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Apis's Men: the Black Hand Conspirators after the Great War

Abstract: The activities of Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis and his clandestine Black Hand organisation in Serbia have long been scrutinised in connection with the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 and the outbreak of the First World War. Regent Alexander and the Pašić government dealt severely with the Black Hand in the Salonica show trial in 1917 when Apis and two of his friends were sentenced to death, a number of officers sentenced to prison and other Black Handers purged from the civilian and military authorities. The rest of Black Handers, particularly those more prominent, who survived the war found themselves in a position of pariah in the newly-founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia). They were constantly under the watchful eye of the authorities and suspected of plotting subversive activities. To be sure, the Black Handers remained in close contact and sought to bring about a "revision" of the Salonica trial and rehabilitate themselves and their dead comrades. This paper focuses on three particular Black Handers, Božin Simić, Radoje Janković and Mustafa Golubić – although their other friends are also mentioned in connection with them – who offered stiff resistance to the regime that had condemned them. Their cases demonstrate that some of former Apis's associates in time came to terms with the authorities in order to secure peaceful existence or even obtain a prominent status, whereas other remained staunch opponents of King Alexander and their frustration took the shape of a left-wing opposition ranging from republicanism to outright communism.

Keywords: Apis, Black Hand, Salonica trial, Serbia, Yugoslavia, communism, Božin Simić, Radoje Janković, Mustafa Golubić

The Black Hand conspiratorial organisation has become known for its role in the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, Austro-Hungarian Crown Prince, in Sarajevo in 1914 that started a diplomatic crisis between the two opposing blocs, Entente Powers and Central Powers, which eventually escalated into the First World War. Much of historiographical debate has centred on the relationship between the assassin Gavrilo Princip and his comrades from Young Bosnia and the members of the Black Hand from Serbia, the *spiritus movens* of which was Lieutenant-Colonel Dragutin T. Dimitrijević nicknamed Apis.¹ The latter and his supporters had been an important factor in Serbian domestic politics long before the Sarajevo as-

* drabakic@yahoo.com

¹ For the relationship between the two organisations see Dušan T. Bataković, "The Young Bosnia and the 'Black Hand'," in *The Serbs and the First World War*, Proceedings of the International Conference held at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts,

sassination. A group of officers led by Apis brutally murdered the Austro-ophile King Alexander, the last of the Obrenović dynasty, and handed the crown to Peter I Karadjordjević in what is known as the May Coup of 1903 which ushered in a new era in Serbian history. The Black Hand was founded in 1911 – its official name was Unification or Death (*Ujedinjenje ili Smrt*) – mainly from the ranks of military officers for the purpose of fomenting revolution in order to liberate the Serbs still living under foreign rule, in the decaying Ottoman Empire and in Bosnia and Herzegovina which had been under practically colonial rule of Austria-Hungary since 1878. However, the Black Hand came into conflict with civilian authorities prior to the Great War: the government of Nikola Pašić's Radicals opposed the growing influence of the conspiratorial officers, particularly in the newly-acquired territory in the south as result of the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. Even if they shared the same ultimate national goals, the responsible government realised that Serbia was in a desperate need of a prolonged period of peace to digest her gains and recover her strength, whereas the Black Hand intended to press forward with its subversive activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Besides being a manifestation of its fervent nationalism, the complicity of Black Hand in the Sarajevo assassination was also a deliberate act of opposition to Pašić and his moderate policy – he tried and failed to curb its activities. The tensions between civilian and military authorities were pushed into the background with the outbreak of the Great War, but they resurfaced again in late 1916 when the remnants of the Serbian army and the government found themselves on Greek soil and joined their Allies in fighting the enemy in Macedonia. Regent Alexander, a group of his trusted officers hostile to the Black Hand – and thus called the White Hand – and Pašić's Radicals all combined for their own and different reasons to settle scores with Apis and his followers in the well-known Salonica show trial in 1917. Apis, Major Ljubomir Vulović and Rade Malobabić were sentenced to death for their alleged conspiracy against the government and constitutional order and an attempt on Regent Alexander's life; a number of persons were sentenced to prison, and the Black Hand organisation was effectively destroyed. These events have been well-served by historians although the fate of Apis and his supporters still remains a rather controversial matter and continues to fan the flames of popular imagination.²

13–15 June 2014, ed. Dragoljub T. Živojinović (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2015), 139–152.

² This and the preceding paragraph are based on Dušan T. Bataković, "Sukob vojnih i civilnih vlasti u Srbiji u proleće 1914", *Istorijski časopis XXIX–XXX* (1982–1983), 477–492, and Mile Bjelajac, *Vojaska Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, 1918–1921* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1988), 39–45. For the 1903 coup see Dragiša Vasić, *Devetstotreća, Ma-*

Not surprisingly, historiographical interest in the Black Hand members focuses on the 1914–1917 period and stops with the brutal liquidation of that organisation. Yet, a number of its members survived the Salonica trial and the rest of the war; they became the subjects of the newly-created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS and after 1929 officially named Yugoslavia) which was, for the most part, governed by Pašić's Radicals with Regent and later King Alexander as a highly influential figure. This meant that the authorities frowned upon the surviving Black Hand members who remained suspected of surreptitious intrigue and political ambitions. The latter were naturally bitter on account of both their criminal prosecution in 1917 and the treatment they received after the war. Leaving aside the question of the Black Hand's activities prior to the Salonica trial and that troubled judicial affair, this paper will examine the lives of a few of Apis's close collaborators after the war with a view to identifying some common features and analysing the attitude of these ostracised national revolutionaries towards the regime and its consequences.

Apis's downfall in Salonica had an immediate effect on four Serbian officers who found themselves beyond the reach of Serbian authorities. In 1916, Lieutenant Colonels Božin Simić, Vojislav Gojković and Aleksandar Srb, and Major Radoje Janković were in the group of officers designated

jski prevrat (Belgrade 1928). For more on Apis and his followers see Andrej Mitrović, *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1984), 306–321; Vladimir Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966); David MacKenzie, *Apis, the Congenial Conspirator: the Life of Colonel Dragutin T. Dimitrijević* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Dragoljub Živojinović, *Kralj Petar I Karadjordjević, život i delo*, 3 vols (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1990), II, 315–340, and Vasa Kazimirović, *Crna ruka: ličnosti i događaji u Srbiji od Majskog prevrata 1903. do Solunskog procesa 1917. godine* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2013). The troubled relations between civilian and military authorities are also discussed in the following articles by Dušan T. Bataković: “La Main Noire (1911–1917): l’armée serbe entre démocratie et autoritarisme”, *Revue d’histoire diplomatique* 2 (1998), 95–144; “Nikola Pašić, les radicaux de et la ‘Main noire’: Les défis à la démocratie parlementaire serbe (1903–1917)”, *Balkanica XXXVII* (2006), 143–169; “Storm over Serbia: the Rivalry between Civilian and Military Authorities (1911–1914)”, *Balkanica XLIV* (2013), 307–356. The Salonica trial is covered in Borivoje Nešković, *Istina o solunskom procesu* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1953); Milan Živanović, *Pukovnik Apis: solunski proces hiljadu devetsto sedamnaeste: prilog za proučavanje političke istorije Srbije od 1903. do 1918. godine* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2015, facsimile of the 1st ed. [1955]); David MacKenzie, *The “Black Hand” on Trial: Salonica, 1917* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) and Dušan T. Bataković, “The Salonica Trial 1917. Black Hand vs. Democracy (The Serbian Army between Internal Strife and Military Success)”, in *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War*, Proceedings of the International Conference organised by the Institute for Balkan Studies and the National Research Foundation “Eleftherios K. Venizelos” (Thessaloniki 2005), 273–293.

to leave the island of Corfu, in which the Serbian army recuperated after the disasters of retreating through Albania, and go to Russia. The goal of their mission was to enlist as volunteers in the Serbian Volunteer Corps as many Yugoslavs (South Slavs) from the Habsburg Empire who had surrendered en masse to the Russians.³ This would not just provide additional manpower for the Serbian army which was in dire need of it after the heavy losses suffered but also present a major political accomplishment insofar as such volunteers would justify the validity of the proclaimed war aim of Serbia: the unification of all Yugoslavs in a single state under the Serbian Karadjordjević dynasty. Judging the mission to Russia as very important for the future course of the war, the Black Hand managed to have considerable number of its officers sent to Russia, including the four more prominent ones mentioned above.⁴

In December 1917, the investigation into Apis's activities involved seven of his closest associates, including Simić and Gojković who were then in the city of Odessa – they would not be charged with any crime. The Supreme Command of the Serbian army demanded from the Army Minister to relieve Simić, Gojković and Srb from their duties in the Serbian Volunteer Corps. Their belongings were also searched but nothing that could incriminate them was found. The four officers, however, were firm in the defence of their indicted friends. During their interrogation the officers denied the charges made against Apis and offered information to the effect that the trial was the culmination of a conspiracy that had long been in the making.⁵ Major Janković even sent an open telegram to the Army Ministry advancing his defence against the trump-up charges, which caused great dissatisfaction as a breach of military discipline. Moreover, he and his fellow-officers in Russia embarked on an energetic campaign against the Salonica trial. They sent a dispatch to the Serbian Minister in St. Petersburg, Miroslav Spalajković, which they demanded to be urgently forwarded to the Serbian government in Corfu and Prince-Regent Alexander in Salonica. In this document, the officers claimed that the true “cause for this unexampled violence is personal hatred, spite, political short-sightedness and moral deg-

³ Ilija Jovanović, Stevan Rajković & Veljko Ribar, *Jugoslovenski dobrovoljački korpus u Rusiji: prilog istoriji dobrovoljačkog pokreta (1914–1918)* (Belgrade: Vojno delo, 1954).

⁴ Bogumil Hrabak, “Delatnost članova udruženja ‘Ujedinjenje ili smrt’ u Rusiji 1915–1918. godine”, *Istorija XX veka* VII (1965), 191–192.

⁵ Belgrade, Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts [hereafter ASANU], The Papers of Milan Živanović, 14434/141, Report of the Military Attaché in St. Petersburg, Colonel Branislav L. Lontkijević, on the interrogation of Major Radoje Janković, Lieutenant-Colonel Božin Simić and Aleksandar Srb, and the report of Lieutenant-Colonel Vojislav Gojković, May–August 1937.

radation in exile” and that the indictment was supported by “denouncers and false witnesses”. They requested that the accused Black Hand members be released at once and their rights restored; if the trial, however, was carried out to its end, they wanted a new trial to take place – and such that would be conducted by a British, French and Russian judge. Furthermore, the four officers threatened that unless they received a reply within fifteen days they would supply “all foreign representatives in St. Petersburg and all world newspapers” with their own information on the Salonica affair including their correspondence and other material.⁶

Indeed, the officers acted upon their threats. In order to bring pressure to bear on the Serbian government, they submitted a memorandum to Mikhail Tereshchenko, Foreign Minister of the provisional Russian government emerging from the February Revolution. Appealing to the fledgling Russian democracy, the officers pleaded for Russian intervention to save the lives of Apis and his comrades.⁷ Russian assistance was particularly valuable since the Pašić government was considered bound to heed advice coming from the great Slav ally which had stood by Serbia in 1914 and much suffered in consequence. The four officers also visited the French and British embassies in St. Petersburg and handed their memorandum. In addition, they found a sympathetic ear in the Russian press, favourably disposed to the victims of the Tzar’s close ally Pašić, and saw to it that several articles be published advocating the cause of Apis and his supporters.⁸ Tereshchenko did respond and appealed to Pašić to spare the lives of the alleged plotters against the Crown and state, but his intervention, as well as that of the French and British governments, was of no avail.⁹ The Serbian authorities also summoned the four officers to appear before the court in Salonica for their defiance and public opposition to their own government, but none of them did so. Finally, the government decided to retaliate and the officers were retired and thus stripped of any official capacity in which they could act in Russia. After the Salonica affair they were tried in absence on the same charges as their friends and received substantial sentences: Gojković twenty years in prison and Janković and Simić eighteen years each; Srb was not alive by then.

⁶ ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/142, “The ultimatum” of the four from St. Petersburg, 23 May/5 June 1917 [Julian/Gregorian calendar – the former was in official use in Serbia until 1919].

⁷ ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/143, Memorandum by the four officers for Tereshchenko.

⁸ Hrabak, “Delatnost članova udruženja,” 210–213.

⁹ Živanović, *Pukovnik Apis*, 535–545; ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/354, Gojković to “Dear Mister Colonel” [Pilac?], Baden, 6 February 1922.

The retired officers were forced to fend for themselves. Simić, Gojković and Srb joined the Russian revolutionary army with a number of former volunteers – the rest of the Volunteer Corps was transported to Salonica and joined the Serbian army – and were promoted to the rank of colonel. Srb eventually found his death in the turmoil of the Russian revolution; he was murdered by a group of his own soldiers.¹⁰ Gojković became a commander of the first Yugoslav revolutionary volunteer regiment in the Red Army and left Russia in 1918. He remained in emigration until 1923 and then returned to Belgrade where he was tried again and sentenced to twenty years in prison of which he served three and a half in Sremska Mitrovica before he was pardoned and retired again.¹¹

The case of Božin Simić was particularly revealing with respect to the fierce opposition to the regime in the Kingdom in which some of the Black Handers would persist and the lengths to which they would go. One of the participants of the May Coup in 1903, he had a remarkable military career, especially in the Balkan Wars and the Great War when he was wounded three times. As has been seen, Simić was sent to Russia from Corfu in connection with the formation of volunteer units and he was later supposed to come to Serbia, according to the plan he had made with Apis, and instigate a rebellion in the enemy's rear. Simić was twice wounded on the Russian front in Dobruja as a battalion commander. Having healed, he went from Odessa to Bucharest with the intention to slip into Serbia, but this never occurred as he was ordered to appear before the court in Salonica. He did not try to eschew this unpleasant trip and made himself available to Minister Spalajković in St. Petersburg to organise a transport to Salonica for him but German submarine warfare made that impossible. Having been sentenced in absence nevertheless, Simić fought in the Russian army and was wounded; he then went to France via Scandinavian countries with the intention of returning to Serbia. Having been warned that he would be thrown into prison rather than tried again, Simić decided against going back to his country. "In emigration he lived in Vienna (for a year), Moscow (eight months) and the rest of the time in France. During his stay in Moscow he spent the whole time researching documents in 'Red Archives'."¹² It seems safe to assume that his academic research was focused on what had passed between the Russian and Serbian governments relating to the Salonica affair.

¹⁰ Hrabak, "Delatnost članova udruženja," 244–248.

¹¹ *Srpski biografski rečnik* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 2014), 731–732. One of his letters was written from Baden, Switzerland, although it is not known if he spent his whole time as an émigré there. See n. 9 above.

¹² ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/284, Biographical note on Božin Simić.

Indeed, Simić was consumed with the struggle to unearth what he considered the truth about Apis and his other persecuted friends and obtain satisfaction for the victims in a re-trial. In the early 1920s, the Belgrade press, and the journal *Novo vreme* in particular, abounded with polemical texts which demanded a "revision" of the Salonica Trial, the authors of which were often the proscribed Black Handers including Simić.¹³ He also produced a large number of brochures which were published in the press with the twin-aims of exalting Apis's patriotism and exceptional capabilities to which the Serbian army owed so much for its tremendous successes in 1912–1918, on the one hand, and condemning the corrupt and wicked ways of Pašić and Radicals, on the other.¹⁴ In doing so, Simić kept in close touch and cooperated with the former Black Hand members in Belgrade who had been granted amnesty in 1918. Yet, they were something of pariahs in the new Yugoslav state and exposed to constant suspicion on the part of the authorities. To begin with, the Black Handers had long been purged from both civil service and the military on Pašić's instructions circulated to all government departments and based on the decisions of the Ministerial Council of 24 March 1917 – the government had still been located in Corfu then.¹⁵ After the war, the harassment of the former conspirators carried on. For example, in March 1919, the retired officers were called to military exercise and, to make the matter more provocative, in the area under command of Božidar Terzić, formerly War Minister who had persecuted them. They refused unless they were given either full satisfaction for what they had suffered or a new and fair trial; needless to say, their conditions had no chance of being accepted.¹⁶

Moreover, the Black Hand members were under permanent surveillance. "The Black Handers maintain the closest connections not just with the republicans, but also with communists. Most often Black Handers gather together at the apartment of Bora Prodanović, a lawyer."¹⁷ It was also stated that the other place for their meeting was a cinema in the street across the building of the Academy of Sciences. Bora Prodanović was a son of Jaša Prodanović, the leader of the Yugoslav Republican Party, and known for his defence of communists in the court of law which in itself

¹³ Živanović, *Pukovnik Apis*, 7–9.

¹⁴ ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/617, Draft of Simić's article. He also condemned Petar Živković, the leader of the White Hand, who had risen to prominence through his surreptitious dealings against Apis and his supporters. See his draft article "Petar Živković" in 14434/620.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 14434/148, Circular by Pašić.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 14434/563, Note sent to the Cabinet, 19 March 1919.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 14434/262, Note by the General Staff department of the War Ministry, no date.

confirmed the accuracy of this intelligence report. Indeed, one of the most prominent Black Handers, Colonel Milutin Lazarević, himself pointed out that Jaša Prodanović was their most concrete supporter among politicians, along with Stojan Ribarac, formerly the leader of the Liberals. The Democrats, he wrote in a succinct political analysis, promised a lot but they asked for patience and wanted to wait for more propitious political circumstances in order to obtain a revision of the Salonica trial; they were afraid of the Crown and at the same time needed its support to come to office.¹⁸

Another intelligence report spoke of a trader Žika Ilić, a fervent Republican, who frequently travelled to Paris where he met with Božin Simić and maintained contact between him and Republicans in Belgrade. Ilić was said to have sent 4,000 dinars to Apis's widow, Zora Dimitrijević, "at whose place local Black Handers meet and where they were all gathered on the day of St. Vitus *atentat* in 1921 [a failed attempt on King Alexander's life] and spent the whole night in deciding something."¹⁹ The same report stated that Milan Gr. Milovanović nicknamed Pilac and other Black Handers were also frequent visitors to Zora's abode from where they wrote letters to Simić. Those letters were then sent to Simić by one of two young students, both of them Pilac's nephews; another sender was a female clerk working for Žika Ilić. This report also seems not to have been far off the mark. As the most active former conspirator in emigration Simić regularly corresponded with Pilac, the main figure among the remaining Black Handers in Serbia. The latter had been one of the ten members of the Supreme Central Committee of the Black Hand and he had been initially sentenced to death in 1917 but then to twenty years' imprisonment before being pardoned with the others. Pilac and Dragomir Ž. Stojanović coordinated the efforts of the Black Handers to gather as much material and testimonies as possible to use for "revision" of the Salonica trial, but they, like most others, did not live long enough to see it come true.²⁰ It was also Pilac, along with Milutin Lazarević, that responded to the well-known accusations against the Black Hand conspiratorial activities by none else than Stojan Protić, their arch-enemy and former Interior Minister in the Pašić cabinet, in the party organ of the Radical Party.²¹

In the early years of his exile, Simić was struggling financially in France and suffered from kidneys. He did not have enough money even for such basic necessities as buying clothes or paying rent; he hoped to receive

¹⁸ Ibid. 14434/371, Milutin Lazarević to Dragomir Ž. Stojanović, private, 10 July 1919.

¹⁹ Ibid. 14434/4243, Chief of the reporting section of the General Staff, General Petar Marković, to the Commander of the City of Belgrade, no date.

²⁰ Živanović, *Pukovnik Apis*, 13–15.

²¹ ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/940, *Samouprava*, no. 68, 1 January 1921.

some financial assistance from Stevan Šapinac and his brother, and eventually a cheque reached him for which he thanked Pilac and a "friend".²² It is clear from his references that he was in personal contact with a number of his old friends: Radoje Janković, Mustafa Golubić, Velimir Vemić were some of the people he mentioned. Simić seems to have been hopeful that amnesty would be soon granted to him and his fellows Black Handers. He sent three of his brochures to Milan Gr. Milovanović Pilac but asked him to have two of them printed prior to amnesty since they would have no effect afterwards; the third one could be printed after the granting of amnesty and it would contain things rather unpalatable to Radicals, and Pašić in particular. If financing these publications presented difficulties, Simić offered to arrange it with "certain persons".²³ Yet, as time went by and nothing changed in his unenviable émigré status Simić became increasingly despondent. He confided in Pilac his disappointment with the inactivity of his friends in Serbia: there was talk of grand political events which were awaited from time to time, but he was tired of living "provisionally" and considered giving up their common cause and going to America, perhaps forever.²⁴ In fact, his friends were not as inactive as Simić believed. A member of parliament Pavle Andjelić requested from the Justice Minister, Lazar Marković, to propose to King amnesty for Simić to be announced on the occasion of King's wedding with Princess Maria of Romania. Andjelić used this opportunity to advance certain questions for Marković which underscored political aspects of Simić's case and handed in a petition for his amnesty signed by a number of respectable citizens from Simić's home town of Kruševac.²⁵

At the end of February 1924, a group of convicted Black Handers and their supporters capitulated before the government. Having lost any hope that they would obtain satisfaction in a legal procedure in their lifetime, Milan Gr. Milovanović Pilac and Lazarević submitted on their behalf a statement to the National Assembly in which they renounced their demand for revision of the Salonica trial. Moreover, they expressed absolute loyalty to the state and the monarch and thus effectively absolved the regime of responsibility for the unsavoury methods employed against their friends.²⁶

²² Ibid. 14434/561, Simić to Milovanović Pilac, private, no date; 14434/616, Simić to Pilac, private, Paris, 22 novembar 1921.

²³ Ibid. 14434/368, Simić to Milovanović Pilac, private, no date.

²⁴ Ibid., 14434/334, Simić to Milovanović Pilac, private, 14 February 1924.

²⁵ Ibid. 14434/4279, Copy of Andjelić's interpellation, 10 June 1922; 14434/4280, Petition of 51 citizens of Kruševac, 29 May 1922. As opposed to Andjelić, this group of citizens appealed for amnesty on humanitarian rather than political grounds.

²⁶ "Solunski proces i današnja politička kriza", *Politika*, 2 March 1924, p. 3.

This was a culmination of the development in which some of the most implacable Black Handers and Simić's comrades from Russia caved in and returned to the country. Vojislav Gojković turned up in Belgrade in 1923 and was immediately tried again and sentenced to twenty years in prison, but he was pardoned in March 1927, returned to the army and subsequently retired.²⁷ Radoje Janković also came back to the Kingdom from Vienna; he was arrested and imprisoned in Sremska Mitrovica for two and a half years before being pardoned in May 1925.²⁸ He wrote to the King from prison with a plea to release him and grant him an audience to give his account of what had taken place.²⁹ Apparently, he had long abandoned the notion that the Black Hand victims could be best rehabilitated through parliamentary enquiry since he had been deeply sceptical to the possibility of a judicial revision of the Salonica trial – although “the monarchical principle has died” in him, he was still against the establishment of a republic which he though would lead to the demise of the country.³⁰ Whether it was because of this loyalty to monarchy, the fact that he had been a leading correspondent for the *Pijemont* [Piedmont] journal, an unofficial organ of the Black Hand, to which Alexander, then Prince, had contributed financially, or because Alexander had valued him prior to sending him to Russia himself, or combination of all these factors, Janković was finally restored to royal favour.³¹ He was even granted, unlike his friends, a pension for the years intervening between his retirement in Russia and return from emigration.³² In addition, Janković was appointed General-Consul in Chicago as soon as he was amnestied and later transferred to New York to do the same job; in

²⁷ ASANU, Živanović Papers, Decision on amnesty, 14434/3212, 8 March 1927.

²⁸ Ibid. Decision on amnesty, 14434/3211, 5 May 1925.

²⁹ Ibid. 14434/366, Janković to King Alexander, 8 October 1923.

³⁰ Ibid. 14434/369, Janković to “Dear Mister Colonel” [Pilac?], Anzio, Italy, 26 June 1919.

³¹ For Janković's work for the *Pijemont* and what had passed between him and Alexander before his departure for Russia see ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/569, Extract from the notes of Colonel Vladimir Tucović. Janković was also a respectable writer and that was perhaps another and important factor for the leniency with which he was treated. For an example of his literary accomplishment see *Dani i godine* (Belgrade: Magelan pres, 2013, rpt. of the 1926 edition). In Vojislav Gojković's account of the activities of the four officers in Russia Janković was said not to have been solidary with his colleagues from the start, but they later worked together to stop the Salonica trial and save their friends. Gojković also condemned Janković's later tendency to present himself as a main figure in those events at the expense of others. See 14434/354, Gojković to “Dear Mister Colonel” [Pilac?], Baden, 6 February 1922.

³² ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/4172, Decision of the Army and Navy Ministry – Judicial Department – Pension Section, 18 May 1925.

1936, he was sent to Tirana where he served as Minister until the Italian occupation of Albania in April 1939.³³ He was also politically active during Prince Paul's Regency as a close collaborator of Milan Stojadinović in his newly-formed Serbian Radical Party. He addressed Stojadinović's supporters at the gala dinner in Belgrade in March 1940 and became an editor of the party organ *Ujedinjenje* in recognition for his outstanding literary abilities.³⁴ Janković was arrested by the Gestapo in Belgrade in 1941 as a hostage and died three years later before the German occupation ended.

Coming after Gojković's and Janković's surrender, the statement that Pilac and Lazarević made to the National Assembly deeply embittered exiled Simić. He was not consulted about this step and, in a message sent to Milan Gr. Milovanović Pilac, resented it as "nonsense and a treachery to his own past".³⁵ This appears to have been a decisive moment for Simić; feeling betrayed by his friends he was pushed into even more determined opposition to the regime in his country. It was hardly a coincidence that he soon coloured his staunch anti-government stance with rather leftist argumentation. In his article reflecting on the statement of his friends, he particularly took issue with their avowed willingness even now to sacrifice everything for the good of the King and the country. In his view, this action of his friends had to do with removing Pašić from power which would eventually take place in a few months when the Democrat government headed by Ljubomir Davidović was formed. However, Simić professed that Pašić's downfall was far from what was required for internal settling of the country:

All those who think that our state crisis comes only from an excessive state corruption to which Nikola Pašić has always been a soul in our country are much mistaken. State corruption – to be true, far less than ours to which Pašić gives a strong imprint – is suffocating all nations today, because bourgeois system, as it has been until today, is about to die. The World War and the Russian Revolution caused the last brutalisation of the hitherto parliamentary democracy and thus threw all states in a conceptual turmoil from which a new democracy and a new state mechanism are yet to emerge. It took a world war and of such long duration so that it can be seen that we have been political slaves until this day just like before the French Revolution, because there cannot be either personal or political or

³³ Belgrade, Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia; hereafter AJ], Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia [collection no. 334, hereafter Foreign Ministry], Personal Files, Radoje Janković.

³⁴ Milan Stojadinović, *Dva sporazuma – uvodna reč od Radoja Jankovića* (Belgrade: Biblioteka Srpske radikalne stranke, sv. 1, 1940).

³⁵ ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/336, Simić's letter [the addressee is unknown due to the damaged paper] containing a protest to Pilac, 22 March 1924.

national freedom without certain material security and independence of each individual.³⁶

A crisis of national unity would not be resolved, Simić went on, with changes of personnel but rather with a thorough change of the entire state order and his friends were wrong because they opposed a change of that order. They were also wrong because they were renouncing a revision of the Salonica trial for it was impossible to obtain satisfaction for their sufferings from the same potentates who had sentenced them in the first place.³⁷

During King Alexander's reign Simić remained inflexible in his attitude towards the Yugoslav regime. He returned to the country in late 1935, a year after King Alexander had been assassinated in Marseilles; he was arrested at the very border and dispatched to prison in Požarevac but he was pardoned after sixth months, released and retired in the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.³⁸ This was a clear indication of the more liberal regime established under Regent Prince Paul and Prime Minister Stojadinović.³⁹ In fact, Simić was free to engage in political life and he had close relations with the members of the Serbian Cultural Club consisting of some of the leading intellectuals.⁴⁰

He re-emerged on the political scene in 1940 in connection with the establishing of diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in which he figured as an ardent supporter of close cooperation between the two countries. The Yugoslav Military Attaché in Moscow, Colonel Žarko Popović, witnessed Simić's role in these events. "In January 1941, the former Colonel, Black Hander Božin Simić suddenly turned up

³⁶ Ibid. Božin Simić, "Jedan koji postavlja stvari na svoje pravo mesto", *Republika* no. 27, 6 April 1924 [director of the *Republika* was Ljubomir Stojanović, one of the founders of the Republican Party]. Original emphasis.

³⁷ Ibid. It seems that one of the drafts for this article is contained in ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/617.

³⁸ ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/284, Biographical note on Božin Simić compiled by Milan Živanović. His main sources were presumably Pilac and Lazarević with whom Živanović, Apis's nephew, spent a lot of time collecting material about the Salonica trial which he eventually used for his *Pukovnik Apis*.

³⁹ It is also characteristic that Apis's sister, Jelena Živanović, together with her son and Apis's legal heir Milan asked Stojadinović in 1937 for permission to exhume her brother's body and transfer it from Salonica to Belgrade to be buried in a family tomb next to her other son Sanja, killed in action in 1912, and mother Jovanka. See ASANU, 14434/1807, Živanović Papers, Jelena Živanović to Milan Stojadinović, 19 May 1937. There is no record of any reply; Apis's body has remained in Greece.

⁴⁰ AJ, Foreign Ministry, Personal Files, Božin Simić, Biography [compiled by an anonymous author in the communist Foreign Ministry after the Second World War], 334-190-678.

in Moscow at the side of our Minister [Milan Gavrilović]. I did not know about his presence for a long time until he walked into my office one day and requested to see what I was doing." Popović believed that Simić wanted his position and that he was trying to undermine him in the eyes of Gavrilović. In late February, Simić disappeared from Moscow. Minister Gavrilović advised him before departure to meet with General Dušan Simović, the commander of Air Force, in Belgrade. The latter would soon become famous as a nominal leader of the officers who carried out coup d'état on 27 March 1941 and overthrew Prince Paul, a fateful event that brought Yugoslavia into the Second World War. Popović claimed that Gavrilović had advised Simović to proceed with a putsch. "On 2 April 1941, this mysterious man for liaison with the Soviet Union, Božin Simić, who bragged about his strong personal connections in the USSR, showed up."⁴¹ Popović also pointed out that Simić and Simović had been classmates in the Military Academy. Another account throws light on what happened later: "After the 27 March putsch the preparation for which had not been unknown to him [Simić], he was sent to Moscow as a second member of our delegation for the conclusion of a pact with Soviet Russia."⁴²

This pact was concluded practically simultaneously with the Axis aggression against Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941 so it was a dead letter for all practical intents and purposes. Simić's role in these events and the exact nature of his connections with the Soviets remain an important and controversial matter. His participation in the Russian revolution and his publically proclaimed leftist views were no doubt credentials that recommended him for a mission in the USSR. There is no firm evidence, however, that he was involved with the communist movement despite the fact that police reports in the mid-1920s mentioned his name among other communist activists and even dangerous terrorists.⁴³ On the other hand, Simić maintained contacts with communists and, in his own words, "just before the war had two meetings in Paris with the emigrant and revolutionary Josip Broz-Tito", the leader of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the future commander of the partisan resistance movement in the Axis-occupied country.⁴⁴ After the annihilation of Yugoslavia in the April War of 1941 Simić joined the government-in-exile in London. He wanted to be sent to the insurgents in the country but instead became a plenipotentiary Minister to the French

⁴¹ Dragoslav Djordjević, *Na raskršnici 1941* (Toronto: Bratstvo, 1988), 162–164.

⁴² ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/284, Biographical note on Božin Simić.

⁴³ Kosta Nikolić, *Boljševizacija KPJ 1919–1929: istorijske posledice* (Belgrade: ISI, 1994), 137–138.

⁴⁴ AJ, Foreign Ministry, Personal Files, Božin Simić, Biography [written by Simić himself for the communist Foreign Ministry after the Second World War], 334-190-674.

National Committee of Charles de Gaulle until he resigned following the formation of the Trifunović-Grol-Živković government.⁴⁵ During the war Simić seems to have maintained his special interests for and links with the Soviets. In September 1942, he put forward suggestion that King Peter II make official visit to Moscow, but Prime Minister, Slobodan Jovanović, set his face against this proposal.⁴⁶

The case of another Black Hander Mustafa Golubić provides a spectacular example of a lifelong revolutionary career. Born in Herzegovina, he joined the ranks of Young Bosnians in their resistance to the colonial rule of Austria-Hungary over their native land. After the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908 Golubić emigrated to Serbia, received a scholarship but never graduated. He was a volunteer in the Balkan Wars in the *chetnik* unit of the legendary Major Vojislav Tankosić. After the wars he returned to studies in Toulouse, France, where he planned, along with another prominent Young Bosnian, Vladimir Gaćinović, an assassination of the Bosnian Governor Oskar Potiorek. He re-joined Tankosić's volunteers in the First World War and became close with Apis in the spring of 1915. At the latter's initiative, Golubić and his fellow Bosnian Serb Dušan Semiz were dispatched to Russia to induce the Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war of Yugoslav origin to join the Serbian army – they were on the same mission as the four officers discussed above. The fact that they were from Bosnia and Herzegovina themselves was supposed to be an asset in this undertaking: indeed, they sent more than 1,000 volunteers to Serbia. Having returned from Russia in late 1915 Golubić took part in the retreat through Albania and found himself in Corfu. He then left for Switzerland and later for France which would be connected during the Salonica trial with the plans to assassinate German Kaiser Wilhelm II – besides Germanophile Greek King Constantine – with a view to incriminating Apis. Golubić was arrested in France, at the request of the Serbian government, and transferred to Salonica but he refused to denounce his friends. Therefore, he was brought before the Grand Military Court “in the unusual role of an accomplice of the accused, although he was not charged himself as he was questioned as a witness”.⁴⁷

Golubić returned to Belgrade after the war but the authorities interned him in the Rakovica monastery. He was soon forced to move to his home town of Stolac since the military authorities considered him and an-

⁴⁵ ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/284, Biographical note on Božin Simić.

⁴⁶ Milan Gavrilović, *Londonski dnevnik* (Belgrade: Žagor, 2013), 115.

⁴⁷ ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/3220, Biographical note on Mustafa Golubić. The author knew Golubić from the time of the war and the two of them met again in Belgrade in 1919.

other Bosnian Nezir Hadžinalić “two very dangerous criminal persons”.⁴⁸ Frustrated because of the treatment meted out to him, Golubić left for Vienna in 1920 where many political emigrants of all persuasions found their refuge. It was there that he became a member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Entering into such subversive anti-state organisation was perhaps a logical course of action for an idealistic young man who was disappointed with and enraged at what he must have considered a grave injustice and senseless persecution. In addition, his restless and adventurous nature was conducive to embracing conspiratorial life style in by then illegal communist party. This is perfectly illustrated in an episode when, having heard that his brother was arrested and beaten in Herzegovina, Golubić sent a personal message to King Alexander warning him that he found him personally responsible for the treatment of his brother and that he would take revenge for that – and for the death of Apis.⁴⁹ This was not just an empty threat. In the mid-1920s, the police authorities in Yugoslavia had information to the effect that Golubić belonged to a particularly dangerous terrorist group in Vienna which enjoyed full confidence of the Soviets and was preparing assassinations of highest-ranking officials in the Kingdom.⁵⁰ It was no doubt part of his struggle against the Belgrade regime when he published under pseudonym an article in *La Federation Balkanique* in 1924 in which he alleged that Apis had prepared the assassination in Sarajevo with the knowledge of Russian Military Attaché Artamanov, Russian Minister Hartwig, Pašić and heir to the crown Alexander.⁵¹

The Yugoslav police was said to have attempted to eliminate him in Vienna; at the request of the Viennese police, Golubić was forced to leave Austria and he went to Prague and then to Paris. Throughout these émigré years Golubić was in contact with Colonel Vladimir Tucović, former Black Hander and brother of late Dimitrije Tucović, the leader of the Serbian Social Democrat Party. Tucović provided financial means for Golubić's subsistence and once paid him a visit in Paris. The latter was in close touch with other Black Handers as well, and Simić in particular. In one of Simić's letters to Pilac, he confirmed that he had received a cheque in Golubić's

⁴⁸ Ibid. 14434/4229, Report of Colonel Josif Kostić to the Command of the City of Belgrade, strictly confidential, no. 1881, 6 November 1919; and Commander of the City of Belgrade, Colonel Dragutin Uzun Mirković to Army and Navy Minister, confidential F.A.o.br.41353, 7 November 1919.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 14434/3220, Biographical note on Mustafa Golubić.

⁵⁰ Nikolić, *Boljševizacija KPJ*, 137–138.

⁵¹ Vasa Kazimirović, *Crna ruka: ličnosti i događaji u Srbiji od majskeg prevrata 1903. do soluskog procesa 1917* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 1997), 620.

name – it is not clear if that money came from Tucović or someone else.⁵² It should be noted that Tucović was first sentenced to death at the Salonica trial only to have his sentence relaxed to twenty years in prison. His right to receive state pension, along with that of another initially death sentenced officer Lieutenant-Colonel Velimir Vemić, was not restored before January 1935 after the assassination of King Alexander I Karadjordjević.⁵³ As will be seen, Tucović would again be of assistance to Golubić. Whether their ties stemmed solely from their friendship and Black Hand camaraderie or because of Tucović's involvement with the communist movement remains a moot point. Far more certain is the fact that Tucović, just like Golubić, was among those who suffered most at the hands of the regime in Belgrade and that consideration alone probably went a long way to make him eager to contribute to Golubić's cause.

In 1927, Golubić went to Moscow “where he completed some military course and was sent on ‘special assignment’ to Germany. Since then Mustafa has scoured Europe with a false passport in his pocket, carried out his ‘special assignments’ and from time to time come to Moscow for a longer or shorter vacation”, recorded his close friend Rodoljub Čolaković who spent a lot of time with him during his emigration in the Soviet capital in the 1930s.⁵⁴ This was the start of an extraordinary career as an undercover intelligence officer in the Soviet Red Army (“IV department”) that turned Golubić into something of a legendary figure for his friends and acquaintances among Yugoslav communists.⁵⁵ Stevan Dedijer, brother of Vladimir Dedijer, a close associate and later biographer of Tito, the communist dictator of Yugoslavia, helped Golubić to hide from the FBI in America for two months after the latter had abducted an American citizen (Kuntz) and smuggled him into Moscow. According to Dedijer's information, he assassinated people for the Soviets and even “took part in the murder of Stalin's opponent Leon Trotsky in Mexico”.⁵⁶ In Paris,

⁵² ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/561, Simić to Pilac, private, no date.

⁵³ Ibid. 14434/3213, Amnesty for Vladimir Tucović and Velimir Vemić, 31 January 1935.

⁵⁴ Rodoljub Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, 3 vols (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1980), II, 93–94.

⁵⁵ Ibid. III, 404. His life has even been the subject of a dramatic play in Sead Trhulj, *Mustafa Golubić: čovjek konspiracije* (Belgrade: Partizanska knjiga, 1986). The second part of the book provides explanations for acts in the play with plenty of historical information based on recollections of Golubić's friends. Plenty of material can also be found in Djurica Labović, *Tajne misije Mustafe Golubića* (Belgrade: Beletra, 1990).

⁵⁶ Stevan Dedijer, *Špijun kojeg smo voljeli* (Zagreb: VBZ, 2011), 122–123; Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, III, 409, confirms that Golubić stayed in the USA for a

Golubić became inseparable friends with a physics student and fellow communist Čedomilj Popović, a brother-in-law of Apis's nephew – this family connection appears to have played some part in the bonding between the two revolutionaries. In fall 1939, Golubić and Popović illegally crossed into Yugoslavia. The former removed his black glasses and started to freely walk across Belgrade after the putsch of 27 March 1941. Golubić stayed in Belgrade after the German forces had occupied the country and set up an intelligence centre for the Soviets. When the Germans undertook large-scale arrests of communists in connection with the impending aggression against the USSR in late May, Golubić and Popović were supposed to move in a place on the Zlatibor Mountain which Vladimir Tucović had prepared for them, but they did not do so.⁵⁷ This was another occasion on which Tucović provided valuable help to his former Black Hand comrade although this time it turned out to be in vain. Golubić was arrested on 6 June 1941 together with his hosts, the Višnjevac family, and the same happened to Popović three days later. Despite all the torture by Gestapo interrogators, Golubić remained firm and did not even admit his real name. Nevertheless, Dragi Jovanović, the head of the special police department in Belgrade during the occupation, recognised him as a dangerous communist whose activities he had followed for nearly two decades.⁵⁸ Finally, Golubić was shot and buried somewhere in a park in central Belgrade. Not even his death passed without controversy. Milovan Djilas, one of Tito's close associates, recalled that Golubić had been hostile to the leadership of the Yugoslav communists which feared that he could create trouble for them in Moscow. The Yugoslav communists thus followed him and were even prepared to kill him if he "proved to be a Trotskyite". They took his photos and showed them to Tito who recognised him as a high-profile secret agent, no doubt from his days in Moscow, and ordered that he be left alone.⁵⁹ The mystery surrounding Golubić's last months in Belgrade only served to enhance the myth of this elusive individual.

Looking back at the destinies of a few prominent Black Handers following the Salonica trial and the death of their three friends including their leader Apis, it should be noted that they proved to be a fairly close-knit group even at the time of hardship. "Every member of the organisation is obliged to provide any kind of assistance to a comrade", read one of the

few months and saw Dedijer and Srdjan Prica there.

⁵⁷ ASANU, Živanović Papers, 14434/3220, Biographical note on Mustafa Golubić; also 14434/701, Biographical note on Golubić by Vladimir Tucović.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*; also Čolaković, *Kazivanje o jednom pokoljenju*, III, 606–608.

⁵⁹ Milovan Djilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 375–376.

articles of the Rules of Procedure of the Black Hand.⁶⁰ The members indeed lived up to this obligation. They found themselves in a difficult situation in the newly-created Yugoslav state for which they had shed blood and considerably contributed to its coming into being only to become outcasts, subversive elements on which the authorities kept a watchful eye. The remaining Black Handers stood and worked together to bring about a revision of the Salonica trial, rehabilitate their fallen friends and restore their own reputation and social standing. However, the regime was too strong and had too much of a vested interest to allow them any kind of satisfaction which would at the same time mean a confession of its own sins.

In this uneven struggle, some of the Black Handers headed by Milan Gr. Milovanović Pilac gave in and abandoned their demands in return for a peaceful existence and lenient attitude on the part of the government. Pilac passed away in 1933 in a large farm in Vojvodina in which he worked as a superintendent; Lazarević dedicated himself to studying and writing about the history of recent wars. Some of them not just made peace with the authorities but also reacquired a prominent status within government establishment — Janković had a fairly successful diplomatic stint. The disappearance of King Alexander, whom the Black Handers regarded as personal enemy — Nikola Pašić died in 1926 — and the more liberal regime of the Regency enabled even those more intransigent, like Simić, to end their emigration and be eventually granted amnesty. However, the likes of Simić, Tucović and, in particular, Golubić remained much more embittered and their frustration took the shape of a left-wing opposition ranging from republicanism to outright communism. A recent study has noted that Golubić even organised his intelligence network in Belgrade on the pattern of small separate groups as had been the case with the Black Hand.⁶¹

After the Second World War, the new communist regime in Yugoslavia took a favourable view of the Black Hand and its national revolutionary struggle, but most of all embraced its hostile attitude towards King Alexander and Pašić. The surviving Black Handers who had demonstrated their leftist convictions before the war were included in the government. Having handed his resignation to the royal exile-government, Simić returned to Yugoslavia and became a member of AVNOJ, the main legislative and executive organ of the communist authorities, in 1945 and later a member of the provisional National Assembly. He was also appointed Ambassador to Turkey from which position he was retired and lived until 1966.

⁶⁰ Živanović, *Pukovnik Apis*, 672.

⁶¹ Kosta Nikolić, *Mit o partizanskom jugoslovenstvu* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2015), 25.

Just like Simić, Tucović was a member of AVNOJ in 1945 and then of the provisional National Assembly; he died in 1947. Gojković was also elected a member of the latter organ in 1945 and then received in the Yugoslav Army where he had a nice career until his retirement in 1948.⁶² Tito's communists cared little for historical truth but rather seized an opportunity to utilise a retrial to Apis and others in 1953, something that their friends had long sought, in order to defame the royal Yugoslavia and her government. The verdicts from the Salonica Trial were annulled.⁶³ The controversy surrounding that dubious trial marked the accused individuals for life and involved them in often dirty political struggle. For those personally affected, it was, as has been seen, not just a matter of setting the historical record straight, but also a driving force behind their political activity which was by no means insignificant and without interests for the history of Yugoslavia.

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⁶² For biographical information in this paragraph see Živanović, *Pukovnik Apis*, 659, 664, and *Srpski biografski rečnik* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 2014), 731–732.

⁶³ Živanović, *Pukovnik Apis*, 619–637; David MacKenzie, *The Exoneration of the "Black Hand"*, 1917–1953 (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1998).

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