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Infrastructures of Political and Institutional Power in Yugoslavia: Organizing Communist Rule and the Organizational-Political Secretariat 1940-1964/66

Introduction and Methodological Considerations

As can be seen from the introduction to this volume, different definitions of “infrastructure” try to frame the broad field of investigation in this respect. Dirk van Laak for example made the point that infrastructures traditionally “designate a broad range of systems and services that support or sustain the function of the economy and society, including roads, railways, utility grids, and telecommunication networks” and that they could be understood as “material manifestations of societal networks”.¹ Apart from that and the “material component” of infrastructure (physical and technical infrastructures), Jens Ivo Engels and Gerrit Jasper Schenk formulated the hypothesis that (technical) infrastructures not only confer power, but also force the negotiation of power relations, and store and legitimize claims to power. In short, they shape and transform power.² Infrastructures therefore not only support or sustain certain functions, but they are also related to questions of power and negotiation processes: how it figuratively applies to structures within political parties or institutions.

In this article, however, which primarily analyzes organizational issues and the Yugoslav communist Organizational(-Political) Secretariat, a central political body/auxiliary organ working in the background of communist power,³ we do not deal with “material manifestations” (of infrastructures). We do examine institutional structures respectively political institutions whose capability lies in

¹ Both quotations: Dirk van Laak, “Infrastructures”, *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 20.05.2021; http://docupedia.de/zg/laak_infrastructures_v1_en_2021; DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok-2215>.

² Jens Ivo Engels, Gerrit Jasper Schenk, “Infrastrukturen der Macht – Macht der Infrastrukturen. Überlegungen zu einem Forschungsfeld”, in Birte Förster, Martin Bauch (Eds.), *Wasserinfrastrukturen und Macht von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015), 22-59, here 24f.

³ Cf. Tatjana Šarić, Marijana Jukić, “Partija u arhivskim spremištima – što očekivati”, in Igor Duda (Ed.), *Komunisti i komunističke partije: politike, akcije, debate. Zbornik odabranih radova s Trećeg međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa Socijalizam na klupi, Pula, 28-30. rujna 2017* (Zagreb, Pula: Srednja Europa 2019), 211-237, here 218, on the importance of the Secretariat (at the republican level).

control and integration, namely in “the entanglement of political order and orientation services”.⁴ This could be viewed as “political infrastructures” here. Like technical infrastructures, these are also future-oriented. Additionally, they are based on legalized institutional configurations and societal networks, anchored by a set of rules, which form (long-lasting) infrastructures of a socio-political nature. Accordingly, I argue that individual parts of both political and institutional structures shape the political order and provide it with a stable framework. In this way, they secure, support, and maintain – as do technical infrastructures – political power relations which tend to produce path dependencies, that is, “preceding steps in a particular direction induce further movement in the same direction”.⁵ And like modern technical infrastructures, such political infrastructures with respect to institutions control, integrate, and exclude certain processes as well. In a sense, it is only these that make possible a highly interconnected and organized society that generates social change and progress.⁶

Therefore, analyzing communist rule in Yugoslavia and institutionalized “infrastructures of political power”, which structure power relationships, means focusing on immaterial sides of infrastructures, in our case on political structures, institutions, and actors. These immaterial aspects can be observed in the figure and the complex matrix of the hierarchically organized Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ)/League of Communists of Yugoslavia (SKJ) – founded in 1919/1920. It was a symbol for institutionalized forms of rule, what also allows us to analyze structures built on prescribed and discursively negotiated norms, institutionally framed, and also partly anchored in law. Here, different political sub-elements or rather organizational entities, as is the case with the Organizational(-Political) Secretariat of the Central Committee of the KPJ/SKJ, represent a figurative scaffolding, the infrastructure for social-political fields of action with their norms and institutions, by supporting political decision-making processes and communication between individual levels and committees. Organizational entities are thus dynamic and correlate with actors, whom we call here “human sides of infrastructures” as did van Laak, and which have received less attention in research than infrastructure’s material or technological history.⁷

However, in order to better understand the KPJ/SKJ's infrastructures of political power, it is necessary to combine institutional history with the actions of political actors. In this respect, Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) is at the centre of our reflections. He was not only a member of “Tito's team” (see Stefan Gužvica's article in this volume) and the provisional leadership from 1938

⁴ Gerhard Göhler, “Politische Institutionen und ihr Kontext. Begriffliche und konzeptionelle Überlegungen zur Theorie politischer Institutionen”, in Gerhard Göhler (Ed.), *Die Eigenart der Institutionen. Zum Profil politischer Institutionentheorie* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verl.-Ges. 1994), 19-46, here 43.

⁵ Paul Pierson, “Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics”, *The American Political Science Review* 94:2 (2002), 251-267, 252.

⁶ Cf. van Laak, “Infrastructures”; Id., *Alles im Fluss. Die Lebensadern unserer Gesellschaft – Geschichte und Zukunft der Infrastruktur* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2019), 25.

⁷ Id., “Infrastructures”.

onwards. At the Fifth National Conference of the KPJ in October 1940, he became an official member of the Central Committee of the KPJ, its Political Bureau (Politburo) and the Secretariat of the Politburo. In addition to the numerous functions he held during his career (among others, building up the State Security Service from 1944), he was entrusted by Josip Broz Tito with organizational tasks at the federal level as early as 1941. He was formally appointed Secretary of Organization in 1942 and held this position until his overthrow in 1966.⁸ Ranković thus headed the Organizational(-Political) Secretariat, our main subject relating to the infrastructure of communist rule. We agree with Bojan Dimitrijević that Ranković rose to become the most influential politician within the party after Tito when it comes to organization and personnel issues before the outbreak of World War II in Yugoslavia. Analysts of Radio Free Europe/Munich in one of their Background Information in July 1963 have made a meaningful and indicative estimation for the post-war period: “The two strongest positions in the state and in the Party are still occupied by Aleksandar Ranković who, in addition to his mighty position as the Party Political-organizational Secretary, has now become, the Vice-President”.⁹

Therefore, we do not only want to ask about the significance of organizational-political questions and the functioning of the Secretariat of the same name under the auspices of Ranković as one of the most important auxiliary organs of the Central Committee that was only institutionalized in 1945 as a “department” [Org(anizaciono)-instruktorsko odeljenje] with control functions and subordinated to the Central Committee. We would also like to question about the possibilities it had to control, integrate and exclude certain political processes. Overall, the aim is to analyze infrastructures of political power and its resilience and durability using the example of the Organizational(-Political) Secretariat in the period until 1964, when it disappeared in the shadow of the 8th Congress of the SKJ.

⁸ The first scientifically founded biography about Ranković has been published only recently: Bojan Dimitrijević, *Ranković: drugi човек* (Beograd: Vukotih media, 2020); Ko je ko u Jugoslaviji. Jugoslovenski savremenici (Beograd: Hronometar 1970), 21, gives an overview of the numerous functions held by Ranković. From when exactly Ranković formally was appointed as Organization Secretary of the party is not clear according to the literature I have consulted. Pirjevec's statement that this was the case since April 1941 is, however, not supported by the literature cited: Jože Pirjevec, *Tito i drugovi* (Zagreb: Mozaik knjiga 2012), 478f. According to one of Tito's dispatches from October 1943, Ranković was appointed as an Organizational Secretary “a year ago”; see: Peta zemaljska konferencija KPJ (19-23. oktobar 1940), Eds. Pero Damjanović, Milovan Bosić, Dragica Lazarević (Beograd: Komunist, 1980), 266.

⁹ See Dimitrijević, *Ranković*, 24; for Radio Free Europe: “Yugoslav Succession?”, 3 July 1963. HU OSA 300-8-3-9721; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Background Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest. Electronic record: <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:8deb2ff6-e8e9-4bfe-8ca9-3b3f43dd2107>.

The Importance of Organisational Issues in the Consolidating of Communist Rule before 1945

As shown by Stefan Gužvica in this volume, the KPJ established its material independence and organizational autonomy in the late 1930s after it had largely overcome the inner-party faction fights. This happened under the watchful eyes of Moscow and the Comintern, which set the standards in matters of party organization. The question regarding the organization of the party played a significant role in the history of communist parties. The entry on “organisation” in the Handbook of Communism, edited by Stéphane Courtois, makes this clear: The question of organisation, an ever-present theme at party congresses, characterises the world communist system in a fundamental way. And although the term has many meanings, it refers, among other things, to the nature of the leadership, the structures and functioning of the party, as well as the appointment of cadres.¹⁰ Fundamental to this was the Statute of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of March 1919, which defined “democratic centralism” as the guiding principle of the party’s organisational structure (point 10) and, in point 25, the organisation of the political leadership. “The Central Committee forms the Political Bureau for political work, the Organisation Bureau for organizational work and the Secretariat headed by the Secretary, who is also member of the Organisation Bureau.”¹¹ Reform efforts continued and the Politburo became the real governing body, while the Central Committee lost power. The control of all three centres of power was again central in the case of Stalin. He was the only person to be a member of the Secretariat, the Politburo and the Organisation Bureau at the same time – however, the latter was dissolved after 1952 in the Soviet Union.¹²

But what was the situation within the KPJ in the 1930s? As shown by Nikita Bondarev an Organisation Bureau didn’t exist within the political infrastructure of the KPJ and the position of a Political Secretary or Organizational Secretary no longer existed since 1933.¹³ Nevertheless, questions on how to organize the party weighed down with factional struggles were of high importance as we can see it in a resolution of the Comintern-Section of the Central Committee of the KPJ from 1936, which demanded a “radical improvement” in the field of organizational work and cadre policy and a “strong leadership that possesses authority in the masses and is able to rally around itself the entire party”. It also

¹⁰ See the entry in Stéphane Courtois (Ed.), *Das Handbuch des Kommunismus. Geschichte – Ideen – Köpfe* (München, Zürich: Piper, 2010; originally published in Paris 2007 under the title: *Dictionnaire du communisme*), 596-603, here 596.

¹¹ An annotated and translated version of the Statute (with facsimile) can be found on the webpage: 100(0) Schlüsseldokumente zur russischen und sowjetischen Geschichte (1917-1991), <https://www.1000dokumente.de/>.

¹² See regarding Stalin’s increasing influence in the 1920s: Manfred Hildermeier, *Geschichte der Sowjetunion 1917-1919. Entstehung und Niedergang des ersten sozialistischen Staates* (München: C.H. Beck, 1998), 213-216; on the Rise of the Politburo Lara Douss, *Inside Lenin’s Government: Ideology, Power and Practice in the Early Soviet State* (London et al.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

¹³ Nikita Bondarev, *Misterija Tito: Moskovske godine* (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2013), 176, 179.

called for better organization at decision-making levels, and it was looked back to that the relationship to the organizational expansion of the Party was not a formal matter, but “a question of our Bolshevik organizational principles in relation to the revolutionary tasks of the Party”.¹⁴ The critique was clear and the demands unmistakable the party had to fulfil, and in the end, it was Tito who was able to satisfy it by creating stability within the party and who was very aware of the highest importance of organizational issues.¹⁵ His aim was to create a “strong and monolithic party that can stand at the forefront of the events”, the “Bolshevization of the party”, as formulated in May 1940.¹⁶ In fact, he and his Team tried to lay the grounds for the political infrastructure that was necessary to maintain power within the party and to gain power outside it.

Consequently, the question of organization was also at the centre of the KPJ's Fifth Land Conference in October 1940, where in the preliminary report (on the organizational question) Tito noted retrospectively that the most important task of the past three years had been the question of consolidating the party and its organization, which had been achieved, among other things, by founding new party organizations in parts of the country where there were none, such as in industrial centres and in villages.¹⁷ Although this was not followed by a further institutionalization of deeper infrastructural measures within the party structures – the resolution adopted at the congress only provided a set of “organizational tasks” –¹⁸, the consolidation of political (long-lasting) infrastructures based on loyalty, hierarchy and unity was evident. Hereafter there were no structural changes before and during the Second World War, but a shift in organizational issues was noticeable. Ranković, who since 1937 held the leading position as a Secretary in the Provincial Committee for Serbia (and briefly for Croatia) and who was elected as a member of the seven-person Polit Bureau at the Conference in 1940 was entrusted with national organizational tasks and appointed as Organizational Secretary in 1942. It was now he who would from then on give lectures on organizational issues of the party at the federal level.¹⁹

¹⁴ Rezolucija Centralnog Komiteta Komunističke Partije Jugoslavije o taktici i radu Partije (k izvjestaju o Aprilskom Plenumu), in Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории (РГАСПИ), fond: 495 (Коммунистический интернационал [Коминтерн, III Интернационал] 1919–1943 гг.) - 11 (Секретариат секретаря ИККИ В.Пика [1934–1941]) - 286, 321-327 (here 326). Many thanks to Stefan Gužvica for the information about the online accessible Comintern-archive at the РГАСПИ, <https://sovdoc.rusarchives.ru/sections/organizations/>.

¹⁵ See as formulated in September 1939 in Moscow by Tito: Izveštaj druga Valtera o situaciji u Jugoslaviji, in Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela*. Vol. 5: Ed. Pero Damjanović (Beograd: Komunist, 1983), 7-18, especially 17.

¹⁶ [Josip Broz Tito] Za čistotu i boljševizaciju Partije (druga varijanta) (*Proleter*, april–maj 1940, br. 3-4), in *Ibid.* 80-84, 84.

¹⁷ [Josip Broz Tito] Izveštaj o organizacionom pitanju na V Konferenciji KPJ 1940. god., in Josip Broz Tito, *Sabrana djela*. Vol. 6: Ed. Pero Damjanović (Beograd: Komunist, 1983), 3-39, 7, 15, 17.

¹⁸ Rezolucija V zemaljske konferencije KPJ, in *Ibid.* 48-69, 67f.

¹⁹ Cf. his newspaper article “Organizaciono pitanje Komunističke partije Jugoslavije u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi”, published in December 1942 and reprinted in Aleksandar Ranković, *Izabrani govori i članci, 1941–1951* (Beograd: Kultura, 1951), 5-18.

On the whole, however, and with regard to questions of party infrastructure, we can identify long-term path dependencies that have their origins in the history of the Russian Communist Party and that had a major impact on the development of the KPJ before and after 1945. Paradigmatic for this is the official “History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)”, firstly published in Moscow in 1938 (translated into Serbo-Croatian and used by the Yugoslav communists), in which Stalin, referring to Lenin and his work “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back” (from 1904), describes the organisational foundations of the party and presents it as an “system of organization”, as “the highest of all forms of organization”, centrally organised (on subordination) – “in order to function properly and to guide the masses systematically” – with the “mission to guide all the other organizations of the working class”.²⁰ These demands were of crucial importance for the Yugoslav communists in the first few years after the war as afterwards.

Formative Years of the Organizational Secretariat, 1945-1958

The rise to power of the Communist Party after the Second World War led to the differentiation of an expanding apparatus of rule and the consolidation of communist structures, the “merging of party and state” as stated by Branko Petranović.²¹ Now, political power was to be transformed into a system of rules and political structures that would serve as the backbone of the emerging political infrastructure. Three departments and nine commissions were therefore set up in July 1945. Among them, the Organisational Secretariat was institutionalised as a “department” (Org[anizaciono]-instruktorsko odeljenje) – in addition to the departments for “propaganda and agitation” and “cadres” – with a certain number of members (instructors). It had a supervisory and strong control function because it had not only to check whether the party organisations were implementing the directives of the Central Committee of the KPJ, from top to bottom, but it had to control the implementation of the directives by the local party organizations. It was subordinate to the Central Committee and existed, like the other departments and commissions (with the exception of two of them) at the federal and republic levels. However, it has been pointed out that this department is “one of the basic departments [...] which is called upon to comprehensively follow the organizational party-political work” and which will react in time to deficits and give instructions regarding party-political work.²² It is noteworthy that in this context it was decided that the cadre department would be under the leadership of the

²⁰ See the online accessible version: *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), chapter 2, paragraph 4, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1939/x01/index.htm>.

²¹ *Zapisnici sa sednica Politbiroa Centralnog komiteta KPJ (11. jun 1945 - 7. jul 1948)*, Ed. Branko Petranović (Beograd: Službeni list SRJ, 1995), 7.

²² Cf. Centralni komitet KPJ. Odluka po organizacionim pitanjima, 3. Jul 1945, reprinted in *Ibid.* 268-282, as well as: Sjednica Politbiroa CK KPJ, 16.VII.1945, reprinted in *Ibid.* 71-74.

organizational secretary of the KPJ. This gave Ranković control over both departments strengthening his position and demonstrating the proximity of organisational issues and cadre politics.

However, despite the personal continuity of Ranković, there was only a limited degree of continuity within the above-mentioned political structures. With the transition to a planned economy in 1947/1948, the departments (odeljenja) subordinated to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia were reorganised and upgraded to administrations (uprave), as stipulated in the Party Statute of 1948 – commissions were no longer mentioned. But only a few years later and under the impression of the “Tito-Stalin split” and following liberalizing tendencies, in October 1951 the administrations (uprave) were abolished as part of the new Yugoslav socialist policy of self-government. The Organizational Secretariat (Organizacioni sekretarijat) was established, under which the Department for Cadres and eight commissions (the Control Commission, the People's Government Commission, the Economy Commission, the Village Commission, etc.) were set up.²³

Even this superficial view of the readjustment of the balance of power reveals, on the one hand, flexible action adapted to political circumstances. At the same time, it can be assumed that the political structures below the decision-making levels were not very stable because of the existing volatility and the desire to constantly improve the situation. There is also evidence of a dysfunctionality at odds with the original intentions. In 1949, during the second plenary session of Central Committee of the KPJ, for example, Ranković criticised the lack of perseverance in following up and carrying out the tasks set, which meant that many things didn't get done. He also criticised the fact that the development of the political apparatus at the level of the republics was seriously lagging behind in view of the tasks to be carried out at the political leadership levels.²⁴ A year later, Krsto Popivoda, member of the Organizational Secretariat of the Central Committee, gave a presentation at an internal meeting on the work of the Secretariat in teams and on the difficulties encountered, for example the lack of insistence on the part of the party leadership and its apparatuses on improving working methods and management. He also criticised the fact that party directives were not implemented in the field and that some organisations were sloppy and careless about these things.²⁵ But it was not until October 1951 that things changed, when, at a meeting that led to the above-mentioned reorganisation, Ranković complained about the lack of coordination within the existing Central Committee administrations and

²³ As described by Bogdan Lekić, *Arhivski izvori za istoriju socijalističke Jugoslavije 1943-1953* (Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1987), 59-64; *Program i Statut Komunističke partije Jugoslavije: usvojeni na V Kongresu Komunističke partije Jugoslavije, 28 jula 1948* (Beograd: Borba, 1948), 62.

²⁴ Aleksandar Ranković, “O organizacionim pitanjima naše partije”, in Branko Petranović, Ranko Končar, Radovan Radonjić (Eds.), *Sednice Centralnog Komiteta KPJ: 1948-1952* (Beograd: Komunist, 1985), 193-207, here 193, 196.

²⁵ AJ-507, V, K-VIII/6: Zapisnik sa savjetovanja sa org. sekretarima, načelnicima uprava i rukovodiocima komisija za selo CK republika, 15. II. 1950 u CK KPJ, 2, 11.

dismissed the existing organisational structure as a copy of the Russian model. At the same time, he defended the need to maintain an Organizational Secretariat that would advise the political leadership and would also be active in the field.²⁶ In so doing, he confirmed the path taken since 1948 of distancing himself from Stalin's Communist Party of the Soviet Union. However, the will to reform did not go so far as to break with the foundations of a Bolshevik understanding of power as laid down in the 1919 Statute (see above).

This followed a period, beginning with the 6th KPJ Congress (1952) and ending with the Fourth Party Plenum (March 1954), when, as contemporary political scientist Paul Shoup noted, “efforts to liberalise the party were concentrated”.²⁷ This was linked to the redefinition of the party's role at the 1952 Congress, and the aim of moving away from a commanding party to the one that emphasised an educational-political thought. At the same time, the party's internal structures were not changed significantly – the Executive Committee replaced the Politburo, for example – but none of this led to any real calm within the party in the years that followed.²⁸

Meanwhile, within the Organizational Secretariat criticism was raised to the fact that the “apparatus” had been reduced to such an extent that successful work, for example on cadre policy, was hardly possible.²⁹ At the Sixth Party Plenum (March 1956), Ranković even criticised the Central Committees of the republics for, among other things, the fact that their party bodies were (still) understaffed or not sufficiently active. And he called for “moving from words to deeds” and taking all necessary measures to qualify a sufficient number of comrades for active political-organisational activity.³⁰ However, it was not until the extended meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee (SKJ) on 6 February 1958 (after the outbreak of miners' strikes in Trbovlje and in Zagorje), which Vladimir Unkovski-Korica equated with “the beginning of the faction fight”, that the Organisation's Secretariat was noticeably reorganised.³¹ During the meeting, the League of Communists was severely criticized at republic level, including by

²⁶ AJ-507, V, K-VIII/13: Zapisnik sa sastanka sa org. sekretarima CK republika, 26. X. 1951. g., 1-4, 22. According to the meeting the members of the Organizational Secretariat of the Central Committee were: Moma Marković, Veljko Zeković, Dobrivoje Radosavljević, Velja Stojnić, Osman Karabegović, Lidija Šentjurc, Vlada Dedijer, Krsto Popivoda, Aleksandar Ranković and Milovan Đilas.

²⁷ Paul Shoup, “Problems of Party Reform in Yugoslavia”, *American Slavic and East European Review* 18:3 (1959), 334-350, 334.

²⁸ Edvin Pezo, “Strukture političke moći i unutarpartijski diskurs. Organizacija i pregovaranje o političkoj moći unutar Saveza komunista Jugoslavije (1952–1966)”, in Igor Duda (Ed.), *Komunisti i komunističke partije: politike, akcije, debate. Zbornik odabranih radova s Trećeg međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa Socijalizam na klupi*, Pula, 28-30. rujna 2017 (Zagreb, Pula: Srednja Europa, 2019), 107-133, 111-114.

²⁹ AJ 507, V, K-VIII/32: Zapisnik sa sastanka Organizacionog sekretarijata CK SKJ, 10.-11.6.1954, 59-62.

³⁰ Aleksandar Ranković, “Проблеми из рада Савеза комуниста”, *Комунист* 15:3-4 (1956), 173-204, 203f.

³¹ Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia. From World War II to Non-Alignment* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 167.

Tito, who argued the party leadership had even lost control: "(...) we let things get out of hand. We created the instruments and thought that they would work by themselves, without the involvement of trade unions and party organisations".³²

Ranković responded to criticism of the League of Communists that there was discord at the level of political leadership and between the federal and republican levels. According to him, the Central Committees at the republic level had neglected their relations and contacts with the subordinate levels. As one result, he called at the meeting for the Organizational Secretariats, which he described as ineffective at both federal and republic level, to be strengthened in terms of personnel, partly because most of their current members also have other commitments and do not have the time to contribute systematically and sustainably to the work of the Secretariat. The importance of this issue can be seen also in the resolutions of the meeting of 6 February, which aimed to eliminate the "weaknesses and negative aspects" of the leading party organs. Regarding the existing political auxiliary organs, only the (now called) "Organizational-Political Secretariat" – an indication for their political upgrading – was addressed, was to also deal with political questions and help to implement the political guidelines of the League of Communists and the decisions of the Central Committees, as well as to provide political and organisational support to the Executive Committee and the Central Committee at federal and republic level.³³ This led to the decision of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee on 20 March 1958 to redefine the work of the Organisational-Political Secretariat as a body of the Executive Committee. It should "unite and supervise" the work of all other organs, organisations, and leaderships of the League of Communists, prepare materials and proposals for the Executive Committee, ensure the implementation of the decisions of the Central Committee and the Executive Committee – from among these two the members, together with a leader and a secretary, should be chosen – and maintain constant contact with the leaderships of the League of Communists in the republics. In addition, a commission of five to seven people should do the groundwork and the editorial office of the SKJ newspaper "Komunist" was to be linked to the Organizational-Political Secretariat.³⁴

Cracks appeared in the political infrastructure, which had already proved fragile. In times of crisis, this infrastructure did not prove as stable as had been hoped, and the party was in danger of losing its legitimacy among the population. According to the party's own understanding of governance, these cracks had to be closed by tightening control.

³² AJ-507, III/75: Stenografske beleške sa proširene sednice Izvršnog komiteta CK SKJ održane 6. februara 1958. u Beogradu, 2; further information to this meeting are given by Pezo, "Strukture političke moći i unutarpartijski diskurs", 116-118.

³³ AJ-507, III/75: Stenografske beleške sa proširene sednice Izvršnog komiteta CK SKJ održane 6. februara 1958. u Beogradu, 33-34, 107-108 (resolutions).

³⁴ See for the decision AJ-507, V, K-I/5.

Crisis in the Party, transformation, and disappearance of the Organizational-Political Secretariat

As defined in 1958 the Organizational-Political Secretariat in a way was (co-)responsible for the functioning of the political infrastructure and an important part of it. It had between 11 and 15 members (see below) – most of them have been reappointed two or three times, ensuring continuity of personnel – and met 57 times between June 1958 and September 1964, mainly to discuss organisational matters of the party.³⁵ In addition, members of the Secretariat were chairmen of existing commissions; for example (June 1963), Veljko Vlahović headed the Ideological Work Commission, Velimir Stojnić the Cadres Commission and Krsto Popivoda the Control Commission. Thus, in terms of personnel, significant decision-making and political power was concentrated in the Secretariat.

Table: The composition of the Organizational-Political Secretariat, 1958-1964³⁶
(highlighted are members who have been reappointed two or three times)

According to the decision of:	June 1958	December 1962	June 1963
1 (chairman)	Aleksandar Ranković	Aleksandar Ranković	Aleksandar Ranković
2 (secretary)	Dobrivoje Radosavljević	Petar Stambolić	Lazar Koliševski
3	Otmar Kreačić	Veljko Vlahović	Veljko Vlahović
4	Cvijetin Mijatović	Svetozar Vukmanović	Zvonko Brkić
5	Krsto Popivoda	Dobrivoje Radosavljević	Krsto Bulajić
6	Petar Stambolić	Otmar Kreačić	Otmar Kreačić
7	Velimir Stojnić	Velimir Stojnić	Todo Kurtović
8	Mika Tripalo	Krsto Bulajić	Bogdan Osolnik
9	Veljko Vlahović	Rista Antunović	Krsto Popivoda
10	Svetozar Vukmanović	Bogdan Osolnik	Velimir Stojnić
11	Veljko Zeković	Marijan Cvetković	Boško Šiljegović
12		Ivan Maček	
13		Uglješa Danilović	
14		Vidoje Smilevski	
15		Milan Vukasović	

It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of the Secretariat's work in stabilising the party's political infrastructure as it would require a specific study. It should also be noted that the real place of decision-making was not the

³⁵ *VIII Kongres SKJ. Izveštaj Centralnog komiteta i Centralne revizione komisije SKJ o radu od Sedmog do Osmog kongresa SKJ* (Beograd: Kultura, 1964), 78f., 97, 235, 271, 280.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Organisational-Political Secretariat but the Executive Committee or Central Committee. In many ways, the Secretariat appears to have been largely reactive and passive in its response to the political and economic crisis into which Yugoslavia was plunged. Nevertheless, at the 8th Party Congress in December 1964, the report of the Central Committee and the Central Revision Commission confirmed that its work had “significantly contributed to the better organisation and functioning of the political operation” in the SKJ Central Committee and to the implementation of a unique action in the SKJ organisations to implement the conclusions of the Central Committee and the Executive Committee. The report also revealed that the Organisational-Political Secretariat gave impetus to the central committee or acted on its behalf.³⁷ By this time, however, there could be no denying the profound political crisis that had already been on the horizon since the second half of the 1950s.³⁸ This manifested itself in many ways. In the Organisational-Political Secretariat, for example, it was complained that comrades showed a certain indifference to Central Committee documents, or that Party members lacked discipline and showed little responsibility.³⁹ But the crisis of the party came to light especially during the extended meeting of the Executive Committee from 14 to 16 March 1962. Inefficiency, disunity, loss of confidence and lack of leadership were some of the accusations made. At the time, Ranković's political style was still largely followed, and the resolution called, among other things, for party unity and an improvement in the work of existing central committees and their organs and appealed to party members' discipline and responsibility for party decisions.⁴⁰

At a meeting of the Enlarged Organizational-Political Secretariat at the end of the year, Ranković described current problems and the work of it. He emphasised the need to better link the SKJ Central Committee and its commissions with the republican Central Committees and their organs, and to achieve a stronger connection with the instructions coming from the central office. Furthermore, he saw problems in the work of the Organisational-Political Secretariats at the republican level in that the Secretaries there were not sufficiently involved in the operational business of the Secretariat and other auxiliary bodies in order to achieve closer cooperation with the Executive

³⁷ Ibid. 96 (quotation), 97-99.

³⁸ See with regard to the socio-political and economic problems the SKJ faced in the 1960s: Marie-Janine Calic, “Die 1960er Jahre in sozialhistorischer Perspektive”, in Hannes Grandits, Holm Sundhaussen (Eds.), *Jugoslawien in den 60er Jahren. Auf dem Weg zu einem (a)normalen Staat?* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013), 69-81; Aleksandar Jakir, “Wirtschaft und Wirtschaftsreformen im sozialistischen Jugoslawien”, in Ibid. 83-108.

³⁹ AJ-507, V, K-XV/9: Zapisnik sa proširene sednice Organizaciono-političkog sekretarijata CK SKJ održane 1.6.1960 god.; AJ-507, V, K-XVIII/5: Zapisnik sa sednice proširenog Organizacionopolitičkog sekretarijata CK SKJ, održane na dan 5.11.1962. god.

⁴⁰ Pezo, “Strukture političke moći i unutarpartijski diskurs”, 122-123; see also regarding the March meeting Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power*, 188-203, as Sergej Flere and Tibor Rutar, “Raspad jugoslovenske političke elite”, 1962-1972, *Sociologija* 63:3 (2021), 500-525, here 507-509, who calls this session a “watershed” (508) for the analysis of the disintegration of the communist elite.

Committees.⁴¹ In the run-up to the 8th Congress, however, there was an admission that the situation was not under control. In the autumn of 1964, under the impression of poor economic development, worsening national relations in the country and unresolved questions concerning cadre policy, it was decided to dissolve respectively to transform the Secretariat. A few days before the heated debate of the Executive Committee on 28 October, in the course of which a political crisis in the leadership of the party became more than obvious, during which Tito even threatened to resign from the post of General Secretary, it was recommended by the Organizational-Political Secretariat (October 21) among others to replace it and the existing committees by creating “groups” under the umbrella of the Executive Committee Secretariat, in order to strengthen the position of the Executive Committee as the executive organ of the Central Committee.⁴² At the congress it was finally decided to form three working sections consisting of several groups, which in turn would be led by members of the Executive Committee. Ranković was appointed secretary of the first section (“organisation, development and ideological and political activity of the League of Communists”; subordinated to it were the SKJ and cadre policy), Edvard Kardelj secretary of the second section (“ideological activity of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia”) and Veljko Vlahović secretary of the section “socio-economic and political relations”.⁴³

Formally, the Organizational-Political Secretariat ceased to exist. However, it continued to exist, at least in the person of Aleksandar Ranković, who was also always perceived as the SKJ's Organizational-Political Secretary. But we will also find a great deal of personal continuity within the sections and the heads of the commissions set up in June 1965. For example, Otmar Kreačić headed the commission for development, organisation and working methods of the SKJ, and Velimir Stojnić headed the commission for cadre issues.⁴⁴ Both had always been members of the Organizational-Political Secretariat (see the table above). In this case, the political infrastructure was significantly transformed, nevertheless the continuity in personnel already indicates structural path dependencies. These ultimately continued until 1966 with the fall of Ranković. However, the period up to that point had been characterised by a deepening economic and political crisis and a party in the throes of a leadership crisis, with the political elite increasingly divided over how to resolve the crisis, with or without greater decentralisation of economic processes and interventions. In November 1965, Tito even went so far as to say within the Executive Committee that “the situation is much worse than before the Congress”, that the decisions of the Congress were not being implemented, that the political situation within the party and even within the Executive

⁴¹ AJ-507, V, K-XVIII/5: Zapisnik sa sednice proširenog Oranizacionopolitičkog sekretarijata CK SKJ, održane na dan 5.11.1962. god., 5, 21f.

⁴² Cf. AJ-507, III/104: Izbor najviših organa Saveza komunista i organizovanje Centralnog komiteta i njegovih pomoćnih tela. Beograd, 23.10.1964, 12-14.

⁴³ *VIII Kongres Saveza komunista Jugoslavije, Beograd, 7-13. decembra 1964, Stenografske beleške*. Vol. 3 (Beograd: Kultura, 1965), 2087, 2093.

⁴⁴ “Organizacija i sastav organa Centralnog komiteta SKJ”, *Komunist*, 3.6.1965, 1.

Committee was bad.⁴⁵ In February 1966 he made a proposal for the reorganisation of the Executive Committee and its auxiliary bodies to make them more efficient and better organized, which was approved by the other members of the Executive Committee (Kardelj, Ranković, Vlahović, [Ivan] Gošnjak, Bulajić), but at a meeting of the chairmen of the commissions of the SKJ Central Committee (March 1966), chaired by Ranković, there were questions and some resistance. In essence, the idea was to create a new party body, a Presidium of the Central Committee, alongside the Executive Committee, which was to be made more dynamic and rejuvenated. This Presidium should have a strong position and, as a political body, be responsible for the general implementation of party policy, have a quorum before the Central Committee and be able to scrutinise the work of the Executive Committee. The subsidiary bodies should be adapted accordingly.⁴⁶ Implementation has therefore been slow. However, the dysfunction of the existing subsidiary bodies was evident when the Commission Presidents criticised the functioning and organisation of the political subsidiary bodies and stressed the need for their reorganisation. Criticisms included the large number of commissions, the lack of links between them, sectorisation and separation, the accumulation of party cadres in the commissions, and the duplication of commissions in other party or state institutions.⁴⁷ Finally, the Presidium of the Central Committee was established in October 1966, after the fall of Ranković during the infamous Brijuni Plenum. This undoubtedly put an end to what had been associated with the Organizational-Political Secretariat in terms of personnel and content. There was no longer a party-political body whose work was exclusively devoted to party affairs.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Focusing on one political body and one actor (Aleksandar Ranković) inevitably leads to the neglect of other institutions and individuals. As a paradigmatic example, however, it also has the advantage of highlighting problem areas and lines of development better than if one were to consider the “big picture”. Dealing with the Organizational(-Political) Secretariat as part of the history of Yugoslavia's political infrastructure proves fruitful, at least to the extent that lines of continuity and discontinuity become very clear. Looking onto aspects of continuity and path dependency we can detect more of them. They are evident in several aspects, in the actors (the members of the Secretariat), in the durability of

⁴⁵ AJ-507, III/113: Stenografske beleške sa sednice Izvršnog komiteta CKSKJ, održane 12. i 13. novembra 1965. god., 2, 6, 15; cf. Pezo, “Strukture političke moći i unutarpartijski diskurs”, 127f.

⁴⁶ AJ-507, IV, K-1/7: Zabeleška sa sednice Sekretarijata Izvršnog komiteta CKSKJ održanog 21.2.1966.

⁴⁷ AJ-507, IV, K-1/21: Zabeleška sa sastanka predsednika komisija Centralnog komiteta SKJ, održanog 23.3.1966, 8f.

⁴⁸ Cf. “Izbor i sastav novih organa CK SKJ”, *Komunist*, 6.10.1966, 2.

the Secretariat as well as in ideological matters, since it was based on Bolshevik organizational principles. This makes it easier to pursue the question of the stability and quality of political infrastructure and institutional power in socialist Yugoslavia. The focus of interest was the Secretariat, whose activities were essentially related to organisational issues and thus to the power structure within the party. In a metaphorical sense, it was the party, the bearer of political power, whose capacity to act and change was up for discussion. We agree with Wolfgang Höpken, who noted that Yugoslav society was experiencing “a permanent, almost manic change in the institutional order of the system”.⁴⁹ This was accompanied by instability and dysfunction in the political power apparatus, as the political discourse reveals. The foundation of the party, with its political infrastructure, proved to be prone to crisis. Moreover, the party increasingly lost its legitimacy and ran the risk of no longer being perceived as a guarantor of political stability. Although Ranković had long been seen as the guarantor of the SKJ's political unity and thus of the state's political order, he was ultimately unable to assert his political ideas. The fact that by the mid-1960s, when an economic and political (system) crisis intensified, the political infrastructure, which he largely controlled, had proved to be worn out or inefficient may have contributed to this. Inevitably, Ranković had become vulnerable. If Tito wanted to protect the political system (the party), he was almost forced to reform the political infrastructure. And this required deep structural cuts due to the political crisis situation, which went hand in hand with the disempowerment of Ranković and the actors close to him. After all, Ranković had more influence on the political infrastructure than anyone else.

⁴⁹ Wolfgang Höpken, “‘Durchherrschte Freiheit’: Wie ‚autoritär‘ (oder wie ‚liberal‘) war Titos Jugoslawien?“, in Hannes Grandits, Holm Sundhaussen (Eds.), *Jugoslawien in den 60er Jahren. Auf dem Weg zu einem (a)normalen Staat?* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013), 39-65, 54f.

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