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CHINESE PROGRESSIVE PRESS REPORTS ON BALKAN PEOPLE'S ANTI-FASCIST MOVEMENTS

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In 1941 fascists from Germany and Italy waged a war and invaded Yugoslavia and Greece. This was at the same time as the Chinese people were suffering under Japanese aggression. Indeed, during the Second World War, the Chinese people's anti-Japanese aggression war was tightly connected with the international anti-Fascist war and Chinese people paid close attention to events around the world. At that time, the Chinese progressive press reported the brave struggles of people in other nations being oppressed by Fascists. Among them the Balkan people's anti-Fascist movements were especially focused on and highly appraised.

In this paper we mainly focused on two dailies published by the Chinese Communist Party, "Liberation Daily" in the liberated area of Yan An and "Xinhua Daily" in the Kuomintang (KMT) dominated area of Chong Qing, to study what kind of coverage and response there was in China to the Yugoslav and Bulgarian anti-Fascist struggles in 1941-45. According to the authors' preliminary findings, from 1941 to 1945 the "Liberation Daily" carried about 600 items of news, reports, articles, comments and editorials on the Yugoslav people's anti-Fascist struggles, as well as maps, Josip Broz Tito's biographies, and pictures. The same newspaper also carried 463 items of news on the Bulgarian people's anti-Fascist movements and the establishment of Bulgarian people's political power, as well as three editorials, five brief comments, and seven articles.¹

¹ See in Ma Xipu, *The Rise And Fall Of Yugoslavia*, Social Science Academic Press, 2010, pp.186-94, and Ma Xipu, *History of Bulgaria*, China Social Science Press, 2011, pp213-16.

On the front page of “Xinhua Daily” on March 3rd 1941 there was a detailed report on the process of Bulgaria’s giving up of its previous neutral policy and acceding to the Axis Powers Group of Germany, Italy and Japan, as well as the strong reactions of Western countries. On the second day, according to some foreign agencies, this newspaper reported that Bulgaria was following Romania on the same old road to ruin.

On March 8th, 1941 “Jin-Cha-Ji Daily” in China commented that as a vassal state of the Axis Powers, Bulgaria had made a negative impact on the situation in the Balkans. The newspaper reported that 200,000 German troops had occupied the whole territory of Bulgaria and that the Bulgarian people were suffering the terrible tragedy of a fallen nation and war. It was furthermore reported in the “International Review” column of the same newspaper that Bulgaria’s seeking the patronage of Germany and Italy had contributed to realizing Germany’s Balkan strategy; namely that Bulgaria had become German’s military strategic base in south and eastern Europe, and Germany had not only expanded its control in south and eastern Europe but also deployed troops on the border area with Turkey and Greece. This had the result that Germany could entice Turkey to keep neutral, force Greece to surrender, and even force Yugoslavia to join the Axis Powers Group.

On April 7th, 1941, the second day of the German and Italian Fascists’ invasion of Yugoslavia, Xinhua Daily devoted a main page to the event. The German airplane bombing of Yugoslavia was regarded as “a war against Yugoslavia”. The newspaper carried an editorial and analyzed the serious situation in Balkans after the occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece by the enemies. It was reported how Germany had launched the prelude of the “Spring Offensive” in the Balkan area, that “the flames of war would burn more and more vigorously and would spread to more and more places,” but that the fate of Balkan countries would depend on the people of the Balkans – that only they “had the right to determine their final fate.”²

In the beginning of July 1941 the Yugoslavian people embarked on an organized arm struggle when the Serbs’ armed uprising erupted. From then on the Chinese Communist Party’s newspaper began to systematically publish a large number of reports about guerrilla

² Editorial “On Balkans War”, in *Xinhua Daily* on April 11th, 1941.

attacks in Yugoslavia and pointed out that “the guerrilla attacks were the main means adopted by Yugoslavia’s people to oppose the occupying army”.

On September 17th, 1941 an article titled “ Anti-Nazi Campaigns Permeated in Europe” was issued. In this article guerrilla attacks in Yugoslavia and Greece were praised as one of the parts of the worldwide anti-Fascist war, and represented “another strong battle line” against Hitler’s invasion. It was reported how this battle line “was checking Hitler’s forces on the eastern line, destroying the economic, goods and material supply provided to Hitler’s war, disturbing the German Fascists in the rear, and threatening the rule of Hitler Fascists in Europe”.

On November 11th, 1941 there was a long article titled “Yugoslavia will never surrender”, in which the situation of the Yugoslav people’s armed struggles in the past half year were briefly summarized. It was stated that one of the important reasons why guerrilla attacks developed rapidly in Yugoslavia was the Yugoslav Communist Party’s correct leadership: “Because of the Yugoslav Communist Party’s leading and supporting role, lots of Communist Party members’ attending the battle personally, as well as Yugoslav people’s support and assistance, guerrilla attacks strongly survived and developed towards victory.”

In the year 1942, the people of the world as well as Chinese people saw Yugoslavia not so much as an occupied nation but as a battlefield of the anti-Fascist war. The struggle of all Yugoslav ethnic groups’ people against foreign invaders and domestic traitors had developed into a real people’s war. The Yugoslav people’s struggle attracted worldwide attention. Chinese people praised it as an example for other people in occupied nations.

On June 8th, 1942 Xinhua Daily cited Yugoslavia and Greece as examples of the European continental enslaved nations’ people’s struggle against German Fascists. This editorial reflected the opinion that they had already transformed from “common destroy” activities to “more complicated strategic actions” on a larger scale, and that they had established “people’s democratic political power” in liberated areas.³

On June 20th 1942 a signed article titled “Yugoslav guerrilla attacks against Germany” was issued in Liberation Daily. It stressed that the Yugoslav people’s struggles were “aimed at

³ Editorial “The Flames of Guerrilla Forces in European Continent”, in *Xinhua Daily* on June 8th, 1942.

the same battle target” as the populations in occupied areas of the Soviet Union, Norway, France, Greece and Czechoslovakia. The struggles were part of the “the third battle line of anti-Fascist war. They were the strongest key link in attacking the Fascist in the rear”.

It was pointed out in an editorial of *Liberation Daily* on November 20th, 1942 that, “the victory of Yugoslav guerrilla forces played an example role in the organized armed struggles for other European countries’ enslaved people.” It was further written that, “We warmly salute Yugoslav comrades-in-arms who are fighting in the outpost of European continental enslaved people’s struggle. We hope that they can keep on fighting, redouble their efforts, win victory as well as expel German and Italian troops from Yugoslav territory.”⁴

The Anti-Fascist Allies won a huge victory in 1943, and in the same year the Yugoslav and Greek people’s liberation war achieved a historical turning point. People’s liberation army and guerrilla forces in the Balkans received more sympathy and admiration in the world, because they had devoted themselves to military victory over the Anti-Fascist Allies.

The development of the Yugoslav guerrilla forces into a fighting force was detailed in an editorial of *Xinhua Daily* in February 1943. It was written how the “Yugoslav people’s liberation army was growing up during the process of upholding unity in resisting war and opposing secession. They drew lessons from which the world anti-Fascist war could learn and became the model for people in other occupied nations.”⁵

It was written in the *Xinhua Daily* in the middle of March 1943 that the Yugoslav and Greek people’s liberation armies were parts of the world people’s armed anti-Germany campaigns, in no doubt that these armed forces were serious hidden dangerous for Nazi army, pioneers of people against Fascists’ rule, as well as important forces in totally destroying the Fascists’ rule.”⁶ When describing the scale and impact of guerrilla wars in Yugoslav and Greece, it concluded that in occupied nations people’s anti-Fascist struggles had become powerful forces contributing to the internal weakening of the bloodthirsty rule of Fascists. The forces could not be trashed and eliminated!

Xinhua Daily on April 9th, 1943 pointed out that “Hitler set on fire in Balkans, but he

⁴ Editorial “The Victory of Yugoslav Guerrilla Forces”, in *Liberation Daily* on Nov. 20th, 1942.

⁵ Editorial “Guerrilla Battles in Yugoslavia”, in *Xinhua Daily* on Feb. 10th, 1943.

⁶ People’s Armed Forces in Europe in *Xinhua Daily* on Mar 18th, 1943.

could not put it out now". On April 21st a piece of news in Liberation Daily said, many Bulgarian soldiers got in hating German moods. Some of them joined in the guerrilla forces' fighting in mountain areas, and others joined Greek and Yugoslav guerrilla forces.

The Italian surrender on 8th September 1943 had a positive influence on the development of the situation in the Balkans. A Xinhua Daily article regarded it as a "hard blow" on Hitler and encouraged the southern and eastern European countries' enslaved people to struggle against the Fascists. In an editorial of this newspaper it was predicted that "following Italian people, people in the Balkans, Yugoslavia, French and even in the whole world will unite to destroy the Bastille".⁷

Xinhua Daily in October 1943 issued an editorial on the Yugoslav people's armed struggles, in which the author reflected on the huge achievements made by the Yugoslav people both militarily and politically during more than two years of liberation war. It stressed that the Yugoslav armed struggles "had eventually become an important element in the development of the Balkans' situation". People in Yugoslavia "set another shining model of guerrilla war movements, except China, to all anti-Fascist nations."⁸

Xinhua Daily on December 27th, 1943 published the full text of the Bulgarian Fatherland Front's programs. The newspaper published another full-length article on December 29th, in which the Fatherland Front was acclaimed for issuing "brilliant programs. They advocated rescuing Bulgaria through building international cooperation with Soviet Union, UK and US, as well as establishing democratic government". "Domestic democratic groups and political parties supported the main ideas in these programs."

On April 15th 1944 Xinhua Daily issued a full-length article written by Shu Han. Looking back to the Bulgaria Kingdom's foreign and domestic policy during the war, the author thought that Bulgarian authorities "already were at the final result". The Bulgarian future only depended on the people, and the people would create the future. In the end of the article he expressed his deep belief that: "the Balkans' winter covered by snow has gone. It is time for most Bulgarian people to create the democratic and freedom future by themselves on

⁷ Editorial "Italia Surrender" in *Xinhua Daily* on Sep. 10th, 1943.

⁸ Editorial "A shining model-On Yugoslav People's Armed Force" in *Xinhua Daily* on Oct. 23th, 1943.

the basis of the Fatherland Front.”

By the closing stages of the war, reports on the development of the situation in the Balkans, especially in Yugoslavia, in Chinese progressive newspapers and magazines rose rapidly in quantity and quality.

On September 13th, 1944 Xinhua Daily and Liberation Daily both issued an item of news which declared that Bulgaria was on the road toward democracy, and that the constitutional rights of people were regained. These two newspapers introduced the Fatherland Front government’s foreign and domestic policy, national elections and sentences on war criminals. The Fatherland Front’s victory in national elections on November 18th 1945 was highly praised.

After the Battle of Belgrade in October 1944, Xinhua Daily issued a full-length article which sought to offer analysis of the situation on the Yugoslav battlefield in the second half of 1944. “When the courageous Soviet Union Red Army joined forces with the Yugoslav People’s Liberation Army, most of Yugoslavia’s occupied territory was liberated from being enslaved by German invaders. Over Yugoslavia’s mountains, forests, fields, villages and cities, fluttered flags of people’s freedom and the air was filled with the songs of people’s freedom. All praise and all honor shall be given to Yugoslav people.”⁹

In March 1945, “Xinhua Daily” made comments about what had happened in Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. It said, “the Greek government-in-exile ganged up with right-wingers to oppose and suppress the people’s liberation movement. Reactionaries founded an anti-democratic military state against the spirit of the Yalta Conference. On the contrary, Yugoslavia’s new democratic united government has been established led by Marshal Tito. The Yugoslav people are completely united together.”¹⁰ Several days later, this newspaper compared the Yugoslav united government with the Romanian united government founded by the national democratic front. Both two new governments were regarded as democratic united governments led by communist parties and joined by other political parties and patriots. “The worldwide people’s anti-Fascist liberation movement has entirely united

⁹ Ru Chun, Majestic Appearance of Free Yugoslavia, in *Xinhua Daily* on Dec. 1st, 1944.

¹⁰ “Yugoslavia and Greece”, in *Xinhua Daily* on Mar. 9th, 1945.

and solidified. It is not only the Balkans people's victory, but also the democratic world's victory."¹¹

Through these articles the Chinese warmly introduced the Balkans' people who were struggling against Fascists and acclaimed them as examples to other European nations' people who had also suffered at the hands of Fascist aggression.

After the founding of the Yugoslav temporary government in the beginning of March 1945, Yugoslav territory was entirely liberated in the middle of May. Liberation Daily made a solemn vow in an editorial celebrating the ending of the Second World War: "European people free themselves because of the anti-Fascist war's ending in Europe." In the middle of November, the same newspaper commented that the Yugoslav national election was a "glorious example for democratic elections in northern and eastern Europe, as well as a brilliant flag of the Balkan people's new democracy movements. Let us welcome the new Yugoslav democratic government!"¹²

On November 21st 1945 Liberation Daily issued a short editorial following the Bulgarian election entitled "Bulgarian people's victory and bankruptcy of military intervention." It was written that "following Yugoslavia, the Bulgarian Fatherland Front also won a victory in national election. This is another victory for new democracy movements in northern and eastern Europe." Furthermore, that "This victory in the Bulgarian election declares that the UK's and US' interventionist policy in Bulgaria is entirely bankrupted."

In conclusion, people in China as well as in the Balkans took great interest in and paid attention to each other's plights during the war. At the same time they sympathized and inspired each other. As a result, this helped to establish a profound friendship during the Second World War.

¹¹ New Governments in Yugoslavia and Romania, in *Xinhua Daily* on March 12th, 1945.

¹² Congratulations on Yugoslav National Front's Victory in Election, in *Liberation Daily* on November 16th, 1945.