegramme from Payart of 13 April, 1946. FM, Paris, Vol. 34, docs. 162-163.

State against it. The Communist leaders still needed to take account of the power of the Church. Whether they responded to the threat which they perceived from the Church with brutality or with caution depended, the memorandum concluded, on the evolution of the international situation.[232]

This was a reference to the course of the negotiations in Paris over the disposition of Trieste and the Julian region, as the Yugoslav regime felt under some constraint to show moderation while it still hoped to gain something from the Allies. In July 1946, following the deliberations of a Commission of Experts, the Council of Foreign Ministers of the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union announced its decision regarding the new Italo-Yugoslav border and the formation of the Free Territory of Trieste. The new line was largely based on the French proposal, and was much more favourable to Yugoslavia than the American or British suggestions, though less so than that of the Soviet Union. In fact neither Italy nor Yugoslavia was satisfied.[233]

The Yugoslav government regarded the outcome of the peace conference very bitterly, and they did not conceal their frustration. It was precisely at this time that attacks on Stepinac and the Church picked up again, with renewed vigour. Observers clearly connected events in Paris with the new offensive against the Church, which culminated in the arrest of Stepinac in September 1946. One senior party official admitted that the arrest was in deliberate defiance of the West, stating that "We must recognize that we can expect nothing more from the Paris peace conference. So be it! ... We shall look after ourselves, we alone!" ("nous nous suffirons à nous-mêmes, rien qu'à nous-mêmes").[234]

Another reason why attacks on the Church picked up at this point was an article in the Vatican newspaper *Osservatore Romano* on 21 June 1946, which contained a

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[232]Memorandum of 8 February, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 148-151.

[233]Bogdan C. Novak, *Trieste, 1941-1954*, pp. 240-247.

[234]Recorded by the French Consul in Zagreb, 28 Sept, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 247-252.

comprehensive attack on the Yugoslav regime. The Yugoslav authorities reacted angrily, and considered expelling Hurley, whom they blamed.[235] Disturbed by this prospect, Rittig tried to defend the interests of the Church in his usual way, mixing attacks upon elements within the Church with expressions of optimism that things were moving in a positive direction. Thus the new offensive against the Church opened with a speech by Rittig, in which he blamed the higher clergy for the poor state of Church - State relations, for having allegedly failed to take up Tito on his offer of June 1945. He also attacked fanatical younger priests who had maintained their links with émigré Ustashas and Križari, harming the interests of the Church and of the people. But he did not believe that the Holy See supported such policies, putting his faith in the proposed law on religious communities and the correct relations between the Holy See and Yugoslavia.[236]

During a long tour of the country during July, Tito repeatedly returned to attacks upon the Church, with a ferocity unknown until then. He warned of a "diabolical union" of domestic and international reaction, which "a vast clero-fascist conspiracy supports and animates throughout the World." Clearly the disappointments in Paris were much on Tito's mind when he accused the "forces of reaction", centred on the HSS and the Catholic Church, of using any means to gain power, including damaging the country's vital interests with regard to Trieste and Istria. He warned that the authorities would not show weakness, and that no ecclesiastical immunity would be able to protect those who attacked the country's interests. Payart asked why Tito chose that time to begin a new offensive? He speculated that, frustrated by the course of events in Paris and aware of the widespread discontent in Croatia, Yugoslavia's leaders were determined to demonstrate that it would not be possible for their enemies to take advantage of their difficulties and their loss of face over Trieste. Tito had stated that "it is under the cassock that one can find the sources of the discontent that is disseminated artificially among the

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[235]Živojinović, p. 160.

[236]Speech reported in *Vjesnik*, 1 July, 1946.

people", and with the apparent failure of his policy towards Trieste he no longer needed to appear liberal in the eyes of the World. The time to cut down the Communists' adversaries had come.[237]

It is also notable that attacks on the Catholic Church as a centre of "reactionary" and "hegemonistic" circles in the World were stepped up in the Soviet union at this time.[238] Emphasis on the international dimension in the Yugoslav press continued. Thus an article in mid-September, following the start of the trial of Lisak, Šalić etc. (Stepinac was added to the list of defendants a few days later) saw Stepinac at the centre of a calculated plan, organizing the Križari in expectation of intervention over the Trieste question.[239]

At the same time as attacks on the clergy were stepped up in the press during 1946, so there were frequent instances of physical attacks on them. Thus, in January 1946 Bonefačić complained about attacks upon priests in the Split diocese, which frequently followed organized demonstrations against the Church. In February, the Franciscan Provincial in Split informed the Religious Commission of the murder of a priest near Drniš, in the Šibenik diocese, in which members of the town People's Committee were implicated, and of an attack on another priest near Knin, in which local members of the Communist youth organization (SKOJ) were involved. Salis reported an attack on the priest's house in Stenjevac on 23 February, and appealed that measures be taken, "that it will not appear that the priestly estate is without defence or personal freedom in this state".[240]

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[237]Letter from Payart of 31 July, 1946, FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 190-192; report in *Vjesnik*, 17 July, 1946, on speech by Tito in Cetinje.

[238]Tass report attacking the Papal representative in Poland and the Archbishop of Milan, in *Vjesnik*, 21 July, 1946.

[239]*Vjesnik*, 16 September, 1946.

[240]Letter from Bonefačić to the Religious Commission of 30 January, 1946 and report to the Regional People's Committee of 27 January, 1946, HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 200; letter from the Franciscan Provincial in Split of 21 February, 1946, HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 338; letter from Salis to the Religious Commission of 1 March, 1946, HDA, VK, kut. 5, doc. 394.

In June 1946, the authorities in Split allowed the annual "Corpus Christi" procession to go ahead. According to the French Consul in Split, Charles Boutant, it was a grand occasion, presided over by Bonefačić with much pomp. Tito reacted furiously to it, claiming it had assumed the character of an opposition demonstration and a political provocation. Boutant saw it as the reaction of the population against the religious policies of the regime. He quoted a priest who observed ironically that "the Ustasha government built churches, but they remained empty. As regards the faith, the present government is perhaps the one that has done the most for the Church."[241]

When it came to an annual procession of a statue of the Lady of Bistrica through the region of Zagorje (around Zagreb) the authorities showed less tolerance. The procession was stopped by the police in Klanjec, and several people, including a priest, arrested, then released on condition that they calm the people, as the procession was banned. According to the Church's version of events, they stayed for two days in Klanjec, during which time they were subjected to organized provocations. They then returned to Zagreb, and placed the statue in the cathedral, where large numbers came to pay homage to it. During the night of 28 August, it was stolen from the cathedral, and was smashed, the pieces being found scattered around the surrounding streets. A large crowd gathered before the cathedral, and there were instances of rebellious slogans being shouted. The police accused Stepinac of being the instigator, and arrested the sacristan and two nuns.

The Communists responded with another attack upon the record of the clergy, accusing certain priests of spreading the false impression that pilgrimages to Marija Bistrica were forbidden. There had, however, been cases of processions being transformed by certain priests into "clero-fascist demonstrations". The main thrust of the article which contained this attack was that these anti-national clergy represented no danger, and their efforts were pitiful, because the people saw through their activities. The

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[241]Letter from Boutant of 21 June, 1946, FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 178-179; report by Payart on speech by Tito in July 1946, FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 190-192.

old times would never return.[242] Clearly the regime was straining to assert its confidence, which in itself suggests continued nervousness at the open displays of defiance which continued to surround Church events.

There were also further reports of violent attacks on members of the clergy during the summer and autumn of 1946. For example, Salis informed the Religious Commission that Fr. Franjo Ljubetić was attacked in late August, while Fr. Josip Ormuž was beaten up near Krapina on 8 September. On 15 September, Fr. Aleksandar Cavlek was taken from his flat and killed. On 5 October, a catechist was murdered in the village of Savski Dol at a time when it was surrounded by police, and on 15 November two priests received a severe beating from uniformed policemen at Popovača, near Bjelovar.[243]

Bonefačić also complained of violent incidents in Dalmatia.[244] Boutant reported that Bishop Pušić of Hvar was pelted with eggs on the island of Brač, by students who had followed him there from Split. However, it was Boutant's impression that the clergy in Dalmatia were trying to stay distant from events in Zagreb, avoiding confrontations. In general he thought this had resulted in a less tense situation there, as evidenced by the fact that processions in honour of the Virgin took place in Split in August and October.[245]

Indeed, it seems that the attacks on the clergy in Dalmatia were not sanctioned by the senior Croatian authorities. In January 1946, Bakarić upbraided the Regional Committee of the KPH for Dalmatia for attacking all of the bishops like they did Stepinac. This general attack was weakening the campaign against the centre of clerical reaction in Zagreb, he said. They should leave the bishops alone if they did nothing wrong. The following month, Bakarić informed the Dalmatian Party that he had heard that two more priests had been killed, and that members and leaders of the Party were involved. He

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[242]Church's version of the events in a circular read in all churches on 1 September, 1946, FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 199-200; official version in *Vjesnik*, 1 September, 1946.

[243]Two letters from Salis to the Religious Commission of 4 October, 1946, and two of 15 November, 1946. HDA, VK, kut. 7, docs. 1437, 1438 and 1791.

[244]Letters from Bonefačić of 30 July and 15 October 1946. HDA, VK, kut. 7, docs. 1487 and 1538.

[245]Report from Boutant of 23 October, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 35, docs. 86-87.

issued a severe warning, asserting that if it happened again legal action would be taken and the death penalty sought for any involved.[246]

Clearly the campaign against Stepinac reached a new pitch during the summer of 1946, and his arrest came on 18 September. It had been prepared for some time before that. Following the arrest of Lisak, Bakarić wrote to Kardelj on 27 December 1945 that the investigation of his activities had produced enough material to compromise Stepinac and the whole Catholic leadership in Yugoslavia. The aims, he said, were twofold; to cleanse the Church's ranks and to pressurize the Vatican.[247] Bakarić's intentions are somewhat enigmatic. As has been shown, he was inclined to be cautious towards the Church, fearing its powerful influence over the Croatian people, but he followed Tito's example in adopting a sharper attitude at the end of 1945.

Rivoire regarded Bakarić as a moderate. Just after the Zaprešić incident, he visited Stepinac. He found that he was under great strain, but that his attitude was tough, and that he continued to make war ("de guerroyer"). Rivoire admired Stepinac, but was afraid that his approach was intensifying the conflict, which could lead to tragedy. He suggested to Stepinac that Bakarić appeared to be a man of real intelligence, as well as reasonable and moderate, to which Stepinac replied "without doubt, without doubt, but he is only the agent (l'agent d'éxecution") of the Party". Rivoire pressed on, and asked Stepinac if he could inform Bakarić of the esteem in which he held him, to which Stepinac replied "yes, do so if you wish".[248]

According to Pallua, Bakarić told Božo Milanović of the Religious Commission a few days before Stepinac was arrested that he would not be arrested. Pallua believed that Bakarić was opposed to such a step, which would clash with the feelings of the

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[246]HIP, telegrammes, inv. br. 2323, knj. 3, despatch nos. 35 of 21 January, 1946 and 96 of 25 February, 1946, from Bakarić to the Regional Committee of the KPH for Dalmatia.

[247]Radmila Radić, *Verom protiv vere: država i verske zajednice u Srbiji, 1945-1953* (Belgrade, 1995), p. 227.

[248]Report from Rivoire of 22 May, 1945. FM, Paris, vol.. 34, docs. 65-66.

people.[249] Certainly Bakarić must have been aware of the plans that were in motion to bring Stepinac to trial, as his earlier cited letter to Kardelj on the subject shows. Were there perhaps differences at the top of the Party on the approach to Stepinac? Whatever Bakarić was thinking when he spoke to Milanović, the evidence suggests that he preferred to avoid a confrontation with the Church, but he always deferred to Tito's policy line.

Hrnčević judged that given Stepinac's persistent hostility to the regime, there was no choice but to bring him before the court. The trial was carefully prepared. The Croatian OZNA carried out the investigation into the activities of Lisak, Šalić and the others, and it was decided to include Stepinac in the trial. The indictment was principally the work of Blažević, and was, in the words of Hrnčević, in the spirit of the time, infused with propaganda. Hrnčević, Blažević and Duško Brkić, the republican Minister of Justice, visited Aleksandar Ranković (a Serbian communist, who, with Djilas and Kardelj, made up the inner circle of power around Tito) on 10 August 1946 to discuss the impending trial. Tito was in the building at the time, but was preoccupied with the foreign reaction to the recent shooting down of an American aeroplane over Yugoslavia, and did not speak to them about the Stepinac case. The trial began on 9 September. There was a recess when the arrest of Stepinac was announced, and the trial re-commenced on 23 September, with Stepinac in the dock.[250]

Those within the Party leadership who had hoped that they could avoid having to move against Stepinac by persuading Hurley to have him removed to Rome, had clearly been disappointed.[251] Payart saw the arrest as the victory of a hardline faction within the Party, which had disavowed Tito's early attempt at conciliation. It was, however, clear that the initiative in adopting a harsher line towards the Church came from Tito. Payart

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[249]Pallua, tape 3, p. 3.

[250]Hrnčević, pp. 193-196.

[251]General Velebit acknowledged as much to the French ambassador, as the latter reported in his letter of 21 September, 1946. FM, Paris, Vol. 34, docs. 238-241.

was surprised that the authorities should have chosen such a moment, when the deliberations in Paris were still going on, and the regime might have seen it as being in its interest to gain the favour of the powers. When he made this point to Vladimir Velebit, the latter replied with an exaggerated gesture "don't let's talk about that, if you don't mind". Payart regarded Velebit, like Bakarić, as a moderate whose views were out of fashion at that point.[252]

Rivoire believed that the trial was a demonstration of the regime's control over the situation.[253] Nada Kisić-Kolanović agrees, seeing that the trial was intended to make an impression on any hesitant elements in Croatia which were still entertaining hopes of a change of regime with the help of foreign intervention.[254] It was also a blow against Croatian nationalism, which, the Communists believed, received a substantial stimulus from the Catholic hierarchy, and was thus intended to stabilize the situation in Croatia.[255]

Djilas later wrote that the trial was ill-conceived and badly timed. Although he considered that the case against Stepinac was convincing, he thought it lacked credibility to put so much emphasis on his wartime stance, given that he was arrested so long after the war. For him the trial was a failure, in part due to Stepinac's dignified bearing during its course.[256] Pallua too saw it as a major political error by the Party, believing that Bakarić's caution had been wiser, and that Tito later came to the same conclusion.[257]

As to the trial itself, apart from Lisak, whom German intelligence reports show to have been a devoted Ustasha, close to Pavelić, the other defendants mainly served the purpose of incriminating Stepinac as the centre of "clero-fascist" opposition to the regime. Blažević's main emphasis was to demonstrate a link between the Catholic clergy

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[252]Letter from Payart of 21 September, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 238-241.

[253]Letter of 30 September, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 253-265.

[254]Kisić-Kolanović, "Problem legitimeta", p. 183.

[255]Nada Kisić-Kolanović, "Vrijeme političke represije", p. 12.

[256]Milovan Djilas, *Vlast*, pp. 34-35.

[257]Pallua, tape 3, pp. 3-4.

and the Ustashas. Lisak was steadfast, avoiding incriminating Stepinac in any way, but the priests in the trial fulfilled their role in mounting the case against Stepinac very effectively. Šalić was apparently subjected to a long and hard interrogation, which broke him psychologically. Under examination in court he pathetically sought to rehabilitate himself, passing the blame on to Stepinac and expressing repentance for his own activities.[258]

There were uncomfortable moments for Stepinac, particularly when he was questioned regarding the forced conversions of Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism, when he became defensive and flustered.[259] But the trial certainly did not achieve the Communists' ends. Hurley saw it as a great triumph for the Church. He confided to Payart that he had initially had worries as to the solidity of Stepinac's case, and as to his resistance, but he believed that his doubts had proved groundless. He declared that Stepinac had entered the court as head of the Church in Croatia, and emerged a national hero, and in prison his authority would be greater than when he was at liberty.[260]

The Communist authorities hoped that, having removed Stepinac from the scene, they could more easily manipulate the Church, and reach an agreement to their liking direct with Church representatives in the country. They were disappointed, as Hurley now took a leading role in Church affairs. They were still faced with having to deal with the Holy See, which was what they had most objected to all along.[261]

Finally, Stepinac was made an example of because he had not been prepared to fit into the very restricted space which the Communist authorities were prepared to grant to the Church and, more than that, he was seen as the focus of opposition, both domestic and international, in Croatia. In spite of the disapproval of his wartime attitude on the part

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[258]Kisić-Kolanović, "Vrijeme političke represije", pp. 11-12; hearing of the case against Šalić, *Sudjenje Lisaku, Stepincu, Šaliću i družini*, pp. 55-84; telegramme from Payart, 18 September, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 233-234.

[259]Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, pp. 153-156.

[260]Report from Payart of 17 October, 1946. FM, Paris, vol. 35, docs. 43-49.

[261]Mužić, p. 88.

of most of the Communist leaders, this was not the reason for his arrest. It has been suggested that the need to balance the major Serbian show trial, that of Draža Mihailović, with a major Croatian trial may have entered into the equation.[262] If so, given the unavailability of Pavelić, Stepinac was the obvious target for the authorities. One contemporary observer noted that:-

> He is now almost the only man of whom the authorities are afraid... He represents, moreover, the one great opposing force to Communism, the Catholic Church, which has always wielded great influence in Croatia, and which is now regarded as the only possible source of organized opposition to the regime.[263]

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[262]Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, p. 138.

[263]Memorandum on Stepinac by the Foreign Office Research Department of 25 September, 1946. PRO, FO371/59429, R14440.

Chapter Six

Conciliation in Slovenia, 1945-1946

Following the end of the war the Catholic Church in Slovenia was able to pursue an independent course in its relations with the new regime only to a limited degree. Firstly, with Rožman's departure, Slovenia lost its most senior Church figure. Secondly, with Yugoslavia restored, the Slovene dioceses were once again part of the Yugoslav province, its bishops (or vicar-generals) part of the conference of bishops of Yugoslavia, whose president was Stepinac in Zagreb. Stepinac was to be the dominant figure on the Church's side in conducting relations with the new government and in responding to its actions. Thus any inclination on the part of the Slovene hierarchy to pursue a different course would carry only limited weight. Relations between the Church and the Communist authorities in Slovenia depended in large measure on attitudes and events in Zagreb.

This chapter will show that the situation faced by the Church in Slovenia had significant similarities to the situation in Croatia. The aim of the Communists to restrict the Church's role in society was essentially the same. In dealing with the attacks of the authorities, the senior Slovene clergy sought to defend the Church, following the line emanating from Zagreb. However, adopted a lower key, less confrontational strategy. This chapter will discuss the relative effectiveness of this strategy, in comparison with the more combative stance adopted by Stepinac.

New Church and State Authorities in Ljubljana

According to Lenič, Rožman had not intended to leave, but he wavered when, just before the Partisans' arrival, he received an invitation in the name of the Slovene clergy of Carinthia to visit Klagenfurt, in Austria. He consulted the cathedral canons, who

agreed that he should go.[1] His place was taken by the Vicar-General, Ignacij Nadrah, who took responsibility for the Ljubljana diocese until his arrest on 13 June 1945.[2] The new authorities were not favourably disposed towards Nadrah, whom they had identified as an enemy during the war (for example, he was heavily criticized for his oration at the funeral of Ehrlich in May 1942, in which he spoke of the Communist danger[3]).

According to the wish of Rožman, expressed shortly before his departure, the succession was then to fall to the next most senior canon. But as other canons had either left or stepped aside, the leadership fell to Anton Vovk. That the authorities were better disposed towards him has been put down to his relationship to Franc Saleški Finžgar, a priest and writer who was a friend of the OF.[4] Indeed, it has been suggested that Vovk was himself regarded as being relatively pro-Partisan, so much so that Catholic sources have felt it necessary explicitly to refute the notion. Lenič believed that there were no grounds for the belief, and that no one in the diocese had the impression that Vovk had any connection with the Partisans. Another priest who knew him, Anton Trdan, described him as essentially non-political, although in his heart for the Domobrans.[5] Be that as it may, the Communists certainly regarded him as a preferable choice of leader.

In a sense, the departure of Rožman, who had been such a bitter foe of the Communists, presented an opportunity for a new beginning in Slovenia, for relations to be set on a new footing. Indeed, under Vovk the remaining senior Slovene clergy made a considerable shift in their attitude towards the Communist regime. Their approach was

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[1]"Pogovor s škofom dr. Stanislavom Leničem", p. 1937.

[2]Ludovik Ceglar, Nadškof Vovk in njegov čas, 1900-1963: 1. del (Klagenfurt, 1993) (hereafter Ceglar), pp. 115-120.

[3]Ude, pp. 63-65.

[4]Ceglar, pp. 121-123.

[5]*ibid.* pp. 107-110.

pragmatic, avoiding the confrontational stances of Rožman, and far more conciliatory and cautious than the line adopted by Stepinac in Croatia.

The Presidency of SNOS named the new Slovene government on 5 May 1945, and on 9 May the Partisans entered Ljubljana. There then followed, as in other parts of Yugoslavia, a period of ruthless cleansing, which lasted until local elections in July, as the regime sought to consolidate its control. This was mainly carried out by OZNA and the military courts. The Yugoslav Army played a crucial role in the takeover in Slovenia, the scene of the last battles. It involved the destruction of Croatian Ustashas and Domobrans and Serbian Chetniks as well as Slovene anti-Communist forces, which had all congregated in Slovenia in the last phase of the war, and which all attempted to flee to Austria before the final Partisan advance.[6]

As to the clergy, so many of whom, especially in the Ljubljana diocese, were regarded by the Communists as wholly compromised, much of the need for "cleansing" was pre-empted by a mass exodus, quite apart from the numbers of priests who had already been killed. In a memorandum prepared for the western Allies just before the arrival of the Partisans in Ljubljana, Miha Krek estimated that 65 priests and nine seminarians were killed in Slovenia during the period before the take-over, as part of a deliberate plan to "liquidate" all those they considered potential obstacles to their revolution.[7] Lenič reckoned that about 200 priests fled in the last days. Noting that the propaganda of the collaborationist regime concerning the killings of priests was very powerful, and caused much panic, he judged that many of them left completely needlessly, but few ever returned. He was ready to leave himself, but was persuaded not to by Vovk and Nadrah. Rožman reported to Rome that 251 priests fled.[8] The Communists reported that many priests, including those of the Maribor diocese, some of

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[6]Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem oblasti*, pp. 210-217.

[7]Report by Krek of 8 May, 1945. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 1-12.

[8]"Pogovor s škofom dr. Stanislavom Leničem", p. 1937; Ceglar, pp. 117-118.

them priests who had earlier been expelled by the Germans, assisted the Zagreb and Ljubljana Franciscans in sheltering fleeing Ustashas and helping them on their way to the border.[9] It may be that some among the Communists had in mind an even more thorough cleansing of Slovenia of their real or potential opponents. In January 1944 a list of twenty thousand people to be liquidated following the German defeat was uncovered in the Communist headquarters in Ljubljana, including Rožman, most priests, intellectuals and prominent people.[10]

Early Attempts at Conciliation

Following the Partisans' arrival in Ljubljana, the approach of Slovenia's Church leaders was to accept the new reality and to make conciliatory gestures to the new rulers. This line was in accord with the views of anti-Communist clericalist leaders outside the country. An associate of Krek, Fr. Stanislav Žerjal, told Allied intelligence officials in August 1944 that Krek advocated caution, that the SLS should preserve its independence but avoid attacks on Tito or Yugoslavia. It should argue for internal peace and renewal, and that the people should be allowed to decide their fate. It should thus leave itself room for manoeuvre, as the current state of affairs would only be temporary. Krek believed that with the help of Allied pressure, the SLS could still return to power.[11]

The Ljubljana Ordinaria was ordered to ring the church bells when the Partisans marched into Ljubljana. Lenič asked Nadrah what to do, and he replied that the war was over, so let the bells be rung. Mikuž expressed a wish to celebrate a High Mass in the cathedral for fallen Partisans. Nadrah was embarrassed due to Mikuž's suspension by Rožman, and went to inform him that the suspension was lifted (interestingly, Mikuž

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[9]HDA, Fond MUP, kut. 5/001.1, report entitled *Katolička crkva kao ideološki i politički protivnik FNR Jugoslavije (The Catholic Church as an Ideological and Political Opponent of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia)* (hereafter HDA, MUP), p. 311.

[10]Report by Krek of 8 May, 1945. FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 1-12; Živojinović, p. 98. Živojinović does not dispute the authenticity of the list.

[11]Živojinović, p. 138; the same information provided in a Foreign Office report on the SLS, PRO, FO371/44387, R14863.

responded that Rožman had lifted the suspension long before). The requiem Mass was celebrated in the presence of government representatives.[12] On 15 May, Nadrah issued a circular hailing the liberation and the unification of Slovene lands, calling for loyalty to the government and expressing confidence that it would respect religion.[13]

But in spite of these conciliatory gestures, the Slovene Church leaders found it difficult to establish fruitful relations with the new authorities during the first weeks after the end of the war. At a certain level there were contacts. Part of the bishop's residence was taken over by the army, thorough searches of it were made, and much was removed. But according to Lenič, the authorities made no effort to enter into relations with the senior clergy, and Nadrah was unable to make contact with the Government.[14]

There was a rapid change following the replacement of Nadrah by Vovk. Clearly, in spite of Nadrah's attempts to strike a conciliatory posture, the Communists regarded him as being too closely identified with Rožman, and so long as he remained at the helm he was an obstacle to attempts to start afresh. Maks Miklavčič of the theological faculty, a supporter of the OF during the war, made an initial approach to the authorities[15] The day after Vovk took over in the diocese, a car was sent for him, which conveyed him to the Interior Minister, Zoran Polič, and it was from this time that contacts began.[16]

A major concern of Vovk's at the time was the position of priests who had been banished from German-occupied areas during the war, and who were now returning. The Interior Ministry had decided that they should not be allowed to return to their former parishes until their wartime conduct in Croatia or Serbia had been investigated. Vovk brought this matter up with Polič at their first meeting, complaining that priests who had been victims of the occupation were now regarded with suspicion, as enemies of the

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[12]"Pogovor s škofom dr. Stanislavom Leničem", pp. 1937-1938; Alexander, *Church and State*, p. 85.

[13]Archive of the Ljubljana Archdiocese, Okrožnice (circulars), 1945-1950. (hereafter Ljubljana Archdiocese).

[14]Ceglar, pp. 118-119; "Pogovor s škofom dr. Stanislavom Leničem", pp. 1937-1938.

[15]Miklavčič to Stella Alexander in 1970. Alexander, *Church and State*, pp. 84-85.

[16]Ceglar, p. 123.

people. For his part, Polič asked that the high representatives of the Church should make a declaration of loyalty to the regime.[17] Thus the Slovene authorities hoped that, having in place at the head of the Slovene Church a figure whom they regarded relatively favourably, they could obtain the loyalty of the remaining high clergy, neutralize them as a potential focus of opposition to the regime and co-opt them in the task of pacifying and gaining the acquiescence of the overwhelmingly Catholic Slovene population in the face of the Communist takeover.

Vovk did not accede to the request at once, but called together the prominent clergy of the diocese, the cathedral canons, the superiors of the religious orders and others for consultation. They drew up a memorandum to present to the authorities. Given that it fully acceded to the authorities' request for a declaration of loyalty, some among the clergy were reportedly resentful. It has been suggested that the principle reason for the arrest of Nadrah may have been his unwillingness to make such a declaration.[18] But nevertheless, on 11 July 1945 Vovk led a delegation of the clergy to an audience with Kidrič, head of the Slovene government, in the presence also of Polič.[19]

Vovk read the prepared memorandum. It expressed the sincere readiness of the clergy to support the People's Government in Ljubljana and the federal government in Belgrade in their efforts to promote the welfare of the people, and loyally to fulfil their national and civic duties, as their faith also demanded. It gave thanks for the liberation and the formation of a Slovene state, and declared loyalty to the federal government, in the belief that Slovene existence, independence and national economic and cultural development were possible only with the "brother nations" of Yugoslavia. Referring to the wartime hostility between the Partisans and most of the clergy in the Ljubljana diocese, it said that it was all the more important for them to stress their loyalty, as wartime events

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[17]*ibid.* pp. 124-125.

[18]Ljerka Bizilj, *Cerkev v policijskih arhivih* (Ljubljana, 1991) (hereafter Bizilj), p. 96.

[19]Ceglar, pp. 125-126.

might cast doubt on their sincere patriotism and real will to support the peoples' authorities. It condemned every neglect of patriotic duty and wilful treachery towards the people as a grave sin before God, and expressed regret for the wrongs of some Catholics, and even some priests, during the occupation.

However, in a passage which was less acceptable to the Communists, it put such behaviour down to bad information, propaganda, pressure from the occupier and the fear of atheism. It could not believe that good Catholics and priests had bad intentions, and it offered to contribute to the healing of the wounds of the bitter past. The clergy would be informed of the content of the memorandum, and care would be taken to see that they acted accordingly, while the people would be informed of their duty, according to God, to fulfil their duties to the state. Finally the memorandum appealed that the government enable the free practice of all of the Church's activities, and that priests who had been panicked into flight be allowed to return.

Kidrič replied with an exposition of the tolerant attitude of the authorities towards religion, stressing the participation of Catholics in the OF. There would be no cultural struggle. But he rejected the suggestion that the treachery of much of the clergy could be explained by their fear of atheism as baseless. The uncomfortable position of many of the clergy upon the liberation was the fault of treacherous priests. But despite Kidrič's rejection of those parts of the memorandum which sought to excuse the behaviour of the clergy and which dealt with the hopes of the Church regarding its treatment, he concluded with an expression of satisfaction with the content of its earlier sections. He declared that if those principles were put into practice, then relations between Church and state could be settled. However, he warned that as yet not all of the clergy were behaving according to the principles contained in the memorandum.[20]

Most of the issues with which the Church was concerned after the war were the same as in Croatia. The memorandum of the senior clergy appealed for understanding

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[20]Report on the meeting with the text of the memorandum and Kidrič's reply in *Slovenski poročevalec*, 14 July, 1945.

regarding the treatment of the clergy, religious education, church property, the religious press and church weddings. But in spite of Kidrič's assurances that there would be no struggle against the Church, it is clear that the new authorities deliberately set out to deal it a heavy blow. The leading Slovene Marxist specialist on the Church, Zdenko Roter, acknowledged as much in 1982, when he said that "after the war optimism reigned among us (Marxists). We were convinced that we would eradicate religion."[21]

There was a severe shortage of priests in Slovenia after the war, as a result of the killings and the mass flight. In the immediate post-war period any priests who were considered to have had connections with the BG or the Domobranstvo were arrested. This continued for several months, and included numerous executions. For example, Fr. Franc Cerkovnik and Fr. Peter Križaj were put to death on 20 March 1946. Kidrič's assertion that priests who had fled could return was disingenuous. They had good reason to be afraid. Fr. Alojzij Strupi was seized while fleeing in May 1945, and died in custody. Fr. Franc Tom was shot in December 1945. Fr. Franc Krašna and Filip Terčelj were shot on their way to Ljubljana in January 1946. A few did return, but they were not always well received. One who wished to return was denied permission by the local People's Committee of his parish. Another who did return was not allowed back to his parish. Fr. Jože Zalokar returned, and was given a long prison sentence. Fr. Janko Arnejc, who had earlier been an intermediary between Rožman and the Partisans, was arrested for speaking in defence of Rožman after the war.[22]

In the summer of 1945, permission was denied to about 100 priests to carry out their priestly functions. As a result of all these factors, in 1946 the Ljubljana diocese had some 60 parishes without a priest. Many priests also suffered severe hardship, especially as a result of the agrarian reform and heavy taxation. Thus Fr. Janez Hladnik declared that he was going hungry, received no pay and could not afford to retire. Many parish houses

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[21]Ceglar, p. 136.

[22]*ibid.* pp. 127 and 143-144.

were occupied by the army, leaving the priest with one room, or having to find other accommodation. Perhaps the best proof of the disingenuousness of the authorities' guarantees regarding the treatment of the clergy is that most members of the delegation to Kidrič in July 1945 later received prison sentences.[23]

As in Croatia, limited religious education was permitted in schools in the initial post-war period. During the first year after the war, it was taught in primary and secondary schools, and prayers were permitted before and after lessons. Attendance was optional, according to the will of the parents, a large majority of whom opted in favour. There were pressures though. For example, the teaching of History in high schools was infused with lessons about the harmful role of the clergy.[24] Priests who were suspected of wartime collaboration were refused a licence to teach.[25]

The Church responded in various ways. On 10 September 1945, Vovk issued a circular to coincide with the start of the new school year, reminding parents of their duty, according to Church law, to ensure that their children receive a Christian education.[26]

The authorities complained that in spite of the restrictions, the Church sought to maintain its influence over the young through their parents, through church choirs, the Marian Society and Catholic Action. Religious education was carried on outside of school.[27] At a meeting of the Central Committee of the Slovene Communist Party on 8 June 1946, considerable time was devoted to a discussion of the position of the Church. Ivan Maček, a member of the KPS Politburo, warned that the ideological struggle against religious prejudice would be long and hard, as the Slovenes were the most faithful of peoples. He complained that religious education was subtly being brought into the churches, where it was carried out by catechists and priests, without any control. Another KPS Politburo

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[23]*ibid.* p. 128 and pp. 145-146.

[24]*ibid.* p. 141.

[25]Alexander, *Church and State*, p. 94.

[26]Ljubljana Archdiocese.

[27]HDA, MUP, p. 312.

member, Vida Tomšič, objected that the schools did not prepare pupils sufficiently ideologically. Party people were too liberal towards religion, and not taking the struggle sufficiently seriously.[28] This meeting took place when, taking the cue from the central leadership, the Party was sharpening its stance towards the Church. Nevertheless, it reflects the frustration of the Slovene Party leaders with the success of the Church in circumventing the restrictions placed upon it to maintain its influence over the young.

In Slovenia too, a major bone of contention concerned agrarian reform. On 17 August 1945, Vovk sent a letter of protest to the Slovene government regarding the measure.[29] As in Croatia, the Church lost a great deal of property, but this was not without incurring the displeasure of the regime by its attempts to avoid it. In 1946, *Ljudska Pravica* noted that agrarian reform had mostly been carried out, but that in some places, such as the Črnomelj region, dispossessed clergy had influenced the population against the reform.[30] In the Maribor diocese and in Prekmurje, the authorities perceived that the focus of the Church's anti-regime activities was against the agrarian reform. The Church authorities tried to avoid losing by selling off threatened land in time. Most active in this, it was noted, was the Vicar-General of Prekmurje, Ivan Jerič.[31]

The Communists moved quickly to suppress the Catholic press upon their takeover, giving as a reason the shortage of paper. Later, a small church press was permitted, once the Communists were more secure in their grip on power. Vovk noted in a circular of 14 September 1945 that the authorities had authorised the publication of a religious paper.[32] In the meantime, members of the clergy had to rely on their ingenuity to circumvent the ban on the religious press. One method was to use posters. Fr. Roman

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[28]Arhiv CK ZKS, ACK KPS III. Politburo CK ZKS, 1945-1984, šk. 2, 1946 (hereafter CK ZKS), session of CK KPS, 7-8 June, 1946.

[29]Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem oblasti*, p. 361.

[30]Ceglar, p. 140.

[31]HDA, MUP, p. 313.

[32]Ljubljana Archdiocese.

Tominec explained how he started the practice, when he used a poster to advertise a Mass at 2am one Sunday morning, so as to enable children who had to set off on a school outing at 3am to attend church first.

A group of priests and theology professors gathered around Finžgar started a religious paper called *Oznanilo*, which was run by Vilko Fajdiga. It had two pages, and carried church announcements and passages from scripture. When there was no paper, Finžgar went to the Presidency of the government to ask that it be provided. No doubt the good relations which he had enjoyed with the Communists were of benefit. In Maribor things were easier, and an eight-page Catholic paper appeared. There were no religious radio programmes, but from June 1946 a mostly Slovene-language Trieste channel provided a religious service.[33]

So in spite of the more conciliatory posture adopted by the Catholic Church in Slovenia, it found itself confronted with much the same difficulties as were being experienced in Croatia. Thus it was that Vovk, Tomažič and Jerič were among the signatories of the September pastoral letter of the Yugoslav bishops. As elsewhere in Yugoslavia, the letter was recognized as a forthright challenge to the new regime, and its reading was mostly greeted by "deathly silence" in the churches. Vovk, however, maintained the more conciliatory approach which he had adopted, in comparison to the line emanating from Zagreb. According to Lenič, when the Slovene government demanded that he retract the letter, he declined, but he gave assurances that he would make no further declarations on it.[34] He would not publicly distance himself from the confrontational stance of Stepinac; the substance of the letter and of Stepinac's protests was, after all, as true for Slovenia as it was for Croatia. But it appears that his approach

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[33]Ceglar, pp. 137-140.

[34]*ibid.* pp. 130-135.

was more cautious. The September letter was primarily a Zagreb affair, and Vovk tried to avoid the fallout in Slovenia being too great.[35]

The reaction of the Slovene authorities was also fairly muted. As in Croatia, there was a slight delay before the authorities decided on their response. When it came in a letter from Kidrič to *Slovenski poročevalec* on 7 October, it was in the same vein as Bakarić's cautious and defensive response in Croatia. Kidrič rebutted the accusations contained in the letter, asserting that there was freedom of worship, religious education and the religious press. There was no persecution of the clergy, and only those guilty of serious collaboration or atrocities were arrested. Those who were guilty of minor crimes and petty collaboration had not been punished, as the Church authorities had promised to take action themselves against such offenders. Yet no such action had been taken, he complained. The Partisans had always, Kidrič went on, sought to enlist the cooperation of the clergy. In this spirit, temporarily requisitioned church buildings would be returned, and the religious commission would be activated and given responsibility for all questions regarding relations between Church and state.[36]

Other responses came from leading Catholic members of the OF. Mikuž's response was much sharper. He accused the bishops of having called upon the faithful to respect and obey the armies of occupation during the war, while recognizing no obligation towards their own country or its government. Given the wartime behaviour of the bishops, they had lost all claim to the moral leadership of Slovenia's Catholics. They had hoped, with the letter, to restore their influence, perhaps hoping to incite real persecution. But such persecution would not be forthcoming.[37]

The letter was seen as being connected with a stepping up of political opposition at the time, with Šubašić's resignation from the government and calls for a boycott of the

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[35]Bizilj, pp. 96-97.

[36]*Slovenski poročevalec*, 7 October, 1945.

[37]*Slovenski poročevalec*, 10 October, 1945.

first post-war elections. Kocbek issued an attack on clericalist influence in Slovenia, while Vidmar attacked the opposition as underground plotters. Just before the elections there were numerous calls for participation in them. One such was a call on behalf of Slovene Catholics, whose signatories included Finžgar, Snoj, Mikuž, Brecelj, Fajfar, Lampret, Šmon, the dean of the theology faculty and others.[38]

The letter did result in a serious strain in relations, especially as Tito's response on 25 October was much fiercer than those of Kidrič and Bakarić. Direct contact between the bishops and the government ceased, although various prominent Catholics continued to act as go-betweens.[39] The attitude of the Communists towards the Church was ambiguous. The desire to avoid a confrontation and to find ways of reaching an accommodation was matched by great suspicion and, frequently, outright hostility. Ultimately, no matter that the Slovene Church's approach was more conciliatory than was the case in Croatia, the Communists' programme unavoidably meant a severe attack upon the interests and the position of the Church.

Communist Attitudes

The Communists' suspicion of the clergy revealed itself in their reluctance to allow the return of priests who had spent the war out of Slovenia, and of whom they had no knowledge. They felt the need to watch the clergy closely. A member of the Religious Commission, Fr. Stanko Cajnkar, complained in a letter to the Presidency of SNOS in June 1945 that returning priests were treated with suspicion by some representatives of the authorities in Styria, who were persisting in general condemnations of the clergy.[40]

The ambivalence of the Communists, even towards Catholics with whom they had apparently good relations, can be seen in their relationship with the Christian Socialists.

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[38]Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem oblasti*, pp. 362-363.

[39]Miklavčič to Stella Alexander in 1970. Alexander, *Church and State*, p. 86.

[40]Letter of 20 June, 1945, Arhiv Slovenije, Predsedstvo SNOS-a, šk. 9, doc. 81/1.

In a report in 1947, the French consul in Ljubljana noted evidence of Christian Socialist input into the regime's policy towards the Church, especially in frequent claims that there was no implacable opposition between Christian and Marxist ideologies.[41] On the other hand, in its discussion of Church affairs at its meeting of 8 June 1946, the Central Committee expressed doubts as to the reliability of the Christian Socialists. Senior Slovene Communist Lidija Šentjurc objected that they often made the same complaints as the clergy and international reaction, for example, claiming that the Catholic press was suppressed. She noted that Kocbek had the habit of visiting parishes and talking with the priests, and was concerned that there were no guarantees as to what he would discuss with them.[42] The French consul concluded that the authorities had not given up hope of reaching an accommodation with the Church on its terms. For example, he noted Tito's gesture in offering to be godfather of the latest child of a very large Slovene family, being represented at the christening by an army general. But there was nevertheless much mutual bitterness, and relations were unstable, threatening a major rupture.

The regime continued to see hostility on the part of the clergy. In general, the Communists complained that the clergy continued to use its influence over the people in opposition to the new order they were trying to build. Ivan Maček listed ways used by the clergy to oppose the regime, cautiously exploiting the "indulgence" of the authorities and avoiding open struggle. Deanery meetings for the spiritual renewal of the clergy were used as an opportunity to inform them as to methods of resistance. For the faithful, parish missions in the autumn of 1945 had the same intention. Confirmation ceremonies, and the parades which accompanied them, were used as demonstrations of opposition, and attracted more people than pro-regime rallies. Priests sought to portray the Church

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[41]FM, Paris, vol. 35, docs. 215-218.

[42]CK ZKS, session of CK KPS, 7-8 June, 1946.

as being under persecution by the authorities.[43] In reality, most of the clergy were simply following the example of Vovk, in avoiding confrontation while cautiously defending the Church as far as was possible.

More specifically, the Communists found evidence of overtly seditious activities among elements of the clergy. For example, it was alleged that individuals within the Ljubljana Ordinaria were in contact with the Slovene 'Chetnik' leader, Major Karlo Novak, and that radio equipment had been found which had been used to maintain contacts abroad. In the summer of 1946, a courier was captured who revealed that Jerič had maintained contact with exiles in Salzburg, and that he and other Prekmurje priests had distributed Chetnik propaganda and collected money for them. The Communists noted that the Prekmurje clergy became increasingly combative during 1946, and that the Maribor clergy went in the same direction, taking the lead in opposing the government, although they had been the least compromised among the clergy during the war. One Maribor priest was arrested in 1947 when it was discovered that he had since 1945 used altar boys to distribute anti-regime leaflets.[44]

But, as in Croatia, in spite of their suspicion of the clergy, the Communists sought to manipulate individual priests for their ends. Thus it was that Polič sought a declaration of loyalty to the regime, as already mentioned. At a meeting on 12 December 1945, Kidrič invited priests who had been in contact with the Popular Front to a meeting the following day, to produce a pastoral letter, to be read on behalf of the Slovene episcopate for the new year. The idea came to nothing due to the resistance of the Ljubljana and Maribor ordinaries.[45] The Christian Socialists provided a notable example of regime manipulation, as the French ambassador noted in a letter in July 1946, when he said that a small group

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[43]*ibid.*

[44]HDA, MUP, pp. 311-314 and pp. 323-325.

[45]HDA, MUP, p. 312.

of Catholics favourable to the regime, led by Kocbek, who was then the vice-president of the Slovene assembly, was excluded by the Party from real power.[46]

In the Littoral and the Maribor diocese, where the clergy had been relatively well-disposed towards the Partisans during the war, the priority of the authorities was to isolate them from the influence of the Ljubljana diocese.[47] In addition, the secret police reported that by the beginning of 1947 they had ten agents among the Slovene clergy. They noted that these priests mainly saw their role as one of mediation and protection of the Church's interests in cooperation with the secret police. They were apparently considered to be of little use, as their pro-regime tendencies were known, and so, it was reported, any "hostile activities" were hidden from them. Their usefulness was primarily limited to the provision of information on directives from the higher to the lower clergy.[48]

The Church Retreats

Shifts in the Communists' attitude towards the Church in Slovenia were to a considerable extent influenced by events in Zagreb, which was the focus of the post-war confrontation between the Church and the new regime in Yugoslavia. Thus it was that the September bishops' conference and the elections to the constituent assembly which came shortly afterwards (in November) were seen as a watershed in the development of relations. Although the Church in Slovenia pursued a much more cautious line than its counterpart in Croatia, the authorities saw the clergy inciting the people against the government, against agrarian reform and other "progressive measures".

However, after the elections, following which it was quite clear that the regime had successfully consolidated its position, the Slovene authorities perceived a change of tactic on the part of the clergy, whose activities they described as being more "thought-

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[46]Letter from Payart of 31 July, 1946, FM, Paris, vol. 34, docs. 190-192.

[47]HDA, MUP, pp. 324-325.

[48]Bizilj, pp. 98-99.

out". Church figures did, in this tense time following the September pastoral letter, try to alleviate the situation with expressions of a desire to cooperate with the authorities. Tomažič issued a pastoral letter calling for loyalty to them. The complaints which were contained in the pastoral letter, and which had been expressed by the Slovene Church before then, concerning religious education, civil marriage, agrarian reform etc., tended not to be made publicly from this time. The authorities noted that by the winter of 1945 the activities of church organizations had slackened off.[49]

Vovk was regarded by the clergy as a suitable leader for the Church in the circumstances. He was an effective tactician who opposed the regime but pursued a pragmatic policy towards it.[50] Following Jerič's arrest, the Ljubljana Ordinaria forbade any participation by the clergy in illegal activities.[51] His cautious response to the conditions in which the Church found itself was noted by the authorities. According to them, this policy was worked out quite explicitly. Shortly after the elections there was a conference in Ljubljana, which, according to the police, decided on a quiet approach, keeping the authorities uninformed about the affairs of the Church, making as few public pronouncements as possible. The focus was to be on modest, individual work. In particular, they would seek to maintain the influence of the Church over the young through parents. The practice was to show readiness for loyal cooperation, while privately seeking to retain whatever advantage they could for the Church.[52]

This pragmatic and cautious approach did not prevent Slovenia from being affected by the Communists' sharp turn against the Church in the summer of 1946, which was largely connected with the course of negotiations over Trieste and the Julian region. During the discussions on the Church at the Slovene Central Committee meeting in June, speakers reflected that the clergy had been taking advantage of the indulgence of

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[49]HDA, MUP, pp. 311-312 and p. 316.

[50]Ceglar, p. 121; HDA, MUP, pp. 315-316,

[51]HDA, MUP, p. 314.

[52]HDA, MUP, pp. 316 and 324.

the authorities, and their activities were linked to the activities of reactionary clergy throughout the World. They needed to go over to the offensive, while avoiding giving the impression that there were any big problems over the question of religion.[53]

A report from the British embassy in August 1946 noted that waves of arrests of priests in Slovenia were taking place.[54] Indeed, from this time through to the early 1950's there was a series of arrests and show trials for spying and "anti-national" activities. Many of the accusations were concerned with Blatnik, who had been an informer for the Italians during the war, and who was in Rome after it.[55] The secret police stepped up their activities in seeking out compromising material on the clergy. One of the purposes of this was to place pressure on the clergy, so as to divide them and intimidate the less diehard among them into being cooperative.[56]

It was also at this time that the trial of Rožman took place. The preparation of the case against Rožman had been going on for some months. The defendants also included Krek (who like Rožman was tried "in absentia") Rupnik, Rösener and others.[57] The charges related to wartime activities, but it was probably no coincidence that the trial took place just at the time, following the disappointments at the Paris peace conference, when actions against the clergy generally were being stepped up, and shortly before the Stepinac trial in Croatia.

According to the authorities, the trial roused enormous indignation among the clergy. Rožman continued to be regarded with affection by most of the clergy, as a simple, good-hearted man who had done nothing more than stand up to the scourge of Communism. There were, however, no official protests from the Church, as the hierarchy

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[53]CK ZKS, session of CK KPS, 7-8 June, 1946.

[54]Telegramme of 3 August, 1946. PRO, FO371/59429, R11823.

[55]Alexander, *Church and State*, pp. 90-92.

[56]HDA, MUP, p. 325.

[57]A detailed description of the case against Rožman was provided above.

took a cautious attitude.[58] No doubt aware that Rožman's wartime behaviour had indeed compromised the Church to a considerable degree, they avoided compromising it further, beyond supplying documentary evidence in defence of some of the charges brought.[59] At the time of the trial, Vovk was in contact with Stepinac. There was speculation that the question of whether to replace Rožman was considered.[60] However, in the context of the time, when the Church felt itself under attack on a broad front, and engaged in a general and bitter struggle against "atheistic Communism", there was little chance that it would offer such satisfaction to a Communist regime, which would have implicitly recognized that Rožman had erred. In fact, the Church preferred to keep relatively quiet about it, especially in comparison to its response to the Stepinac trial. Unlike Stepinac's case, the Rožman trial had little long-term effect on the life of the Church.[61]

The Holy See and the Trieste Question

Relations between the Communists and the Church in Slovenia were particularly affected by the dispute over Trieste. Knowing that they would meet the western Allies in the Julian region, the OF had carefully prepared the ground there before the end of the war. They expected opposition to their takeover of the region from the Holy See, and had already noted that the Slovene clergy, under Vatican influence, had turned against the Partisans and towards the western Allies as the end of the war approached.[62]

While for the Holy See the situation had no ambiguity, in that hostility to Communism was complimented by support for Italy, the Slovene Church was clearly presented with a dilemma, given that support for the Yugoslav side in the territorial dispute was only

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[58]HDA, MUP, p. 314.

[59]MNZ, file 1, pp. 3117-3118.

[60]HDA, MUP, pp. 314-315.

[61]Alexander, *Church and State*, p. 88.

[62]Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem oblasti*, p. 219.

natural. Vovk's position was consistent with his conciliatory line towards the authorities. In a circular in August 1945, he called for prayers that the Paris peace conference would bring the unification of all Slovenes in the national state. He referred again to the desirability of unification in a later circular the following month.[63]

The French Consul in Ljubljana noted in his report in 1947 that the Slovene authorities, following the lead taken by Tito in Croatia, coupled attacks on the influence of the Vatican with encouragement of the nationalization of the Church in Slovenia. Here too, the regime resented the notion that the Church in Slovenia owed allegiance to an external authority. He concluded, however, that the Church was not prepared to fit into the regime's vision of a "national" Yugoslav Church, adding that Yugoslav patriotism was largely alien to Slovene Catholics.[64]

The Holy See lobbied hard against the Yugoslav cause. Reports from the American presidential envoy, Myron Taylor, show that the Pope was preoccupied with the region's fate. For example, in September 1945 the Pope handed a memorandum to Taylor on conditions in Croatia and Slovenia, detailing vigorous oppression of the Church. Another report on the region followed at the end of December, and a note was handed to Taylor in May 1946.[65]

As with Croatia, the authorities in Slovenia complained that the Slovene hierarchy was led by the Vatican, through Hurley.[66] Hurley reported that Rožman was highly regarded in Rome, and that his see would be kept vacant if it was impossible for him to return.[67] In fact, Rome and Rožman himself continued to hope for some time after the

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[63]Circulars of 28 August and 4 September, 1945, Ljubljana Archdiocese.

[64]FM, Paris, vol. 35, docs. 215-218.

[65]Živojinović, p. 143.

[66]HDA, MUP, p. 312.

[67]Letter from the British ambassador in Belgrade of 11 March, 1946, reporting a conversation with Hurley. PRO, FO371/59429, R4620.

war that Rožman would be able to return.[68] It was the same hope as influenced the Croatian Church leadership, that the new regime might prove to be short-lived, and it explains the uncompromising attitude of the Holy See towards Yugoslavia. Although Vovk remained true to Rožman, his behaviour, marked as it was by pragmatism, was in sharp contrast to the line emanating from Rome.

The Italian bishops in the Littoral region were also active in trying to thwart the Yugoslav Communists' ambitions. Bishop Santin of Trieste was in contact with the Italian anti-Fascist Committee of National Liberation (CLN), which had, since the withdrawal of its Italian Communist representation, pursued a strongly anti-Yugoslav policy. He tried, without success, to persuade the German garrison to surrender to the CLN, to forestall a Yugoslav entry into the city. He was also among leading figures in the city to be approached by anti-Communist Serbian forces which had gathered in the region at the end of the war, and which tried to form a common anti-Communist front. The proposal got nowhere, as the Serbs could not accept the demands of the Italians, including Santin, that the Julian region be recognized as undisputed Italian territory.[69]

However, following the entry of Yugoslav troops into the city, Santin initially tried to be conciliatory. On 4 May 1945, he met the Yugoslav commanders in the city. At the beginning of June, a Yugoslav newspaper reported the following statement by Santin:

> I am happy to declare that the attitude of the Yugoslav and local Trieste authorities has always been correct and very attentive. For myself, I have absolutely not been troubled by the People's authorities, nor subjected to their surveillance in my flat. The religious life in Trieste continues to function without hindrance.[70]

However, relations quickly deteriorated. Following the division of the region into Allied- and Yugoslav-controlled zones, Santin complained to Allied commanders about violations of political, civil and religious rights in the Yugoslav zone B. On 17 June, he was forced to abandon a visit to Sežana, after his car was attacked by a stone-throwing

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[68]Bizilj, p. 82.

[69]Bogdan C. Novak, *Trieste, 1941-1954*, pp. 140, 145 and 154.

[70]Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Le Conflit de Trieste, 1943-1954* (Brussels, 1966), p. 171, citing *Borba*, 4/6/45.

mob. He also faced a hostile demonstration in Koper. At a press conference on 20 June 1946, he declared that religious freedom did not exist in Zone B. His pro-Italian stance brought protests from some among his Slovene clergy. His order, in the summer of 1946, that Yugoslav flags be removed from two churches led to disorder. When the decision on the creation of the Free Territory of Trieste was announced, he was in Rome, and he handed a memorandum to Taylor, citing the lack of religious freedom in Yugoslav areas, and complaining that it was unjust to Italy.[71]

Archbishop Margotti of Gorizia also opposed Yugoslavia's ambitions in the region. Following a conference of the northern Italian bishops in February 1946, he held a conference of his clergy, at which he attacked the Yugoslav regime. As a counter-measure, pro-regime Slovene clergy held a conference of their own. Margotti also directed his clergy not to cooperate with the Communist regime.[72] As with Vovk, there was a certain ambiguity in the attitude of the lower clergy in the region. At the KPS Central Committee meeting in June 1946, at which they discussed the position of the clergy, senior Slovene Communist Miha Marinko noted that the clergy in the Littoral were opposing the regime, although their national consciousness was high.[73]

The authorities found that most of the Littoral clergy were for Yugoslavia, but against Communism and atheism. In Zone B, the local authorities were instructed not to take harsh measures against the clergy, so as not to create martyrs. In fact, the authorities found little basis to attack the clergy. They objected to the policy on religious education and condemned the employment of work brigades on Sundays, much as elsewhere in Slovenia.[74] However, following the announcement of the setting up of the Free Territory of Trieste in July 1946, prayers were ordered for the inclusion of Trieste and the Julian

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[71]*ibid.* pp. 214 and 539; Živojinović, pp. 118 and 125-127.

[72]HDA, MUP, pp. 314 and 320.

[73]CK ZKS, session of CK KPS, 7-8 June, 1946.

[74]HDA, MUP, pp. 312 and 318.

region in Yugoslavia.[75] It was just at this time that the Church came under increased pressure, as the regime, reacting angrily to its failures in Paris, gave up all pretence of moderation in its behaviour towards the Church. It would seem that many among the Slovene clergy felt it necessary to renew efforts at conciliation.

The Rožman Succession

The deterioration in relations between the Church and the Communist regime in Slovenia and throughout Yugoslavia could be seen at its most stark in the arrest and trial of Stepinac in Croatia, but it was also revealed in the wave of arrests and harassment of priests in Slovenia which took place at the time. It was against this difficult background that the question of the long-term succession to Rožman was addressed. By the summer of 1946 it was clear that the regime had consolidated itself, and hope that Rožman would be able to return in the near future had to be abandoned. At the beginning of August, Rožman informed the Pope that he could not return to his diocese, and would not be able to fulfil his duties.[76]

The need for an assistant bishop had already been recognized. The Secretariat of State had asked Rožman to suggest three candidates in May. On 2 July, Rožman sent a list of three cathedral canons, headed by Vovk. It is quite possible that Rožman had it in mind that if he were to be able to return one day, Vovk was a man with whom he would be able to work. There was considerable secrecy surrounding the appointment, and that of Maksimiljan Držečnik, who was named assistant bishop of Maribor at the same time. The news came from the nunciature in Belgrade on 18 October. The authorities did not initially accept the appointments, as they had been made without consulting them.

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[75]HDA, MUP, p. 313.

[76]Ceglar, p. 153.

However, Vovk and Držečnik visited Boris Kraigher, the interior minister, on 23 October to discuss the matter.[77]

The consecrations were fixed for 1 December for Vovk and 15 December for Držečnik. A circular was planned to coincide with the consecration of Vovk, but the authorities banned its dissemination. By no means all of the clergy adhered to the ban, but a few days before the ceremony a new one was submitted. Still the Ljubljana authorities tried to block the proceedings, but the nunciature managed to arrange it from Belgrade. The ceremony in Ljubljana did not pass off without incident, as a tear gas bomb was thrown during its course.[78]

Following his investiture, Vovk quietly maintained his conciliatory policy. On 4 December, he invited priests and theology professors of the diocese to a meeting, including the pro-Partisan Finžgar among their number. At the end of the month, Petar Kovačevič was installed as abbot in Celje. The authorities regarded him as a reactionary, and he had avoided all contact with them. However, following his appointment, he presented himself to the Chairman of the NO for Celje. The authorities saw this as part of a coordinated line, as Vovk sought to get off to a good start with them.[79]

Vovk had consistently sought to pursue a conciliatory line since the end of the war. He had protested against measures which he saw as damaging to the interests of the Church, much as Stepinac had done in Croatia, and he had quietly and unobtrusively sought to defend the Church's position without antagonizing the regime. When it came to the crunch, he avoided the type of confrontational posture which Stepinac finally adopted when it seemed that no amount of reason would divert the Communists from their frontal attack on the position of the Church in society. However, despite Vovk's quieter, more conciliatory approach, it cannot be said that on any of the key issues, such as attacks on

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[77]*ibid.* pp. 154-167.

[78]HDA, MUP, pp. 315-317.

[79]HDA, MUP, p. 317.

the clergy, the confiscation of Church lands or the restriction of religious education, the Church in Slovenia gained any appreciable advantages over its counterpart in Croatia.

Conclusions

By the end of 1946, the reversal of the Communists' wartime strategy of conciliation and coalition building, appealing to and seeking to reassure the Catholic clergy and faithful, was complete. This thesis has aimed to provide an analysis more systematic and detailed than that available in any previous works of the shifting priorities and changes of approach in the Communists' policy towards the Catholic Church from 1941 to 1946. It has shown that throughout these apparent shifts, the Communist leaders did not alter their fundamental goals, and maintained a constant purpose. It is hoped that the thesis has enhanced our understanding of a relationship that has hitherto been covered relatively thinly in the academic literature. Drawing substantially on previously unused primary source material and upon recent relevant research carried out by historians in former Yugoslavia, the thesis has tried to present a more balanced portrayal of a subject which has often been fraught with emotion, prejudice and political controversy.

The thesis has stressed that during the period of the war and the Communists' takeover and consolidation of their power, their policy towards the Catholic Church sought to balance two principle objectives: the short-term goal of seizing power; and the longer-term goal of implementing their revolutionary programme. The first involved extensive efforts to appeal to and reassure Catholic clergy and the faithful that, following a victory for the National Liberation Movement, freedom of religion would be guaranteed and the Church would be able freely to go about its work. Thus for much of the war the Communists avoided measures or pronouncements which might confirm fears that, once in power, they would implement a social revolution which would fundamentally impinge upon realms that the Church regarded as vital to its interests and its mission. Such realms included education, marriage and the properties by which the Church maintained itself. Thus the Communists sought to ease their passage to power by neutralizing a potentially formidable opponent.

The short-term strategy for achieving power necessarily meant that the Communists'

longer-term revolutionary goals had to be downplayed. But the longer-term objective of a transformation of society according to principles, such as atheism, materialism and the separation of Church and state, which were bound to be regarded by the Church as inimical to its interests, was never abandoned. The thesis has charted the change in the balance between these two aims during 1941-1946. For much of the war, the longer-term plans of the Communists were indeed played down, as the emphasis was on building alliances with any who were prepared to cooperate in what was portrayed as a war of national liberation against the occupiers and their domestic collaborators.

The relatively little academic literature that has assessed the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Communists has tended to focus on the confrontation between two bitter rivals. A key contribution that this thesis has aimed to make is a detailed presentation of the Communists' efforts to appeal to Catholic clergy during the war. As with Rittig and other priests in Croatia, Bosnia and Slovenia who had contacts with, or even cooperated with the Communists, and also with the Christian Socialists in Slovenia, the thesis has illustrated the uses to which the Communists put their allies in the liberation movement as they sought to spread their appeal beyond their own narrow constituency.

This conciliatory approach was, however, never more than a strategy for gaining power, and the Communists had never intended to compromise on their revolutionary programme once in power. Just as the emphasis on liberation from the occupiers was played up during the war, at the expense of the wider goal of social revolution, so Communist assurances and appeals to Catholics were primarily a short-term ploy to soften Catholic opposition to them and to try to win Catholics to their banner. Later in the war, especially from the summer of 1944, the Communists' priorities changed, as, with their position strengthening and with victory in sight, they sought to consolidate and centralize their rule, to gain international recognition and to set their sights on the new society which they intended to build after the war. Thus the balance between the short- and long-term objectives shifted away from the compromises inherent in the coalition-

building strategy, and towards the ultimate purposes to which they intended to put their power, once gained. In describing this shift, the thesis has pointed to the tensions that it caused among the ranks of the Communist leaders in Croatia and Slovenia.

It might appear that the repression to which the Communists turned after the war represented a complete negation of their earlier policy of including all within as wide a front as possible. But despite tactical manoeuvrings during the war, they never gave up their revolutionary principles. Gaining power came before everything, and they were prepared to be flexible in dealing with others to that end. In key respects they were completely consistent throughout. They were by nature conspiratorial, merciless towards opponents or doubters, and intolerant of resistance.[1]

During the war too, the Communists could be ruthless towards any who opposed them, or who even came under suspicion of doing so. These included priests, large numbers of who were attacked, arrested and murdered, the popular front policy notwithstanding. Few Communists ever really managed to overcome their inherent hostility towards the Church and the clergy, which arose both out of their ideological beliefs, as Marxists, and their awareness that most of the clergy and Catholic faithful were fundamentally opposed to them. This awareness was frequently confirmed by the hostile activities of priests, especially in Slovenia, where members of the clergy were in the forefront of the struggle against them. Communist suspicions were also often confirmed in Croatia, where Stepinac, having put aside his scruples about the involvement of the clergy in politics, when faced with the prospect of a Communist takeover, took an active part in the attempts to forestall their seizure of power.

Yet despite attempts by members of the higher clergy to thwart their accession to power, the Communists were ready to renew their efforts to reach an accommodation after the war. However, any accommodation could only have been based on the preparedness of the Church leaders compliantly to fit into the narrow space allotted to

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[1]Radmila Radić, *Verom protiv vere*, p. 110.

them in the new Communist order. Essentially, this meant two key conditions: their loyalty to the new regime would have to be assured; and they would have to accept that, while the Church would be able to continue to administer the purely spiritual sides of its life, its sacraments and rituals, it would be denied any role in the social life of the country. This was at the root of the conflict that quickly developed between the Church and the Communists after the war. The Communists expected that in time religion and the churches would lose their relevance in the new order that the new regime set about building. While they were prepared in the meantime to allow freedom of religion, their understanding of what that meant was so narrow that there was really no basis for a settlement that could have satisfied both sides. The Church was to become a dead thing, ministering to the needs of an ageing pre-revolutionary population, while the youth, and the future of society, would be won for the ideological goals of the Communists.

In a sense, it was the things that the Communists and the Church had in common which made them irreconcilable. Both claimed a right to a close involvement in the life of society. Just as the one sought to achieve its vision of society by inculcating its ideological precepts into the masses, so the other sought to maintain its hold over its flock. As the Communists sought to deprive the Church of its means of competing with them, especially in the spheres of the education of the young and the Church's financial ability to pursue its mission, there was no room for meaningful compromise. With the Communists determined to implement their revolutionary programme on coming to power, and given Stepinac's unwillingness to accept the new regime's conditions for an accommodation, a confrontation with Church leaders was unavoidable.

Probably some of the bishops would have been inclined to adopt a less confrontational stance than that taken by Stepinac. But seeing the extent of the new regime's attack of upon the interests of the Church and upon its role in society in the first months after the war, Stepinac could see no basis for a compromise. Stepinac's critics have suggested that the confrontational position he adopted from the issuance of the September 1945 pastoral letter was foolish given that the balance of power so

overwhelmingly favoured the regime. Certainly, he seems to have misjudged the international situation and to have under-estimated the strength of the regime. The common belief in the inevitability of war between the Soviet Union and the western Allies, which would result in the speedy collapse of the Communist regime, certainly influenced his attitude. However, it is worth recalling that he only abandoned attempts at conciliation when it had become apparent that the regime would not make any meaningful compromises.

Vovk, by contrast, managed to avoid such a high-profile confrontation in Slovenia, but ultimately he did not win any more concessions than did Stepinac. One notable difference between the two approaches was that whereas Vovk broke with the tradition of the Church in Slovenia, maintained by Rožman during the war, of taking an active role in the political sphere, Stepinac, despite all his objections to political participation by members of the clergy, turned the Church into the principal focus for all those in Croatia who opposed the regime. The Church in Croatia became a symbol of the perceived injustices suffered by both the Church and the Croat people.

The bullying and persecution to which the Communists resorted in their dealings with the Catholic Church in Croatia, Bosnia and Slovenia arose firstly out of fear and insecurity in the face of an institution they knew they could not simply obliterate, and whose support and devotion among the people would make it an enduring reminder of the fragility of their own rule. In the longer term, the Communists needed to deal with a determined opponent of their plans to revolutionize society. By contrast, those parts of Yugoslavia where Catholicism held the allegiance of only a very small section of the population, in the predominantly Orthodox and Moslem regions where the Catholic Church was of no more than peripheral interest to the local authorities, the Church had little of the potentially subversive power which the Communists perceived in the western areas of the country.

In Montenegro, as we have seen, Archbishop Dobrečić of Bar was put under particularly strong pressure to disassociate himself from the September 1945 pastoral

letter. The suppression of religion in general was particularly severe in Montenegro (the Serbian Orthodox Church was subjected to much harsher measures there than it was in Serbia), and the strength of the pressure placed upon Dobrečić probably in part reflected that. In contrast, the Catholic Church in Macedonia was treated with comparative gentleness. The French consul in Skopje, Charles Boutant, who had earlier been in Split, estimated the Catholic population of Macedonia at about 10,000, mostly Albanians. In June 1947, he wrote that while the Orthodox Easter was not a holiday, and workers who did not go to work found their names on lists, the Catholic Easter was celebrated and a public procession authorised. He noted that at a confirmation service, the bishop gave a sermon about the role of the Church among the youth, which contained ideas much like those which had contributed to Stepinac's arrest. The authorities, he concluded, saw little need not to be liberal towards such an insignificant minority, which presented no real threat.[2] In Serbia too, Archbishop Ujčić, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Belgrade, quickly established reasonably cordial relations with the new regime.

The Communists frequently emphasized, notably at the trials of Rožman and Stepinac in 1946, allegations of wartime collaboration and complicity in the crimes of the occupiers and their domestic accomplices. However, while it was certainly the case that Communists mostly did regard the wartime record of these and numerous other clergymen as unsatisfactory, this thesis has demonstrated that this was not the reason for the post-war deterioration in relations. That the Communists initially sought to reach an accommodation with Stepinac is sufficient proof of this. Some members of the senior clergy probably were considered as being too compromised by their wartime opposition to the Partisans for any fruitful relationship with them to be possible. Rožman was almost certainly among these, and some senior Communists seem to have been inclined against dealing with Stepinac.

But the Communists nevertheless tried to reach a settlement with the hierarchy. The

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[2]Letter of 17 June, 1947. FM, Paris, vol. 35, docs. 211-213.

Communist authorities' failure to achieve this was due to their under-estimation of the importance that the Church attached to the social aspects of its mission and to the means through which it put them into practice. The Communists promised that, provided that the clergy and Catholic faithful were loyal to the regime, freedom of religion would be guaranteed, but they failed to appreciate that for the Church their understanding of religious freedom was woefully inadequate.

The Communists also defined political loyalty in a way that showed little understanding of the relationship between the Church in Yugoslavia and the Holy See. However, the stress that Tito placed on the need for the Church to be more "national" at his meeting with the senior Zagreb clergy immediately after the war should not lead to a conclusion that it is the refusal of the Church hierarchy to break with Rome that primarily explains the souring of relations and led to the clampdown on the Church. Tito and the Communist leadership were mainly interested in reaching a settlement that would ensure the political loyalty of the Church hierarchy and remove the Church from the social sphere. In his discussion with the senior clergy, and at his meeting with Stepinac, Tito's stress was on political matters. At that time, his mind was particularly focused on the Trieste crisis, and on the possibility of Allied intervention that might threaten his newly established regime. As relations between the Church and state authorities deteriorated during the summer of 1945, it was the question of the hierarchy's loyalty to the regime, as well as the limitation of the Church's role in society, that was the key point at issue.

The Communists were, right from the time of Tito's meeting with the Zagreb clergy, consistent in showing no interest in spiritual matters, in the narrowly religious aspects of the Church's life. When Tito said that he would not question the links of the Church in Yugoslavia to the Holy See in matters of faith and doctrine, he almost certainly meant it. What he was interested in was to settle the question of the Church's place in the new order so as to ensure that it would be able neither to subvert the regime nor to obstruct the implementation of its revolution. The point of the Church being more "national" had two main purposes, one international, and the other domestic. At the time when Tito

expressed this wish, he was concerned about the international situation, and about the fact that the wider Catholic Church was both hostile towards Communism and inclined towards Italy over Yugoslavia.

Domestically, Tito wanted to negotiate a settlement with the Church in Yugoslavia from the position of considerable advantage that the regime enjoyed over the Church after the war, in order to pressurize the Church leaders into accepting a position acceptable from the Communists' point of view. This hope was thwarted by the repeated insistence of Church leaders that any settlement of the Church's position in the state could only be arrived at through negotiations between the state and the Holy See. That standpoint seemed, from the Communists' perspective, both to throw doubt upon the loyalty of the senior clergy, and to challenge the new regime's efforts to transform society. Tito did not specify exactly what he meant by the Church being more national. However, while it is possible that he and other Communist leaders would have regarded a break with Rome on the part of the Catholic Church as desirable, there was never any prospect of this. Such a full break was not seen by the Communists as a condition for a satisfactory arrangement with the Church. However, the inclusion of the Holy See as a factor in deciding on the ordering of Yugoslavia's internal affairs was regarded as unacceptable by the Communist authorities. They would deal with the local hierarchy according to their terms, or else they would resort to repression.

The regime's attitude towards the Catholic Church was complex. Its leaders realized that it would remain a major force in society, and so tried to reach an accommodation with it. The Church was unique in a Communist society. With the elimination of the political opposition, no other group which did not support the legitimacy or the desirability of the established order was permitted an independent existence.[3] It nevertheless had to

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[3]Bogdan Denitch, *Religion and Social Change in Yugoslavia*, in Bociurkiw and Strong, *Religion and Atheism in the USSR and Eastern Europe*, p. 385; Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *The Improbable Survivor: Yugoslavia and its Problems, 1918-1988* (London, 1988), p. 102.

be restricted. Given the unwillingness of Church leaders to fit into the space granted them, and what the regime considered to be their subversive activities, coercion was finally needed to force them into line. However, while the Catholic Church was indeed temporarily bowed by the measures taken against it, the Communists ultimately failed in their attempts to find a place for it that they could regard as satisfactory. In prison, Stepinac's prestige among the Catholic population was if anything enhanced. The hierarchy stuck to its insistence that the regime deal with the Holy See in negotiating any settlement and, in general, the Church remained defiant and an enduring reminder of the limitations on the Communists' ability to transform society as they wished.

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