IVAN MATOVIĆ

IVO LOLA RIBAR

HIS PATH IN LIFE AND REVOLUTIONARY WORK

SAVA PRESS

The Legends Library has been awarded the 4th of July Charter — the highest public recognition for its contribution to nurturing the revolutionary traditions of our nations and nationalities.

This book about Ivo Lola Ribar, the legendary leader of the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (SKOJ), is dedicated by the publisher to the anniversary of the nationwide uprising in Yugoslavia.

IVO LOLA RIBAR

If only we could know —
can the dead rise again?
We would raise our hero,
Comrade Lola, Secretary of SKOJ.
Oh Ivan, leader of the SKOJ members,
the SKOJ members — the bravest fighters.
Comrade Lola, Secretary of SKOJ,
your youth mourns you.
We mourn — we have someone to mourn:
Comrade Lola, your name is immortal.
Youth, we mourn our hero —
avenge him — that is your duty.
Comrade Lola, you surely must know:
The youth will remember you forever.

Folk song

"We love this land, our land, with all the passion of our youth. We love it because it is soaked with the blood of our heroic past, filled with so many struggles for freedom. We love it because it is ours, because we are its future, because we want to live in it, to make it happy and free."

Ivo Lola Ribar, 1939.

Publisher's Note

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A Carefree Childhood in the Home of Freedom Fighters

Ivo Lola Ribar's parents came from two different parts of Croatia: his father Ivan was from a family of teachers in the village of Vukmanić, near Karlovac, and his mother Tonica was from a family of civil servants in the village of Draga, near Sušak.

Ivan Ribar (1881-1968) was one of four children of Andrija, a Kordun-region folk schoolteacher. As an excellent student, he tutored weaker pupils from wealthier families in Karlovac to earn money for books and essential school supplies. From an early age, he cultivated a love of literature and the arts, which he passed on to his sons. While studying law in Zagreb, Vienna and Prague, he supported himself by working as a stenographer.

From the start of the century, as a young man, he was engaged in promoting "a realistic, progressive and positive people's policy and national unity, brotherhood and freedom for our peoples." This marked the beginning of what would become a nearly seven-decade-long political career as a respected democratic politician, lawyer and patriot — a fighter for the social and national liberation of our peoples.

Tonica Šimat, née Petrić, after the death of her first husband Lujo — a pharmacist from Đakovo — moved with her three children to Zagreb. In the midst of the First World War, she married lawyer

and national representative in the Croatian Parliament, Dr. Ivan Ribar. She had met him earlier in Đakovo, where, starting in 1910, he had worked as a law clerk and became a leading figure in the Croat-Serb Coalition.

In the Ribar household, on April 23, 1916, their son Ivo was born. He was entered in the church records as Ivan, and that is how the school system would list him through to the end of his studies. However, in the history of our revolutionary movement, he would be known exclusively and forever as Ivo, with the nickname Lola.

In 1919, "First Lieutenant in the reserve" Dr. Ivan Ribar returned from the war to Đakovo, where his family had moved and grown by one more son, Jurica, born on March 26, 1918. There, Dr. Ribar resumed his legal practice and became a prominent citizen — a leading figure in sports clubs and cultural institutions, and, above all, a vocal advocate of unifying our lands into a common South Slavic state.

In the new country, Dr. Ribar — one of the democratic leaders of the Croatian Parliament — initially joined the Provisional National Assembly. After the November elections of 1920, he became the first president of the Constituent Assembly of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Due to his political responsibilities, he spent most of his time in Belgrade. He visited his family between parliamentary sessions and trips across the country and Europe, until he moved them in 1923 to Čukarica,

then a remote suburb of the city. They moved into a large house in isolation, surrounded by fruit trees, with a spacious yard that was ideal for children's play. In that house, everyone formed a close bond with books. At an early age, Lola learned his first letters from his half-sisters Božena and Mira. He bought his own primer and collected illustrated books full of fantastic stories and poems, which fuelled his imagination and took him on journeys to distant lands and worlds. He read those colourful booklets several times and retold the adventures of their heroes to his brother Jurica, often in the evenings. Sometimes, in front of his father's friends — known politicians and celebrated military leaders — he would recite memorized poems. Even then, he showed a talent for drawing, and, with help from his father — a well-known philatelist — he collected his first postage stamps. This would become one of his distinct and actively pursued hobbies. At the same time, he showed interest in other pleasures that only big cities and well-off families could offer children in those days — watching films, gymnastics competitions, football matches and travel...

The Ribars were a well-off, respected and thoroughly progressive bourgeois family, and they were able to provide their children — city-bred young gentlemen — with excellent conditions for development and a secure start in life. This had a significant impact on the formation of both Lola and Jurica.

An Excellent Student with Wide-Ranging Interests

Lola did not attend the first and second grades of primary school regularly, but in the autumn of 1923, he passed the exams before a commission at the public primary school in Karlovac. During the examinations, he demonstrated an exceptional level of knowledge for his age, along with rare intelligence and resourcefulness. At that time, Lola was just entering his eighth year, while his peers were learning to write their first "slanted, thin, upright, thick, right-curving" letters. He was fortunate: clearly more intelligent and gifted than many, he learned easily and quickly. From the beginning, not only did he have better conditions than others to develop his interests and talents, but he also had the opportunity to show what he knew.

Lola attended third grade in Belgrade, in a primary school building that then bore the name of King Petar, located at today's July 7 Street, number 7. This educational institution, with a long and distinguished tradition, was founded in 1718. Just two years after Lola, his brother Jurica also began attending the same school. In the new Yugoslavia, the school was reopened immediately after the liberation of Belgrade as People's Primary School No. 1, and in 1950 it was renamed "*Braća Ribar*" (Ribar Brothers).

Lola looked forward to going to school. With

the wholehearted support of his parents, he easily mastered the curriculum, especially in history and mathematics. His report card for third grade listed nine top marks and one average (in singing). The following year, he earned top marks in all subjects. From the start of his education, and with the help of his teachers, he studied French, and by the end of primary school, he was already able to read simpler texts and write about the world around him in that language — something that, after further improvement, would prove very useful in secondary school.

According to preserved records and the memories of his classmates, Lola excelled at the Second Boys' Real Gymnasium, which he began attending in the 1926-27 school year. He was never satisfied with textbook knowledge, especially in literature, history and mathematics. Instead, he sought out additional reading to gain a broader and deeper understanding of the material. He also participated in many school clubs, where he continued to develop his talents. Thus, as Jozo Petričević — arguably his best biographer — notes, Lola, during his high school years, learned not only French and Esperanto but also German, English and Russian with the help of his teachers, and Italian with the help of his mother, Tonica.

The Second Boys' Gymnasium was also known for a number of brilliant lecturers and excellent educators who helped their students embark on wide intellectual paths and engage with the life-giving currents of culture. Lola won them over with his

wide range of interests and wealth of knowledge, and often surprised them with "challenging" questions and his persistence in clearing up every doubt. He was also willing to engage in classroom discussions with his professors, undeterred by their authority. This was something the classical school system of the time did not tolerate. Had Lola not been the son of one of the capital's most influential politicians, he might well have faced serious consequences. Of course, Lola would not have been true to himself if he had relied on his father's reputation or hidden behind it — but the "Old Man" was, objectively speaking, always present. This unique young man was allowed to say or do things for which the son of a law clerk might have received the lowest conduct grade — or even been expelled.

Lola was especially active in the "Vuk Karadžić" student literary society, which he led as president for nearly two years — right after the January 6th Dictatorship, during which the Communist Party and League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (SKOJ) used legal organizations like these to spread their ideas and nurture future recruits. A devoted "Vuk member," Lola organized literary evenings, gathered young writers, and presented his own critical essays on various authors and their works. In discussions, he stood out for his intellectual insight, serious tone, breadth of knowledge and eloquence — the ability to express his thoughts beautifully, without notes, improvising answers in debates on complex topics in social literature, often touching

on social reform and visions of a very different future.

Lola's love for his mother tongue and literature was particularly encouraged in Grades 7 and 8 by Professor Miloš Savković — a well-known literary critic and aesthete, as well as a revolutionary and Marxist, who, like his beloved student, would later give his life for the ideals of the revolution. According to accounts, Savković had a profound impact on Lola's literary choices, the development of his writing style, the shaping of his thoughts and his oratory skills. The professor saw in Lola a gifted young man with a wealth of knowledge, healthy ambition and a curious, critical spirit — and Lola, in turn, saw in his teacher a skilled expert, a talented critic and a captivating conversationalist in long dialogues about various writers, their creative output, values and messages.

Largely influenced by Professor Savković and inspired by the ideas he encountered in both domestic and world literature, Lola, along with his brother Jurica and several school friends, founded the literary club "*Relit*" (Realist Literature). The name reflected the founders' core idea — to, as Lola wrote in the first issue of the club's journal, "write sincerely and portray the real truth." The first editors of *Relit* were Lola and his classmate and closest friend, Milovan Matić Lule. Among the first members were Lola's brother Jurica and future painter Aleksa Čelebonović, among others.

On the front cover of the 1932 edition of *Re-*

lit (only two issues were ever published), there is a drawing of a train headed into the infinite — drawn by Jurica, who was clearly a talented artist. For the founders and publishers of *Relit,* this image symbolized "the conquering of space and new journeys."

During this period, Lola also wrote poetry — his father was his first and rather strict critic. Unfortunately, his poems, like many of his essays, were lost forever in the war.

As a high school student, Lola also contributed to *Novi List* in Sušak, a publication from his mother's home region. The preserved works include the short story "The End" and the tale "Destiny." Both — particularly the latter — bear witness to Lola's undeniable literary talent and spiritual maturity, even though he was only 16 years old.

The Open and Warm Ribar Family Home

As a secondary school student, Lola could fluently read in five European languages and speak three or four. This allowed him to read world literature in the original, drawing on the extensive library of his father, which was continually expanded after each of his travels, or ordered later by his sons following their own trips across Europe. Their parents had taken or sent them on such travels starting after Lola's third year of gymnasium. He read books and shared their content and ideas

with friends who gathered daily at the Ribars' open home, then located at 32 Francuska Street. From an early age, he enjoyed having his friends over, although he sometimes displayed an overly cautious attitude when choosing whom to invite. There, they would engage in discussions about the themes of social literature, with Lola being the most articulate and outspoken. These conversations were never idle — the young men took their time seriously, along with the responsibilities they felt, often with some exaggeration, idealism and enthusiasm — all hallmarks of youth.

His mother Tonica, a warm and hospitable woman from the Adriatic coast, always made sure her sons' guests felt welcome in their home. The head of the household, a well-known democrat and humanist, a legal defender of communists and a devoted friend to youth, encouraged his sons to associate with progressive young people. In fact, every Wednesday the Ribar home was open for meetings and debates among democratically oriented politicians, writers, painters, lawyers and musicians. These candid and open conversations, mostly free of pretension or hypocrisy, were often overheard by the Ribar sons — and at times, by their friends. This was where they first heard about the lives of individual communists and SKOJ members, and about the crimes of the regime.

Through this environment, Dr. Ribar was introducing his sons to real life and the harsh truths of the world. Alongside his wife Tonica, he gave

them all his parental love, created an atmosphere of openness and trust in the home, provided them with the means to learn from both books and life, gave them access to world literature and encouraged their curiosity to absorb knowledge on their own terms — forming their own views on personal and social issues that concerned the youth of the time. He opened their home to their peers, facilitated encounters with progressive figures from Belgrade's political and cultural circles, and gave them the freedom to grow independently as individuals, supported by love and trust. In this, Tonica played a vital role. As her daughter Božena later recalled, she was "the cheerful spirit of the house, an active, energetic, gentle woman, the best friend of her children and their companions. She helped as much as she could, followed their work. In short, she lived for her children, her husband and their friends." These harmonious and healthy conditions at the Ribar household are remembered by many young men and women who spent time with Lola and Jurica and frequently visited their home. Many believed that this supportive family environment was essential to the full development of Lola's intellectual and moral qualities, his political education and later his involvement with the Party. As one of his friends recalled, he was "his father's collaborator, his mother's beloved son whom she also respected, his sisters' pride and brother, and Jurica's comrade."

Certainly, this healthy family atmosphere — its democratic and critical spirit — and all that this

curious, gifted young member of the household experienced and learned within it, including open conversations with key figures from Belgrade's progressive political and artistic circles, shaped Lola's outlook. Exposure to progressive literature and a clear-eyed view of life taught him valuable lessons early on. Within a year or two, he and his brother would grow apart from their privileged peers and take their place on the side of the people. There, they found the courage to distance themselves from "salon communists" and join fierce class struggles, risking and eventually giving up the comforts that came with their privileged social status — a status that would have otherwise guaranteed them a carefree, elite lifestyle.

With a steady allowance, Lola regularly bought new books and was a well-known customer at several established bookstores. He visited two second-hand bookshops on Knez Mihailova Street almost daily. His circle of trusted authors was broad and diverse — spanning generations and literary styles — though he primarily read French, English and Nordic writers, likely because he was most comfortable with those languages. Among Yugoslav writers, he especially valued Miroslav Krleža, whose works he read attentively, pencil and notebook in hand. He saw in Krleža's writing a literature that truthfully, and with pronounced tone, reflected life and contributed to resolving some of the essential existential challenges facing future generations — which, in Lola's view, was the foremost duty of real

literature.

The Beginning of "Stumbling into Communism"

As early as high school, Lola began reading works of philosophy, art history and monographs about revolutionary movements shaking the world at that time — in places like China and Spain. Among philosophers, he studied Nietzsche, Hegel and Russell in depth. At age 19, he turned to Marx and Engels. He first read *Anti-Dühring,* then went on to study *Capital* — a task in which, as he said, his solid knowledge of mathematics helped. Still, he never bowed to the authors or their works. He read them carefully and understood that their analysis and critique could offer solutions to deep social crises — but he did so critically, with open eyes, ready to listen to and evaluate everyone's arguments before accepting or rejecting them.

With that kind of curiosity and reading list, Lola increasingly reached for books banned by school authorities and the regime. This coincided with his growing interest in the ideas and activities of the progressive youth movement, during the reawakening of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) at the tail end of the Great Depression and the monarchist dictatorship. Under those conditions, even literary clubs, student associations, sports societies and other youth groups that Lola

took part in began evolving into political circles — spaces where progressive young people gathered and acted, often forming networks beyond their schools, across the city. It was precisely within these environments that the Communist Party exerted its influence over the youth, and from them emerged a new generation of powerful figures in the revolutionary movement — including Veljko Vlahović, Branko Krsmanović, Rifat Burdžović Tršo, Mika Mitrović, Cićko Pavlović, Đoko Kovačević, Vlado Popović, Krsto Popivoda and others. Lola would become a reliable comrade to them during the most turbulent years of the revolutionary youth movement. This choice of books and company could not remain a secret to the regime, which relied on a network of informants for its stability. The police began knocking more frequently on Dr. Ribar's door, and school authorities would condescendingly warn him that his son was "stumbling into communism."

During school holidays, Lola and Jurica travelled to Switzerland, to the Fischer Institute in the resort town of Montreux, where — alongside peers from all over the world, or rather from the wealthy segment of it — they were taught etiquette, practised foreign language conversation and engaged in sports, especially skiing and hiking. They were also taught how to behave in the company of women — even the art of courtship — in which Lola, by all accounts, showed natural talent. However, he was not a slave to any of his many pursuits, not even academics or youth activism. He lived life to the

fullest, as a member of his generation — something that, unlike most of his peers, his exceptional talent and family circumstances allowed. His talent enabled him to learn quickly and grasp concepts faster than others, and his family background provided complete material security. Thanks to this, he was able to enjoy elite sports, travel, meet new people, get to know girls, court them and spend time with them at parties and outings. Intelligent, educated, charming, witty, handsome and stylishly dressed — Lola was successful with young women his age.

At the end of his high school studies, on June 23, 1934, Lola received his diploma after passing the advanced graduation exam. As an excellent student, he was exempt from the oral examination. The notoriously strict exam board of the Second Boys' Real Gymnasium gave him top marks in all thirteen subjects and declared him "mature and ready for university-level study." When it came to choosing a field, both Lola's preference and the family's decision aligned — he would study law.

Letters from Switzerland

In early September 1934, after an extended holiday on the Adriatic coast, Lola arrived in Paris to study political science. However, shortly after the assassination of King Aleksandar, and in order to avoid difficulties with the French police — who were arresting Yugoslav students — he transferred

to the University of Geneva to study political economy and sociology and to make use of the university's rich library. He also attended sessions of the League of Nations, as he wrote from there, in order to listen to the inspiring speeches of well-known politicians and statesmen. He stayed in Geneva for less than two months, just long enough, as described by Milovan "Lule" Matić, his close friend from high school and university, to "gather literature and familiarize himself with research methodology, so that upon returning to Belgrade he could approach his studies more effectively and organize his individual work." In any case, Lola did not go to Geneva intending to stay there and complete his studies — had that been his goal, he had every opportunity to remain and graduate from that elite university. In fact, he wrote to Matić that he had decided to go there to safeguard himself, as much as possible, through a scientific framework, "from the concept of society imposed on us by law — which is not only unscientific, like any normative concept, but diametrically opposed to the sociological perspective." He wanted, he added, to attend introductory lectures and discussions, especially on methodology, and to get acquainted with methods of work and reading lists — in short, to prepare himself for independent study later on. "Based on what I've already done and what I'll still manage to do, I will accomplish that goal — a program that seems narrow but is of vital importance. As I've written before, the library is excellent — and

the lectures are very good, and most importantly, discussions with professors are held on all topics. Professor of sociology Duprat is very sarcastic but clear and entirely objective. Modern political history of Europe is taught brilliantly by the famous Italian émigré Guglielmo Ferrero. The professor of political economy isn't as good as the other two, but he's an honest man and unafraid to devote three of the introductory lectures to Marxism..."

His serious approach to studying and preparing for law school is also evident in a passage from another letter from Geneva:

"So much material must be mastered to really enter the subject! Not just from sociology, economics and history, but also from anthropology, psychology, even the natural sciences and mathematics!... Of course, I have no illusions that I'll master even a small portion of it while I'm here, but at least I'll get oriented and introduced to the field, and after that I'll be able to work on my own..."

Known among his classmates in Belgrade as an "old Nietzschean," Lola also defended Nietzsche's philosophical views in letters from Geneva — especially from distorted interpretations by some of his critics — acknowledging that "I owe the most in my intellectual development to that man (Nietzsche)," while adding (in parentheses): "which does not mean that I subscribe to his doctrines taken literally."

A gifted young intellectual raised in a democratic spirit, Lola became disillusioned with politics

and the regime in his own country, and during his brief time abroad — especially in Paris — he likely became disappointed with the politics and politicians of the Western democracies as well. This was surely influenced by the content and messages of the books he was reading. He came to realize that: "In politics, preaching hatred is what most inflames the masses; one could even say it's the only thing that inflames the masses. We all know that. I saw it for myself at a rally in Paris — the loudest applause came when the speaker attacked his opponents and demanded their deaths. That's a fact. And it leads us to the question of demagogy. I admit that demagogy — precisely for the reasons listed above — is a powerful factor in political struggle, and will remain so as long as general intelligence remains at the pitiful level it's at today."

Lola wrote that he was attending lectures and progressing in his study of sociology and modern political history, reading Joyce, Proust, Russell and other authors whose works reflect, in his words, "the final refined glimmers of a culture in decay." He was quickly gaining insight into the political and social condition of the West — as far as it was possible through "observation, reading and conversation with young people of various beliefs and nationalities, mostly Americans, English and Swiss."

After lectures, discussions and readings, he came to recognize the important "role of economic factors in our history," while also searching for others. He acknowledged the growing importance

of Marx's economic theories, more than he had previously, but remained sceptical of dialectical materialism.

A long and warmly written letter to Matić from Geneva, dated November 20, is full of insights from books he'd read on sociology, history and philosophy. It contains reflections on politics and culture, and expresses both humanism and the confusion of a young intellectual faced with the harsh reality of life in Europe during a time of rising fascism and devaluation of true values. He concluded the letter:

"As you can see, if I continued any further, I could spend the whole night discussing these matters — but my pack of cigarettes is almost finished, and that wouldn't be economical. If you don't think it's a bit pretentious of me, I'll repeat for you the principle of Bertrand Russell, which I've adopted as my main one during any studies: 'I do not preach faith to you, but the strength to doubt' — especially in what we like, even more so than in what we oppose.

"You write that you're in a miserable mood; I can see it clearly in your handwriting. (From time to time, I'm studying graphology with someone from Montreux!!!). I don't have a better cure to suggest than this: fall in love! 'Love at first awakens new energies and stimulates the imagination,' as Georg Brandes once said."

At the beginning of December 1934, Lola returned home and began studying law at the University of Belgrade as a regular student. He started

brilliantly. With a father who was a renowned lawyer, he didn't need to study long or with difficulty, but instead worked rationally and thoughtfully, separating what mattered from what didn't, focusing on essential problems, learning how to express his thoughts clearly and confidently, and practising oratory. In this, his father was his first and most careful teacher and critic — a skill that would later serve Lola well as a youth orator and public speaker.

With the Communists, on the Barricades of the Faculty of Law

The year 1935 was a time of deep unrest and upheaval at the University of Belgrade. Lola took part in these events from the very beginning — politically still unformed and untested, especially in class struggle — but fully aware that his place was among the fighters of his generation, that they had responsibilities and debts to life that no one else could or would repay. Lola entered the struggle with youthful zeal. Recalling Lola's early steps on the revolutionary path, Veljko Vlahović, then a young communist and member of the leadership of the student movement, wrote:

"During the 1935-36 school year at the University of Belgrade, unrest was constant. Strikes, demonstrations, pamphlets, slogans, arrests. The university was frequently shut down. That was the atmosphere in which Ivo Lola Ribar appeared

among us, after his time in Geneva and his studies of social and political issues — more through literature and in university libraries than through daily contact with the harshness of reality.

"It was during those days that I first met and got to know Lola. We had long discussions. He had a commanding knowledge of the contemporary socio-political literature and the various currents then flowing across Western Europe. We, his new comrades, knew better the reality of life at the university, the political conditions in the country and the daily life of ordinary working people..."

So, while Lola was stronger in theory, his comrades from the revolutionary student leadership were more grounded in real-life experience. But since they all approached the struggle sincerely and with determination to address life's fundamental problems, they quickly found themselves on the same side of the barricade, becoming reliable comrades-in-arms. Speaking at a memorial marking on the 10th anniversary of Lola's death, Vlahović recalled one of Lola's first revolutionary confrontations:

"In 1935, during a general student assembly in what is now the Hall of Heroes, we spoke together before the student body. The agenda covered the joint struggle of students from the University of Belgrade, the University of Zagreb and the University of Ljubljana — against tuition fees and other smaller issues. There were 22 points on the agenda. Lola personally wrote the resolution of

that assembly. He knew how to incorporate — even through the smallest details and demands — what truly mattered to students of the time. He knew how to mobilize and activate the student body and, through those 'minor' issues, unite each individual in a much larger battle and movement..."

Another of Lola's comrades from that year, Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, recalled Lola during the February barricades at the Faculty of Law. At a student assembly, hundreds decided not to leave the faculty building and to continue demonstrating until their fellow students, imprisoned in a concentration camp in Višegrad, were released. The university authorities, bowing to the demands of the Ministry of the Interior, had expelled a group of the most active students. By choosing persecution and internment, the government of Bogoljub Jevtić had established the Višegrad camp and, on January 19, sent 19 students, shackled and under heavy guard, into exile. In protest, Belgrade students took to the streets day and night, while students from all seven faculties of the University of Zagreb held a solidarity protest with their comrades in Belgrade. After receiving an underground letter detailing police brutality in the camp, students in Belgrade held a mass assembly on January 29, demanding the immediate release of the detainees. The government refused. A new protest was scheduled for February 1, with speeches by Veljko Vlahović, Mirko Tomić and Svetozar Vukmanović. Determined to insist on the closure of the camp — modelled after those Hitler

had already established for opponents of fascism — and to defend the autonomy of the university, students barricaded themselves in the Faculty of Law.

Two days later, on February 3, new protests broke out during the funeral of fallen comrade Mirko Srzentić, in which Lola also took part.

After all that he had seen and learned — especially from literature — this young man, in the militant student environment, finally understood that he had stepped onto a path where one matured quickly and genuinely, becoming a worthy heir to the legacy of his ancestors and the proud traditions of struggle among his people — a fighter for the unity of youth in the effort to change the world and shape their own future.

The tumultuous year 1935 was also momentous for Lola because he was admitted to SKOJ and elected to the Action Committee for professional, economic, cultural and sports associations. At that time, Veljko Vlahović was president of that committee — the legal leadership of the revolutionary student movement at the University of Belgrade. That same year — also remembered for revolutionary unrest throughout the country, including around 180 major strikes — was significant from the perspective of SKOJ and, more narrowly, Lola's political development, due to the decisions made at the 6th Congress of the Young Communist International (YCI) held in Moscow. The 15-day congress brought together representatives from revolutionary youth movements in 56 countries, including Yugo-

slavia. Its central aim was to eliminate the previous sectarian character of the communist youth movement and orient it towards legal, mass-based work and towards uniting all progressive, anti-fascist forces in a common front — to fight against fascism and war and to improve the position of working-class youth. This included establishing legally recognized leadership structures. In Yugoslavia, this meant that SKOJ — once deeply underground, small in number and insular — would now become the core, the backbone and the organizer of a broad, militant youth movement uniting patriotic and progressive young people in the fight for a better life and against the fascist menace ravaging Europe. Operating legally and on a broad front, the movement would now take shape through mass political, cultural and sports actions. The SKOJ branch at the University of Belgrade fully supported this new direction, calling for the creation of a new, national liberation-oriented youth organization in a country under national oppression. Lola emerged as one of the leading fighters for implementing this orientation — something he would go on to prove in both word and deed.

The following year, 1936, was also marked by major events at the University of Belgrade, with the Faculty of Law again at the forefront. For Lola, it was especially important because he became one of the central figures in the famous April student strike.

Following Hitler's model for dealing with com-

munists and progressive forces, in 1935 the regime either founded, commissioned or supported several pro-fascist organizations intended to dismantle the Communist Party, SKOJ and the progressive unions. The Yugoslav National Movement "Zbor," initiated by the reactionary lawyer Dimitrije Ljotić, was founded specifically to destroy workers' and People's Front organizations and disrupt their events — including physical attacks on their leaders and members. To break the revolutionary student movement at the University of Belgrade, a pro-fascist group known as "*Ornasovci*" was created — members of the Organization of National Students (ORNAS), whose honorary president was university rector Ćorović. It should be noted that both Zbor members and *Ornasovci* operated in openly violent ways — fully armed with the police's blessing — using daggers, clubs and even firearms, which they employed with calculated brutality to attack strikers and protesters.

On April 3, the students launched a general strike, demanding the removal of police surveillance on campus, the protection of university autonomy, academic freedom and students' personal freedoms, as well as the revocation of unjust disciplinary measures issued against members of the Action Committee. However, Rector Ćorović refused to resolve the matter peacefully.

The next day, a group of *Ornasovci* clashed with striking students in an attempt — at the rector and police's behest — to break the strike. During this

attack, *Ornasovac* member Slobodan Nedeljković, a law student, stabbed fellow student Žarko Marinović, also from the Faculty of Law. The act of bloodshed outraged the students gathered in the atrium of the Faculty of Law — even more so when they learned that Marinović had died three hours later at the Medical Faculty's clinic.

On 4 April, the strike committee — which included Lola — issued a leaflet (urgently printed through underground connections) addressed to all the students. It informed them of what had been done so far and called for unified support in demanding that the terrorist organization ORNAS be disbanded immediately, and that Rector Ćorović, who was acting against the vital interests of the students and university, resign and permanently remove himself from the university.

Following the bloody events of April 1936, and with Lola's full involvement, the leadership of the revolutionary student movement sent a letter to several influential progressive politicians and respected scholars and artists. The letter explained the students' core demands, the goals of their struggle and the truth about "the real situation at the University," where violence and terror against students prevailed — students who, "in their just struggle for the most basic necessities of life, continue to make the greatest sacrifices, even giving their lives." It stated that ORNAS was doing everything in its power "through brutal force and weapons to crush every movement of the militant and democratic

student youth." Among the figures to whom the students appealed was Dr. Ivan Ribar, then First Vice President of the Central Committee of the Democratic Party.

Almost without exception, all those approached for support ignored the letter — even though, with their public standing, they could have influenced a favourable resolution of the urgent issues facing the students at the University of Belgrade. As expected, Dr. Ribar stood out for his courage: he did not ignore the students' letter. He visited the offices of leading political figures, advocated for the fulfilment of student demands and protested against the violence.

From Veljko Vlahović's recollections, it's clear that the April events of 1936 cemented Lola Ribar's place within the communist movement. Reflecting on Lola during that period, Vlahović said:

"One night, after the strike had ended — it was a spring night in Belgrade — Lola and I walked for hours around old Zvezdara, near Karađorđe Park, talking about many things. Lola had come to love his comrades deeply, he felt a strong bond with them. In a conversation about the people we had worked with, he told me something like this:

"'I've found the meaning of my life in working with my comrades — in the love I've felt from them, and in my love for them.'

"Comrade Lola found his life's purpose in that shared life, in struggle and collective action."

Admission into the Communist Party of Yugoslavia — Recognition and Responsibility

For Lola, the revolutionary year of 1936 was also significant because, having earned the full trust of the communists at the University through his conduct in class struggle, he was admitted into the CPY. He saw this not just as recognition, but even more as a responsibility — never to falter or be absent from the struggle. In his speeches and articles, Lola often referred back to the April strike as a test of strength for the student movement, an historical event, and also a personal milestone, a test of solidarity, his first true class confrontation. On April 4, 1938, during the commemoration of the strike's second anniversary, he published a lengthy article in the newspaper *Student* entitled "From April 4, 1936 to April 4, 1938." In that article — programmatic for its time — he wrote:

"Since then, over the past two years, our student movement has steadily developed in all directions — through broader organizing, planned actions and ever more constructive, student-led initiatives. Obstacles and mistakes have been overcome, and achievements made — achievements beneficial to students, science and the people. Today's student movement — one of collaboration and unity among students, built through their associations that have won numerous demands — is a movement of full democratic unity under the United

Student Youth. It is no longer just an expression of spontaneous protest or general political aspirations of a student vanguard. Today, in April 1938, two years after that great strike, our first general student action, we now have a student movement that is truly youth-driven and cultural — a movement of a generation conscious of its social position, its common fate and responsibility...

"We students will not allow outside forces to disrupt this university. We will not allow it to be shut down — because we want to study here, to prepare for the future in classrooms and through our movement.

"The strength of our movement, which has come to the fore again in recent days, shows the way forward — a path that began with April 1936, the beginning of an era, the moment when our movement became organized and aware of its tasks. It became a movement through which a generation advances towards life and towards its goal — towards conscious service to the people, towards fulfilling the social role of a national intelligentsia we aim to build."

With Lola's increasing involvement in the revolutionary movement, the Ribar home at 32 Francuska Street became more openly used for both legal and illegal gatherings, planning sessions of communists and SKOJ members, and organizing and executing actions. The entire family became involved in this work — each in their own way, but united in the same goal: to see the struggle through

to victory. Lola's sister Božena later recalled:

"From 1936 onward, as the People's Front began to grow stronger, we all got involved in the same work — political work. Alongside Lola and Jurica, our mother Tonica mobilized her own friends to join the fight against the growing enemy. In addition to Dr. Ribar, Lola and Jurica, our mother also played an active role in hiding and protecting progressive youth and underground activists. She took part in women's circles and encouraged women to join the struggle..."

From Vladimir Popović, Lola's close friend and comrade from that time, we have the following testimony:

"During that turbulent period of activism at the University of Belgrade, we often used Lola's flat — his family's home on Francuska Street — for our meetings and planning sessions. But we also found time to relax and enjoy good food there. We'll never forget the genuine hospitality and parental care shown by his parents — Dr. Ivan Ribar, a lawyer and leading opposition figure in the Democratic Party, and Tonica, Lola's mother — not only to Lola and Jurica, but to all of us. We'd also go to Lola's to use Dr. Ivan Ribar's vast library, which included the works of the classics of Marxism-Leninism."

Undeniably, even earlier — since by 1936, Veljko Vlahović was already studying in Prague — Lola had become a central figure among the revolutionary student youth. Vlahović preserved details about how several comrades would sneak

into Francuska Street at night, lock themselves in Dr. Ribar's office, where there was a typewriter, and without asking permission, type up pamphlets until dawn. Then they would smuggle them out of the print shop and distribute them around Belgrade. "It was there that I came to truly admire and love Comrade Lola," Vlahović recalled, "because he had tremendous energy... He was able to write a leaflet every night — one that never needed corrections, that was read with great interest not only by the students and working-class youth, but also by the citizens of Belgrade..."

Lola was the author of editorials and other contributions — usually highly argued and written in an engaging, impactful style. These were widely read and frequently quoted. Because of this, the Ribar home was searched, editorial offices shut down, publications banned and confiscated, and even sought out — to understand the Party's views and plan how to combat the spread of communist ideas. These articles were sought not only by ministers, but even by Prince Paul himself, who reportedly asked his court minister to discreetly obtain copies of *Student*.

In June 1938, Lola launched and led the newspaper *Mladost* — officially a monthly journal for youth affairs and sport, but in reality the legal central organ of the illegal SKOJ. As its nominal editor, he appointed the then-popular Milutin Ivković Milutinac, full-back for BASK football club and the national football team, a progressive figure and

youth sports idol. Milutinac was a physician and patriot, known also for publicly opposing the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. His name and popularity secured the magazine's public appeal, especially among the youth. Through commentary and reports, Lola explained to young people what they could and should do — in the fight for a more secure tomorrow, against fascism and war. The dark forces would settle that debt during the war — Milutinac was imprisoned and killed in the Banjica concentration camp.

A Brilliant Speaker at International Youth Gatherings

Let's return for a moment to the year 1936, when Lola represented the Belgrade student movement and Yugoslav youth at two major international youth events, on behalf of the Action Committee. For the International Youth Conference organized by the YCI on February 29 and March 1, 1936 in Brussels, Lola was nominated by the president of the Action Committee, Veljko Vlahović. As Vlahović later recalled, there were several reasons for the nomination: Lola had a valid passport — rare and essential at the time; he was fully fluent in French, the official language of the conference; and he approached every issue with careful study and strong logic, capable of linking ideas and presenting them persuasively. The nomination was initially ac-

cepted in principle, but since Lola was not yet widely known to most Action Committee members, it was decided that Veljko Vlahović, Hasan Brkić and Uglješa Danilović would draft the report for the conference. The final version would be reviewed in Lola's presence and approved at the next meeting. As the delegate of the Yugoslav youth, Lola would speak on the topic: "Strengthening and Coordinating Youth Organizations for the Defence of Peace and Culture."

The draft was accepted, and Lola earned the Action Committee's trust — though with some individual reservations. According to Vlahović, Lola didn't see this as distrust, but rather as part of a collective process of growing into a Party activist within a shared ideological framework, where people were guided towards the revolutionary path, starting from "small tasks and work built from countless details."

The university rector approved the student of law Ivan Ribar's travel to Brussels, but refused to fund the trip, which would cost 3,137 dinars. The solution came in the form of a student loan, which was quickly repaid through voluntary contributions from citizens.

There was also the issue of formal authorization. A creative solution was found: beneath the French-language mandate, thirty student associations of the University of Belgrade affixed their seals — with 60 signatures. It was said to be the most original authorization among the 316 delegates at the Brussels conference.

Also present was Zdenko Levental, a Zagreb-based activist and leader in the Student Pacifist Cultural Association, who later stated that: "Lola's passionate and compelling speech was warmly received by the delegates."

After returning from Brussels, Lola presented a detailed report on March 10 to the Action Committee, covering the conference's work and the upcoming World Youth Congress in Geneva. According to Vlahović, this marked: "...the beginning of wide-scale student and youth engagement in our country in the struggle against fascism, for peace, for ties with other peace movements and youth organizations abroad, and for making the youth of the world aware of the activity and struggles of the Yugoslav youth." From that point on, Lola became one of the most active members of the Action Committee. He also wrote an article about the Brussels Conference for *Politika,* which was heavily censored. A second article, published in *Glas omladine,* somehow escaped censorship. It was a rallying cry against war and a call for the youth to engage in the struggle for peace, in line with the Brussels resolution.

With the Action Committee's approval, Lola requested a permit from the police to hold a public anti-fascist youth assembly, where he intended to speak about the Brussels conference and the upcoming youth congress. However, the regime — well-informed about Lola's statements in Brussels — flatly refused. Determined not to give up, Lola

instead organized a similar gathering in Niš, using connections with liberal politicians and friends of Dr. Ribar from the civic opposition to ensure it was fully legal. Posters appeared across the city under the bold headline: "Gather, Youth!" It was announced that Ivan Ribar, law student and delegate of progressive youth at the Brussels Peace Congress would speak about the need for youth cooperation. The call to workers, peasants, intellectuals and youth was clear and forceful:

"Youth — in fascist regimes you have always been nothing more than prey and cannon fodder. Come to this meeting to express your protest against war and injustice.

"Youth of Niš — remember: the fight against fascism is a fight against bloodshed and violence, a fight for freedom and the progress of civilization, for a better, happier future for the people — Gather!"

The "Knjaževac" tavern was far too small to hold the more than 700 attendees. Present, as always at such events, was the local police commissioner. Lola began his speech, as usual, without notes. The packed hall fell silent. When he mentioned the "laws of social development," the commissioner jumped up and rudely interrupted him, shouting: "Don't mention the law!" Lola paused, aware that provoking the commissioner would be risky, and politely asked: "May I, sir, use the word 'norm'?" The officer, without hesitation, replied: "You may say norm — but not law!" Lola continued

and successfully completed his address. According to a plan he had outlined the previous day with local SKOJ members in a nearby vineyard, the assembly adopted the "Anti-Fascist Appeal of the Youth of Serbia."

In the weeks that followed, Lola held several similar assemblies in other parts of the country — always under the pretext of conveying messages of peace from Brussels.

The First World Youth Congress for Peace was held from August 31 to September 6, 1936 in Geneva. It was organized by the YCI, in line with its decision of the congress to bring together all progressive youth, regardless of religion, nationality or political affiliation, under a united program to defend peace. Among the nine members of the official delegation of progressive Yugoslav youth, Ivo Lola Ribar stood out as the most prominent. Evidence of this includes the fact that in one of the Congress's commissions, he presented the main report on the issue of international youth cooperation and proposed the resolution text — which was adopted in full. He was also elected to the Congress' presidency and administrative council, and later to its leading body — the International Committee for the Coordination of Congress Resolutions. In total, the Congress brought together 450 delegates representing youth from 35 countries and a large number of international organizations.

As a member of the Congress presidency, speaker at the podium and interlocutor in meet-

ings with delegates, Lola left a powerful impression, delivering his speeches in French and English. His interventions were judged as among the most mature, substantial and eloquent heard from the Geneva Congress platform, and Santiago Carrillo, then youth leader of Spain, which was engulfed in the fire of a defensive war against fascism, told Veljko Vlahović that Lola's speech was "the most substantial and beautiful address heard at the Geneva Congress."

Lola truly demonstrated an excellent knowledge of international relations, warned of the threat of fascism, and pointed to ways of strengthening and connecting the global youth movement in the fight for the defence of peace and freedom. It was largely due to his efforts that the Congress adopted the Yugoslav proposal as its appeal to the youth of the world, which included the following:

"Youth of the world, unite, so you may live and grow in peace — the holiest good of mankind and of our generation!

"Youth of all nations and of all beliefs, join this great movement, whose foundations we have laid for the happiness of youth. Lead the youth's crusade for peace, for the future of culture, for the happiness of mankind!"

That text was written by Lola — a gifted and committed young man, whose words echoed through the congress hall:

"So, as realists, as young people who genuinely want to fight against war, we must now fight for the

unity of our forces, for the organization of peace. That is the first stage. Tomorrow, when we have completed that work, we will set out on the path of jointly removing all injustice, jointly organizing a way of life in which people will live in dignity and freedom. That is the only path possible for us, that is the only true policy of peace today! Every other stance... leads directly to war."

This was the beginning of Lola's activity on the international stage. In that same year, 1936, he would represent the youth of Yugoslavia two more times at international gatherings, and in the following year, he spent three months in Paris, during which time, already a leader of SKOJ, he also met with Josip Broz. However, in 1938, the police did not permit Lola to attend the 2nd World Youth Congress for the Defence of Peace in New York, where delegates of youth organizations from 54 countries adopted the renowned "Peace Pact." The regime clearly had no interest in fuelling the popularity of this fiery "advocate of linking the defence of peace with the long-term goals of the communist youth movement." Nonetheless, they could not deny him permission to stay in Paris in August 1939, where, from August 15 to 19, the 3rd Congress of the World Student Community was held. He led the Yugoslav delegation and spoke about the problems facing the youth, after which the leaders of the international anti-fascist youth movement proclaimed him "the most talented orator of his generation and the most passionate youth fighter

against fascism and war."

After returning from each of these international gatherings, he shared the conclusions with the Yugoslav youth, conveying the experiences of the anti-fascist youth movements around the world, condemning bloodshed, violence, the destruction of cultural heritage, and the abuse of man's feelings of belonging — whether to religion, nation, race or political order.

Comrade in the Transformation of SKOJ

Anyone familiar with the history of the CPY will easily recognize that Lola, in representing the youth movement before the world, was expressing the true sentiments of the broad masses, and — most importantly — interpreting the Party's policy in the struggle against fascism. Without a doubt, as early as 1936, the Party had noticed Lola as one of the young people it could rely on in the coming struggles within the country. In the second half of 1936, Tito returned to Yugoslavia twice as an underground operative, meeting with Party leaders. On the second trip, which lasted from late December to March 25 the following year, he also analysed the state of SKOJ. In Zagreb, he met with Leo Mates, then the delegate — authorized representative — of the Central Committee of SKOJ, whose task was to continue reorganizing the communist youth movement in line with the conclusions of

the 6th Congress of the YCI. Understanding that restoring proper functioning within SKOJ was strategically important, Tito, preparing to lead the revolutionary movement inside the country, requested from Party leaders in Belgrade, towards the end of 1936, that they send him "an untainted, bright, one of the very best young comrades" to lead the communist youth. They sent him Lola — a brilliant law student and a young man with a reputation. They met at the home of musician Pavle Markovac, one of the participants in the movement. That cultivated, twenty-year-old young man was already a brilliant mind full of energy and potential.

In March 1937, Tito met again with Lola and Mates in Zagreb, so that he could report more convincingly at the meetings of the CC of the CPY, held in Paris on April 5 and 16, about the state of SKOJ, and more broadly, about the youth movement in the country. By then, Lola was already being considered to lead the Provisional Youth Commission, but Tito's decision was still awaited. And on April 12, from Paris, just before returning to Yugoslavia, Tito informed the Executive Committee of the Comintern that he had "formed a central youth leadership — provisional and operating entirely legally."

Tito returned to the country for work already at the end of May, remaining until August 16. From that period, two key moments related to the history of SKOJ stand out: the first — in the May issue of *Proleter* (no. 5/37), his directive article "SKOJ on a New Path" was published, signed "T.T.," written

in the second half of April in Paris; the second — mid-year, as he would tell students of the Political School of the LCY in Kumrovec forty years later, he formed the Central Youth Commission within the CC of the CPY, with Lola Ribar at its head. Its task was "to improve the organizational condition of SKOJ and the youth movement. At that time, I also developed guidelines for SKOJ's work, pointing to the path for SKOJ's development into a militant core of the youth movement..."

The Guidelines for SKOJ's Work, referred to by Tito, were outlined in the article "SKOJ on a New Path," and they would introduce revolutionary changes to all prior political work of the communists and youth. Instead of dissolving SKOJ — something a part of the CPY's "external" leadership, tainted by sectarianism, had already decided, even at a time when at least 2,000 students in Belgrade could be mobilized for any action outside the University — Tito showed confidence in SKOJ, directing it on how to "gather and lead the younger generation on the path of struggle for bread, peace and freedom, for a happier and more joyful life." He pointed out that "the communist youth of Yugoslavia has glorious traditions behind it." SKOJ had shown "numerous, admirable examples of heroism and self-sacrifice" and had produced "no small number of the best fighters," but it "was not a mass organization, it was not connected to the broader youth masses, but rather fought isolated from them — a fight the youth admired, but did not partic-

ipate in. SKOJ was thus only a kind of vanguard of youth, living and fighting separately from the broader youth masses. SKOJ ignored the issues that mattered to the broader youth layers. It did not understand the daily needs of the youth. SKOJ members were young old men, who looked down on everything that was not 100 per cent revolutionary and highly political, and in doing so created a gap between themselves and the youth."

The Party leader called for an end to these sectarian views, emphasizing that "SKOJ needs to be thoroughly reorganized — not based on some template, but gradually and in line with the conditions of each specific place and region. The brilliant past of our SKOJ obliges all members to bravely embark on a new path — a path of closeness to and inclusion in mass youth organizations. The tasks of our League are: 1) To work on the development and strengthening of all democratic, progressive and cultural organizations; 2) To support cooperation among all progressive youth organizations; 3) To educate the youth in the spirit of struggle against fascism, and for democracy, progress and peace; 4) To safeguard the legality of all youth organizations."

Pointing out that the progressive youth movement in Yugoslavia had already demonstrated a number of initiatives and showed readiness to participate worthily in the fight of "the many millions strong army of young people around the world for peace, bread and freedom," Tito noted that the

movement "encompasses only a small part of the youth here, and that only in urban areas — mainly students and, to some extent, workers," which he considered a serious shortcoming. He stressed that the rural youth "must also be approached and extended a fraternal hand," and that they must be shown that the interests of all youth are shared — and that is the fight for peace, because the main burden of war horrors falls on the younger generation. "Not sowing hatred, but promoting love and brotherhood. Not war and killing, but peace, bread and freedom.

"In their work, the progressive youth must pay greater attention to national-cultural issues, education and similar matters. Greater attention should be given to youth needs, with more substance and variety in youth life. A more content-rich youth life will enable the creation of mass national youth associations because that will attract them.

"The youth, by nature, are inclined to express their energy in some form. They are militant. But it would be a mistake to use this trait only occasionally for political demonstrations. That is needed — but it's also necessary to create opportunities for recreation, sport and entertainment. The struggle for peace should be more closely linked to the issue of public education, cultural events and the daily needs of the youth...

"The youth must and can play an important role in the fight against chauvinism and in bringing the peoples of Yugoslavia closer together. This

will weaken the influence of various fascist organizations (like the *Frankovci*, etc.) that sow hatred, especially among the youth. These fascist organizations that stir up hatred between peoples are working in the interests of fascist powers that are today doing everything they can to provoke a world war and threaten the freedom and democracy of the entire world."

Warning that the "common enemies of the younger generation in Yugoslavia" were Ljotić's supporters, the *Frankovci,* reactionary religious figures and others, Josip Broz concluded with the following message:

"The younger generation does not want war — it wants peace, culture and freedom. It wants a bright and joyful life, not the horrors of war and another descent into darkness and destruction."

The tasks of the Commission were extremely important — all the more so because the Party's expectations of it, and of SKOJ, were high and historic. And Lola was twenty-one years old, with not even two years in the movement. Fortunately, in his approach to political struggle, others found support for their own views on how to rally the masses and democratic forces ready to fight for peace, bread and freedom.

Mates and Krajger were appointed to the Commission — two other young Party members, somewhat older and more experienced than Lola, also students.

At the Forefront of Marxist Publishing

Lola faced months and years of work at the University of Belgrade, organizing regional and local leaderships of SKOJ, undertaking actions for the legal gathering and engagement of the youth in sports, cultural-educational, recreational, artistic and other associations and groups. Additionally, he participated in the work of the CC of the CPY, both abroad and within the country, where Tito, in May 1938, appointed him to the Party's inner leadership circle. On top of all that, he did not neglect journalism and publishing, seeing them as a form of political struggle through which one could intervene quickly and efficiently — to break with old methods of dealing with new problems and needs. Two of his directive articles are particularly characteristic in this regard — "Bolder Steps on New Paths in Youth Work" and "New Tasks of the Communists in the Youth Movement" — published in *Proleter* in August and December 1937, under the pseudonym D. Perić. After Tito's article "SKOJ on a New Path," these two contributions were the most influential guides for communists working with the youth. That year, he also published about fifteen articles in legal publications, which likewise served as practical instructions for work in SKOJ and the youth movement, though written in Aesopian language, since even censors had by then recognized him as a writer whose words hit the mark and mobilized youth. Even at that time, Lola's sharp articles were

reaching the broadest masses of youth, speaking to their minds and hearts, awakening them from despair and apathy, and bringing them into political and social life — into the ranks of fighters for national and social liberation. For him, contributing to the press was, in fact, just one — albeit very effective — means of political struggle and organizational action, which was also the Party's view. He made no compromises in outsmarting censorship so that his pieces could reach readers and influence them through their content and, especially, their message. Truly, in each of them, even today, one can sense not only the clarity of the author's position but also the purity of his language, the conciseness of thought and the beauty of his style. Some of them will be discussed further.

In the articles he published in *Proleter,* Lola offered answers to the questions arising at a time when the young communists were "no longer isolated from the youth masses," when results had already demonstrated the significant advantages of the new approach to youth work, thus opening up "unprecedented possibilities and perspectives." He advocated rising up against the view that the fight for unity among the younger generation was "a manoeuvre and camouflage." He did not hesitate to write that "we want the unity of the youth because we are convinced it is the path through which it will develop its specific demands, the path by which it will truly become the hope and future of the people." For this reason, he firmly demand-

ed that young communists rid themselves of sectarianism — their greatest internal enemy — and abandon "purism," which still stood between them and the youth masses. He stressed that they "must be the first among young people, not only in the struggle and daily work, but also in general social life, in moments of rest and leisure," so that the youth would come "not only to respect them, but to love them." Here, Lola revealed himself as a practical-minded person, capable of guiding the youth towards achievable tasks that reflected their real-life interests: bringing together working-class youth, building a broad student movement and developing it into a generation of people's intelligentsia, strengthening the social life of rural youth through workers' organizations, promoting youth sport, raising the issue of protecting young people's health as a matter of national importance, mobilizing young women, fostering cultural advancement, and engaging politically "neutral," unorganized and isolated youth. According to him, the essential task was to bring the youth together and provide class-based education, and he saw the communist role of SKOJ members as "working with all other honest young people to create and strengthen organizations and movements for the rights and interests of all youth, regardless of political affiliation — organizations and movements that can and must remain legal in order to best serve the youth masses." This was a time when the regime, exploiting every sectarian move made by the Party and SKOJ leaderships,

attacked the movement, banned the youth organizations, suppressed the youth press and persecuted young pioneers — which, in Lola's view, "posed an urgent task for every young anti-fascist: vigilance against provocateurs and government and fascist agents who seek to politicize youth organizations and destroy their legality." For that reason, he demanded "unrelenting struggle against all sectarianism." "Broader outreach — that is the main task!" he wrote, while also advising that, despite difficulties and dangers, one must "work patiently with the masses, without skipping stages," that solidarity among the youth of our peoples must be cultivated as the foundation of stronger brotherhood and unity, and that all templated and inert approaches to work be rejected. He closed his inspired article with Lenin's militant slogan — "to be a communist means to work on uniting and educating the entire growing generation."

Lola's articles from those turbulent pre-war years, collected in two or three books, are still read today with great interest — both as outstanding examples of our Marxist political writing and as valuable testimony of that era.

As the threat of war loomed larger and fascism grew more aggressive, Lola began to frame his words and thoughts differently. It was no longer just a call for peace, but also a call for a just, defensive war, in case the imperialists dared to strike our country. In 1938, following the capitulation of Czechoslovakia, he stirred the fighting spirit of the youth in

the editorial "Let Us Be Prepared," published in the November issue of *Mladost,* preparing them for war — in stark contrast to the defeatist mood spread by the ruling circles: "The matters at hand today," he emphasized in that editorial, "are greater than all individual interests. Avoiding responsibility, desertion, rotten compromises — that is not the tradition of our people. And events show that this is not the way. No, we cannot give up anything for which this country has bled for centuries. Let all know: the spirit of Cegar and Orašac is still alive here, so is the readiness and resilience of the common folk who knew how to fight, still alive in the hearts of our youth is the spirit of the *hajduks*... Yes, even after the Golgotha of Albania come victories — but never after capitulation. The graves of thousands of freedom fighters, which have covered this land for centuries, tell us: this is the way. Yes, it is better to die standing than live on your knees!...

"Heads high, young people! We are the sons of a nation that has never surrendered in five centuries, that has fought for five centuries for independence and freedom. Let us be prepared to give everything for that, in that same spirit!"

Clearly, this was an example of successfully elaborating the CPY's position in the fight to preserve Yugoslavia's national independence — a key part of the preparation for what would take place on March 27, 1941, when at least two-thirds of the country's people publicly and decisively declared themselves against fascism.

Lola advocated for the internationalist education of young people, for protecting the youth from chauvinism — which the ruling elites, both in our country and across the continent, used as a powerful tool for sowing hatred and distrust between individuals and nations, making it easier for them to pursue their goals. In 1939, in the article "On the Path to Unity," Lola argued with the editorial board of the journal *Vidici* about the true reasons for the unprecedented surge of patriotism among the Yugoslav youth, emphasizing:

"We know that people are brothers, we feel solidarity with the younger generation in every country, whose situation is the same as ours, whose ideals and aspirations mirror ours! We are champions of human brotherhood, because we know that only those who do not oppress others can truly be free! We know our struggle for tomorrow is one and indivisible — it is being fought not only here, but thousands of kilometres beyond our borders, just as we know that our enemies are also one and indivisible."

In that article, he summed up the entire political philosophy of internationalism in a single sentence: "To prove that one can love their own country and mankind — to prove that this is one and the same love — that is our task!"

The Fiery Words of a Youth Tribune

Alongside his publishing activity, Lola also stood as a tribune of the youth. He interpreted their authentic interests and showed them the true path of struggle. In addition to his brilliant speeches at international youth gatherings in Brussels, Geneva and Paris, and within Yugoslavia on the same topics, his inspiring speeches at political academies held in the packed Physical Hall of the Faculty of Law (now the Hall of Heroes) remain unforgettable.

After Hitler's divisions, having annexed Austria to the Third Reich, reached the Karawanks, and Mussolini's forces, after occupying Albania, took control of the Drin and Bojana rivers, the Central Committee of SKOJ, together with 23 other youth organizations, associations, sections and editorial offices, organized an academy dedicated to the role of the youth in the defence of the country. From that academy, attended by more than 10,000 young people, following the speeches by Lola Ribar and his comrades, a resolution was announced under the title "Youth, When the Homeland Is in Danger — All Forces Must Unite." In that spirit, Lola delivered a comprehensive speech at the academy, one with a truly programmatic character. At its core, once again, he insisted on the unity of the younger generation and its patriotism, invoking the patriotism of their fathers and of the French Communards — in line with the People's Front. Concluding his address, warning of the seriousness of the times in which they were "setting out on the

greatest of all battles," "carried by their youth, their humanism and their patriotism," he called upon young people:

"Let us carry the momentum of our patriotism across our entire country — let us unite all the forces of our generation within it, young men and women from our fields, workshops and factories, schools and universities! Let us never forget that our greatest weapon, our strongest trench — is our unity!"

"We are a great army of young patriots of this country, a great army of freedom and the future of mankind. We believe in our own strength, in the strength of the people, and in the cause for which we are ready to give our young lives — to give them calmly, without a word, with the smile of youth on our faces. United and in harmony — nothing will frighten us, nothing will defeat us; to the enemies of our country, who are also the enemies of our generation, of freedom and man's happiness, we are ready, when the time comes, to say through our deeds the words of our poet:

"Only up to there — to that stone,
to that rampart,
may you set foot, perhaps with unclean intent!
Should you dare go further... you will hear thunder,
as the silence of the free land
is torn apart by a dreadful roar..."

In 1938, when Hitler threatened the Republic of Czechoslovakia and thousands of young Yugo-

slavs volunteered to defend it, Lola thundered on June 7:

"The unity now being forged in full trust, at this very place from which the word of truth and justice has been heard for years — the unity between the generation of former warriors and us, the new generation, the army of freedom and peace — is the essential guarantee of achieving unity and harmony among all friends of Czechoslovakia, among all democrats and patriots to whom we address our appeal. We, the younger generation, precisely because we love peace, freedom and culture, declare here our determination to remain loyal to the oath of our elders: to remain faithful to it because we are convinced that in defending our fraternal Czechoslovakia, we are also defending the independence of our own country. The Czechoslovak Republic, freedom and peace have an army of friends among us; here, in this hall, they already have their first battalion of volunteers..."

Lola emerged from within the Party and the progressive youth movement, in the fierce struggle of the 1930s waged on our soil for the authentic interests of the broadest working and democratic masses, maturing into the most prominent individual produced by the revolutionary youth movement of that time. As a broadly educated and gifted young man, the Party entrusted him with tasks where his education and talent would be most beneficial to the movement. In addition, his broad influence and numerous international youth connections, com-

mand of foreign languages and general culture were taken into account. Still, alongside his brother Jurica and other close comrades — especially from the leadership of the Belgrade student movement — he also dealt with very concrete, practical tasks: organizing youth assemblies, writing proclamations, coordinating fierce demonstrations during visits from Hitler's and Mussolini's envoys, and initiating events in which the democratic public warmly welcomed representatives of anti-fascist movements and democratic governments. One such event was the 1937 reception in Belgrade for the representative of the Czechoslovak Republic, Eduard Beneš, or for Ivo Delbos, the foreign minister of the Popular Front government of France. For those visits, Lola published unsigned editorials in *Student,* as openly as strict censorship allowed — but still combative and clear — demanding the expansion of the fight for peace and against the fascist threat, the strengthening of the Little Entente and reliance on democratic forces around the world. Today we know that during Beneš's reception, alongside tens of thousands of workers, patriots and friends of Czechoslovakia, around 5,000 students also took part. With the help of Belgrade's cultural associations — in which members of the Ribar family had significant influence and connections — Lola and his comrades organized a "Czechoslovak Cultural Evening," in which Jurica, a talented painter, played a key role.

On December 12, over 50,000 demonstrators

welcomed Minister Delbos at Belgrade's train station, even though the authorities had arrested communists and SKOJ members from police watchlists beforehand, issued threats and pressure not to attend, and planted fascist provocateurs led by Ljotić and Hodjera. Outside the station, anti-fascist slogans rang out and fighting songs echoed, despite police arrests and provocations from pro-fascist groups. Hundreds of students arrived from the University of Zagreb as well. The demonstrations continued into the evening, even though the police filled the Glavnjača jail with arrestees, mostly students. Among them was Jurica Ribar, arrested as "one of the ringleaders and organizers."

In the Physical Hall, for Delbos' visit, Lola and his comrades, with the broad support of cultural figures, organized an academic evening dedicated to friendship with the French people, during which *La Marseillaise* was sung in unison. Students flooded the streets chanting for the Popular Front and for France, which at the time was openly supporting democratic Spain in its fight against fascism.

The Organizer of the Youth Front for National Defence

Tito, writing from Paris, informed Georgi Dimitrov about the political situation in Yugoslavia, which had experienced over 600 strikes during the previous year. He also reported that the youth

movement in the country was developing well, that sectarian work by former SKOJ members had largely been overcome, and that they were successfully adapting to the new approach to building a mass movement. The best evidence of this, he said, were the welcomes for Delbos and Beneš. Tito added: "At the University of Belgrade, more than 5,000 students have been successfully united in the struggle for democracy and peace."

A few months later, Tito arrived in Moscow. On December 1, 1938, he wrote to Lola acknowledging receipt of his letter from Belgrade — about continued mistakes by some Party leaderships in their approach to SKOJ's work and youth efforts as a whole, and their failure to understand the need to strengthen the broadest youth movement. These were consequences of the earlier sectarian views on SKOJ — views that had gone so far as to propose its dissolution, a move the Party leadership had blocked in 1937. Now he wrote to Lola, acknowledging just how serious — even enormous — those challenges were, and how difficult it was to maintain the Party's authority: "But it is precisely in such a situation that one must remain in place, increase initiative and deepen awareness of one's own responsibility."

It was precisely from those "Moscow" days that another document emerged, written in Tito's own hand — "Resolution on Work Among the Youth of Yugoslavia." Citing numerous results from a twenty-month struggle to create a mass legal youth movement, with SKOJ at its head, the Party leader

pointed out that the "democratic youth movement spreading across Yugoslavia relies primarily on the student masses and their organizations," and that it was developing in isolation from the broader working-class and rural youth, showing "an extremely weak interest in involving working-class and peasant youth in its ranks or defending their economic and cultural demands." Seeing this as evidence that SKOJ members "still lack full clarity on principle regarding their tasks," Tito laid out, in light of the dangers to the security and future of the country, the fundamental tasks facing SKOJ members and all anti-fascist, democratic and patriotic youth in Yugoslavia in that complex situation.

Lola and his comrades committed themselves to carrying out the tasks assigned by the Party leader, which coincided with the most dynamic period of ideological and organizational renewal of both the Party and SKOJ. From fewer than 3,000 members in loosely structured organizations in 1937, SKOJ had grown to over 9,000 members by July 1939, at the time of its 5th National Conference.

The 5th National Conference of SKOJ was held in a shepherd's house on Velika Planina, near Kamnik in Slovenia. About 20 delegates from all regions — except Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina — were in attendance. Representing the CC of the CPY was Franc Leskošek Luka. There, Lola — who chaired the conference — delivered the main report on the key organizational issues and the tasks of the youth in defending the country. He described

the growth and restructuring of the young communists' organization as "the beginning of a new era in which SKOJ rapidly advanced towards becoming a mass revolutionary organization of a new type — one of working-class, peasant and other working youth of all Yugoslav nations." It can rightly be said that "strong foundations were laid there for SKOJ as a unified revolutionary mass organization of Yugoslav working youth." At the end, Lola was, for the first time, formally elected Secretary of SKOJ — "now renewed, reorganized and tripled in size, and transformed into the core and backbone of a broad youth movement."

After electing the SKOJ Central Committee with Lola at the head (joined by Dušan Mamula, Leo Mates, Dobrijoje Radosavljević, Veljko Vlahović and Stane Bobnar), the Conference, based on discussions and Party directives, specified the following tasks for the revolutionary youth organization in the coming period:

"1. Eliminate sectarian attitudes towards working-class youth; begin a decisive struggle for unity among working youth; develop an action program in cooperation with the youth from the socialist movement. Particular attention must be paid to issues affecting apprentices.

"2. Launch peasant youth movements based on a proper approach to their everyday demands — primarily economic and cultural — while taking into account national and regional specifics. Intensify efforts towards uniting students, especially at

the universities in Zagreb and Ljubljana, and work towards coordinated actions across all three university centres.

"3. Do everything possible to involve young women in the general youth struggle.

"4. Secure our leadership role in mass youth organizations; through the broadest forms, organize educational work among youth in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism..."

A few months after the Conference, Josip Broz wrote: "From the report of the SKOJ Secretary and the discussion, it is clear that SKOJ is now consolidated, that it understands the line of the 6th YCI Congress, that it is functioning well, as already proven by the successful results of its work among mass youth organizations — especially in Serbia."

The Ribar brothers, in cooperation with a broad network of associates, organized a number of cultural events which, in name and program, were camouflaged for the regime — but in essence, they consistently turned into mass political rallies where communists, SKOJ members, leaders and progressive student representatives warned of the immediate danger of war and the urgent need to unite all youth forces and prepare for the defence of the country. Under Lola's leadership, the Youth Front for the Defence of the Country was formed — a special structure aimed at unifying the younger generation on the basis of resistance to war and the defence of Yugoslavia. The core of this broad movement was the United Student Youth (USY) of the

University of Belgrade, founded in 1937. On October 17, 1939, USY distributed a leaflet throughout the country entitled: "Against War! For Freedom, Democracy and Equality of Our Nations! For the Rights and a Better Life for the Young Generation!" At the request of youth movement leaders from hundreds of towns and villages, several additional editions of the leaflet were quickly printed.

During the Bloody Demonstrations of December 14, 1939

In November 1939, Tito wrote about the widespread activity of the USY organization, including a major protest assembly held on October 27 in the Physical Hall. On October 28, *Politika* reported: "The hall, with a capacity for 3,000 people, was overflowing and could not accommodate all those who wanted to hear the student speakers. Because of this, the organizers had to install loudspeakers outside the hall. In their passionate, youthful speeches, the speakers outlined the main demands of the student youth... The youth will always stand against being dragged into a war in which millions of innocents are led to ruin for the interests of others."

The next day, October 29, thousands of students marched through Belgrade, joined by workers and secondary school students, shouting their fighting slogans: "For peace!", "For an alliance with

the Soviet Union!" The police arrested 23 young people. Among the organizers of this demonstration was Lola — who, according to Tito, was then using various pseudonyms in illegal correspondence and publications, such as Fišer, Davidović, Perić and Ilija.

The sons of Dr. Ribar also took part in the "bloody demonstrations of some ten thousand workers, citizens, students and honest youth" that broke out on December 14, 1939 in Belgrade, as a protest "against dragging the country into war, against war profiteering and price-gouging, and for the freedom of political and union organizing." In several parts of the city, the police opened fire on the demonstrators, killing eight and injuring more than 40 young people. Among the victims were communist students Mirko Luković, Bosa Milićević and Živan Sedlan, as well as workers Rajko Lalić and Golubović. More than 60 participants were arrested. During the protest, Jurica's task was to work with a group of comrades to gather the severely wounded from the streets and get them to hospitals where the Party had trusted contacts. After the demonstrations, Dr. Vlatko Maček responded to an official protest by USY representatives over the bloodshed by saying: "Go ahead and demonstrate — we'll do the shooting!" Some details from Jurica Ribar's revolutionary work — he who, in a sense, lived in the shadow of his brother — were recalled by Aleksa Čelebonović, his comrade in cultural activities:

"Alongside his cultural work, Jurica was completely involved in political action within the student and youth movements, though he did so less visibly. Very often, when some specific illegal task needed to be carried out in the movement, Jurica would be part of it. Whenever *Student* or *Mladost* had to be smuggled out of the print shop — often along with leaflets — he helped actively.

"He took a strong stand at all student and public demonstrations in the years leading up to the war. From his normally calm and withdrawn demeanour, he would suddenly become a towering young figure. His usually stooped posture would straighten. And everyone could see that Jurica was much taller than he seemed when he would raise his blond, wavy-haired head high and shout at the top of his lungs:

"'Down with oppression — long live freedom!'

"His voice would take on a strange tone and strength it lacked in everyday speech. That strength came from genuine conviction — the same conviction that brought him into the streets, into the front lines, where open and often dangerous confrontations with the gendarmes took place. And that is how he ended up in prison..."

In carrying out the heavy responsibilities of the SKOJ leadership and the mass youth movement, Lola poured in all his energy and ability, fighting without compromise or hesitation for the unity of the younger generation. He was preparing them for the fateful events that were rapidly and threatening-

ly approaching. These were increasingly serious responsibilities — as SKOJ secretary and as a member of the innermost leadership circle — during which he insisted on shedding the mindset of "purism," "which only distances our cadre from the youth movement." SKOJ members, he argued, must be the best — first not only in struggle but also during moments of rest; "nothing that troubles or interests the youth should be foreign to us." The revolutionary and writer Oskar Davičo encountered Lola in discussions and on assignments, and remembered him as: "...a fighter capable of leading and guiding others, a comrade devoted to the point of self-sacrifice, a revolutionary... capable of igniting the youth masses, of stirring their enthusiasm and carrying it through into battles." He recalled that Lola respected everyone's work — never underestimating even "minor" tasks — and displayed: "...all the exceptional talents of a professional revolutionary, a man with a sense for strategy and a gift for untangling even the most complex situations, for understanding people, grasping the unspoken and the hidden. These qualities never for a moment compromised his principled defence of his ideas or his firm belief in them — even when in the minority — nor his willingness to later defend the majority's views with the same energy, passion and intelligence. Humble yet courteous and refined, unobtrusive and restrained, he swiftly became — by overcoming obstacles and skipping no stages — the object of great affection among all his comrades, both his peers

and older generations. It was hard for anyone not to recognize in him the rare talent of a revolutionary politician, combined with a youthful impatience and bold fighting spirit..."

A Communist — a Solid Student and Reliable Comrade

True to the principle that a communist must also be a model student — that SKOJ "must be firmly rooted in the classrooms," and that SKOJ members, above all, must be exemplary workers, strong students, reliable friends and well-liked among their peers — he, too, consistent in never preaching what he had not mastered himself or could not accomplish, always found time for studying and taking exams. Preserved records confirm that he continued to excel academically, completing all his law faculty exams regularly and with distinction. Between February 26, 1935 and March 15, 1939 — in just four years — he passed 21 exams: eight with top marks (10), ten with grades of nine and eight, and Roman Law, Economic Policy and the third part of Civil Law with sixes. One of his final exams was Private International Law with Dr. Milan Bartoš. He earned a 10 and displayed such broad knowledge and brilliance that the famously strict professor would later say: "Students like that, and such exceptional individuals, are born only once in a thousand years!"

On April 4, 1939, Lola received document no. 12133 — his diploma from the Faculty of Law — confirming that "he may enjoy all rights attached to it." He exercised two of those rights immediately: that same year, he began working as a law clerk in his father's legal office and enrolled in a two-year doctoral program in law, which he attended regularly while diligently preparing his doctoral dissertation in political economy. At the same time, during the 1940-41 academic year, he enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy.

By simply working as a legal trainee in his father's "well-established law office," Lola — ostensibly engaged with numerous legal cases — was able to travel across the country, by train and plane, to attend regional or local SKOJ or Party conferences, or for meetings with the CC of the CPY. Travelling supposedly to "gather documentation" or for trials, he skilfully disguised the real purpose of these trips. The extent of his revolutionary activities during this period is reflected in the fact that, in the *Collected Works of Josip Broz Tito* from that time, he is the most frequently mentioned individual. Furthermore, during Tito's visits to Belgrade, Lola was one of his most trusted contacts — the man who, with the help of relatives and reliable comrades, arranged meetings and ensured safe locations, which meant finding both trustworthy interlocutors and secure apartments.

In increasingly complex circumstances, this young lawyer, postgraduate student, new university

enrollee and — above all — professional revolutionary, proved to be a man of boundless energy. He arrived everywhere on time and succeeded in everything he did, serving the revolutionary movement in the best possible way. And all of that did not prevent him from living the full life of a young man, including finding time for love. In late 1937, he fell in love with a German student, Sloboda, the daughter of Belgrade pharmacist and democrat Svetislav Trajković. That "lifelong love of Lola's" was a progressive young woman — she listened to Radio Moscow, dreamed of socialism and occasionally took part in underground activities.

Writing about Lola's tenderness towards Sloboda, Ž. Stanković observed:

"It could be said that love was the dominant value in his life — a value that permeated his entire personal ethic: love for his parents, siblings, beloved partner, love for learning and work, for his comrades, responsibilities and the revolution. Interwoven within him, these loves made him a strong and harmonious individual."

In the Bileća Camp

The progressive youth movement was growing ever wider and more active. The regime saw it as a "red infection" and a "communist threat," and to suppress it, it banned assemblies, prohibited publications, dismantled clubs and associations, tight-

ened surveillance of students, outlawed unions, and arrested students and young workers seen as "ringleaders." It also encouraged gangs of thugs — like Hitler's stormtroopers — to beat progressive youth and disrupt their work, and eventually opened concentration camps for them. But this tide of youth resistance could not be stopped...

The surge in the revolutionary movement — a wave of strikes and fierce demonstrations that culminated in the bloodshed of December 14, 1939 in Belgrade, and then soon after in Split, Kraljevo, Skopje and several other major working-class and student centres — shocked the regime with its intensity, scale and, especially, the unity between students and young workers. The Cvetković-Maček government, which represented and protected those ruling interests, along with the Royal Court and General Staff, responded by amending the already draconian and notorious *Law on the Protection of the State.* In late December 1939, a new provision was added — "to eliminate the communists," as was openly stated to the public. Simultaneously, lists were drawn up of communists deemed "dangerous to the state order" and "to public safety." These individuals, under the new law, could be "removed from society." Later archival evidence shows that the chief of the Belgrade police placed Lola at the top of the list, while the deputy interior minister, Vlaškalin, reportedly threatened Dr. Ribar directly: "We will not rest until we bring Moša and Lola to heel, until we lock them up and liquidate

them — because they are the source of destructive communism, and until we destroy the communist youth movement."

The regime soon turned threats into action. In mid-January 1940, around 30 agents surrounded the Ribar home in the dead of night. A few of them stormed the house with pistols drawn and arrested Lola in his sleep. Out of caution, he almost never slept at home, usually staying with friends. But that night, as if in defiance, he let his guard down and stayed the night — a decision that backfired. The agents took him to the Glavnjača prison, where Moša Pijade, Ivan Milutinović, Todor Vujasinović and others were already being held. Without any interrogation, they were all issued police orders for "forced residence" in the Bileća concentration camp, in accordance with that new legal provision.

On December 18, in the dead of winter, the gendarmes loaded the prisoners into a train — shackled in pairs, chained at both hands and feet. Along with Lola, Moša, Milutinović and Vujasinović, the group included Rajko Jovanović, Košta Stamenković, brothers Bora and Josip Baruh, Đorđe Andrejević Kun, David Demajo, Aleksandar Simić and other well-known communists, most of whom, like Lola, had been arrested while sleeping.

The internees were brought to Bileća after three days of gruelling travel in a slow train from Belgrade. Lazo Kapor, the prison carpenter — who would become not only helpful but also a collaborator of the imprisoned communists — recalled

that two days before the group arrived, the prison administration ordered that "at the moment they pass through the town, no one was to leave their homes," which stirred great interest among the locals. On January 21, a column marched from the small railway station in Bileća towards the camp. It was a strange procession of about 25 men, bound hand and foot, accompanied by twice as many armed gendarmes. A line of chained men passed silently through the deserted town. Behind every window along the road to the camp, local residents peeked out, curious.

The gendarmerie barracks that held this group — along with another from Slovenia — was an old structure with thick walls, "so heavily guarded that not even a bird could approach." The walls were so cold and damp that icicles hung down inside the "rooms" where the internees were crammed. There was no heating, and the administration wouldn't even allow the prisoners to buy firewood with their own money. Worst of all, the internal rules were brutally harsh. As Lola would soon write secretly to his father: "You can't move anywhere without a gendarme's permission." The guards, with the encouragement and blessing of the prison authorities, monitored and provoked them around the clock — intending to "liquidate them one by one." Informing his father about this camp regime — which, he noted, existed nowhere else in the world "except in death row cells before execution" — Lola drew this conclusion: "The purpose of this regime in the

camp is only one: to make it easier to liquidate us." He especially warned his father that there must be firm protests against the threats that they could be killed — not only in case of escape, rebellion or violence — but even for disobeying ordinary staff.

The regime's objective was to isolate well-known communists from major cities from political life and to physically break them down through internment. From the very first day, however, the internees began to resist in an organized and tactically skilful way. This resistance evolved into a determined political struggle led by the Party committee formed on the train en route to the camp, consisting of Milutinović, Moša Pijade, Lola, Vujasinović and Josip Bosnar. That struggle — to protect lives and break the imposed isolation — was initially supported, after connections were established, by the communists from Bileća. The CC of the CPY reinforced this effort by sending Miro Popara, and soon Party leadership and the country's democratic public took up the fight. The harsh truth about the brutal regime inside the camp, and the regime's intention to liquidate the internees, was first exposed thanks to Lola's clandestinely delivered letters to his father. Based on these, Dr. Ribar, acting as the legal representative of the internees, filed complaints and legal motions with the Ministry of the Interior and other government authorities. Despite heavy censorship, the information began to reach the public. Dr. Ribar later recalled how Lola once informed him in a letter that, following a discussion about

art, a gendarmerie captain burst into the prison cell threatening to use a firearm. He violently dragged Moša Pijade and Ivan Milutinović to the district police jail, where Moša was beaten and tortured. When Dr. Ribar reported this crime to Deputy Interior Minister Vlaškalin, Vlaškalin laughed and replied: "Well, do you really think that people like them — especially Moša — deserved anything better in a camp?"

Thanks to Party contacts, Lola urged his father to act quickly "on all fronts" to thwart the regime's plan to have them eliminated. He wrote that it was necessary to: "Mobilize honest and patriotic democratic public opinion, all democratic forces within civic organizations, even the foreign democratic press, in order to stir public sentiment in defence of mankind and against the violence being carried out by the all-powerful police."

When Milutinović and Pijade were taken to the district jail and beaten, Lola gave a statement on February 28 before a police clerk. It was preserved in the form of a detailed written record. In it, he directly denounced the prison regime, describing the removal of these two veteran communists — seasoned in royal prisons — as a blatant provocation. He described at length the circumstances under which they were dragged out, testifying courageously and with dignity that Captain Laković, Lieutenant Terzić and others were nothing more than criminals and provocateurs.

The brutality was especially directed at Moša,

who had three ribs broken. As Lola held great respect for him, he took every possible step to have him and Milutinović returned to their comrades. Among other things, he proposed an immediate hunger strike, a collective protest to prison authorities, a demand for a medical examination for Moša and reforms to the "house rules." The internees unanimously supported his proposals — and that was decisive. By refusing food, they forced a collective hearing before the district chief where they exposed the gendarmerie's abuses. Beforehand, they agreed to choose three representatives to present their demands. Lola was among them. According to Milan Apih, a member of the Slovenian group and author of the popular song *Bilećanka,* Lola spoke "in a very calm and dignified tone, though his voice trembled with anger," and, on behalf of all the internees, he firmly protested against such illegal and barbaric behaviour. He demanded that both comrades be returned immediately, that their health be officially assessed, medical care provided, and that the perpetrators face investigation. He announced they would send a protest telegram to the Ministry of the Interior and declared: "We will ensure that all of Yugoslavia is informed."

According to Todor Vujasinović, the hearing before the district chief was mostly successful: "Moša and Milutinović were returned to the room. We gained the right to receive packages and to go for walks. But more importantly, we achieved something critical for us: the gendarmes were re-

moved from our room. At that moment, nothing could have meant more. It brought immense relief and created new conditions for better organization of life in the camp. We immediately began organizing various courses and lectures. Moša and Lola were irreplaceable in this — Moša with his prison experience, and Lola with his exceptional intelligence and wide-ranging culture."

But this was not the end of the struggle to protect the internees. On the contrary — it was only the beginning. And it succeeded in large part thanks to Dr. Ribar, who, along with a group of democratic lawyers, took up their legal defence, turning his home into a kind of war room. Tonica, his wife, played a key role as well — organizing, with other mothers, sisters and wives of the imprisoned, the writing and signing of complaints and appeals. Dr. Ribar made several trips to Bileća, sometimes accompanied by Jurica and Sloboda, to stay informed about developments in the camp. Meanwhile, Edvard Kardelj, a top CPY leader, arrived in Dubrovnik to support efforts being made to defend the basic rights and lives of the internees. He sent word from there that their execution was no longer likely "after such an uproar in public." If absolutely necessary, communists and sympathizers from the surrounding area — even from certain military units — were under orders to be ready to help them escape, if needed, by force.

Kardelj's *Open Letter to the Deputy Prime Minister of the Royal Government, Dr. Vlatko Maček,*

about the crimes committed in the Bileća concentration camp, had a particularly strong public impact. He wrote that the government had turned the name of a poor little Herzegovinian town into: "A synonym for inhuman violence, horror, martyrdom, death sentences and the lowest depths of man's consciousness."

Both domestic and international public pressure provided the internees with significant support and protection — and eventually the right to walk as far as the picturesque spring of the Trebišnjica River. Under such conditions, the Party instructed its imprisoned members not to even think of escaping anymore. The regime was ultimately forced, after four months of atrocities, to open the gates of the camp and release the internees in April 1940. Thus, the struggle for their release — during which the song *Bilećanka* often echoed as an expression of solidarity and defiance — was completely won. Instead of liquidating a group of communist pioneers, the regime was forced to dissolve the Bileća camp (and others like it), although it replaced them with more insidious forms of detention — like "calling unwanted individuals to military drills." Lola passed even that test brilliantly, by organizing a decisive, yet measured and well-informed resistance. He emerged as one of the movement's top leaders, even among seasoned revolutionaries hardened by prison ordeals — men who could organize imaginative and courageous counter-measures and turn prisons into their own "red universities."

Upon returning from the camp, Lola was required by city authorities to report to the police daily. In order not to lose even that limited "freedom," he worked in his father's law office and avoided any public appearances, though he continued to discreetly monitor the work of SKOJ and the development of the mass youth movement, guiding it in part through directive articles in the Party press. For instance, in the April-May issue of *Proleter,* under the pseudonym D. Perić, he published an article entitled "The Communist Youth in the Struggle Against Imperialist War," in which he outlined the transformation of the progressive movement "into a powerful force for peace and progress on the side of the working class and the Communist Party."

A Youth Assembly on the Eve of Revolution

In July, after receiving police permission and under their not-so-subtle surveillance, Lola spent about 20 days at the seaside in Dubrovnik with Sloboda and her family. He then joined preparations for the 6th National Conference of SKOJ. From that time until the outbreak of war, he spent most of his time in Zagreb, where the police were less familiar with him. Already known as a constant traveller on Party assignments, he was able to move in and out of the city under Mount Sljeme with fewer obstacles. At that time, Tito was also operating from Zagreb, overseeing the Party and the movement as a whole. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia and the Party's technical operations were based there as well. In early August 1940, Tito tasked Lola with organizing the 6th National Conference of SKOJ — specifically in Zagreb. This gathering of young communists was meant to precede the 5th National Conference of the CPY and serve as a final assembly of Yugoslav communists before critical historical events.

Lola immediately formed a preparatory committee, which included Jože Vlahović, Leo Mates and Rade Vlkov, in addition to himself. The committee met almost daily to plan the event and ensure it would yield the most meaningful results.

The chosen venue for the Conference was right in the city centre — the Vojvodina Canteen (Club of Vojvodina Students) at 28 Gajeva Street. Known for hosting progressive events and not yet compromised in the eyes of the police, it was a strategically valuable location under those conditions. Groups of SKOJ members were assigned various tasks: discreetly setting up the space, securing the premises, procuring sleeping mats and food for three days (Lola insisted on coffee so the delegates "wouldn't doze off"), welcoming delegates at the main train station and ensuring their safe arrival at the venue.

Thirty delegates from across the country arrived at the station via predetermined routes and connections. Committee members greeted them and led them through Zrinjevac Park to the hall, where the Conference began on the night of September 8,

1940. Representing the CC of the CPY was Ivan Milutinović, Lola's longtime comrade from Bileća, and on the second day of proceedings, Tito arrived. He came to witness the accomplishments of the 17,800 SKOJ members, including 8,500 workers, operating through 85 local and regional organizations led by a core of around 600 SKOJ members who were also Party members. In fact, the Conference was preceded by 45 local and regional conferences and six provincial ones, where about 1,500 leaders and activists evaluated SKOJ's readiness and outlined future strategies.

At the Conference, Leo Mates presented a report on SKOJ's role in the struggle for peace, Dujo Mamula spoke on the status and rights of youth, and Lola gave the political report. One of the most significant and realistic elements of his presentation was his assessment of the CPY's influence on the younger generation:

"The most important outcome of our work is the fact — acknowledged even by all the powerless bigshots, youth 'guardians,' the press and the bourgeois apparatus — that the working youth of Yugoslavia are increasingly rallying around the struggles of the working class. The influence of our Party, the influence of the communists, has become the decisive driving force of this country's youth. With SKOJ at the forefront, already 18,000 strong, this reserve army of our Party is entering increasingly important struggles and demonstrating its loyalty to the cause of liberating the working people — to

the cause of communism...

"All this rightfully fills us with pride and proves the correctness of our youth policy. It reaffirms the great truth that our movement — as Lenin said — is a movement of youth, a movement of the future. But this also imposes a serious responsibility: to guard our achievements, address our weaknesses and strengthen our leadership role among the working youth..."

The Conference adopted a resolution and laid out guidelines for future work with SKOJ members and the youth more broadly. It called on young communists and progressive youth to dedicate all their strength to transforming scattered and largely individual actions into a unified and organized movement — uniting working-class, peasant, student, school-age and all other youth from various social and national backgrounds. According to Lola's later assessment, the Conference defined the young communists' primary responsibilities as "ensuring Party leadership, fostering youth devotion to the Party and educating working youth in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism." In truth, the event defined numerous important goals — aptly entitled *With the CPY for a Better Future for Working Youth, for Socialism*.

The Conference elected 14 members and three candidate members to the new SKOJ Central Committee. The Bureau of the SKOJ Central Committee included: Ivo Lola Ribar (listed under his alias Fišer) as Secretary, Jože Vlahović (Mirko), metal-

worker from Zagreb, Jovo Stoisavljević (Stojan), metalworker from Belgrade, Mira Svetina (Ljerka), student from Slovenia, Budo Tomović (Pavle), legal trainee from Podgorica, Dušan Mamula (Petar), shoemaker from Zagreb, Đorđe Zličić (Lala), graphic worker from Vojvodina. Also elected to the Plenum were Veljko Vlahović (Vlahov), SKOJ's representative to the YCI, Rato Dugonjić (Bosanac), student from Bosnia, and Mika Špiljak (Janko), "village proletarian" from the Sisak region. Of these 14, eight were later declared National Heroes for their exceptional service to the homeland: Lola Ribar, Jože Vlahović, Veljko Vlahović, Budo Tomović, Mika Špiljak, Mira Svetina, Đorđe Zličić and Rato Dugonjić.

The Youngest Member of the Central Committee of the Party

The Conference elected Lola Ribar, Budo Tomović, Milutin Baltić and Jože Vlahović as SKOJ's delegates to the upcoming 5th National Conference of the CPY.

Just days after the SKOJ Conference, and clearly based on what he heard there, Tito wrote — in early September 1940 in Zagreb — a lengthy and directive article entitled "The Struggle for the Younger Generation." In it, he assessed that the SKOJ Conference reflected great progress in both its development and in connecting communist youth with

the broader working youth. He wrote that SKOJ had "emerged from years of isolation and become a truly mass organization of communist youth." Despite being isolated from the working youth and functioning, with its "1,000 to 2,000 members," as a sectarian organization — "a copy of the Communist Party," marked by "slow and difficult development" — its core had always remained "healthy and loyal to the Party and the working class." In those difficult times, Tito concluded, SKOJ had "proven that it cannot be destroyed by firing squads, executions, prisons or years of incarceration... the blood of fallen youth has borne a hundredfold harvest." He stressed that SKOJ's achievements were "indeed great, but nowhere near enough to satisfy or pacify us." According to him, those were "only the first steps in winning over the working youth," and in the period ahead, "the struggle for the youth masses" needed to be SKOJ's central slogan.

At the 5th National Conference of the CPY, held in Zagreb from October 19 to 24, 1940, Lola presented the report *The CPY and the Question of Work Among the Youth.* The core message — the Marxist-Leninist education of the membership — was of great importance, given SKOJ's role as an educational organization. He said, among other things: "The path taken in SKOJ — forming special educational units — must continue, but more systematically and with better planning and oversight. These units must remain under SKOJ leadership. The harmful practice of excluding these units

from SKOJ's forums must end — as must the Party's direct management of educational groups, even in Belgrade. That practice narrows their scope...

"The Party's support in SKOJ's educational work is essential, more so than anywhere else, and Party oversight must take a different form — through the involvement of trained Party members in SKOJ's educational efforts, as instructors, lecturers and so on."

With foresight and clarity, Lola emphasized that the youth of all the peoples of Yugoslavia — if properly engaged — would become a powerful force on the side of the working class and the Communist Party in the coming struggles.

The 5th National Conference — arguably the most important gathering of communists before the war and revolution — established the next steps and responsibilities for the younger generation, particularly in defending the country, and outlined the Party's obligations in that regard. At the Conference, Lola Ribar was elected to the Central Committee, among the most prominent Party leaders. Tito concluded the gathering with the words: "Comrades, decisive days are ahead. Let us now go into the final struggle! The next conference must be held in a country liberated from both foreign occupiers and capitalists."

In the following months — the final stretch before Yugoslavia entered the war — Lola, either on his own or with members and instructors of the SKOJ Central Committee, visited local SKOJ

organizations. He explained to the youth the importance of national defence and the unconditional involvement of communists, SKOJ members and all patriots in that effort. It's recorded, for example, that in the first three months of 1941 alone, he travelled to Slovenia and Croatia as many as ten times each, and made multiple visits to nearly every other region. Attending SKOJ conferences during these visits, he relayed the positions of the Party's new leadership on pressing societal issues and how they could be resolved. As his biographers would later write, through his committed work, Lola left a deep and powerful mark on this turbulent period and, with his strong personality, significantly contributed to the faster and more cohesive unification of working-class, school, student and rural youth. In one report to the YCI, he listed several significant and large-scale actions from that period: the apprentices' strike in Belgrade, involving 9,000 participants, which ended successfully and served as a precursor to a wider movement across the country; the rapid growth of the Rural Youth Cooperative, which, due to intensified work by young communists, exceeded 100,000 members; and major victories by the USY in Belgrade and leftist students in Zagreb in the February 1941 university elections.

In the same report, Lola also wrote that SKOJ, "based on the platform set by its Sixth Conference, was building a youth movement for peace, national independence and alliance with the USSR, and actively participated in all Party campaigns in that

direction. The events of March 27 showed that the majority of youth stood with us..."

The People Say NO to Hitler!

The events of March 27, 1941, which unfolded across the country, showed that at least two-thirds of Yugoslavs clearly declared themselves against fascism — a resounding "NO!" to Hitler and any cooperation with the Axis powers. The youth played the most numerous and resolute role in this uprising.

Alongside Rade Končar, Cana Babović, Svetozar Vukmanović and other leading communists, Lola was remembered that day as one of the most prominent speakers addressing the swelling crowds in Belgrade. He spoke at multiple locations, seeming to fly from one gathering to another where the people were most numerous. Vladimir Popović recalled seeing him speak in front of the Soviet embassy, where he urged the youth and people to bring down the Pact and the traitorous government, and to organize for national defence with the support of the Soviet Union. "The street was so packed you couldn't fit a pin in it," Popović remembered.

According to accounts from participants in this "eruption of freedom and the Party's breakthrough from illegality," a massive crowd of youth and citizens of all ages and occupations listened to Lola on Slavija Square. In a wave of patriotic enthusiasm, the crowd interrupted his speech with cheers of "We will defend the country!" The youth lifted him onto their shoulders, shouting loudly that it was better to die standing than to live kneeling.

Upon hearing of the events in Belgrade and the communists' public appearances before the people, Josip Broz flew from Zagreb to Belgrade on March 28, heading straight into the heart of the action. He said goodbye to Krsto Popivoda with the words: "War is inevitable — we must be ready!" That same afternoon, through Lola's arrangement, Tito met with members of the Politburo who were active in Belgrade. He received a full report on developments, praised the communists for their conduct during the events and proposed a Provincial CPY meeting be held the next day in Čukarica. Before 35 high-ranking Party officials, Tito laid out his views on the events of March 27, emphasizing that the communists must work towards strengthening national defence, respond en masse to military mobilization and become leaders in the resistance against the aggressor. He cautioned that they should not harbour illusions about the new government, but nevertheless support its efforts at organizing national defence.

After the consultation, again through Lola's mediation, Tito attempted to meet with the democratically oriented leaders of the bourgeois parties in hopes of reaching an agreement on national defence. However, it became clear that most of them were capitulationists, unwilling to engage with the

communists or take on any responsibility in those fateful days. Realizing this, Tito wrote a leaflet in Belgrade, published under the title: "Peoples of Yugoslavia! Workers, peasants and citizens, officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers!" Then, on a train packed with students rushing home in fear of the looming war, he returned to Zagreb — determined to make his way back to Belgrade as soon as possible to lead the Party from there.

The Party's assessment proved accurate: however much March 27 had marked a major victory in the people's long struggle, and however powerful that wave of resistance was — strong enough to topple the capitulationist Cvetković-Maček government — it was still not powerful enough to bring true democratic forces to power. The new government did not, in any sense, reflect the will of the people. Only six of its ministers, including the coup-appointed Prime Minister General Simović, had not previously served in one of the 38 Karađorđević governments. The "generals-and-Maček" government, even if some individuals had wanted change, was in no position to transform the capitulationist spirit of the regime.

There was nothing left that could save the Kingdom.

The people clung only to one hope — an alliance with the Soviets — believing that the first socialist state was the only one capable, if willing, to defend Yugoslavia's independence. For that reason, on the evening of April 5, word quickly spread

through Belgrade: the communists were calling on Belgraders to attend a large rally the next day to celebrate the announced signing of the pact with the Soviet Union.

But the war began before the rally.

The *Junkers* Struck Before the Engagement Celebration

The days leading up to the April War in Belgrade were filled with uncertainty, evacuations and tearful farewells, but also with illusions and hopes — among politicians, generals and ordinary people alike — that the worst might somehow be avoided. Lola, however, as a Marxist, understood that war was inevitable for Yugoslavia, and that its outbreak was only a matter of days. In early April, he buried all the Party and sensitive documents in his backyard — including those detailing the events at the Bileća camp — and exchanged the Central Committee of SKOJ's cash holdings for gold coins, which he stored in his father's safe at the First Croatian Savings Bank. In a desire to affirm his deep emotional bond with Sloboda in front of both families, he scheduled their engagement lunch for Sunday, April 6. On the night before what was meant to be a joyful occasion for both families, he celebrated a "bachelor's night" at a tavern with Moša Pijade, Veselin Masleša and Bora Prodanović. That celebration took place in an unusual atmosphere —

the night before destruction. One foreign visitor described it: "The cafés were full, Gypsy bands competing with loud music, restaurants bursting with gourmet food, people comforting themselves with the idea that war might still be postponed."

Lola came face to face with the brutal reality of war the next morning, rushing to meet comrades at Kalenić Market, where the rally was scheduled. Running through rubble and crowds in panic, he searched for his loved ones. The Ribar family home was in flames, and Sloboda's father's pharmacy had been levelled — but fortunately, no one from either family was harmed.

For Lola, the war had begun — the war he had spent years preparing for, along with SKOJ and Yugoslavia's youth.

The communists and SKOJ members had clear instructions: to enlist in the army and fight bravely, inspiring others to resist the occupiers; to help organize the home front against the fifth column, chaos and looting; and to politically mobilize the masses against the enemy, raising a fighting spirit that, from the very beginning, resembled more a collapse than a resistance. Following the Party's line, Lola and Jurica were among the first to volunteer. However, the military authorities in Belgrade, like elsewhere, firmly rejected them — as they did thousands of others. As Dr. Ribar would later write: "They joined units that were being formed voluntarily, because the responsible military districts refused them. When they asked for weapons and

ammunition from army warehouses, the district commanders told them... they would rather hand them over to the Germans than give them to communist youth."

Lola, along with Jurica and many other young volunteers, made it as far as Sarajevo during those tragic April days. Amid the chaos of soldiers and civilians — all aware the war was lost — he observed one bright spot: the SKOJ organization had taken charge of organizing the home front. He would later cite this as a positive example, alongside the engagement and heroic stance of young communists at the front lines in Belgrade, Montenegro and Slovenia...

Like his sons, Dr. Ribar, a reserve officer in the royal army, struggled to keep up with his abandoned unit, retreating all the way to Rogatica, where he learned of the capitulation. With him, he carried a substantial sum of gold coins — property of the SKOJ Central Committee — which he had withdrawn from the safe during the bombing and guarded as a matter of family honour. He brought them back to ruined Belgrade, after a difficult return journey, and handed them — down to the last coin — to Lola, who was already surrounded by Party leaders and engaged in new responsibilities.

In Belgrade, around April 20, three members of the Politburo and several members of the CC of the CPY gathered. They quickly established contact with Party leadership in Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro, and — through couriers — with the General Secretary of the Party in Zagreb. At

the Party's technical base in Belgrade, on April 29, under the leadership of this group — which included Lola — a May Day proclamation was printed and urgently sent out across the country. In it, the CC of the CPY declared new responsibilities to the people:

"And just as the Communist Party has so far stood at the forefront of the people's struggle, so it will now, with even greater persistence, organize and lead the people's fight against the occupiers and their collaborators in the country, against the incitement of national hatred, and for the brotherhood of the peoples of Yugoslavia and all the peoples of the Balkans. Against the exploitation of the working people, for a better and happier future."

The closing section of the proclamation urged the youth to rise against fascism — "which spills rivers of young blood to prolong the life of what has outlived its time, what obstructs the progress of mankind — the capitalist social system" — and ended with a call to action: "Youth, the Communist Party calls on you to stand in the front lines of the people's fight against imperialist conquerors, in the struggle for a better and happier future for the younger generation."

Preparing the Youth for the Decisive Struggle

In early May, Josip Broz summoned Lola — as a member of the CC of the CPY and Secretary of

the Central Committee of SKOJ — to Zagreb for the May Consultation of the CPY. Among others invited from Belgrade was Cana Babović, though out of caution, they each travelled separately. To avoid detection amid numerous checks, Lola disguised himself with glasses, calmly crossed the German pontoon bridge over the Sava, and arrived in the ever-burning revolutionary hub. There, SKOJ members — even as the king, with the nation's gold reserves and "loyal" ministers, fled the country by plane, leaving it at the mercy of the invader — openly distributed leaflets with a clear message: "The reality of national enslavement is far too brutal for the people to be deceived by idle talk of freedom... Everyone, rise up! Let us unite all our forces in a general and joint struggle against the imperialist occupiers!"

Tito's report, and the discussion among the delegates from nearly all national and provincial Party leaderships, focused on the situation after the April War and the specific tasks of the communists in each region following the occupation and dismemberment of Yugoslavia. It clearly outlined the fundamental tasks for SKOJ members — especially the need to strengthen ties between organizations, and to cooperate more closely in the field with all groups and individuals, all progressive youth willing and able to fight.

After the consultation, Lola threw himself into strengthening the regional leadership of SKOJ — building unity across the country despite the occu-

piers' imposed divisions. He focused on improving discipline and accountability, and called for the immediate removal of any young communists who had compromised themselves during the war in any way.

He returned to Belgrade shortly before Tito's arrival. He immediately attended a meeting of the Provincial Committee of SKOJ for Serbia, where it was concluded that "weapons and medical supplies must be systematically gathered and organized, youth squads and platoons must be formed, ready for combat, and all SKOJ leadership and organizations must begin training young men and women in weapons handling and first aid."

That same month, a proclamation by the "People's Youth of Belgrade" was printed, urging young people not to accept forced labour in Germany. The document cited successful actions by the youth in Zagreb and some towns in Bačka who had resisted forced labour and repression by the new authorities.

Lola heard the news of the Wehrmacht's attack on the Soviet Union — on the morning of June 22 — during a Local SKOJ Conference in Belgrade, which focused on organizing the youth for upcoming tasks. Visibly shaken, he told the assembled youth leaders that the time had come for a harsh test of everything the younger generation had been preparing for over the years. That afternoon, he was called to Molerova 43 — where Ivan Milutinović, operating illegally, was staying. There, the historic Politburo meeting of the CC of the CPY was held.

From that meeting came a call to the working class and to all the peoples of Yugoslavia to rally around the Communist Party and help "by all means, the just struggle of the great and peace-loving land of socialism," and to secure a future for themselves and their children.

Tito's statement from that meeting — that the youth must "now stand in the front lines of the struggle" — was echoed by Lola that very afternoon at a meeting of the Voždovac SKOJ leadership. He understood that the most urgent priority was getting the Party's voice — and its call to immediate action — to the youth as quickly as possible. About 30 delegates from local, student and high school organizations unanimously accepted the call of their secretary. At the very end of that historic day, Lola, seeing it as a natural continuation of the Politburo meeting, chaired a session of the SKOJ Central Committee Bureau. According to Rato Dugonjić, it was held somewhere on Brankova Street, and focused on preparations by SKOJ members and the younger generation for armed resistance. The next morning, he attended a meeting of the CPY Provincial Committee for Serbia, where it was decided that the entire Party organization would go into full mobilization. The Party would shift from a sabotage-based strategy to open warfare, and Party leaders and instructors would be dispatched to the Serbian interior to help speed up the formation of armed units, their arming and deployment into action in the shortest time possible.

Unity in Struggle — The Pledge of Victory

By July 1, over 35,000 SKOJ members across the country had received a proclamation from the Central Committee of SKOJ, written by Lola. The very title conveyed its message: "Everything for the defeat of the fascist bandits! Everything for the just cause of the Soviet Union — for the liberation of our peoples." The proclamation was, in essence, a call to arms — a reminder of duty, an encouragement to sacrifice, and a guide towards true ideological and action-based unity among the younger generation: "Bolder and stronger than ever before, take your stand alongside all the oppressed and enslaved in the great army of liberation! Unite, young workers, peasants and intellectuals, young men and women of all South Slavic peoples — regardless of which organization you belong to, of race, religion or nationality — unite! All young democrats, Sokols, Catholics, all young patriots, together with the communist youth — unite for the liberation of our peoples!... Only in your unity and shared struggle lies the pledge of your victory!"

It is easy here to recognize not only the ideas and messages, but Lola Ribar's own words — the same words he had delivered at political rallies of the youth before the war, especially in the Physical Education Hall, or written in his linguistically brilliant and combatively toned articles. He had consistently emphasized that only a fighting, united youth could carry the historic battles to come and

secure its own future. Now, the time for those battles had arrived, and Lola, now also a member of the Supreme Command of the Yugoslav National Liberation Partisan Detachments (formed on June 27), was calling on young people to take part.

Throughout April, May and June, alongside ongoing acts of resistance and political propaganda, essential organizational preparations for uprising were carried out. In acts of resistance — especially sabotage — SKOJ members took the lead. From their defiance grew their prestige; from their actions, their popularity.

On July 4, on Botić Lane in Dedinje, inside the villa of *Politika* director Vladislav Ribnikar, the Politburo of the CC of the CPY held a meeting where it was decided to launch a nationwide uprising. Tito had stayed in that villa illegally in May, later relocating to a secret hideout at the Nenadović family home, between Dedinje and Banjica, right next to a German barracks. From there, he often visited the Ribnikars — to meet with movement leaders or to work in the back garden, hidden by dense greenery. Lola had also made himself at home in that house, using it as a base while in hiding. Right after June 22, he had parted from Sloboda, urging her and her parents to take refuge in Vrnjačka Banja. Jara Ribnikar recalled that during those days he would type proclamations and articles on their typewriter "like a machine gun." He carried a pistol and grenades in his pockets — even when going out, dressed smartly in a straw hat and dark sunglasses. He often spent

the night at the Ribnikars', taking turns on guard duty under the porch while the others slept.

At that meeting of the Politburo, Tito declared that "the time had come for armed action against the occupiers — the time for a national liberation partisan war." He stressed that the upcoming struggle would have a pan-Yugoslav character only if the masses were convinced that the old Yugoslavia would not be restored, and that in the new social order, their life interests would be guaranteed and all would be equal. From that meeting, Central Committee delegates were dispatched across the country to support provincial Party leadership in organizing the uprising. The text of a proclamation from the Central Committee to the people was approved and printed on July 12. The call to a nationwide uprising quickly spread — between July 7 and 27, it reached almost every region of the country. A wave of actions against the occupiers and their collaborators swept through Belgrade, which, despite being occupied and heavily garrisoned, remained the seat of the Central Committee and Supreme Command until mid-September. In July alone, strike groups carried out some sixty combat actions throughout the city: destruction of enemy vehicles, burning of garages, cutting communication lines and more — some of which Lola personally led.

"Join the Heroic Partisan Detachments"

Researching Lola's revolutionary activities during the uprising, journalist Živomir Stanković wrote: "The sharp features of his face and character, intensified by the dangers of underground work and the harshness of wartime conditions, concealed a great dreamer — even a visionary — who, when time allowed, could speak passionately for hours about how life worthy of human dignity should be organized. Just like his impassioned, sharply cut speeches and writings, his conversations were full of vitality and fresh thought — never wordy or moralizing, never bogged down in theoretical abstractions or burdened with clichés or political jargon. They were grounded not only in ideological conviction but in the lived experiences and lessons of life itself."

This was not, in Lola's case — as it was not before the war — defeatism. On the contrary, it was a distinctly combative humanism. Lola was one of its strongest proponents. He demanded that the youth must fight — even kill fascists — so that they might live tomorrow. He believed that their humanity and patriotism would be measured by the number of enemies defeated. These philosophical principles, refined in the brutal school of war, were expertly turned into political slogans of the day — emerging from his speeches or from his typewriter as an irresistible call, a motto and a symbol of faith in the justice and meaning of the struggle.

"Know that your liberation must be the work of your own hands, the result of your own struggle,"

wrote Lola in one of the SKOJ Central Committee's proclamations during the uprising — the ones he sent to the youth of Yugoslavia "like a machine gun" from Dedinje. "Let us join the heroic partisan detachments by the thousands... let us show that we too are a generation made for song." For him, the uprising was a "sacred guerrilla war."

From Belgrade, Lola helped lead wartime SKOJ not only through direct participation but also by sending directive articles, mostly as circulars, to all provincial committees simultaneously. At the Central Committee session of the CPY on August 31, his report on the early successes of SKOJ organizations in the fight against the occupiers — presented the day before to the SKOJ Bureau — was adopted, along with a decision to establish and develop a united youth anti-fascist movement. At the same time, the Central Committee of SKOJ confirmed the decision to organize the youth within partisan detachments. Following that, Lola issued two major directives. In the first, he laid out how the united anti-fascist national liberation youth front should be built and what organizational structures should be developed "from the bottom up" — from villages and neighbourhoods to provincial levels. Thanks to this initiative and the momentum of the national liberation struggle and resistance across the country, broad anti-fascist youth alliances soon emerged in every province. As Lola wrote on August 30, the youth front was being built "from below" — not by merging political parties, but through mass engagement by "many thousands of young patriots, who daily offer magnificent examples of self-sacrifice and courage."

In the second directive, written on August 30 and confirmed by the CC of the CPY on August 31, Lola gave instructions for building strong, unified SKOJ organizations within the partisan units — essentially, how to ensure leadership and structure for those fighting groups, which forms of work should be developed, and how to strengthen discipline and responsibility. All of this was aimed at fostering the ideological, political, military and cultural development of SKOJ members — who, by general recognition, were the "flower of the detachments," making up three-quarters of the companies, battalions and units from the very beginning of the uprising. According to Lola's directive, SKOJ organizations were to serve as the backbone of leadership in strengthening the units and as a vital link between the detachments and SKOJ and youth organizations in each region. His demand was clear: in the new revolutionary army, SKOJ must become and remain "the main ally of the Communist Party, the most disciplined and selfless strike force of commanders and political commissars, and, at the same time, the favourite of all the partisans."

In preparing the armed uprising, the Yugoslav Party leadership adopted a flexible strategy of partisan warfare, rooted in existing revolutionary traditions and informed by international experiences — including the example of the Russian Civil War,

as well as the work of the Comintern. Rather than relying on rigid positional warfare or premature urban insurrections, the leadership aimed to build a broad-based people's war, engaging the enemy in dispersed formations, operating from liberated territories and relying on the support of the population. This approach required the relocation of central Party leadership from Belgrade to western Serbia, where the first liberated zones were being formed. These transfers were carried out through underground networks and with the help of local Party organizations and partisan units, ensuring that political and military leadership could be exercised directly from the field.

Leaving Occupied Belgrade

Tito left Belgrade on September 15, travelling by train via a circuitous route to reach the territory controlled by the Valjevo Partisan Detachment, whose ranks he would later describe as "young fighters, practically still children aged 15 to 18."

Lola, as agreed with Tito, left Belgrade on September 18, and his brother Jurica followed on October 2. Before his departure, on September 13, Lola sent a report to the Communist International in Moscow: "SKOJ has been mobilized. Leadership and communication are functioning. The core membership, despite heavy blows, has been preserved. One-quarter of the membership is with

the partisans and is fighting well. Main issues: intensify political work, organizational consolidation of unity against the occupiers and organizing SKOJ within the partisan detachments. Two Central Committee proclamations issued, along with several local ones. The Central Committee is functioning." This report was based on information coming to Lola through various channels from across the country. On this basis, at the August 30 meeting of the SKOJ Central Committee Bureau, he had noted that SKOJ members "in all provinces... are striking increasingly heavy blows against the occupiers and domestic traitors, carrying out ever more significant acts of sabotage and diversion, participating in raids against the enemy... and joining the heroic partisan detachments in ever greater numbers."

Just before leaving Belgrade, Lola said farewell to his fiancée and comrade-in-arms Sloboda Trajković with an extraordinary and deeply moving letter. He entrusted it to a fellow comrade, to be delivered only if he were killed. The letter — written by hand — is a remarkable message of love and purpose, worthy of inclusion in any anthology of farewell letters:

"My dearest, my one and only,

"Writing this letter, I firmly hope — I am an optimist, as always! — that it will never reach you, but that we will see each other again and always be together. For that is the very reason it was written.

"At this moment, as we head into the final and decisive stage of the struggle — a stage on which,

among everything else, our personal future and happiness depend — I want to say a few simple things to you.

"In my life, there are only two things: my duty to our sacred cause, and my love for you, my dearest. Our happiness and the life we wanted were never meant — like for millions of others — to be lived in isolation, but only through our fight and our victory. And so, in my heart, these two things are truly one and the same.

"Know, my love, that you are the only one I have ever loved and that I still love. I have dreamed, and still dream, of our shared happiness — the kind we both wanted, a happiness worthy of free people. That is the only true happiness, the only one worth desiring.

"If you receive this letter — if, in other words, I do not live to see that great moment — do not grieve too much, my dearest! In the world you'll live in then, you'll always find the best part of me alive, and all my love for you.

"I am certain that your path will be the right one — the path it must be. On that path, in the course of your life, you will find both vengeance and happiness.

"I love you very, very much, my only one! And I hope you'll never receive this letter — that we'll live to see the great moment of victory together. I want my love to make you as happy as you truly deserve.

"Always yours, L."

Lola left for the partisans with two other mem-

bers of the Politburo in an operation organized by Milentije Popović. They were supposed to be accompanied by four Party members for protection, but due to a miscommunication, only one ended up joining them. According to the plan, Lola — dressed in a traditional Šumadija peasant outfit made of homespun wool and wearing pointed *opanci* (peasant shoes) — stopped by Đorđe Dikić's tavern in Čukarica, which served as a Party safehouse, to meet his escorts. The tavern owner was a trusted ally of the resistance. "Lola came in out of breath, wearing clothes that," the tavern owner recalled, "looked ridiculous on him." Just as he was about to meet up with the comrades waiting for him in the garden, police agent Jovanović — an old acquaintance of Lola's — burst into the tavern. "When Lola saw him — he disappeared in an instant. He opened a window and jumped into the courtyard — just as my wife was packing sausages and bread for him to take to his comrades," the tavern owner recounted.

There's one detail that had long bonded the Dikić family with Lola — in fact, one that made them feel forever indebted to him. It dated back to the traditional May Day workers' picnic in Košutnjak in 1939, during which blood was spilled. The family patriarch recalled: "The police opened fire on us from the west, while the royal guard's sentries fired from the east. Lola was there too, with many young people. When the shooting started, we were caught in a crossfire. Lola was right next to me. He

grabbed my daughter and, with my wife, got them both out of the police trap."

After that, they became such close friends that Lola used the Dikić apartment for illegal meetings with workers from Makiš, the Sugar Factory and other nearby areas.

That's how Lola left Belgrade, the city of his revolutionary youth — never to return. Sadly, that would also be the wartime fate of his younger brother Jurica, the family's beloved son, a gifted artist and prominent revolutionary activist. Before his departure, their mother Tonica gave him her blessing and two books — which, despite all the horrors of the war and every offensive he endured, he carried with him until the day he died.

Tonica Ribar herself would never return home either. At the time her sons went to join the partisans, she had taken shelter in Zemun, staying with the family of poet Gustav Krklec, where she remained until January 1943. While trying to reach liberated territory, she was captured by fascist forces and executed shortly afterward.

Their half-sister, Božena, barely survived the horrors of the Banjica concentration camp.

Thus, the Ribar family, torn apart by war, was never reunited. The Trajković family, Sloboda's — Lola's fiancée — shared the same tragic wartime fate.

Operations from Liberated Krupanj

While Tito was holding his first negotiations with Draža Mihailović in Struganik, trying to avoid civil war and rally all national forces to the cause of liberation, Lola, along with Ivan Milutinović-Čvorka, arrived in the small town of Krupanj in an old Ford. The town had been liberated for about fifteen days. There, the two of them assisted in the work of the local command, people's guard, workers' control board and the first institutions of people's power. Lola took an interest in everything. Mića Jeremić recalled how he wanted to visit the camp where 124 German soldiers were being held, having been captured during the town's liberation. Lola carefully observed the prisoners and even spoke with some of them.

One day in September, Lola, together with a group of comrades, visited the antimony smelter in Zajača. There, from a group of young men from the Mačva region, he formed a youth detachment. At his suggestion, the fighters themselves chose their commander and commissar. After a fiery speech and a call to relentless combat, he sent them off to the front.

He also attended a meeting of the Workers' Control Board at the smelter. He greeted the workers, outlined their tasks and sketched out the broader perspective of their struggle...

In Krupanj, Lola met with a group of veteran communists who had managed to escape the Sremska Mitrovica prison. He embraced every one of them, devoting special attention to Spasoje

Stejić, the man involved in the failed assassination attempt on Crown Prince Aleksandar on June 29, 1921. Stejić's health had been severely damaged by two decades of harsh imprisonment.

As they parted, Lola urged the local command to ensure the former prisoners were well cared for, and asked that they be given better clothing and footwear.

The main task assigned to Lola and Milutinović, sent there by the Supreme Commander, was to prepare a military-political consultation of the highest-ranking leaders of the uprising and the Party from all the regions of the country. They worked on this with great dedication, without revealing their purpose due to operational secrecy. Together with the local committee and command in Krupanj, they arranged for a multi-day stay of the Supreme Commander and representatives from Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia. During this time, Lola interrogated a captured Volksdeutscher named Erceg, originally from Banja Luka, for two nights. On the first night, he was assisted by Rade Končar and Vlado Popović. Lola questioned him like a seasoned investigator, but the agent was a "tough nut to crack." However, he began to break down when Lola spread out on the table a set of photographs secretly taken by SKOJ members in Valjevo, showing Erceg with the Gestapo chief Keller. Confronted with this evidence, Erceg revealed multiple spy points and the names of collaborators who had infiltrated liberated

territory — some of them posing as refugees fleeing the Ustaše. In the morning, Lola ordered that Erceg be transferred to Stolice, where, hoping to save his life, he "spilled everything he knew" — even what he hadn't been asked.

In Stolice, after analysing and summarizing past experiences and agreeing on the further development of the National Liberation War and National Liberation Movement, the following tasks were set: Establish Main Headquarters of partisan detachments in regions where they did not yet exist; Rename the Main Headquarters of Yugoslav Partisan Detachments into the Supreme Headquarters; Transition to more unified and solid military formations, with larger units formed as the struggle progressed; Prioritize support services: logistics, medical, intelligence and more; Expand and liberate more territory — not to defend any area at all costs, but to recover lost ground by liberating even more elsewhere; Continue fostering unity among all peoples in the fight against the occupiers; Devote full attention to the National Liberation Committees, as the bearers of true people's power; Adopt the red star as the universal emblem of all partisan fighters — henceforth known collectively as partisans.

The Ribar Brothers in the heart of the Užice Republic

As the Supreme Headquarters and Politburo prepared to relocate to liberated Užice, Lola was tasked with launching the first radio broadcast station of the uprising's leadership. His brother Jurica also helped with this project. However, the job was difficult — the radio station had been seized during the fighting for Krupanj and had technical issues, and there were no experienced radio operators or known frequencies. Lola, under pressure, grew frustrated — the world needed to hear the truth about who was fighting on Yugoslavia's front lines. A joyful moment came when Edvard Kardelj (Bevc) arrived, embracing Lola after a gruelling journey from Slovenia, where he had been when summoned for the consultation.

For Lola, arriving in free Užice, the heart of a vast liberated territory was a chance to fully demonstrate and affirm his revolutionary capabilities. From Užice operated: The CC of the CPY; The Supreme Headquarters; The Main National Liberation Committee of Serbia; A partisan arms factory that worked day and night; Youth work brigades organized to secure food supplies for the army and civilians; Užice's workers — metalworkers, bakers, tailors — worked with rifles at hand, ready to defend their self-governing city, like Paris Commune fighters; The founding rally of the Serbian National Liberation Youth Alliance was held there; Newspapers were printed: *Borba* (the organ of the CC of the CPY) and *Omladinska borba* (the organ of SKOJ); Cultural life flourished, showcasing the tal-

ent and energy of partisan artists — painters, actors, poets. In this first Partisan Republic, the old saying "when the cannons roar, the muses fall silent" did not apply. Lola had a prominent role in all of it, alongside his brother Jurica and comrades who shared the same ideas, goals and weapons. Participants recall how the Ribar brothers fully embodied the moral strength, work ethic and political maturity necessary for the enormous revolutionary events of the time. Jurica was especially active in the newspapers *Borba* and *Omladinska borba,* serving as both editor and illustrator, working from the fourth floor of the Hotel Palas. He kept a partisan diary, and as a wartime artist, sketched portraits of SKOJ members, gunners and machine gunners — while also fulfilling his role in Serbia's youth leadership.

Lola's passionate speech at the founding rally of the Serbian National Liberation Youth Alliance is remembered for clearly defining the movement's purpose: to turn the youth into a driving force of the National Liberation War, both at the front and behind the lines.

Lola took on every responsibility with great success. However, he is best remembered for his role as the speaker at the central celebration of the 24th anniversary of the October Revolution in Užice. His speech, delivered in the name of the Politburo of the CC of the CPY and the Supreme Headquarters, began with these words, spoken under the pseudonym Ivo Pavlović: "We celebrate this great date — the partisans and the people of Užice — gathered

here in the heart of liberated Serbia, which we have freed with our blood in the fight against Hitler's gangs." He then laid out the Party's internationalist stance — emphasizing both the global cooperation in the anti-fascist struggle and the unique, authentic nature of Yugoslavia's uprising. He highlighted that: "Our country is united in the common fight with the fraternal Russian and other peoples." This was, in terms of sheer number of significant events from dawn to dusk, "one of the most glorious days in Užice." A special 16-page edition of *Borba* was printed for the occasion, filled with front-line reports and articles. Dedijer, in his *Diary,* wrote: "The celebration on October 7 had a powerful impact on troop morale. As dusk fell, the red flag with the golden hammer and sickle fluttered over Supreme Headquarters, red lights cast the image of a star far and wide. Battalions marched one after the other in solid step. On the podium in the market square stood the Old Man (Tito's nickname) and others..." Mounted commanders delivered reports, a review was held, the ceremony began — and Lola's speech, as Dedijer recorded, was excellent.

Later that day, in a small room of the Sokolana, an art exhibition was opened featuring works by Jurica Ribar, Boro Baruh and other partisan artists. That evening, a torchlight parade and cultural performance were held. The "Dimitrije Tucović" Užice Partisan Detachment, with over 3,500 fighters, along with other units that had marched in the parade and attended the rally, rushed back to their

positions immediately after Lola's speech — to repel yet another enemy assault on Užice that very night.

Fully aware of the power of the written word as one of a revolutionary's weapons, Lola found time to assist Kardelj in editing *Borba,* and Dušan Nedeljković in editing *Vesti,* often writing the lead articles for nearly every issue. In his recollections of that collaboration, Dušan emphasized that the "deeply humane, revolutionary-liberationist and powerful voice of the tribune of our revolution, Ivo Lola Ribar, with its comprehensive substance and eloquent, direct persuasiveness, will remain unmatched." This comrade from the Bileća prison especially remembered two of Lola's editorials in *Vesti,* entitled "Pavelić and Nedić" and "Everything for the Front." In the first article, Lola exposed the deceitful intentions of the so-called "Father of Serbia," placing him — through his deeds and objectives — side by side with Pavelić. Describing "the repulsiveness and misery of these two great criminals and villains," Lola simultaneously highlighted the fate of every traitor — "even if they escape the dissatisfaction of their foreign masters, they are never spared the wrath and justice of their own people." Lola wrote quickly and easily, often on his knee or a small table in the newsroom, producing articles so forceful that editors rarely found anything to change.

"For *Borba,* Lola wrote numerous articles," said his comrades, "many unsigned or signed only with initials." Even the headlines spoke volumes: "The

Meaning and Purpose of Our Slogan 'Everything for the Front,'" "Moscow — The Graveyard of the German Imperialists," "We Received No Armed Help from Anyone," "Let Us Learn the Leninist Style of Work," "For the Theoretical Advancement of Party Cadres"...

Together with Jurica and Jovan Marjanović, Lola helped launch and edit *Omladinska borba,* with assistance from Dušan Nedeljković. For the first issue, printed on November 17 in the building of the National Bank, Lola wrote the editorial. There, he stated that *Omladinska borba,* as the organ of SKOJ, should become: "The paper of all patriotic youth, their guide, their support, their faithful companion and signpost in the struggle — a highly influential tool for politically mobilizing young fighters, to broaden the unified movement of Yugoslav anti-fascist youth." In *Omladinska borba,* he also published three directive articles: "SKOJ in the Harsh School of War," "The Young Generation in the Liberation War of the Yugoslav Peoples," "The Position of Our Youth in Occupied and Liberated Territories." Jovan Marjanović recalled: "Lola regularly attended editorial meetings when we planned the issues. He also reviewed texts and gave suggestions and corrections. Jurica handled the operational side of the work — final editing, layout, printing — and oversaw the paper's release."

The second issue of *Omladinska borba* came out on November 24. A third issue was prepared in the following days, but publication was halted by the

enemy offensive, which forced most of the partisan forces to withdraw into the Sandžak. Despite the harsh conditions of war, the paper would later be printed again in Bosnia, much like its "older sister" *Borba,* in whichever locations housed the Central Committee and Supreme Headquarters, provided even minimal conditions were met. The prepared third issue was finally printed in November 1942, in the Bosnian Krajina...

As the last surviving fighters of Užice's Workers' Battalion and part of the Posavina National Liberation Movement detachment resisted the Germans at Kadinjača on November 29, defending the approach to the "Red City," Lola was among the final group to leave the capital of the republic, already collapsing under the blows of German and Chetnik forces. With Draganče Pavlović, he tried to blow up the road to Mačkat to slow down the German tanks racing towards Zlatibor, smashing through the rearguards of the partisan columns. But the enemy had pilots, tanks and motorcyclists working in unison...

The Supreme Headquarters, along with most of the forces from Serbia, retreated to the Sandžak under pressure from the enemy offensive — to liberate new territory and reignite the struggle. Lola was tasked by the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, Arso Jovanović, to remain in Radoinja with a group of commanders to await the exhausted and reduced units retreating from Serbia. His role was to help reorganize them, secure lodging and — when neces-

sary — reprimand, discipline or even punish those who had erred during the difficult retreat. Shortly thereafter, Nova Varoš was liberated and became a temporary base for those units. Lola visited them, encouraged them and calmed their nerves, telling them: "The struggle continues — we will liberate new territories!"

Lola accompanied Tito and Arso during the formation of the 1st Proletarian Brigade. He gave a speech on the occasion, with "fiery greetings" to Stalin, the Red Army and the Comintern, elated by the revolutionary significance of the event and by the fact that the unit was made up of young fighters, mostly communists and SKOJ members — much like the 80,000 fighters at the time fighting across Yugoslavia in the National Liberation Movement detachments, 50,000 of whom were younger than the SKOJ age group.

With Kardelj in Occupied Zagreb

On the evening of December 24, Tito and Arso Jovanović, with a group from the Supreme Headquarters, including Lola, arrived in Rogatica, spending the night on a straw-covered floor. The next day, the Supreme Headquarters held a consultation with comrades from the Main Headquarters of the National Liberation Movement detachments of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In assessing the military-political situation, they revisited issues raised earlier, on December 7, at the CC of the CPY session in Drenova — namely, the challenges facing the revolutionary leadership in maintaining constant, secure communication with headquarters and party leadership during enemy offensives and under life-threatening conditions. According to historian Mišo Leković, it was determined that: "Maintaining communication across occupied territory using regular transport operated by the occupiers was far more secure, faster and more efficient. As a result, it was decided: A secure clandestine base should be established somewhere in occupied territory; A group of Central Committee members would operate from there as an organizational secretariat, to restore broken links and stabilize fragile ones, connecting all Party and military leadership across the country; The CC of the CPY and its Politburo had been exposed to extreme danger, often operating on the front lines — making it reasonable to expect the worst; Therefore, in the conditions of enemy offensives and unstable liberated territories, it was unwise for the entire top leadership of the CPY and the National Liberation Movement to be concentrated in one, highly threatened location. Conclusion: A section of the Politburo (two or three members) would be separated to form a kind of secretariat, which would, on behalf of the CC of the CPY, maintain contact with Party leadership across Yugoslavia, the Comintern and the leadership of communist parties in neighbouring countries: Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, Albania and others.

"It was decided that this secretariat would initially be composed of Edvard Kardelj and Lola Ribar, and that later — depending on its consolidation and increased activity — it would be expanded with additional members and instructors from the Central Committee.

"Kardelj and Ribar were given full authority to act, in the name of the CC of the CPY, and to take all necessary measures in accordance with the directives and instructions they had received. Given the difficulties of maintaining reliable communication with the Central Committee and with Tito himself, it was understood that they would, when necessary, act independently — issuing directives, clarifying positions and finding appropriate solutions based on the circumstances on the ground. Their responsibilities also included maintaining contact with Party and military leadership across the country, with the Comintern and, where possible, with other communist parties..."

In accordance with this decision, the Supreme Commander wrote on January 8:

"A few days before the offensive, which the occupiers together with the Ustaše and Chetniks prepared and launched against us in Bosnia, we decided that comrades Bevc and Fišer (Kardelj and Ribar) would go to Zagreb, so that in case we found ourselves in a difficult situation, they could take over the duties of the Central Committee. They will, in any case, handle a significant portion of the leadership's work..."

By the time Tito wrote this, Lola was already resting in Pale after a gruelling journey he made on skis and in -30°C temperatures, from Bijele Vode on Romanija to the outskirts of occupied Sarajevo. He had set out using a regular party channel, together with Josip Kopinić Valdes, the Comintern's representative in Zagreb, from where, in addition to the CPY, contact was also maintained with five other communist parties in Western Europe. Lola, Valdes and a courier departed on January 2, after spending New Year's Eve with comrades in Bijele Vode. Valdes had arrived there to establish a direct link between the Supreme Headquarters and Moscow, because sending couriers to Zagreb — where the centre was — had become increasingly dangerous and slow, maintaining that connection only indirectly and with considerable delay. On skis and wearing civilian clothes, they passed through Sokolac, Crepoljsko and Skakavac. For disguise, Lola wore black-rimmed glasses, which clearly bothered him, and along the way, in the home of a hesitant host, he had to pretend to be a doctor — offering prompt and skilled help to the man's sick daughter — which instantly won the man over. On the way to Sarajevo, they spent one night in a mill near Sokolac, between the Chetniks, their unwilling allies, and close to the Ustaše. The next day, the Germans also chased them on skis, but they managed to escape towards the city. A courier, who knew the terrain well, guided them to Crepoljsko, a mountain lodge above Sarajevo. There, they walked into a chaotic

scene: about 250 armed men were fiercely debating whether to become Chetniks or partisans. Lola tried several times to intervene in the heated argument, but the thought that he had to complete the mission — and the real risk that he could lose his life in that hornet's nest — warned him to stay silent, as Valdes also advised. Their second overnight stay was at a mountain lodge in Skakavac, where, after a day or two, couriers from Sarajevo came for them. They proceeded cautiously. Lola wore a dark grey suit borrowed from a bourgeois man in Krupanj, complete with a fine tie. Unfortunately, they became infested with lice along the way, so they kept scratching and picking the pests from their clothes. They were taken to a Party checkpoint in Pale, where they rested for a few days, got rid of the lice, obtained travel passes and prepared to return to "civilization" in Zagreb.

Passenger checks at the station and on the train were strict, but Lola and Valdes had proper documents. By lucky coincidence, in their compartment also travelled Pavelić's adjutant Jure Francetić, returning from Sarajevo where, as he bragged, he had been "on assignment" by order of the *Poglavnik.* He had no idea that he was riding in the company of two men from the staff of the Supreme Headquarters — one of whom, Lola, carried directive letters for the party and military leadership in Serbia and Croatia, while the other held ciphers for communication with the Comintern. These were people and documents Pavelić would have paid untold riches

to capture! When the conductor arrived, Francetić ordered that no one else be allowed in their compartment. The conductor obeyed without question and didn't even dare ask them for tickets or IDs. As a result, no one else entered the compartment all the way to Zagreb. As the journey dragged on, the group conversed on all sorts of topics — mostly about politics, the successes of fascism and the genius of the *Poglavnik* — creating the impression that Lola and Valdes were "very much pro-Ustaše." At the station, they barely managed to shake off Francetić's offer to drive them in his official car. They arrived safely in the western part of Zagreb, Kustošija, while the commander of the infamous "Black Legion" continued on his path of crime, only to meet the end he deserved later that year. When his damaged plane made a forced landing in Kordun, villagers finished him off with axes and Pavelić posthumously declared him a "knight."

Lola and Valdes arrived at the villa that had been rented in 1941, on the Party's orders, by the Zagreb lawyer and communist Vladimir Velebit for Valdes, so that during the war, while taking part in complex covert operations, he could maintain contact with the Comintern in Moscow and serve as one of its intelligence points in Western Europe. Valdes was the only one authorized to encrypt reports to "Deda" (Georgi Dimitrov), and he alone knew the cipher, while his wife, Stela, a Greek by origin, was the radio operator. While at the Supreme Headquarters, Valdes trained Dr. Pavle Savić

to be a cipher officer during his brief stay, and then both radio stations, operating on the same frequency at an agreed-upon time, maintained communication with Moscow and each other.

Already the next day, Lola — dressed smartly and carrying ID under the name of a lawyer from Osijek named Štamberger, supposedly on business in Zagreb — appeared at Velebit's office, located in the very centre of the city, on Jelačić Square. From then on, he mostly worked and stayed there for months, under the protection of a reputable, untainted law office, but he also frequently visited Valdes and many other Party safe houses and contacts across the city — always in the centre, as befitted such a high-ranking official and gentleman. Working with Kardelj (who left Čevljanovići near Sarajevo on January 12 with Ivan Maček Matija, a day after the CC of the CPY meeting) and a group of leading Party officials, including Vlado Popović, Dragutin Saili, Stevo Krajačić, Marko Belinić and others, who were then operating illegally in Zagreb under Party orders, he changed his place of residence regularly, avoided raids and maintained contact with Party leadership in Serbia, Slovenia, Vojvodina and Croatia. In addition, based on collected reports, he drafted telegrams to the Comintern, signing them in the name of the Old Man, which Valdes then encrypted and sent.

Lawyer Velebit was visibly pleased to reunite with an old acquaintance, but, feeling the heat under his own feet, feared for Lola's safety in the heart

of Pavelić's capital, where not only communists but also sympathizers of the National Liberation War were being brutally destroyed. The host's unease grew when Lola told him that he would stay in Zagreb for two or three months and was taking him as his assistant, since years of working in "special operations" had kept him unknown even in Party circles and off the police radar. Velebit pointed out that he, too, was in a precarious position. Nevertheless, Lola stuck to his decision, ignoring Velebit's arguments, confident that he would manage somehow, though he was well aware that he was well known to the police and that his documents were poor and his situation insecure.

Over the next three months, Velebit provided them with great support in their work. He had the opportunity daily to admire the extensive clandestine work of Kardelj, who remained in Zagreb until March 7, then left for Ljubljana posing as an assistant train driver. He also witnessed Lola's resourcefulness — he worked with confidence, skill, bravery and composure, naturally drawing on firm, though often compromised and dismantled, Party and anti-fascist organizations. "His smiling, wryly friendly eyes, his particular style of laughter and warm, pleasant voice were so distinctive, personal and unique that I often wondered how such a memorable figure — known to thousands from public rallies, protests and actions, and hunted relentlessly by fascist police of every language and uniform — could remain underground in our relatively small

cities."

Lola and Kardelj operated in Zagreb, with the help of prominent Party leaders, numerous contacts and the Party organization, during the most critical period for the National Liberation War and the anti-Hitler coalition. Through their work in the harshest of conditions — as evidenced by Lola's letters and words to Tito, saying they were "simply living on luck, day by day" — they made an invaluable contribution to the revolution's development. Among other things, they successfully linked the CC of the CPY and the Supreme Headquarters with Moscow and with Party leaderships and main staffs in various provinces. They offered significant support to comrades in Croatia in fanning the uprising across the region, establishing brigades and launching major operations, etc. In the midst of all this, Lola still managed to lead SKOJ and the youth movement across the country, sending letters, analysing reports and issuing tasks that his brother Jurica was faithfully working on in Bosnia — whom he warmly greeted in every letter to Tito, reporting anything he learned from comrades in Belgrade about their father, mother and sisters.

Writing regularly to Tito, Lola reported on the development of the National Liberation Movement in Croatia, especially in Zagreb, where increased Ustaša terror was met with growing resistance to both the Ustaše and the Germans, as well as on "news from liberated areas." In a long letter dated March 17, he wrote, among other things:

"In Zagreb itself, the authorities' call for registration, allegedly for 'verification of identity,' and threatening military court for non-compliance, ended with the need to issue a 'Supplemental Call.' The turnout was very low. In the villages around Karlovac, of 173 draft notices issued the other day, only three reported. Of course, this is a partisan action zone. But comrades from other areas report similar figures. Once again, it is clear that the success of the mobilization depends entirely on the ability of our organizations — especially the units in Croatia — to connect with the masses of conscripts and integrate them into our ranks. To that end, we have once again emphasized this to all organizations and unit commands, and just recently issued a special proclamation addressed to conscripts, soldiers and officers, calling for a boycott of the mobilization and for them to join the partisans..."

Lola then wrote about the successful development of the partisan movement in Lika and Kordun, in Slovenia, Hrvatsko Zagorje and Dalmatia, with which the Zagreb leadership maintained constant contact, then returned to the situation in the occupied city beneath Sljeme:

"Our contact with the army is still weak, although the potential is considerable. Still, some initial successes have been achieved. Just recently, a captain from Zagreb, with two army trucks, a dozen soldiers, two crates of ammunition and a machine gun, quietly left the city and joined a partisan unit we had previously indicated. He is already in

combat. His example has had a massive impact in the barracks — it's now the main topic of conversation and, naturally, of official investigation. On the other hand, some contacts have been captured who will be very valuable for intelligence. One such piece of information, a detailed plan of the deployment of German troops in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) — I am sending to you, and will also send you the deployment of Domobran and Ustaša units, as well as other information we receive that may be useful to you...

"We already wrote extensively last time about our situation here, especially regarding the recent bust. Unfortunately, things have not improved at all. I don't have a proper flat, nor proper documents, and we are quite literally living 'on luck,' day by day. Meanwhile, it's getting more difficult, due to mobilization, military document checks, etc. According to all reports, a new wave of lockdowns and raids is being prepared in Zagreb, in which the Ustaše plan to 'cleanse the city' completely. Reportedly, two to three thousand more arrests are being prepared..."

In Zagreb, Lola worked systematically, coolly and tactically, "as if he were among brigades, or at the very Supreme Headquarters itself — not in its most dangerous reconnaissance outpost." Yet Lola was only human — vulnerable, especially when it came to his Sloboda. Previously, through a Supreme Headquarters courier from the liberated territory, he would send her greetings, but from Zagreb that

was impossible. Still, he couldn't resist writing her a letter, to her full address, asking her to immediately write back to the address of "lawyer Štamberger" at Velebit's office. That hardened fighter and experienced underground operative forgot — or ignored — that the police and Gestapo were aware of his relationship with Sloboda, that she was under surveillance because of it, and that the letter might ultimately cost her her life. Naturally, he couldn't have known that the Trajković family, due to informants reporting they sent medicine "to the forest," was already in serious danger. His letter provided a convenient pretext for Sloboda's arrest. The police were certain they could, under threat of death — against her and her family — force her to write a letter to her beloved, asking to meet somewhere. But that delicate and gentle girl proved stronger than anyone imagined — before the special police and the Gestapo, she firmly refused to write, bravely defending her love and the life of her beloved comrade. Realizing that beatings and threats would get them nowhere, the Gestapo opted for a "subtler" tactic. About ten days later, a suspicious man showed up at Velebit's office — allegedly a Volksdeutscher from Zemun — with a "personal, urgent message for Mr. Štamberger." Realizing it was a setup, Velebit managed to get rid of him, advising him to look in Osijek, where "Štamberger" supposedly lived, and had only briefly come to Zagreb for legal assistance.

Lola learned in the meantime that Sloboda and her family were being held hostage in the Banjica

camp, which, according to Vlado Popović's recollection, "threw him into deep psychological depression."

Faced with the extreme danger to his life due to the "Štamberger affair," comrades secured him a new residence on Subićeva Street, along with new documents in the name of Ivan Petrić, "a technician for the Field Office for the Regulation of the Sava in Zagreb, under the Ministry of Transport and Public Works of the NDH." He stayed there only a short time, driven by an unshakable feeling that he needed to leave "civilization" as soon as possible. All at once, he ordered Velebit to check, via the established channel to Sarajevo, whether he could be urgently transferred to Foča, where the Supreme Headquarters had been until January 21. The communists in charge of this highly secure channel replied that he could set out in a few days. However, "gripped by nerves and a personal premonition," Lola ordered that arrangements be made for him to leave with a courier that very evening. In fact, he had already announced this possibility to Tito in a letter, explaining that he and Bevc had agreed that he would temporarily leave Zagreb if he could not, within the shortest time, set up a bunker and secure solid papers. "I thought of going up with him to Slovenia," he wrote, among other things, "but it makes no sense for both of us to be there, so we gave up on that."

Since there were no other options, Lola and Velebit set out — Lola with forged documents, and

Velebit with his own. In accordance with the rules of conspiracy, his contact in the city, Vera, came to the station just before the train's departure to hear what still needed to be done with the belongings on Subićeva Street. He gave her instructions on how to hide the typewriter, notes and carbon paper. At dawn, she walked into an ambush set by the infamous Ustaša Surveillance Service (UNS) for Lola — less than two hours after he had left Zagreb.

In Foča, V. Dedijer, in a diary entry dated April 2, 1942, began with great excitement: "Tonight, Lola and Vlado Velebit arrived from 'civilization,'" and after describing how they left Zagreb and the complications they faced while travelling "in the company" of Domobran Colonel Bećir Kulenović by train, he continued:

"When they arrived in Sarajevo, they went to our public contact at the home of a comrade, who took them to a courier — two worker brothers in a Sarajevo suburb on the way to Kiev. The next morning, comrades Ribar and Velebit, with the courier, calmly left the city carrying harmless-looking bottles in their hands, as if they were heading out to get milk. Four kilometres from the city, they encountered the first partisan patrol...

"I visited our barracks with Lola and Vlatko, where alpine troops had once been stationed. We couldn't get enough of the sight. Rooms prepared for 500 soldiers. Clean. Everything freshly whitewashed, even the pictures of Badoglio and Mussolini. Kitchens equipped. Bathrooms with six show-

ers. Upstairs, a meeting of the Youth Company. We entered. Everyone jumped to their feet and saluted sharply, like soldiers. On the wall — a wall newspaper and *Crna lista*. You could see the political work was thriving. Same among the Užice comrades. In the third room — a 'Red Corner.' Lola and Vlatko were amazed. If people in 'civilization' knew how partisans lived — they'd come here. Truly, we can be proud. We accomplished wonders this winter. But it would be good to hold Foča as long as possible. Still, the main thing is that we've created mobile, politically solid, militarily experienced units. Our most important asset is manpower. That's why we don't cling to cities at all costs..."

The Organizer of the "Partisan Olympics" in Foča

Two days after Lola's arrival in Foča, on April 4, a session of the CC of the CPY was held, which, according to M. Leković, was "one of the most important during the war. The reports of the Organizational Secretariat of the Central Committee, which had spent three months in Zagreb, were among the topics discussed, and they significantly contributed to the adoption of conclusions that marked a new quality in CPY policy.

"The Central Committee assessed at that session that the three months of work by the Organizational Secretariat in Zagreb had been very

successful and that in the future, as conditions for the illegal presence of Party officials in the city improved, it would be necessary to revive the Secretariat's work..."

In Foča, then the seat of the new "republic," Lola immediately got to work. A rich political and cultural life was flourishing there, in which Jurica played a notable role, among other things as the editor of the newspaper *Narodni borac*. Getting involved in all this, in conditions where the Italians were so close to the city that entire families were being evacuated, Lola, full of energy, combative and resourceful, proposed that a "partisan Olympics" be organized in town to boost both sportsmanship and civilian morale. The idea was wholeheartedly accepted and echoed among the people: "If the Supreme Headquarters is playing football and the Italians are only about ten kilometres from town — then the situation must be good."

The Olympics began on April 20 — with football. The tournament lasted about ten days, whenever time allowed. Players included Lola, Arso Jovanović, Koča Popović, Jurica, Rato Dugonjić, Krcun Penezić, Sreten Žujović and his son Zoran, Velebit, Milentije Popović, Dedijer, the painter Voja Dimitrijević and others. On the field were members of the Politburo, the Supreme Headquarters and fighters from the Foča Youth Company. Some matches were attended by the Supreme Commander himself, who joined in cheering from the sidelines. When the Foča youth, whose team was selected by

the SKOJ Committee, once complained about the biased refereeing of Dušan Korać, who despite being the commissar of "their" Youth Company had clearly favoured the Supreme Headquarters team, Tito responded: "What can I do? The referee surely knows what he's doing!" They played in proper football kits borrowed from local clubs Sloga and Grafičar. Lola played inside forward — and did quite well, skilfully advancing through the opposing defence. The Supreme Headquarters team, with Lola, was very strong — but the Kragujevac Battalion team was even stronger and beat them 17-0!

May Day in Foča was celebrated with ceremony. "A large crowd gathered in the big hall of the tobacco station. The first May Day celebration on liberated territory. Lola spoke on behalf of the Party. I remembered our big rallies in the Gymnasium Hall. May 1938 — the Czech crisis. Ten thousand people. And now, four years later — armed, in the midst of war — on liberated land. We've come a long way. We've made huge sacrifices.

"Following the election of an honourary presidium of Stalin, Kalinin, Voroshilov, Timoshenko, Budyonny, Molotov, Tito and all members of our Central Committee, Lola paid tribute to fallen comrades, greeted friends in the still-occupied areas, in prisons and concentration camps. He underlined Stalin's recognition of our struggle: 'Yugoslavia and the Soviet regions occupied by the Germans are engulfed in the flames of partisan war.' Lola went on to say that hard battles awaited us in

this year, 1942, which must be a year of victory. It was one of Lola's finest speeches. It had a strong effect on the crowd. The people especially cheered for the Old Man, and Arso Jovanović to his right. In the evening, we had a formal dinner... Everyone was in good spirits. Our choir sang several songs. They didn't embarrass themselves. That's how we celebrated May Day on liberated ground..."

On May 10, under pressure from the "Third Offensive," the Supreme Headquarters left Foča. On the eve of that day, knowing the enemy was approaching Foča, Lola warned comrades that there was no more time for volleyball — they needed to destroy and burn everything that had benefited the partisans during their 108-day stay in the small town on the Drina, so it wouldn't serve the enemy: bridges, warehouses, buildings and more.

Ten days later, from the Sandžak, Arso Jovanović sent Lola and Sreten Žujović-Crni to assist comrades in Herzegovina — along with a group of high-ranking military and Party leaders — to help resolve the consequences of the "leftist deviations."

As the Supreme Headquarters' plenipotentiary with full authority, Lola personally witnessed the consequences of dogmatic leftist deviations and undeniable errors, but he never spread ill-will or acted like an inspector, never passed judgement on leaders or organizations, and certainly did not demand "the heads of those responsible for serious mistakes." Instead, he strove to help his comrades in a spirit of solidarity, to save whatever could be saved

from the wave of counter-revolution. At the same time, as a member of the Politburo and Supreme Headquarters, he felt duty-bound to justify the trust placed in him — especially in such complex conditions — with an accurate, fact-based Marxist assessment. So, on June 6, he sent a report to Tito via courier, clearly stating: "The root of everything lies in major political shortcomings and mistakes that were made here, and in the Party's weaknesses in this area." The Party confirmed Lola's assessment through the measures it took — and time proved them right.

The Party's Emissary in "Civilization" Once Again

Living day and night in the heart of events, where partisan brigades were concentrated, Lola directly participated in deciding the timing and direction of movement, as well as battles and manoeuvres of this strong formation marching from the tri-border of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro towards the Bosnian Krajina. From that march, Lola made his way down to Ilidža, then to Sarajevo, and on June 30 set off on his second military-political mission as a representative of the Supreme Headquarters and the Politburo in Zagreb, where he would remain for a full three months.

The atmosphere in the city beneath Sljeme during his second wartime stay is reflected in two

things: first, reports of increasing violence by the UNS, and second, a private letter from senior German officer Franz Schulz, who wrote: "There is no peace in this country. In Zagreb, communist saboteurs blow up facilities daily, kill from ambush and break into homes and offices. We must move through the streets with the utmost caution, even during the day." Once again, Krajačić and Saili, known as "the Conspirator," secured secret lodgings and permits for Lola, including papers identifying him as a senior Domobran officer. This enabled him to maintain contact with the Party and military leadership in Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia, convey directives from the Arso Jovanović, write letters to SKOJ leadership and contribute articles to the partisan press. At the same time, together with Krajačić, he worked on establishing military committees and Party cells within the NDH military, which led to desertions and a general drop in morale. He also led a meeting of the committees from four wartime districts of the Communist Party of Croatia in Sesvete near Zagreb. Under the alias Ivan Pavlović, he issued the order to form the Žumberak-Pokupski and Zagorje-Prigorje National Liberation Movement detachments, assigning them specific zones of operation. Recalling those events in and around Zagreb — and especially the collaboration with Lola on military intelligence tasks of immense importance to the National Liberation Movement — Krajačić said:

"Lola and I, in our daily work, didn't avoid

going out in public. We visited the most well-known Ustaša establishments, even those nearby. We managed to adapt to the environment and our behaviour with the people, which at the time was very important. We even used some of these places to meet with our contacts and friends, sometimes even with notable Ustaša and German officers, always careful not to draw attention to ourselves. We also used the opportunity to procure food, which was hard to come by. Among others, we would stop by a café on Preradović Square, where it was mandatory to greet with a raised hand and the Ustaša salute: *spremni*..."

Lola's closest collaborators in Zagreb also helped him fulfil another task given him — to bring his father from occupied Belgrade to liberated territory. The leadership of the Belgrade Party organization provided Dr. Ribar with forged documents and a reliable courier. He crossed the NDH border — then located along the Sava. In Zemun, he was met by Lola, dressed in a Domobran officer's uniform and armed with a pistol, at the apartment of Jelica Orešković Bapšek, the widow of fallen CC of the CPY member, Spanish Civil War legend and Lika uprising organizer Marko Orešković Krntija. After embracing, Lola inquired about his mother, sisters and Sloboda. His father answered sorrowfully that Sloboda had been "gassed in a vehicle by the Gestapo and the Banjica camp chief Vujković, along with her entire family." Lola fell silent, stunned, as he would later confide to Tito in his first letter. But

there was no time for mourning — they boarded a train using papers identifying them as "high-ranking Domobran officials." Dr. Ribar's document, signed by General Milic, stated that he could "travel throughout the NDH procuring supplies for the Domobran forces." They passed through Zemun accompanied by courier Elza Meterli, who pushed a baby carriage for cover.

They travelled to Zagreb without incident. There, Dr. Ribar stayed for thirty days to "build up strength for the partisans" and while preparations were made to transfer him to liberated Žumberak. Meanwhile, Lola, as Dr. Ribar later noted, hinted at efforts to "form a political body, which, alongside representatives of the Communist Party, Communist Youth and the National Liberation Army, would also include members of civic political parties and groups that had joined the revolutionary struggle. That's how I understood Tito's invitation to go to Supreme Headquarters as soon as possible..."

On September 10, Party collaborators within the Domobran army transported Dr. Ribar, Lola and Krajačić in a small truck to liberated territory. After a stay at the Croatian Main Staff headquarters, they were transferred on the night of September 26-27 to Mliništa, where the Supreme Headquarters was then located. There, they met with Party and military leadership, and Dr. Ribar was admitted into the CPY — a moment he later described as "one of the happiest in my long and rich

political career."

A Greeting to AVNOJ in the Name of the Younger Generation

At Oštrelj, Tito informed Dr. Ribar of the decision by the CC of the CPY and the Supreme Headquarters "to establish, organize and convene a political body that would assume the highest popular authority, which had until then been held by the Supreme Headquarters." Tito said a special preparatory committee — consisting of Dr. Ribar, Moša, Milutin, Masleša and Lola — "would be tasked with organizing and convening the session of this representative political body and drafting the resolution, decisions and proclamations to be submitted to the agenda."

Lola participated in the discussions and editing of documents for the 1st Session of the Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), held on November 26 and 27, 1942 in Bihać. Here is part of the text from Dedijer's *Diary* that testifies to this historic event:

"The great day has come. In this old Bosnian town, the first historic session of AVNOJ begins tonight. Thousands of men and women from Krajina and Lika, dressed in traditional folk costume, have walked 30 to 40 kilometres to witness this great act. People were singing in the streets, gathering in front of the building where the council was meeting in

the large hall of a women's monastery; they sang and cheered for the Supreme Headquarters, for our brave army, which had fought one of the fiercest battles of our liberation war here — in the assault on Bihać...

"The Old Man gave the opening address. He too was emotional. Exactly one year ago the Germans had launched an offensive against us, and under terrible conditions we retreated from Serbia. One year ago, to the day, the Old Man was 150 metres from a German machine gun on the Zlatibor road above Užice. The Germans were firing at him with automatic weapons — he was completely surrounded — and tonight, in free Bihać, he opens the Anti-Fascist Council. What a glorious path we have taken since then...

"Ivo Ribar spoke on behalf of the youth. He emphasized that our youth had selflessly joined the sacred war for freedom and would continue to support our heroic army, both on the front and behind the lines."

At that time, Lola stated that around 20,000 SKOJ members had been killed over the past nine months, proudly highlighting what the Supreme Commander himself had said at the Session — that the younger generation made up three-fifths of our National Liberation Army. He also emphasized that, despite the enormous losses, "the heroic young generation will not hesitate to give everything in defence of their homeland, even their greatest treasure — their lives."

A Role Model for the Youth and Leader of USAOJ

Upon Lola's return from Zagreb and during their first meetings at Mliništa, Tito proposed the idea of holding a congress of Yugoslavia's young generation. At that time, of the 150,000 fighters of the National Liberation Army, about 110,000 were under the age of 26. Among them were 20,000 SKOJ members — almost as many had already fallen. Tito outlined the basic guidelines and tasks for the youth, in both the army and the rear, that the Congress should discuss and define. He left the rest to Lola.

Lola convened the SKOJ Central Committee Bureau, where he, Mihajlo Švabić, Rato Dugonjić and Slavko Komar defined the main ideas to be developed in the Proclamation announcing the 1st Anti-Fascist Congress of Yugoslav Youth, scheduled for December 27 and 28, 1942. Once they had agreed, Lola, as Dugonjić recalls, "sat down one afternoon, with a typewriter on his knees, and typed up the proclamation of the Convening Committee." After listing around 50 names of committee members — in fact, the most prominent young leaders from units and from both liberated and occupied areas — Lola signed the document with his full name and title as Secretary of the SKOJ Central Committee.

Following the proclamation, extensive activity

was initiated across units in the field. Lola wrote to provincial committees that SKOJ, "as the vanguard of the youth organization, must bear the main burden of Congress preparations." Conferences were held, delegates were elected, delegations were transferred across both liberated and occupied territories, and broad propaganda activity was launched. All of this was directed by the SKOJ Bureau — first and foremost by Lola. This was closely followed by a devoted friend of the youth, Dr. Ribar, who later wrote:

"How many direct instructions they issued and how many leaflets and newspapers they sent through couriers, in order to mobilize and stir the youth in every, even the smallest, corner of our country. I simply could not believe that agitation and propaganda could be carried out so perfectly and effectively... I often watched Lola as he typed articles, leaflets and instructions. Sitting in the sun, in the garden, with a typewriter on his knees... I also remember the arrival and welcome of delegates from all parts of the country. All armed — men, women, even the youngest — because the journey involved fighting through Ustaša and Chetnik ambushes. On the eve of the Congress, my younger son Jurica arrived with Montenegrin proletarian fighters. My fatherly joy, along with the excitement of meeting the youth, reached its peak, because it was my first — and sadly, last — meeting with both of my sons during the National Liberation War."

The Youth Congress was held from 27 to 29

December 1942, in Bihać, with 365 delegates in attendance representing youth from the army and from both liberated and occupied areas.

Recalling the delegates, Slavko Komar wrote:

"This was truly the flower, the very best and most courageous of our youth at the time. The meeting of delegates from the front and from the rear, from liberated and occupied territories, was deeply moving... Delegates from Slovenia and Macedonia could not attend due to the situation in those regions at the time..."

The Congress, at which the United League of Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia (USAOJ) was founded — with SKOJ remaining its most militant faction — was presided over by Lola, who, according to delegate recollections, was the most prominent and soon the most popular figure. Indeed, he was elected to the executive presidency and as leader of USAOJ under his full name. Moreover, by signing an article entitled "The League of Communist Youth in the Harsh School of War," he publicly revealed his full identity for the first time, and youth across the country began to see themselves in him — quoting him in songs, viewing him as their leader and idol.

At the beginning of the ceremonial session, Lola, on behalf of the Youth Congress, welcomed Tito and gave him the floor. The Supreme Commander, addressing the 123 delegates from National Liberation Army units among others, said in his long and passionate speech that "the youth

were the first to fill our small partisan detachments, which gradually grew into larger and larger units and today form the liberation army. We can proudly state that in the National Liberation Army and partisan detachments, 70 to 75 per cent of fighters come from the young generation of our peoples... This congress should further strengthen the brotherhood between all peoples of Yugoslavia, because the CPY has always seen in the youth the bearer of that brotherhood and unity — and it has not been mistaken..."

The leader of the revolution expressed his deep conviction that after the Congress, young people, both in liberated and occupied territories, would work "with tenfold strength — so that the victory over the enemies of our peoples and our young generation would come as quickly and completely as possible." In closing, he expressed his hope that the Congress "will bear such fruits and results as our peoples, our youth and the democratic forces of the world are expecting. That means: brotherhood, unity of all patriots and the young generation of Yugoslavia in the fight for the final destruction of the fascist beasts..."

The delegates stood and applauded, chanting and singing in response to Tito's remarks, pledging to carry out the tasks he had set before them. Then Lola stood up, visibly moved, and addressed the delegates and guests with words that would be entered into the official record of the Congress as "the pledge of the young generation to the Supreme

Commander." Looking his young comrades in the eye, he said:

"Comrades, delegates, you have heard the words of our comrade, our Supreme Commander, Comrade Tito. I am certain that I express the wishes and thoughts of all of you when I say here, at this ceremonial session of our congress: Comrade Supreme Commander, as until now — and more than until now — the young generation of our country will carry out all its tasks with honour. As until now — and more than until now — it will know how to unite all its efforts to strike a death blow against the bloody fascism and all enemies of its future."

Several more messages of support were heard for the fighting youth. Everyone listened with utmost attention. Each message was greeted with long, thunderous applause. Then — silence. A heavy, mournful silence. Complete, breathless. The representatives of Yugoslavia's young generation honoured the tens of thousands of fallen fighters for freedom with a minute of silence.

In the working portion of the Congress, which lasted two full days, three reports were presented and dozens of participants from military units, liberated regions and occupied cities took part in the discussion. These were SKOJ leaders, saboteurs, grenade-throwers, couriers, machine gunners, youth work brigade organizers, underground operatives and unit commanders. Running through all the reports, discussions, conclusions and declarations to the youth of the peoples of Yugoslavia and of occupied Europe was a recurring message from Lola Ribar: "Youth, march bravely forward into battle — bravely forward to victory!"

Many delegates — like the legendary bomber Boško Buha, who spoke about how he and his comrades seized bunkers — were shorter than their rifles, but spoke boldly and maturely on various topics, shaped by the harsh conditions in which they fought and gave selflessly for freedom. Some, like Milka Kufrin, were too emotional to speak. She began with the customary "comrades" and fell silent. Later, she explained: "I was overwhelmed and unable to speak. My eyes locked onto our leaders and I couldn't say a word. In that moment, I burst into tears..."

On the third day of the Congress, Lola spoke as well. He gave a long and passionate speech — about the wealth of forms of struggle the Congress had demonstrated, about the betrayal by the pre-war "official" youth organizations, and how the new, anti-fascist organizations had emerged from the ground up in an unprecedented way. He spoke of how USAOJ, by fighting fascism, was rapidly growing into an organization of brotherhood. Then, calling on the youth fighters to be even stronger, to unite all its efforts in service of the front, he concluded:

"I address you first, comrades of our glorious brigades and divisions, of our heroic partisan detachments. You are our pride. You are the pride of our country, the hope and shield of our future. Be

even stronger and more determined. Fight — because in doing so, you pave the way for yourselves and for the future of our generation!

"Youth in the rear, you must even more than before unite your efforts and place yourselves in full service to the front — with greater unity, cohesion and effort!

"And finally, I address you, comrades from the occupied parts of our country! You — some of whom travelled hundreds of kilometres to bring greetings from our comrades suffering under the yoke of fascism; you — who come from regions where the blood of our dearest is being shed under the boots of fascist butchers and their local henchmen; you — who bring us greetings from legions of unknown heroes waging war in the cities, destroying our common enemies and preparing for liberation, undermining the very structure of Hitler's cursed 'New Order' — the prison-house that holds the youth of Europe... take from this free territory our greetings to your comrades, from the fighters of our National Liberation Army and all the Congress participants, and tell them: know that we have not forgotten you, that we are thinking of you, and that we will not spare even the last drop of our blood until we free you and tear down that building of terror where you are held today...

"Forward into battle, comrades! Forward into battle, youth of our homeland! Be worthy of your forebears, worthy of your people! March bravely forward into battle — bravely forward to victory!"

The Congress elected the National Committee of USAOJ, with Lola as its head. The documents stated that henceforth, the united youth organization would remain open to "all anti-fascist organizations, groups and individuals from all parts of Yugoslavia." In essence, USAOJ was constituted as a "solid organizational form of unity for all patriotic and anti-fascist youth — regardless of nationality, religion or political affiliation. It is an alliance of fighting brotherhood and unity of the young generations of Serbia and Croatia, Slovenia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dalmatia and Vojvodina, the Sandžak and Macedonia. It is a league of all patriotic and anti-fascist youth — workers, peasants and intellectuals — both anti-fascist and liberation-minded organizations."

During and shortly after the Congress, several sports competitions, dances, comradely evenings and performances were organized in Bihać. Notably, right after the Congress ended — while all the delegates were still present — a football match was played between a team of delegates from the Bosnian Krajina and the "Others." The Krajina team, with standouts like Joco Marjanović, Hajro Kapetanović, Niko Jurinčić and Stojan Bjelajac, started strong, winning the first half 4-1. According to one participant, "general teasing broke out." Still, the "Others" stayed optimistic and didn't lose hope. A bet was made: the Krajina team's "manager," Veso Masleša, bet with the midfielders of the "Others" — Lola Ribar, Arso Jovanović, Sreten Žujovic

and Rato Dugonjić — that his team would win... Lola, Arso, Sreten and Rato would get pastries if the game ended in a draw.

The teams returned to the field. Cheering erupted. The "Others" made a few lineup changes, regrouped and launched a counter-attack...

Final score: 5-5. A draw.

After the match, of course, they all went to the pastry shop...

By evening, most of the delegates from the rear had dispersed, while those from the units remained for a scheduled consultation on military work under increasingly complex conditions. Afterwards, some — led by Lola — stayed to ring in the New Year 1943, in high spirits and hopeful for swift liberation.

Mission in Slovenia and Gorski Kotar

Just about 15 days after USAOJ was founded — with SKOJ as "only a part of it," excluding the military where it retained independent status for the sake of the struggle — Lola was working on youth affairs, especially regarding the "introduction" of collective leadership in operations. On January 14, 1943, he signed an instruction on SKOJ activities in the army. In a regular report from the SKOJ Central Committee to "the comradely CC of the CPY," he wrote that "among other things, it can be said that, after the Congress, all the major

issues have been clarified and addressed, tasks have been clearly defined, and the Central Committee's main duty now is organizing the implementation of those tasks." Lola entrusted collective leadership of SKOJ to Mihailo Švabić, Ljubinka Milosavljević and Slavko Komar, and leadership of USAOJ to the Secretariat of the National Committee — where Rato Dugonjić was the organizational secretary, and among the 30 members were celebrated heroes like Ranko Šipka, Pero Kosorić, Petar Jovanović, Ante Bilobrk, Milka Kufrin, Miodrag Milovanović Lune, Ivanka Trohar, Stjepan Funarić and others. Thus, the legendary SKOJ Secretary, after nearly six years at the head of the youth communist leadership, effectively — though not formally — handed the Party's "youth sector" over to a new generation of young leaders. This had long been his idea, since when he wrote in August 1942 in a letter from occupied Zagreb that the elected SKOJ Central Committee had, for the most part, been wiped out. Among the fallen were Budo Tomović, Jože Vlahović, Đorđe Zličić Ciga and Jovo Stojisavljević Brka. For that reason alone, he argued, a temporary leadership should be reorganized — and filled with young, proven fighters who "have that sense for the new, which is so important in youth work." He added:

"Since we're talking about youth, I want to — for the first time — raise the question of myself. I've been in this role for five years. I've aged a bit, and over the past year, due to the circumstances of un-

derground work, being in the Supreme Headquarters, etc., I've become somewhat distanced from the day-to-day issues of that sector. I'm not asking to be relieved of this function now — on the contrary, I think I still need to help the younger comrades in this sector until a new leadership emerges. But that help, by force of circumstance, will increasingly be only general political support — in a way, a link between us — that is, the Central Committee — and the youth work. That's why it's especially important that we actively work on raising new, independent leaders in that sector."

With the founding congress of USAOJ, Lola had effectively — and he personally felt this — crowned his six-year struggle for the unity of the young generation, from which some 20,000 of his comrades — SKOJ members from the earliest uprising charges — had already perished. He entrusted the leadership of SKOJ and the youth movement to the leadership that had grown under his guidance, and, following Tito's decision of January 15, 1943 — when he left Bihać for Slovenia with Rato Dugonjić, and in conjunction with the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters Arso Jovanović — he was able to fully devote himself to delicate military and political duties within the Supreme Headquarters.

According to his comrade from 1937, Boris Krajger, Lola came to Slovenia to assist local leaderships in overcoming the aftermath of the recent winter offensive and to "strengthen and re-establish closer ties between the liberation movement and the

army, as well as between the youth organizations in Slovenia and the general National Liberation Movement of Yugoslavia." In the army, Arso Jovanović served as the main leader in its reorientation. In this area, Lola followed in the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters' footsteps. Among their accomplishments, on the last day of April 1943, Arso and Lola reported to the Supreme Headquarters that, at the end of March, four newly formed Slovenian shock brigades "with a broad deployment" attacked the occupier's strongholds in Suha Krajina, the main base of the White Guard. "A seven-day battle developed in which the fascists were decisively defeated. Three hundred and seven enemy soldiers were killed and many more were wounded." With Commander Šaranović, Arso and Lola outlined the present and future operational plans of the Slovene Partisans in Dolenjska, Bela Krajina and Žumberak. In this work, together with representatives of the Main Staff and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia, he and Arso formed encouraging and — as he said — surprisingly positive impressions. The free territory was vast, the influence of the National Liberation Movement was strong and the youth movement widespread. This was especially important to Lola, since the Slovenian youth delegation had been unable to attend the USAOJ Congress, so now he and Dugonjić were there to explain the decisions of that historic gathering.

In the new joint battles of Slovenian and Cro-

atian units — intensified particularly along the Zagreb-Karlovac railway line in an effort to relieve pressure on the group of divisions and thousands of wounded in the Neretva Valley — the Slovenian brigades and detachments captured significant amounts of weapons and formed new units. Seeing that he could now be more useful elsewhere, Lola frequently visited Gorski Kotar and Kordun, assisting military and party leaderships, and then spent some time with the Main Staff of the National Liberation Army of Croatia. From there, together with Vlado Popović, Arso Jovanović and several other leaders, he set out to join the Supreme Headquarters, as plans were being made for the Operational Group of divisions to move into Serbia. However, a new enemy offensive — the German Operation Schwarz — caught up with them in Bosnia, where Lola and Arso joined the 5th Krajina Division. Under orders from the latter, the Chief of the Supreme Headquarters, the division advanced along with liberated Soviet officers from German captivity, towards the Bosna River to assist the Operational Group in breaking out of the Sutjeska Valley. This gruelling segment of Lola's wartime path was filled with countless hardships and dangers. In two peculiar incidents, he narrowly escaped death — events later recalled by one of his closest friends, Vlado Popović:

"In one meadow, we decided to test our 'new' pistols. I clumsily cocked mine, not even thinking it might fire. But it did. Lola was lying in the grass,

about 10 metres from me. At that moment, I saw him grab his left ear. My blood froze..."

Fortunately, it ended without injury.

"On that same journey," Popović also recalled, "another mishap occurred. Lola, whenever he rode a horse, would wear a Schmeisser strapped across his chest, with the barrel pointing up. At one point, as we galloped, the muzzle snagged on a wire. He was launched from the saddle as if shot from a cannon. He flew ten metres. And again — luckily — it ended well."

At that time, Lola, as part of the Bosnian Strike Corps, took part in the liberation of the Kakanj mine. Afterward, he addressed the miners. A beautiful monument was later erected on the very spot where he spoke.

Under the Red Flag, in Liberated Split

Lola and Arso met with Tito on July 4 near Kladanj, following the breakout from the inferno of Sutjeska. Two full years of brutal combat had passed since that historic meeting of the Party leadership at Dedinje — years now crowned with major successes. The truth about the National Liberation War was gaining international recognition, as confirmed by the presence of the British military mission led by Major Deakin. The National Liberation Army had grown into a force taken seriously by the anti-Hitler coalition, and within AVNOJ, we now

had a kind of wartime parliament...

The meeting with the leadership of the Supreme Command and the three members arriving from the west was "very warm. We embraced like aunts, happy that this offensive was broken, that we survived the mortal danger and that we were together again. Tito was particularly happy to meet Lola and Arso; he was impressed by the youth, energy, openness and certainly the unwavering loyalty of the first; with the second, he appreciated his military knowledge and responsibility, was confident in him during uncertain military situations, assured of his complete loyalty, but also his readiness to oppose him with arguments drawn from his assessment of the situation and the balance of forces..."

Of course, the losses at Sutjeska were severe and irreparable: more than 7,000 fighters fell, including around 5,000 young people — mostly SKOJ members.

Soon after, Lola met with his father in the village of Plahović on Majevica, where he was helping to organize the new people's government. Lola gave his father a change of clothes, as well as a black horse, complete with saddle and blanket, and several bars of chocolate — all rare luxuries at the time.

Dr. Ribar later recalled one specific detail from those days:

"As we climbed the slope of Mount Milan, the rain poured down relentlessly. If it hadn't been for Lola and his little flashlight, I wouldn't have been able to dismount my horse when it came time to

descend into the valley."

Despite all his duties, Lola still found time to help his father during the dramatic crossing of the Bosna River.

In Eastern Bosnia and then moving towards Krajina, Arso Jovanović initiated a new phase of operations. Judging accurately that Italy's capitulation was imminent, he decided that the main forces should occupy the Adriatic hinterland as quickly as possible. Accordingly, on August 25, from Jajce, he sent Lola on a new military-political mission to the 4th Operational Zone (Dalmatia), to assist National Liberation Army units in outpacing the Germans in disarming Italian divisions.

In liberated Split, Lola — as envoy of the Supreme Headquarters — together with commanders of the 4th Operational Zone and the 1st Proletarian Division, dictated the terms of surrender to Mussolini's General Becuzzi at Hotel Park, in the presence of British Major Deakin. Immediately afterward, as Deakin was about to depart for Jajce, Lola asked him to bring Tito a copy of *Slobodna Dalmacija,* which covered the triumphant victory, and the pen that had signed the surrender of the notorious Bergamo Division. Deakin delivered them to Tito, expressing his deep astonishment at the speed, courage and dignity with which National Liberation Army units had carried out the disarmament of Italian forces. It was likely then that the respected historian, Oxford professor and sincere friend of the new Yugoslavia began to form the thoughts he

would later put into his book *The Warrior's Mountain,* where he wrote that Lola Ribar: "...was the symbol and idol of the youth... a passionate debater, quick to grasp matters and unwavering in his convictions. Tolerance for others was not his strongest trait, but his natural charm softened his assertive stubbornness. Lola had nerves of steel and great willpower, and faced dangerous assignments cheerfully. I felt both respect and affection for him..."

According to the act of capitulation, all the soldiers who requested to be transferred to Italy were transferred, while those who wished to fight against fascism within the ranks of the National Liberation Army were retained. All of the division's military equipment was unconditionally handed over to our headquarters. Then, on September 16, a large public gathering was held in liberated Split, where Lola was the first speaker. His fiery words echoed through the square; he expressed gratitude to Dalmatia and its capital for their sacrifices and contribution to the struggle, inspiring citizens towards new battles and victories. Split remembered and repeated his words: "On Marjan, after two years, the battle flag with our Partisan star flies once again!"

It was clear that Split would have to be temporarily abandoned due to advancing German and Ustaša forces, so Lola visited the Archbishop of Split, Bonefačić, demanding that he influence the Ustaše and Germans — as their long-confirmed associate — to spare the city from bombing, stressing that he would personally hold him responsible for

any acts of violence committed against the citizens of Split.

Leader of the First Mission of the New Yugoslavia to the Allies

Thousands of new National Liberation Army fighters were armed with weapons seized from the Italian units in Dalmatia. The arms were transported to Mosor and Kozjak, to the islands and to Biokovo. During those days, nine new brigades were formed in Dalmatia.

The National Liberation Army soon grew to 350,000 fighters, making it an even more significant force that both allies and enemies had to reckon with. The leadership then decided to embark on a diplomatic struggle for fuller international recognition of the actual situation on the Yugoslav front, for the recognition of AVNOJ and the new Yugoslavia. In this regard, the 2nd Session of AVNOJ, with its historic decisions, was expected to play a crucial role. It was therefore vital for the Allies to understand and accept AVNOJ and its decisions as the will and lasting determination of our people, as the path of the new Yugoslavia. The leadership of the revolution believed it was of strategic importance for the Allied High Command for the Mediterranean to accept our Military Mission as soon as possible — and certainly before the 2nd Session of AVNOJ — as a means of authentically conveying

those decisions and serving as a form of recognition of the National Liberation Army and the new Yugoslavia.

Lola was appointed as the head of the mission by the Supreme Headquarters and the CC of the CPY — clearly on the principle: "the most special tasks for the most special individuals." But as the Allies delayed their acceptance of the delegation, Lola, while waiting for this long journey and very delicate mission, remained working at the headquarters of the 4th Operational Zone in Livno. It was there that the news of Jurica's death reached him. In the midst of heavy fighting for Kolašin, on October 4, he was fatally wounded at Barutana while visiting the positions of the 4th Montenegrin Proletarian Brigade, where he was part of the political department. He died shortly after, from wounds sustained in the explosion of a Chetnik mortar shell. After the sorrow of losing Sloboda, this was too heavy, an unhealable pain. Deeply shaken by the news, he could not bring himself to inform his father — who was then engaged in preparations for the 2nd Session of AVNOJ — of the loss of the family's youngest. So from Livno, on October 10, he wrote to Tito: "When you think the time is right to inform my Old Man of Jurica's death, please let me know so I can write him a letter as well." He would write that letter only on November 24, as he was preparing to depart for Cairo — but he did not have the heart to give it to his father, nor to tell him at their farewell that Jurica had died.

What he could not tell his father, Lola wrote down. He left the letter with Tito, who would say many years later:

"When Lola was leaving, he gave me a letter and told me to give it to the 'Old Man' when I thought the time was right. The letter was sealed, and when Lola was killed, I decided to read it. It was written as if he were saying goodbye, as if he sensed something..."

That letter from Lola — his final message to his father and homeland — reads:

"My dear father,

"Although, they say, it's not yet certain, I know and feel at the moment I write this that our dear, good Jurica is no longer with us. He fell, like so many others, in the fight for the homeland's freedom, somewhere around Kolašin, in the dark Montenegrin karst.

"Words are inadequate, my dear father, words cannot express the full blow of the pain that has struck us. I would rather, a hundred times over — both for his sake, who was better than me, and for all our sakes — that I had fallen in his place. But — here we are, it happened otherwise.

"This wound will never heal. Just one year after I lost my Sloboda, I have now lost my brother — two beings I loved so deeply and who were only just beginning their lives. But I know how it must be for you, dear father, who have lost a son — our beloved youngest.

"Do not cry, don't give in, father! Our Jurica

did not fall alone — he is forever part of that generation of sons of this country who, giving their lives for it, created its pure glory, its immortality. His blood calls for justice, his death obligates us to complete the task! This is no longer about personal happiness — it is about duty, duty to our dead, duty to peace. To fulfil that duty, to live and do our part — that is our mission.

"Forgive me for writing all this. I know that you know this: We all know you've shown and proven that you understand this. I know you'll be able to bear even this terrible blow. Don't give in! Stay calm, strong, capable of carrying out your duty to the end, father! Our dear Jurica demands it from you! Think how heartbroken he would be to know that, by our conduct, by our strength — we were not worthy of him! To be weak now would be to betray him and his sacrifice!

"We all — and I, especially today — our country, for which Jurica died, still need you: your thoughts, your work, your health, your life, my dear father!

"My Sloboda, so small and gentle, went to her death as if going for a walk, with the smile that was always hers. Our Jurica went through a hundred clashes and fell as a warrior. Consciously, calmly, cheerfully — just as he lived. We must never, not even for a moment, forget that — nor will our homeland.

"Jurica is not dead. He lives in the hearts of our people, he still lives — in us, in our battles, in the

victories whose dawn he already glimpsed.

"It's hard for me, father, it's hard not being with you in this moment — I know it would be easier for you. But you're not alone — you are still, even today, a father not only to me, but to thousands of young people like our dear Jurica, to the comrades he lived with and loved. Love them too, even more than today!

"That is our path — the path of our duty and will, the path of our Jurica. Be strong, dear father! Don't isolate yourself, don't give in. Let's grit our teeth, clench our fists. Through work and struggle — only through that will we be worthy of him. I know, I'm sure, that you will be strong!

"Dear father, you know how proud we, your sons, always were of you and mother — especially in these last years — you know how much we love you. Know that I will do everything I can, through my life, work and love, to at least partially make up to you and our dear mother for this great sorrow, now that I remain your only son.

"We've always gotten along well, wonderfully — and it will be even better in the future, in our shared work, in life and struggle. Let us be worthy of our beloved youngest, dear father! Your son Lola loves you very much!"

Death in the *Dornier,* on Glamočko Polje

The Allies delayed sending a secure plane for

the Mission, one with fighter escort, so Lola insisted on being allowed to fly in a *Dornier-17* bomber, which two Croatian Domobran pilots had just defected with from Mostar to the Partisan-held Livno. Lola was in a hurry to reach the Allied command in Cairo at least two days before the 2nd Session of AVNOJ, so that he could quickly, authentically and in person explain the decisions made in Jajce — about the state and legal foundations of the new Yugoslavia — for which he had prepared and brought documents, articles and photographs. It was decided that the Mission would take off in the *Dornier,* marked with red stars, on November 27 from Glamočko polje.

The night before the Cairo flight, Lola and the other members of the Mission, along with the group of leaders accompanying them, sat in the command of the First Air Base. The mood was cheerful, though all were excited — understandably so, as this was the Supreme Commander's first mission, heading to the Allies in a Partisan plane. A conversation began about souvenirs from the trip. Lola started it after dinner and once the trucks had arrived at the base. He was well liked, in part because he always brought small gifts to close friends from his travels around the world or from occupied cities — even if just a token.

Lola said that in wartime, the most cherished gifts were bombs, pistols, submachine guns — things taken in hand-to-hand combat — but now, the members of the Mission should bring back

something else from abroad for their comrades, something rare in wartime. Then he turned to Jože Rutić, a famous actor and member of the National Liberation Theatre, and promised to bring him something all actors lacked — makeup kits, beards and wigs. Then he asked the Partisan leader Vice Buljan what he'd like him to bring. One of the British officers, overhearing, started pointing at his jumper and leather gloves. But Vice replied:

"What I'd like most, Lola, is for you to bring me news that the Allies have finally understood who in this country is really fighting the Germans...

"Lola was thrilled by that answer. The Englishman — not so much.

"Then Lola gave the young cook, a local girl named Milja Jandrić, a pack of cigarettes. He got up early the next morning, splashed himself with cold water, had breakfast and — before getting into the truck to head for the airfield — kissed everyone goodbye. Even the pilot, Džamil Bekavac, to whom he said: 'Good luck! We'll have nice weather for the flight, the English told me...'"

Unfortunately — he never took off. He remained there forever, on Glamočko polje. It was the first task in his life that he didn't complete. And his last words were about happiness, beauty, life, the sun...

Lola was killed by a German reconnaissance aircraft, a *Henschel* (called a "matchstick" by the Partisans), which suddenly appeared in the sky just as the *Dornier* was preparing to take off. Vladimir

Velebit, who was beside Lola at the time, would later explain that the British plane scheduled to pick up the Mission in Livno had not arrived that day. So Lola, with the permission of the Supreme Headquarters, decided to fly in the *Dornier* that two Croatian Domobran pilots had recently defected with. Since takeoff from Livno was impossible due to the soft and marshy terrain, the pilot had flown the empty plane to Glamočko polje. Lola and the others travelled there by road, along with a group of English officers. "Enemy intelligence was informed and prepared an attack," said Velebit. "Just as our men boarded the plane, an enemy 'matchstick' attacked and set it ablaze with bombs. Lola was killed as he was the first to exit the aircraft, while the others — who remained inside — were unharmed..."

The skeletal remains of the *Dornier-17* were still smouldering. Beside it lay Lola, his throat slit. A single piece of shrapnel had made a thin cut and taken his life. Alongside him lay four other National Liberation Army fighters and two Englishmen. There were also wounded. All were sprawled across Glamočko polje.

The survivors gathered around Lola. They stood in stunned silence. They were shocked by the sudden appearance of the "matchstick" aircraft — unaware that it had been the result of betrayal by a spy network run by the Rekvenji brothers. Disguised as members of the Partisan air force service, they had used secret radio transmitters to inform the Germans and Ustaše of the *Dornier*'s flight to

Glamočko polje and its scheduled takeoff time — essentially guiding the "matchstick" to its target. As a result, the enemy destroyed the Partisan aircraft on the ground and killed Lola. This would only be uncovered after seven months of patient investigation...

Tito was informed of Lola's death immediately. At that moment, sculptor Antun Augustinčić was beside him — he had sculpted Lola's bust just a day or two earlier. He heard Tito let out a deep sigh:

"Eh, I've lost my right hand..."

Tito urgently summoned Dr. Ribar.

"Lola has been killed," he told him.

"And is Jurica far away?..."

At that moment, Tito realized that Dr. Ribar didn't know his younger son Jurica had also died — a month before Lola. He approached the old Ribar, took his hand and said:

"Jurica has fallen too."

Dr. Ivan Ribar remained silent, then he whispered with pain:

"This struggle of ours is a heavy one."

Immediately after, Lola's closest comrades offered their condolences to his father. That same night, he presided over a session of the Legislative Committee, which was preparing the draft resolutions for the 2nd Session of AVNOJ.

On Tito's order, a tin coffin was made for Lola's remains, and from Glamoč he was transported by truck to Jajce. There, he lay in a chapel at the Jajce cemetery while the historic 2nd AVNOJ Ses-

sion took place — presided over by the elder Ribar. So Lola was present at the session, one of the most deserving fighters for the creation of the new Yugoslavia — but now, dead.

November 30. Rain and sleet fell on the streets of Jajce. Next to the tin coffin holding Lola's body, covered with a red flag, the Supreme Commander Tito, Chief of the Supreme Headquarters Arso Jovanović, and members of the Politburo and the Supreme Headquarters stood guard for the last time.

All 280 AVNOJ delegates were present, along with the fighters, the most prominent leaders of the revolution, Lola's comrades-in-arms and youth representatives — the very youth for whom Lola, a year earlier, had said: "You are the pride of our country, our people, and the defence of our homeland..."

On behalf of the Politburo and the Supreme Headquarters, Uncle Janko bid farewell to Lola. He spoke warmly and movingly: "They can't even comprehend, Comrade Lola, how daring you were — that you would even sneak into occupied Zagreb, taking on tasks of inestimable value for the revolutionary cause..."

Over Lola's body — the youngest member of the Supreme Headquarters and the Politburo of the CPY, the legendary secretary who, at the time of his death, was 27 years, 7 months and 24 days old — his closest comrades spoke, and then, in the town square in Jajce, the elder Ribar turned to Tito:

"I would like to say a few words to my Lola too."

Then he approached the coffin:

"My dear and beloved son Lola. I want to say a few words above your casket — to you and to your dear, beloved brother, my good Jurica. You were good children. When you were still little, I fed you and swaddled you, taught and raised you. When you grew up, I gave you the freedom to educate yourselves and prepare for life. A new life.

"Already in secondary school, you achieved remarkable knowledge for political work. I gladly fulfilled every one of your wishes, because I too believed they were justified and that their fulfilment would only benefit your future work. You enriched yourselves with knowledge and shared it with your comrades.

"Through conversations and reading with you, my dear sons, and in meetings with your comrades, I informed myself, gave guidance, gained new perspectives on life — adopting new views and ideas about society and the state — thanks to you, Lola, and to you, Jurica. You two gave me fresh momentum and new strength.

"Alongside you and your comrades, a fighting spirit developed in me, which steeled me in my political work. I was no longer afraid of reactionary persecution, I no longer made compromises when it came to the general national policy. That was a direct result of your influence and that of your comrades.

"You two always, my dear sons, asked me to be combative. I now gladly submit to that wish and vow to you that I will remain combative to the end,

in service of our sacred National Liberation War.

"You always asked me to take care of my health, saying it was necessary if I wanted to endure the struggle, the suffering, the hardships. I promise I will take care of it.

"I vow to persevere in my work with double the will and strength, because I want to complete every part of the task that the two of you began.

"Your absence must not be felt — not by others, and not even by me — because you live, and you will continue to live for me, as long as I am alive.

"You, Lola, always used to say during our talks, 'No sacrifice is too great for the homeland...' and I, your father, standing here today by your coffin, will not betray you. I will remain steadfast and brave, honouring the sacrifice that you and your brother made for the fatherland.

"Even now, in this time of sorrow, I vow to you, my son, that from now on no sacrifice for the homeland is — or will ever be — too great. Your death, and Jurica's death — the death of my children — is a heavy loss for me as a father. But you fell for the homeland, and I understand that. You, Lola and Jurica, my sons, will live in me forever. I will continue on the path you both walked."

The warriors, moved by the tragedy of the moment, wept.

The joy that had filled the square earlier that morning — brought on by the decisions made and the naming of Tito as Marshal — fell silent. Instead of partisan songs, there were sorrowful sighs from

the fighters and the final echoes of a funeral lament. Then the fighters fired a final salute and laid the coffin onto a truck.

The funeral procession moved again, stopping in front of the Youth Centre. There, young people laid wreaths and bouquets of flowers onto the truck. Mihajlo Švabić, one of Lola's closest comrades, approached the truck. He said farewell to Lola on behalf of the Central Committee of SKOJ:

"It will be hard without you. The harsh school in which the young generation is being shaped still goes on — and you, Lola, were its greatest and most unmatched teacher... You left when we needed you most."

Then, the most prominent youth carried their beloved comrade in their arms. A mournful procession moved forward. No gun carriage, no wreaths, no cushion with medals. At the front was Tito, holding Dr. Ribar by the arm. Beside them were members of the highest leadership of the revolution, delegates, heads of Allied missions. People who stood along the road removed their hats. Some even made the sign of the cross — something that didn't bother Lola's fellow communists, who understood it was the simplest way ordinary people paid tribute to a hero.

It was a true partisan funeral, during which someone started singing a fighting partisan song, and the funeral procession quietly joined in.

The honour guard fired a final volley. The en-

gine roared, and the truck disappeared towards freedom-loving Grmeč.

The village of Gornji Ribnik. Under Grmeč. The last day of November 1943. The darkness was thick as dough. Sleet fell. Janja Grahovac, a 50-year-old villager and partisan collaborator, happened to glance out her window. She saw a group of about ten people. Among them, a lantern. They were digging — hurriedly. She realized they were burying someone in deep secrecy. Likely a hero, whose grave must remain unknown to friend and foe alike.

Janja watched for a long time. She recognized some of the comrades — most were from the 5th Corps Party cell. They were burying the fallen beside a small river. They camouflaged the grave and disappeared into the dark. Secretly, just as they had come. Janja silently vowed to keep the grave's secret and to care for it.

When the enemy raided Ribnik, Janja would rush to camouflage the grave before they arrived. The stream would flood the grave and wash away the soil — and Janja would come right after, reshaping the mound.

Lola — A Lasting and Powerful Inspiration for the Youth

A year after Lola's tragic death, in newly lib-

erated Belgrade, the 1st Congress of the Anti-Fascist Youth of Serbia began. On the third day of the Congress, November 18, two decrees of the AVNOJ Presidium were read aloud: the first — USAOJ was awarded the Order of National Liberation; the second — "the immortal leader of the Yugoslav youth," Ivo Lola Ribar, was awarded the Order of National Hero.

Dr. Ribar presented the decoration to USAOJ on stage, embracing all the members of the Central Committee. Then he spoke to the delegates, from the heart, about how long he had stood with the fighting youth, how with the help of his sons, Ivo and Jurica, he had prepared "for these great battles, these great sacrifices, these great deeds and heroic days" crowned by shining victories. "And today, as I look at you, young men and women, I see my children in you. When I look at you, I know that my children live, and that they work with you, and that we will work together. We must work together to see the happiness, satisfaction and progress of our people in Yugoslavia. I am united with you, my dear young comrades, and I will never separate from you. As long as I live, I will seek your cooperation. I remain committed to this, I believe in it and always will..."

The decree awarding Lola Ribar the Order of National Hero was read by veteran revolutionary Moša Pijade, Vice-President of the AVNOJ

Presidium, who signed the document in place of President Dr. Ribar — along with Secretary Rodoljub Čolaković. The hall echoed with words describing how the leader of SKOJ "sacrificed himself and gave his young life for the realization of the noble ideals of his youth and for strengthening the brotherhood and unity of the youth across all nations of Yugoslavia."

In a profound silence that expressed the delegates' respect for Lola's sacrifice, Rato Dugonjić, Secretary of the Central Committee of SKOJ, approached Dr. Ribar, conveyed the feelings of all the Yugoslav youth and handed over Lola's Order of National Hero — "to keep for as long as the world exists."

In 1947, by decision of the CC of the CPY, Lola Ribar's remains were transferred from Gornji Ribnik to Belgrade.

Today, the remains of Ivo Lola Ribar rest at the Kalemegdan Fortress, above the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers, alongside the remains of three other great revolutionaries — Đuro Đaković, Ivan Milutinović and Moša Pijade. From the very place where he once loved to walk with his Sloboda during rare breaks from revolutionary work — and where he dreamed of man's freedom and happiness — he radiates the greatness and beauty of his deeds and remains a lasting and powerful inspiration for the youth.

Proof