PREVIŠIĆ, Martin: *Povijest Golog otoka*
Fraktura, Zagreb 2019, 634 pages

This comprehensive volume by Zagreb historian Martin Previšić on the concentration camp for Yugoslav supporters of the Soviet Union on the Adriatic island of Goli Otok (Desert Island) between 1949 and 1956 is an essential work. This book, the result of more than a decade of research, is a significant contribution not only to the historiography of Tito's Yugoslavia, but also of political repression, violence and internment during the 20th century in general. With his first monograph, Previšić has once again cast light on a topic that historical research has all but neglected in the past three decades. Goli Otok and the persecution of the sympathisers of the June 1948 Cominform resolution (the so-called Cominformists, *informbirovci*)[1] during the Soviet-Yugoslav split was a hot topic in Yugoslav society in the 1980s and in the early 1990s. In the final days of Yugoslavia's Titoist regime, ideological orthodoxy and historical taboos in the public space had been lifted on the topic. Dozens of memoirs of former victims of persecution, as well as journalism and literary and film adaptations, used authentic storytelling to question the official narrative of the heroic and morally pure resistance of Yugoslavia under the leadership of its leader Josip Broz Tito to the brute force of Stalin.

Even then, these works pointed out that the struggle of the Yugoslav communist leadership against Stalin was deeply Stalinist in nature and employed brutal methods against actual or potential pro-Soviet "fifth columns". Many authors have pointed out that completely innocent people often fell victim to this struggle with "Cominformism" (*informbirovština*, a typically Stalinist term). Thus, the debate led to the conclusion that even Yugoslav socialist self-management – a system far more humane and liberal – was rooted in Stalinist repression and dogma. The shocking witness testimony helped to delegitimise the Titoist system in the eyes of the general public. However, the lack of sources other than personal testimony produced many inaccuracies and untruths. There was speculation in particular about the number of people imprisoned and murdered, estimates that have often been exaggerated. However, to a certain degree, the official historiography and political literature, despite relying on apparently privileged access to archival sources, was unable to counter these exaggerations. Their data did not strike the public as being sufficiently credible.

In the early 1990s, the Yugoslav crisis and the subsequent violent disintegration of the country pushed the issue of Goli Otok into the background. In the face of new violence, the stories of human suffering that took place at the turn of the 1950s lost their urgency. Nationalists dominated the public sphere. In some republics, anti-

1 The Information Bureau of the Communist and Worker's Parties, an organization of seven Eastern European and two most influential Western communist parties, established in 1947, is commonly known under the acronym *Cominform*. In Yugoslav languages beside the term *Kominforma* (Cominform) also acronym *Informbiro* was used. Hence the followers of *Informbiro* (sometimes only letters *IB* were used) were called *informbirovci* or *ibeovci*.

-communist political elites emerged for whom the "struggle against the Cominform" was nothing more than a manifestation of the internal power struggle raging within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Komunistička partija Jugoslavije, KPJ). Moreover, Goli Otok was a topic of Yugoslav history that was (despite unsuccessful attempts from the Serbian side) difficult to transform into new, nation-centered historical interpretation. In principle, this course was also followed by historians moving within the defined framework of "nationally conscious" historiography. Although some historians, especially Serbian, have studied recent history as the history of Yugoslavia, they never addressed Goli Otok. It seemed that eyewitnesses and journalists had already told the story. Moreover, in the 1990s, historians did not have access to the State Security archives. In contrast, they were allowed to study other state and Party institutions' archives, which gradually opened up to researchers. In addition to the general political climate, the topic of research was thus determined, to a certain extent, by the availability of sources. On an academic level, only the Slovene cultural anthropologist Božidar Jezernik[2] gave attention to the persecution of the Cominformists. At the beginning of the 2000s, the Serbian historian Srđan Cvetković began to systematically investigate politically motivated repression during the period of Tito's Yugoslavia. However, his works are more documentary in character and the period 1948–1956 occupies only a partial chapter in his research.

Martin Previšić's book is unusual in the context of Croatian historiography. Previšić writes not about Croatian, but about Yugoslav history[3]. He does not deal with the "Yugoslav issue" from a "Croatian perspective" or primarily address a Croatian audience. His book speaks to the reader, regardless of whether he/she is from Croatia or another part of the former Yugoslavia, or indeed from another part of the world. That is not something to take for granted in Croatian historiography. In Previšić's telling, Goli Otok thus forms an essential theme in the history of Yugoslavia as well as the history of the 20th century. It can be expected to attract attention outside the post-Yugoslav space and beyond the international community of academics who deal with Yugoslavia.[4]

The opening of the archives of the former State Security Administration (Uprava državne bezbednosti, UDBA) and State Security Service (Služba državne sigurnosti, SDS) in two former Yugoslav republics, Slovenia and Croatia, has provided an opportunity to revisit the topic. Although the security archive of the former federal state security headquarters in Belgrade remains closed to researchers, Previšić gained

2 JEZERNIK, Božidar: *Goli otok – Titov gulag*. Modrijan, Ljubljana 2013. The book was also published in German, Polish and Czech translation (*Goli otok – Titův gulag*. Volvox Globator – Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, Prague 2020).

3 Croatian historians with an eye on the Yugoslav horizon include Tvrtko Jakovina, who deals with international politics during the Cold War (JAKOVINA, Tvrtko: *Treća strana hladnog rata*. Fraktura, Zaprešić 2011), political scientist Dejan Jović (JOVIĆ, Dejan: *Yugoslavia: a State That Withered Away*. Purdue University Press, West Lafayette 2009), or Ivo Goldstein with his biography of Tito (GOLDSTEIN, Ivo – GOLDSTEIN, Slavko: *Tito*. Profil, Zagreb 2015).

4 PREVIŠIĆ, Martin: The Goli Otok Camp: Torture Justified by External Threats? In: *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Torture*. Brill, Leiden 2019, pp. 115–128.

access to documents in the archives of the former republic security services, which he compared with published testimonies of former convicts and prisoners and recorded witness statements of members of the UDBA and representatives of the Party and state apparatus. In 2008–2012 he conducted interviews with the last surviving former prisoners. He spoke with Jovo Kapičić, a senior UDBA and Federal Interior Ministry official at the time in question, who served as a deputy to the head of the security service Aleksandar Ranković who was responsible for the Cominformists' prison camps. In addition to state security documents, Previšić also studied other archival materials from federal and republic-level political and Party bodies. This has contributed towards creating a work that, unlike previous works on this topic, is built on an extensive and diverse source base.

However, the advantage of Previšić's work lies not only in the reconstruction of historical events. The author conceives of his topic in the context of contemporary domestic and foreign policy developments and raises questions of a more general nature, i.e. what place do the Yugoslav camps for Cominform followers occupy in the history of repression, violence and internment.

The strong point of the book is the description of the mechanisms of identifying people as enemies, their arrest, investigation and, of course, their internment on Goli Otok and other camps (Sveti Grgur and Ugljan islands, and on the mainland Bileća, Stara Gradiška, Ramski Rit and Zabela prison in Požarevac). Through careful analysis, the author confirms, clarifies, balances and refutes existing accounts. He sheds new light on the functioning of the UDBA apparatus, the filling of personnel positions and powers associated with them, as well as the making of tendentious, exaggerated or at times completely fabricated accusations. For example, it was established that at the time of the largest mass arrests, UDBA itself believed up to 50% of prisoners were innocent even according to the then very loosely defined criteria. Reasons for arrest by UDBA included clumsy statements or other verbal transgressions. Some of those arrested fell victim to false accusations, enemies settling scores, mistakes, and so on. Far from all who those deemed to be "pro-Soviet elements" were imprisoned and interned. Punishments were also meted out by Party bodies; people were expelled from the Communist Party, and those affected were usually punished by losing their jobs and apartments. Even though formally free, they were tainted and subjected to public bullying and oppression as well as under the constant fear of arrest and imprisonment. Nevertheless, the despotism committed by the UDBA was in many respects comparable to conditions in the countries of the Soviet bloc.

One welcome feature of Previšić's book is the specification of different categories of prisoners and their numbers, compared to the different data presented by previous literature. The author lists how many of those deprived of their liberty were convicted and administratively punished, how many were army officers or civilians, how many were men and how many women, as well as the individual nations and nationalities (national minorities) of Yugoslavia they represented. Thanks to this, we know that 15,737 people were imprisoned in 1948–1956, of whom 862 were women. Around 13,000 were imprisoned on Goli Otok alone, although inmates moved between various prison camp facilities during their internment. At the same time, these numbers are

much lower than those cited by authors of memoirs or journalists, who often relied on statements – even oral ones – from UDBA officials or Yugoslav communist politicians. It is surprisingly close to the data presented by the official political and historical literature of the late 1980s.[5] The same is true of the number of deaths and murders, which the memoirs often exaggerated. Although UDBA documents apparently failed to record all deaths, they are probably not far from reality; approximately 400 people died on Goli Otok and in other camps during 1948–1956, for various reasons.

Previšić presents a further clarification of the reality of Goli Otok in his analysis of the functioning of the camp system. It shows that a specific and well thought out design, based on the torture and humiliation of prisoners, was the result of gradual development. Conditions at the Goli Otok camp, established in the summer of 1949, deteriorated rapidly with the arrival of the so-called "Bosnian Group" of prisoners in the autumn of the same year. These prisoners, who included individuals with criminal or collaborationist backgrounds, established a shadow system of prison management and subjected other prisoners to terror and "re-education". The author gives various indications that the group was assembled by UDBA using its agents. However, direct evidence for this is still lacking.

An essential part of the interpretation is the chronology of the development of the system on Goli Otok. The horrors known from the testimony of former inmates mostly took place from the autumn of 1949, and especially from the beginning of 1950, to roughly the autumn of 1951. Later, the prison camp regime gradually began to ease, although it persisted at a slightly lower intensity throughout 1952. Between 1953 and 1956, conditions on the island were milder than in previous months and years. The most severe phase also accounts for the largest number of deaths, many of which were caused by a typhus epidemic in 1951, which erupted due to deliberately catastrophic hygiene conditions. Besides, however, Previšić documents and complements with new data previously known cases of victims of violence, deadly work accidents caused by deliberately worsened conditions and numerous suicides. Between 1950 and 1951, the camp also housed the largest number of prisoners, whilst afterwards their numbers gradually began to decline. There were fewer numbers of newly arrested and imprisoned people, and prisoners were gradually released.

The author also describes the less tragic aspects of life on Goli Otok. In less harsh periods, or even for a certain segment of the inmates, life in the camp was relatively bearable. Not all prisoners performed heavy physical work in the quarry. About a quarter of them worked in other occupations, in workshops, or in fishing. In addition to the privileged prisoners – collaborators with the camp administration – people with better qualifications were also granted these more sought-after jobs. For example, Dalmatians and people from the northern part of the Yugoslav Adriatic were deployed to fish or repair ships. We learn from the book how prisoners spent their free time, and about the island's cultural life, including theatre and film screenings. Even though "cultural activities" were also a part of "re-education" – some artistic produc-

5 PETRANOVIĆ, Branko: *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988, treća knjiga*. Nolit, Beograd 1988; RADONJIĆ, Radovan: *Izgubljena orijentacija*. Radnička štampa, Beograd 1985.

tions consisted of celebrations of Tito and the Yugoslav Communist Party and satirical skits of Stalin, Soviet leaders and Cominform émigrés – the theatrical and cinema repertoire was surprisingly apolitical, especially in the milder periods of repression, and provided inmates and their guards with fun and entertainment. These passages of the book certainly do not seek to relativise the dark side of the camp, which is confirmed by a chapter devoted to the appalling conditions in so-called Peter's Hole (Petrova Rupa), otherwise known as Workplace 101 (Radilište 101), a horrific facility for the most prominent and hardened inmates: pre-war communists, former émigrés in the USSR, members of the International Brigades in Spanish Civil War, senior Party and state officials, and army or state security officers.

One insightful chapter focuses on the economic significance and efficiency of Goli Otok. Contrary to the notion that inmates were forced to engage in aimless, almost Sisyphean drudgery, Previšić proves convincingly that Goli Otok was a well-functioning and profitable enterprise. Under the cover brand Velebit Rijeka, the prison camp produced concrete terrace tiles, which were distributed throughout Yugoslavia. The tiles and other products were also successfully exported to Italy, for which the UDBA obtained for Yugoslavia a valuable supply of hard currency during the harsh economic blockade by the USSR and its allies. Some of these proceeds went to a special UDBA fund to finance secret operations abroad.

The author deals in detail with the re-education system, built on extreme humiliation and denunciation amongst prisoners. Reporting on fellow prisoners was the only way a person could attain a higher, more tolerable prisoner status and achieve parole under the promise of further cooperation after release. There might not be anything revolutionary in that, but a valuable contribution of the book is an explanation of the whole mechanism, which was aimed at breaking solidarity amongst prisoners or amongst those who had been released. This monstrous system, which made inmates victims and accomplices in the suffering of fellow prisoners, was not an end in itself. Although there are no direct sources of who initiated and invented it, its meaning was clear: to demoralise and undermine the will to resist, and to prevent the creation of any organised opposition in the future.

The author's argument about the creation of the camps, however, was somewhat problematic, and never completely resolved. It is certainly possible that the primary reason was to separate "unreliable elements" from society and intern them in a safe place at a time when Moscow was attempting via the Cominform to overthrow Tito's leadership and urge "healthy forces" in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to resist and Yugoslavia faced the danger of Soviet armed intervention. Previšić's chronology of arrests and imprisonment confirms this. Such a situation corresponds to the panic and fear of internal enemies, and explains that the criteria for determining a group to be persecuted were loose and haphazard. Previšić aptly points out the similarity with the xenophobically motivated persecution and forced internment of American citizens of Japanese origin in the USA during the Second World War. Organisational shortcomings, prejudice and hatred caused by the climate of war also led in this case to suffering and, in many cases, death. However, in my opinion, this argument does not offer an answer to the reason for the emergence of the specific form of

violence, torture and the deliberate destruction of personality – i.e. re-education – at Goli Otok. In the Yugoslav case, this inhuman system was not only used by holders of power against former comrades, fellow Partisan fighters and often even personal acquaintances and friends, but also used to force internees to destroy each other mentally and physically within the fictitious prison "self-management".

As the author concludes appropriately at the end and indeed elsewhere in the book, some forms of torture used at Goli Otok were also used elsewhere before and later: the so-called trellis, for example, in the Habsburg or Russian armies of the 19th century; the infamous waterboarding used by American guards at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo also had its Goli Otok equivalent. Humiliation, bullying and unbridled violence are not only inherent in prison systems under totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, but also occur where guards are given broad autonomy and are not subject to legal norms and supervision. As the notorious Stanford experiment by psychologist Philip Zimbardo has shown, the boundless power of guards over prisoners leads to the dominance of sadistic and brutal types over moderate ones. Barriers to such behaviour fall even for people who have not previously shown a disposition to cruelty. Apart from more general statements, however, Previšić does not go into greater depth on this point. He does not examine the domestic sources of specific forms of violence in the tradition of settling scores with "traitors" not only during the recent war, but also in the practice of local illegal underground movements or the long tradition of armed (guerrilla) struggle in the Balkan region.

The lack of sources also prevents us from understanding the extent to which the system on Goli Otok was controlled from above and who played a role in it. It is clear that the initiative for its creation came from the top party leadership led by Tito, and that Aleksandar Ranković was responsible for it as Minister of the Interior. However, the intensity of control and management of the camps remains unknown from the available sources. Nevertheless, Previšić writes that following Ranković's visit to Goli Otok in 1951, conditions gradually began to improve. Needless to say, no one was held accountable for the situation in the camp. On the contrary, UDBA officers running the camp later embarked on successful careers in the political and economic spheres. Unlike others released, UDBA agents who had participated in the violent system of prison self-management also later appeared to enjoy a privileged position in Yugoslav society.

The author also compares Goli Otok with the Nazi concentration camps and the Soviet gulag. He finds some similarities in both cases, including the existence of prison self-government. However, the idea that the Yugoslav communists and UDBA officials deliberately copied from the Nazis or learned from the Soviet Union does not seem to me to be sufficiently well-argued or grounded. In addition to the general awareness of how the Nazi camps worked, the basic preconditions for creating similar facilities in modern times could well have influenced the organisation of the Yugoslav camps. At the same time, Previšić points out that the purpose of Goli Otok and the Nazi camps was completely different. Goli Otok did not lead to the physical elimination of the regime's enemies. Despite the euphemism of *Arbeit macht frei*, meanwhile, the Nazi camps did not make any attempt at re-education. The system of prison self-

-government also had a completely different purpose in the Nazi camps. With its help, the German authorities were able to make up for their own shortages of officers, who were urgently needed at the front. On Goli Otok, however, self-management was an essential means of achieving the goals of internment: breaking the prisoner's personality and moral integrity. Of course, certain similarities could also be found in the Soviet gulag. However, completely different geographical conditions, the extent of the camp system and the number of prisoners would have made emulating the Soviet system impossible. Nevertheless, despite millions of destroyed lives, the Soviet system did not primarily oversee (similar to the Yugoslav) the physical annihilation of prisoners. On the other hand, the fact that there was no mass execution of prisoners in Yugoslavia after 1948, as was the case in the Stalinist campaigns in the late 1930s and early 1940s, may have been due only to the fact that Yugoslavia was not the object of the Soviet military aggression.

Previšić also points to another resemblance to the Soviet Gulag: contrary to popular belief, Goli Otok, like the Soviet prison system, was part of the state's economic system, although of course its modest size did not allow for such strong involvement in "Socialist construction efforts" as in the Soviet camps. However, even the prisoners on Goli Otok had to meet production targets and participate in labour projects and work brigades. In several cases they were also deployed on civilian construction projects such as the Bratstvo-jedinstvo (Brotherhood and Unity) motorway connecting Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana, and the construction of railways. The author's discovery that the Yugoslav communists tried to prevent comparisons with both German and Soviet labour camps is characteristic. Officially, there were no prison camps in Yugoslavia. Instead of the term "camp", the term "workplace" (radilište) was used, where inmates performed "socially beneficial work". Both during the schism with Stalin and later, Tito's regime tried to hide the existence of the camps. Former inmates were forbidden from mentioning them to anyone, and many of them respected this order out of fear, some until the very end of Yugoslav socialism.

The chapter mapping the fate of inmates after their release is very useful. In contrast to the various published memoirs, Previšić mainly provides the view from the other side, i.e. from the perspective of state security documents. Based on documents from UDBA, he describes how state security and the authorities treated the Cominformists and how they subjected them to police supervision for many years, some until the 1980s. The Cominformists, and not only former inmates but all those registered in the period 1948–1956 by state security for their sympathies with Cominform resolution, were still considered a potential threat by the Titoist regime. Thousands of them were exposed to ostracism and bullying. Several hundred of them ended up interned once again on Goli Otok following the deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union in 1958. Pressure and police surveillance increased in other periods of tension, such as during the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the new activation of the Cominformist movement in the first half of the 1970s when several trials took place and dozens of people were once again sent to prison, as well as in the period following Tito's death in 1980. One of the specific attributes of Yugoslavia compared to the countries of the Soviet bloc is the fact that many former prisoners

were allowed to practise their civil occupations. Among the former Cominformists were several dozen university professors, prominent scientists and officially recognised artists. Others succeeded in the economic field and often took positions as the directors of companies or banks. Some of them were allowed to rejoin the Yugoslav Communist Party (The League of Communists of Yugoslavia). However, a clear limit was set: no former supporter of the USSR could be promoted to significant positions in the Party or state apparatus. However, regardless of their social status, most victims carried with them a lasting feeling of insecurity and fear that they might become the target of repression again.

A weakness of this overall excellent work can be seen in one respect. In my opinion, the author did not manage to lose a priori perspective that sees supporters of the Cominform resolution of 1948 as dangerous, later simply bizarre "Stalinists". Their starting points and motives remain visibly incomprehensible to him. On the other hand, even though he certainly makes no excuses for the repression of 1948–1956, he displays understanding for it. At a fateful moment, the Cominformists proved to be "unreliable elements" to their country, some ready to side with a foreign power, the Soviet Union. In principle, the author has resigned himself to analyzing material from more than 16,000 personal files on individual persons, which may also contain materials written by them, various correspondence, transcripts of police wiretaps, and records of private interviews with agents. He did not use the opportunity to decipher the views and attitudes of his protagonists.

The key issue for studying the history of the communist movement, especially in its Leninist and Stalinist phases, is the relationship between the class, political and national identities of its followers. What did it mean to be a "good Yugoslav communist" and a "Yugoslav patriot" in 1948? What did it mean to support either the current leadership of the Party, led by the unquestionable authority of the leader of the victorious domestic movement Josip Broz Tito, or the leader of the world communist movement and the only socialist power, the "homeland of socialism", Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin? In the Marxist-Leninist understanding, the prospect of building socialism in one country was closely linked to the prospects for the success of socialism on a global scale. The idea that little Yugoslavia could implement this program on its own, or even in opposition to the leading socialist power, was incomprehensible in the eyes of many communists at the time. It also seems controversial to call the Cominformists "Stalinists". Despite numerous mentions of Tito's struggle against Stalinism by Stalinist means, it is suggested to the reader that the dispute between Moscow and Belgrade was ideological or concerned with principles. All communists at the time, whether on one side or the other, shared the Stalinist political culture, way of thinking and habits. On both sides, there was roughly the same determination to use all available means against their opponents: a campaign of false propaganda and violence. Subsequent developments, which led to the emergence of socialist self-management in Yugoslavia, were not yet observable in 1948, nor in the years immediately following. On the contrary, injustice and the deepest humiliation became a key formative experience for the Cominformists, which determined their later political and ideological direction. However, not all of them later proved to be

dogmatists. In this respect, Previšić's approach still has its limits that remain a challenge for the future.

As I mentioned, the author speaks of Goli Otok as a Yugoslav phenomenon. He certainly remains uninterested in the ahistorical optic created by the current national and political climate. Nevertheless, he has not completely avoided some stereotypes common in Croatian public discourse. For example, on several occasions he mentions – in a negative light – manifestations of Serbian nationalism. Sometimes his assessment is questionable. For instance, he assesses the trio of Croatian Serb officials who, after the Cominform resolution, expressed concern about the safety of the Serb population in Croatia, who had been exposed to the Ustasha genocide just a few years previously. These leaders, Rade Žigić, Duško Brkić and Stane Opačić, saw in the socialist revolution guaranteed by the alliance with the Soviet Union a promise that something like this would never happen again. And likewise, they saw the split with the Soviet Union as a possible way to strengthen the influence of the West and thus to a possible restoration of pre-revolutionary conditions, which might eventually have brought about a recurrence of fascism and ethnic violence. Perhaps their fears might seem exaggerated to historians today. However, from the perspective of 1950, only five years after the war and in the midst of a serious crisis, they were relevant and pressing. It is also out of place for Previšić to rebuke one of his protagonists – Savo Zlatić, a former prisoner in the so-called Peter's Hole – for his nationalism, merely because (according to a UDBA confidant's report in 1986) he showed understanding for the difficult situation of the Serbs in Kosovo. Does this mean that one becomes a Serbian nationalist only by not denying or underestimating ethnically motivated anti-Serbian expressions? Previšić uses this statement to confirm the dogmatic and inconsistent nature of Zlatić's political thinking. The author also did not refrain from an ahistorical criticism in his mention of Dobrica Ćosić. This prominent Serbian and Yugoslav writer visited Goli Otok in 1952 to learn on the spot the subject of his forthcoming novel on "correcting those Communists who have embarked on the wrong path". However, Ćosić, shaken by the reality on the ground, refused to write the book and informed the leadership in Belgrade of his findings. To relativise Ćosić's brave and principled act, Previšić recalls his much later nationalist speeches. Nowadays, Ćosić is considered in a simplified way to be the ideological father of the revival of Serbian nationalism and is therefore irrationally demonised. Hence, Previšić, as a liberal, anti-nationalist-minded author, immediately felt the need to balance the positive mention of Ćosić with a negative one, albeit unrelated to the subject of the work. Such references to Serb nationalists, of which there are certainly not many in the text, contrast somewhat with the absence of similar references to Croatian nationalism.

In my opinion, Previšić is also too influenced by the old interpretation of his teacher Ivo Banac on the national subtext of sympathy for the Soviet Union. He thus reiterates Banac's thesis that the Orthodox peoples of Yugoslavia showed greater affinity for the Soviet Union than the Catholic peoples.[6] However, admiration for

6 BANAC, Ivo: *With Stalin against Tito. Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1988.

Russia and the Soviet Union led by the idea of Slavic kinship was undoubtedly commonplace in Slovenian and, to a large extent, Croatian society (especially when it came to communists and followers of post-war development). He also claims that, for example, members of the Hungarian and Italian minority supported the Cominform resolution because they gravitated towards their home countries or the communist mother parties more than to the KPJ. Similarly, Previšić interprets the inclination towards the Cominform among Macedonians, who allegedly – either secretly or openly – gravitated towards Bulgaria. However, this hypothesis is still waiting to be tested through careful source analysis. Previšić does not offer such analysis in the pages of this book.

It is a pity that the gender aspect is almost completely absent from Previšić's text. The book hardly deals with female prisoners, instead merely stating that their camps' regime and conditions were essentially the same as those in the men's camps. This statement seems a little simplistic to me, and as Božidar Jezernik, who works only with published sources, shows in his book on Goli Otok, it is also not entirely true. Another simplification is to focus the book exclusively on Goli Otok itself. The author dealt with the other camps in the same way as with the women's question: according to him, the system and their conditions were not fundamentally different from Goli Otok.

Although Martin Previšić may not have shown enough understanding of the political views of the Cominformists, he was able to develop an approach full of deep human understanding. He treats the fates of people who have gone through various horrors – not only Goli Otok but also the partisans' fierce battles with various enemies, imprisonment in Ustasha, German or Italian concentration camps, and all sorts of intrusions in their later lives – with unusual sensitivity and awareness. It is here – not only in the precise analysis of the functioning of Goli Otok but also in the no less important human dimension – that the greatness of his book lies.