

Abstract:

After the break with the Soviet Union in 1949 the Yugoslav communist regime took special measures against its own party members who had questioned the new party line. Tens of thousands of suspected supporters of the Cominform, in the dispute with the Soviet Bloc, were arrested and imprisoned. They were sentenced to years of imprisonment based on mostly hearsay evidence and without public or even secret trial where they might defend themselves against their accusers. Prisoners were often subjected to cruel and unusual punishment and thousands are reported to have died. The state exercised arbitrary authority and used terror and intimidation in its struggle with political opponents.

This entire period of repressive measures was a taboo subject in communist Yugoslavia for half a century, and the repression of many of these prisoners continued long after their confinement through secret government surveillance and acts of intimidation. With the break up of Yugoslavia secret police files became available to the former prisoners, and by the late 1980's and early 1990's a number of them had published accounts of their arrests and imprisonment. However, by that time the horrors of the new wars over the break up of Yugoslavia overshadowed these more historical accounts of state violence against the citizens of the former Yugoslavia.

Dr. Toma Batev, a former prisoner in the most notorious prison camp, the island camp of Goli Otok, wrote in the introduction to his 2006 book *Mislata i dushata vo obrach*:

"Storm clouds had gathered over Yugoslavia back then [1949]. The state's top officials took drastic measures against the political line of the InformBiro. A dictatorial approach was used to purge the Communist Party. In those confused times the security apparatus of the party used various means to persecute those members of the party who, on the flimsiest of evidence, were deemed disloyal. Those who hesitated in the least in support of the sudden and confusing political policy changes were declared traitors, enemies of the people, and of the fatherland.

"In that abnormal time the state took extreme measures. Fear and confusion swept through the ranks of the party. There was widespread mistrust among the members. It was these terrible circumstances that led to so many being locked up in torture camps like Goli Otok, in the guise of socially useful labor camps."

The Documentation of Human Rights Violations in the Goli Otok Prison Camp of Communist Yugoslavia

Resistance to arbitrary and abusive state authority is no easy task. It involves personal risk of loss of income, status, friends, and freedom. It means taking a principled stand for the rule of law and legal process when powerful state authorities argue that the only thing that matters is winning against a dangerous, ruthless enemy, using any and all means toward that end.

The imprisonment, torture and deaths of thousands of members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia by their own leadership in the late 1940's and early 1950's has been a subject of limited interest to a world still reeling from the knowledge of the sheer scale of the barbaric prison systems of Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia, and there is little

enough sympathy today for victims of a power struggle within the Yugoslav Communist Party that mainly affected supporters of Josef Stalin. With the break up of Yugoslavia secret police files became available to the former prisoners, and by the late 1980's and early 1990's a number of them had published accounts of their arrests and imprisonment. However, by that time the horrors of the new wars over the break up of Yugoslavia overshadowed these more historical accounts of state violence against the citizens of the former Yugoslavia.

After reading a recent memoir of life in the Goli Otok Prison Camp by a rather naïve young prisoner, Toma Batev, I began to better understand why this terrible episode in the history of communist Yugoslavia deserves our attention. He writes in an opening chapter (pages 11-13) of his memoir:

I was part of a university youth brigade that had worked on the highway project named Brotherhood and Unity. We had been rewarded for our hard work with a month-long vacation at Lake Ohrid.

On one particularly lovely warm day, after play on the beach, my comrades and I gathered for a party that evening at the Belvi Hotel. We danced and sang and partied late into the night. So we were all slow to rise the next morning. I got up and bought a copy of the newspaper Politika. The newspaper (7/14/49) had printed a resolution of the Inform-Bureau and a response by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. I read it all carefully and considered it.

That same day in the afternoon all of the communist youth from the brigade were called to a meeting. It was held in the general assembly hall in Ohrid. Krste Tsrvenkovski, Secretary of the CPM, Communist Party of Macedonia, a leading party functionary, led the meeting. He read the Inform-Bureau resolution to us and the response by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. He explained that everything in the IB's resolution was lies and slander. He cited the position of the Central Committee of the CPY and opened the floor to discussion.

There were 17 of us present. The majority of the party members present remained quiet, choosing not to enter into a discussion of the topic.

I spoke up. I said that I thought that our party was undemocratic, that the leadership made decisions in an undemocratic manner, that the meetings were often held in private homes, such as the meeting held in the home of the general secretary of the party organization in Skopje, Roman Lecheski. If there is one party rule, with all others made illegal, and there is no democracy in the ruling party, what will be the future of such a society and state? It was the truth, and it would be many years before we would see democratization. What was my error?

I asked: Why hasn't the party held a congress. It has been a number of years now since we achieved liberation?"

Then I went on to mention how the forced collectivization of the village agriculture had been a big mistake. It was already apparent that it had caused serious economic damage. Was it also an error to mention that?

I ended by saying that there was no need for bickering like a bunch of old women at a well, because you don't solve anything that way. You just get yourself into worse trouble. The Inform Bureau and the Central Committee needed to engage in open democratic dialogue. The future would bear that out.

What do the old say: youth-stupidity! Carried away by idealism, truth and only the truth and youthful enthusiasm for revolution, I simply said what I honestly thought. It was an objective assessment by a well-intentioned citizen, if a somewhat incautious one.

The high official was furious. He began to talk in a high-pitched, nervous voice, totally disregarding my questions.

Then he offered cigarettes to anyone who smoked. I was beginning to see, by the hostile way he regarded me, that maybe I was wrong to speak up, that perhaps I should have remained silent, like the others. As a wise Greek philosopher said: "If I keep silent, I can't say the wrong thing."

It was already too late to undo the harm I had done. I learned my lesson too late. I would have to suffer the consequences for the rest of my life.

The honest and brave had a bitter pill to swallow. Only the chameleons knew how to survive under such circumstances in such times as it was our fate to live. No matter that everything I said that day would be vindicated with the eventual triumph of democracy. Those who are too far ahead of their times always must suffer. My own serious error of judgment would cost me dearly.

The bare facts repeated: five months in judicial custody, 29 months at the island prison camp Goli Otok, a lifetime of discrimination, always watched, ill treated and plagued by a personal dossier...

Toma Batev's personal account is corroborated by the testimonies of hundreds of others, and the injustice done to prisoners affirmed by legal authorities of the successor states to the former Yugoslavia such as the President of the Macedonian Lawyers Guild:

The Goli Otok prisoners were not imprisoned on the basis of violations of the law or the state constitution, but as a result of the tyranny imposed on a minority who did not agree with their [the Communist Party of Yugoslavia's] politics and were associated with the Inform Bureau. Many of them sided with Stalin as opposed to Tito, who had the majority support of the people. They were condemned as part of a classic example of an intra-party struggle. Their mistake was to refuse to accept party discipline, while openly expressing their dissent. The struggle between those who favored Stalin and those who supported Tito could not have been foreseen and there was no law governing its conduct. And the Goli Otok Prison Camp was no normal, lawfully run part of the penal system. It was part of a party-run set of camps in which they engaged in what was called "reeducation," and "socially reformative work," but, in fact, was a form of terrible physical and psychological destruction of individual human beings. ...The conclusion that the prisoners did not violate the law," 'according to the President of the Lawyers Guild,' "is supported by the undeniable fact that no court tried them and rendered a verdict. By not allowing proper legal debate of their purported crimes, the state was able to do whatever brutal abuse to them that it pleased, with total impunity." Slavko Petrov 2

Toma Batev mentions a number of works on Goli Otok in his memoir 3 , and I have done my own search of the literature and discovered several other published works on the subject. 4 Batev includes considerable corroborating documentation of the notorious prison, where over 50,000 political prisoners served time and as many as 5,000 may have died from physical and mental deprivation and torture. The final section of his

book offers excerpts from many of these works. 5 His own account is thus corroborated by a number of written accounts by other witnesses to the crimes committed in Goli Otok's prison camps:

In the section entitled "Goli Otok, as a metaphor, and its historical sense," from *Goli Otok Witness*, [original, *Golotočki svedoštva*], Menora, Skopje, 1999, page 12 states: "*There was continual state terror, with communist internationalists the number one enemy. Over 60,000 communists were imprisoned in UDB (State Security) torture chambers and more than 5,000 Goli Otok prisoners died. There were about 230,000 members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia expelled in the period between 1948 and 1953. Nearly 200,000 relatives and friends of Goli Otok prisoners suffered repressive measures. The SKY (Communist League of Yugoslavia) became a haven for thousands of opportunistic sycophants of mediocre talent. The misery that accompanied the advent of socialism in Yugoslavia began with the Goli Otok Prison.*"

One action initiated by the Association of Goli Otok Prisoners involves legal actions aimed at rehabilitation of political prisoners from the events of 1948. In *Goli Otok Witness*, pages 251-255 Bogdan Božinovski states: "...*the evil torture machine of Goli Otok was so thoroughly thought out and implemented that the prisoner had no protection from anyone. He was forced to beg those in control for every basic necessity of life. The extent of this repression exceeded that of the Siberian Gulag and camps of Nazi Germany.*"

The same work contains the words of the eminent professor of medicine from Sarajevo, Nikola Nikolić (a former prisoner doctor on Goli Otok), who said: "...*I was once a prisoner at the notorious [World War Two] prison at Jasenovac. Conditions were actually far better there than at Goli Otok. They did not engage in the psychological torture practiced against the prisoners at Goli Otok that robbed them of their natural human dignity and left their spirit severely damaged. ...*"

"Following on the initiative of Dobrica Ćosić – "A million victims of the Inform Bureau." *Goli Otok Witness*, page 262 states: "*It was state sponsored terrorism,*" wrote the President of SR Yugoslavia, "*when 200,000 prisoners served sentences of varying lengths, and some 15,000 of them died due to the conditions of their imprisonment.*"

Another witness, Dragoslav Mihajlović stated: "*All of the victims received the same treatment for their essentially verbal missteps.*" And Lawyer Milan Vujin stated: "*Our legal system never foresaw the need for compensation for the injuries of rehabilitated prisoners.*"

A step in that direction, according to some, was the concrete distinction drawn by the President of SR Yugoslavia, Dobrica Ćosić, when he asked the Union Parliament to finally do everything they could to correct the wrong done to the Inform Bureau victims. He then said: "...*I propose the complete legal absolution and moral acknowledgement of all that these unfortunate people endured.*"

Another witness stated: *“Blažo was arrested in the summer of 1948. He was one of the first prisoners on Goli Otok. He arrived on the notorious island, today better known than Brioni, on the 9th of July of 1949. The same day the prison camp opened. For a brief time there was a willingness to let the prisoners speak their minds freely without interference by the investigators. Then a group of “reeducated” prisoners arrived from Bosnia. They began to use clubs on their fellow prisoners, smashing skulls, and breaking ribs and drawing blood. Then Goli Otok became the bleak island of its name. The prisoners had to spit on everything they had formerly believed about Stalin, the Soviet Union and the Inform Bureau. Blažo didn’t want to do that. They made it clear that if he held on to his views, his head would roll. He refused to budge.”*

“At the end of July of 1949 Blažo was put through the line. The order was given to beat him to a pulp. Afterward he was carried to the prison hospital, where he died an hour later...” (Dr. Blažo Raičević was the first victim of Goli Otok.) “May he always be honored.”

In *Goli Otok Witness*, on page. 260, Slavko Petrov stated: *“The government can and should morally rehabilitate the Goli Otok prisoners.”*

“Association with the Stalinist or Titoist option was not a punishable offense, so the legal rehabilitation of those imprisoned isn’t possible,” said the President of the Lawyers Guild of Macedonia. “...the state of Macedonia must rehabilitate the condemned of Goli Otok simply by decree, in which the present-day government condemns the actions of its predecessors, and it apologizes to the people for the harm done,” said Slavko Petrov. “That will provide some moral satisfaction, which is a broader concept than legal rehabilitation,” reckons Petrov. “While the question of compensation is another issue altogether.” ...It was the former Macedonian state that was involved in this evil-doing.” But Petrov believes that the present-day government of Macedonia can show that it is a nation ruled by lawful means that recognizes and apologizes for past crimes of the state. “... [an additional excerpt from this witness appears near the beginning of this paper]

*“Rehabilitation is not an opportunity to revel in revenge,” according to Marjan Janev in *Goli Otok Witness*, on page 261: “The Macedonian public and all of Macedonian society must give all due respect to the innocent victims of Goli Otok and acknowledge their suffering. The government and parliament must ratify an act that will restore their dignity and moral integrity.”*

Goli Otok Witness, page 18 contains an entry concerning the number of communists that perished as a result of association with the Inform Bureau. *“According to Vladimir Dedijer, a well-informed, credible insider among the high party functionaries during the period of the Federated Peoples Republic of Yugoslavia, there were 3,800 victims. No party or state has ever disputed that number.”* (From p. 468 of the 3rd tome of the biography of Josip Broz Tito, entitled “New Contributions to the biography of Josip Broz Tito.)

Stavre Džikov, in *Goli Otok Witness*, page 277, in a section entitled “Makedonija,,” created a list of persons [from Macedonia] accused, jailed or imprisoned and sent to prison camps due to the Resolution of the Inform Bureau. He created this list

through a search of archival material, and other documents and literature. [This list contains over 1100 names, but Toma Batev, *Mind and Spirit Under Siege*, page 203, warns that this list is neither complete, nor entirely verifiable.]

There is an excerpt of a work written by Goli Otok prisoner Venko Markovski published in English in the USA, entitled "Goli Otok, Island of Death," New York, 1984, translation by Diana Cenić. In an excerpt from that work Markovski states: *"At the same time, those with the strongest spirit were destroyed, ground into sorry, gray dust. The prison was cruel. I remember so many people who fought bravely for the revolution during the fierce struggle against fascism, only to die here, mercilessly betrayed and left to perish between the stone walls, engulfed by the foggy wasteland. The sea is peaceful here, but the floor of the Adriatic is soaked in the blood of the proud warriors of the Yugoslav partisan army, who lay in the depths enshrouded in algae."*

"Even after I left Goli Otok its pathetic, inhuman story still tortures my soul at night, forcing me to once more listen to the groans of the people who were being buried alive."

"The tortures that I described in 'Modern Paradoxes' was not merely vague generalities, but concrete fact. The lines formed for punishment and the blacklist are all still so very real to me, revealing the true character of the hellish system devised by the UDB for dealing with the worthiest sons and daughters of Yugoslavia. I was subjected to the same treatment, and I know that it is one thing to write about things that happened to others and quite another thing to write about your own suffering."

"I have no doubt that some day in the not too distant future Goli Otok Prison will be shut down and it will become a recreational park for young people or maybe a foreign tourist destination in some totally reconstructed future version. But when the stars begin to sparkle in the blue black night sky and the moon floats across the heavens, shadows will roam about the island and spread fear across the cursed landscape. The curses of the people who lie on the floor of the sea with bound hands and stones attached to their ankles will float to the surface. The dark night will grow darker, the air will cut like a knife, the sea will rage, and Velebit Mountain will grow dim. Who among the living could remain calm on such a night? The bloody wounds of the murdered will continue to leave bloody traces and they will continue to curse the present-day, living descendants, the citizens of the tortured and doomed state of Yugoslavia."

"Perhaps there will someday be films that try to show the living heroes, that will try to recreate life on Goli Otok, but the agony of Goli Otok can never truly be depicted in a film. What happened there is beyond depiction. And so the island will in the future become what it will be, but it won't be Goli Otok."

"Dear Reader, with this I arrive at the end of my tale about Goli Otok, the island of death." Venko Markovski.

The poem "Stone Island," "Kamen ostrov" by academic Nikola Kljusev, published in Skopje, 1994, is one of the most authentic, vivid depictions of the systematic torture and endurance of unimaginable humiliations of the prisoners, and all of the work of the UDB. They inflicted such torture upon the human body and soul that it led to complete despair. His poem is a most expressive narration of the experiences and emotions of the prisoners. It is a subtle and disturbing poetic expression by one with the rare ability to describe that which he personally experienced and endured in the camp, as

opposed to a second hand telling of the story or a narration by some more passive observer.

It is a masterful work by a truly gifted poet whose words leave no reader unmoved. It will move one to tears. He presents shocking, vivid images in a way that only he could transmit through words. It is truly a gift from God. He has conveyed for all time a theme from an irrational time in our history.

Professor Dr. Stojan Risteski published his personal police file, number 2771 in a work entitled *My Informers, [Moite kodoši]* Iris, Struga, 2001. He presents documents from his dossier concerning informers and others who collaborated with the authorities. As in many other files, as the author explains: “...*It is only the work of fantasy, the construction of situations to blacken reputations, using the most powerful arguments of the time: nationalism as opposed to brotherhood and unity, thinking only of Macedonia and not Yugoslavia, befriending of various nationalists and supporters of the Inform Bureau and their glorification, thus the decision to listen in on phone conversations, as unsavory instructors, implementing the action under the name “Competence,” intended to evict people from their work and send them off to forced labor camps.*”

How grand this “most democratic and free land of ours,” that made me into an enemy of the state. The informers and toadies were its foundation and that is why it collapsed. In reality, it began to unravel when they divided the people into the good and the bad, when they established the dirt-filled files. No regime can survive that is propped up by dishonest men.”

In Dr. Stojan Risteski's book *Goli Otok Gogotha [Golootočka golgota]*, Ohrid, 1991, the author offers an authentic account of the suffering of one victim of Goli Otok. The confession and agony of Stojmir Jordanoski-Mirče is not the whole truth about Goli Otok, just one more contribution to our knowledge of that terrible time.

In the introduction to the book *Goli Otok Confessional [Golootočka ispoved]*, Iris, Struga, 2003, the author, Stojan Risteski writes, among other things: “*Upon study of the published lists of the repressed, one gets the impression that Macedonia, as in the case of the fallen soldiers, aspired to match the efforts of the other Yugoslav Republics, particularly, it is clear, those in the army, the union leadership, and forums. They welcomed the Resolution of the IB with its many “sinners” from the NOB (People's Liberation Fighters), which afforded the opportunity for scoundrels and opportunists along with their agents to rise in the ranks, eventually becoming the worst lackeys in those positions. Carried away by a spirit of retaliation, people informed on one another readily: relative on relative, son on father, husband on wife, brother on brother, etc. unbelievably. Thus, a man from Debar informed on four members of his wife's family: her brother and three cousins who ended up being sent to Goli Otok. He and some of his own family were well rewarded for this.*

No small number of people were condemned to prison as part of the struggle with the Inform Bureau, when they didn't even know what it was. If someone didn't like someone, if they had a dispute, if they were on opposite sides in some debate over an issue, suddenly one of them would scent the influence of the Inform Bureau and run to report his adversary to the UDB.

All of those who were rounded up and sent to Goli Otok or some other camp as suspected Inform Bureau supporters were never tried and convicted. They were simply selected for socially useful labor.

The authorities came up with a way to increase the number of activists to deal with the population of prisoners. Specifically, those responsible for implementing the government's policy became the room captains who knew how to sow fear and trembling among the prisoners. These included trustees who served as overseers, political agitators, pavilion attendants, cultural workers, and the like. All of this cadre, some 300 men, was directed by a board that coordinated their work. The investigators, at their whim, stirred this entire apparatus to action, which led to ever more ingenious ways to inflict self-torture and self-destruction on the prisoners.

With the arrival of the second group of prisoners, reeducation began, with its ugly practice of the gauntlet, which provoked the most vicious attacks by those who wanted to get on the good side of the activists. This was followed by acceptance in the collective. Of course, failure to win acceptance meant blacklisting. Those who were rejected, the blacklisted, were forced to stand with their heads bowed over the chamber pots in which the prisoners relieved themselves, and they were put on fire watch duty, which meant that they received only a few hours sleep. They were punished for everything and nothing. The more stubborn and resistant the worse the prisoner was treated. It wasn't trained policemen but those who lived with the men in the barracks who put them through the gauntlet, ordered them about, reported on them and beat them. The activists in the collectives were the most brutal and vicious in their treatment of the blacklisted prisoners.

*The representatives of the regime: the investigators (who came from every republic, province and population center) and the police officers who worked with them merely rubbed their hands in satisfaction. The activists in the camps made their job easier, dealing with the incorrigibles, because they filled the dossiers of the prisoners with just the right information to achieve the desired result. They each behaved somewhat differently depending upon their degree of conscience, honesty and culture. However, even the most honorable and aware among them didn't dare oppose the activists in the camps because it would then bring them under suspicion. "Fear and expediency, particularly their access to prison stores and their high pay, explained their behavior," said one investigator in the book *The Truth about Goli Otok*, Belgrade, 1987, page 288.*

There was equality of the sexes in Goli Otok. From 1950 to 1952 there were around 900 women prisoners there. They were put in a separate camp away from the male prisoners, facing the Velebit Mountains over on the mainland. They never saw any of the men, nor did the men ever see any of them. And the women were expected to do the same work as the men. They received similar treatment. Many had little children from whom they were separated during their time there.

Many of them were condemned for refusing to admit that their young husbands were members of the Inform Bureau crowd. There were women who wouldn't say anything about their association with members of their collectives who were Inform Bureau supporters. They had too much integrity and self-respect to name them. The wife of the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Sima Marković, was among the women prisoners on Goli Otok.

The island of Goli Otok was a hell for everyone. The burning sun and the hot stones were hell. So were the poor food and shelter, the lack of drinking water, since the boat-shipped source of our water was never enough, the exhausting work and the constant degradation by men-beasts.

Worst of all was the camp called Petrov's Hole. They sent the most notorious supporters of the Inform Bureau there.: ministers, generals, members of the Central Committee, ambassadors, university professors, those accused of being agents of the Soviet Secret Service, the NKVD, those who had been abroad, and the like. There was a guard tower over this torture camp, which was lit up all night. No one was allowed to have contact with these prisoners. They were subjected to the harshest regime of all. Maybe it was because their reeducation was the cruelest of all that this ninth circle of hell was referred to as the monastery. We only shared the fact that we were all considered criminals, no matter what our status on the desolate island.

Everyone sent to Goli Otok went through hell in his own way, which is really the way it is in life in general. Everyone only talks about the misery they endured. They will all say that they merely shouted "Criminal! Bandit!" whenever required. So who was it that spit and punched and ratted on others? Not them. Once they were free they kept a low profile in order to evade the investigators. Some of those who beat up their own fathers, who informed on everyone who was honest and good, later would write about the torture they endured, as if they were real heroes. But their misdeeds, what they really did there, would eventually catch up with them. Some of those who behaved as beasts would now like to disavow the evil they did. However, that won't work since many of their victims are still among the living.

How many people perished on the island of Goli, no one knows. The living embodiment of the Macedonian revolution, the President of the first session of ASNOM, [the group that proclaimed a Macedonian Republic in Yugoslavia during World War Two] Panko Brašnarov, was not buried on Goli. His body was put on a boat and carried away, to be dumped at sea or buried elsewhere, but no one I know can say what happened to him.

For those who tried to maintain their integrity and dignity, the labor at the various work sites was not the hardest part. They stoically endured it all. The hardest thing for them was the constant humiliation and harassment, the demeaning of all they believed in. It was the reason they were sent there, as everyone could see, the reason they had to endure the abuse of criminals, opponents of all they had fought for. It is impossible to become reconciled to all of the evil done there, all of the ways that life was denied.

From the period 1949 to 1953 Goli Otok is the blackest mark on the history of Yugoslavia. Until 1953 the wider public knew nothing of the island of Goli. It was a taboo subject. Even the military was not allowed there. Adriatic shipping sailed at a distance and fishermen were also kept far away. No one who had been there dared to talk about it, because they knew it would only lead to trouble. The highest government officials knew about it. The plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia on June 4, 1951 at the request of Tito, ordered a quarterly report by the office of the military prosecutor on all military prisons after visits to review conditions. Aleksandar Ranković visited Goli Otok in 1951 and 1952. Others such as Svetozar Vukmanović Tempo also apparently paid visits to the island, none of these people claimed to know anything about Goli Otok. That was pure sadism that speaks volumes about them.

From within the system that self-destructed [Od niz sistemot što se raspadna samiot od sebe] (1945-1988), Skopje, 2002, by Mishko Božinoski, is an autobiographical work, a memoir. Mishko Božinoski was a recipient of the distinguished award of “Partisan 1941” and an economist who dealt with the banking system. He recounts his own personal experiences and the events that he witnessed in the life of the new system established under communist rule until the entire system collapsed under its own weight.

Goli Otok Witness, page 249 declares: “...the intention of the Goli Otok prisoners to seek redress for the historic injustice done to them. The association Goli Otok seeks abolition of all legal measures, criminal charges and other measures taken against those who were condemned and punished with prison terms, time in work camps, concentration camps or other facilities where suspected supporters of the Inform Bureau were interned.

In addition, the former prisoners of Goli Otok would like to have the government find the graves of those who disappeared and were never properly accounted for. They also request that the name of the city of Titov Veles be changed. [It is now once again simply Veles.] “

While some people in the former Yugoslavia did know about the prison and its history, it was a taboo topic for many years, only talked about in whispers among trusted friends and family. Most former prisoners such as Toma Batev lived for many years in such fear that they rarely spoke to anyone about their experiences.

It was only with the fall of communist Yugoslavia that accounts like that of Dr. Batev could reach a domestic audience, while precious few accounts were ever available to foreign readers prior to that time. 6 With the publication of works such as his memoir significant new light has been shed on a subject that remained far too long in the shadows. Toma Batev offers us an accessible, personalized account of the experiences of Goli Otok prisoners. 7

Individual and collective resistance to arbitrary and abusive state authorities may seem like an old story, but it is one that bears repeating in its numerous versions, whether unlawful arrest, imprisonment and torture is described in a Soviet Gulag or the Yugoslav Goli Otok, whether it occurs in Iran, Russia, China, or the USA, or at a military base beyond our shores such as the facility at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Dr. Michael Seraphinoff, March, 2017

Notes

1. Batev, Toma. *Mind and Spirit Under Siege [Mislata i dušata vo obrač]*, Venecia, Shtip, Macedonia, 2006,
2. Petrov, Slavko. *Goli Otok Witness [Golootočka svedoštva]*, Menora, Skopje, 1999, p. 260.
3. Toma Batev's personal account was further enhanced by inclusion of passages from a fellow prisoner's narrative poem about their experiences in that notorious prison. (Kljusev, Nikola. *Stone Island [Kamen Ostrov]*, Skopje, 1994). Academic and poet Nikola Kljusev was elected in 1991 to be the first premier of the newly independent Republic of Macedonia
4. These include Masan Radonjić's *Goli Otok, mad torture chamber [Goli Otok, ljudsko mučilište]*, Prometej, Beograd, 1993. There are also descriptions of incidents from life in the prison in Slovenian author Igor Torkar's autobiographical novel entitled *Dying in Installments [Umiranje na obroke]*, Globus, Zagreb, 1984. Another Slovenian writer, Branko Hofman, also provides some descriptions of the Goli Otok prison in his novel *Night Til Morning*. Portions of the Bulgarian Macedonian writer Venko Markovski's work *Goli Otok- The Island of Death* appeared in an English translation by Diana Cenic, Social Science Monographs, Boulder, 1984. Ligio Zanini's autobiographical work on Goli Otok appeared under the title *Martin Muma*. Fiume, Rijeka, 1999. Others who wrote about Goli Otok include Italian author Giacomo Scotti in his work *Goli Otok. Italiani nel Gulag di Tito* and Slovenian writer Drago Janchar's work entitled *Brioni*. Dragoslav Mihailovic wrote *Goli Otok- Island of Death*, Politika, Beograd, 1990. There is also reference to Goli Otok in Dragoslav Mihailović's *When Pumpkins Bloomed [Kad su cvetale tikve]*. A novel by a non-Yugoslav writer, Michael D. O'Brien, *Island of the World*, describes the experiences of a fictional character, who escapes imprisonment on Goli Otok.
With the fall of Yugoslavia in the early 1990's more accounts of Goli Otok appeared such as the compilation *Goli Otok Witness [Golootočka svedoštva]* published by Menora, Skopje, 1999. The narrative poem *Kamen Ostrov (Stone Island)* by academic and former Premier of the Republic of Macedonia, Nikola Kljusev, appeared in Skopje in 1994. Dr. Stojan Risteski's book *A Goli Otok Golgotha [Edna golootočka golgota]* was published in Ohrid in 1994 and *A Goli Otok Confessional [Golootočka ispoved]* also by Stojan Risteski, was published by Iris, Struga, 2003
5. Batev, Toma. *Mislata I dušata vo obrač*, Venecia, Shtip, 2006, (Seraphinoff translation, *Mind and Spirit Under Siege*, from the website MacedonianLit.com, pp. 104-113).
6. I initially had hoped that an academic publisher might be interested in publishing my translation of his memoir. When that did not prove to be the case, I decided that this episode in the history of the Yugoslav Communist Party still deserved more exposure than it has thus far received. Therefore, I chose to make his entire memoir available to readers in English through my translation, available as a free PDF download at my website Macedonianlit.com.
7. Professor Dr. Toma Batev passed away in October of 2010 at the age of 83. I was fortunate enough to meet Toma Batev in October of 2006, not long after the publication of his memoir. A good friend who had gone to school with his daughter took me to visit him at his home in Shtip in the Republic of Macedonia. Professor Batev greeted me

warmly, despite his obvious physical pain from a recent illness. He spoke of his memoir and the ordeal he and his fellow prisoners endured with the same honest emotion and intellectual integrity that one encounters in the memoir itself.