Aleš Gabrič. *V senci politike: Opozicija komunistični oblasti v Sloveniji po letu 1945.* Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2019. 239 pp. $36.30 (hcv.). ISBN: 978-961-282-332-0.

The head of the Hungarian Communist Party from 1945–56, Mátyás Rákosi, allegedly described his method of neutralizing the political opposition in Hungary as similar to that of slicing off salami, methodically isolating and destroying the various factions of opposition until all that was left was the Communist Party and a few suitably obedient fellow travellers. The Slovene historian Aleš Gabrič employs his own "salami tactics," systematically introducing the reader to the various meager groupings that raised their voices against the cementing of communist rule in post-WW II Slovenia and their silencing by the regime. Gabrič provides us with the one of the most thorough pictures to date of this still obscure crucial interval from 1945 to the late 1950s. Part of the reason for this obscurity was the difficulty in accessing archives on this period of history until after the end of communism and the independence of Slovenia. The lack of archival data, destroyed and/or never generated, on the postwar killings of thousands of real and suspected collaborators and other opponents of the regime in May, June, and July 1945 has also left a wide gap in what we know about this era and contributed to the increased sensitivity over this period. Gabrič's work literally opens up the archives for us, providing about a dozen images of archival documents and many more photographs, revealing some surprising insights into the regime's handling of the real and illusory opposition. Perhaps most striking were the various letters sent to the President of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, Boris Kidrič, in the summer of 1945, mostly from the female relatives of members of the Royal Yugoslav Army and the Slovene Home Guard who wondered "where are all those, who were imprisoned in the prisons of the new government, but should already be released?" (49).

About half of Gabrič's book focuses on the run-up to and the immediate aftermath of the 11 November 1945 Yugoslav parliamentary elections, which elected members to the Yugoslav Constituent Assembly. Not surprisingly, the Yugoslav People's Front (Ljudska Fronta Jugoslavije, LFJ), the communist-dominated ruling "coalition," won the election by some 90% of the vote, which the opposition boycotted. In his first section, "The Legal Opposition until the Elections of November 1945," Gabrič contextualizes the so-called opposition in Slovenia—the main aim of his work—by first providing a picture of the status of the political opposition in other parts of Yugoslavia. Gabrič is careful with his use of the term "opposition." The opposition that was allowed to survive after WW II, and even take part in the elections, were generally individuals belonging to parties of a leftist persuasion, many of who had already cooperated with the communist-led Partisans during the war and who were opposed to the return of the prewar Yugoslav regime. We are introduced to some of the most prominent among them, including Dragoljub Jovanović, the founder of the

left-leaning Serbian People's Peasant Party, who was a member of the LFJ; the Serbian politician Milan Grol, who led the Democratic Party (and its paper *Demokratija*) and who would be permanently sidelined after calling for the boycott of the November election; as well as the once powerful Croatian Peasant Party, whose ranks had been decimated by the war and the calving off of some of its members in support of the LFJ.

Gabrič's detailed description of opposition to the communists in the rest of Yugoslavia sets the stage for its comparison with the opposition in Slovenia in his second section, "Critics and Opponents of the Authorities in Slovenia." His assessment is blunt:

> Attempts to form a political opposition in Slovenia in 1945 are therefore not even close to comparable to the activities of political parties in Serbia and Croatia. In Slovenia, we do not find any attempts to register a political party, attempts to publish an independent newspaper or organize gatherings of old (or new) party leaders. (88)

This weakness was not simply a function, as Slovene émigrés were prone to claim after the war, of oppression by the communist secret police. As Gabrič points out, Serbia was liberated a half-year earlier than Slovenia, which would have given the secret police more time to do its work, yet Serbia had a much stronger opposition than Slovenia.

Gabrič walks us through the slices of the Slovene opposition. The dominant prewar Slovene political party—the conservative, clerical Slovene People's Party / Slovenska Ljudska Stranka (SLS)—had crumbled in the course of the war, dividing on the question of cooperating with the occupiers and hampered by the fact that part of its leadership had retreated into exile with the rest of the Royal Yugoslav government. The exiled SLS divided still further between the small minority (Franc Snoj, Izidor Cankar, and Alojzij Kuhar) who were willing to work with the Partisans and those, like Miha Krek, who remained steadfastly opposed. In relation to the SLS, Gabrič warns the reader not to conflate its opposition to the communists with commitment to democratic values: "Every democrat is an anti-communist, but not every anti-communist is a democrat" (7). Gabrič reminds us that the prewar SLS were not Western-style liberal-democrats, but instead flirted with corporatism and antisemitism, "which brought them closer to the views of fascist ideologues" (55). The Slovene liberal camp was divided already *before* the war. The small wartime anti-fascist party of liberals, Stara Pravda (Old Rights Party), which was led by Črtomir Nagode and which for two brief years (1941–42) had been part of the communist-led Slovene anti-Axis coalition, the Liberation Front (Osvobodilna Fronta, OF), was reduced to a mere shell by 1945. One of its members, Ljubo Sirc, reminisced in his memoir how after the war "of the former Pravda there remained only six or seven of us. Once a week we gathered in Nagode's house, to talk about what

could be done" (70). According to Gabrič, very little was done, as the liberals never established a formal political opposition. With prewar Slovene Catholic and liberal parties mere shadows of their former selves after the war, some hope was held out for the non-communists operating within the OF and the LFJ. The most prominent among these was the famous writer Edvard Kocbek, the leader of the Christian Socialist group within the OF. Yet, for much of the late 1940s, he remained committed to the unity of the OF and the naïve belief that the monopoly of the communist party would be restrained.

Despite the fact that Slovenia, perhaps more than any other region of Yugoslavia, had by 1945 moved closest to what the historian Hugh Seton-Watson had described as the "monolithic regime" stage of the communization process, Slovenia had the weakest support for the LFJ in the 1945 elections, with some 16.75% voting for the "black basket" of the boycotting opposition (85). Gabrič observes that Slovene areas with the weakest OF presence during the war generally had the highest votes for the opposition. Indeed, in two regions in northeastern Slovenia—Gornja Radgona and Dolnja Lendava—the opposition "won," which made no difference as the LFJ candidates ultimately took their seats in the parliament.

Gabrič's third section, "The Twilight of the Opposition," focuses on the period after the November 1945 elections through to the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, and traces the dissolution of whatever remained of a potential opposition to communist power in Yugoslavia. Once again, Gabrič employs his successful approach of first outlining the suffocation of the more developed opposition in the rest of Yugoslavia, before honing in on Slovenia. Remaining critics within and outside the victorious LFJ (most notably Jovanović, Grol, and the Croatian Peasant Party) were silenced through well-worn techniques, including denigration by the regime and its propaganda organs, loss of employment, and the shutting down of the remaining non-communist press. Occasional physical attacks and more common arrests and show trials finished the job.

As Gabrič repeatedly reminds us, the so-called "opposition" in Slovenia—a term that Gabrič notes was used far more commonly by the secret police than by its targets—continued to remain far less developed than in the rest of Yugoslavia after the 1945 elections. By its own admission, the secret police reported in 1946 that the remnants of previous parties in Slovenia do "not cause major political damage" (123). A strikingly similar assessment was offered by one of the leading regime critics, Angela Vode (a former member of Stara Pravda), who agreed that despite the terror and mistakes of the Communist Party, the regime "enjoyed considerable support from the population" (122) and that there was no chance for opposition against it. This did not stop the regime from "paving the way to full power" (129) by slicing away at whatever was left of the Slovene opposition. In July and August 1947, the Nagode show trial condemned the liberal opposition,

with Nagode executed by firing squad. Gabrič then follows the long divorce between Kocbek and the party, revealing the ongoing paranoia of its leadership that the leading Christian Socialist could become a magnet for opposition, particularly among Catholics with whom the party was in a bitter struggle in the early 1950s. While Kocbek continued with his critiques of the party (such as their execution of the Home Guard), this was all done behind closed doors and Kocbek never made any moves in the direction of what the party feared most. In the end, the publication of Kocbek's famous 1951 collection of short stories *Strah in Pogum* (Fear and courage), in which he portrayed the messy moral dilemmas of Partisan resistance, was, as Gabrič notes, merely the excuse rather than the cause of Kocbek's ouster. Kocbek refused to recant and in February 1952 he resigned "under pressure" (148), as he noted, from the government, which the communist-controlled press dutifully ignored.

Gabrič's fourth section "The Opposition of Youth Organizations in Slovenia," strikes a somewhat more inspiring note as it shines light on the mostly forgotten actions of a handful of brave and very young Slovenes who challenged the party and its youth wing. The gumption of these illegal student groups, most prominently the Union of Democratic Youth, was evident in their newsletter *Zarja svobode* (The Dawn of Freedom). First issued in January 1946, it featured, among other stories, Eleanor Roosevelt's UN critique of the treatment of civilian populations in undemocratic regimes like Yugoslavia's. Despite its limited copies and reach, Gabrič describes *Zarja svobode* as the only pro-Western paper that appeared in the first postwar year in Slovenia (173). Notwithstanding their young age (Vladimir Krek, one of the leading members of the Union of Democratic Youth and the nephew of Miha Krek, was only fifteen), the secret police cracked down hard on these youth activists, arresting and interrogating a number of them between February and April 1946. While all were eventually released, they were thoroughly dispirited and there was no return to the same political activism.

The final section, "A New Generation of Critics of Power on the Horizon," is equally hopeful, as it describes the transition from the dark days of the late 1940s to the more permissive 1950s, which followed the break with Stalin and Yugoslavia's opening to the West. The regime lifted some pressure on those critics who did not seek their overthrow, and Gabrič explores this process through the ensuing dance between the regime and a series of youth literary magazines, beginning with *Mladinska revija* (Youth magazine), its successor *Beseda* (Word), and *Beseda*'s successor, *Revija 57* (Magazine 57). Despite the fact that the regime terminated each of these short-lived magazines, it seemingly only encouraged their independence from party supervision. While the party placed strict limitations on *Revija 57* (for example, the former editors of *Beseda* were unable to join as members), it was by far the most outspoken and critical of the three magazines, leading the regime to confiscate its October 1958 issue and arrest its key contributors

and editors, including a young Jože Pučnik who was subsequently sentenced to nine years in prison.

The critical issue, Gabrič reminds us in his final pages, is that Pučnik was a member of the Communist Party, that he and others in this younger generation did not believe that membership in the party precluded the ability to "express their opinion" (225), and that he did not consider himself to be the opposition. Thus, Gabrič ends his study where he begins, with a thoughtful interrogation of the language that we as historians employ in making sense of the past, and the anachronistic consequences of applying a certain post-1980s understanding of political opposition to the communist regime of Yugoslavia to describe individuals who did not see themselves in this role. It also risks accepting the language—and the indictments—used by the regime in its aspersions of their critics, which for its own self-serving political reasons attempted to construct conspiracies where there were none.

Gregor Kranjc, Brock University

Andrew Anžur Clement. *The Kosovo War – Tito's Lost Children, a Tale of the Yugoslav Wars 4*. Independently published, 2020, pp. 155. £.6.99. ISBN-13: 979-8613888160

The Kosovo War—*Tito's Lost Children, a Tale of the Yugoslav Wars 4*—continues the line of previous novels by Andrew Anžur Clement, which is in the genre of science fiction alternative history. In this work, the reader is introduced to a boy's experience in the Kosovo Liberation Army. One in a long list of novels produced at a record pace by Clement, this book keeps the reader turning the page.

Effective in its ability to offer an experience of urgency to the reader, Clement can put characters on the page and draw attention to the immediacy of their feelings. Written in the first person, the novel is an attempt at a diary of survival and testifies to the ingenuity of the writer, who limits the narration to what the protagonist made of his experience. Experientiality being at the core of the narrative, this can often be an effective way of presenting an idea dramatically and maintain the experience of the readers while they orientate themselves in the universe of the story. Walking in the steps of the protagonist, we are introduced to the human geographies of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and the impossible relationships a young teenager is asked to form with the family of the man who accidentally killed his parents. As the protagonist continues to protect his brother and comply with the will of the group that cares for them in exchange for his service in the army, the reader makes sense of the experience and the characters the author chose to make agents of change in the story. The relationship between brothers, as offered