

## **Mind and Spirit under Siege**

By Professor Dr. Toma Batev, translated into English by Dr. Michael Seraphinoff

Macedonian language original *Mislata i dushata vo obrach*,

published by Venecia, Shtip, 2006.

Dedication: "To my lifelong supporter and companion in life and work"

### **Peer Reviews**

**Dr. Vlado Kambovski**

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*Mind and Spirit Under Siege* - a tale of the universality of the spirit and its trials

There are books that one reads for a sense of satisfaction, out of curiosity, with specific interests, and the like. But there are other books again that one doesn't so much read as one understands and recognizes oneself in and embraces the story as one's own. It belongs to all of us, as if we were all co-authors, despite the fact that it is set in a particular time and place and happens to particular people. We can personally identify with the narrator as he asks the universal questions: who am I, where am I, what am I? These are questions that are never satisfactorily answered by fatalistic determinism regarding a specific time and place, but instead they require a probing into the esoteric and the eternal reaches of our human being. And Toma Batev's story is less about the personal tragedy of an individual who was the victim of a particular system than it is about the far more significant issue of what is the essence of a truly human life. It is no less than an assertion of the existential "I" that one witnesses in each word of the story. It is the constant struggle to defend the right to be one's self in a society that would have one become merely a tool of society, an alien being without human dignity.

Something that his book teaches us is that we must not judge a society so much by its formal attributes as by its actual, specific treatment of the individual within that society. Toma Batev certainly has a lesson for us in his moving portrayal of the monstrous excesses of a totalitarian state. His is a triumph over evil, but one that cost him dearly, and now with the publication of

his memoir we can fully recognize his genuine contribution to the advancement of humanity toward a better world and life, for which we owe him a debt of our most heartfelt gratitude.

**Dr. Svetomir Shkaric**

**Professor of Constitutional Law, Faculty of Law, Skopje University**

Review of *Mind and Spirit under Siege*

I recently read Toma Batev's book in one brief period of total absorption. As I read I could see an image of the author in my mind's eye, as I knew him back in 1958, when he was a professor of geography at the high school in Strumitsa, where he was a respected and able teacher. What impressed me most as I read his very personal, intimate account was the depth of his integrity, rare in our world both today and in the past. He consistently refused to spy on his fellow citizens in his deep hatred for the practice, and he remained surprisingly optimistic given the grief that his principled stand brought down on him. Although the path he chose was long and hard the author never gave way to hatred of the society whose representatives and judges had punished him. Nor did he ever seek revenge upon them for his stolen youth or the sheer injustice of their actions against him.

Toma Batev stresses instead the importance of living a principled life, not giving in to evil impulses, no matter what the cost. This makes his autobiographical work of particular importance as a model for a younger generation, in addition to its obvious contribution to the historical record. His is a universal message that transcends history. It is both personal and representative of the most enduring of universal values. His memoir is very readable and readily understandable for all who take the time to hear the story of his path in life and the challenges he encountered on the way.

The book *Mind and Spirit Under Siege* is in essence a metaphor for the cruel absurdity of the Goli Otok rehabilitation camp. The nihilistic barbarism of that prison regime will trouble the consciences of men long after our own time and circumstances. How could it not trouble readers such as myself when I study the list of former prisoners at Goli Otok. The list includes some of the most respected figures and finest minds of that generation of my countrymen. I found the names of the fathers of a number of my university colleagues, respected friends and co-workers for more than thirty years.

## **Preface**

One day in October of 2006 while on a visit to the Republic of Macedonia, a friend asked me to join him on a visit to someone's home. That someone turned out to be Dr. Toma Batev, a retired professor of geography, and the purpose of our visit was to receive a copy of Dr. Batev's recently published memoir on his life as a prisoner of conscience in post-World War Two Yugoslavia.

I had prided myself on my substantial knowledge of Balkan history; ancient, medieval and modern. However, I was astonished by my ignorance concerning the events described in Dr. Batev's book. I knew nothing of the brutal repression of those who had expressed opinions other than the official party line during the first decades of communist party rule in Yugoslavia.

I knew that dissenters had been punished by the state. One of my own uncles had served time in prison for butchering his livestock instead of giving it to a newly-formed collective farm in his village. I had long ago read Milovan Djilas's and Vladimir Dedijer's published accounts of their political resistance to the regime. However, they described public trials with witnesses and evidence and an opportunity for the accused to present a defense, even if such proceedings did not meet all of the standards of Western jurisprudence.

What I did not know was that thousands of other lesser-known dissidents, mainly suspected supporters of the Cominform in the 1948 dispute with the Soviet Bloc, had been arrested and imprisoned. They had been subjected to cruel and unusual punishment after being sentenced to years of imprisonment based on hearsay evidence and without a single day in a public or even a secret state courtroom where they might defend themselves against their accusers.

There will always be those who will argue that during times of extreme peril states must suspend normal legal safeguards of citizens' rights for the good of the state. President Abraham Lincoln did so during the American Civil War. After the break with the Soviet Union and in the absence of security treaties with Western European states, the Yugoslav state was in peril. As a result its leaders took special measures against those who were deemed a threat to the state's security. The recent US prison for "enemy combatants" at Guantanamo is another example of questionable government treatment of individuals deemed a threat. As usual, the devil is always in the details. What actions or activities would constitute a real threat to the state? Who would make the determination? How would it be made?

Professor Batev' memoir of his arrest, determination of guilt and punishment provides strong evidence of the exercise of arbitrary authority by a state government that appeared more willing to rule by terror and intimidation than by civilized standards of legal behavior and with respect for human rights. If Dr. Batev at times tends to exaggerate the barbarity of those who imprisoned him, equating their crimes with those of the Nazis during their reign of terror, the simple, unembellished facts of his experience provide damning evidence of criminal behavior by those wielding state power in post-war Yugoslavia.

In my over 40 years of experience of the former Yugoslavia I never met a former prisoner of the Yugoslav government during those years who was willing or able to convey the experiences described in Toma Batev's book. My uncle, who was imprisoned, and his brothers expressed their dislike for the Yugoslav communist regime, but they only spoke in vague generalities, and I was surrounded by evidence that the one party communist rule of Yugoslavia had been a blessing in many ways to its citizens.

Compared to former times, life in socialist Yugoslavia was better than ever before. Universal education had eliminated illiteracy and provided new opportunities for upward social and economic mobility for millions of citizens. Universal health care had eliminated many of the worst diseases that had ravaged the population in the past. Economic development of the country surpassed that of the Eastern Bloc countries under Soviet control. The eventual opening of the borders allowed many people to improve their lives through well-paid work in Western Europe, Australia, Canada and the USA. And a new respect for the rights of the nationalities had allowed people like my Macedonian cousins to enjoy a degree of self-rule and linguistic and cultural self-identity and self-expression as Macedonians in their own Republic of Macedonia within Yugoslavia that had long been denied to them under centuries of foreign occupation.

It was only when we occasionally talked about such rights as freedom of speech, assembly and association that I would learn about rights that were denied to Yugoslav citizens that we enjoyed in the West. I would only learn what the absence of such rights really meant for a citizen of the former Yugoslavia after reading Toma Batev's book.

No doubt I could have possibly come across some similar accounts of human rights violations in the former Yugoslavia earlier. By the late 1980's and early 1990's a number of people had published accounts of their arrest and imprisonment there. However, by that time the horrors of the new wars over the break up of Yugoslavia had overshadowed the more historical

accounts of state violence against the citizens of the former Yugoslavia. As a result, too few people like myself, who took a certain pride in their knowledge of the languages, literature, history or cultures of the former Yugoslavia, bothered to pay much attention to these accounts. I would myself only read one of these works when the author literally set his book in my hands.

Professor Batev mentions a number of works in a section at the end of his book that offer accounts of the prison on the island of Goli Otok, and I have done my own search of the literature and discovered several other works. These include *Goli Otok, ljudsko muciliste (Goli Otok, mad torture chamber)*, Masan Radonjic, Prometej, Beograd, 1993. There are descriptions of incidents from life in the prison in Slovenian author Igor Torkar's autobiographical novel entitled *Umiranje na obroke (Dying in Installments)*, Globus, Zagreb, 1984. Another Slovenian writer, Branko Hofman, also provides some descriptions of the Goli Otok prison in his novel *Night Til Morning*. Portions of the Bulgarian Macedonian writer Venko Markovski's work *Goli Otok- The Island of Death* appeared in an English translation by Diana Cenic, Social Science Monographs, Boulder, 1984. Ligio Zanini's autobiographical work on Goli Otok appeared under the title *Martin Muma*. Fiume, Rijeka, 1999. Others who wrote about Goli Otok include Italian author Giacomo Scotti in his work *Goli Otok. Italiani nel Gulag di Tito* and Slovenian writer Drago Janchar's work entitled *Brioni*. Dragoslav Mihailovic wrote *Goli Otok- Island of Death*, Politika, Beograd, 1990. There is also reference to Goli Otok in Dragoslav Mihailovic's *Kad su cvetale tikve (When Pumpkins Bloomed)*. A novel by a non-Yugoslav writer, Michael D. Obrien, *Island of the World*, describes the experiences of a fictional character, who escapes imprisonment on Goli Otok.

With the fall of Yugoslavia in the early 1990's more accounts of Goli Otok appeared such as the compilation *Goli Otok Svedosta (Goli Otok Witness)* published by Menora, Skopje, 1999. The narrative poem *Kamen Ostrov (Stone Island)* by academic and former Premier of the Republic of Macedonia, Nikola Kljusev, appeared in Skopje in 1994. Dr. Stojan Risteski's book *Edna golootocka golgota (A Goli Otok Golgotha)* was published in Ohrid in 1994 and *Golootocka ispoved (A Goli Otok Confessional)* also by Stojan Risteski, was published by Iris, Struga, 2003. Toma Batev offers excerpts from these works in a closing section of his book that is intended to make it clear to readers that what he described was not made up. All of it was corroborated by a number of written accounts by other witnesses to the crimes committed in Goli Otok's prison camps, where perhaps as many as 50,000 people suffered confinement and as many as 5,000 may have perished as a result of their maltreatment there.

The preceding list of publications makes it amply clear that the repression of democrats and dissidents like Toma Batev, illegally condemned to years of brutal imprisonment and nearly a lifetime of surveillance and restrictions on their freedom in the former Yugoslavia, did, in fact, occur. While many in the former Yugoslavia did know about this, it was a taboo topic for many years, only talked about in whispers among trusted friends and family. Most former prisoners such as Toma Batev lived for many years in such fear that they rarely spoke to anyone about their experiences.

Too few accounts like that of Dr. Batev have reached a domestic audience, let alone foreign readers. With the publication of this translation of Toma Batev's memoir *Mislata I dusata vo obrac*, significant new light is shed on a subject that has remained far too long in the shadows. He offers us an accessible, personalized account of the experience of Goli Otok prison. This is accomplished in part by effectively weaving portions of fellow prisoner Nikola Kljusev's narrative poem about Goli Otok into his own prose narration.

Professor Dr. Toma Batev passed away in October of 2010 at the age of 83. He was aware of the fact that a press was interested in publishing my translation of his memoir. Although he did not live to see that publication in print, I am sure that he took the publisher's interest in his work as one more proof that history would finally stand in proper judgment of those who so unjustly imprisoned, tortured and abused him and his fellow political prisoners in post-World War Two Yugoslavia. He deserves our respect for his brave resistance to unjust authority and our gratitude for his eventual commitment of his story to paper, so that others might know and learn from his experience.

## Mind and Spirit under Siege

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Storm clouds had gathered over Yugoslavia back then. The state's top officials took drastic measures against the political line of the Inform Bureau. A dictatorial approach was used to purge the Communist Party. In those confused times the security apparatus of the party used various means to persecute those members of the party who, on the flimsiest of evidence, were deemed disloyal. Those who hesitated in the least in support of the sudden and confusing political policy changes were declared traitors, enemies of the people, and of the fatherland.

In that abnormal time the state took extreme measures. Fear and confusion swept through the ranks of the party. There was widespread mistrust among the members. It was these terrible circumstances that led to so many being locked up in torture camps like Goli Otok, in the guise of socially useful labor camps. They were condemned without real evidence, trial or exclusion from the party. They were simply declared guilty and sent off for "reeducation". They were held until they were deemed rehabilitated. Once arrested, their fate was sealed, and then their suffering and torture would begin. It all took place in secret, physical and mental torture that seemed to know no bounds.

The scholar Nikola Kljusev in his narrative poem "*Kamen Ostrov*" ("*Stone Island*") published by Matica Makedonska, Skopje, 1994, gave a moving description of what the condemned had to endure. In the second sonnet he wrote:

*I endured my share of foul-mouthed lies and curses,  
Shamelessly broadcast to the whole world  
By those ugly, vengeful men who had it in for me,  
Somehow I tended a secret flower garden in my soul.*

*Not that there weren't times when my heart pained me,  
And my thoughts churned in a boiling cauldron,  
Always in terror that they might return me to Goli,  
I lived under a dark cloud my entire life.*

*Always under surveillance, the nightmare never left me.  
I was never left in peace, I lived my life in the shadows,*

*Never knowing if my work, what I created, would come undone.*

*How could I ever spy on others? No, that would have  
Been too much to live with, that shame and dishonor.  
I somehow kept my honor, when others lost their way...*

Goli Otok was a crucible where they tried to crush every ounce of pure, human decency out of us. It was maddening to contemplate the impossibility of proving ones innocence there. Those who ran Goli Otok systematically worked to break us physically and mentally. They used every means possible to humiliate us, strip us bare and degrade us until we lost all hope. It was the worst kind of violation of our humanity. Even after we were released, we were never free of the terror that those who watched our every move would find some reason to return us to Goli Otok prison.

For many years we who suffered at the hands of the state-sponsored monsters did not dare to tell our story. There was no way for us to tell others what we had endured as prisoners of the state, the crimes that had been committed against us or the terrible suffering that we had endured in the prison camps.

The dictatorship that ruled the land imposed its single-minded will over us. We didn't dare breathe a word to anyone of what we had seen and heard and experienced in state-run torture camps. The voices of the victims of so much cruelty and abuse remained silenced for the longest time.

One of the better known prisoners at Goli Otok prison camp, who was a doctor in the prison hospital, a university professor at the medical school in Sarajevo, Dr. Nikola Nikolic, once said,: ..."What was done on the island of Goli Otok was more criminal than murder, the guillotine or death by firing squad would have been more humane. I am no pacifist, I can see the need at times for measured revolutionary violence to bring about needed change. But I am a humanist and I don't want to deny that in me, I am willing to wield the sword when necessary, but I can never accept the prison camp's systematic brutality and degradation that reduced us to nothing."(Gojko Nikolic, "One more variation on the theme of Goli Otok Prison," *Knizhevna Rech*, 10/05/1987, p.3)

Former prisoners at Goli Otok often experienced discrimination after returning to society. Many of them were denied opportunities to advance their careers in their area of expertise. They were always under constant surveillance by specially assigned members of the state security police. They were, in fact, second class citizens, denied the rights enjoyed by others. Their only real opportunity for advancement required active collaboration with the state security police after serving their sentences in the crucible of Goli Otok prison camp.



There was no sense of brotherhood or solidarity among the former prisoners from Goli Otok. Several years ago I chanced to meet a former prisoner from the camp on Grgur. He denied ever having been there. I didn't try to contradict him. I knew just how terrifying the whole experience had been, and how it had left all of the former prisoners wary of anyone and everyone. They had had all of their faith in their fellow man destroyed. Anyone could be a spy for the state, who would inform on them.

All of them had become cynical. Goli Otok had shown them how easily men could become beasts, with no shred of decency left in them. And who was responsible for this? It was the witch hunters, although there were those who blamed people like myself, who wouldn't keep silent, but told the truth despite all.

There were, however, many such links in the chain that made up our cynicism. We despaired of socialist ideology and practice, but at the same time we couldn't see other positive values to replace the socialist ideals that had failed us. We no longer could believe in human morality, friendship, honesty, and the like. The former prisoners didn't trust anyone, not even their own mothers.

Goli Otok had robbed them of their humanity, and a man without human values is no longer human. Beneath all of the fancy clothes and false scents hide the stench of humanity.

*"I want to close my eyes to the bleak island,  
to forget the foul scenes and murk,  
to never again see the investigator's gaze upon me."*  
(*"Stone Island,"* N. Kljusev)

The Macedonian Jernej does not find the justice he seeks in the world. However, unlike the original Jernej [Slovenian intellectual Jernej Kopitar 1780-1884] this one doesn't seek revenge, but just judgment of the individual, since the judgment of a whole period is no more infallible than the judgment of the individual. The truth is that no one is in a position to accuse another simply because he thinks differently, even if he keeps that well hidden inside himself. Future ages will certainly cast off as lies and falsehood what so many cling to as truth today. This is born out by facts that come to light later.

Only the most courageous dare voice their dissent from prevailing opinion. Such a person might even want to hear arguments against his own thinking, but he certainly doesn't want to be abused, mistreated and punished with prison for his thinking. It, in fact, should be a fundamental right of all people to think ones own thoughts, to have freedom of speech, to pursue ones own life, to be creative and advance human progress.

I paid for my famous error with 29 months in the prison camp on Goli Otok, at Breza-Varesh and on the island of Grgur, including five months in investigatory detention in Skopje,

altogether 34 months. My personal criminal file is number 6008,9544,10836 and surveillance occurred under the code name "Tall Shadows," which also includes microfilmed material. All of this I later learned from 351 pages of files released to me on August 8, 2000.

This file included material over a 40 year period from 1949-1990, from surveillance of my workplace, out on the streets, everywhere I went and included tapping of our telephone.

It meant that, in fact, I was never really free of state control. If it wasn't outright prison, I was restricted and controlled, watched by hostile men and limited in what I could do my entire life. I ask myself, what really for? Because I freely expressed my thoughts for everyone to hear my ideas and opinions, which, in fact, proved progressive? Because I didn't pretend to believe what others wanted me to believe? What kind of human rights are these? To act ignorant when you know better. Above all I refused to cooperate in the persecution of others, gathering information and making accusations against them. I angered those in power by my unwillingness to collaborate with them, because I wouldn't spy on my fellow man. I was often valued for my work. I surpassed many others in my studies and was given high marks in my subjects, so I could never be accused of anything there, although they tried at times to discredit me in my work, to somehow have me banned and blacklisted. There were some dirty tricks pulled in order to try and show that I was not an honorable man, but they didn't succeed. I endured it all to survive until the present day.

I recall the words of the writer Ivan Krilov, who once said: "Those who have risen to the highest positions without any great effort or intelligent work on their part, will come crashing down like a spider and its web in a strong wind."

That was my great error that changed my life. Everything has its price, only human dignity is priceless. In the Republic of Macedonia some 16,000 people were classified as undesirables, enemies of the state, who had police files. There was an army of collaborators with the secret police who served as their eyes and ears and filed regular reports on these people, filled with all sorts of information, both true and imagined.

"Those who inform on their fellow citizens are the unholy foot soldiers of the state and the source of tremendous evil in the world." (Mile D. Micunovic) Finally I want my grandchildren to know the truth about their grandfather. That I was never an enemy of the state, a traitor, a criminal, an informer, but an honest patriot, who did honorable work with a mind and spirit that served the cause of freedom and humanity.

*"To live means to struggle, the slave for freedom and the free man for perfection."*  
(Yane Sandanski)

On the list of those condemned and punished as enemies of the state in Stavre Dzhikov's book, among the names, listed as number 2774, is my own name, Toma Kiril Batev, born in 1927 in Strumitsa, sentenced to two years of socially useful work in a prison camp.

## A FATEFUL BLUNDER

I was part of a university youth brigade that had worked on the highway project named Brotherhood and Unity. We had been rewarded for our hard work with a month-long vacation at Lake Ohrid.

On one particularly lovely warm day, after play on the beach, my comrades and I gathered for a party that evening at the Belvi Hotel. We danced and sang and partied late into the night. So we were all slow to rise the next morning. I got up and bought a copy of the newspaper *Politika*. The newspaper (7/14/49) had printed a resolution of the Inform-Bureau and a response by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. I read it all carefully and considered it.

That same day in the afternoon all of the communist youth from the brigade were called to a meeting. It was held in the general assembly hall in Ohrid. Krste Tsrvenkovski, Secretary of the CPM, Communist Party of Macedonia, a leading party functionary, led the meeting. He read the Inform-Bureau resolution to us and the response by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. He explained that everything in the IB's resolution was lies and slander. He cited the position of the Central Committee of the CPY and opened the floor to discussion.

There were 17 of us present. The majority of the party members present remained quiet, choosing not to enter into a discussion of the topic.

I spoke up. I said that I thought that our party was undemocratic, that the leadership made decisions in an undemocratic manner, that the meetings were often held in private homes, such as the meeting held in the home of the general secretary of the party organization in Skopje, Roman Lecheski. If there is one party rule, with all others made illegal, and there is no democracy in the ruling party, what will be the future of such a society and state? It was the truth, and it would be many years before we would see democratization. What was my error?

I asked: Why hasn't the party held a congress. It has been a number of years now since we achieved liberation?"

Then I went on to mention how the forced collectivization of the village agriculture had been a big mistake. It was already apparent that it had caused serious economic damage. Was it also an error to mention that?

I ended by saying that there was no need for bickering like a bunch of old women at a well, because you don't solve anything that way. You just get yourself into worse trouble. The Inform Bureau and the Central Committee needed to engage in open democratic dialogue. The future would bear that out.

What do the old say: youth-stupidity! Carried away by idealism, truth and only the truth and youthful enthusiasm for revolution, I simply said what I honestly thought. It was an objective assessment by a well-intentioned citizen, if a somewhat incautious one.

The high official was furious. He began to talk in a high pitched, nervous voice, totally disregarding my questions.

Then he offered cigarettes to anyone who smoked. I was beginning to see, by the hostile way he regarded me, that maybe I was wrong to speak up, that perhaps I should have remained silent, like the others. As a wise Greek philosopher said: "If I keep silent, I can't say the wrong thing."

It was already too late to undo the harm I had done. I learned my lesson too late. I would have to suffer the consequences for the rest of my life.

The honest and brave had a bitter pill to swallow. Only the chameleons knew how to survive under such circumstances in such times as it was our fate to live. No matter that everything that everything I said that day would be vindicated with the eventual triumph of democracy. Those who are too far ahead of their times always must suffer. My own serious error of judgment would cost me dearly.

The bare facts repeated: five months in judicial custody, 29 months at the island prison camp Goli Otok, a lifetime of discrimination, always watched, ill treated and plagued by a personal dossier – number 6008 9544 10836 PPR, including microfilmed material (secret file) from 10/11/1949 until 4/23/1990.

#### CALLED BEFORE THE COMMITTEE IN OHRID

The next day, in the early morning, I was called to appear before the secretary of the party organization of Ohrid at 7am sharp.

I felt like I'd been bitten by a snake. I was drenched in a cold sweat. I'd never felt so bad in my entire life. I was tortured by terrible thoughts. What would happen to me now? I was all alone. I had no one to talk to, to give me advice. What should I do?

I reported as ordered, at exactly 7 o'clock. I told the receptionist that I was there to see the general secretary. She directed me to his office and let him know that I was there. I went in, I said hello and announced who I was and that he had asked to see me personally.

The secretary was middle aged, balding. He was direct with me, "Yesterday you spoke at a meeting, now I want you to write what you said down," he informed me.

I told him that I didn't want to write any of it down. I didn't see any need to, I told him that certain things hadn't been clear to me, but now I understood. I'd had a chance to think about it. What I'd said at the meeting. He said he understood and I went away.

The university work brigade, after completing its work and having a month's vacation in Ohrid returned to Skopje.

#### THE CASE OF BATEV COMES BEFORE THE CPM ORGANIZATION IN THE PHILOLOGICAL DEPARTMENT

After working with the brigade, I returned to Strumitsa. I was very despondent, withdrawn and listless. I didn't talk politics with anyone. I knew the situation I was in. There were secret agents following all my actions now. I didn't want to do anything to further complicate things. I never abandoned my beliefs. I knew that I had spoken the truth that was later confirmed by subsequent events. My whole life, in pre-trial detention, in prison, in the camps after I was "freed," I never doubted that I was innocent of any crime. I had only said the honest truth.

Summer gave way to fall. I entered my fifth year of studies. There was a great change in how I was treated. My fellow students began to avoid me. They didn't want to be associated with me now. There were those who tried to provoke me. See what they could get for it. I lost my place in the party organization in the Philological Department. They removed my picture from those posted on the wall. I received new responsibilities. I worked as a clerk in the student affairs office.

In October of 1949 they held a special party meeting specifically to discuss the case of Toma Batev. There were about a hundred members of the Communist Party in the department. They included students, professors, and service personnel in the department.

The meeting was held in the school "Miladinov Brothers" in Skopje. The secretary opened the meeting and announced the case to be discussed "The Toma Batev Case."

Once that was agreed upon by the assembly, the secretary described the case for the group. He concluded by declaring that Batev did not belong in the ranks of the Communist Party. There followed a lively discussion in which most of those who spoke took my part. They argued that the punishment was too severe. All I had in fact done was offer my frank and honest opinions. A vocal minority, however, accused me of taking sides and the Inform Bureau, without providing any arguments to back this up.

I sought the floor and received it. I then said that I didn't feel that I should be ousted from the party for speaking my mind freely. That would mean that there was no democratic process in the party. That freedom of thought was forbidden. That was my response to the four members who had spoken against me. Then I proposed that, after lively debate, we should vote on the issue of my expulsion. Let the group decide.

This was agreed upon and we voted. Out of the hundred people present, 96% of them voted not to expel me. Four people voted for my expulsion. With that the meeting ended.

As we exited into the hallway of the school, many of the comrades tapped me on the shoulder, others congratulated me, and one of them, Angel Kostadinov, who was later imprisoned, told me that instead of the accused, I had become the accuser. After that, he said to me: "You are our Georgi Dimitrov." I remained silent, though inwardly I was rejoicing. That joy was short-lived. Terrible things would soon follow.

#### UNFAIRLY DENIED MY FREEDOM

It was late autumn in November of 1949. I was given permission to visit the healing waters of the Vranje Baths for 21 days. I was suffering from rheumatism. I was traveling with another university student, Blazhko Simik, a student of the VPS in Skopje. We took a train to the Vranje Bath. We stayed at the Hotel Balkan. We recognized each other from past times and got along quite well. We shared a room and went off to the spa together for treatment, since we were suffering similar symptoms.

One day, upon returning from the spa, still drenched in sweat, the porter stopped by. He had a message for me: "Batev should come down to the hotel restaurant; some friends are waiting for him there." I told him that I would be right down as soon as I had changed clothes, which I did.

A former friend, a fellow student and party leader from the department was waiting for me. He had once asked for my picture to post on a department wall as the best student and a leader of my group. He was also in the geography program. He had once been the party secretary of the departmental organization. We had met in his house in the past. He had moved on to responsibility for student affairs for the Security Police at the university. I knew immediately what this was all about. He had come to arrest me. Which he did. He greeted me in a respectful manner and asked after my health. He asked me what I would like to drink. I said nothing. I was sick, and alcohol would be bad for me, and I should probably avoid cold drinks as well. I thanked him for his concern and that he had thought to come see me.

The conversation faltered. He was visibly nervous and upset. I had no doubt that he had been sent to finger me and lure me out for arrest. He invited me to step outside. I told him that it was chilly out, and I'd rather not in my condition. He insisted: "We'll take just a short walk and come back," he said.

It was dark out. There was a thick fog. The air was cool and moist. I felt like it cut right to the core. We walked about a hundred yards along the path that led to the baths. There was an American make jeep parked alongside the path. There was a driver and a secret service agent sitting in the front seat. They were waiting for us. My "friend" Roman

Lechevski, told me to climb in the jeep. I asked: "Where are you taking me? I'm sick and I need heavier clothes, and the jeep is open. He guided me into the back seat and sat down next to me. The second agent took up a position on the other side of me. The driver drove off at a high speed. I started to shiver from the cold. I asked again: "Where are you taking me?" No one said a word.

We arrived in the town of Vranje. They took me into the secret police station. It was 7pm. I was conducted to one of the offices. It was just me and my "friend." He began the conversation.

"Come on, tell us everything you talked about with others and everything will be okay. Otherwise you can expect the worst!"

I told him: "I've said everything that was on my mind. I have nothing further to say."

And he responded: "You're a bandit! An enemy of the people and the party. You'd better change your story but quick!"

Then he called a policeman to conduct me to the jail. The policeman bound my hands behind my back with cuffs, and he carried a rifle with a bayonet. He held it horizontally, prodding me along with it. He led me along the dark streets of Vranje right to the prison.

When we arrived at the gate, a guard wrote my name down in his book with relevant information. It was 9 pm by the time the guard conducted me to a cell. I found three prisoners already in the cell. They were lying on a rug on the floor. It was the first time in my life to see such misery. They immediately stood up and began asking me who I was, where I was from and how I'd ended up here. I told them that I wasn't sure why I was arrested. I was a bit wary of them. They told me that they were in prison for over five months now for alleged losses from a company where they had worked. They were pale and jaundiced, clearly suffering, and unsure of what would happen to them next.

They told me that there was a woman, a party functionary connected with the IB in a nearby cell. They would often hear her screams when they beat her. I asked if they had also been beaten, and they told me that they never had been. I lay down on the filthy rough floor. I was poorly dressed, without a blanket or pillow. That was the prison in Vranje.

It was very cold. My fellow prisoners felt sorry for me, but there was nothing they could do. I spent the whole night staring wide eyed. I couldn't sleep, for any number of reasons. I had no idea what would become of me. It was killing me.

The next day they called me into an office. They warned me to behave myself. I would take the train to Skopje and a policeman would accompany me, but at a distance so as not to alarm my fellow passengers.

At 11 o'clock the train left, Vranje for Skopje. An unarmed policeman accompanied me, at a discrete distance in the car. I traveled like any other "free" citizen that was how I returned to Skopje.

That evening we arrived in the city. The days were short and it was already dark by then. The policeman behaved decently enough. He never said anything. And when I asked for some cigarettes he bought me several packs and some matches. In the Skopje station he told me that he would lead me to the prison, walking a few paces behind me.

#### IN THE PRISON OF INTERNAL SECURITY IN SKOPJE

We arrived at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Skopje, where the policeman handed me over to a prison guard. He was aware of my case and he conducted me into a small cubicle cell only about 3 by six foot. There was no window and only one small light that were perpetually on. Prisoners here couldn't tell day from night or even winter from summer. It had a concrete floor. There was a grating in the floor like they have in public baths. That was all. Not a blanket or a cushion. Ideal conditions for the treatment of my illness.

I wanted to light a cigarette, but it was too damp to get a match to light or a cigarette to burn. This was real hell for a smoker. I had two matches and a hundred cigarettes, but I couldn't do a thing with them. I was in total despair, and anxious about the future. My rheumatism grew worse. The pain was almost unbearable. Human misery and suffering. I couldn't believe all of this was happening to me. Could I really endure all of the physical and mental suffering? It was something you wouldn't subject the worst criminal to.

It only confirmed the belief I had expressed that our government was undemocratic. If we lived in a real democracy, none of this could be happening. And, I wasn't alone. Thousands of people were being locked up for expressing their opinions.

A few days later the agent on my case, Roman Lechevski, called for me and asked ironically how I was doing. He told me to come clean and tell him the names of those with who I had discussed politics.

I again repeated that I had no more to tell than what I had already said. He grew angry at this and had the guard return me to the isolation cell. I was in terrible condition by then. My health was deteriorating, and tears poured from my eyes uncontrollably.

They kept me in the isolation cell for several more days. It felt like years to me. I was given only one short break from the box each day. I lost weight and grew thin and sickly in just days. The time passed incredibly slowly, and the uncertainty was killing me. Strangely though, they didn't manage to break me mentally. I remained strong.



A few days later the guard led me to an office. Roma Lechevski was there again. All this time I had been detained without formal charges or any kind of record of my interrogations. Lechevski was calmer this time. He offered me a cigarette. I refused even though I desperately craved a smoke. I thanked him for the offer. It was 8 pm. He began to lecture me about how we communists had to resist the enemy, both those from the East and the West. I agreed. An officer in a uniform, a major in the secret service came into the office. He took up the theme broached by his colleague. He lectured me about how the party had taken care of me. Educating me and even sending me to the spa for treatment. I agreed with him. He went out and then it was just Lechevski and me. He also went out and I was left alone in the office. The two of them talked in the adjoining office, but I couldn't make out what they said. Then Lechevski returned and gave me a blank sheet of paper and a pencil he dictated what I should write down. It had to do with my promise that I would struggle against the Yugoslav party's enemies from both the East and West. The statement included a code name, "Dragoljub Ilic." I dated and signed it.

Later, when I was out in the world again, I happened to see a notice in the newspaper Politika announcing the death of Dragoljub Ilic. He was described as a Belgrade lawyer and agent of the secret service of Yugoslavia. He had worked as a spy for many years in France.

He offered me a cigarette and we had a quiet, civil talk, without any of his earlier abrasive language. He told me that I could return to the Vranje spa yet that evening to continue my treatment. I was told not to say anything to anyone about what had happened to me here, and I was told to leave by a back door. He told me that upon my return from the spa in Vranje I should meet with him again, and he and I would become sole collaborators. I listened to all of this without emotion or comment. I kept all of my thoughts to myself.

#### BACK AT THE VRANJE BATH

That same evening at 11 pm I boarded a train for Vranje. I returned to my treatment at the baths. My roommate had already returned to Skopje. I chanced to meet him again many years later and he told me about how he had met with the investigator Roman Lechevski back then. The investigator had wanted to know what he had talked about when we were together. He was hoping for some dirt on me. Blagoj Simik told him that we had only talked about our illness and our studies. Lechevski warned Blagoj not to say a word to anyone about their meeting or about what had happened to me.

I found it difficult to be there at the baths by myself. I was quite troubled by the thought that I was now expected to spy on enemies of the state, whether Western or Eastern oriented. I hated the idea of doing that. I believed with all my heart in the right to freedom

of thought and speech. How could I betray that by spying as they demanded me to do? It was morally repugnant to me. There was no way that I could join the ranks of those who marched in lock step, unthinking spineless parasites, who simply followed orders handed down to them with no thought as to the morality or wisdom of those orders. They were mere automatons, doing whatever they were told without question. I could never be one of them. I preferred death to such a life.

I thought about how to escape the demand of Dragoljub Ilic. I had already concluded that it would be impossible for me to do as they asked. But I knew that there would be hell to pay for my refusal to cooperate with the secret police. What form would then revenge take? Would it be prison for me? I considered fleeing. But where to? How? Who would accept me? I didn't have anyone to confide in or help me. I couldn't see how there was any escape from Yugoslavia for me. It meant that I would be buried alive here.

My treatment eventually ended and I returned to Skopje. I returned to my room, number 9, in the student dormitory. I was greeted by friendly faces, people who were happy to see me back and interested to know how my treatment went. I, however, couldn't hide my state of mind. It was obvious to all that I was no longer the outgoing, idealistic fellow I'd been. Now I was withdrawn, preoccupied with my own troubled thoughts and no longer interested in anything that went on around me.

My friends grew worried and they tried to draw it out of me. I tried to deflect their questions by simply claiming that I didn't feel well. That maybe the treatment had left me with side-effects. I told them that it might just require some time.

I began my studies in the seventh semester. I had already missed two months, but I worked hard to try and catch up. There were the usual party meetings. I attended but I had nothing to say. Party leaders no longer greeted me when they saw me. I was totally discouraged and withdrawn.

One day my shadow secret service agent, Roman Lechevski, called on me. He asked after my health and said that he had worried about me. He said meet him at 8pm at his house. I arrived as promised at the scheduled time and place. We were alone in the house.

I knew exactly why he had called me there. I had thought about it, and I had decided to tell him the truth, that there was no way I could do what they asked. I couldn't inform on my colleagues. Neither of us said anything at first. After a time, he finally spoke and asked me: "What's new with you?" I replied: "Nothing much. I'm feeling much better after my treatment. I'm trying to catch up with the school work I missed." He then told me that there was lot of work that needed doing if we were going to defeat the enemies of Yugoslavia.

I didn't have to consider my answer. I'd had a whole month to think it over, and so I told him that I couldn't do what they'd asked. He seemed to consider what I'd said for a

moment, and then he had calmly replied: "Fine!" He said good bye to me and saw me on my way. That was the end of association with the secret police under the code name of informant "Dragoljub Ilic." I went home, with a weight lifted from my shoulders, after having refused to work for them. All the same I had a gnawing fear of the consequences. I knew this wasn't over, there would be repercussions.

That was my first refusal to cooperate with the authorities of the secret police, in Skopje, October 15, 1949. I would be approached with alternative propositions later

## MY SECOND ARREST

Three days after my conversation with Lechevski I was arrested a second time. I had just returned from class. It was the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, 1949, around 1 pm. I was on my way to the cafeteria to have lunch. I was joined on the way by my fellow student Galaba Palikrusheva, who wanted to borrow a book from me. I told her that I would bring it to her tomorrow at school. We parted ways in front of the Ministry for Internal Affairs, which was located on the right side of the Varder River. Galaba continued to walk alongside the river, and I headed for the cafeteria.

A rather dark, middle-aged man, who was unfamiliar to me, stopped me. He asked if I was Batev. I told him that was me. Then he said, "Come with me for a moment." I followed him. What else could I do? He led me to the State Security Police building, and handed me over to an officer.

The officer handed me a piece of paper to sign that stated that they were imprisoning me as an enemy of the people and the state. I refused to sign it. The officer said, "I have reason to doubt your loyalty. No one is above suspicion." I replied, "Well, I have no doubt about my loyalty to the people and the state, and I swear that I've never done anything to injure either one." The man seemingly accepted what I said, and he didn't insist that I sign the statement. He then collected my belt, my tie and my shoelaces and locked me into a bathroom.

I couldn't believe it. It had to be punishment for refusing to sign the paper. To this day, I don't know what made me defy them. Something just snapped in me. And there I was locked in a bathroom; I decided to sing at the top of my lungs: "Don't weep for me Daniela..." I was a good singer too.

I was locked up in the bathroom for several hours. Then a policeman came and led me out to the street where one of the black cars popularly known as a Maritsa was waiting. They drove me over to the Central Prison. I was locked into cell number 30. They tossed in

an army blanket and that had to serve as a mattress, blanket and pillow. I was given a mess kit for meals and a bucket for all my other needs. That was my entire inventory of supplies.

I was by myself for an extended period. That was one of the hardest things for me to endure in prison. Then four others were put in with me. That made life a little easier for me, having others to share with, and the time passed quickly.

#### THE TIME IN CELL 30

One evening we had a visit from the prison warden Levski. He was a harsh, cheerless man. He demanded to know: "Who was it scrawled things on the wall?"

"It wasn't us!" We answered. Some previous inmate had marked his time in the cell by writing dates on the wall.

It was already winter time. There was one Turk among us. He only had on light cotton summer clothes. The warden asked him: "Why are you dressed like that?"

The prisoner answered: "I was jailed in summer, and that's why I have summer clothes."

The warden said in a harsh voice that he would receive warm clothes and double rations tomorrow. The Turk thanked him, and Levski left. The boy was a student in the teachers college in Skopje. He'd been in jail for five months. He never talked politics. Each day at the appropriate time he would say his prayers. Some of the other prisoners made fun of him. I tried to get them to leave him alone. His faith was his own private business. As a result he befriended me and he would sometimes share his extra bread with me. I never knew his name and or his surname. He was a good natured, friendly boy. He told me in confidence that a professor from the teacher's college gave him a sealed letter to deliver to another professor in Gostivar. After that, the professor from Gostivar, fled to Albania. The young man never knew the contents of the letter. What student wouldn't have done as his teacher asked? I heard all sorts of stories of the arrests and imprisonment of my fellow prisoners. I tried to follow the progress of the young man's case. I eventually heard that he immigrated to Turkey.

One day when the warden visited, I asked him if I might have another blanket from home and additional food. The nights were quite cold, and I was still recovering from my illness. He asked my name, and once he learned it, he informed me that I was not allowed anything. Then he departed from cell 30.

In order to reduce our misery sleeping in the cold cell, we would switch places each evening. Everyone looked forward to the nights when they would sleep in the middle of the group where it was warmer.

After three months in that cell, one of my fellow prisoners, a lawyer and former vice president of the Macedonian state planning commission and member of the superior court judiciary, Tase Trpkovski, from Skopje, tried to tell us that three months was the limit that they could hold us without filing formal charges. I told him: "You, of all people, ought to know better. They can do whatever they please with us." And I was right. I spent five months in cell number 30. No one ever announced any sort of charges against me during that entire time. The prisoners in cell 30 were special cases. They were treated differently than others. Some of them arrived there beaten up by the investigators. They were open with the rest of us about how they'd been treated.

#### MY FIRST INTERVIEW

In the five months I was locked up in cell 30 I was called in for an interview four times. I was jailed on November 23, 1949; I remained in the Skopje jail until April 24, 1950, when I was sent to Goli Otok.

My first interrogation took place on the fifteenth day after my arrest. I was interviewed by a young agent. We had an ordinary conversation. I had the impression that he was inexperienced at this sort of work.

When I entered the office he was alone and smoking a cigarette. I approached the desk and he asked me my name. Once he heard my name, he asked me, "Why have you been locked up?" I answered him that I myself had no idea. He grew angry at that and said: "So you mean, we lock up innocent people?" That put me on the spot. I wanted to say yes, but I held my tongue. He asked me what the difference was between the Party and the SDB, State Security Service. I told him that there was a big difference. The interrogator told me that there was no difference. They were one and the same. The SDB is merely an arm of the party that carries out the party's orders. He simply smiled at me and made no further comment. We then had a rather pointless conversation about nothing and he ended it with the words: "That's enough for now."

He called a guard who led me back to my cell. When I returned to my cell, I told my fellow prisoners about the interview. It hadn't been all that bad, for a first meeting.

#### NO ONE CARES IF YOU LIVE OR DIE

I paid a visit to the assistant warden at my request. It was late autumn. The window of cell number 30 was frozen. The first snow was falling outside. A bitter cold breeze penetrated our cell through cracks in the window. I was by myself in the cell for several days by then.

I only had one blanket to keep me warm. I tied the ends of the blanket together and wrapped myself in the middle. That's how I slept. My pillow was the container that I received my meals in. The cold was unbearable. Winter had arrived in my cell. The light in the room was perpetually on. Only for a brief time in the early morning was it turned off. That brief interval was all I had to indicate that a new day had begun.

But things went from bad to worse. One evening around 8 pm my stomach began to hurt. The pain was terrible. I thought it might be the end that they had poisoned me by putting something in my food. I banged on the door, but no one came. I felt like it was more than I could stand. I started to sweat. At the same time I was shivering from the cold. And the thought – why am I here? – pierced my heart.

I was there because I had refused to become an agent, a spy for the authorities. That was what was killing me. I just wanted to die and have an end to all my suffering. That seemed like the best thing. There were even worse times to come, but what I learned was that a human being could endure incredible hardship. Far more than I would have ever believed possible.

The pain did not let up. The night passed terribly slowly. There was no one to help me. Eventually the light went out, which meant that a new day had begun. Then the jailer could be heard making his rounds, opening and closing doors, clanging his way down the corridor. He stuck his head in and shouted the usual, "You still alive?" I told him: "I've had terrible stomach pain all night. You've got to call a doctor!"

The jailer just frowned. He slammed the door shut, locked it again and never said a word. He then continued his routine, walking on down the corridor.

The pain grew even worse. The sense of helplessness and hopelessness was overwhelming. I thought that I would die there in that cell. Around 10 am the jailer anxiously opened the door again, and called for me.

I was conducted out of my cell and down two stories to the basement office of the Assistant Warden. I learned later that he was known as "Maxo from Prilep." The jailer waited at the door while I went in.

The Assistant Warden ordered me as I entered the room: "Turn around and stand over there in the corner of the room." Then he asked: "What is your name?" After that he asked what I wanted, I told him that I'd had terrible stomach pains all night, and I hadn't slept a wink. I begged him to let me have a blanket from home and some winter clothes because I was freezing in my cell. Maxo didn't give it more than a moment's thought before he answered harshly: "No one cares if you live or die!" He ordered the jailer to return me to cell number 30.

I didn't receive help of any kind. Not a blanket or the warm clothes from home that I'd asked for. My stomach continued to hurt, but it wasn't quite so intense. The weather that continued to grow colder represented the worst threat to my health. The poor diet, my own poor health, the terrible conditions in the prison generally, and the cold all seemed like they would soon overwhelm me: "Could I endure it all?" I asked myself.

Then things took a turn for the better. A new prisoner, also a student, was put in my cell. Suddenly I had companionship and I learned a lot of news. We quickly became close friends. The student, Angel Lazarevski, had already been in jail for several months.

Despite all, the two of us found some solace in song. It seemed to raise our spirits to sing together. He taught me one particular song that became a favorite that we would often sing together:

*Life is a game,  
Today it is joy and jest,  
But tomorrow only sorrow,  
As I roam this world alone.....*

With his arrival, somehow life became more bearable. There was some shred of hope again. We both suffered terribly, but somehow we endured, even the bitter cold of winter. I had forgotten how good it felt to have companionship. He reminded me of that.

#### MY SECOND INTERVIEW

How to describe my second interview with the prison interrogator. It was cold, snow was falling. The cold was making life hell for me, exacerbating my rheumatism. They called me in to talk to Roman Lechevski. I entered the office. He was alone, standing by the window, smoking. He turned to me and asked how I was getting along in prison, and if I had any complaints. I replied: "Conditions here are terrible. I'm sick and I don't get any medical care, and I'm begging you to do something."

Lechevski said: "You're the worst criminal in this prison, and you are only getting what you deserve!"

That got me angry and I told him: "I don't begin to compare with you. Your dirty methods and mistreatment of innocent people in this prison!" I told him the truth and it was only later that I learned that Roman Lechevski was given high honors for his service to the State Security Service.

The interrogator then demanded once again that I admit to my traitorous activities against the party and the state. He even demanded that: "You must admit to all of your disloyal thoughts!"

That provoked me and I replied: "I understand that people can expect to be locked up if they are agents of a foreign state. If they spy, or plan assassinations or work to overthrow the government. They need to be arrested and to answer for their crimes. But for hearsay and grumbling, for thinking this or that, its' not right."

I went on to say: "Just as it's impossible to make everyone look alike, it's impossible to get us to think exactly alike. I try to express my honest beliefs, what I think is right. I may be right or wrong, progressive or backward. But to torture me for what I think that's some barbaric practice that's unbelievable today!"

The interrogator grew red. My words upset him. He said to me: "You're as stubborn as a mule. You can't do that. You'll pay for it!"

I answered him again: "I've done nothing to harm the party, the people or the state. At the party meeting, when they took a vote on whether to expel me from the party, out of a hundred people only four voted to throw me out. 96% supported me. You know that, because you were there. If you think that I have committed some crime, then charge me and have me tried by a court of law. If I'm found guilty I'll accept my punishment. I'm not asking for mercy. What is it you want from me?"

I couldn't believe how cold blooded he was. He just told me that my fellow classmates would be finishing their studies and take jobs while I sat in prison. Didn't I value my freedom? I answered him that, of course, I valued my freedom, but I was fighting for the right of all my fellow citizens. I didn't want to spend the best years of my youth, lying ill in a prison cell. But what could I do to secure my freedom? I asked him.

The interrogator answered: "Be honest and admit everything, then everything will be fine."

I was expected to sign a confession and according to him, accept my punishment. Certainly it wouldn't do to send me to prison without a signed confession. But I would remain locked up, in limbo, forever, if I didn't sign a confession. In the end he said: "You could be stuck here, you know, your stubbornness and criminal behavior could cost you dearly." He nervously lit a cigarette, called the jailer and told him: "Take this criminal back to where you found him!" So ended my second interview in the investigatory lock up. Inspector Lechevski did as he pleased. I had no way to object to what he was doing to me. All the same, I felt good about having stood up to him and telling him what I really thought.

COME CLEAN - TELL US EVERYTHING!

I was called in for a third interview in my fourth month in the lock up. I was brought to the same office, but the investigator was new. He was sitting at the desk. He seemed pleasant



enough. He even smiled at me. He seemed more like a movie star than an inspector for state security. I was reassured. He was patient, correct in his behavior, and he spoke to me in a relaxed, conversational manner.

We had an honest, open talk. He treated me with respect. He made me feel that I was being listened to. We talked about everything. He seemed to be interested in determining what I could write in my confession. I told him that I couldn't do it. He didn't push me, and I went on to tell him about my health problems, my need for medical attention, the bad food in the jail, and my need for some warm clothing from home, or at least a blanket.

He stopped and said: "Come clean! Tell us everything!"

I tried to tell him that I had nothing to confess. I hadn't engaged in any subversive activity. No one should ever be locked up in this way in the absence of credible evidence against him. "It's not right to try pressuring me for four months to admit to guilt for something I didn't do. You're wasting your time. I'm willing to accept punishment, but tell me what for?"

The inspector didn't get angry, he just said: "That doesn't depend on me. That's somebody else's job."

I continued: "I don't think you ought to be locking people up without credible evidence of their guilt. According to the law, I should be set free."

I didn't get any sort of response to that. He called the jailer and had me returned to cell number 30. I again felt satisfied with what I had said. I felt that honesty was the best policy, and as a result, I had never been physically mistreated, and this inspector had been particularly respectful to me.

Spring arrived. The snowy scene outside the window disappeared and the bitter cold subsided. There were now five of us in cell number 30. I'll never forget that cell number for as long as I live. It was a mixed crowd, a lawyer, a policeman, an actor, an accountant, and myself, a student. But one of us was a plant, a spy put there to report on us. He would be rewarded by being set free afterward. But I never did learn who that was.

#### A SOCCER BALL

Disaster loomed. Inspector Lechevski called me into his office. It was my fourth and final interrogation at the Central State Security Prison. Besides the inspector there was a major from State Security. He was dressed in his uniform. This was the same man who had me sign the statement that I would inform on others for state security under the code name Dragoljub Ilic.

As soon as I entered I was aware of the hostile atmosphere. The inspector and the major nervously smoked cigarettes. They were frowning at me, and, no doubt, sharpening their knives in their minds for the attack on me. The major ordered me to face the wall of the room. He conducted the entire interview. The inspector only observed. It appeared that the major wanted to get a confession out of me and settle matters now that I'd been confined for five months. He wanted to send me on for a proper prison term.

The major began the interview in a harsh and anxious voice, demanding that I admit to everything I had said against the party and its leadership.

"Comrade major..." I began and he immediately and rudely cut me off with the comment that we were not comrades. I continued to tell him that I had never said anything that maligned the party or the leadership of the CPY. Nor had I heard others do so.

That only served to anger and he said: "You are the worst kind of criminal! You've even urged your fellow prisoners to resist the will of the authorities. You've given them whole lectures. If they get slapped around, don't respond. That even if it is hard to do so, they must resist! You've done that right here in the prison, so who knows what you did outside!"

I was silent, because it was all true. I had said that. I only wondered who it was in our cell that was an informer. The major continued to be nervous. His voice rising, he approached me and grabbed me by the shirt and said: "You've been playing with us!" Then he kicked me so hard that I fell to the floor. The two of them began kicking me as if I were a soccer ball, and the major cursed me soundly. It looked like he had totally lost control. He was kicking me with all his might, in the legs, back, head, all over. He struck at me and shouted: "You think you can play with us!" He swore like crazy.

Roman Lechevski was kicking me along with the major, but he wasn't trying very hard to hurt me. But I was unable to endure the beating, physically or mentally. I lost consciousness. I have no idea what happened to me after that.

I awoke in cell 30. All four of my fellow prisoners were hovering over me, wiping the blood off me and tending to my injuries. I groaned in agony. Every part of my body hurt. Blood was dripping from a head wound. I was so grateful at that moment for the support and help of my brother prisoners that I thought, 'how could one of these be a spy for the authorities? How could that happen here? It did have the effect, however, of silencing my political talk. I felt so disillusioned. How could one of our group have proven to be so treacherous and deceitful? And who was it? It would have to be someone who would end up being freed rather than sent on to a prison camp. Whoever it was, they must have agreed to spy for the secret police, just as I had once promised to do.

That was my last interrogation. All four were just ordinary conversations with no written record of what was said. There was never a confession on my part or a proper process

of presentation of evidence and proving of guilt. Because they had held me for five months without trial or proof of guilt, I thought that they would certainly have to release me. But that proved to be a naïve notion. Instead of immediate release, I was condemned to many months in prison camps.

#### SENTENCED TO 24 MONTHS OF SOCIALLY USEFUL LABOR

After five months in cell number 30 they put me in another cell. I was only there for two days. There were two other prisoners in the cell. One was a partisan veteran from Kavardarsi, Boro Angelovski-Vatashki, who was suffering with a kidney disease and spent his time laying down on a straw mattress. The other was Dimo Popev, a student from my own course geography, and in the same year. We became close.

The two days passed very quickly because I was hearing a lot of news. I learned that we could be transferred to the work camp very soon. On April 24, 1950 at around 6 pm, the jailer led me an underground parking garage where a "Maritsa" automobile awaited me. They transported me to the Ministry of the Interior Building that was near the Macedonian State Assembly Building. I was led into a large hall.

The hall was filled with prisoners, many familiar faces, some not. Everyone was smoking. Someone offered me a cigarette. I smoked for the first time in ten months. Everyone was talking quite freely. The word was that we were all on our way to a socially useful work camp. We all thought that conditions would have to be better there. Some people were visibly pleased by the prospect. We discussed our possible sentences and what conditions might apply. There were some among us who had been taken right off the streets. They hadn't been jailed for investigation. They were headed directly to a work camp.

There were prisoners who had bread, canned food, cigarettes and other supplies from home. We were a diverse group assembled from all over for dispatch to work camps. They kept us there until midnight. I kept expecting to be brought before some commission that would formally sentence me, but nothing of the kind ever occurred.

Two uniformed officers of State Security entered the hall. They approached each one of us individually with a notice that described the sentence and required our signature. When they reached me they announced that I had been sentenced to 24 months of socially useful labor, and they handed me a paper to sign. I refused because there had been no official record of a charge, trial or proceedings. How could I be sentenced without being proven guilty of anything?

The officer who held the paper only smiled at me and said, "You'll have plenty of time to philosophize, where you're going. You'll come to your senses there after a time." All the

others signed the document without protest. Everyone there received 24 months, 18 months, or in some cases, 15 months.

I received the full 24 months of labor camp, after 5 months in the investigation unit. My signature on the sentencing document has been forged. There had never been a proper investigation, charges, trial or sentencing. Proof of my hostile activities against the party and the state had never been established. I'd never had my day in court. There was no legal basis whatsoever for what they were doing to me.

I couldn't believe that things were done this way anywhere in the world. It was even worse that there was no one I could complain to. Authority seemed to be totally arbitrary in our land. It seemed no better than Turkish times, when the authorities did whatever they pleased with you.

### A JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN

Around midnight of April 26, 1950 they began to handcuff us in pairs in the hall. I got lucky in this. By the time they reached me they had run out of handcuffs, so they used rope to bind the rest of us. They tied me to a third year chemistry student from Skopje University named Zhivko. After we were all tied up, they began to load us on trucks with canopies. They told us to keep quiet and not to make any sort of commotion. They packed us in tightly together. The canvas canopy hid us quite thoroughly. The trucks pulled out. No one knew where we were going. After a short time we arrived at the railway station in Skopje. The truck backed up a rail car so that we could be loaded directly into the car. Once we were all in they closed and locked the door, and we were left in the pitch dark. There were no lights in the rail wagon. It was a special train, we would later learn, that delivered prisoners to the island of Goli Otok.

The scholar Nikola Kljusev in his poem "Stone Island" (1994, Skopje) captured some of experience:

*Where is the locomotive bound  
With its cargo of human flesh?  
Stubbornly crammed together in the overcrowded  
Wagons, hungry and tired, in a brotherly embrace.*

*Evil henchmen aim automatic weapons  
At us through the ugly bars from every direction.  
They stare at us,  
Our every wound exposed.*

*Well-fed men with frowning gazes  
That cut through you like a rifle shot.  
They stare with drooping mouths and  
Blood shot eyes at the rows of slaves*

*They herd us like dogs  
In the murky darkness,  
Tied one to the next,  
Hurried along through an unseen entry.*

The train departed. Soon we were all asleep, worn out, mistreated and shaken to our roots. Maybe the monotonous sway of the train quickly lulled us off to sleep. When I woke up, it was already day again. I looked around at my fellow prisoners, pale, sickly, silent rumped heaps scattered around the car. We had each received a tin of food and hunk of bread for the journey, but that was long ago used up, and we were all hungry. We had only an open bucket for a toilet. The car looked as if it was normally used for shipping livestock.

My travel partner Zhivko and I untied ourselves, since we had only been tied together with a piece of rope. He was a good-looking somewhat dark young man, cheerful and talkative. So we sat and had a long conversation about our fates and sorrows.

The train moved along at a considerable clip. We rarely stopped anywhere along the way. Sometime later the next night we arrived at the Bakar Harbor not far from Rijeka. They unloaded us from the train and led us aboard a boat named the "Punat." It was a freight ship that hauled everything bound for Goli Otok. It was owned by the Mermer Company. There were several policemen standing alongside the gangway who had whips and wooden paddles. They were maliciously striking at the helpless pairs of shackled prisoners as they boarded the ship. My partner and I somehow avoided the heavy blows that so many were receiving to their arms and legs. But the scene was awful. Men were screaming and crying and desperately shoving each other in order to try and avoid the blows. Some as a result of the beatings and the fear even soiled themselves. And the policemen just kept up a relentless barrage, forcing us all to cram into the hold, as if we were being ground between a mortar and pestle. Many of the men were injured by the half-crazed policemen, who screamed and cursed us as they lashed out at us: "We're sending you to your pal Stalin!"

The ordeal lasted about an hour, and we were underway. Everyone lay exhausted and groaning in the ship's hold as we left the dock. Our voyage on the Adriatic Sea in the "Punat," took several hours. I would only later learn that our group, that was only a fraction of the train load, numbered some six hundred men from all over Yugoslavia. It was far more than the boat "Punat" was designed to carry.

*"The infamous ship, the Punat, opened its  
Night doors, where the cold fists of overseers  
Rained down on heads, put thought to flight,  
Sowing an invisible terror in every one of us.*

*Over the Bakar Harbor a copper moon weeps,  
At the utter inhumanity of it all.  
Human beings crammed into the hold like canned fish  
Bleeding their life blood out on the slippery wooden deck.*

*More like fish caught in a net than men,  
They groan under the terrible weight of it all.  
Who are these, smashed and humiliated  
By cruel henchmen in the flower of youth?*

*In the dead silence, suddenly the powerful  
Engine roars to life, setting off a minor panic  
Among the prisoners bound for the unknown,  
Imagining themselves nothing more than food for sharks.*

*Each one lost in his own troubled thoughts,  
Adrift on his own solitary raft in a sea  
Of sorrow hidden deep inside himself  
And muffled by the steady rumble of the engine.*

*Oh Lord, eternal witness to this hour,  
Let your merciful angels sing the truth.  
Will the dawn break in a raging storm,  
Or will the day die in utter silent dusk?*

*The waves crash on the sea cliffs  
And the songs of white sea birds  
Echo and mix with our cries  
And the chaos of loud curses and shouts.*

from "Stone Island" N. Kljusev

#### ARRIVAL ON GOLI OTOK

We eventually arrived on Goli Otok. I was quite scared, because prior to my arrest, I had heard a program of Radio Budapest in which they referred to Goli Otok as the island of death.

The Punat pulled in at a small dock where we were "greeted" by about 5000 prisoners from the camp. They filled the air with various political chants: "Down with the Stalinist thugs! Hurrah, long live Tito! Enemy lackeys! Down with the traitors! All for the Party!"

We climbed down off the boat one by one, to be greeted by a double row of prisoners nearly a mile long. The 5000 or so of them had been formed into a gauntlet that we would each have to run through. As we new arrivals passed between the lines, they continually shouted: "Down with the traitors! Down with the thugs! Down with the Stalinists! Hoorah!" And they struck at us with their fists and feet, competing to see who could deliver the worst beating. Some would spit in our faces as well, while all along screaming: "Down with the thugs! Down with Stalin's henchmen! Down with the traitors!" The heavy blows would knock some of the new arrivals down, but they would be lifted back onto their feet and forced to continue down the line of waiting prisoners. Only those who were knocked unconscious were thrown out of the gauntlet.

When my turn came I joined hands with another prisoner, Alexander Vitanov from Strumica, who would later become a surgeon. We plunged into the gauntlet together, thinking that if we died, at least we wouldn't die alone. But no one was spared the terrible beating. We received as many shouts and ugly curses, spitting and hard blows to every part of our bodies as the others. When we finally reached the end of our mile long ordeal we collapsed into an exhausted, battered heap. I couldn't see my own face, but my partner from Strumica was a terrible mess. His nose was bleeding and his red eyes were nearly swollen shut. Everyone came through the line in a similar condition, and some had suffered even more serious injuries than we had.

After our beating we all lay on the ground for nearly an hour, thoroughly exhausted and covered with painful wounds. Eventually we were offered water to drink and a chance to clean ourselves up. They took away our civilian clothes and gave us each a set of baggy ill-fitting prison uniforms. They only left us our shoes. Then we were assigned a place in the barracks, a set of primitive wooden shelters.

*Trembling martyrs arranged in pairs  
Move in silence toward the strange seashore.  
Naked as the day they were born  
They are tossed into the icy water.*

*And they tremble uncontrollably,  
Shorn like sheep, with vision blurred.  
They run on bare feet over the island's stones,  
"Let's go, scum, into the tunnel" a voice curses them.*

*Into the warm tunnel of the gauntlet  
They enter; pass between the raging rows of men  
And blows from fists and feet rain down on them  
As angry and dangerous as a thunderstorm.*

*The gauntlet extends on forever.  
The poor frightened rabbits run  
Through it as if scalded with boiling water  
And the once tortured inflict pain on the newcomers.*

*The overseers sharpen their eyes  
Sowing terror by their mere gaze  
Over the ordered rows of prisoners as  
They watch for those who soften their blows.*

*Some stumble and fall, and others tumble  
On top of them, trampled and bloodied,  
Beaten nearly to death, as if they  
Had fallen prey to hungry eagles.*

*The inquisitors peer down from the heights.  
They gape through a window, their eyes locked  
On the carnage, with a look of satisfaction they  
Raise their glasses to foamy lips, unfazed by it all.*

*Bodies tumble out of a tunnel like wheat stalks  
Laid down by the harvester's scythe.  
They lie there in a battered groaning heap,  
After the attack of the vicious pack of wolves.*

*In a daze I see one unfortunate soul,  
His tender young life snuffed out,  
The sight of his drooping bloodied head  
Fills my heart with such an ache and sorrow.*

*Pale, trembling, exhausted bodies  
Lie on the stones in one dreadful, bloody heap.  
I try to rise, but immediately fall back  
And a vulture circles, follows us with keen interest.*

*Blood flows freely over the white stones*



*Of the path we must take, and someone says:  
"Bear up, heart, we've arrived at the gates of hell!"  
I brace myself. Satan, lead me on!*

*Ah, at least I have a dear friend  
Who wipes away the blood from my face.  
Wipes away those tears hidden away in my heart  
Our shared suffering, sorrow, a consolation.*

*The blue bloodied faces of the condemned  
Form a circle on the stark stone island,  
Where demons set them one against the other  
And assign them all numbers for their stay in this hell hole.*

*Oh, old father! It hurts me so  
To see you beside me here bloodied and bare.  
I want to help you, but I am powerless,  
One more hawk with broken wings.*

*How did we call down such wrath of God  
Upon our sorry heads, So many innocent lambs  
Skewered on the horns of angry devils,  
On this burning, blood-drenched barren island.*

*My heart weeps at such a fate,  
Cast into the shadows, bereft and silenced,  
Suddenly adrift in the land of the dead,  
Floating in the dark depths of hell.*

*With a sigh I gaze into the circle of hell  
And the shadow of death that hovers over us,  
That watches over these cursed children  
In this dark abyss of human sorrow.*

from "Stone Island" N. Kljusev

There were twenty barracks in the camp, with two hundred prisoners in each. We were the fourth group of political dissidents from all over Yugoslavia. There were six hundred of us in our group. They assigned us each to barrack buildings. These were actually rather primitive log huts. Our beds were wood boxes without pillows or mattresses, only one blanket. I was assigned to barrack number two.

That first day we were allowed to rest after our journey and the beating. None of the old prisoners approached us. They were forbidden to converse with us. That evening we received a meal. We were given a war-time portion of beans to eat from a spoon. The rest of the meal consisted of water and a piece of bread.

We were then ordered to line up outside the hut, where we were each ordered to identify ourselves in a roll call. Then the guards escorted us to the toilets, and afterward to our sleeping boxes. That was the end of our arrival day on Goli Otok. That was how my group arrived. However, there were even worse initiations to come, when the new prisoners were forced to run half naked through the passages, accompanied by further shouts, spitting, beatings and offensive words.

### GOLI OTOK- ISLAND OF DEATH

The island of Goli Otok is located in the Kvarner Sound. It is surrounded by the islands of Grgur, Prvich and Rab. It covers 4.7 square kilometers. It is the most infamous prison camp on European soil since World War II.

The island is barren limestone karst wasteland. There is no soil, no vegetation, no plant or animal life, and no source of water, and, therefore, no basis for human habitation. It has a Mediterranean climate, with along warm, dry summer and a mild wet winter. It was that mild climate that made it possible for prisoners to survive. The selection of the site for a prison was no accident. There were three camps on the island: a male camp known as "Big Darling," a female camp known as "Little Darling" and work camp 101 known as "Peter's Hole." The male camp was the largest. It was situated on a bay of Goli Otok. The entire camp was surrounded by barbed wire with several guard posts and only one large entry gate. It was guarded by policemen. There were twenty stone barracks buildings in the camp, built by the prisoners themselves. While they were building the barracks the prisoners were housed in temporary wooden structures. I spent the first year in one of these buildings. In addition to the barracks, there was a kitchen, a medical clinic and a bathroom building in the camp. The workshops were outside of the camp.

The women's camp or "Little Darling" was much smaller, with several wooden barracks buildings and out buildings. It was located in a desolate, limestone depression surrounded by barb wire. The camp was empty. One day we prisoners from barracks number two worked at cleaning up the camp. It was identical to the men's camp, only smaller.

The camp known as "Peter's Hole" was located in the middle of the island, on high ground. This camp was also in a depression or hole in the limestone island. In addition to barbed wire, this camp had a stone wall around it several meters high. I worked there one

time as well. This camp was for the most important prisoners, high ranking public officials, military men or party officials. The island was one of the harshest cruelest prisons on earth. Goli Otok's three prison camps earned the place its name of the island of death. The brutality and torture that took place there has few rivals in history. It was so outrageous that it was called a social correction work camp. All we ever did was move stone from one place to another. It was a human meat grinder designed for crushing the inmates mentally and physically.

The main purpose of the camp was to root out all dissident activity among the prisoners. This goal was pursued by every means possible. No method was considered too cruel to be employed. There would be no half measures. Rehabilitation of the prisoners would require total and absolute cooperation, and this meant that full confession of ones own subversive thoughts and anything and everything one had heard from colleagues, friends, brothers, sisters, spouses or parents must be made. This led to open conflict between fathers and sons in the camp as one betrayed the other. Rehabilitation was not considered complete until a person had shown absolute loyalty to the party through thorough cleansing of ones own soul and total renunciation of the party's foes. The prisoners often sang the song:

*Oh, Goli Otok  
Your shores awash  
In foamy waves  
On all sides.  
Our souls  
Pressed on all sides  
Like the shores  
Of you, in answer.*

*With no escape  
Our souls have  
Been besieged  
Here now.*

The investigation didn't end there. You had to cooperate with the investigator, at least twice a month you had to inform on someone about something. Most of the prisoners tried to out do each other in reporting on their fellow inmates in the belief that this would improve their life on Goli Otok. They even thought that it might lead to their release. For some it really did lead to reduced work or new privileges, but it didn't gain their release. Everyone had to serve his full sentence (sentences ranged from five to twenty four months) with no exceptions. In this regard, the prison camp treated everyone the same.

I was only called in to see the investigator three times during my stay on the island, and at the Breza-Varesh camp I never even saw what he looked like. A visit to the investigator depended on your perceived character. Spying required a willingness to improve your personal circumstances at the expense of those around you. You had to be willing to inflict suffering on others in order to gain lighter work for yourself, if not early release from prison.

There was something else at work here as well, something terrible. There was sophisticated methodology of torture and destruction of the prisoners, terribly twisted, cruel forms of physical and psychological torture were inflicted upon helpless captives. The prisoners were battered humiliated, made to spy on each other and beat each other up. All of this was carefully orchestrated by the prison authorities; the entire machinery of brutal mistreatment was operated by them.

There was no end to their brutality. I thought that there would be some easing up or lessening of their cruel methods over time. But it never happened.

I can't help but think that Goli Otok was one of the most evil prison camps in the world, its evil exceeded only by some of the worst concentration camps of World War II, such as Auschwitz and Treblinka.

Goli Otok truly was an island of death, a torture camp like none other in the world. There was both physical and psychological murder. Many people, particularly among the older prisoners, took their own lives in various ways

What possible justification could there be for inflicting such pain on members of their own people, former comrades? That was the thing that anguished us most.

All of this is the sad, tragic awful truth, the work of a depraved society. No one knows that better than those who felt it on their own skin.

I can't imagine more inhumane treatment has ever been done by human beings. Only in the Balkans could people be so crazy.

Under such conditions, for a person to survive and retain his humanity, that is something truly noble and good. We were punished because we valued freedom, justice, humanistic and fair treatment for all in our society.

#### ONE DAY ON GOLI OTOK

In order to give you an idea of what Goli Otok, the island of death was really like, I will describe a typical day for us. We rose early in the morning. The guard would shout, "Get up Crooks!" We would quickly fold our blankets and leap out of our sleeping boxes and slipped on our shoes laid out on the floor in front of the bed. The prisoners would scramble frantically

trying to get a decent pair of rubber sandals to wear. Whoever got a pair that was damaged, or too big or small would suffer all day for it.

I solved this problem by picking out a decent pair the night before and then sleeping on them. It was very risky doing this because, if they caught me, I received severe punishment.

Then we all lined up for roll call, without exception, out front of the barrack. While we stood in line, we received our breakfast. It consisted of a spoonful of corn mush and a small cup of brown herbal coffee. In the absence of water, we were given a spoonful of sugar with our corn mush. That was breakfast the entire time I was there. In the beginning water was very scarce, and we were limited to one small cup a day, a terrible source of misery. Withholding water was one of the worst punishments we had to endure during the summer months. We couldn't even wash our hands and faces. Later on we were given more drinking water.

After breakfast we marched in line to work. The work site was about a mile and a half from the camp. It was a stone quarry, where we moved stones around with a shoulder harness and board, four prisoners to a load.

We would sing as we worked:

*Comrade Tito, we who are on our way,  
From your path we will not stray.  
No more lies and curses,  
Tito, to us is most dear*

Most times the song continued:

*Comrade Tito  
Fair one  
The youth as one  
Adore you.*

We only sang about Tito. You had to sing loudly; because silence or inaudible singing would be taken as proof that a prisoner sympathized with the enemy or was apathetic. The alert eyes of the activists were always watching us.

The manager of the quarry work site would decide who worked where and at what. We shifted stone from one place to another using hauling devices. There was a note-taker present every day who noted down the work of each prisoner in a notebook he carried with him. He was there every day of my stay on Goli Otok. Few prisoners escaped hard physical labor (Only frail old people, some cultural workers, sanitation workers, foremen at the work

site, barrack chiefs, the camp commandant and his assistants, and assistants to the investigator, i.e. prisoners who were proven activists in all the activities of the camp.) Those prisoners who did the best work were singled out for praise, and sometimes they received extra rations at supper. Those who hadn't performed well in moving stones were declared malingerers.

Often, before going to bed, the malingerers were punished by being made to run a gauntlet of prisoners lined up outside the barracks. After the beating, they were sent off to bed.

Otherwise, the work was the most brutal part of life on Goli Otok. All we did, day in and day out was move stone from one place to another. Month after month and year after year it went on. It wore the prisoners down both physically and mentally. It was real torture.

Often enough I had to run the gauntlet, punished as a malingerer, troublemaker, lazy bones or the like. The beating was always accompanied by curses and spitting, with shouts of: "Ooah! Crook! Lazy bum! Down with the troublemaker! Down with the malingerer!" Etc.

How did they get us to beat each other up? Anyone who didn't want to do it was reported to the barracks sergeant and he was severely punished, shunned as an apathetic parasite and criminal.

Exactly at noon each day work was suspended, which meant that we worked from 7 am until 12 noon. Then we returned to the camp in marching formation, singing songs about Tito, for lunch.

Lunch itself consisted of a 100 gram piece of bread and a military portion of beans. It was a thin soup with only a tablespoon of beans in each bowl. That was our diet, day in and day out, never changing. Because I was perpetually hungry, nothing has ever tasted better than that lunch, in my entire life. We were all thin and sickly as a result of this meager, inadequate diet.

Immediately following lunch we went off to rest for two hours. Those who were labeled malingerers didn't get a rest. They were required to break stones into small pieces out front of the barracks while the others napped. Then everyone was marched back to the quarry to work until sunset. And afterward we again marched in file and sang about Tito. This included the following song, thought up by the activists among us, called the Battle Song:

*Now above Goli Otok  
Doves no longer fly  
The striker brigade  
Is here at labor.*

*We have built roads,  
We have built bridges,  
We have built rail lines  
We've done what we could  
Building Belgrade  
Making it a Moscow.*

Often we would also sing the song:

*The sun is burning,  
The sun is baking,  
Brother it is to  
You island of Goli.*

There was no public moment without songs. Our supper was the same as lunch. Normally, after supper, we had meetings, some for the benefit of new arrivals, worker's meetings at which the malingerers, troublemakers and wreckers were meted out punishment. They read political tracts from various sources, though mainly from the newspaper *Borba* (Battle), and then the topic would be discussed. That was the routine, without exception. So there was little time to see and talk with friends in the barracks, and no one spoke a word outside the barrack.

Those who were on the blacklist, before bed, were put through the gauntlet, and then they could go off to sleep. Except, they were forced to sleep on the hard cement floor at the far end of the bunkhouse, under the box beds that stood a foot off the ground. In addition, they were expected to do night watch duty. Some had to stay up until midnight, others were assigned the midnight to dawn shift. Punishment lasted until the investigator decided that the prisoner had demonstrated that he no longer engaged in hostile activity.

While we were lined up outside the barracks the next day's assignments were read to us. This included announcements of who should report to the investigator, who was to report to the medical clinic, who was on fire duty, watch duty, etc.

We slept in bunks that were set three high. They were made of rough hewn sticks, and we slept on thread bare blankets. Instead of pillows, we used our rolled up jackets from our prison uniforms. Although the conditions were very bad, we slept like babies because we were all so exhausted from the day's activities.

There was a camp plaza where we gathered for meetings and various activities, and where the best barrack group was singled out for praise every ten days. We competed with other groups to see which group could move the most stone at the quarry.

At the end of the ten day period we would all assemble on the public square and our 'wise leaders' would announce the winners, how many cubic meters of stone the tortured prisoners had moved from one place to another, and that was followed by a program.

There was a choir and soloists who sang songs from all the regions of Yugoslavia. Each of us sung the words of our favorite sad, nostalgic song. One prisoner, Aleksandar Vitanov from Strumitsa, who would later become a prominent surgeon, was the first to sing in Macedonian:

*Painful it was to part from you  
When I left for parts unknown.  
My heart weeps in despair,  
At my hard life in a desolate land.*

The song was taken up by all of the nationalities, by all of the prisoners. And there was the Dalmatian song:

*Let the sun bake me on the sea,  
I dream each night of that day,  
When will it come,  
To be with Marjan.  
Oh, my Marjan,  
Oh, my dear Split.*

Sometimes there would be a surprise. One evening we were hurried into four columns and marched to the central square. The weather was very cloudy, threatening to rain.

We were all surprised at this, since it wasn't the usual practice. We sat ourselves down on the ground. The site was covered with fine gravel. We were all facing a large frame covered with a cloth sheet for projecting films on.

The film began, entitled "Gorka Rizha" ("Bitter Rice"), starring the Italian actress Silvana Mangano. The prisoners were shown a film with skimpily clad women and love scenes. Why they showed us this film, I don't know.

Suddenly it began to rain. It was a real downpour. We all sat on the ground with our legs crossed and no one dared to move. We sat, and puddles began to form all around us. We were all soaked to the bone, but no one reacted, as if this were anything unusual. So we watched the movie to the end.

Afterward, totally drenched, we went off to bed. We had to sleep in our cold wet clothes, and we went off to work the next day in those same damp clothes. At the workplace, the wind and the sunshine dried out our clothes.



That was the first and the last time we saw a film in the camp. Otherwise, the previous pages described a typical day in the camp we called Big Darling on "the island of death." I spent 29 months there, living and working, at what was called socially useful labor. But what was so useful about it?

*A castaway commander from the secret police  
Trying to make his career advance,  
Points to me with his finger and shouts;  
"Beat the new gangster!" like a wolf cry.*

*The ugly ritual is repeated one more time.  
The frightened witless prisoner asks?  
"How long do we have to endure this hell?  
Will it only end with our total destruction?"*

*One after another we are put on the stand,  
To have our honor, pride and humanity  
Beaten and stomped out of us  
Until nothing but hatred remains.*

*The darkness hides the fury on the faces.  
And as Rigel rises in the starry sky  
A gentle breeze soothes our battered souls  
And the cooing of the winged doves.*

from "Stone Island" N. Kljusev

I'll try and convey some of my own time before the collective. The afternoon of the second day there, upon returning from work, after the evening meal, a meeting was called. We all sat on our bunks. The building captain called on me: "Come up here, Batev, and tell us in your best words why you are here on Goli Otok."

It was always the easiest for those who had serious subversive activities to report. After they had confessed to everything, they were accepted into the collective.

I didn't dare think too much before answering, and I could never admit that I was there because I had refused to spy for the secret police. How could I describe the way I'd agreed to work under the code name Dragoljub Ilic? I'd even signed a statement agreeing to it.

I began by explaining how I'd questioned some party resolutions at a meeting concerning the Inform Bureau. The prisoners immediately began to shout: "Down with the

innocence act! Down with the gangster! Blacklist him!" Then the captain told me: "Give us your biography!" I told them my background and that made them a little easier on me. The captain continued: "Come on now, tell us something about your brother Mitko, who was a leading party functionary. I told them that he was a loyal adherent to the party line, and that I hadn't spoken to him about anything to do with politics. At that the others shouted: "Gangster! Criminal!"

"Come now; tell us about your talks with your younger brother who studied in Belgrade and before that in Kiev." I answered: "I haven't seen him in a long time and we haven't been able to talk."

The building captain got angry, and he said to me: "You're trying to tell us that you're innocent. You shouldn't be here? That our party sends innocent people to Goli Otok?"

I didn't have any answer to that. The captain then proposed that I be put on the blacklist, and that I remain there until I finally confessed my guilt and told them everything about my subversive activities. I would need to provide names of those who spoke against the party, and especially what my brother had told me. The shouts from the collective continued. "Blacklist the gangster! Blacklist him!"

That was how I ended up on the black list on my second day at Goli Otok. If you were blacklisted it meant that everyone shunned you at the work site. The activists competed with one another to see who could make life more miserable for the blacklisted. No one else dared to talk to us, only those activists designated to deal with us.

The blacklisted prisoners got no rest during the afternoon breaks. While the others napped, they were forced to break up fine gravel out front of the barracks. Every evening after roll call they were ordered to lay a blanket under their bunk on the hard floor. They were also put on night watch duty in two shifts that ran from dusk to midnight and midnight to 7 am.

The blacklisted prisoners also had a red ribbon sewn to their pants to distinguish them from the other prisoners. They were never allowed rest times and no one was allowed to talk to them.

I spent 40 days on the blacklist. So I know quite well, in my own skin, what it felt like to be blacklisted. Anyone foolish enough to show some mercy to one of the blacklisted and was caught doing so, after being reported to the barrack captain, was immediately punished.

The 40 days of my blacklisting was the most terrible time of my whole stay at Goli Otok. I don't know to this day how I ever endured it. It almost killed me to admit to my "crimes" in front of the 200 assembled men from the barrack of pavilion two, to fabricate crimes to confess to them. So many times I was punished for failing to come up with crimes to admit to, because I really had nothing real to confess. I simply didn't know what to say.

Those first two months on Goli Otok, 40 days of blacklisting, nearly killed me physically and mentally. I was in total despair. I fell into a deep depression, in which I nearly lost the ability to communicate with others. It lasted for a long time.

I attained the age of 21, but I felt like an old man of 80. I couldn't have felt any worse. But, all the same, I held on to a firm belief that this too would pass, if only I could stay alive.

I'll describe one little incident during that period. I was assigned one day to work on the preparation of a tennis court for the investigators. Upon his arrival at the work site we were expected to greet a guard with a proper greeting with our hat removed and bowing our heads. I was so preoccupied that I failed to notice a guard's arrival and I failed to greet him. The crew leader immediately reacted to this. He sent me in a rage to run the outer perimeter of the tennis court, three laps, while the other prisoners shouted curses at me: "Gangster, shirker!"

#### THE PATH TO FREEDOM

The path to freedom, no matter what the crime and punishment, consisted of the following: To come clean in the confessional sessions; to work hard at the physical labor; to be active in the political meetings; to frequently give reports to the investigators; and to be an active member of the collective.

I was most concerned about how to satisfy the investigator. I was convinced that the investigator believed that I was innocent. My chief crime was my unwillingness to spy on people for the secret police. As a result, he had no interest in pursuing investigation of my crime any further.

As far as the physical work was concerned, I was too sickly to do hard work, even if I had wanted to, and it was difficult to motivate myself to transport heavy stones from one place to another. That was my greatest sin in regard to the work on Goli Otok. One time I had the audacity to suggest that we would be better served by being given more meaningful work. The inspector had me punished for saying that.

On the other hand, I would have liked to be an active participant in political discussions, but the meetings at the camp were not opportunities for free and open dialogue. You were expected to toe the party line. That would have been hypocritical on my part. I never could think one thing but say another. I was no chameleon.

I was also incapable of informing on my fellow prisoners to the inspector. I considered that immoral. That was the "crime" that had landed me on Goli Otok. There was no way I could do that now, and I was frequently punished for my lack of cooperation. I endured it

though. It was a promise I had made to myself, not to spy on my comrades, and I kept that promise, through it all. I am completely opposed to such spying on others.

Given my stand on this, I never became one of the camp activists in the collective and I was declared a passivist and unreformed right up until my release from prison.

I couldn't accept any of it. The entire reform process appeared senseless, pointless, inhuman and unjust to me. The majority of those who participated wanted to believe that they were rational human beings, when in fact, they behaved like wild animals, ruled only by the law of the jungle, kill or be killed. Slander someone in order to avoid being slandered. Get credit at someone else's expense by doing evil. I couldn't bring myself to participate in any of this.

That was what made Goli Otok such a hell for me. As an unreformed passivist I had my term extended an additional five months, and for the entire 29 months of my confinement on Goli Otok I was obliged to do hard labor. I became an expert at hauling heavy stones on a carrier.

I took the hard road, and I knew it would be almost impossible to endure. It had nothing to do with ideology. It was a highly demanding art simply to remain human under such terrible circumstances.

#### BLACKLISTED A SECOND TIME

One day I was called in by the room captain of Building Number Two. I was terrified of what was to come. The room captain only called on people who were to be punished for something. As soon as I entered, he announced: "Tomorrow you will report to the investigator!"

I barely slept that night, anticipating the worst. I imagined all sorts of things. None of them good. The next day I reported as ordered. There was a line of prisoners, all ordered to report to the administrative center. An activist took charge of us. So that we wouldn't sit idle, waiting our turn, he set us to carrying stones from one place to another. There were about 30 of us from the various barracks buildings.

Finally it came my turn to report. Investigator Levter was by himself, as usual, in the office. He was nervous and frowning as he gazed out the window. He didn't even look my way. Suddenly, in a nervous, booming voice he began to speak: "What are you thinking, how do you ever expect to gain your freedom?"

I answered: "I'm not very strong. I'm sick. I can't do a good job on the work site."

That just made him angry and he said: "You're a slackard, a passivist. The worst lazy trouble maker of all the Macedonians! You cause trouble at the work site, persuading the others that the work is pointless, moving stone from one site to another. You tell the others

that they are stuck here as long as they refuse to become spies for the state, that this place, Goli Otok is a factory where some come and others go, once they've been turned into loyal slaves to the state, that the investigators are responsible for their prisoners, but I haven't done right by the Macedonians, who have all become unreformed passivists!"

He frowned and gave me a fierce look and said to me: "You'll stop demoralizing the others and start learning to work. You aren't the first one we've taught how to work here!"

After he'd finished, without thinking, I said to him: "I'm no criminal. I was one of the best students and an exemplary youth leader. None of this applies to me. I can only be who I am, once I'm set free again!"

That only further enraged him, "You're the worst kind of criminal, and you really need to be taught a lesson!"

With that the interview was over, and he dismissed me with a curse. It was, in fact, true that the Slovenians, who were the smallest group on Goli Otok, received the best treatment from this Slovenian investigator. They always seemed to earn an earlier release from him.

That evening the meeting was all about Toma Batev. I was very frightened of the beating I expected to receive, knowing that I wasn't that physically strong, and I wouldn't be able to endure much. It could be the end of me.

The room captain must have received his orders, because he announced that the meeting that evening would be about the behavior and conduct of Toma Batev.

The room, as usual, responded to the call. The collective pronounced me the worst lazy troublemaker at the work site; that I tried to convince others that there was no point to the work we were doing; that I had told them that Goli Otok was just a factory for the production of obedient slaves to the state and that we would all be turned into spies for the State Security. He also went on to repeat the rest of what the inspector had said, about how I had told people that our Slovenian inspector favored Slovenian prisoners, who received easier work and were released earlier, and he didn't look out for the interest of the Macedonian prisoners, who had to do hard labor and full terms in prison, and that was why they were unreformed passivists. It was all a repetition of what the inspector had said to me earlier.

As one the assembled prisoners roared their disapproval of me: "Down with the bandit! Blacklist him! Down with the saboteur! Down with the criminal! Down with the slackard!" Many of the activists continued to shout: "Criminal! Saboteur! Bandit!" ...and the like. They competed in the discussion to see who could say the worst about me, inventing incredible things I had done to them or others. All to make me out as some terrible enemy, and to emphasize their own good conduct.

I was used to that. I can't believe that they didn't give me a beating. All I can think is that they were somehow moved by my defense that I was not a slackard or saboteur, that I was too physically ill and weak to do the hard physical labor demanded of me. It was my physical weakness, not any criminal intent that was my problem.

In unison, they shouted in response: "Blacklist! Blacklist! Down with the slackard!"

In the end the collective with the agreement of the room captain, called for my blacklisting. It was my second blacklisting on Goli Otok. I thought, okay. Another fifteen days on the blacklist. It was only the latest misery. The blacklisting, in fact, did not last that long, because I was already at the end of my endurance. I was very exhausted, and they saw that it wouldn't do to continue my blacklisting, so after ten days I was taken off the list.

And from then on I continued to be apathetic and unresponsive, generally avoiding conversation with anyone. I didn't participate in discussions at meetings in the evening. Sometimes there were as many as two meetings a day, on top of the usual eight hours of hard physical labor (hauling stones around the work site). I never visited the inspector again.

Ten months passed that way. I endured my punishment, did my "socially useful work" on Goli Otok. The daily regimen was such that there was no free time. We were engaged in some activity with our barrack mates at all times. There was the routine of meetings, discussions, physical labor and the meting out of punishment. In addition to my two times on the blacklist, I was punished by having to run the gauntlet, given night guard duty, and additional physical labor. Mainly I was punished for my passivity (failing to report things to the inspector and failing to participate in meetings), and for my inability to do hard labor and for discouraging others from doing the work assignments.

#### ILLNESS ON GOLI OTOK

The daily routine of hard physical labor exhausted the prisoners on Goli Otok. The daily stresses of the physical and mental maltreatment, and the poor diet were all reasons why, after a time, all of the prisoners became walking skeletons, emaciated and weak, suffering a host of ailments, the most serious of which were the infectious diseases.

Chronic malnourishment led to disease. But no one dared to complain because that would result in accusations of malingering or even sabotage and result in punishment. So no one dared to report to the camp physician with his complaints of illness. There were numerous cases of night blindness, rheumatism, anemia and a number of other conditions that the authorities refused to recognize as diseases. Only those with high fevers could receive medical attention, but by then it was too little, too late, death was the likely outcome. If someone was injured working with the stone, they might receive some sort of bandage, and if necessary,

they could perform surgeries, but there was no use of anesthetics. We were all little more than walking skeletons, barely able to do the work demanded of us. Men would grip a rope fastened to the stone carrying sledges with their teeth or fasten it around their necks in order to gain a little more leverage. They were desperate to carry their share, although this was often more than the men themselves weighed. To drop a load of stone would result in severe punishment.

It was only when some highly infectious disease such as typhus or dysentery would reach epidemic proportions among us that the authorities would begin to take preventive measures. It was only very rarely that someone would be examined by a doctor. I was only seen by a doctor once in all my 29 months on Goli Otok, and even then I was simply declared a malingerer, and I was punished that evening by being forced to run the gauntlet. I have no idea to this day, how I managed to survive it.

Lice appeared in the camp. There wasn't a prisoner who wasn't covered with lice. I had them on my head, my body, and my eyebrows, everywhere. Due to our "heavy schedule" there was no time to disinfect ourselves.

On May 15, 1951, it was announced that we wouldn't go to work for the rest of the day. Typhus had appeared in the camp, but we were not supposed to know this. We were forbidden contact with prisoners from the neighboring barracks. Then we were told, instead of work at the stone quarry, we would delouse ourselves. We were all sent out into the yard adjacent to our barracks, and naked as the day we were born, we set about picking the lice off one another, much as monkeys will do. We picked them off ourselves and then each other. The bunks in our barrack were disinfected, as well as our clothing. It took a week to do it all.

Our barrack came through it without losing anyone, but there were other barracks where many prisoners died from typhus. It was supposed to be a big secret, and you could end up on the blacklist for talking about it.

Once the lice were eradicated, typhus disappeared from the camp. But from then on our blankets and clothes were disinfected once a week. Not long after that, dysentery spread among us as a result of the bad diet. Unsanitary conditions in the camp spread it readily.

There was no way to maintain cleanliness when there wasn't even adequate drinking water. For the entire 29 months I spent on Goli Otok my face and hands were covered with grime. Many prisoners died as a result of dysentery.

Once again we were forbidden to mention this illness, or complain. It would get you punished. The authorities did eventually take some measures. They placed a trough filled with disinfectant in front of every barrack, and we rinsed our hands in it before each meal.

Many prisoners died due to typhus, dysentery, suicide, and other reasons. No one knows just how many. Nor are their graves marked. Their deaths were kept from the world.

One time I was assigned to clean the women's barracks during a time when they were empty. On the way there we passed a site covered with graves without markers. It looked like there had been a community here for many years.

The president of the first meeting of ASNOM, the Macedonian partisan liberation movement, at the Monastery of Prohor Pchinski on Ilinden (August 2<sup>nd</sup>) 1944, the reknowned Macedonian revolutionary. Panko Brashnarov, was brought to Goli Otok with the eighth group of prisoners on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 1951, in a semi-conscious condition due to the severe torture he'd received in Skopje. He died soon after on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July. (This is reported in Stojan Risteski's book *Golotocka Isповed*, Iris, Struga, 2003, pp. 89-91)

*The cursed, barren stone island is  
Surrounded by a deadly electric fence,  
Covered in nettles and brambles, with snakes  
And lizards everywhere and buzzards hovering aloft.*

*Storm scattered clouds drizzle  
On our bitter life fate  
And men like ants march in long columns  
And labor in the man-made hell.*

*Tossed into the bowels of the earth  
Their thoughts churn in the darkness  
Is it a punishment from the Almighty?  
To be cast into Petrov's den, \* the slave's fate.*

\*A cavern where the most important leaders and intellectuals were tortured. It held as many as 110 prisoners

*I soak up the sun as the dusk descends,  
My spirit mourns at the loud sound of the dying,  
Those who beg for mercy in the last throes of typhus,  
And each day the graves increase, all without record or sign...*  
from "Stone Island" N. Kljusev

#### PUNISHED FOR BEING ILL

One day I felt very bad. I reported it to a medical assistant. Because of my report, I was not sent to the work site as usual the next day, but I stayed back at the barrack where I was put to work before and after my medical exam. There was no such thing as rest time on Goli Otok. We cleaned the barrack until 11 o'clock. Then I was seen at the clinic. The doctor, Nikola Nikolic, also a prisoner, had been a professor on the medical faculty in Sarajevo.



Besides the doctor, there was a member of the security police present at my examination. The doctor made a great show of examining me, and asked all about where I hurt and what was wrong with me. I complained that the muscles in my legs were very painful, my head ached, and I had constant tremors. I told him about my interrupted treatment at the spa.

The doctor then took my temperature, which was 36.2 degrees Celsius, and that concluded my doctor's exam. He had been put on the blacklist in the past for being too kind to the prisoners, as if he could actually do something to help them. He is cited in a publication about Goli Otok from 10/5/1982, *Knjizhevna rech*, p.3. Among other things he is quoted as saying: "That which was done on Goli Otok was worse than a death sentence, crueler than the guillotine or execution by firing squad. I'm not a pacifist. I can accept the use of the sword for Revolution, cutting when and where needed, but I'm also a humanist and want to remain so. In no way do I want to see the sword blade replaced by systematic dehumanization to the depths of total depravity."

The doctor had nothing to say about my illness, and I returned to the barracks with the medical assistant. Once we were back at the barrack he immediately assigned me to heavy physical labor, and he continually berated me as a malingerer. He told me that I would never see my home again, that they would bury me here on Goli Otok. I couldn't think of anything to say and remained silent. He was one of the leading activists, which accounted for his attaining the post of a medical assistant, a job in which he had little to do but spy on others and make life miserable for the "passivists." I was used to that sort of treatment by now and I didn't pay it much mind.

It came time for the evening meal. The room captain gave his report, which he did twice a day, morning and evening. After the report he called my name and announced to everyone in barrack two that I had visited the doctor that day and been declared fit for work. All of the prisoners began to shout: "Down with the malingerer! Down with the saboteur! Down with the criminal!" Then the room captain ordered everyone to form up for the gauntlet. One hundred men on each side formed up in two parallel lines. I ran the gauntlet with everyone shouting the usual slogans at me, while they punched and kicked me and spat in my face.

I had come to accept this as normal behavior here. It was hard to endure these beatings in my weakened state, since I'd grown so frail. But I was more concerned and frightened of another period of blacklisting. That was my first and last visit to the doctor during my entire 29 months at Goli Otok.

## Song Ten

....The toady accuses his victim,  
The room captain reads the results:  
"Blacklisting, to be spit on by all.  
Down with the traitor!" they shout.

The child trembles, shrinks away,  
Fists pound soft flesh, blood flows.  
I hear the order, everyone must spit,  
The sight of it all makes my heart break.

He squeezes his thick eyelashes shut,  
The spittle drips from his face,  
The sun burns like a baking dish,  
Dries the burned wounds on his face.

The executioners devise methods, schooling  
To match those of Dachau and the Gulag,  
For torturing the inmates of prison camps,  
A host of new technology and terms.

The blacklist, a torment of body and soul,  
Banished, burdened, aware only of sound,  
And his eyes fogged over and dead as ice,  
Remain fixed on the earth below.

On the blacklist his tortured body burns.  
The son in tears, the father hounded and bloody.

On the blacklist, caught in a nightmare,  
Of struggling under the terrible leaden weight  
Of gray stone on the wooden carrier,  
Yoked to the carrier, straining hands and neck.

The yoke cuts into my neck, blood covers my chest.

from "Stone Island" N. Kljusev

## MEN LIKE BEASTS

On Goli Otok the Security Service created a totalitarian regime with a spy network of rumor-mongers, listeners to everything, collaborators who thought that with all this work they could demonstrate how they were reformed, that they could obtain easier work in the camp as a result. There were the activists among us who competed to see who could report the most information against the blacklisted and passivist prisoners. Those who were reported on received harsh punishment. They were put on the blacklist, declared unreformed passivists, simply because they couldn't bring themselves to live according to the law of the jungle, of animals that must kill or be killed.

What made some people turn into beasts, treating their fellow men like dirt, trampling on them mercilessly, denying them their dignity, pride, honor and respect, reducing them to nothingness? And all of this served to pit everyone against one another in the camp. It meant that we all became complicit in the crime. No doubt this was the intent of those in charge on Goli Otok. The thought was always on our minds that we weren't going to ever see home again. We would leave our bones here, if we couldn't demonstrate our "reform," "reeducation," if we couldn't bring ourselves to spy, inform on others, smash and destroy.

Anyone who opposed this regime was mercilessly crushed. The terrible conditions, the poor diet, the hard physical labor, the mental and physical torture, the fear of blacklisting, the endless beatings, they all worked to transform men into beasts. It was very difficult to remain human under such conditions, when the authorities were determined to set us against one another. The strong inevitably dominated the weak, and the prisoners sought whatever means they could find to lighten their work or have their sentences reduced.

I tried to resist this dehumanization during my entire 29 months on Goli Otok. I had to endure hell, but I was determined to maintain my personal beliefs.

The Security Service was equally determined to prove to us all that dissenters such as the supporters of the Inform Bureau were unworthy of respect. So they pitted them one against another in order to demonstrate their lack of human character. How ironic that in the process of dehumanizing these men they revealed their own low moral character. Those who consciously created and ran Goli Otok displayed incredible hypocrisy and cynicism. Their practices were utterly perverse and contrary to the most basic principles of decent proper human conduct. Such twisted and abnormal treatment of one's fellow man has few precedents in human history. No wonder the prison camp on Goli Otok came to be known as "the island of death."

The conditions of life and rules of conduct in the prison on Goli Otok were forced upon the prisoners, no matter how repugnant they might be to them. Once the order of things was

established it became a self-regulating system in which the normal rules of human conduct were replaced by a more primitive set of rules – those of the jungle. Spy on others so that they won't spy on you and report on you. Kill so that you won't be killed. Take from others in order to ensure your own survival. The majority of the prisoners accepted all this as the likeliest way to escape the living hell of prison life, and secure their own survival.

I don't necessarily blame them. Most prisoners merely tried to adapt to conditions. That they were the subjects of a monstrous experiment that turned them into beasts was not their fault. To do otherwise under the circumstances was to invite terrible suffering and misery.

The prisoners on Goli Otok ranged from 17 to 80 years of age, and they came from all walks of life. There were highly educated and important societal functionaries and the illiterate. There were those among us who had no idea what the Inform Bureau was and even less idea of why they had been imprisoned.

There were those among us who truly were beasts. Men who wouldn't hesitate to beat up an innocent man if it might earn them the right to go home. There were the ones who were most likely to spy on everyone and report what they learned to the investigator. They manufactured evidence of misbehavior out of the most insignificant actions and had it all written up in report form. Then the accused were subjected to the most severe punishment and blacklisting. This was an everyday occurrence. No one was spared. I myself suffered terribly during my time on the island as a result of such reports.

These corrupted individuals; monsters really, mercilessly fingered their fellow prisoners for the blacklist. They seemed to actually get some strange satisfaction from doing so. They bragged about teaching the criminals a lesson. They were among the loudest and most aggressive at meetings, demanding blacklisting for the "passivists, malingerers and saboteurs." They beat others mercilessly, spit on them and cursed them like madmen. It was such man-beasts who made life on Goli Otok so unendurable.

They thought that their actions would earn them an early release, but they deluded themselves. No one was ever released before his 24 month sentence was up. They could only manage to make their life easier. They could avoid hard, physical labor. They could obtain leadership positions and avoid any punishment. They actually became quite privileged in the camp. They did desk jobs in the administrative center, and some of them assisted the inspector. It was a far cry from the life of the average prisoner who hauled heavy stones all day and suffered punishments and blacklisting.

To give you an idea of the kind of people they were, I'll describe just one personal experience with them. One evening I went to the room captain because I wasn't feeling well and I asked for lighter work. The room captain had been an assistant public defender in Bosnia

Herzegovina. He listened to me and said: "Okay, why don't you confess to me all of the lies you've been telling the prisoners at the work site?" He was thoroughly enraged. He began to beat me directly, until I fell into unconsciousness. When I woke up, he was standing over me pouring a cup of water on my head. That's how he revived me.

That was an everyday occurrence. But the worst was when these monsters would spend an entire night interrogating someone. The cries of the person being beaten would keep us all awake.

## A SECOND LIFE

One day I was working in the stone quarry unloading the wagons that transported stone across the quarry on a track. The work wasn't particularly hard, but you had to pay careful attention. I was quite run-down at the time. My muscles ached and I couldn't have weighed more than 90 pounds. I was working with another prisoner, in Albanian from Kosovo. Our job was part of an assembly line operation and we had to be attentive in order to keep up with the delivery of stone. It was about 11 o'clock, when my partner and I, as we dumped a load and went for the next one, lost control of the wagon of stone. I was not accustomed to this work, and I was exhausted and barely able to keep up with the pace. My partner managed to get out of the way, but I was too slow and clumsy, and the load landed on me.

I was knocked unconscious, and when I woke up I was already in the camp infirmary, on a bunk. The medic told me that when the load of stone flipped over, a stone hit me in the left temple and ear and that I had bled all over the place. Four prisoners had transported me on foot on a stretcher from the work site to the infirmary.

I was fortunate that a blacklisted surgeon was on duty in the infirmary at the time, and he did a good job of patching me up. I still have the scar from that accident to remind me of my time on Goli Otok. My whole body was covered with purple bruises and I hurt all over from the stone that had fallen on me.

I spent a week in the camp infirmary. The infirmary was similar to our barrack, but they fed us better. I had nightmares my whole time there, probably from the stress of the situation. I apparently cried out often in my sleep. The inspector came by one day and looked me over, frowning, and then left. He probably had heard about everything that had happened to me.

The time in the infirmary gave me a new lease on life. I was quite a wreck. The pain subsided, but the bruises lasted for a long time, and I limped around the barrack like a wounded snake. I was given ten days of extra food rations for the first time. That was truly good fortune, although it ended all too soon. Yet, this period gave me a new chance to live.

After my release from the infirmary I was allowed three days rest before returning to work. Then the room captain called me in and told me that I would be given lighter duty. I would work in the section where stone, marble in particular, was worked.

Near the administrative center there were stone working facilities. Stone had been worked there in order to build beautiful buildings for the administrators and inspectors. This was about two kilometers from the main camp where we all lived.

That next day I reported for work at a facility where marble was worked into fine objects. I got to operate machinery that carved the stone. I was so relieved to have lighter work. My fellow workers here were older, less hardy men, old communist party members mainly, intellectuals and university professors.

The time passed quickly. We talk about everything under the sun, except politics. We came from all of the barracks and included people from every republic of Yugoslavia. It seemed like an opportunity to broaden my own horizons.

A new inspector arrived. He seemed like a more decent man than the last one, but that impression didn't last very long.

One day, after I'd been at my new work for about ten days, we were all called together for a meeting in the center of the camp. There were investigators from all the republics who had come to look over the prisoners, as if we were horses or slaves for sale at a market. Prisoners were needed for work crews.

The new investigator Strogov asked me if I wanted to join a work crew. Without thinking, I said I would like to. He laughed at that and said that I was a lazy bum. I replied that that wasn't true. He laughed again and said, "Fine, you can go work on a crew."

The word spread all over the camp that a work brigade was forming to go work on the Breza-Varesh railway line. We who were chosen were delighted at the prospect of escaping the death camp on Goli Otok. The chosen prisoners were told to be ready to leave the next morning. We were so excited that none of us could sleep that night.

The next morning we were brought before the camp commandant who informed us that if we worked hard, this could be our road to freedom. "Work will free you." The thought that we might have our sentences reduced delighted us. We felt so fortunate to have this opportunity. We boarded the ship, the Punat, and then made our way to the work site on the Breza-Varesh rail line in Bosnia.

#### IN THE BREZA-VARESH CAMP

The boat trip to the port at Bakar lasted about seven hours. The weather was beautiful, and it put us all in good spirits for a time. It was a lovely spring day. Most of the prisoners sat out on

the deck and delighted in the sea that surrounded us. It seemed to be a healing balm for our injured spirits. The Punat approached the shore. This time the sight of the sparkling blue sea and the greenery of the shoreline along the coast of Krk, Senj, Novi, Crkvenica and Kraljevica was a source of pleasure to our eyes, this place that held such unpleasant memories from our last visit here on our way to Goli Otok.

In Bakar they loaded us on a train, in cattle cars. We were all in good spirits, because we were on the road to freedom. We talked about everything, but we avoided any discussion of politics. Finally we arrived at the new camp at the work site on the Breza-Varesh railway line.

The camp was located in the broad valley of the Breza River. It was surrounded by barbed wire and had only one entrance gate. There were wooden bunks similar to those of Goli Otok. About 150 prisoners were housed in each barrack. The barracks were well furnished and we received three full rations of food per day. Instead of thin bean soup we received a full soldier's ration of thick pea soup.

We usually worked in three shifts. There was also an inspector and a room captain here. But life was much easier; there was no blacklist or other punishment. Meetings were rare. The main focus was the work on the Breza-Varesh rail line. Each prisoner worked according to his physical abilities. Conditions were dramatically different from what prevailed on Goli Otok. The prisoners talked freely among themselves. All in all, we were much better off, in our living conditions, food, work and the absence of punishment. We worked in a pleasant green valley with abundant clean, fresh mineral water springs. So we had excellent sources of drinking water, all we could want, unlike on Goli Otok, where we were constantly thirsty and hungry, mercilessly beaten and abused.

When we weren't working, we made trips into the forest, where we collected dry wood to feed the cook stoves. When the work site grew distant they transported us there in train cars.

Every ten days there was a meeting where we discussed the progress we'd made during the preceding week and a half. We worked hard and achieved good results.

As a result of improved conditions in the camp, we all experienced visible improvement in both our physical and mental health. No one was tortured here. However, we still had no contact with our homes; neither packages nor letters were allowed without permission of the investigator. I never once in my entire stay received from or sent a letter home.

The fall season approached. Rain became more frequent. We remained at this camp for six months. The most common topic of conversation among the prisoners was speculation about when we might be released from prison. We all had high hopes. I had completed 29

months of my term and I harbored dreams of an early release, that I would return home directly from the Breza-Varesh camp. Early release was a cherished dream of every person both here and on the island.

#### A VISIT TO THE CAMP BY A FRENCH DELEGATION

All of the sudden one day the camp authorities began an effort to quickly clean up the camp. All of the barracks were made ready as if for inspection. We sensed that someone important would be visiting soon. The kitchen was given special attention. Everything was cleaned and sanitized. The edges of the camp were cleaned up. We were amazed at the change. We were certain that someone would visit, but we had no idea who it would be. I remember it was a Saturday. There was a meeting in our barrack that evening as well as in other barracks.

The room captain led the meeting as usual. Our room captain had the nickname "Survivor." The name had something to do with the odd fact that every so often he would have trouble keeping his food down, but somehow he would manage to eventually reswallow it. It was very strange to see.

The room captain informed us of an impending visit by a French delegation of the Socialist Party of France. They wanted to see how we were treated, our living conditions, any punishments, and the nature of our sentences. That meant that the delegation actually wanted to know something about the true condition of prisoners. So the socialists wanted information that they could take back to the French public about how the Inform Bureau prisoners were being treated. The fact of the matter was that they simply wanted to be able to counter claims that the prisoners' conditions were bad and the prisoners were treated harshly.

The room captain coached us on how we were to answer all of the questions of the visiting delegation. There were 20 questions in all, and there were answers prepared in advance for each one, that we were expected to give the visitors. The delegation needed to know our real situation: why we were punished, how we were being punished and the conditions under which we lived. Among the most important questions and the answers we were to give were the following:

Why are you being punished?

We were supposed to answer that: *we had committed serious crimes against the Party, the state and the people. We deserved the most severe punishment, but our Party was so magnanimous that we were given only minimal sentences.*

What is the food like?

*The food is excellent. We get three meals a day.*

Do you correspond with family members?



*We receive letters on a regular basis from family members back home, and we answer them with our own letters. (What irony, given the fact that I never once was able to send or receive a letter for the 29 months of my incarceration.)*

What is the length of your sentence?

*From 16 to 24 months. It is a mild sentence, considering the fact that there are those who deserve a death sentence or at least 10 years in prison.*

Do you receive food from home?

*No, there is no need, because we have everything we need here.*

How much do you work and what do you do afterward?

*We work 8 hours on the rail line. In our free time we do whatever we like: we read, participate in choir groups, play sports, and the like. (Out and out lies).*

I can't recall all of the questions and the answers we were to give. There were too many to remember them all. That was the truth concerning our situation for the delegation. It was a terrible source of shame to me, the way the real truth was hidden from them.

On a Sunday we were to be visited by the delegation. That day we were assembled as if it were a usual work day. After breakfast a group of us was singled out for special duty. Some of us from my barrack were called out by our full names along with others from the other barracks. We were then sent off to spend the day gathering wood far from the camp. It appeared that those of us considered the most unreliable, the potential troublemakers, were singled out for this duty. We spent the entire day out in the forest far from camp collecting firewood. It was evening by time we arrived back at camp.

We heard that the delegation had taken an interest in everything. They had inspected the kitchen to see what we ate. They had even gone through our bedding to see what we slept on. One of the delegates had remarked upon the fact that everything seemed to be in good order, but it is hard to imagine how those French communists could have verified that. It was said that at least one prisoner had told them the truth, but I have trouble believing that, given the harsh retribution that would have resulted in.

Six months passed for me in the railway camp. I didn't distinguish myself in any way during that time. I was simply apathetic, because I could never get over the fact that I was being punished for something I hadn't done. I never saw my investigator during this time either. I don't even know what he looked like.

There were those prisoners among us who did visit the investigators, and they didn't stop by just to have a cup of coffee, you can be sure. No doubt, many of them reported on their fellow prisoners in order to ingratiate themselves with the authorities. I despised that kind of thing. I knew it would cost me dearly. It did, in fact, lead to an extension on my stay on Goli Otok. Indeed, it would have consequences for me even after my release from prison,

right up to nearly the present day. My independent thinking marked me as a troublemaker. That is just the way it was, and that is the stand I've taken all my life. Others who played the game as the authorities would have them do; upon completion of the railway work really did get to go home. For others like me, it couldn't have been worse, we were sent back to Goli Otok.

The work on the Breza-Varesh line ended in late autumn. One day around 11 am all of the work ceased. We were all brought back to camp. We wondered if this might be the moment when we would be released. There was an excitement in the air at the prospect.

About noon a meeting was called. First of all, they announced the work that had been accomplished in the preceding week and a half. Then, we were treated to a special performance by musical performers, singers among the prisoners. I remember one particular song that I heard for the first time that day that had a particularly strong effect on me:

*O lovely wild springtime  
You've come back to me  
O, wonderful love,  
You my lost happiness,  
My love lost.....*

After the artistic program the practical business at hand began. They read out the names of many prisoners. I heard my own name among them. I heard the order, for all of us whose names were called to fall in. The railway station was located right in front of the camp. After a short time we were all loaded into special cars normally meant for livestock. They locked us in and the train departed.

Later we were to learn that the prisoners who remained behind in the Breza-Varesh camp were set free. We rode for many hours with no idea where we were bound, being locked in closed box cars with no way to look out.

I was once again in with my friend from Strumitsa, Aleksandar Vitanov. We had traveled together to Goli Otok two years before. We were able to have an open conversation. We were both of the opinion that they were returning us to Goli Otok. The thought terrified us. We wondered if we would immediately be blacklisted and subjected to special punishment. Everyone was frightened and demoralized.

We arrived for the third time at the port at Bakar. For a third time we were loaded on the ship "Punat." It was clear that we were on our way back to Goli Otok. Any hopes of early release were now dashed. Our fate was sealed.

#### THE CAMP ON THE ISLAND OF GRGUR

When we arrived at the dock the Punat was waiting for us. A supervisor from the camp at Goli Otok was there to meet us. They gave him a letter. He read it and then he tore it into little pieces and threw it into the sea. He gave the order that we were to be transported to the island of Grgur, not far from Goli Otok.

We were loaded on board and the Punat then set sail for Grgur. It is a very small island. We had heard that it was formerly a women's prison.

We eventually arrived on Grgur. There wasn't a living soul on the island. The wooden barracks were bare and decrepit-looking. There were no blankets or mattresses. We didn't know what to make of it. Then we found a security police captain who took us in hand.

By the third day our lives were organized. The captain established order. Activists arrived from Goli Otok and were put in charge of us. They were among the most trustworthy zealots, chosen especially to deal with us. There were about a hundred of us in the camp, all returnees considered among the most incorrigible of prisoners. We were all housed in one barrack. Once again we were set to work hauling rock around on wooden carriers. Fortunately, that was the only kind of work they had for us. They soon began to subject us to the usual forms of mistreatment, the same sort of thing we endured upon first arriving on Goli Otok two years before. Most of us were Macedonians. Because we had been returned to the prison, they assumed that we were troublemakers who needed to be taught a lesson. They started the blacklist up and subjected those on it to harsh punishment. We suffered terribly at their hands, but for some reason I was convinced that I could endure it all and would survive.

The same sort of regime that we had been subjected to on Goli Otok prevailed on Grgur. The work consisted of moving rock from one location to another. All of the prisoners were totally demoralized. Instead of freedom, we had been returned, to be subjected to new punishment.

I kept thinking someday they would have to let us go. They couldn't keep us in prison forever. It was important for us to muster whatever little shreds of hope and optimism we could. If there was some ray of hope we could endure terrible hardships. Hope always dies last. Somehow, despite all, I remained an optimist and that helped me survive. There were times when I was severely tested. Many prisoners, who had lost all hope, tried to kill themselves, to put an end to their trials and suffering. They preferred to take their own lives.

After four days at the camp on Grgur, the order came to appear before the collective. The room captain demanded that I explain why I had been returned to the prison camp. I thought to myself: "I'm back here because I enjoy it so much and don't want to go home." I instead formed my answer carefully, as much as I hated to. I said that I wasn't among the best workers, and I thought that maybe I should have pushed myself harder, but I wasn't physically strong or that healthy. Our living conditions had not been good for me, and I had

never been that strong. I was sure that I had convinced the collective that I didn't deserve to be blacklisted. Oddly, the prisoners in our camp didn't react. They had seen it all before. They were sick of the blacklist. And they were simply worn out. They had no will to act. Only the room captain and his assistant would have liked to blacklist me, but they could see the mood of the collective so they chose to remain silent. I silently rejoiced, inside myself. No one attacked me. No one demanded an explanation or questioned me further. Everyone remained silent.

The room captain among other things said: "Fine, you were sick back then, you're still weak and can't do heavy physical work. Let's agree on that, but tell me, how often have you reported to the investigator? Do you need to be in good physical shape to do that? What about that?"

I told him that I hadn't been to see the investigator because I had nothing to report. After that, I was sure that I would be put on the blacklist. But it didn't happen. I got away without blacklisting.

The camp on Grgur was arranged specially for our group, the unreformed returnees, in an effort to teach us a lesson, and vent some of their rage and frustration with us. We were kept at the camp for several months, during which time we were free of blacklisting. Otherwise, the regime on Grgur was no different than that on Goli Otok. Everything was done according to the same rules. Everything that they could think of was done to torture and destroy us, to remove any last shred of hope that we might see our homes and families again. Personally, all of their sadistic repressive measures to reeducate me had the opposite effect. For those of us who had strong moral or ethical character, the physical hardship was not the worst of it. We suffered most from degradation, humiliation and discouragement concerning all that we believed in. After three months they sent us back to Goli Otok.

#### A SECOND TIME ON GOLI OTOK

One day they loaded us all aboard the ship Mirna and took us to Goli Otok. The Punat and the Mirna were the two boats that served Goli Otok. Nowadays there is no such boat service that struck such fear in our hearts whenever we traveled it. And there is no longer the gauntlet of prisoners, kicking and punching, cursing and spitting, and berating their victim.

When we arrived we were immediately dispersed among the barracks. The next day we were sent off to do "socially useful work." We knew this work quite well. It consisted, as usual, of shifting stones from one site to another. I can't imagine more grueling work.

We were housed in a new camp. All of the barracks and other buildings were made of stone. The administrative building was an exceptionally beautiful structure. But we prisoners

took no satisfaction in that. The building housed the apartments and offices of the camp administrators and investigators.

Some of the original prisoners had moved on, but there were always new ones arriving. I had come in the fourth group, and they were now expecting the eleventh. Each group consisted of about 600 prisoners from all over Yugoslavia.

The new arrivals continued to be greeted by the gauntlet, which they were forced to run naked. It was even worse for them than it had been when I arrived. The ferocity of the attacks unnerved us all. It was all becoming so unbearable. The endless brutality, punishment and meetings that we were all forced to participate in were driving us all mad. The cruelty and sadism knew no bounds.

The activists and barrack captains were the worst. The beating and screams of the blacklisted prisoners would go on late into the night. None of us could sleep through it. Blacklisted prisoners were subjected to more brutal methods than ever.

The time passed. 29 months passed, but I still had no idea if or when I might be released. My sentence had been 24 months, and here I was still imprisoned 5 months later. I wanted to believe that my suffering would soon be over.

There are those who say there is no end to suffering, but, in fact, there is. There were some who had to endure far more time than what they were sentenced to. There was no justice to it, it all depended on how cooperative a prisoner proved to be.

One day I was called in to the investigator. I was shaking with fear. I kept wondering what I had done this time. It was the second time I had been called in for an interview. I reported to his office without delay. This was the third investigator to rotate through the camp. The investigators had come and gone, but I had remained. The new investigator impressed me as a serious man, but also a realist. Later I learned that this same investigator had slept in our house in Strumitsa during the anti-facist struggle of World War II. Among other things he asked me whether it was true that I had told a fellow prisoner: "What do you need to talk to people about freedom, when nobody wants to hear about it from you?" I immediately responded that that was a lie and that there was no way I would say something like that to another prisoner, especially after 26 months in the prison camp. All I really wanted was to be free to pursue my studies again and get on with my life. It would be crazy for me to say such a thing. The inspector agreed. He told me that he had never heard anything negative about me personally, that I didn't have a record of trouble making. I agreed with him. And somehow I've retained that memory of this conversation.

The Slovenians had it easiest. They usually got the lightest work and were released earlier than the rest of us. They never got extended sentences and they usually did less than

their sentences. We Macedonians, on the other hand, were treated differently. We seemed to bring it upon ourselves. It was our curse, our syndrome of self-destructiveness.

The conversation with the investigator encouraged me and gave me hope in life. It raised my spirits. I enjoyed, after so much time, a bit of optimism. I began to look forward to freedom.

#### FREED FROM PRISON

My time passed, spring came. I continued to haul stone on the wooden carrier. I was pretty well adapted to the work by then. It didn't bother me. I was convinced that I had served my time and that I would soon be released. They had to free me. I had followed all the rules and done my reeducation and reformatory time. I couldn't change what I am, a champion of democracy, and nothing was more precious to me than freedom. I couldn't help but regret the lost time, my stolen youth that could never be regained. I had had to pass through the fire, and it had left lifelong scars on my spirit. I mourned the loss of my innocence, my youthful optimism, my naturally cheerful disposition. Meaningless work and pointless suffering, hypocrisy, and mockery of all that was meaningful in human life had robbed me of so much.

Let them try and garner respect, that is, if they can live with their own consciences, if they have any such thing. They imagined enemies of the state and the people where they didn't exist. Why? Who found that invention necessary, and then to subject the victims of that invention to such cruelties. They based the arrests on hearsay, baseless accusations. My "sin," which should never have been a crime, was the fact that I was ahead of the times in my progressive thinking.

I was given the maximum sentence, an innocent man, without any semblance of a fair and open trial, based on hearsay with no opportunity to defend myself. It was a great perversion of the legal system. Unjustly punished. We were ordered to do "socially useful work," but, in fact, we were subjected to cruel mistreatment, torture, at the mercy of our sadistic jailers.

I am proud of the fact that I somehow survived it all and managed to retain my humanity. I remained a human being in the true sense of the word.

It was a hot July day. The kind of day when you can feel the heat in your lungs. We were working without our shirts, that we kept draped around our waists or nearby. Whenever we could, we would stop to rest on the ground, conserving our strength, knowing that the work was endless.

Suddenly word came down that there was to be a meeting. We all gathered at the usual place for such meetings. There was an opening speech. The speaker talked about the

magnanimity of our Party, which routinely released a certain number of prisoners back into freedom. Then there was a reading of the list of prisoners from each of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia who would be released. I heard my name and surname among them. I felt a surge of joy, but I waited to have the news confirmed by my comrades.

It meant that I would finally be free again. I could return to normal life. I would be able to continue my studies and enjoy all of the other blessings of freedom. I was overjoyed. It was the happiest moment of my life. The long-awaited day of my release. We were given our civilian clothes back. We left the camp on Goli-Otok and made our way down to the dock. We gathered on the seashore, near a workshop. Everyone was in high spirits. Their eyes shone with happiness. We basked in the sun and enjoyed a dreamless sleep. All we could think of was freedom. We made our plans of what we would do once we were free.

There were two of us from Macedonia, a lawyer names Daskalov from Kavardarsi and myself. Suddenly I thought: What now? What would happen? I entered the office of the investigator, who told me that I was being released. I smiled at that, and he said to me, while looking me straight in the eye: "I want to tell you, honestly, were you telling me the truth before? Did you tell a fellow prisoner, 'Why should you report someone freely, when no one insisted on it.' You can tell me now. You won't be punished." I denied saying that, and the investigator continued: "You see how bad it is here, don't let yourself be brought back here. You won't get another chance at freedom, if you do!" I told him: "That will never happen!" That was the end of our conversation and I went on my way.

We spent the night out under the open sky, waiting impatiently for the Punat. With daylight the boat arrived. We felt wonderful. It was so different than the day of our arrival at Goli Otok. We boarded the boat. Everyone smiled and laughed as we peered out at the sea. The glittering rays of warm sunshine gently caressed us and gave us hope for the future. Our joy was as endless as the sea that surrounded us. We could sense freedom like a sweet perfume, like clean, clear seawater, like a summer breeze over the water; it filled our lungs with an intoxicating air of promise, of happiness and fulfillment. The memory that day of the islands and the coast of the Kvarner Peninsula will always be with me. I would at last be set free. After 5 months in a jail cell (11/23/1949 to 4/24/1949) and on Goli Otok for 29 months (4/24/1950 to 8/20/1952). I served 34 months in all, without any of the due process of law.

#### FREE BUT UNDER WATCH

For the trip home we each received a thousand dinars. We traveled with wide grins, full of good cheer. For the first time our happiness knew no bounds.

The Punat arrived at the dock in Rijeka and we disembarked. After so long we again saw people freely going about their business, in the cafes, the sweets shops, strolling along the sidewalks, driving the streets. I felt as if I had just emerged from a cage, or a jungle, or come from another planet. Everything was interesting to me. Especially the female world, which I hadn't seen for 34 months. We sat in a sweets shop and just basked in the freedom of it all. I and a friend from my home town of Strumitsa, Aleksandar Vitanov, traveled together. The group split up and everyone headed for his own home. The two of us had train tickets for Skopje, and then we planned to take the bus on to Strumitsa.

In Skopje we reported to the Security Police. That was obligatory. They sent us to the old central jail, where I had been held for five months before being sent to Goli Otok. I entered the investigator's office. My "old friend" Roman Lechevski was there by himself, poring over my case. He was very attentive to me. He invited me to sit down and he offered me a quality brand cigarette. He started to talk to me about the great achievements of the socialist state; the public works, the democratic institutions and the workers self-management, like nowhere else on earth. He was saying all of this to me, a person he had imprisoned, without proof of guilt, who had been declared an enemy of the Party, the State and the people. The one whose head he had used as a soccer ball, who had been sentenced to 34 months in prison, a person that he had caused terrible suffering and grief, sending me to prison without a proper trial or defense. Now, this same miscreant was lecturing me on democracy in Yugoslavia. It was sadistic irony. It was beyond belief. He continued to talk about the benevolence of our party, how it had shown us such mercy, letting us go free again. I received my personal identification card and wallet that he had been holding there. He looked at me and shamelessly announced: "We'll be seeing each other on a regular basis, now that we have an understanding, because you are now reformed."

I immediately thought, 'My freedom is going to depend on whether I collaborate with them?' But I never saw Roman Lechevski ever again, nor did I cooperate with him.

I was thoroughly enraged, totally miserable inside, so that I could barely contain myself. But I somehow managed to do so. There was no way that I could change who I was, but it was so terrible to see the depths to which they would stoop. I held it all in and bit my tongue, all the while thinking to myself, 'This is so incredible. How can it be?' I realized that I wasn't really free. I would always be under surveillance. It was another version of Goli Otok.

I got away from that awful man, Roman Lechevski. Many years have passed since then, and I never spoke to him again. He simply ceased to exist for me, and despite his assumptions, I never collaborated with him. I had to live with this shadow over me, and always under surveillance. I had to suppress my rage and live with the injustice, forever after a second class citizen, my mind and spirit under siege.



I arrived in Strumitsa. Only my mother came to meet me at the train station. She began to cry from happiness. We left for home and she told me how she had suffered such anguish and sorrow over my incarceration.

I was finally free. As one of the rehabilitated I had to walk on egg shells. I was wary of everything and everyone. I avoided all politics. 1952 was a bad year, the Yugoslavian communist party was under attack from all of the other communists in the world.

I felt lost in time and space. I didn't trust anyone, they all seemed like hypocrites and chameleons at best, and many were possibly vile informers on others. I was totally adrift, at a loss as to how to behave. What hurt most was the way old friends, colleagues and even family members shunned me as if I were a rabid dog or a carrier of the plague. Some wouldn't even greet me on the street, let alone have a conversation or invite me to join them. It felt like being blacklisted, even though I was no longer in prison. I've wondered if that was the Party's intent all along, to make the people afraid of me. It is still unclear to me, their intent.

Was it the same for all the other former inmates? I don't know. I do know that some of them did very quickly resume old posts or gain new ones as directors, members of parliament, and the like. I never associated with any former inmates from Goli Otok, because I simply didn't trust them. We were all very suspicious of each other and avoided contact with each other. It was a very oppressive atmosphere in which to try and live.

In September of 1952 I traveled to Skopje and tried to reenroll in the seventh semester of the geography program in the philology department. I took all of the required documents to the department secretary. He told me that I would need the approval of the dean. So he sent me to the dean's office. Blazhe Koneski was the dean at the time. I explained the situation to him. He listened attentively and then told me that he would need some time to work on this, and that I should come back in a week. He seemed sincere.

It was a Monday, so I would need to return the next Monday. I thanked him and left. I thought about how the rules that applied to others no longer applied to me. There were stricter rules for me.

I returned a week later as requested by the dean. He apologized for the delay, but he told me to come back in another three days. I did that, and this time I received permission to reenroll in the program. He sent me back to the secretary who signed me up for classes. I once again attended lectures and resumed my studies.

It wasn't the same though. There were all new students in the program now. Everyone who had studied with me had graduated and they were now teaching at schools. There was a great need for teachers in the schools at the time, but I was determined to complete my studies first, despite the challenges. I had no money. That was the most difficult challenge. It was also hard to find a place to live. For a while I stayed "illegally" in the student dormitory.

I'd once had the room of the president of the student organization, but they didn't welcome me back now. After a short time they called me in and ordered me out of the dormitory. Once again Goli Otok haunted my free life.

I left immediately. That evening I slept at Aleksandar Vitanov's. He and I were at Goli Otok together and had become close. There was only one cramped room in a hole in the wall building off Marshal Tito Street, that we called "Palace Shayo." He studied medicine and later became a leading surgeon. I told him my predicament. He agreed to put me up. We both shared his narrow, little bed, and neither of us got much sleep that night. The room was so small that there was little room for more than his bed. So there was little choice in the matter.

The next day I went to another friend, who had also been on Goli Otok with us, also a medical student, named Petar Nalev, who lived with another student named Ilija. They lived in what had once been a laundry. I spent one night in Petar's bed with him, but it also was good for one person. Petar told me that I could stay there if I would go out and get myself a straw-filled tick mattress to sleep on. I went out the next day and bought a mattress cover and then visited a field on the outskirts of town in the vicinity of Gazi Baba, where I filled the mattress with straw and hurried away before anyone could catch me taking it. I carried the mattress right through the center of town to the former laundry. My two roommates went on to become a medical specialist and a university professor.

In June of 1953, right after completing my eight semester of studies, without taking the usual period of time to prepare, I took my qualifying examinations and passed with the high mark of a nine. Despite all of the challenges I managed to complete my studies and receive my diploma, which was to my great benefit, because now I had a way to earn a living.

#### MOTHER KOSTADINKA SEARCHES FOR HER CHILD

Later, after I got out of prison, my now deceased mother, Kostadinka told me about how she had sought news of me a few months after my arrest. After four months without any news from me she decided to seek information from the authorities. At the time she had no idea what had happened to me.

Along with my aunt, Nadeshka, who shared both good and bad times with her, my mother decided to visit the local office of the Communist Party of Macedonia to ask for information about my whereabouts and why they hadn't heard from me. They saw Mara Minanova, who was probably the most important member of the local party, a member of the Central Committee of the C.P.M. They thought that she would surely know something. Mara and Nadeshka were actually related, and they were all close because they had often been together at meetings of the party and the resistance at our house during the war. My father

had worked for many years at a shop owned by Mara's father, who was a local manufacturer. Our house had been chosen for meetings because of its secure location on the edge of town.

All of this led them to seek out Mara, who accepted them in her office. My mother was so upset at the time that she immediately began to cry. She turned to Mara Minanova, an old acquaintance, and pleaded with her: "Daughter, my Toma hasn't been heard from for over four months now. We've heard rumors that he was arrested, so we've come to you in hopes that you will know something about what has happened to him."

Mara Minanova frowned and answered her: "Your son is in prison. He has committed serious crimes; he even stirred up trouble in prison. He'll be in prison a long time, if he doesn't reform himself!"

My mother listened to her carefully, and then she said: "My children were very young when their father died. I've done the best I could, working outside the home to support them. I've raised them and taught them. They are all honest and good people, and I'm proud of them. I've never had any reason to cry over their actions. You tell me he is a criminal, when I know for a fact that he was a model student and leader among his peers, who received honors in his university department. He couldn't possibly be a criminal in need of rehabilitation."

My mother went on to say that it was a great miscarriage of justice, what was done to her son. "God will, sooner or later punish all of you who are responsible for this," my mother told Mara Minanova as she left her office in obvious distress. Mara Minanova's name is one of those listed on the documents announcing my 24 month sentence to socially useful labor, despite the fact that she never once saw me or talked to me. She simply accepted the hearsay evidence presented by others that got me arrested and charged and eventually sentenced to prison.

#### A SOLDIER IN THE YUGOSLAV ARMY

In July of 1953 I received a draft notice to report for duty in the Yugoslav Army. So I graduated in June and in July of 1953 I entered the army and was stationed in Aidovshchina, Slovenia. I had already served 18 months as a volunteer in the liberation army during the war, and now I was expected to serve another year. As a former soldier during the war I was supposed to be exempt from further duty, but such rules didn't apply to former prisoners from Goli Otok.

I reported for duty at the end of July at the army base in Strumitsa. The first thing they did was give new recruits a haircut. We slept that night on straw and the next day they loaded us in train cars and shipped us to Aidovshchina. It was a small town previously under Italian control, with a big military base. The base was located outside of the town and

surrounded by high walls. It had been built by Mussolini. The empty base was now being filled up with Macedonian army recruits. Upon our arrival we all bathed and received our uniforms.

Then we fell into line and there was a roll call, and we were each given our assignment. I was singled out for special attention and assignment to a special unit. This was just a continuation of the harsh treatment I was to experience as an ex-political prisoner. The major told me that he had a special assignment for me.

I was assigned to a mortar battalion. I was given a mortar to carry across my shoulder and taught to aim and fire it. The training ground was over a mile from the camp and each day we made our way there to train. In the evenings I was assigned guard duty in the horse barn. Our battalion still used horses.

I didn't enjoy the horse barn. I'd never worked with horses before. After all, I was a university graduate destined for teaching. Most of the others were poorly educated common soldiers, often illiterate peasants. While grooming one horse named Olga, she bit me. Another horse named Tsigο smashed my foot. I just didn't know what I was doing.

Around that time I talked to a cousin my age, who had the misfortune of having the same name as me. It was only by the documentation that we had different fathers that the authorities could distinguish between us. This poor cousin told me about how he had been arrested a while back, because they thought he was me. He was held and abused by the police for over a month until the mistake was discovered, and the authorities had to apologize and let him go. He later became a fiscal manger for the Yugoslav railway and worked in Belgrade.

I soon grew accustomed to army life and even fit in. During free time I taught classes to the soldiers, and I taught mathematics to the unit commander. I taught geography to a group of officers. I was soon on friendly terms with all the officers. I continued to struggle with care of the horses. I adapted to the life, and I was always busy. The time passed quickly. Two months passed without my noticing it, and ten remained.

I had a lot of friends among the soldiers, Macedonians and Slovenians. I got particularly close with one poorly educated Albanian recruit. We did everything together. But eventually my prison record caught up with me and the mistreatment and abuse started. My platoon leader informed me that I was to report to a major from the army security police at 5 p.m. the next day.

I grew anxious at the news and feared the worst. How long would this go on? I reported to the major's office at precisely 4:45pm. As I sat there waiting all sorts of terrible thoughts passed through my head. Would they again ask me to inform on those around me? Would they insist on my collaboration? I was called into the office. I saluted the major as I entered. He smiled and said that that was unnecessary. He immediately began asking me

questions. First there were the usual questions; he asked me where I had been from 1949 through 1952. I told him that I had been on Goli Otok and five months in state security in Skopje under investigation. He asked me why I had served extra time, when my sentence was only 24 months.

I told him honestly that I never accepted the verdict of the court. I never felt that I had committed any crime. Then the major got right to the point. He told me that I would have to cooperate with him and submit regular reports on any suspicious activity on the base. He wanted me to report on what the officers and men said, both positive and negative about the state. Then he continued: "You're bright and educated, you need to be sensible and do this work conscientiously. It shouldn't be hard for you."

I didn't have to think about it. I told him: "Not everyone can be a doctor, in the same way, not everyone is suited for this kind of work. If there is an enemy to be dealt with, I'll fight him right then and there, and I'll report it all to the proper authorities."

The major grew livid at this response. He started to berate me. He even threatened to make my life so miserable that I would never forget him so long as I lived.

I stood there, dead quiet, frozen. But in my mind I was filled with dread that this meant I would be sent back to Goli Otok.

The major raged on for a while and then sent me away. It was dinner time. For the first time I was unable to eat. I gave my portion to my Albanian friend, telling him that I didn't feel good and had no appetite. I couldn't sleep that night. I was tortured by thoughts of what would happen to me next. The blood froze in my veins at the thought of it. I was filled with dread. I considered going back to the major and begging his forgiveness, and telling him that I was ready to cooperate with him. How could I rid myself of the stigma of my criminal record? But no, there was no way I could get myself to participate in their dirty game. Let them do what they will, even if it's a hundred times worse.

I finally decided that I would just have to prove myself by being the best soldier I could be. I always stepped forward when there was a call for volunteers. I only had positive things to say in front of the soldiers. I did everything I could to be an exemplary soldier. I knew that my every move would be watched. I tried to be perfect.

It was wearisome always having to assume that I was being watched and knowing that I was discriminated against. There was always some barrier to my advancement. I was simply treated differently than others, denied the rights and privileges others enjoyed.

I remained always on the alert. I tried not to do anything that those who watched me could report against me, no matter how carefully they studied and analyzed my actions. It meant that I could never really relax and enjoy myself. It was like a dark cloud that hung over me during my entire working career and even after going in to retirement. Years later when I

was able to obtain the file that the secret police had kept on me for all those years, I was able to confirm the fact that informants among "friends" really had spied on me during the entire period. It also showed how their reports often contained falsehoods designed to blacken my good name.

I made every effort to be a good soldier. I reported to the kitchen for volunteer duty peeling potatoes, preparing beans and other food. I led the horses out for water. I volunteered for cleaning details for the meeting halls and bathrooms. I distinguished myself by being among the best recruits during military exercises, despite the fact that I was among the oldest at 26 years of age. I held classes for the soldiers. And when the others complained about the food and refused to eat it, for example, when we were served cooked spinach, I praised the food for its vitamin content and asked for a second helping.

Another month passed. I was painfully aware of the fact that I might at any moment be summoned by authorities, rearrested and sent back to prison. It made me crazy.

Then one afternoon our unit gathered for a conference in a field near the army camp. At the end of the conference the army security police major arrived. He addressed the soldiers, asking them where they were from and how they were finding things at the camp. He approached me and slapped me on the shoulder, and he said to me: "You see this soldier; you all need to behave like him." And he continued in his praise: "He volunteers for all the work details, even the cleaning of the toilets. When you complain about the food, he explains to you why you ought to appreciate the spinach you're served that provides vitamins. He has completed university and he'll be a professor." The major slapped me on the back again, in front of the other soldiers, and the eyes of all were fixed upon me. "Here," he said. "Is an exemplary soldier and the rest of you need to be like him."

I was overjoyed. I was free of all doubt now, and I breathed a deep sigh of relief. It was as if a great weight had been lifted off my back.

And I continued to be a good soldier. I never saw the major again. I intentionally avoided him. I carried the mortar, took care of the horses, did night guard duty on alternative evenings, and other duties.

Two months passed this way. I settled in to life in the infantry unit. The time went by quickly. I felt relaxed and free of worry.

One afternoon while we soldiers were resting, the bugle call sounded calling us to order. The entire camp assembled in battalions and smaller units. A three member army panel selected soldiers from the ranks to attend an auto school in Mucici (a hamlet near Rijeka). They selected 200 candidates and after a physical and mental examination that number was reduced to 40 recruits who would attend the school. I was one of those. The commander of

my unit asked me why I would even want to leave his group. I smiled and told him that I thought I would enjoy driving cars instead of tending horses.

The next day the 40 of us set out for Mucici. The camp there was quite large and included a large vehicle training ground. It was the largest auto school in Yugoslavia. The camp was much nicer than the one at Aidovshchina. Everything was well organized. We had classes on the mechanics and operation of motor vehicle every morning, and in the afternoon we studied political theory. After a month of serious study, we began to practice driving, first on the training ground and later on the highway. I must admit that it didn't come easy to me, I was a clumsy driver. The semi-literate boys from the countryside took to driving much more quickly than I did. I especially struggled to control the American trucks. I failed my first driving tests. I did pass on my second try, much to my delight. Upon completion of the course all of the recruits were dispersed among various units around the country to drive a variety of vehicles. I remained at Mucici.

A major in the local group put me to work as a cashier in the offer's bar. I was again challenged by this new assignment.

When the unit went on maneuvers, the major put me in charge of the bar, a job normally done by a captain in their group. I told the major that I didn't have any experience at this work and that I was afraid that I could make some error that would misplace funds and possibly land me in jail for stealing. He assured me that I had nothing to fear and that I would do fine.

In fact, I did run into trouble. One day an officer, who came in to pay on his bill, accused me of writing the wrong amount in the book, cheating him. He reported another time to a captain who had replaced the commander that I had given out food without paying for it. It was all done just to cause me trouble. I really think that he had it in for me. I wouldn't doubt that he was an informer and provocateur.

There was a soldier from Zagreb, a high school graduate, who worked in the unit headquarters, who became good friends with me. I often treated him at the bar. I would also go visit with him in his office on occasion. One time when he was working on some files, I asked him what they were: "What's in these files?"

He told me: "I'm updating the permanent file on each member of the unit. Each of these files represents a soldier."

I very innocently asked: "Could I see my own file?"

"Are you crazy?" he asked.

"What, don't you trust me?" I said, and then continued: "Do you really have so little faith in me? I just want to see my own. No one will know. What kind of friends are we? We Macedonians keep our word. There are no more trustworthy people in the world. You can be

sure. If you don't think so, I'm not sure we can be friends. But I consider you a true friend, a comrade fellow soldier that I would do anything for.

He thought about it for a while. He was anxious though, but he finally said: "Fine. I'll give it to you, but you better be careful."

I read it quickly. In the folder, among other things, after my name, surname, date and place of birth, there was a brief note about my time on Goli Otok that stated: "He was there for 29 months and remained unrehabilitated." There were some other notes, but nothing that particularly interested me. I glanced through it all rather quickly, before anyone could catch me. After I'd finished reading I thanked my friend and told him: "Don't worry, no one will ever know, I promise you. But it was really important to me to see it."

That file accompanied me wherever I went over the years, and no doubt, it must have grown quite large over time. I certainly would have liked to see it again. That file defined a person for as long as he lived.

Eventually the day came when I was released from military service. I was on my own again. I had a military service book that included the designation driver-specialist. And so my 12 months military obligation was completed in August of 1954, having begun in July of 1953.

#### MY FIRST JOB

From 1954 to 1960 I worked as a teacher at Yane Sandanski High School in Strumitsa. It was gratifying that the students seemed to respect me. But, as usual, I was always under the watchful eye of the security police.

The secretary of the local communist party organization in the district that included our high school, an old school chum named Gjorgji Gavrilov, urged me to request reinstatement in the party, although I had never officially been expelled in the first place. I avoided the subject for years. I'd had enough of politics and been burned by it.

My old school friend eventually replaced the judge Vlado Mishev. A number of things led me to conclude that I had better return to the Communist Party if I hoped to have a career. Teachers didn't dare refuse to join the Party. My request for reinstatement in the party, without every being formally ousted, was read at a local meeting. Of all those who spoke, only one member spoke against my request. Among other things he said: "You have to recognize that Batev committed serious offenses against the Party and you shouldn't be so quick to pardon him."

The other members of the Party didn't respond. I wanted to answer him, but I thought better of it. As a wise Greek philosopher once said: "Whenever I keep silent, I never say the



wrong thing." Since no one else had anything to say, the secretary put the request to a vote. The response was unanimous, so I was accepted back into the Party in 1957.

One time I received notice to report to the State Security Police in Strumitsa. The local bureau chief Ilija met me there. That was in 1958. His office was quite plush. He greeted me and offered me a seat and a cup of coffee, but I declined the offer claiming that I never drank coffee. He began the conversation by asking me: "What's new at the high school?" And he asked: "As a teacher, how do you find things?"

I told him that all was well with me and the school so far. Then he got right to the point: "We need to work together." He also reminded me of the usual, that we former prisoners had been treated with such generosity by the Party. I told him that I had never done anything to harm the Party, the state or the people. I had been wrongly accused. To that he responded that back then it was like a storm that brought hail that damaged everything it touched. Without thinking it through very carefully I said to him: "The prison camps didn't build socialism, they had the opposite effect, destroying it.

Then I went on to categorically announce: "There is no way that I would do that. If I were the sort of person who would do that, I wouldn't have been in prison for 34 months. Please don't ask me to collaborate with you, because I just can't bring myself to do it. I hate the idea."

When the local chief of state security heard that, he got angry, but he didn't seem to see any point to pressuring me. I asked: "Can I go now?"

He let me go. It was very disturbing to me, five years after being released from prison, to once again be asked to spy for the police, report on others around me, to become, as they'd once requested, "Dragoljub Ilic". I felt like I was already back on Goli Otok. All of my old fears, anxieties, tortured thoughts and bitterness reappeared just when I had imagined that all of that was far behind me.

My work at the Yane Sandanski High School in Strumitsa lasted from 1954 to 1960, and I left there with a record as an exemplary teacher.

#### THE TEACHER'S COLLEGE GOTSE DELCHEV

A teacher's college opened in Shtip beginning in the 1959-1960 school year in order to train teachers for the primary schools of Macedonia. There were two divisions, one for school teachers for the primary schools of Macedonia and one for curriculum examiners. There were four subject groups: geography-history; Macedonian and French Languages; Biology, Chemistry, Physics; and Mathematics.

There was a written competition for instructors in each of the divisions and groups. I had all the qualifications and decided to compete for a position in the school. Although I was one of those chosen to teach geography, my appointment was delayed for six months, and I didn't get to teach until after the New Year. To this day I have no idea why that happened.

I settled into my work rather quickly. All of the instructors received apartments. Although I had a family I was the last to be assigned one. I always had to wonder why that was so often the case with me.

The time passed quickly and I went from the position of instructor to professor at the teacher's college. I began writing articles for the journals, *Prosveten Rabotnik*, *Prosvetno Delo*, and other scientific journals. That made me a strong candidate for a professorship at the school, which was a five year post rather than the three an instructor received. I soon became a professor and had my contract renewed a number of times over a twenty-three year period.

During my time in Shtip I was quite active in both professional and in civic life. I served on the town council. I was president of the local worker's self-management association and a worker's council at the school. I was active in a range of public organizations, all the while under close police surveillance. I was even chosen president of a regional community council named Prolet.

In 1963 I was called in for questioning once again by the state security service office in Shtip. The officer was a no-nonsense, middle aged, balding man, who got right to the point. He said: "You were seen driving a car with Bulgarian embassy plates on the road between Strumitsa and Valandovo." He asked me: "So, who were these people?"

I composed my answer after listening carefully: "The information you received was incorrect. I was on a trip abroad at that time. I have the proof in my passport. I wonder how you were so badly misinformed."

It was a warning that I was still a person of interest to the security police. I would never enjoy the freedom of others. They continued to seek my collaboration, but they would never get it.

#### UNFAIR TREATMENT ON THE ECONOMICS FACULTY IN PRILEP

I continued to live a restricted, regimented life, under surveillance, with bitterness in my heart, a second class citizen. I was a victim of the communist regime. My mind and spirit remained under siege. It was nearly impossible to prove my innocence.

The teacher's college was going through changes, of the posts at the school, only the section teacher and examiner's position remained. I looked to the Economics College in Prilep for future prospects, in order to advance my career. The new laws on education decreed that

only those with a masters or doctorate in their subject would be hired as university professors. So I began to consider my options. In 1965 I was chosen to lecture at the college in Prilep on the economic geography of Yugoslavia. The college eventually grew into a university.

This necessitated the selection of new faculty. Mainly they rehired the old teachers. I expected to be rehired, although the dean, Ljupcho Adzhi-Mitreski, told me that they had decided to advertise the position for professor of economic geography of Yugoslavia. I still thought I would be their choice, because I had taught at the school from 1965-1974. I had also obtained my Masters degree, and I was working on a doctoral dissertation through Belgrade University. I hoped to be called to defend my dissertation very soon. So I was surprised when they chose someone else for the faculty position. I couldn't understand why it wasn't me, but I had my suspicions.

As a teacher, both in Shtip and Prilep, I had always strived for excellence in my daily lessons. Not one of my students, tested under strict control in the main hall, ever failed. I was never called in for mediation or correction for poor performance. The students all knew me as a teacher who didn't play favorites, and who was dedicated to seeing that they learned my subject. Their grades were all a matter of public record, and any student who was unhappy with their grade could come in and discuss it with me. It didn't matter if the test were a written one or oral. The thousands of students that I taught over the years at the teacher's college in Shtip, the economics school in Prilep, the teacher's college in Bitola and the Department of Tourism in Ohrid, all would attest to the fairness of my teaching and marking.

I knew all along that I was also under surveillance, both at work and at home in my free time. They tapped my telephone. They only lacked the means at that time to keep me under surveillance with cameras. I tried to be as discreet as possible, given the circumstances.

As a result of my doctoral work in Belgrade and my selection as a lecturer in the department, my fellow teachers organized a reception in my honor in the old main hall of the university in Prilep. It meant that I was a respected colleague, well-liked and fully accepted by my peers at work. The dean gave a brief talk in which he wished me success in my work. But as they say: "Not every good deed is rewarded." The good times were short lived. I was among the first in the department to obtain both the Masters and Doctorate degrees. I was also pleased by my reception in the department.

However, all citizens were not equal in the eyes of the state. I did not enjoy all of the rights that others did. I would always remain in some version of Goli Otok for my entire life. Mischievous troublemakers were always present, under the direct command of the security service. They used all manner of dirty tricks to make life difficult for those they deemed enemies of the Party, the people and the state and a threat to the regime, the unrepentant former prisoners. There was nothing they wouldn't do to try and punish us.

At that time a professor appeared among us with direct ties to the state apparatus. Mitko Panov actively worked to undermine the authority of the departmental leadership. He wrote a letter to the department that challenged the judgment of the academic selection committee and the entire faculty advisory council. In the end it was the legitimacy of his claims that became questionable.

In his letter, among other things, he wrote: "Concerning the study of the geography of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia and the other republics of Yugoslavia, I believe that the academic selection committee, in its second faculty member selection acted improperly because the person selected has not yet completed his doctorate."

What the faculty advisory council had in mind was to balance the program with one economist and one geographer. They had selected a teacher for the Economics Department but not for geography. Two eminent professors, Dr. Milorad Vasovic, a full professor at Belgrade University, who was president of the Society of Geographers of Yugoslavia and Dr. Milos Bogdanovic, a full professor from Prishtina University, who presided over the Union of University Professors of Yugoslavia, were in charge of the process.

The reference to a doctorate was about the fact that of the newly-chosen teachers, I was the only one who had his Masters Degree and had presented his doctoral work to Belgrade University, but it still needed to be defended.

He went even further in his letter, however, writing: "We are not aware of whether Mr. Toma Batev reported in his accompanying documents any details about his activities, but we know that he certainly was a member of the SCY, League of Communists of Yugoslavia, in 1942 (but there was no mention of his present membership)..."

In 1942 I was 15 years old and as a minor there was no way I could have been a member of the Communist Party of Macedonia. He had written SCY, but it should have been the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. To be specific I was in the SCOY in 1942.

As far as my party membership went, I was a member of the SCY, I was even secretary of the local organization "Prolet" in the Shtip region and secretary of the local organization of the SCY at the teacher's college as well as being in the leadership of other social and political organizations.

On the fourth page of the letter, the respected and esteemed professor really gets bold when he proposes to the Teacher's Council of the Economics Department in Prilep that: "...It would seem, to our thinking (In my opinion, this is probably just his own thinking since, despite the fact that he tried to put pressure on the members of the Geography Institute, no one supported him, he remained alone in his bid for action.) there is no need to make an appointment until a better prepared candidate is found. If Mr. Toma Batev had already been named, that does not necessarily make my request irrelevant. Your esteemed Teacher's

Council should be able to revise its decision. I urge you to bring my letter before a meeting of the council... He goes on to say: "...A copy of this letter has also been sent to the University Council....."

I was amazed at the bold impudence of Professor Mitko Panov, the fact that he presumed to advise the council to rescind a lawfully made decision. There isn't a council that would do as he asked. He sought to reverse the decision of a council of 29 respected professors. Who did he think he was?

The dean put the letter on the agenda of the Teacher's Council's next meeting. The letter was read out loud, and then I left the meeting so that my colleagues could discuss the matter more freely, not wanting to prejudice their deliberations by my presence. The letter offended the council, and his suggestion was unanimously rejected by the professors.

And what was the final outcome? The subject, economic geography of Yugoslavia, was entirely eliminated from the curriculum of the Economics Department in Prilep. It continued to be taught at every other economics department at every institution of higher learning in the country except Prilep. The intent was clear, to see that Batev didn't teach at the school. They eliminated the entire subject in order to get rid of the professor. What a shame. It was simply unbelievable.

Although I had been chosen for a five year term as a lecturer, I was out of a job after only two years. The Economics Council of Macedonia tried to find me a position on their Tourist Bureau, to become a representative abroad, and they even encouraged me to improve my German language skills to that end. But it came to nothing, despite the best efforts of those involved.

Competing for a position in the Economics Department in Shtip was an appealing prospect for me, because I believed that I was to be chosen for a position there. I had both my Masters and my Ph.D., and I had published a considerable number of academic papers. Surely they would encourage my move from the school in Prilep back to Shtip.

The teacher's college had gone through changes. My subjects were no longer being taught. I no longer had a place there. My very livelihood was being threatened by this. It was my good fortune, however, that the new Department of Economics opened in Shtip that same year. I had already been the department's first choice in Prilep. I was certainly well-qualified. I had already prepared a curriculum for the students to follow.

I participated in a written competition. What was the final outcome though? The judges decided that only those who had majored in economics would be considered. My application wasn't even considered. The only reason I wasn't chosen was because I wasn't an economist, but a geographer.

I wrote a letter to the highest authority for the department, to the Society of Geographers of Yugoslavia, to my local regional union council and to the union council for the republic to try and seek justice.

Once again the conditions for successful candidacy were revised. Now it was only a matter of who was best educated. I couldn't see how I could be passed over. I again submitted the documentation that I had presented for the first search for a qualified professor. In 1978 I visited the head of the search committee, Milan Hrovat, and asked him if I was a viable candidate this time. He told me: "You shouldn't have any problem, unless a more able candidate should apply."

I had no doubt that I would succeed this time in securing my professional career. At the end of the summer vacation, I went to find out if I'd been chosen for the position. The secretary told me to take back my documents because they'd chosen someone else. He told me that there was just a note saying: "...Dr. Toma Batev needs to come pick up his documents."

You would think that I would want to ask the head of the search committee why this had happened. I couldn't shake my despair that the network of the security services had intervened. I couldn't come up with any other plausible explanation for how this could have happened. How could someone else have been selected? It defied all logic. No one met the established criteria for selection better than I did. How could they have passed me over for someone without proper qualifications? A candidate without the prescribed Masters or Ph.D. degrees. The department had more than its share of hangers on, teachers with mediocre qualifications and records of achievement.

I had never been so discouraged in my life. It was no surprise that I didn't want to go see the man who had told me that I shouldn't have any problems.

I resolved to visit all of the responsible political and social functionaries in Shtip and eventually in Skopje, with the aim to resolve my work situation, otherwise I would soon have no work at all in Shtip.

I was a member of the Communist Party, so I paid a visit to the local committee secretary of SCM, the League of Communists of Macedonia, Jordan Arsov. He had been close to me over the years. I explained in detail everything that had happened to me. I told him: "I've come to you, the head of the local party, as a party member who needs help." He was honest with me and said that there really wasn't anything he could do. Then I asked him: "What do you think as a lawyer and prosecutor and legal expert. If Batev had murdered someone and been punished for it, then he could be labeled a murderer. But how can I be labeled an enemy of the party, the state and the people, when there is no proof of my ever

having committed a crime against them. I was declared guilty without any proof of guilt. How is that possible? He stood there just thinking for the longest time, unable to answer me.

Upon the recommendation of the president of the City Council of Shtip, Mihael Danev, I visited the vice president of a Macedonian state council named Vasil Tudjarov. We were familiar with each other from school days and the town. He knew my two older brothers quite well, from governmental and party work. The receptionist announced my arrival and right away I was shown into Tudjarov's office. There was a stranger in the office with him, and I offered to come back another time. But once we were just the two of us, we began the usual conversation, about our children, where they were in their schooling, I learned about his deceased mother, a particularly nice woman, and I talked about my own mother. Eventually we got around to my situation. He asked me many questions, all about my case, and I answered them all.

He told me that he would talk to some people. I asked him when I should come back, and he told me that there would be no need, that he would let me know any results. I never visited him again and he never called me. The director of the teacher's college in Shtip, told me in confidence that the security service wouldn't issue a permit for me to become a teacher in the Economics Department in Shtip.

I finally decided to visit the secretary to the head of the Central Committee of the SCM, League of Communists of Macedonia, Boro Denkov. For the first time in my entire life I visited the headquarters of the Party.

The receptionist took my identification papers and signed me into his registry. He announced my visit, and relayed the information that I only asked ten minutes of the secretary's time. I was told to wait. I shared a cigarette with the receptionist and we talked about soccer. He had once played and now he was a referee. We continued to smoke and had a pleasant conversation.

He rang the secretary several times, but every time I was told to wait. The president of the Socialist Union of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, Aleksandar Donev, passed by in the hall. He said hello and congratulated me on my doctorate. He asked what I was there for. I briefly explained the situation. He said: "Don't get all upset. You have work. Look after your health." With that he said good bye and departed from the building.

When the receptionist heard that I had taught in the Economics Department in Prilep, he told me that his daughter had studied with me. She had done very well and he praised me for my fairness and the quality of my teaching. When it was 2:55 in the afternoon, after so many hours of waiting, the receptionist angrily called the secretary's office one more time. They informed him that the secretary of the Central Committee would not be able to receive me. The receptionist expressed his sympathy that I had waited for so many hours to no avail.

I said good bye to him then and left. As I walked away I thought about how outrageous it was that I had been kept waiting for so long and then sent away without even a word of apology or any suggestion of when I might come back and be seen. Where in the world do people treat other people this way? So ended my attempt.

I paid the president of the Shtip regional council a second visit and told him all about what had happened. He advised me to go see the president of the responsible commission, Milan Hrovat. I begged him to speak to him for me on the telephone, to let him know what I was interested in speaking to him about. He immediately agreed. The telephone conversation was quite brief, but I could tell by his reaction that it had left an impression on him. Did it mean something was wrong? I asked him: "Did he turn you down?" He replied: "We'll go to Skopje together to see Mr. Hrovat, president of the high commission." I was a bit surprised that he would take such an interest in my case. I wondered if it were some sort of trap. His Mercedes raced along the highway to Skopje. There were just the two of us plus the driver. Among other things, he told me that he wouldn't be able to bring me back to Shtip, that he would be staying over in Skopje. He said that I wouldn't have any problem catching a bus home. I suspected that if we didn't have a positive result he would just as well not have to ride back to Shtip with me. Why should he have to share my misery? We arrived in Skopje and went into the building of the state high commission without any problems, as if we were welcome guests. The president of the Shtip council seemed to know everyone. We sat in one of the high commission's offices. My companion appeared moody and pensive. I was in a highly agitated state myself. The president of the high commission eventually came in with a smile for my companion. They shook hands and he sat down at the desk in a comfortable chair. He offered us coffee, but we declined because we had recently had a cup. He knew the purpose of our visit, so he initiated the conversation. Finally he said that he was responsible for changing the criteria for selection and that he had done that for my benefit. Then he praised me for achieving such academic success, and said that I was a solid, honest, family man. He told me that he didn't know my past history, but it accounted for the fact that I had not been selected for the teaching position in the Economics Department in Shtip.

I reacted angrily. I told him all about what had happened to me. I had endured my punishment and I was now an active member of the Party. I also participated in many public, community organizations. I also was aware of how I was being treated unfairly in my professional life. He reddened in embarrassment and said nothing. I asked: "What would you do in my place? After 27 years of proven professional competence to be ignored, passed over, discriminated against, shut out of work?"



This only made him angry and he said to me: "You're lucky you're not out on the street."

I immediately responded: "I'm prepared to do whatever honest labor is required to survive – drive a taxi, carry people's baggage, whatever I have to do. But that would be a shameful waste to society of my skills and abilities, if I am reduced to bare survival on the streets."

My companion remained impassive. He urged me to calm down and accept things. I told him that any acceptance of things as they were was a moral injury to me. I told him that I would take my case to the highest authorities in the Socialist Federated Republic of Yugoslavia. He smirked at the irony of that. Looked me in the eye and told me that all that would do was end me up right back here at this office, where I would get the same response. Someday things would be different. He and his commission wouldn't be here forever.

At that moment, a union representative (a brother of my nearest neighbors in Shtip) entered the office. He appeared to know all about my case. He also urged me to calm down, and he told me that the injustice of my situation would eventually be rectified. In the next three years, he said, "I would certainly be selected for a faculty position."

I replied: "It doesn't matter if I am eventually selected for a position. What was done was against the rules. How was it possible that a lawyer, former judge and government minister could violate the law so readily? I never received a written response to my application, and I was only urged verbally to take back my documents."

He answered me: "That's all the best for you."

I shot back: "I have nothing to be ashamed of. I'm neither a murderer, nor a criminal, nor an evil-doer. Write the reasons specifically, why the qualified candidate was rejected." And I added: "And regarding someone deemed an enemy, charge him according to the law."

It was all clear to me. There was no further need for discussion. I stormed out of the office. My companion who had brought me to Skopje, told me to ask his driver to drop me off at the bus station. I refused his offer, saying: "I don't need any more help from you." I was barely under control and I don't know how I made it to the Skopje bus station.

...On the 18th of October, 1978 I was admitted to the General Hospital of Shtip. I was in intensive care for eight days. I was at high risk of a heart attack. It was a frightening experience, but, fortunately, the worst did not occur. I have seen over my lifetime how a human being can sometimes be as fragile as glass or as tough as steel. There are times when all of us can become as fragile as glass, and easily fall to pieces, if we're not careful.

Although still not fully recovered from my illness, I decided at that time to write down all I could remember of my life's experiences. I began that day to write it down.

Why do that? Who needs to hear my story? I was still sick and here I was risking exposing me and my family to great danger. But I simply decided that my experiences on Goli Otok needed to be recorded for future generations. So that what had happened there might never be repeated ever again in our world. All citizens everywhere deserve the right to live in freedom, under truly democratic rule, for the sake of human progress and prosperity.

#### COULD IT HAVE BEEN OTHERWISE?

I had been released from Goli Otok but not truly freed. I was hounded and harassed at every step. I was not treated fairly under the law. The security service could do as they liked with me, without consequences. I had to endure this treatment right up to my retirement, and even beyond it, to be treated as a second class citizen, passed over at work, without the rights of others for a lifetime, and with a secret police file kept on me from October 23, 1949 until October 20, 1990.

I have long considered the possibility that all that I endured could have possibly been avoided. Could I have somehow escaped much of the suffering and difficulties that I had endured over the years? Could things have been otherwise? Could I have somehow enjoyed the privileges and the high regard and rank that others enjoyed in society, people who did not have my educational background or record of achievement?

Why was I always considered an undesirable? Someone who needed constant watching by the agents of and collaborators with the security police. Why was my secret police file always being upgraded and added to? The answer is simple. I made it clear that I would not cooperate with the secret police. I would not spy on people in order to report on whether they were pro-western or pro-eastern oriented. I wouldn't gather hear say information about people and then use it to advance myself at their expense. I couldn't bring myself to report what people freely expressed to me so that they could then be labeled enemies of the state. Never!

As a result I learned how cruel the security police could be to people like me. They had no doubt concerning my refusal to collaborate with them in their endless spying on the citizenry. This led to their many dirty tricks to teach me a lesson; punish me, by spreading lies and slanders about me. They had no facts, no evidence of any wrong-doing; they simply did all they could to ruin my chances of getting ahead in life.

Once they set a trap for me, to see if they could ruin my reputation. A neighbor of mine in Shtip, a former student at the Commercial College in Strumitsa, Branko Siveski, invited me over to his apartment for coffee. Before calling me, probably as part of the plan, he had invited over a student of mine at the teacher's college in Shtip, from the history and

geography department. My neighbor had some cognac, Ambassador Brand, that he placed on the table with two glasses, and then he withdrew to the adjoining room where his fiancé was waiting, leaving me alone with my student. This was probably all pre-arranged. Then she began to undress. She said to me: "Professor, all I'm asking is for you to change my grade to a passing mark. In exchange, I'll have sex with you."

I was outraged that she would try such a thing, and that she had assumed that I was of such low moral character. I struck her and ran out the door without a single word to our hosts. I've thought about this incident a lot since then. What kind of people would set a trap like that? They must have had a low opinion of my morals to imagine that I would naively fall for their trick. I'm not at all naïve, and people know me as someone who is ethical. I've always kept my distance from dirty business. But as Ante Tresic said: "We are always vulnerable to evil."

I had no doubt that I was always under surveillance, so I was very careful about who I met with and what we discussed. I had to assume that just about anyone might be a police informer.

One summer, on our return to Shtip from Ohrid, we made a detour through Bitola and Demir Hisar on a trip with my wife, daughter, son-in-law and grandson. I was interested in seeing this part of Macedonia for the first time. We arrived in Krushevo and enjoyed the natural beauty of the region. We also visited many of the historical cultural sites. In the afternoon we drove to Prilep, passing through the village of Krivogashtani. We decided to visit my former student, Tane Klekachoski. He was there and he was delighted to see us. Later we went on over to his parents' house, who lived nearby, on the main street. His parents, although we'd never met before, were very pleasant and welcoming to us. It was a short, but very heart-felt visit. We talked about health, village life, children and grandchildren.

A considerable time later, I chanced to meet Tane Klekachoski again, and I was very surprised by what he had to tell me. The next day after our visit his father was called in to talk to the security service in Prilep about what he had heard during my visit. They asked among other things, what the professor had wanted with them and how they knew him. The inspector insisted on knowing everything that had been said. It was one more proof of the extent of their surveillance of me. They had suspected sinister things from the most innocent of visits. The security service apparently followed my every move.

"No one can predict who might prove a charlatan," said Gotse Delchev. The security service was never satisfied with me. No matter how capable, competent or active I was in the community, nor how much respect or honor I had garnered from others.

After so much suffering, so much misery and punishment, there was no way I could become what they wanted me to be. I would always be a fighter for justice and freedom, and

never could I be a collaborator in their dirty work. That was simply impossible. Those who love freedom and democracy hate to be blocked from its practice, but it is even worse that they should be punished and mistreated for it.

#### MORAL AND MATERIAL POVERTY

I had as a major life goal to attain my Masters and Doctor degrees, and then to become a tenured faculty member. I wanted a full career. That was what led me to Belgrade University. I was a very productive professional. I had over 32 published works. I wrote a definitive "Economic Geography of Yugoslavia," peer reviewed by the eminent professor Dr. Milorad Vasovic, a full professor at Belgrade University. It became the major text for students on the subject at the time. I had invested a great deal of my time and money to accomplish this, and I expected that I would be a tenured teacher in the Economics Department in Shtip. However, I was passed over by the selection committee. I was condemned to material and moral poverty. I had conducted myself as honorably as possible, but it was to no avail.

#### IN INTENSIVE CARE

There was no longer a place for me at the teachers college in Shtip. As a result I had grown terribly discouraged. I couldn't see any hope for the future. The reality was that grim.

It was a Friday. I had four hours of classes to teach at the college. I made it through the first hour, and as I began the second I could feel that something wasn't right with me. I felt like a great weight was pressing down on me, crushing me. My head hurt and my hands began to grow numb. I wanted to cut the lesson short, but I held out till the end. I had a short break before the next class, so I went to my office. One of my colleagues came by. I told him that I was feeling really bad and that I thought I should go to be checked out at the hospital. I decided to drive myself there, although he had offered to give me a ride.

I don't know how I made it to the hospital. I looked at myself in the rearview mirror. My face was pale as wax. I felt terrible. I had this crushing pressure on my chest and I could barely breathe. I had no feeling in my hands. (I still wonder how I could have possibly managed to drive myself to the hospital in that condition.) I must have been extremely lucky, considering. A cousin saw me and helped me get out of the car and into the hospital entrance. He helped me check myself into the emergency entrance adjoining the main entryway. A specialist immediately examined me.

He took a measure of my blood pressure. It was 215 over 125. The doctor immediately put me in intensive care. I received quick attention and the pressure was relieved. There were two other patients with heart trouble in the room with me.

I remained there for eight days, and at my request, they released me. My family picked me up with the car at the entrance.

I remained ill for a long time and rested at home, in peace and solitude. Time heals all wounds. I eventually became reconciled to my fate. I accepted the reality and got on with life, although I remained depressed for a long time. I often suffered self-hatred as a result of my failure to find fulfillment in life, given the limitations put on me.

#### MY SELECTION AS PROFESSOR OF TOURISM AND HOSTELRY IN OHRID

In 1983 the teacher's college was restructured. All of the old sections were shut down. Only two divisions remained. My position as professor of geography was discontinued. Second year students were allowed to finish out their course, but the first year students were not allowed to take the subject. That was the end of the geography program.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, 1981 the department of tourism in Ohrid advertised for a position for a professor of socio-political factors in tourism and hostelry. I applied, but for some unknown reason the position was withdrawn. However, on September 11, 1983 a notice appeared in the newspaper *Nova Makedonija* announcing the position once again. It renewed my hope that I might secure a post that was commensurate with my skills and education to feed my family.

I went ahead and applied once more. I included material that demonstrated my active engagement in politically progressive activities within the teacher's college in Shtip. They didn't require such material with the application, but I wanted them to see it. Among other things there was mention that I would be a very good match for work in the department of tourism and hostelry in Ohrid. There was also a statement vouching for my teaching skills, work ethic and high moral character.

Three years later I received written notification that I had been selected to join the faculty as professor for the subject the politics of the development of tourism and the hotel business. I was so happy to finally have work in my field that could feed my family. It was a realization of sorts of my long sought after life's ambition. Not long after that I became head of the Ohrid faculty advisory council.

I was an attentive and conscientious teacher. I strove for fairness. I treated the marking of my students with great care and objectivity. Everything was done openly and for all to see. Those who disagreed with their marks were free to ask for an explanation. On

average about a quarter of the students in my subject passed their exams. The marking was always fairly administered; I wished all my students well and made that clear in a very public way. When students had trouble with other teachers and subjects I told them not to be afraid. They had to react immediately and speak up if they weren't being treated fairly. Bribery and corruption was a problem with others, but not with me, where everything was done fairly and openly. This is an issue that must be addressed, the struggle against corruption. It is clear from my secret police files, dossier number 6009, that the Security Service watched me very carefully in Ohrid.

#### A FAMOUS LAW

In 1944 while still a seventeen year old high school student, right after the liberation of Strumitsa from the fascists, I became one of the first public school teachers. At the age of seventeen I taught my first students. We had a short course of training, taught by some of the older teachers among us. We were all so happy to be among the first teachers in our native Macedonian language, an age old dream of a people realized.

There were all sorts of problems that needed to be addressed in the villages. We teachers took a leading role in much of the work to address these problems. We organized the villages, politically and socially, as part of this work. We had to do everything from the bottom up. We held meetings, collected warm clothes for soldiers, taught reading to the adults, and generally helped the villagers however we could.

We had four grades of classes in our village school and no books or other materials, but we had a surplus of youthful energy and enthusiasm and with no pay, we did our work. The villagers fed us and we slept in the school. We all took care of each other. We were away from home for many months. And despite all of the challenges we achieved real results.

Thus, I was, by decree, removed from high school at the age of seventeen to become one of the first generation of village school teachers, gladly and willingly. In 1987 at the age of sixty, again by government decree, I was forced to retire at the age of sixty. I was still in my prime as a teacher. I still had much I could have contributed to the education of another generation. It was society's loss. After all they had invested in me, to cast me aside, to discard me, a senseless, pointless act of discrimination.

I complained to the proper authorities within the Yugoslav government, but it was of no use. So I had a career as a village teacher at seventeen and eventually became a university professor. I suppose it could be considered a good life to be given my first teaching post by decree and to receive a pension and enter into retirement again by decree at age sixty. Perhaps so, in any case, that was my path in life.

## DOSSIER NO. 6008 – “TALL SHADOWS”

On August 3, 2000 in letter number 46, I was informed by the Macedonian Internal Affairs Bureau that if I appeared at Barrack 2, room no. 25-26 on 66 Dimche Mirchev Street, Skopje at 9 a.m. I could receive a copy of my secret police file. I appeared that day and paid the required fee for a copy of my file No. 6008.

I couldn't believe it. Here were 351 pages and this wasn't even a complete record of the surveillance they had done on me. There were cross references to other files in which I appear, such as file no. 10836, personal file 9544, and personal file 6008 “PPR Tall Shadows,” and there is microfilmed material still unavailable. The file started on November 23, 1949 and ran until October 20, 1990, 41 years of my work career, and then three more years of my retirement, making a total of 44 years of surveillance.

The majority of the informants were friends in my neighborhood. It is interesting that one often suffers worse harm at the hands of those one considers friends rather than enemies. I suppose it is because we guard ourselves against the threats from enemies, while we let our guard down for friends. The reports on file from neighbors and friends were filled with misinformation, totally made up stories, distortions of the truth, and the like. If they had to report on me, at least they could have told the truth. The theme of the biblical story of Judas and Christ is as true today as ever.

My innocence is even confirmed by the authorities at Goli Otok who reported that “...in the entire file there are no activities hostile to the state...”

I have analyzed my entire file from its initial days under the Agency for State Security (UDBA) through the present day State Security Service in great detail in my book *Visoki Senki (Tall Shadows)*, Shtip 2005.

## A CONCLUSION OF SORTS

While there is no denying the trials and suffering and the sleepless nights that marred my life in the flower of my youth, I have no regrets about taking an honorable stand. There are those who will always try to crush the individual of integrity so long as honest people exist.

Freedom is one of the most sacred things on earth. Let the light of day shine on all things and let there be no taboo themes. Let future generations come to know that their grandfathers, who were declared traitors, in fact, were the true patriots who spoke the truth to those in power. Instead of being ashamed of their record of imprisonment, let them take pride in their honesty and courage.

Although on our last legs, we're still here, alive, with a little time left to roam the parks, the streets, the markets and to make our presence known. Our lives are narrowly prescribed in old age. Yet, here we are, able to express the long unexpressed truth of what we've experienced, to reveal it all finally to the light of day, our history.

Every era must have its heroes. Whether Batev belongs to that group, he is among those who did not give in. His mind and spirit were under siege for his entire adult life from the State Security Service and his own self-censorship.

I dreamt of an ideal society (like so many young people carried away by socialist ideas) in which humanity, justice, freedom of speech, equality, democracy, and the like would prevail. It would be socialism without prison camps, perversion, and dictatorship, with respect for human rights and with the right to dissent, a system that would be more democratic and humane than capitalism, that would make for rapid economic progress and lead to a better and happier life for all.

And despite the strict social control over me, the constant surveillance, and the like, I was an active participant in community life. I never fully trusted anyone, but I worked with everyone. I always did my work conscientiously, and I was often praised for it. I received public recognition for my service, such as the Golden Wreath of the Order of Labor from the presidency of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. I received that in 1980.

Nothing, however, seemed to stem the flow of misinformation that ended up in my secret police files over the years. Indeed, this work was performed by incompetent people, who did work of dubious value. The informants are truly a blight on society. They have failed to engage in meaningful work. Instead they've looked for ways to advance themselves by doing the dirty work of the State Security Service. What they were paid for this work, I don't know, but it must have cost a lot to have people constantly watching my every move, listening to my phone conversations, recording what I said, and the like. All of these hours plus the planning and coordination that must have gone into it all add up to many hours. And if you consider that there were 16,000 of us on the list of those in need of such attention as possible subversives in the Republic of Macedonia, it must have cost them a fortune. There must have been an army of informants and agents working constantly to fill all of our files with all of the useless misinformation they reported in order to receive their pay.

I can't help but wonder why they kept it up year after year, considering how little their reports about me amounted to. It must have been clear early on that I was one of many left liberal, Western-oriented pacifists, more interested in my work and my community than doing anything that could threaten the state. That is all plain to see in my voluminous secret police file. Why did they waste so much time on me?



My file, obtained on August 17, 2000, number 6008 in their system, code name 'Tall Shadows,' was compiled over a 40 year period (1949-1990), by hundreds of people in the pay of the security services. I obtained 352 pages of my file, but there were still many more available only on microfilm. It is interesting that after all that time they had nothing to conclude than that they could find no discernible evidence of subversive activity.

An investigator for the State Security Service wrote: There is no evidence of hostile activity at his workplace or contact with other subversives. He appears to engage in socially useful and productive work. He is respected and honored for his work as a professor at the teachers college of Shtip. (Entry on possible subversive activity: April 25, 1983. Entry No. 136, Shtip). So it went until the end. Clearly no evidence of subversive activity was ever found.

So why was I punished? Why was my every move followed for nearly half a century? Who will ever compensate me for all that I lost? (The loss of my freedom, the pain and suffering, the discrimination, the violation of my human rights...) "We are always vulnerable to evil," said Ante Tresic-Pavicic (1867-1949).

Dear reader, with this I end my story of imprisonment on Goli Otok, the island of death. In freedom, after so long with my mind and spirit under siege, I have one final message to impart: "Let this never be repeated anywhere, ever again, on earth!"

#### EXCERPTS FROM WORKS ON GOLI OTOK

"Goli Otok, as a metaphor, and its historical sense," *Goli Otok Witness*, Menora, Skopje, 1999, p. 12 ... "There was continual state terror, with communist internationalists the number one enemy. Over 60,000 communists were imprisoned in UDB (State Security) torture chambers and more than 5,000 Goli Otok prisoners died. There were about 230,000 members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia expelled in the period between 1948 and 1953. Nearly 200,000 relatives and friends of Goli Otok prisoners suffered repressive measures. The SKY (Communist League of Yugoslavia) became a haven for thousands of opportunistic sycophants of mediocre talent. The misery of socialistic Yugoslavia began with the advent of Goli Otok Prison.

One action initiated by the Association of Goli Otok prisoners involves legal actions aimed at rehabilitation of political prisoners from the events of 1948. In *Goli Otok Witness*, Menora, Skopje, 1999, pp. 251-255 Bogdan Bozhinovski has stated: "...the evil torture machine of Goli Otok was so thoroughly thought out and implemented that the prisoner had no protection from anyone. He was forced to beg those in control for every basic necessity of

life. The extent of this repression exceeded that of the Siberian Gulag and camps of Nazi Germany.”

The same work contains the words of the eminent professor of medicine from Sarajevo, Nikola Nikolic (a former prisoner doctor on Goli Otok), who said: “...I was once a prisoner at the notorious [World War Two] prison at Jasenovats. Conditions were actually far better there than at Goli Otok. They did not engage in the psychological torture practiced against the prisoners at Goli Otok that robbed them of their natural human dignity and left their spirit severely damaged. ...”

“Following on the initiative of Dobrica Cosic – A million victims of the Inform Bureau.” *Goli Otok Witness*, Menora, Skopje, 1999, p. 262. “It was state sponsored terrorism,” wrote the President of SR Yugoslavia, when 200,000 prisoners served sentences of varying lengths, and some 15,000 of them died due to the conditions of their imprisonment.

Dragoslav Mihajlovic: “All of the victims received the same treatment for their essentially verbal missteps.”

Lawyer Milan Vujin: “Our legal system never foresaw the need for compensation for the injuries of rehabilitated prisoners.”

A step in that direction, according to some, was the concrete distinction drawn by the President of SR Yugoslavia, Dobrica Cosic, when he asked the Union Parliament to finally do everything they could to correct the wrong done to the Inform Bureau victims. He then said: “...I propose the complete legal absolution and moral acknowledgement of all that these unfortunate people endured.”

“Blazho was arrested in the summer of 1948. He was one of the first prisoners on Goli Otok. He arrived on the notorious island, today better known than Brioni, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July of 1949. The same day the prison camp opened. For a brief time there was a willingness to let the prisoners speak their minds freely without interference by the investigators. Then a group of “reeducated” prisoners arrived from Bosnia. They began to use clubs on their fellow prisoners, smashing skulls, and breaking ribs and drawing blood. Then Goli Otok became the bleak island of its name. The prisoners had to spit on everything they had formerly believed about Stalin, the Soviet Union and the Inform Bureau. Blazho didn’t want to do that. They made it clear that if he held on to his views, his head would roll. He refused to budge.”

“At the end of July of 1949 Blazho was put through the line. The order was given to beat him to a pulp. Afterward he was carried to the prison hospital, where he died an hour later...” (Dr. Blazho Raichevic was the first victim of Goli Otok.) “May he always be honored.”

*Goli Otok Witness*, Menora, Skopje, 1999, p. 260, Slavko Petrov said: “The government can and should morally rehabilitate the Goli Otok prisoners.”

"Association with the Stalinist or Titoist option was not a punishable offense, so the legal rehabilitation of those imprisoned isn't possible," said the President of the Lawyers Guild of Macedonia. "...the state of Macedonia must rehabilitate the condemned of Goli Otok simply by decree, in which the present-day government condemns the actions of its predecessors, and it apologizes to the people for the harm done," said Slavko Petrov. "That will provide some moral satisfaction, which is a broader concept than legal rehabilitation," reckons Petrov. "While the question of compensation is another issue altogether." ...It was the former Macedonian state that was involved in this evil-doing." But Petrov believes that the present-day government of Macedonia can show that it is a nation ruled by lawful means that recognizes and apologizes for past crimes of the state. "...The Goli Otok prisoners were not imprisoned on the basis of violations of the law or the state constitution, but as a result of the tyranny imposed on a minority who did not agree with their politics and were associated with the Inform Bureau. Many of them sided with Stalin as opposed to Tito, who had the majority support of the people. They were condemned as part of a classic example of an intra-party struggle. Their mistake was to refuse to accept party discipline, while openly expressing their dissent. The struggle between those who favored Stalin and those who supported Tito could not have been foreseen and there was no law governing its conduct. And the Goli Otok prison camp was no normal, lawfully run part of the penal system," said Petrov. "It was part of a party-run set of camps in which they engaged in what was called "reeducation," and "socially reformatory work," but, in fact, was a form of terrible physical and psychological destruction of individual human beings. ...The conclusion that the prisoners did not violate the law," according to the President of the Lawyers Guild, "is supported by the undeniable fact that no court tried them and rendered a verdict. By not allowing proper legal debate of their purported crimes," said Petrov, "the state was able to do whatever brutal abuse to them that it pleased, with total impunity."

"Rehabilitation is not an opportunity to revel in revenge," according to Marjan Janev in an article in *Goli Otok Witness*, Menora, Skopje, 1999, p. 261: "The Macedonian public and all of Macedonian society must give all due respect to the innocent victims of Goli Otok and acknowledge their suffering. The government and parliament must ratify an act that will restore their dignity and moral integrity."

*Goli Otok Witness*, Menora, Skopje, 1999, p. 18 contains an entry concerning the number of communists that perished as a result of association with the Inform Bureau. "According to Vladimir Dedijer, a well-informed, credible insider among the high party functionaries during the period of the Federated Peoples Republic of Yugoslavia, there were 3,800 victims. No party or state has ever disputed that number." From p. 468 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> tome

of the biography of Josip Broz Tito, entitled "New Contributions to the biography of Josip Broz Tito."

Stavre Dzhikov, *Goli Otok Witness*, Menora, Skopje, 1999, p. 277, in a section entitled "Makedonija,," created a list of persons [from Macedonia] accused, jailed or imprisoned and sent to prison camps due to the Resolution of the Inform Bureau. He created this list through a search of archival material, and other documents and literature. [See appendix at the end of this work that includes a copy of this list.]

There is an excerpt of a work written by Goli Otok prisoner Venko Markovski published in English in the USA, entitled "Goli Otok, Island of Death," New York, 1984, translation by Diana Cenic. In an excerpt from that work Markovski states: "At the same time, those with the strongest spirit were destroyed, ground into sorry, gray dust. The prison was cruel. I remember so many people who fought bravely for the revolution during the fierce struggle against fascism, only to die here, mercilessly betrayed and left to perish between the stone walls, engulfed by the foggy wasteland. The sea is peaceful here, but the floor of the Adriatic is soaked in the blood of the proud warriors of the Yugoslav partisan army, who lay in the depths enshrouded in algae."

"Even after I left Goli Otok its pathetic, inhuman story still tortures my soul at night, forcing me to once more listen to the groans of the people who were being buried alive."

"The tortures that I described in 'Modern Paradoxes' was not merely vague generalities, but concrete fact. The lines formed for punishment and the blacklist are all still so very real to me, revealing the true character of the hellish system devised by the UDB for dealing with the worthiest sons and daughters of Yugoslavia. I was subjected to the same treatment, and I know that it is one thing to write about things that happened to others and quite another thing to write about your own suffering."

"I have no doubt that some day in the not too distant future Goli Otok prison will be shut down and it will become a recreational park for young people or maybe a foreign tourist destination in some totally reconstructed future version. But when the stars begin to sparkle in the blue black night sky and the moon floats across the heavens, shadows will roam about the island and spread fear across the cursed landscape. The curses of the people who lie on the floor of the sea with bound hands and stones attached to their ankles will float to the surface. The dark night will grow darker, the air will cut like a knife, the sea will rage, and Velebit Mountain will grow dim. Who among the living could remain calm on such a night? The bloody wounds of the murdered will continue to leave bloody traces and they will continue to curse the present-day, living descendants, the citizens of the tortured and doomed state of Yugoslavia."

"Perhaps there will someday be films that try to show the living heroes, that will try to recreate life on Goli Otok, but the agony of Goli Otok can never truly be depicted in a film. What happened there is beyond depiction. And so the island will in the future become what it will be, but it won't be Goli Otok."

"Dear Reader, with this I arrive at the end of my tale about Goli Otok, the island of death." Venko Markovski.

The poem "Stone Island," by academic Nikola Kljusev, published in Skopje, 1994, is one of the most authentic, vivid depictions of the systematic torture and endurance of unimaginable humiliations of the prisoners, and all of the work of the UDB. They inflicted such torture upon the human body and soul that it led to complete despair. His poem is a most expressive narration of the experiences and emotions of the prisoners. It is a subtle and disturbing poetic expression by one with the rare ability to describe that which he personally experienced and endured in the camp, as opposed to a second hand telling of the story or a narration by some more passive observer.

It is a masterful work by a truly gifted poet whose words leave no reader unmoved. It will move one to tears. He presents shocking, vivid images in a way that only he could transmit through words. It is truly a gift from God. He has conveyed for all time a theme from an irrational time in our history.

Professor Dr. Stojan Risteski published his personal police file, number 2771 in a work entitled *My Informers*, Iris, Struga, 2001. He presents documents from his dossier concerning informers and others who collaborated with the authorities. As in many other files, as the author explains: "...It is only the work of fantasy, the construction of situations to blacken reputations, using the most powerful arguments of the time: nationalism as opposed to brotherhood and unity, thinking only of Macedonia and not Yugoslavia, befriending of various nationalists and supporters of the Inform Bureau and their glorification, thus the decision to listen in on phone conversations, as unsavory instructors, implementing the action under the name "Competence," intended to evict people from their work and send them off to forced labor camps."

How grand this "most democratic and free land of ours," that made me into an enemy of the state. The informers and toadies were its foundation and that is why it collapsed. In reality, it began to unravel when they divided the people into the good and the bad, when they established the dirt-filled files. No regime can survive that is propped up by dishonest men.

In Dr. Stojan Risteski's book *Goli Otok Golgota*, Ohrid, 1991, the author offers an authentic account of the suffering of one victim of Goli Otok. The confession and agony of

Stojmir Jordanoski-Mirche is not the whole truth about Goli Otok, just one more contribution to our knowledge of that terrible time.

In the introduction to the book *Goli Otok Ispoved*, Iris, Struga, 2003, the author, Stojan Risteski writes, among other things: "Upon study of the published lists of the repressed, one gets the impression that Macedonia, as in the case of the fallen soldiers, aspired to match the efforts of the other Yugoslav Republics, particularly, it is clear, those in the army, the union leadership, and forums. They welcomed the Resolution of the IB with its many "sinners" from the NOB (People's Liberation Fighters), which afforded the opportunity for scoundrels and opportunists along with their agents to rise in the ranks, eventually becoming the worst lackeys in those positions. Carried away by a spirit of retaliation, people informed on one another readily: relative on relative, son on father, husband on wife, brother on brother, etc. unbelievably. Thus, a man from Debar informed on four members of his wife's family: her brother and three cousins who ended up being sent to Goli Otok. He and some of his own family were well rewarded for this.

No small number of people were condemned to prison as part of the struggle with the Inform Bureau, when they didn't even know what it was. If someone didn't like someone, if they had a dispute, if they were on opposite sides in some debate over an issue, suddenly one of them would scent the influence of the Inform Bureau and run to report his adversary to the UDB.

All of those who were rounded up and sent to Goli Otok or some other camp as suspected Inform Bureau supporters were never tried and convicted. They were simply selected for socially useful labor.

The authorities came up with a way to increase the number of activists to deal with the population of prisoners. Specifically, those responsible for implementing the government's policy became the room captains who knew how to sow fear and trembling among the prisoners. These included trustees who served as overseers, political agitators, pavilion attendants, cultural workers, and the like. All of this cadre, some 300 men, was directed by a board that coordinated their work. The investigators, at their whim, stirred this entire apparatus to action, which led to ever more ingenious ways to inflict self-torture and self-destruction on the prisoners.

With the arrival of the second group of prisoners, reeducation began, with its ugly practice of the gauntlet, which provoked the most vicious attacks by those who wanted to get on the good side of the activists. This was followed by acceptance in the collective. Of course, failure to win acceptance meant blacklisting. Those who were rejected, the blacklisted, were forced to stand with their heads bowed over the chamber pots in which the prisoners relieved themselves, and they were put on fire watch duty, which meant that they received only a few

hours sleep. They were punished for everything and nothing. The more stubborn and resistant the worse the prisoner was treated. It wasn't trained policemen but those who lived with the men in the barracks who put them through the gauntlet, ordered them about, reported on them and beat them. The activists in the collectives were the most brutal and vicious in their treatment of the blacklisted prisoners.

The representatives of the regime: the investigators (who came from every republic, province and population center) and the police officers who worked with them merely rubbed their hands in satisfaction. The activists in the camps made their job easier, dealing with the incorrigibles, because they filled the dossiers of the prisoners with just the right information to achieve the desired result. They each behaved somewhat differently depending upon their degree of conscience, honesty and culture. However, even the most honorable and aware among them didn't dare oppose the activists in the camps because it would then bring them under suspicion. Fear and expediency, particularly their access to prison stores and their high pay, explained their behavior said one investigator in the book *The Truth about Goli Otok*, Belgrade, 1987, p. 288.

There was equality of the sexes in Goli Otok. From 1950 to 1952 there were around 900 women prisoners there. They were put in a separate camp away from the male prisoners, facing the Velebit Mountains over on the mainland. They never saw any of the men, nor did the men ever see any of them. And the women were expected to do the same work as the men. They received similar treatment. Many had little children from whom they were separated during their time there.

Many of them were condemned for refusing to admit that their young husbands were members of the Inform Bureau crowd. There were women who wouldn't say anything about their association with members of their collectives who were Inform Bureau supporters. They had too much integrity and self-respect to name them. The wife of the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Sima Markovic, was among the women prisoners on Goli Otok.

The island of Goli Otok was a hell for everyone. The burning sun and the hot stones were hell. So was the poor food and shelter, the lack of drinking water, since the boat-shipped source of our water was never enough, the exhausting work and the constant degradation by men-beasts.

Worst of all was the camp called Petrov's Hole. They sent the most notorious supporters of the Inform Bureau there.: ministers, generals, members of the Central Committee, ambassadors, university professors, those accused of being agents of the Soviet Secret Service, the NKVD, those who had been abroad, and the like. There was a guard tower over this torture camp, which was lit up all night. No one was allowed to have contact with

these prisoners. They were subjected to the harshest regime of all. Maybe it was because their reeducation was the cruelest of all that this ninth circle of hell was referred to as the monastery. We only shared the fact that we were all considered criminals, no matter what our status on the desolate island.

Everyone sent to Goli Otok went through hell in his own way, which is really the way it is in life in general. Everyone only talks about the misery they endured. They will all say that they merely shouted "Criminal! Bandit!" whenever required. So who was it that spit and punched and ratted on others? Not them. Once they were free they kept a low profile in order to evade the investigators. Some of those who beat up their own fathers, who informed on everyone who was honest and good, later would write about the torture they endured, as if they were real heroes. But their misdeeds, what they really did there, would eventually catch up with them. Some of those who behaved as beasts would now like to disavow the evil they did. However, that won't work since many of their victims are still among the living.

How many people perished on the island of Goli, no one knows. The living embodiment of the Macedonian revolution, the President of the first session of ASNOM, [the group that proclaimed a Macedonian Republic in Yugoslavia during World War Two] Panko Brashnarov, was not buried on Goli. His body was put on a boat and carried away, to be dumped at sea or buried elsewhere, but no one I know can say what happened to him.

For those who tried to maintain their integrity and dignity, the labor at the various work sites was not the hardest part. They stoically endured it all. The hardest thing for them was the constant humiliation and harassment, the demeaning of all they believed in. It was the reason they were sent there, as everyone could see, the reason they had to endure the abuse of criminals, opponents of all they had fought for. It is impossible to become reconciled to all of the evil done there, all of the ways that life was denied.

From the period 1949 to 1953 Goli Otok is the blackest mark on the history of Yugoslavia. Until 1953 the wider public knew nothing of the island of Goli. It was a taboo subject. Even the military was not allowed there. Adriatic shipping sailed at a distance and fishermen were also kept far away. No one who had been there dared to talk about it, because they knew it would only lead to trouble. The highest government officials knew about it. The plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia on June 4, 1951 at the request of Tito, ordered a quarterly report by the office of the military prosecutor on all military prisons after visits to review conditions. Aleksandar Rankovic visited Goli Otok in 1951 and 1952. Others such as Svetozar Vukmanovic Tempo also apparently paid visits to the island, none of these people claimed to know anything about Goli Otok. That was pure sadism that speaks volumes about them.



*From within the system that self-destructed (1945-1988)*, Skopje, 2002, by Mishko Bozhinoski, is an autobiographical work , a memoir. Mishko Bozhinoski was a recipient of the distinguished award of "Partisan 1941" and an economist who dealt with the banking system. He recounts his own personal experiences and the events that he witnessed in the life of the new system established under communist rule until the entire system collapsed under its own weight.

*Goli Otok Witness*, Menora, Skopje, 1999, p. 249 declares the intention of the Goli Otok prisoners to seek redress for the historic injustice done to them. The association Goli Otok seeks abolition of all legal measures, criminal charges and other measures taken against those who were condemned and punished with prison terms, time in work camps, concentration camps or other facilities where suspected supporters of the Inform Bureau were interned.

In addition, the former prisoners of Goli Otok would like to have the government find the graves of those who disappeared and were never properly accounted for. They also request that the name of the city of Titov Veles be changed. [It is now once again simply Veles.]

—Toma Batev, 2006

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