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Većeslav Holjevac – Forgotten Dissident

IZVLEČEK

VEĆESLAV HOLJEVAC – POZABLJENI DISIDENT

Hrvaški politik Većeslav Holjevac (1917–1970) velja za enega najuspešnejših županov mesta Zagreb. Kljub temu sta njegova osebnost in politično delo javnosti danes malo znana. Njegove zasluge na kulturnem področju so šle večinoma v pozabo, prav tako pa tudi dejstvo, da je bil edenn najpomembnejših hrvaških disidentov. Njegov primer razkriva vprašanje hrvaškega gibanja za nacionalno reformo, znanega pod imenom Hrvaška pomlad. Zaradi močnega značaja ga ni bilo strah braniti lastnih stališč celo v bojih s tovariši komunisti, ki so zasedali pomembnejše funkcije v hierarhiji Zveze komunistov Jugoslavije, kar je povzročilo njegov politični zaton. Članek predstavlja ključne trenutke njegovih disidentskih in političnih nesoglasij s tovariši, zaradi katerih si je v partiji prislužil status odpadnika. Prav tako obravnava trditve, da naj bi Holjevac postal vodja Hrvaške pomladi.

Ključne besede: Većeslav Holjevac, disident, Zveza komunistov Jugoslavije, Komunistična partija Hrvaške, Hrvaška pomlad

ABSTRACT

Croatian politician Većeslav Holjevac (1917–1970) has been remembered as one of the most successful mayors of the city of Zagreb. However, his character and political work are scarcely known to the public today. His merits in the cultural sphere are mostly forgotten, as well as the fact that he was one of the most important Croatian dissidents. His case delineates the issue of the Croatian national reform movement known as the Croatian Spring. Due to his solid character he was not afraid to defend his standpoints, even in the fights with communist comrades who were higher in the hierarchy of the League of Communists

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of Yugoslavia, which caused his political decline. The article presents the critical moments of his dissent and political disagreement with his comrades that led him to the role of the party renegade. The article also discusses the claims that Holjevac was to become the leader of the Croatian Spring.

Keywords: Većeslav Holjevac, dissident, League of Communists of Yugoslavia, League of Communists of Croatia, Croatian Spring

Introduction

Većeslav Holjevac is partially known in Croatian history, primarily as one of the most beloved mayors of the City of Zagreb. The public image of Holjevac is mostly positive and often reduced to the successful urban development of Zagreb. His political career was promising at one point, but progressively faded and was finally over in 1967 due to his disagreement with some of his communist comrades who were higher in the hierarchy. In this article, I will try to show the key moments in his life that directed him to the path of the Party renegade. I will try to elucidate the reasons for his political decline and to show what kind of dissident he was.

There is not much written about Većeslav Holjevac as a dissident. Moreover, there are very few scientific papers written about him at all. To date, there is no historiographically relevant biography of his. The only monograph dedicated to him *Većeslav Holjevac: builder, visionary, warrior*, edited by Juraj Hrženjak,¹ includes some valuable articles and data but it cannot be considered a historiographical biography. The most serious monograph about Holjevac is the MA thesis written by Iva Kraljević, who analysed his presidency of the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia (EFC) in the period 1964-1968.² Unfortunately, it has not yet been published as a book, so its availability is quite weak. Holjevac was not much elaborated in the scientific articles as well, except for a few valuable articles by Iva Kraljević³ and the article written by Katarina Spehnjak on Holjevac in 1967.⁴ Besides, information about Holjevac can be found in several obituaries and small articles written in his memory,⁵ of which Slavko Goldstein's was

1 Juraj Hrženjak, ed., *Većeslav Holjevac: graditelj, vizionar, ratnik* (Zagreb: Savez antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Republike Hrvatske; Multigraf Marketing, 2006).

2 Iva Kraljević, "Većeslav Holjevac – predsjednik Matice iseljenika Hrvatske 1964. – 1968" (Magistarski rad, Sveučilište u Zagrebu, 2007).

3 Iva Kraljević, "Matica iseljenika Hrvatske 1964. – 1968.," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 41, No. 1 (2009): 71–92. Iva Kraljević, "Uloga Komande grada Zagreba u životu Grada prvih poslijeratnih mjeseci 1945. godine," in: 1945. – *Razdjelnica hrvatske povijesti*, eds. Nada Kisić Kolanović et al. (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2006), 451–61.

4 Katarina Spehnjak, "Većeslav Holjevac u političkim događajima 1967. godine," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 32, No. 3 (2000): 567–96.

5 The list of obituaries can be found in *Hrvatski biografski leksikon*, Većeslav Holjevac, accessed July 26, 2017, <http://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=67>.

the most informative.⁶ Some sporadic information about him can be found in the published diaries and memoirs of his contemporaries.⁷

As far as the available resources are concerned, several important archival funds are consulted for writing this paper. I used three archival funds of the Croatian State Archives (HR HDA). The fund of the Central Committee (CC) of the League of Communists of Croatia (LCC) (HR HDA, 1220), the fund of the Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (SRC) (HR HDA, 1081) and the fund of the Ministry for the newly exempted territories of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY) (HR HDA, 1086). In the State Archives in Zagreb (HR DAZG), I consulted the People's Committee of the City of Zagreb archival fund (HR DAZG, 37). As a source for some of the data, I used the interview Tatjana Holjevac (daughter of Većeslav) gave on the radio show *Historical Controversies*.⁸ I also used Većeslav Holjevac's interviews he gave to the press in the 1960s, as well as some books and articles that directly or indirectly referred to Holjevac.

Military and Political Career

Većeslav Holjevac was born in Karlovac on August 22, 1917, in a family of workers. He attended high school in his native city, but due to the difficult financial situation, he had to quit school and become a commercial assistant. The then difficult situation of the entire working class led him to engage in the struggle for workers' rights, so he soon joined and became an active member of several trade unions. In the summer of 1939 he became a member of the Communist Party of Croatia (CPC),⁹ and in early 1941 he was a member of the CPC's District Committee for Karlovac.¹⁰

At the beginning of the Second World War in Yugoslavia in 1941 he was a soldier of the regular army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia stationed in Zagreb area, near Samobor. After the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia on April 10, 1941, Holjevac organized the escape of a group of prisoners from Samobor and walked more than 50 km to Karlovac.¹¹ As a member of the Military Committee of the CPC's District Committee for Karlovac, Kordun and Banija, he was one of the organizers of the Partisan uprising in Kordun.¹² In the fall of 1942, Holjevac became Commissar of the Second Operation Zone and from the end of 1942 to 1945, the Commissar of the First Corps of the People's Liberation Army of Croatia, which, at the same time, was the Fourth Shock Corps of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia.¹³

6 Slavko Goldstein, "Nacrt za Vecinu biografiju," *Kritika* 3, No. 14 (1970): 618–27; this article was also published in Hrženjak, *Većeslav Holjevac*.

7 See for example Savka Dabčević Kučar, '71. Hrvatski snovi i stvarnost (Zagreb: Interpublic, 1997).

8 "Povijesne kontroverze" (radio show), *Third program of Croatian Radio*, November 17, 2017.

9 Većeslav Holjevac, *Zapisi iz rodnog grada* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, 1972), 48.

10 Milan Bekić, Ivo Butković and Slavko Goldstein, *Okrug Karlovac 1941*. (Zagreb: Institut za historiju radničkog pokreta, 1965), 21.

11 Holjevac, *Zapisi iz rodnog grada*, 71–84.

12 Bekić, Butković and Goldstein, *Okrug Karlovac 1941*, 238–42.

13 Hrženjak, *Većeslav Holjevac*, 154–57.

When the Partisan units entered Zagreb in May 1945, Holjevac participated in the final battles for the liberation of Trieste and Istria as Commissar of the Fourth Corps of the Yugoslav Army. However, the Command of the City of Zagreb was formed in Topusko during the war operations, and Holjevac was, as a lieutenant general, scheduled to become its commander.¹⁴ He took the command of the City of Zagreb on May 9, 1945.¹⁵ He performed the duty until the end of July 1945 when he was appointed deputy commander (he later became commander) of the Military Administration of the Yugoslav Army for Istria and the Slovene Littoral.¹⁶ From 1947 to 1948 he was the head of the Military Mission of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY) in Berlin.

In 1948 Holjevac completed his military career and started his political career on a high level. He was a member of the Central Committee of the CPC,¹⁷ a member of the Parliament of the People's Republic of Croatia (PRC) from 1947 until his death, a member of the Federal Assembly (of the FPRY), and served as a minister in the Federal Government in several mandates.¹⁸ In 1948, he was appointed Minister of the newly established federal Ministry for the Newly Liberated Territories. His primary task was the organization of state administration and economy in Istria and the Slovene Littoral regions that were annexed to the FPRY based on a peace agreement with Italy.¹⁹ He was in charge until 1950 when he was appointed Minister of Labor in the Federal Government. In 1951, he was appointed Minister of Transport and Maritime Affairs of the PRC's Government. In autumn 1952 he became the President of the People's Committee of Zagreb, which was equivalent to today's duty of the mayor of Zagreb.²⁰ Holjevac's mayoral mandate, which lasted more than a decade, was marked by significant projects that accelerated the development of Zagreb.²¹ He was in the mayoral position until the abolition of the People's Committees as administrative-representative bodies in 1963.²²

14 F. Kiseljak, "Zapisi i intervjui Većeslava Holjevca: Tri puta u Zagrebu," *Večernji list* (Zagrebačko izdanje), July 13, 1970, 4.

15 Kraljević, "Uloga Komande grada Zagreba," 452.

16 HR HDA, 1220, Dispatch Books of the Central Committee's Organizational Instructional Administration 1943 – 1946, book No. 1, dispatch No. 1037, July 23, 1945. According to Kraljević, "Uloga Komande grada Zagreba," 460.

17 The Communist Party of Croatia (CPC) changed its name to League of Communists of Croatia (LCC) in 1952.

18 See Holjevac files in the files of the PRC's Parliament members in HR HDA, 1081, box. 1768, 1773, 1778, 1790, 1793.

19 HR HDA, 1086, box. 1.

20 HR DAZG, 37, Sessions of representative bodies, Minutes of the meetings of the People's Committee of the City of Zagreb, book 15, 1952, Short record of the 23rd Session held on October 6-7, 1952.

21 More about his mayoral mandate and city projects see Josip Mihaljević, "Stota obljetnica rođenja Većeslava Holjevca (1917. – 1970.)," *Zagreb moj grad* (Zagreb) 11, No. 64 (2017): 6–11. Ivo Goldstein, "Novo lice grada," in: Goran Hutinec and Ivo Goldstein, *Povijest grada Zagreba*, vol. 2 (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2013), 174–241. Marko Blažević, "Vizionar suvremenog Zagreba," in: *Holjevac, graditelj, vizionar, ratnik*, 42–44.

22 The function that was previously performed by the People's Committee was taken over by the City Assembly. The president of the City Assembly took over mayoral duties. Holjevac was not even elected to the City Assembly. HR DAZG, 37, Sessions of representative bodies, Joint Sessions of the City Council and the Council of Producers, book 94.

Party Conflicts and Disagreements

Slavko Goldstein believes that the first signs of Holjevac's disagreements with his Party comrades emerged in the period of the Second World War. He states that, after Vladimir Bakarić left his position as a political commissar of the Main Headquarters of Croatia in 1944, Holjevac was supposed to fill that position. He was the Commissar of the First Corps (the largest formation of the Croatian Partisan Army) and was then a Party member who had most experience as commissar and the one with the best reputation.²³ However, instead of Holjevac, Rade Žigić, former Commissar of the 6th (Lika) Division, which was a part of the Corps Holjevac commanded. So, Žigić was a person who was directly subordinate to Holjevac. Goldstein finds this "skipping" of Holjevac problematic: *"In the absence of a document that would give a reliable answer, we can only speculate: allegedly Veco²⁴ was not orthodox enough, he was not sufficiently 'red' commissar, in the Soviet sense of the word. Alternatively, perhaps he was skipped because of the national key. Due to the relatively large number of Serbs in the Partisan Army of Croatia, a Serb should have come to one of the most important positions? Or Veco was simply considered to be too young for such a duty."*²⁵

According to Slavko Goldstein, first Holjevac's significant disagreement with the party hierarchy after the war occurred at the Third Congress of LCC, which was held in May 1954. At that time Marijan Stilinović, member of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of LCC, due to his liberal attitudes was removed from the political leadership and political life.²⁶ Contrary to usual practice, Holjevac continued to maintain close relations with Stilinović, who was his friend and neighbour. According to Goldstein, this was a sufficient reason for the directive which came from the top, not to choose Holjevac for his next mandate in the Central Committee.²⁷ Although we cannot be sure that this was the reason, the fact is that Holjevac's absence from the next Central Committee was quite surprising given his reputation at that time.

Holjevac was known as an active person who skillfully avoided bureaucratic and formal obstacles. *Nova Hrvatska*, a journal of Croatian emigres in an article about Holjevac's sudden death in 1970, says: "In organisational works, he had no peers. As very few of them, he had succeeded in avoiding the influence of the communist bureaucracy that kills any initiative."²⁸ In that sense, his conflict with centralist bureaucracy was most important. That bureaucracy was considered an obstacle for Yugoslavia's progress, especially in Croatia and Slovenia. Many Croatian communists thought Croatia was investing too much in federal funds and the capital of Yugoslavia (Belgrade) while other republic centres were unjustly lagging behind. As a Mayor of Zagreb, Holjevac

23 Goldstein, "Nacrt za Vecinu biografiju," 621.

24 Veco was the nickname of Većeslav Holjevac.

25 Goldstein, "Nacrt za Vecinu biografiju," 621.

26 Zdenko Radelić, "Đilasovci u Hrvatskoj i hrvatska historiografija," in: *Disidentstvo u suvremenoj povijesti*, eds. Nada Kisić Kolanović et al. (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2010), 63.

27 Goldstein, "Nacrt za Vecinu biografiju," 626.

28 "Iznenadna smrt Većeslava Holjevca," *Nova Hrvatska* 12, No. 2-3 (August 1970): 5, 6.

had shown that it was possible to develop other cities, their industry and infrastructure, despite the opposition of the centralist bureaucracy.

Moving the Zagreb Fair to a new location was the risky undertaking of Većeslav Holjevac. Namely, in the fall of 1955, Holjevac found out that Belgrade was planning to build a new trade fair that was supposed to have an international character and should become the central fair event for the whole of Yugoslavia. This meant that the Zagreb Fair would have lost its significance and probably had been abolished as redundant, although it had a long tradition.²⁹ Moreover, Zagreb would face an even higher degree of isolation. The Croatian Communist leadership did not see any problem in this, because they thought it reasonable for Belgrade, as the capital of Yugoslavia, to take precedence. Holjevac recognised the situation as a potential threat to the development and significance of Zagreb and reacted. He knew that the then location of the Zagreb Fair (Savska cesta) in the centre of the city was perspectiveless because the Fair could not spread due to the lack of space. He took full responsibility and decided to build a new fair at another, more favourable location. He neglected the five-year plan and ordered the entire Zagreb's constructional industry to build the Zagreb Fair on the southern shore of Sava in only one year. Numerous associates told him that this was an impossible mission, especially because the project did not have the financial support of the state.³⁰ However, the construction was completed within the deadline due to the maximum engagement, but also the financing model in which the states that were supposed to exhibit in Zagreb Fair build their pavilions themselves.³¹

Moving to a new location allowed the Zagreb Fair to remain the leading trade fair in Yugoslavia, which was not in favour of centralist-oriented politicians who, according to some opinions, have since become extremely dissatisfied with Holjevac. Moreover, Aleksandar Ranković, the most significant representative of the centralist circles within the top hierarchy of the Party, a longtime minister of interior, who had the greatest influence on the notorious State Security Administration (*Uprava državne bezbednosti* - UDBA), allegedly directly threatened Holjevac. A very well-informed journal of Croatian emigres *Nova Hrvatska*, wrote about Holjevac's conflict with Ranković saying that Holjevac risked his life in the case of Zagreb Fair.³² In 1972, at the Zagreb District Court on the trial that was conducted against Franjo Tuđman, Tuđman said that Holjevac was threatened with potential persecution "because he was building a new trade fair without permission and because he retained in Zagreb the money that was supposed to go to the federal government."³³

According to Tatjana Holjevac's testimony³⁴ Aleksandar Ranković threatened Holjevac that he would face the consequences if he builds a new trade fair in Zagreb. She said in the interview that the whole Holjevac family was monitored and

29 Mihaljević, "Stota obljetnica rođenja," 8, 9.

30 Ivan Strižić, *Hrvatski portreti: lice i naličje hrvatskoga bića*, 2nd ed. (Zagreb: DoNeHa, 1996), 282, 283.

31 Rikard Štajner, "Skok preko Save," in: *Holjevac, graditelj, vizionar, ratnik*, 49.

32 "Iznenadna smrt Većeslava Holjevca," 5, 6.

33 Franjo Tuđman, *Usudbene povjesticke* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 1995), 258.

34 "Povijesne kontroverze."

eavesdropped by UDBA.³⁵ Furthermore, she said that Ranković threatened Holjevac saying: “The Fair will go to Belgrade or you will go to Goli Otok!”³⁶ However, military general Ivan Gošnjak, federal secretary of defense, protected Holjevac by managing him a meeting with Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito. After four-hour talks, Tito gave support for the construction of the new Zagreb Fair.

There are no documents available which can confirm that Ranković’s threat happened. Holjevac was a relatively high-rank politician and respected person, with a big reputation as people’s hero to be openly threatened. However, if we have in mind Ranković’s way of action, it is not impossible that he threatened Holjevac. As a long-time head of UDBA and internal affairs, Ranković used these institutions not only against the enemies of the state or the enemies of the ruling Communist Party but also as a means of control within the Party. At the time of Ranković’s political peak, there was a belief that he and his service keep the files on his comrades and that, if necessary, something compromising could be found on almost everyone.³⁷ In that sense, he could have some file on Holjevac and some dangerous material against him. Perhaps this might have been the fact that Holjevac’s older brother Leon was a member of the Croatian Home Guard. At the end of the war, he even gained a military rank, although he did not participate in any military action, but earned the rank as a musician playing in the military orchestra.³⁸ In his memoirs, Holjevac describes his brother as a man who was interested only in music, not in politics.³⁹ In the last days of the war, the Partisans captured him somewhere near Zagreb and killed him. It was never established where and how he was killed. Većeslav could not find him and save him.⁴⁰ The death of Leon was a taboo topic in Holjevac’s family. Tatjana Holjevac said that her mother, Nada, did not allow her children to talk about Leon, as well as about Milovan Dilas or Andrija Hebrang until they became grown-ups.⁴¹ By all accounts, the fact that his brother was a member of Croatian Home Guard and killed by the partisans could have been information which Ranković could use against Holjevac.

One of the key questions of Holjevac’s biography is why did not he get a new mayoral mandate in Zagreb? His mandate expired in October 1963. According to many of his contemporaries, although his results in Zagreb were remarkable, his political views, Croatian patriotism and enormous popularity in the Croatian capital city were

35 UDBA’s file on Holjevac could not be found in the Croatian State Archives where that kind of records and other archival material created by UDBA are preserved (Archival fund HR HDA, 1561). It is hard to answer the question of whether the file existed or not, and if it exists why it is not placed in the Croatian State Archives.

36 Goli otok is a small island located in the northern Adriatic Sea which the communist authorities transformed into a secret prison, and labour camp used to incarcerate political prisoners.

37 See for example Josip Mihaljević, “Razilaženja u SKJ - marginalizacija Vicka Krstulovića,” in: *Disidentstvo u suvremenoj povijesti*, eds. Nada Kisić Kolanović, Zdenko Radelić, Katarina Spahnjak (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2010), 259.

38 “Povijesne kontroverze”.

39 His memoirs (*Zapisi iz rodnog grada*), which he prepared for printing before his death, were published posthumously in 1972.

40 Goldstein, “Nacrt za Vecinu biografiju,” 622.

41 “Povijesne kontroverze.”

not met with sympathies in the centralist circles in the Party leadership.⁴² Holjevac's emphasis on the need for stronger integration of Croatia was a thorn in centralists' side. In an interview he gave while he was still the head of Zagreb, he said that Zagreb needs to use its position more actively and to become a connecting point for all parts of Croatia and that it is a "great harm for Zagreb and for the whole community that we do not yet have modern road connections with Dalmatia."⁴³ Whether due to disagreement with individuals in the Party or for some other reason, the fact is that the Presidency of the Central Committee of LCC did not propose Holjevac for a new mayoral mandate.⁴⁴

After his mayoral mandate, Holjevac continued his political career as a member of the SRC's Parliament, member of the Executive Council of the Parliament, and in 1964 was elected as the new president of the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia (EFC). Although Holjevac's work in the EFC was considered by many as marginal, in the four-year period, he developed a significant activity in connecting the Croatian diaspora with their homeland. He extended the EFC's scope and activities. By the end of 1967 EFC co-operated with about a hundred emigrant organisations and more than five thousand individuals. At the time, Holjevac published his first book, *Croats abroad*.⁴⁵ It was the first systematically written book on Croatian emigrants, in which he reported that more than 25% of Croats live outside Yugoslavia.

Two significant conflicts that caused his final political decline happened during his mandate in EFC. In 1966, as the president of the Božidar Adžija Awards⁴⁶ Committee, Holjevac insisted on awarding Gajo Petrović and Milan Kangrga. They were part of the intellectual circle gathered around the critically oriented journal *Praxis*,⁴⁷ and as such, the highest Party officials considered their philosophical books unsuitable for the prize. The Party leaders considered their social criticism destructive.⁴⁸ In May 1966, the Secretariat of the LCC's City Committee of Zagreb wrote a complaint with objections regarding the award criteria and the case was discussed at the meeting of the Executive Committee of the CC LCC.⁴⁹ The Executive Committee rated the deci-

42 This is also one of the motifs of the novel by Josip Barković, *Rasplet u Rimu: roman o Zagrebačkom velesajmu* [Denouement in Rome: a novel about the Zagreb Fair] (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 2002), in which the author presents the conflict between the advocates of more liberal political and economic ideas, and the orthodox communist bureaucrats, who supported central planning in economy and total control in social life.

43 Kiseljak, "Zapisi i intervjui Većeslava Holjevca," 4.

44 Kraljević, "Većeslav Holjevac – predsjednik Matice iseljenika Hrvatske," 17, 18. Barković, *Rasplet u Rimu*, 143, 144.

45 Većeslav Holjevac, *Hrvati izvan domovine* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1967).

46 It was the highest state award for scientific and cultural achievements.

47 More on Praxis intellectuals see Albert Bing, "Praxis and Korčula Summer School Collection," *COURAGE Registry*, 2018, accessed August 29, 2018, <http://cultural-opposition.eu/registry/?uri=http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n31917&type=collections>.

48 Dunja Bonacci Skenderović, "Radio Slobodna Europa o sukobima jugoslavenske vlasti i časopisa Praxis (1972. – 1975.)," in: *Dijalog povjesničara – istoričara* 8, eds. Hans Georg Fleck and Igor Graovac (Zagreb: Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, 2004), 283. Kraljević, "Matica iseljenika Hrvatske 1964. – 1968.," 88.

49 HR HDA, 1220, Executive Council, Commission for the Examination of Nationalist Phenomena in the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia 1964-1967, box. 30, Controversy over the 'Božidar Adžija' Awards in 1966, Record No. 02-413/1-1966, May 7, 1966.

sion to award the Praxis intellectuals as a “direct attack on CC LCC and the policy of LCC.”⁵⁰ The Party critique was also published in the daily press.⁵¹

Contrary to the Party’s judgement, as the chairman of the Awarding Committee, Holjevac continued to justify the Awarding Committee’s choice. He defended the decision stating that the Awarding Committee was composed of members who were recognised experts and academics.⁵² Because of this, the Republican Chamber of the SRC’s Parliament on the proposal of Miloš Žanko, but in fact on the instruction of Executive Committee of the CC LCC, decided to dismiss Većeslav Holjevac from the position of the chairman of the Awarding Committee. He was prepared to bear the consequences of his actions which is evident “from his indifferent and somewhat disinterested behaviour at the discussion of the Republican Chamber of the SRC’s Parliament.”⁵³

However, this was not the end of Holjevac’s conflicts with higher Party circles. His political downturn was related to Party purges that were conducted in Croatia after the publication of the Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language in March 1967. The Declaration was a manifesto of Croatian linguists who were dissatisfied with the published dictionaries and language praxis in Croatia in which the language was called Serbo-Croatian. Croat scholars gathered around *Matica hrvatska*, the leading cultural institution in Croatia, made the text of the Declaration and it was signed by the Society of Writers of Croatia, and seventeen other Croatian scholar and cultural institutions.⁵⁴

EFC was not a signatory of the Declaration, nor its President Većeslav Holjevac. However, as one of the leading representatives of the national and democratic reform wing of the LCC, Holjevac advocated the defence of Croatian national interests within the Yugoslav federation. For this reason, even though he was not a signatory to the Declaration, he was subjected to a Party investigation as a person whose “behaviour contributed to the appearance of the Declaration.” Paradoxically, the EFC’s Main Committee, led by Holjevac, condemned the adoption and publishing of the Declaration at its regular session on March 30, 1967.⁵⁵ Why did Holjevac find himself in the line of fire? The answer can be found in Vladimir Bakarić’s speech at the meeting of the CC LCC’s Presidency on April 3, 1967. He said: “I was unwilling to

50 HR HDA, 1220, Executive Council, Record of the session of the Executive Council of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia held on May 12, 1966, p. 1: according to Iva Kraljević Bašić, “Većeslav Holjevac i Nagrada fonda Božidar Adžija 1966.,” in: *Disidentstvo u suvremenoj povijesti*, eds. Nada Kisić Kolanović, et al. (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2010), 378.

51 “Kamufilirana politička akcija,” *Vjesnik*, June 25, 1966, I. Cf. Kraljević Bašić, “Većeslav Holjevac i Nagrada fonda Božidar Adžija,” 382.

52 *Ibid.*, 380.

53 *Ibid.*, 383.

54 “Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskog književnog jezika,” *Matica hrvatska*, accessed August 20, 2018, <http://www.matica.hr/kolo/314/Deklaracija%20o%20nazivu%20i%20polo%C5%BEaju%20hrvatskog%20knji%C5%BEevnog%20jezika/>.

55 “Književni jezik Hrvata i Srba,” *Matica* 17, No. 6 (1967): 219. Cf. Marko Samardžija, ed., *Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju Hrvatskog književnog jezika 1967. – 2017.: vijesti komentari, osude, zaključci* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 2017), 291–95.

involve comrade Holjevac into this thing if he has nothing to do with it, but we need to talk about the focal points of nationalism and to establish his attitude towards them.”⁵⁶

Some of Holjevac’s contemporaries, as well as some historians nowadays, believe that Bakarić was the crucial person responsible for Holjevac’s political fall. Josip Boljkovac, Holjevac’s friend and Party comrade, believed that the case of the Božidar Adžija Awards in 1966 was the beginning of the conflict between Holjevac and Bakarić.⁵⁷ Historian Ivo Goldstein claims that Bakarić wanted to eliminate Holjevac because he “bounced out of nomenklatura too much and was too liberal,” but also because Bakarić saw Holjevac as a direct competitor due to his popularity.⁵⁸

The case of Holjevac was also discussed at the Seventh Plenum of the CC LCC held on 19 and 20 April 1967. On that occasion, defending himself from the attack of pro-unitarist politician Miloš Žanko, Holjevac stated that he always sensed his national identity but that at the same time he always condemned chauvinism and nationalism.⁵⁹ The Plenum concluded that the CC LCC’s Executive Committee forms a Commission for the Examination of Nationalist Phenomena in the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia, solely to monitor the activities of the EFC’s president, Većeslav Holjevac and some of his associates and to establishing their political responsibility.⁶⁰

At the end of May 1967, the Commission held talks with Većeslav Holjevac and his associates.⁶¹ On June 22, 1967, the Commission wrote the report, in which it stated that the EFC was “one of the focal points of nationalism”, and accused Holjevac of being responsible for a “nationalist turn,” “an unhealthy climate suitable for further deformation in the EFC,” as well as for attempting to “formalistically justify criticized phenomena and actions.”⁶²

Holjevac was accused of being too openminded towards some Croatian organisations in USA. The authorities considered these organisations extreme and hostile to Yugoslavia. The Commission also held that the appeal for help that EFC sent to emigrants during the flood in Zagreb in 1964 was nationalistic because it was addressed to “Croatian emigrants and other Yugoslav citizens on temporary work abroad.” One

56 Vladimir Bakarić, *Socijalistički samoupravni sistem i društvena reprodukcija, vol. 2* (Zagreb: Informator; Mladost; Svjetlost, 1983), 367.

57 Josip Boljkovac, *Istina mora izaći van: sjećanja i zapisi prvog ministra unutarnjih poslova neovisne Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Golden marketing - Tehnička knjiga, 2009), 144.

58 Ivo Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008* (Zagreb: EPH; Novi Liber, 2008), 492, 493. Cf. Dino Mujadžević, *Bakarić: politička biografija* (Zagreb: Plejada; Hrvatski institut za povijest – Podružnica Slavonski Brod, 2011), 268, 269.

59 *Sedmi plenum CK SK Hrvatske: O međunacionalnim odnosima* (Zagreb: Informativna služba CK SKH, 1967), 70.

60 HR HDA, 1220, Executive Council, Commission for the Examination of Nationalist Phenomena in the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia 1964-1967, box. 30, A conclusion on the basis of a report submitted by the Commission for the Examination of Nationalist Phenomena in the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia, 1967, p. 1.

61 HR HDA, 1220, Executive Council, Commission for the Examination of Nationalist Phenomena in the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia 1964-1967, box. 30, Stenographic log of the conversations conducted by the Commission.

62 HR HDA, 1220, Executive Council, Commission for the Examination of Nationalist Phenomena in the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia 1964-1967, box. 30, Report submitted by the Commission for the Examination of Nationalist Phenomena in the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia, 1967. Cf. Tatjana Šarić, “Commission for the Examination of Nationalist Phenomena in the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia (1964-1967),” *COURAGE Registry*, accessed August 20, 2018, <http://cultural-opposition.eu/registry/?uri=http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n23156&type=collections>.

of Holjevac's "crimes" was the non-attendance on Republic Day celebration in 1966.⁶³ The accusations included the singing of Croatian songs on New Year's Eve.⁶⁴ He was accused of hesitating to condemn the Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language and its signatories, as well as inviting Franjo Tuđman and some other "Croatian nationalists" into EFC's Main Committee.⁶⁵

Holjevac was found guilty of political "deviation" and was suggested to resign from membership in the Central Committee of the LCC.⁶⁶ Consequently, he was forced to resign from the position of EFC's president, but he performed the duty until the election of a new president in 1968.⁶⁷

Was Holjevac Supposed to Become the Leader of the Croatian Spring?

Holjevac's contemporaries knew very soon that he was unfairly accused of being a nationalist.⁶⁸ Miko Tripalo, who at the session of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of LCC on June 27, 1967, discussed the EFC case, said that "Veco is a little bit infected with these nationalistic beliefs" soon changed his views. In the time of the Croatian Spring, at the second session of the LCC's Conference in July 1970, Tripalo said: "we should reconsider some of our decisions from the past regarding the Party relations towards some comrades." Slavko Goldstein thought Tripalo was thinking primarily of Holjevac.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Holjevac enjoyed great reputation and respect among the Serbs in Croatia not only because he was one of the leaders of the anti-fascist uprising in the Kordun area but also after the war because he was a man who understood the essence of the Serbs-Croats relations in Croatia and acted in order to improve relations between them. The case of his insistence on the awards to Gajo Petrović and Milan Kangrga in 1966, confirms, in a way, that the accusation for nationalism was meaningless. Namely, besides the fact that he did not share their viewpoints (Praxis philosophy was opposed to the Croatian national movement), both of them were Serbs.

Holjevac's resignation from membership in the Central Committee of the LCC was the end of his political career. He did not participate in the Croatian Spring in 1971, in which he would probably be one of the most important actors. One can

63 Ibid., 12.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., 13–15. Cf. Tatjana Šarić, "Commission for the Examination of Nationalist Phenomena."

66 HR HDA, 1220, Executive Council, Commission for the Examination of Nationalist Phenomena in the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia 1964-1967, box. 30, A conclusion on the basis of a report submitted by the Commission for the Examination of Nationalist Phenomena in the Emigrant Foundation of Croatia, 1967.

67 Kraljević, "Većeslav Holjevac – predsjednik Matice iseljenika Hrvatske."

68 Goldstein, "Nacrt za Vecinu biografiju," 626.

69 Ironically, Tripalo was one of the Party leaders who in 1967 attacked the adoption of the Declaration and its signatories, and after only a few years, as one of the leaders of the Croatian Spring, he experienced a political fall under the accusations of being a nationalist.

assume this, given his past work, but also because of his attempt to return to the scene in 1969/1970. Namely, in the last year of his life, together with some Croatian intellectuals and economists,⁷⁰ Holjevac participated in the attempt to establish a Croatian Economic Bank that supposed to be independent of Belgrade. They aimed to break the economic and financial inferiority of Croatia within Yugoslavia by financing large infrastructure projects and by encouraging entrepreneurship in Croatia.⁷¹ As the leader of that group, Holjevac had the idea of engaging the Croatian diaspora as a vital financing source for the future bank. He considered that the Croatians who worked abroad would gladly invest their savings in such a bank. The attempt to establish a bank, however, has failed.

Many Croatian emigrants have seen Holjevac as a potential leader of a future Croatian opposition. For example, Ivo Rojnica, wrote in his memoirs that it is “no exaggeration to say that Holjevac, giving his human, intellectual, organisational and political virtues, was potentially the most important man in Croatia.” He saw Holjevac as an ideal person, “not just as the leader of the unofficial opposition, but was also most suitable to take active leadership in Croatia at any time.”⁷²

However, after a shorter illness, Većeslav Holjevac died in Zagreb on July 11, 1970, before his 53rd birthday. He died of cancer after a few weeks of sickness. The mentioned Rojnica wrote in his memoirs in the 1970s that he arranged a meeting with him in July 1970 in a Western European country: “*On the very day when he was supposed to travel, on July 9, he suddenly felt sick and was urgently taken to a hospital, where he died on July 11. It was a public secret that Holjevac was poisoned, and I am giving this historical truth that he died in suspicious circumstances.*”⁷³

This was not just a rumour from emigration, but these scary rumours spread out in Croatia as well, and it can be heard even nowadays. In an interview he gave for the daily newspaper in 2012, Holjevac’s son Veco also expressed the suspicion that his father was poisoned. “*Our family doubt, which was backed up by various evidences we encountered later, is that our father is actually poisoned. When Boljkovac became the first Croatian Minister of Interior, he came to us with the question of whether we want to re-investigate our father’s death. He came of his own initiative, obviously with some solid clues. My sisters and I did not want to start the investigation, because we were aware of the fact that someone will only collect political points in that way, and that our father will never return.*”⁷⁴

According to his son’s suspicions, Većeslav Holjevac was assassinated because he was the most prominent leader of the Croatian reform movement which later

70 Josip Boljkovac, Šime Đodan, Danijel Ivin, Božo Singer, Ante Todorić, Marko Veselica, and Vladimir Veselica.

71 Josip Boljkovac, *Istina mora izaći van: sjećanja i zapisi prvog ministra unutarnjih poslova neovisne Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Golden marketing - Tehnička knjiga, 2009), 139–41. Tihomir Ponoš, “Zašto 1970. nije osnovana Hrvatska gospodarska banka,” in: *Holjevac, graditelj, vizionar, ratnik*, 76–78.

72 Ivo Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji: razdoblje od 1938. do 1975. u mojim sjećanjima*, vol. 2: 1945–1975 (Zagreb: DoNeHa, 1994), 296.

73 Ibid., 299. Cf. Marijan Grakalić, “Je li Holjevac ubijen?” *Globus*, February 28, 1991, 12.

74 In his memoirs published in 2009, Boljkovac mentions nothing on Holjevac being murdered or poisoned. Cf. Boljkovac, *Istina mora izaći van*, 145.

flourished in the Croatian Spring. Moreover, he said that in 1967, in Plješivica the forerunner of the HDZ⁷⁵ was established, which chose his father as its leader, and the whole group later ended up with Franjo Tuđman.⁷⁶

Some authors believe that Holjevac was a potential leader of the Croatian opposition. Ivan Strižić believes that in Belgrade Holjevac was considered “the Croat who would be most likely to become a person who will take over the Croatian helm and therefore he had to be eliminated at any cost.”⁷⁷ He even claims that the motive for the alleged murder was his reputation among Croatian Serbs and his good relations with them. Strižić believes that the supporters of the idea of Greater Serbia wanted to use the Serbs in Croatia for Greater Serbia goals, for which the good cooperation between Croats and Serbs in Croatia was considered an obstacle.⁷⁸

Holjevac belonged to the pro-Croatian circle of Croatian Communists, which, besides politicians and military officers like Ivan Šibl, Ivan Rukavina, Nikola Kajić, and Srećko Manola, included some important intellectuals such as writers Miroslav Krleža and Petar Šegedin, historians Vaso Bogdanov and Franjo Tuđman, artists Vanja Radauš and Krsto Hegedušić. Ivan Šibl mentioned in his memoirs that they were “some silent, sometimes even loud, constructive opposition in the Party,” and that they had, in some issues, views different from the Party line, and that they advocated democratisation and the improvement of the national relations in Yugoslavia.⁷⁹ Some called this group “Krleža’s intellectual circle” or even “Croatian shadow government,” describing it as a “semi-opposition” to Vladimir Bakarić and LCC’s Central Committee.” They were not satisfied with Bakarić’s leadership of the Croatian communists because they considered that “he does not protect Croatian interests sufficiently from the pressures and manipulations from Belgrade.”⁸⁰

Of all the above-mentioned, Holjevac was politically the most popular among Croatian people.⁸¹ Furthermore, he has already made an important step towards connecting the Croatian emigration with the homeland.⁸² Nevertheless, Savka Dapčević Kučar and Miko Tripalo, who couple of years earlier criticised Holjevac of “being infected with nationalist views,” became leaders of the Croatian national movement. It would be interesting to see what role Holjevac would play during the Croatian Spring if he was still alive at the time because he was still quite young but experienced enough.

75 HDZ is an acronym of the Croatian Democratic Union (Croatian: Hrvatska demokratska zajednica - HDZ), a political party founded in 1989 that won the first multi-party elections in Croatia in 1990.

76 Bojana Mrvoš Pavić, “Veco Holjevac: Sumnjam da je moj otac Večeslav otrovan,” *Novi list* (on-line), May 13, 2012, accessed May 27, 2018, <http://novilist.hr/Vijesti/Hrvatska/Veco-Holjevac-Sumnjam-da-je-moj-otac-Veceslav-otrovan>.

77 Strižić, *Hrvatski portreti*, 288.

78 *Ibid.*, 290.

79 Ivan Šibl, *Sjećanja III: Poslijeratni dnevnik* (Zagreb: Globus; Naprijed, 1986), 148.

80 Darko Hudelist, *Tuđman: biografija* (Zagreb: Profil, 2004), 306, 307.

81 Around 30,000 citizens attended his funeral, which was by far the largest funeral in Zagreb after the funeral of Stjepan Radić in 1928. See N. Fiegenwald, “Slava drugu Veci!” *Večernji list* (zagrebačko izdanje), July 14, 1970, 3.

82 It should be mentioned that Franjo Tuđman had his first contacts with Croatian emigrants through Holjevac. See Mate Meštrović, *U vrtlogu hrvatske politike: kazivanje Peri Zlataru* (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 2003), 287. Tuđman’s link with Croatian emigrants may well be a crucial factor for his victory in the first multi-party elections in Croatia in 1990.

Strižić points out that Holjevac was “the source for the generations of young intellectuals and students who were carriers of the Croatian Spring.”⁸³

Conclusion

The analysis of Holjevac’s political carrier confirms the claims that he was a “self-confident person who did not give up his political views.”⁸⁴ Due to these characteristics, he occasionally came into conflicts with some of the leading figures of the then ruling League of Communists of Yugoslavia. Already in 1954, he attracted attention as a person who did not blindly follow the usual party praxis because he did not distance himself from some comrades that were thrown off in Party purges. As a member of the pro-reform and anti-dogmatic wing within the Party, he advocated Yugoslavia’s decentralisation and the equitable development of all its republics and regions. These endeavours of his were in contravention to the aspirations of the intercessors of centralism, primarily in Belgrade. With his actions at the local level, Holjevac irritated centralist circles, even their most important representative - Aleksandar Ranković. Regardless of whether Ranković’s threats were real or not, Holjevac’s insistence on creating the new Zagreb Fair was a move against the will of a party official who was above him in the Party hierarchy. Similar to this was the case of awarding Praxis intellectuals in 1966, in which he ignored the instruction that came from Vladimir Bakarić that they should not be rewarded.

The adoption of the Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language in 1967 was an ideal moment for Bakarić to politically eliminate the disobedient and (perhaps) too popular Holjevac. Although he was not a signatory to the Declaration, the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia, proclaimed Holjevac as a nationalist. Holjevac’s insistence in Croatian patriotism was induced by the feeling that Croatia was withheld in Yugoslavia. That is why his political orientation was a struggle for “fair play politics” (*politika čistih računa*), which was the fundamental orientation of the Croatian Spring movement, which would flare up only a few years later. However, while Savka Dabčević Kučar and Miko Tripalo built up their popularity on that policy, Holjevac suffered a political fall. The difference was that Holjevac, as well as some others of his contemporaries, insisted on it too early, before the time in which it was possible to advocate such agenda publicly. Although he was one of the most popular Croatian politicians among the people, many years of isolation and early death prevented him to participate in the Croatian Spring.

Perhaps this fact holds the answer to the question why Croatian historiography has not published too much on Holjevac. While he was in high politics, he was still relatively young man, and was still relatively young when he experienced his political

⁸³ Strižić, *Hrvatski portreti*, 289.

⁸⁴ Spehnjak, “Većeslav Holjevac u političkim događajima 1967. godine,” 593.

downturn. So, he did not get the satisfaction, which many of his even less deserving party comrades experienced, to see some historians writing about his life. On the other hand, after the collapse of communism and the creation of the Republic of Croatia, Većeslav Holjevac was not perceived as a man meritorious for Croatia's national independence, because he did not participate in the Croatian Spring in 1971. So nowadays, Holjevac is one of the most cherished mayors in Zagreb's history, but he is still forgotten as a dissident.

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Josip Mihaljević

VEĆESLAV HOLJEVAC – FORGOTTEN DISSIDENT

SUMMARY

Croatian politician Većeslav Holjevac (1917–1970) has been remembered as one of the most successful mayors of the city of Zagreb. However, his character and political work are scarcely known to the public today. His merits in the cultural sphere are mostly forgotten, as well as the fact that he was one of the most important Croatian dissidents. The article presents the critical moments of his dissent and political disagreement with his comrades that led him to the role of the party renegade. The first dissident moment of his happened in 1954 when he did not distance himself from Marijan Stilinović, a Party comrade that was thrown off in a Party purge. However, maybe the crucial reason for Holjevac's political decline was his hard advocacy of Yugoslavia's decentralisation and the equitable development of all republics and regions. As a member of the pro-reform and anti-dogmatic wing within the Party, he struggled against the aspirations of the intercessors of centralism. In 1955 Holjevac insisted on creating the new Zagreb Fair, which was a move against the will of Aleksandar Ranković, an influential party official who was above him in the Party hierarchy. Similar to this was the case of awarding Praxis intellectuals with the "Božidar Adžija" Awards in 1966. The highest Party officials considered their philosophical books unsuitable for the highest state prize. Holjevac, who was the president of the "Božidar Adžija" Awards

Committee, ignored the instruction that came from Vladimir Bakarić that they should not be rewarded. The adoption of the Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language in 1967 was an ideal moment for Bakarić to politically eliminate the disobedient and (perhaps) too popular Holjevac. Although he was not a signatory to the Declaration, the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia, proclaimed Holjevac as a nationalist. Holjevac's case delineates the issue of the Croatian national reform movement known as the Croatian Spring. Due to his solid character, he was not afraid to defend his standpoints, even in the fights with communist comrades who were higher in the Party's hierarchy, which caused his political decline. The article also discusses the claims that Holjevac was to become the leader of the Croatian Spring.

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VEĆESLAV HOLJEVAC – POZABLJENI DISIDENT

POVZETEK

Hrvaški politik Većeslav Holjevac (1917–1970) velja za enega najuspešnejših županov mesta Zagreb. Kljub temu sta njegova osebnost in politično delo javnosti danes malo znana. Njegove zasluge na kulturnem področju so šle večinoma v pozabo, prav tako pa tudi dejstvo, da je bil eden najpomembnejših hrvaških disidentov. Članek predstavlja ključne trenutke njegovih disidentskih in političnih nesoglasij s tovariši, zaradi katerih si je v partiji prislužil status odpadnika. Do prvega nesoglasja je prišlo leta 1954, ko se ni oddaljil od partijskega tovariša Marijana Stilinovića, ki je med čistko v partiji izgubil svoj položaj. Morda se ključni razlog za politični propad Holjevca skriva v njegovem zagretemu zagovarjanju decentralizacije Jugoslavije in pravičnega razvoja vseh republik in regij. Kot član krila znotraj partije, ki se je zavzemalo za reforme in zavračalo dogmatska stališča, se je boril proti težnjam zagovornikov centralizma. Leta 1955 se je Holjevac zavzemal za ustanovitev novega zagrebškega sejmišča, kar je bilo v nasprotju z voljo takrat vplivnega partijskega uradnika Aleksandra Rankovića, ki je imel v primerjavi s Holjevcem pomembnejšo funkcijo v partijski hierarhiji. Podobno se je zgodilo leta 1966, ko so intelektualcem iz časnika Praxis podelili nagrado Božidarja Adžije. Najvišji partijski uradniki so namreč menili, da njihove knjige s filozofsko vsebino niso primerne za najvišjo državno nagrado. Holjevac, ki je deloval kot predsednik komiteja za nagrado Božidarja Adžije, ni upošteval navodil Vladimirja Bakarića, naj skupine ne nagradi. Sprejetje deklaracije o imenu in položaju hrvaškega knjižnega jezika iz leta 1967 se je izkazalo kot izvrstna priložnost, s katero je Bakarić neposlušnega in (morda) preveč priljubljenega Holjevca izrinil iz politične sfere. Čeprav Holjevac ni bil med podpisniki deklaracije, ga je Izvršni odbor Centralnega komiteja komunistične

partije Hrvaške označil za nacionalista. Njegov primer odstira vprašanje hrvaškega gibanja za nacionalno reformo, imenovano Hrvaška pomlad. Zaradi močnega značaja ga ni bilo strah braniti svojih stališč celo v bojih s komunističnimi tovariši, ki so zasedali pomembnejše funkcije v hierarhiji partije, kar je povzročilo njegov politični zaton. Članek prav tako obravnava trditve, da naj bi Holjevac postal vodja Hrvaške pomladi.