

Prof. Petar BOSNIĆ

Živan Knežević i Nikola Kosić o 27. martu 1941. godine u „Promemoriji” (1981).

Iako je od državnog udara 27. marta 1941. godine prošlo 60 godina neke dileme, kako o oportunisti samog istorijskog čina koji su izveli rodoljubivi oficiri uz podršku naroda, tako i o ulozi njegovih protagonista, do danas nisu apsolvirane u našoj istoriografiji. Još uvek se o godišnjici ovih dramatičnih zbivanja lome koplja među istoričarima i političarima *pro et kontra* 27. marta koji je odredio potonju sudbinu naše zemlje i posebno srpskog naroda u drugoj polovini XX veka.

O ovim događajima i njihovim implikacijama na dalji tok istorijskih zbivanja na jugoistoku Evrope, kako na nacionalnom tako i globalnom planu, pisano je do sada mnogo kako kod nas tako i u inostranstvu sa različitih političkih polazišta i sa više ili manje ostrašćenosti, glorifikovanja ili osude. Javno mnjenje kod nas i u emigrantskim krugovima u inostranstvu podelio se na „dvadesetsedmomartovce” i „dvadesetpetomartovce”. Gotovo po pravilu, događaji vezani za ovaj datum zorno su posmatrani kroz optiku zavađenih emigrantskih grupa, kvislinških izopačenja notornih činjenica ili komunističke ideologije.¹ Naravno, bilo je i izuzetaka.

Tek u poslednjoj dekadi prošlog veka naša istoriografija i publicistika obogaćena je sa nekoliko objektivnih dela i prikaza martovskih događaja, koji prema rečima Marka Dakovića, Ministra bez portfelja u prvoj koncentracionoj Vladi generala Dušana Simovća „predstavlja najveći događaj posle Kosova u istoriji srpskog naroda”.²

¹ Gregorić, D., *Samoubistvo Jugoslavije*, Jugoistok, Beograd 1942. Isto delo prevedeno je na nemački jezik pod naslovom: *So endete Jugoslawien*, isti izdavač, Beograd 1942.

Milovanović, N., *Vojni puč i 27. mart 1941*, Prosveta, Beograd 1960.

Pomorišac, N., *26-27. mart u dvorskom vozu*, Sydney 1983.

Kosić, N., *Dnevnik 17. mart-28. mart 1941.*, Milvoki, Viskonsin 1984, (Otadžbinsko izdanje knjige izdao je „Čačanski glas”, Čačak 1996).

Simović, D., „U službi naroda i otadžbini” (Memoari). Nepublikovani rukopis i memoara čuvaju se u Arhivu Vojnoistorijskog instituta u Beogradu (P. 17.k.8, II deo III odeljak). Deo „Memoara” za štampu priredio Vojmir Kljaković (*Politika*, 21. avgust-24. novembar 1970).

² Petranović, B. i Žutić, N.: 27. mart 1941. (Tematska zbirka dokumenata) NICOM, Beograd 1990.

Ilić, B., *Memoari armijskog generala Bogoljuba S. Ilića 1898-1942.* (Priredio Bjelajac, M.) Srpska književna zadruga, Beograd 1995.

Mirković, B., *Istina o 27. martu 1941. godine* (memoarski spis), priredio Bosnić, P., izdanje priređivača, Beograd 1996.

Posle vojnog debakla u kratkotrajnom Aprilskom ratu 1941. vođe zaverenika našle su se u Kairu i Londonu sa jugoslovenskom izbegličkom Vladom i mladim Kraljem Petrom II Karađorđevićem ili u zarobljeničkim logorima Nemačke i Italije. Posle Drugog svetskog rata ponovo su se okupili u patriotskim organizacijama koje su ranije postojale u dijaspori (SAD, Kanada, Velika Britanija, Francuska, Australija) ili novoosnovanim, sa jasnim antikomunističkim opredeljenjem. Braća, major Živan i profesor Radoje Knežević, istaknuta vojna i civilna ličnost u organizaciji i izvođenju dvadeset-sedmomartovskog državnog udara, uz saradnju i pomoć svojih saboraca i saradnika prikupili su i priredili obiman dokumentacioni materijal o 27. martu i objavili ga u obimnoj knjizi u SAD. Potonja istraživanja autora rezultirala su novom obrađenom građom, koja je trebalo da bude objavljena u drugom izdanju. Nažalost, nedostatak potrebnog novca za štampanje drugog izdanja ovog vrednog dela, učinilo je da knjiga ostane u rukopisu.³

Dramatična zbivanja u posleratnoj podeljenoj Evropi i Drugoj Jugoslaviji, pomalo su u očima svetskih državnika na Zapadu bacili u zasenak i zaborav borbu srpskog naroda za slobodu, mimo NOB-a i njegov doprinos savezničkoj stvari u ranoj fazi Drugog svetskog rata, u okviru opšteg napora slobodoljubivog sveta u borbi protiv nacizma i fašizma. To je bio neposredni povod da preživele vođe državnog udara na 40-tu godišnjicu 27. marta upoznaju Vlade i građanske partije slobodnog sveta sa značajem 27. marta, ne samo za srpski narod, nego i za pobeđu savezničke koalicije u Drugom svetskom ratu sa relevantnim činjenicama od kojih su neke dugo vremena bile pod embargom u zapečaćenim ratnim arhivama.⁴

Predlog za izradu „PROMEMORIJE” potekao je početkom 1981. godine od Marka Milunovića, predsednika Socijalističke stranke Jugoslavije u egzilu, napisali su je Živan Knežević i Nikola Kosić.⁵ Ovaj dokument poslan je po adresaru Socijalističke Internacionale u Londonu, i to na sledeće adrese:⁶

1. Predsedniku (V. Brant), sekretaru i Sekretarijatu Socijalističke Internacionale u Londonu;

2. Počasnim Predsednicima Socijalističke Internacionale: Norveška, Švedska, Kanada, Francuska, Švajcarska, Belgija, Zapadna Nemačka, Austrija, Japan, Finska, Italija.

3. Podpredsednicima Socijalističke Internacionale: Japan, Kanada, Španija, Jamajka, Venecuela, Italija, Austrija (B.Krajski), Velika Britanija, Francuska, Švedska,

³ Knežević, Ž., *27. mart 1941.* (sa predgovorom R. Kneževića), Njujork, USA, 1979, prvo izdanje. Rukopis drugog izdanja nalazi se kod Živanove ćerke Ivane u SAD zajedno sa ostalim arhivskim materijalom braće Knežević.

⁴ Pismo Živana Kneževića Marku Milunoviću od 12. februara 1981. godine, Arhiva Nikole A. Kosića, dokumenta Živana Kneževića 1979-1982, fasc. II, dokument br. 22.

⁵ Promemoria, repudiation of the Tripartite pact by the Serbian People. Autori: Ž. Knežević i N. Kosić, 1981. Isto, dokument br. 23.

⁶ Pismo Živana Kneževića Nikoli Kosiću od 12. februara 1981. godine u kome mu javlja o slanju „Promemorie” po adresaru Socijalističke Internacionale u Londonu. Isto, dok. br. 21.

Belgija, Senegal, Kosta Rika, Izrael, Novi Zeland, Portugalija, Norveška, Meksiko, Holandija.

4. Partijama koje su članovi socijalističke Internacionalne: Australija (Labor Party), Austrija, Barbados, Belgija, Kanada, Čile, Kosta Rika, Danska, Dominikanska Republika, El Salvador, Finska, Francuska (F. Miteran), Zapadna Nemačka (V. Brant, Helmut Smit, Egon Bar, Dingels), Velika Britanija (Kalagan, Alaun, Hejvord, Atkinson, Majkl fut, Lestor, Litli), Island, Irak (Labor Party), Izrael (Perez, Bar-Lev, Gat), Italija (Šaragat, Longo, Djiezi, Veri), Italija (Socijalistička partija), Jamajka, Japan (Sasaki, Kodaira, Nakamura, Cukamoto, Vatanble, Tagučići), Japan (Socijal demokraci), (Asukata, Tagaja, Kavakami, Sudijama), Koreja (Park Čang Kiun), Luksemburg (Smit, Krips, Šreder, Hansen), Malezija, Malta (Labor Party), (Mintof, Trigona), Mauricius, Holandija (Labor Party), Novi Zeland, Severna Irska (Socijaldemocratic i Labor Party, Norveška, Portugal (Maćedo, Soares, Mateus), Senegal, Švedska (Ulof Palme, Anderson, Demberg, Dablin, Sori), Švajcarska, USA (Komitet Socijalne demokratske partije, Socijaldemokratska partija).

5. Konsultativne Partije: Kipar, Paragvaj, Venecuela, Bugarska, Čehoslovačka, Estonija, Mađarska, Litvanija, Letonija, Poljska, Rumunija, Jugoslavija (Mirko Milunović, Jovan Vuletić).

6. Bratske Organizacije: Socijalistička Internacionalna Zena (Velika Britanija), Azija Pacifik Socijalistička Organizacija (Japan), Konfederacija Socijalističkih partija Evropske Zajednice, Socijalistička Prosvetna Internacionalna (Belgija), Internacionalna Federacija Socijalističke i Demokratske štampe (Bon), Međunarodna Unija Socijal Demokratskih učitelja (Francuska), Jevrejski Labor Bund, USA, Radnička sportska Internacionalna (Belgija), Socijalistička Unija za Centralnu i Istočnu Evropu (Velika Britanija).

Od pet primeraka „PROMEMORIJE” koje je Milunović dostavio Ž. Knežević, on je po jedan primerak dostavio svojoj ćerki Ivani, sinovcu Lazaru i majo-Kosiću (svi u SAD). Jedan primerak zadržao je u svojoj arhivi.⁷ U pismu N. Kosiću od 12. februara 1981. godine, Ž. Knežević predlaže da se „PROMEMORIJA” objavi kao separat i distribuirati senatorima, poslanicima, Vladi i bibliotekama. Posebno ističe potrebu da se ovaj dokument objavi u posebnom broju „SRBOBRANA” koji je izlazio u Pitsburgu u 10.000 primeraka, i to na engleskom jeziku, „kako da bi i mladi Srbi ovde rođeni mogli da vide sve ovo”.⁸

Dve godine kasnije, 27. marta 1983. godine, Živan Knežević u želji da javnost SAD podseti „da Jugoslavija i Srbi još uvek žive u ropstvu i pored njihovog doprinosa pobedi Saveznika”, poslao je pisma i „PROMEMORIJU” Predsedniku Ronaldu Reganu, njegovim savetnicima, članovima Vlade, Ministarstvu spoljnih poslova, Mi-

⁷ Pismo Živana Kneževića Marku Milunoviću od 12. februara 1981. u kome mu javlja o distribuciji 5 primeraka „Promemorije” koje mu je poslao. Isto, dok. br. 22.

⁸ Beleška uz pismo Živana Kneževića Nikoli Kosiću od 12. februara 1981. Ujedno, moli Kosića, da, ako stigne, napiše i on pismo Milunoviću i zahvali mu na objavljivanju „Promemorije”, „Promemorija” nikada nije objavljena u „Srbobranu”, prema izjavi majora Kosića autoru ovoga teksta. Isto, dok. br. 20.

nistarstvu narodne odbrane, senatorima i poslanicima. O ovome je obavestio Njegovo Kraljevsko Visočanstvo princa Tomislava Karađorđevića⁹ i episkopa gospodina Lavrentija u Londonu.¹⁰ „To je sve”, naglasio je on u tim pismima, „što smo mogli da uradimo major Kosić i ja sa nekoliko preživelih drugova iz 27. marta 1941. U pismu od 9. aprila 1983. godine Ž. Knežević obaveštava majora N. Kosića i nekolicinu još živih prijatelja, o uspehu predstavlke Reganovoj administraciji.¹¹ Uz ovo pismo su poslani i faksimili prvih pozitivnih reakcija ali i naglašava da sve ovo nije za objavljivanje” jer bi to škodilo našoj stvari”.¹²

Od 4-18. aprila 1983. na adresu pukovnika Kneževića¹³ stigli su dogovori Roberta Makferlejna,¹⁴ pomoćnika Predsednika za poslove nacionalne bezbednosti, Henrija Džeksona,¹⁵ Senatora, Slejd Gortona,¹⁶ Predsednika Komiteta za trgovinu, nauku i saobraćaj, Žaka Pola Klajna,¹⁷ specijalnog pomoćnika za spoljne poslove Departmana za vazdušne snage, Pola Laksalta,¹⁸ Senatora, Filipa Krejna,¹⁹ Senatora, Orina Heča,²⁰ Senatora, Čarlsa Persija,²¹ Senatora i predsednika Komiteta za spoljne odnose, Džona Tauera,²² Senatora i predsednika Komiteta za oružane servise. U svim navedenim pismima izražava se divljenje za čin slobodoljubivih oficira 27. marta 1941. i doprinos pobeđi savezničkog oružja u Drugom svetskom ratu. (U stvari, prvi odgovor „kao iz puške” prema belešci na margini pisma, signiranom sa „Ž”, stigao već 29. marta od senatora Džordža Hansena). Na kraju, smatram da ovaj kratki prikaz stvaranja i dis-

⁹ Pismo Živana Kneževića Njegovom Kraljevskom Visočanstvu Princu Tomislavu od 27. marta 1983. godine, u kome ga izveštava o urađenom a ujedno i dostavlja pismo koje je uputio Predsedniku Ronaldu Reganu i ličnostima njegove administracije uz „Promemoriju”, „Arhiva Nikole A. Kosića, dokumenta Živana Kneževića 1983-1984, fasc. III dok. 23.

¹⁰ Pismo Živana Kneževića Njegovom Preosveštenstvu Episkopu Gospodinu Lavrentiju od 27. marta 1983. godine u kome ga izveštava o pisanju i distribuciji „Promemorije”. Isto, dok. 24.

¹¹ Pismo Živana Kneževića Nikoli Kosiću i još trojici prijatelja od 9. aprila 1983. godine u kome im saopštava o uspehu njihove predstavlke Reganovoj administraciji. „Isto tako potsetili smo ih navodi se „u ovome pismu, „da su Srbi i Jugoslavija još uvek pod komunističkom tiranijom. Najzad, da tu komunističku tiraniju održavaju Zapadne demokratije ekonomskom i vojnom pomoću!” Isto, dok. br. 31.

¹² „Ova poslednja činjenica nije mogla da bude prijatna nikome, kome smo poslali pisma sa „Promemorijom”, Jugoslavija je sada u haosu i političkom i ekonomskom, ali se zlikovci drže na vlasti. Niko ih neće oterati sem Srba, ako se dignu u nekom novom 27. martu i tresnu o ledinu ove krvopije, koji skoro decenije uništavaju Srbe i muče ih na načine nepoznate čak ni pod Turcima”. Isti dokument.

¹³ Pominjanje različitih vojnih činova ispod imena Živana Kneževića, rezultat su njegovih unapređenja tokom Drugog svetskog rata. Kao šef Vojnog kabineta Kralja Petra II do 1943. godine, unapređen je u čin generalštabnog potpukovnika, a 1944. od Ministra Vojske i Mornarice Kraljevske Jugoslovenske Vlade i komandanta JVOU armijskog generala Dragoljuba Mihailovića, u čin pukovnika.

¹⁴ Robert C. McFarlane, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, The WhiteHouse, Washington, April 4, 1983. Isto, dok. br. 32.

¹⁵ Henry M. Jackson, USS, United State Senate, Washington, D.C., April, 4, 1983. Isto, dok. br. 33.

¹⁶ Slade Gorton, USS, United State Senate, Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, Washington D.C. 20510, April 4, 1983. Isto, dok. br. 34.

¹⁷ Jacques Paul Klein Special Assistant International Affairs, Department of the Air Force, Washington 20330, 6. april 1983. Isto, dok. br. 37.

¹⁸ Paul Lexalt, USS, United States Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510, April 4, 1983. Isto, dok. br. 42.

¹⁹ Philip M. Crane, M.C., Congress of the United States, Ways and Means Committee, April 7. 1983. House of Representatives Washington, D.C. 20515. Isto, dok. br. 37.

²⁰ Orrin G. Hatch, USS, United States Senate, Washington, D.C., Committees Judiciary, Labor and Human Resources, Small Business, Budget, Office of Technology Assessment, April 11. 1983. Isto, dok. br. 40.

²¹ Charles H. Percy, Chairman, United States Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, April 15, 1983. Isto, dok. br. 43.

²² John Tower, USS, United States Senate, Washington D.C. 20510, April 18, 1983. Isto, dok. br. 44.

tribucije „PROMEMORIJE” ne bi bio potpun bez prezentacije pisma njenog duhovnog oca Marka Milunovića Živanu Kneževiću, 27. marta 1981. godine.²³

Dragi i poštovani gospodine Ž. Kneževiću,

Srećan ovaj svetli praznik, koji će sjati svima naraštajima, a ono ni „vaskresenja ne biva bez smrti”!

Danas su misli sa svima Vama, „pregaocima mrijet naviknutima” i bude se one uspomene, kada se „svesno umiralo za otadžbinu” i bilo se spremno udariti i na „desetoro”. I ja sam čvrsto uveren da Vi, svi Vaši saradnici, i svi mi koji smo celim bićem bili sa Vama, „imali smo se rašta i roditi”, a patnje su samo preduslov mučeništvu, a bez toga ne bi bilo ni svetiteljstva, ni najvećeg dela istorije. Vi ste kao Prometej stekli istorijsko mesto, a nadam se da ćete ući i u Panteon srpskog naroda. Kada se misli na Kosovo, ne misli se na žrtve, nego na viteštvo s kojim se bilo prošlo u borbu „za krst časni i slobodu zlatnu”. I ja se sa milinom sećam onoga dana, a sa ponosom glavnih aktera, i uverio sam se onda da je mesto srpskom narodu u vrhu opšte narodne piramide. Bili smo i ostali verni saveznici. Ne oni koji „rat objavljuju”, mrtvacima, kada su za pokop. Nego slični Davidu koji „praćkom” pođe na Golijata. Jer „boj ne bije svijetlo oružje, već boj bije srce u junaka”. I nad nama se prelomio put nesreće, ali mi smo bili oni „s njim ili na njemu” i primili smo krst stradanja o kojemu smo bili svesni kada se pošlo u „boj ljuti naviknuti”. Tako da bez Vas bio bi manji obraz Srbinov, sa Vama možemo mirno „stati pred Miloša i ostale srpske vitezove”. SREĆAN NAM PRAZNIK!

Uz ovo pismo šaljem na nemačkom prikaz „PROMEMORIJE” koji je pisao nemački novinar, saradnik mnogih listova, i izdavač OST-DINSTA iz Hamburga (Hans Peter Rulman).²⁴ To je pisao za „Nahrihtendinst” iz kojeg kupuju razni listovi svoj materijal i sigurno je da će izaći u još nekom listu, ali posigurno u OSTDINSTU. Nadite nekoga da Vam prevede, u koliko ne znate nemački. Znači da je ušla u opštu svetsku javnost još jedna teza koju je „PROMEMORIJA” mudro postavila. I toliko mi je milo da sam imao udela publikovanjem spisa, da se Vas radi istorijsko delo stavi na analizu svetskim faktorima. Dobro bi bilo kad bi izveli misao g. Kosića i da se sa njim upoznaju USA faktori. (.....).

Mnogo pozdravite svoje i gospodina Radoja i Vi primete mnogo srdačnih pozdrava i najboljih želja. Vama odani, Marko Milunović.

„PROMEMORIJA” se sada prvi put publikuje u našoj zemlji, posle ravno 20 godina od njenog pojavljivanja na svetskoj političkoj sceni. Prema rečima jednog od njenih tvoraca g. Nikole Kosića, majora u penziji, koji posle poluvekovnog života u emigraciji u SAD, ponovo živi i radi u svom rodnom Čačku, ovaj dokument do danas nije distribuiran ni jednoj nacionalnoj instituciji, uključujući arhive i biblioteke.

²³ Pismo Marka Milunovića Z. L. Kneževiću od 27. marta 1981. godine o značaju 27. marta 1941. za istoriju Srba i nova pokolenja, Arhiva Nikole A. Kosića, dokumenta Živana Kneževića 1979-1982, fasc. II, dok. br. 37.

²⁴ Hans Peter Rullmann berichtet: Jugoslawien, /UdSSR/Deutschland: Ging Hitler Krieg in Belgrad Verloren? (prepis članka iz „Nahtrichtendinst”, bez datuma. Isto, dok. br. 38.

Svestan analiza, ovoga do sada kod nas nepoznatog dokumenta, koji se stavlja na uvid našoj naučnoj javnosti, omogućuje istoričarima da razreše neke, još uvek prisutne dileme. Posebno one koje se tiču posledica po jugoslovensku državu čina pristupanja Trojnom paktu, kao i vojnog značaja odlaganja „Plana Barbarosa” za slom nemačke ofanzive pred Moskvom u zimu 1941. godine.

Posebnu vrednost ovome dokumentu, kojim se on razlikuje od pamfleta, daje naučni aparat, na kome autori grade svoje viđenje 27. marta 1941.

PROMEMORIA
REPUDIATION OF THE TRIPARTITE PACT BY THE
SERBIAN PEOPLE,
27 MARCH 1941

CONTENTS:

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1. The Tripartite Pact, 27 September 1940

At the end of 1940 Axis Powers were master of Europe. The Soviet Union from 23 August 1939 was in secret alliance with Nazi Germany, and the two predatory powers had already divided Eastern Europe. England stood alone defiantly against the Axis Powers, refusing to accept the conquest of Europe or to recognize Hitler's and Stalin's division of Eastern Europe. Realizing that the war would last longer than he and expected, Hitler decided to organize the New Order in Europe as well as in Greater East Asia with Japan's cooperation. On 27 September 1940 Germany, Italy and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact dividing the world among themselves.

The organization of this New Order in Europe was to be made by inclusion into the Tripartite Pact of small European states still outside the conflict. On 28 October 1940 Mussolini, without Hitler's knowledge and against his wishes not to extend the conflict into the Balkans, attacked Greece, then allied to Yugoslavia by the Balkan Pact. This action forced Hitler to accelerate the adherence of small countries to the Tripartite Pact. Hungary joined the Pact on 20 November, Rumania on 23 November and Slovakia on 24 November. Bulgaria secretly promised to join the Pact, but, fearing Yugoslavia and Turkey as members of the Balkan Pact, postponed adherence until 1 March 1941, when German troops were able to enter Bulgaria and descend immediately to the Greek and Turkish borders.

The Tripartite Pact recognized „the leadership of Germany and Italy in the establishment of a New Order in Europe (Article I). The vital part of the Pact was that the

Three Powers would not only cooperate in their effort to establish the New Order in Europe and Greater East Asia, but also that they would „undertake to assist one another with all political, economic and military means when one of the three contracting parties is attacked by a power at present not involved in the European war or in the Sino-Japanese conflict” (Article III). Therefore, this was a military alliance not only between the Three Power signatories but also with all other smaller countries which could and would later adhere to the Pact.

It was unmistakable that the two great countries not involved in the European conflict could decisively change the course of the war: The United States and the Soviet Union. Consequently, Nazi Germany had to check the Soviet Union, while Japan had to neutralize the United States and enter into the war if the United States joined Western Democracies in Europe against Germany and Italy.

What transpired was that smaller countries which adhered to the Pact were obliged by Article III enter into the war on the side of Axis Powers and fight not only against Great Britain and France but later also against the United States and the Soviet Union. And they actually did, losing the war with tremendous and catastrophic consequences for the glory of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

The political objective of Axis Powers in Europe was destruction of Versailles Europe. The new states of Czechoslovakia and Poland, born after the end of the First World War in 1918, as well as the existing but enlarged states of Yugoslavia, Greece and Rumania, had to be totally eliminated or greatly reduced in favor of Germany, Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria.

The fate of Yugoslavia was determined in Berlin at a meeting on 7 July 1940 between the Fuhrer and Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano. Speaking of Yugoslavia the Fuhrer „declared himself to be in absolute agreement with the necessity of liquidating 'this problem in a manner favorable to Italy' ... the Fuhrer says that once the English problem is liquidated... it will be a very simple problem to settle the Yugoslav question.” At the end of the meeting Ciano summarized, „It is established that Yugoslavia, as she is now, will not be able to have the right to citizenship in the new Europe created by the Axis... the Yugoslav question must be solved in a manner favorable to Italy!”²⁵ Yugoslavia in the case of Axis victory was not to have a place in the New Order. Her certain dismemberment was merely postponed on 7 July.

2. Events Leading to the Signing of the Pact.

In the latter part of October 1940, General of the Army Milan Nedic wrote a memorandum to Regent Prince Paul recommending that Yugoslavia join the Axis Powers. He justified his suggestion by citing Yugoslavia's inability to resist if attacked by Germany and by the impossibility of any forthcoming arms or troops from former Allies in

²⁵ Galeazzo Ciano: L'Europa Verso la catastrofe, Mondadori, 1948, pp. 722 and 570.

the First World war. The sooner Yugoslavia sided with the Axis the better, he reasoned as the Minister of Army, Navy and Air Force.

Towards the end of October, General Nedic ordered the mobilization of six infantry divisions in Serbia, along with improvement of the road network in the direction of Greece. The true purpose of these measures was unknown to the General Staff and its chief, General of the Army Peter Kosic. Several days after the Italian invasion of Greece from Albania, Regent Prince Paul, with the knowledge of very few ministers in his Government, decided to attack Greece and capture Salonica. He told his ministers that for Greece it was better in the long run to have Yugoslavs rather than Italians in Salonica. While the bulk of the Greek forces at that time were fighting desperately against the Italian armies, Yugoslav forces were to strike toward Salonica in the deep rear of Greek forces engaged against the Italians. Greece was then still Yugoslavia's ally in the Balkan Pact.

Before attacking Greece and taking Salonica, however, Regent Prince Paul decided to obtain prior consent from Hitler, General Nedic and Minister of Foreign Affairs Aleksandar Cincar-Markovic instructed the Military Attaché in Berlin, Colonel Vladimir Vauhnik, to see Hitler and obtain his consent. On 4 November Colonel Vauhnik informed General Nedic that the Fuhrer was not in Berlin and his aide had advised addressing Italy for this question, because Salonica was in the Italian sphere of influence.

The Duce was informed by Germany of Yugoslavia's intention to capture Salonica. Believing that Italian troops would soon enter that city, he wanted to warn Yugoslavia about any action she might take in that respect. On 5 November the Italian Air Force bombed the Yugoslav town of Bitolj, killing ten and wounding 23 civilians.

The following day General Nedic was replaced by General of the Army Petar Pesic, and a few days later Regent Prince Paul sent lawyer Vladislav Stakic to Rome. As his secret agent, without the knowledge of the Yugoslav Minister in Rome, Stakic informed Ciano on 11 November that Prince Paul desired to „reinforce liaison between Italy and Yugoslavia” and eventually to include ‘an alliance with far-reaching guarantees to include the demilitarization of the Adriatic’. The initiative for an alliance between Yugoslavia and the Axis Powers had come directly from Prince Paul, and on 18 November at Berghof Ciano informed the Fuhrer about the Regent's offer through Stakic.

Ten days later, on 28 November, Yugoslav Foreign Minister Cincar-Markovic was received by Hitler and von Ribbentrop at Berghof. Hitler then requested that Yugoslavia join the Three Powers Pact. On 14 February 1941 both Prime Minister Dragisa Cvetkovic and Cincar-Markovic visited Hitler at Berghof on their own initiative. They proposed the establishment of a Balkan Block composed of Turkey, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The purpose of this Block was to mediate the conclusion of peace between Greece and Italy and to guarantee that Germany would not be attacked by England

through the Balkans. Hitler refused to even discuss this and proposed instead that Yugoslavia sign the Tripartite Pact. The reward for adherence was to be not only respect for Yugoslav integrity but extension of Yugoslav sovereignty over Salonica and the environment. Because Cvetkovic and Cincar-Markovic had no authority to accept or reject this proposal, Hitler expressed the desire to meet Regent Prince Paul in the immediate future. On the same day in Washington, Cordell Hull personally went to the Yugoslav Legation to deliver a message from President Roosevelt to the Yugoslav Government. In it was stated that „The President... is convinced that any victory on behalf of the predatory powers... would but pave the way for fresh demands accompanied by threats of force against the very independence of the nation thus menaced... Lend Lease Bill.... permits.... the President to supply the materials of war to those nations that are now the victims of aggression of which might be threatened with aggression.”²⁶

Four days later Minister Arthur Bliss Lane informed Mr. Hull that „Prince Paul said Yugoslavia would fight if attacked;” but „if German troops occupied Bulgaria, Yugoslavia's position would not be tenable and, if Yugoslavia were attacked by Germany, her resistance could not continue for more than two weeks. He felt that any United States aid would come too late to help Yugoslavia.”²⁷

On 23 February Minister Bliss Lane delivered another Presidential message to Prince Paul: „...the United States is looking not only to the present but to the future, and that any nation which tamely submits on the ground of being quickly overrun would receive less sympathy from the world than a nation which resists even if this resistance can be continued for only a few weeks.”²⁸ Regent Prince Paul told Minister Bliss Lane that „Yugoslavia would sign with Germany no political agreement impairing Yugoslav sovereignty and would resist aggression. Under no conditions would Yugoslavia sign the Tripartite Pact or participate in the New Order in Europe.”²⁹

One day later, on 24 February, Regent Prince Paul informed the German Minister in Belgrade that he accepts Hitler's invitation to meet, but requested strict secrecy.³⁰ On 4 March Prince Paul secretly met Hitler at Berghof and agreed to immediately start negotiations for Yugoslavia's adherence to the Pact.

On 6 March Regent Prince Paul informed the Crown Council of his meeting with Hitler. Prime Minister Cvetkovic stated that the signing of the Pact would mean

²⁶ Cordell Hull: The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, New York, 1948, p. 929.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 930.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 931.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 931.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 931.

„destruction, disorganization and occupation of the country.” The Second Regent, Radenko Stankovic, opposed any negotiations dealing with adherence of Yugoslavia to the Pact. For Cincar-Markovic the choice was either peace or war. Regent Prince Paul declared that Hitler requested neither the Yugoslav Army nor the transfer of German troops through Yugoslavia. General Pesic maintained that „it is too late for resistance, because the German troops are near Salonica” and that „we will lose the war.” Vladko Macek, representing Croats, and Fran Kulovec, representing Slovenes, were in favor of the Pact.

Negotiations were conducted in Belgrade 7-19 March between the German Minister and the Yugoslav Foreign Minister. Attempts of Cincar-Markovic to free Yugoslavia from Article III (political, economic and military assistance when one of the three contracting parties is attacked) ended in failure. Therefore, adherence meant military alliance with the Axis Powers against the Western Democracies.

On 19 March Minister von Heeren informed the Yugoslav Government that the signing of the Pact must take place by 24 March. On 20 March Regent Prince Paul met with the Crown Council (1100-1300 hours), and later in the evening Cvetkovic and Cincar-Markovic met with the entire Government in order to formally decide to sign the Pact. Prime Minister Cvetkovic made a final unsuccessful appeal to Prince Paul not to sign the Pact. That evening the Government accepted the decision to adhere to the Pact. Srdan Budisavljevic and Branko Cubrilovic, Ministers representing the only two Serbian political parties in the Government, resigned. Therefore, it must be said that the Pact was accepted by Prince Paul with support from Croats, Slovenes and Moslems. All other Serbian political parties already in opposition were very much against the Pact. Patriarch dr. Gavrilko, head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, submitted a memorandum to Prince Paul and personally advised him not to sign the Pact. All this left Prince Paul unmasked as the only instigator for military alliance with the Axis Powers.

On 22 March British Prime Minister Churchill made an appeal to Prime Minister Cvetkovic not to side with the Axis Powers. „The eventual total defeat of Hitler and Mussolini is certain... there are only 65,000,000 Huns... The peoples of the British Empire and the United States number nearly 200,000,000... they are determined that the cause of freedom shall not be trampled down... by the criminal dictators... We know that the hearts of all true Serbs, Croats and Slovenes beat for the freedom, integrity and independence of their country, and that they share the forward outlook of the English-speaking world. If Yugoslavia were at this time to stoop to the fate of Rumania, of commit the crime of Bulgaria and become accomplice in an attempted assassination of Greece, her ruin will be certain and irreparable. She will not escape, but only postpone the ordeal of war.”³¹ But another document Great Britain promised the Istrian Peninsula

and Trieste if Yugoslavia sided against Axis Powers. This and all other appeals were in vain.

Also on 22 March the German Minister presented an ultimatum to the Government: the signing of the Pact was to be on 25 March in the morning at the latest. „The decision of the Government had to be delivered to the German Minister by midnight 23 March.”³²

On 25 March at Belvedere in Vienna Prime Minister Cvetkovic signed the Tripartite Pact. Yugoslavia abandoned her neutrality and joined in military alliance with the Axis Powers. In siding with Hitler against Western Democracies for the first time in history Serbs, and indeed all Yugoslavs, were to kill Frenchmen, Englishmen and later Americans, the peoples who had created their country after the First World War.

As Regent Prince Paul and his Government had requested, Salonica and a corridor between Yugoslavia and this port were promised to Yugoslavia after Axis victory in Europe. This was the reward for joining Axis Powers against the traditional allies of the Serbian people and the Yugoslav state.

3. Serbian Revolt Against the Pact

From the beginning of the Second World War it was evident that German victory would either put an end to the existing states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Yugoslavia and Greece or at best dismember and reduce them fully under German political and economic domination. The Serbian people realized this from the very beginning and hoped very much for an Allied victory. Consequently, Serbs could not believe that Regent Prince Paul could and would dare under any circumstances to side with Hitler and Mussolini.

Above all, the Serbs could not imagine themselves excluded from deciding their fate, and that one man, Prince Paul, could force them to die for Hitler's and Mussolini's glory against their traditional friends and allies – France, Great Britain and the United States.

From October 1940 four Serbs seriously discussed among themselves this catastrophic foreign policy of Regent Prince Paul. These four Serbs were General of the Army Dusan T. Simovic, Commander of the Air Force, and his deputy, Brigadier General Borivoje J. Mirkovic; professor Radoje L. Knezevic, and his brother Major Zivan L. Knezevic, Chief of the Cabinet of the Chief of Yugoslav General Staff under

³¹ W.S. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. III, pp. 141-142.

³² Ulrich van Hassel: Diary, p. 163.

General Simovic and later under General Petar Kosić. Mobilization of six infantry divisions in Serbia and preparations to attack Greece in order to capture Salonica; the exchange of messages between General Nedić and Colonel Vauhnik in Berlin concerning the capture of Salonica; and the Italian bombardment of Bitolj were to all of them clear indications that Prince Paul's Government would join the Axis Powers. Siding with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, however was so monstrous and shameful and contrary to the existence of Yugoslavia as a state, that no one actually believed that Prince Paul would dare to attempt it. Nevertheless, these four men closely followed Italian and German moves in the Balkans and Prince Paul's policy.

On 1 March 1941 Bulgaria formally joined the Pact and on the same day German troops crossed the Danube from Rumania, reaching the Greek and Turkish borders a few days later. On that eventful first day of March General Kostić, Chief of the General Staff, sent General Pesić the Order for General Mobilization if the Yugoslav Armed Forces for Prince Paul's signature. The Order was returned at noon to General Pesić unsigned and with the explanation that Prince Paul was aware of something that no one else knew, not even Pesić, so there was no need for general mobilization.

With Yugoslavia surrounded on all sides except Greece, and with Italian and German troops in Albania and Bulgaria, the fate of Yugoslavia seemed very bleak. Discussions between Generals Simovic and Mirković and the Knežević brothers intensified. As Churchill cited in Grand Alliance (p. 161): 'Direct action, if the government capitulated to Germany, had been discussed for some months in the small circle of officers around Simovic. A revolutionary stroke had been carefully planned. The leader of the projected rising was General Mirković, commander of the Yugoslav Air Force, aided by Major Knežević, an Army officer, and his brother, a professor, who established political contacts through his position in the Serb Democratic Party.'

The four men had decided that in Prince Paul abandoned Yugoslav neutrality and entered into military alliance with the Axis Powers, he and his regime had to be overthrown by military force in order that Yugoslavia be returned to neutrality. This policy of neutrality was the only one accepted almost unanimously by Serbs. After Western Powers had been destroyed in May-June 1940, to enter into war against Axis Powers was certain suicide. This was all the more the case after German troops had reached the Greek border.

EUROPE ON MARCH 27, 1941



HITLER AND STALIN WERE REAL MASTERS OF THE CONQUERED EUROPE.

Though surrounded from all sides, the SERBS repudiated the Tripartite Pact and returned Yugoslavia to the policy of neutrality as before the 25th of March. Serbs defied the formidable powers of the Axis still in the alliance with the Soviet Union. The Serbs refused to capitulate without the resistance.

On the other hand, to abandon neutrality and enter into military alliance with the Axis Powers meant that the Yugoslavs were not only to die for Hitler's and Mussolini's glory, but they were to fight against Yugoslavia as well. No Serb believed that the Axis Powers could possibly gain victory over Western Democracies. Even Serbian peasants believed that the United States would enter the war against Nazi Germany. This faith in victory of the West and the Serbian tradition was, of course, in direct opposition to Prince Paul's decision to side with the predatory powers, which had already destroyed the freedom of all small European countries. To join the Tripartite Pact in the Serbian view was simply a blasphemy! This had to be prevented by all means, including the use of armed force.

The Serbian nation and the Serbian officer corps had but two choices: to repudiate the Pact and return Yugoslavia to neutrality, or accept the Pact and the fate of a satellite. The latter choice would have later meant sending the bulk of the Yugoslav Army, some one million soldiers, to the Eastern Front, where they would have died for Nazi Germany. This faith in victory of the West and the Serbian tradition was, of course, in direct opposition to Prince Paul's decision to side with the predatory powers, which had already destroyed the freedom of all small European countries. To join the Tripartite Pact in the Serbian view was simply a blasphemy! This had to be prevented by all means, including the use of armed force.

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On 10 March the four principal organizers learned that Prince Paul had on 4 March initialed the Pact at a secret meeting with Hitler. It was then decided to start consultations with commanders in the Belgrade garrison and prepare for the overthrow by the Army after the Pact was signed.

The political plan was made by professor Radoje Knezevic and accepted by General Simovic. According to this plan, King Peter II had to be proclaimed of age and the Regency abolished; the Queen Mother had to return to Belgrade from England; Prince Paul with his family had to be expelled from the country; a government had to be established composed of all political parties of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; General Simovic had to declare in a proclamation to the people that the new government would stay in power only until free elections for Parliament took place; and an immediate proclamation of general mobilization of armed forces had to be made the day of the coup.

The military plan was made by Royal Guard Major Zivan Knezevic in cooperation with General Mirkovic. Major Knezevic executed the coup d'etat in accordance with this plan. At 2 a.m. on 27 March all units took their positions in Belgrade and around the Royal Palace at Dedinje. All went as planned without bloodshed.

General Simovic and professor Knezevic gathered together at 5 a.m. at the General Staff all representatives of political parties and formed a new government. This was the most democratic Government between the two World Wars.

Prince Paul was visited by the German Minister on 26 March at 6:30 p.m. He then hastily departed Belgrade, apparently on his way to another secret meeting with Hitler. In the morning, 27 March, German troops had been scheduled to cross into southern Yugoslavia and attack Greece. Hitler most likely wanted to have Prince Paul near him probably to issue the order to the Yugoslav Army not to resist German troops passing through southern Yugoslavia. Prince Paul, however, was halted at Zagreb and returned to Belgrade where he arrived at 7 p.m. He and the other two Regents submitted their resignations. At 11:50 p.m. Prince Paul departed Belgrade for Greece with his family, thus terminating his personal regime. King Peter II and his Government took over the destiny of their imperiled country.

Hitler postponed entrance into Yugoslavia from 27 March to 6 April, when he attacked from all sides except Greece, without any declaration of war and with unprecedented fury. He destroyed Belgrade, an open city, in order to punish Serbs for their defiant repudiation of the Pact.

The Serbian-led coup d'etat repudiated the shameful adherence to the Pact,

returned Yugoslavia to neutrality, and established the most democratic all-party government which Yugoslavia had between the World Wars. Moreover, the honor of the Serbian people and their Dynasty war preserved and the future of the country was assured. The entire revolt was carried out in the name of King Peter II, although without his prior knowledge. The password during the coup were „Long live the King! Long Live the Fatherland!” The nucleus of the coup was the Infantry Regiment (5000 men) of the Royal Guard, supported by the Air Force and tank and artillery units in Belgrade. King Peter II was proclaimed of age and formally ascended the throne, thereby terminating intentions and desires of Prince Paul for his own eventual ascent to the throne. Above all, if attacked, the Serbian nation would fight as in the past together with traditional allies against the powers whose aim was to destroy Versailles Europe. Serbs were to die for freedom, democracy and independence not for Nazi and Fascist glory.

The revolt of a small and unarmed nation against the most formidable Nazi German State, already Master over Europe, was indeed an act of Extreme bravery. The Serbian nation astonished both the Allies and the Axis. It once again demonstrated its devotion to freedom and independence as well as its determination to resist predatory powers despite inevitable catastrophic consequences.

4. World Reaction to the Coup d' Etat

A) ADOLF HITLER

Minutes of a Conference Regarding the Situation In Yugoslavia

Wehrmachtfuhrungsstab

Berlin, March 27, 1941

Present: Fuhrer, Reichsmarshal, Chief Wehrmacht Operations

Staff, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Chief of the General Staff of the Army, Reich Foreign Minister (and others).

The Fuhrer describes Yugoslavia's situation after the coup d'etat...

The Fuhrer is determined, without waiting for possible loyalty declarations of the new Government, to make all preparations in order to smash Yugoslavia militarily and as a state. No inquiries regarding foreign policy will be made or ultimatum presented...

It is important that action be taken as fast as possible.

Politically, it is especially important that the blow against Yugoslavia be carried out with inexorable severity and that the military destruction be carried out in a lightning operation... The Croats will take our side when we attack...

In this connection, the beginning of Operation Barbarossa will have to be postponed up to four weeks... Forces may be taken from the concentration echelon for Bar-

barossa...

The Luftwaffe... (will) destroy the capital, Belgrade, in attacks by waves; and along with this to support the advance of the Army. The Fuhrer orders the immediate start of all preparations. He expects the plans... in the course of the evening of March 27.³³

(Halder Diary: the conference took place between 1:00 and 2:30 p.m. at the Reich Chancellery)

Without a single shot the coup d'etat in Belgrade had set back the German invasion of the Soviet Union from 15 May to 22 June 1941. The result was that winter found the German troops still outside of Moscow.

The Serbian revolt of 27. March 1941 obviously took Hitler by surprise. Speaking to his Ambassador in Moscow, Count von der Schulenburg, on 28 April, Hitler said that the Yugoslav coup had come suddenly out of the blue. When news of it was brought to him on the morning of the 27th, he thought it was a joke.³⁴ But when he realized that this was not a joke, he flew into a fit of rage. It must have been as Prime Minister Churchill so colorfully envisioned it before the House of Commons on 9 April: „A boa constrictor who had suddenly covered his prey with his foul saliva and then had suddenly covered his prey with his foul saliva and then had it suddenly wrested from his coils, would be in an amiable mood compared with Hitler, Goering, Ribbentrop and the rest of the Nazi gang when they experienced this bitter disappointment.”³⁵

B) WINSTON S CHURCHILL

Speaking before the annual meeting of the central council of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, Mr. Churchill summed up the British feeling:

And now, here at this moment, I have great mews its soul. A revolution has taken place in Belgrade and Ministers who yesterday signed away the honor and freedom of their country are reported to be under arrest.

„This patriotic movement arises from the wrath of a valiant and warlike race at their country being betrayed by the weakness of its rulers and foul intrigues of the Axis powers.

„We may, therefore, cherish hope (I speak, of course only on information which has reached me) that a Yugoslav Government will be formed worthy to defend the freedom and the integrity of their country.

³³ Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series D (1937-1945), Vol. XII, The War Years, pp. 272-275.

³⁴ Nazi/Soviet Relations 1931-1941, Department of State, Washington, 1848, p. 331.

³⁵ The War Speeches of the Rt. Hon Winston S. Churchill, London Cassel, 3 Volumes: I 1951; II-III 1951. Excerpts from Vol I, pp. 373-392.

„Such a governm, in its brave endeavor, will receive from the British Empire – and I doubt not in its own way, from the United States – all possible aid and succor.

„The British Empire and its Allies will make common cause with the Yugoslav nation and we will continue to march and strive together until complete victory is won”.³⁶

KING GORGE VI, on the first anniversary of 27 March in a message to King Peter II stated, „Your people spontaneously rejected the yoke of the Axis Powers... March 27 will remain inscribed by golden letters in the history Yugoslavia and entire Europe. The heroic spirit of independence, which was expressed on that day, outlived terrorism and still is the subject of admiration by the civilized world.”

CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER W.L. MACKENSIE KING on 10 July 1941 told King Peter II in Canada that, „Before the war in Canada Yugoslavia was a geographic name. But she is today known to every child as the country which had shown the example to the entire world how one must defend his national freedom... Our entire country was tremendously impressed when resisting German pressure, the 17-year old king had ascended to the throne and when he decided with his Government to resist the enemy. The event is maybe unique in the history of humanity.”

AMBASSADOR SIR GEORGE RENDEL in his book THE SWORD AND OLIVE, wrote: „On their arrival in England the Yugoslavs were greeted as heroes. The coup d' etat of March 27, 1941, by which they had repudiated Prince Paul 's surrender to the Germans and proclaimed their determination to resist the invader, had made a great appeal to the British public. Young King Peter, now no longer subject to the Regency of his cousin, became the symbol of Yugoslavia's desperate struggle to preserve her liberty... The Serbs are among the most physically courageous people in the world/// the coup d' etat had shown a fine fighting spirit.”³⁷

C) FRANKLIN D. ROOSVELT

In a cablegram to King Peter II at Belgrade, the President expressed good wishes and encouragement to Yugoslavia in her resistance to Germany:

„At this moment, when Your Majesty has assumed the full exercise of your royal rights and powers and the leadership of a brave and independent people, I wish to share with the people of the United States in the expression of our sincere and genuine wish for the health and well-being of Your Majesty and for the freedom and independence of Yugoslavia.

³⁶ Ibidem, Vol. I, p. 382.

³⁷ Sir George Rendel: The Sword and Olive, London, John Murray, 1957, pp. 210-211.

Furthermore, I extend the that the relations between your government and the government of the United States may be mutually beneficial in the support of those principles of liberty and tolerance so cherished by the Yugoslav and American people."³⁸

The American Minister in Belgrade, Arthur Bliss Lane, informed the Yugoslav Prime Minister that the United States Government considered that „This event constitutes a matter for self-congratulation for every liberty-loving man and woman.”³⁹ And on the first anniversary of 27 March, President Roosevelt sent King Peter II this message: „The decisive resistance of the Yugoslav people against the Powers which intended to destroy his freedom and independence, and brave resistance to continue the struggle for freedom, are proof of faith in the idea for which our people are fighting together.”

D) COMMUNIST

1. Moscow denied congratulating Yugoslavs. On 1 April 1941 Pravda stated that the Yugoslav people were distinguished by a glorious past and were deserving of congratulations. However, the Soviet Government had not sent a message to that effect to the new Yugoslav regime. Mr. Zaslevsky, one of the best known Soviet political commentators said”

„The Yugoslav people doubtlessly have a glorious past and are deserving of congratulations and there would be nothing astonishing in such congratulations had there been any. But no such congratulations were sent, perhaps because the Soviet Government forgot or did not think of sending them.”

2. Milovan Djilas, member of the Central Committee of The CPY, Partisan hero during the war and Vice-President of Yugoslavia under Tito, wrote about his reaction to the coup d' etat:

„He (Dragoljub Jovanovic, leader of the left wing of the Agrarian Party of Yugoslavia) gave no indication of any foreknowledge of the coup d' etat planned by General Simovic for March 27, 1941. We Communists didn't know about it either, although we knew how alarmed some top-ranking officers were with the government's policy.

„Nor did the Regional Committee know what was going on in the provinces of Serbia... Military leaders, in co-operation with the nationalist organizations such as Soko and the National Defense, had also begun organizing people in protest meetings...

„In fact, we in Belgrade knew nothing about these gatherings, held a couple of days before the events of March 27.

³⁸ A Nation's Fight for Survival: The 1941 Revolution and War on Yugoslavia as Reported by the American Press, Published by the Royal Yugoslav Embassy, Washington, 1943, p. 28.

³⁹ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1941, Vol. II, p. 969.

„...Early the next morning Mitra went out to buy a paper and some food for breakfast. She heard about the coup and ran back...

„The slogan of the day was „Bolje rat nego pakt” ("War is better than the Pact"). We Communists didn't favor this slogan, although we didn't oppose it either. We felt the approach was wrong. Rather, by leaning on the Soviet Union, we should try to avoid the war. There was no way of suppressing it though. Someone shouted it, and the crowd spontaneously picked it up. The strength of the slogan was in its simplicity, in its expression of national pride, and pride was something the Serbian nation has always had. The springtime had awakened new life in us. It was good to be a Serb that day.

„We considered Churchill's greetings, in recognition of March 27, provocative in spite of their poetic beauty.”⁴⁰

3. Tito's Communist Party of Yugoslavia was surprised by the Coup d'Etat. Tito, himself, rushed from Zagreb to Belgrade on March 29 to hold an emergency meeting with the Regional Committee for Serbia. On March 30 the following leaflet was circulated in Belgrade:

„The peoples of Yugoslavia are threatened by ferocious British warmongers and Great Serbian national extremists. With their provocative attitude, they are pushing our State into war. Do not permit these irresponsible elements and imperialists, especially from Serbia, to put into effect their action, because we do not want to hear about imperialistic war.”⁴¹

4. Tito's Secret Directive Against the Defense of Yugoslavia was one of the immediate measures taken to meet the new situation. The new Simovic Government had issued secret instructions for mobilization to start April 3, 1941. On that day Tito acted in the Molotov-Ribbentrop spirit by having drawn a secret directive which read:

a) „The Yugoslav Communist Party is now in a position to take an active part in the overthrow or the present monarchical regime, and to this end will render assistance to all elements, regardless of their ideological outlook and character, which are bent on the same purpose. Yugoslavia must first be dissolved into its several component parts, and the party will then be able to pursue its work within each of them in accordance with the directives already issued.

b) Party members who may be called up to the army will have the following tasks to perform; firstly, disorganize the resistance of the Yugoslav Army by creating confusion amongst officers and men so that defeat appears to be the result of the incompetence of the officers' corps whose authority will be destroyed once and for all; secondly, collect all arms and war equipment which may be thrown away in panic and convey them to safe hiding places for later use; thirdly, collect information regarding individual officers and men who do not belong to our movement but who may be of use to us in the event of the U.S.S.R. entering the war.

⁴⁰ Milovan Đilas; Memoir of a Revolutionary, Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, Inc., New York, 1973, pp. 368-379.

⁴¹ Glasnik, Serbian Historical and Cultural Association „Njegos”, Vol. 17, June 1966.

In the performance of these tasks, full use should be made of our underground organizations on the home front who will work according to the same plan.

c) Render any assistance necessary to the Ustase, Macedonian, Albanian and other national organizations in so far as they may contribute towards the speedy overthrow of the present regime. Help should also be given to the Montenegrin Separatists if they adopt an anti-royalists line in Montenegro.

d) Germany will speedily crush Yugoslav resistance and with the help of Italy, introduce the Ustase regime in Croatia and possible similar separatist regimes elsewhere. Steps must therefore be taken to infiltrate our own people into the new administrations for intelligence and other purposes."⁴²

e) E.H.MARKHAM on 27 March 1941 wrote 'Slave or Free? Serbia Takes A Stand' in the Christian Science Monitor: „Serbia asserts itself. The same Balkan nation which first dared defy Turkish Sultans and brave the yoke of century-old slavery has also been the first to defy Axis dictators and throw off the yoke of a new enslaving treaty. One of the bravest peoples on the continent of Europe was driven to a crossroad, where it had to make a quick and momentous choice, and it chose what it firmly believes to be right...

Now all that history and all that sentiment has been spoken in these Serbian people. It is not the result of mass action, no mob is in motion. This comes not from any propaganda, except the inescapable propaganda of a half millennium of history and the imperious propaganda of a national character speaking from the skies of dawn, the stars of night, the wind blowing over the hills, the firm steps of grandpas who have not bowed their heads and of Serbian children looking to the future. The only propaganda was the irresistible command of a nation's innermost conviction.

Serbia's common people took their stand..."

5. Effect of the Coup d'Etat on „operation BARBAROSSA”

A) U.S. Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 20-260:

„Fifteen May was the earliest possible date for the start of the invasion of Russia. No postponement was mentioned before the Yugoslav revolt, which had an immediate effect on the plan for Operation „BARBAROSSA”. As early as March 27 Hitler estimated that the campaign against Yugoslavia would delay the invasion by about four weeks. This was based on the diversion of forces for the assembly against Yugoslavia... the plans for invasion of Russia were modified in accordance with this estimate. On 7 April Field Marshal von Braushitsch, Commander-in-Chief of the German Army, issued an order in which he explained that Operation 25 (attack against Yugoslavia)

⁴² Stephen Clissold: Whirlwind, Philosophical Library, New York, 1949, p. 27.

necessitated changes in the preparation for Russian campaign postponing it between four to six weeks.”

B) Army General Franz Halder, Chief of the German General Staff expressed his opinion regarding the effect of Coup d'Etat at the Nuremberg Trials (New York Times, 12. March 1945). „The campaign in Yugoslavia postponed the beginning of the attack against Russia for about two months.”⁴³

C) Major General Hermann Burkhardt Mueller-Hillebrand, Chief of Staff, the Third Panzer Army, who in October 1940 was assigned as adjutant to General Halder, declared that „Yugoslavia had not been expected to enter the war on the enemy side... Forces could be made only by interfering with concentration of the forces which were being assembled for the Russian campaign and sending elements of these forces to the Balkans... It was obvious that the campaign against Russia, contemplated for the end of May, would have to be postponed for several weeks.. By 4 April 1941, it was obvious that the Russian campaign could not be started until after 20 June... Forces in Germany were ready for commitments either about to be shipped or already being transferred to the Eastern Front. Forces of BARBAROSSA had to be rerouted while enroute to BARBAROSSA. The unexpected campaign in Yugoslavia delayed the completion of the BARBAROSSA concentration by SIX WEEKS, from 15 May to 22 June.”⁴⁴

D) Vice Admiral Kurt Assman, former head of the Historical Section of the German Naval High Command, in a study titled „The Battle of Moscow, Turning Point of the War” wrote „The forces provided for MARITA (invasion of Greece) were not to be considered in the deployment against Russia. Moreover, the opening date of BARBAROSSA suffered no postponement when on Hitler's order of March 22 the Balkan campaign was extended, as a result of British landing in Greece. The widely accepted belief that the British intervention in Greece resulted in a postponement of the opening date of BARBAROSSA is not valid. Events in Yugoslavia did delay it, however... None of the support divisions provided for BARBAROSSA were taken for this purpose... There can be no doubt that the loss of almost SIX weeks of precious summer weather had a decisive and ominous effect on the outcome of the eastern campaign... Before the author had the opportunity to study the German campaign in Russia, it seemed to him that the turn of the tide in the Second World War was at the close of the year 1942, when the German High Command was sorely tried by three ominous events: El Alamein, the Anglo American landing in Africa and Stalingrad. It now

⁴³ M.S.Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-260: The German Campaign in the Balkans, Spring 1941, November 1953, p. 150.

⁴⁴ H.B. Mueller/Hildebrand; The Improvisation of an Operation/German Preparations Against Yugoslavia, Historical Division European Command, 1949.

appears that this view is not correct: The turning point occurred earlier it was on the battlefields before Moscow. The Wehrmacht was never able to recover from this ordeal.”⁴⁵

E) Cordell Hull in his Memoirs noted: „Important was the fact that Yugoslavia resisted. German divisions had to be employed in the Balkans that could have made considerable difference during the invasion of Russia two months later. Had we not taken strong diplomatic steps we took, Yugoslavia might have given in without a struggle, and the Nazi occupation divisions tangled in the Balkans might have been thrown decisively into the climatic struggle in the December snows at the gate of Moscow.”⁴⁶

F) Professor DeWitt C. Pool, who conducted an investigation for the U.S. Government among the top military and civilian Nazi leaders found that the „Germans we talked with stressed that events in the Balkans contributed decisively to the German defeat. The order to prepare an offensive against Russia, which Hitler communicated to the General Staff on December 18, 1940, envisaged May 15 as the date for the opening attack... the Coup d' Etat in Yugoslavia, and the consequent need to conquer that country, delayed the beginning of the German campaign eastward until June 22.... Karl Ritter, who for some time represented the Foreign Office with the General Staff, told us with sober mien that the delay cost the German the winter battle before Moscow, and it was there the war was lost.”⁴⁷

G) Anthony Eden delivered the following address at the Yugoslav House opening ceremony, 24 September 1942:

„May it please Your Majesty Your Excellencies, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am only too glad to have the chance of being here this afternoon, and on behalf of my colleagues in the Government of wishing all success to this new venture. I think that everyone of my countrymen will say to me today that Yugoslavia has already an outstanding record in this war. (Applause.) It is no part of our job to try to be historians and write this history of this war. That's going to give quite a lot of people quite a lot of headaches hereafter. But certain dates do, I think, already stand out as landmarks in the progress even of this great world conflict, and one of these dates was March 27th of last year, the date of the coup d' etat in Jugoslavia. (Applause.) On the material side the gain is plain for all to see. Jugoslavia's resistance with the heroic resistance of Greece/ those two nations together certainly disjunct Hitler's plans for the early part of last year. It certainly delayed them, it certainly postponed the day of the treacherous attack on Russia. But, quite apart from that, quite apart from the material gain, on that day

⁴⁵ Kurt Assmann; „The Battle for Moscow, Turning Point of the War,” Monthly Foreign Affairs, New York, January 1950, pp. 309-326.

⁴⁶ Memoirs of Cordell Hull, p. 933.

⁴⁷ Professor Dewitt C. Pool; Foreign Affairs, New York, October 1946, p. 150.

Jugoslavia found herself and found her soul again, and she showed the other countries that, though tanks, guns, aero planes, have their power, the spirit and the destiny of a nation can be stronger still. And after all, that's what this war is about/that your people, Sir and our people, and other peoples may be allowed to live their lives in freedom and at peace, in enjoyment of their own traditions and their own happiness.”⁴⁸

H) The Communist Daily Worker in London on 8 December 1945 printed the following as dispatched from Nuremberg: „Today's proceedings were largely taken up by the Nazi preparations for attack on Russia. It became crystal clear from the evidence that the Yugoslav people's decision in 1941... had a decisive effect upon history.... Hitler instantly summoned a meeting of his chief generals and commanders... In the secret report of this meeting held 27 March occur the words heavily underlined, 'the beginning of „BARBAROSSA” will have to be postponed up to four weeks.”

I) Prime Minister Winston Churchill wrote the following:

1. „Shortly after Prince Paul had made his secret visit to Hitler at Berchtesgaden on March 18, three out of five Panzer divisions which had moved through Rumania southward toward Greece and Yugoslavia had been sent northward... The whole of this transportation had been reversed after the Belgrade revolution and the three Panzer divisions sent back to Rumania... The fact that the Belgrade revolution had required their return to Rumania involved perhaps a delay from May to June.

2. Hitler's directive of December 18 had prescribed May 15 as the date for invading Russia and that in his fury at the revolution in Belgrade this date had on March 27 been postponed for a month, and later to June 22.

3. We shall now see how a delay of five weeks was imposed upon the supreme operation as the result of our resistance in the Balkans, and especially of the Yugoslav revolution. No one can measure exactly what consequences this had before winter set in upon the fortunes of the German-Russian campaign. It is reasonable to believe that Moscow was saved thereby.”⁴⁹

J) General Albert C. Wedemeyer had this assessment, „If Hitler had ignored the Balkans for concentration on Russia, which would have been strategically sound, it is possible that he might have captured Moscow before Winter set in. As it was, the Balkan campaign delayed the attack on Russia so long that the Nays could not reach assigned objectives before snow and cold immobilized their heavily armored columns.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Yugoslav „Sluzbene Novine”, No 10, London, 24 November, 1942.

⁴⁹ W.S.Churchill: The Second World War, Vol. III, pp. 357, 361 and 364.

⁵⁰ General Albert C. Wedemeyer: Wedemeyer Reports!, Henry Holt @ Company, New York, 1958, p. 414.

K) Julian Amery British Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, had this opinion: „It would be idle to claim that S.O.E. (Special Operations Executive) organized the coup d'etat of 27 March. There has never been a more spontaneous revolt in history....

The coup d'etat of 27 March may well have been a turning point in the war. It forced Hitler to clean up German's Balkan flank before attacking Russia, and so delayed the Russian campaign by more than six weeks. These six weeks probably saved Moscow and may thus have turned the tide of the war..⁵¹

„...It remains one of the noblest gestures in Serbian, indeed in European, history... It may even have saved Moscow...”

L) Hitler's message to General Nedic, 4 January 1942.

After the Battle of Moscow was lost, on 28 December Hitler ordered Bulgarian troops to occupy part of Serbia so that German divisions could be transferred from Serbia to the Russian Front. General Nedic, reminded of Bulgarian atrocities in WWI, threatened to resign. Hitler warned him to remain in his post for the good of Serbia, sending him the following message: „The conspiratorial attitude of the ruling circles of Yugoslavia at that time created colossal and bloody sacrifices for the German Army at the end of 1941, during the breaking down of the Soviet Union. For the dreadful casualties of the German Army in this connection, Serbia is responsible... If General Nedic withdraws now almost demonstratively, the patience of the Reich would end. Serbia will have to blame herself for the consequences.”⁵²

M) Adolf Hitler in his Testament wrote that on 26 February 1945 he told Martin Bormann that „... the tragedy, in my opinion, was that I could not attack Russia before 15 May: but to succeed in my first attack it was essential that I do not attack after that date... the unexpected turn of events forces us to bring Yugoslavia into the war, what I wanted to avoid by all means.”⁵³

⁵¹ Julian Amery; Approach March, Hutchinson and Co., (Publishers) LTD, 1973, pp. 227-229.

⁵² N. Milovanovic; Generali Izdaje, Beograd, 1977, pp. 273-274.

⁵³ Testament of Adolf Hitler; Testament of Adolf: „Voice of Canadian Serbs,” Windsor, Canada, May 4, 1961.