Telegram from Mr. Harrison[[1]](#footnote-1), Minister at the British Embassy in Moscow, to the Foreign Office, London, on the expulsion of Yugoslavia from Cominform, dated 8 July 1948

CONFIDENTIAL

From Moscow to Foreign Office

It has been considerably easier to see the immediate propaganda profit which can be drawn from the excommunication of Tito and the Yugoslav Communist Party than to diagnose the reasoning which led the Kremlin to embark on such drastic action.

2. It is [gps. undec. (sic)] that the charge of having erred from the narrow path of Marxist orthodoxy is merely a cloak. If Tito has erred than he has done so in good company and there seems no immediate sign of the other sinners being called to heel. Nor am I aware that he has ever contested the supremacy of the Moscow hierarchy in matters of doctrine or laid claim to ideological succession […]

3. I think therefore it must be accepted that Tito’s fault lay not so much in a deviation from orthodoxy as in his prideful stubbornness culminating in his refusal over a considerable period of time to subordinate his own views, judgement and policies to the requirements of Moscow.

4. It seems to me that the Kremlin had two courses open to them. The first and easiest would have been to ignore the challenge. But I do not believe they could afford to do this. Tito had challenged their authority and was widely known to have done so. To have passed this over would eventually have compromised and endangered the whole hierarchical system of authority in which the sole final and infallible arbiter must be the Politburo in Moscow. That system is vital to the implementation of the Communist world strategy and just as the most absolute discipline and obedience to the local higher authority are demanded of party members so too unquestioning discipline and obedience to Moscow are required of every national party leadership. The alternative was a show down and I think that Tito’s intractability in effect made this inevitable. That such a course would be inconvenient, unpleasant and at least temporarily damaging was I feel surely taken into account; but the importance of establishing the principle was held to outweigh everything else.

5. Having taken their decision the Kremlin next had to determine the best method of proceeding against Tito. They could have kept the quarrel on a strictly Soviet-Yugoslav basis but the Cominform was clearly the more logical instrument for their purpose; it enabled the issue to be kept, nominally at least, on the inter-party rather than the inter-state plane, it provided a basis for their theoretical argument that there was no question of Soviet interference on the internal affairs of a neighbour and it committed the leaders of the Communist parties associated in the Cominform to “voluntary” disavowal of Tito and his offending views thus tying them even more firmly to the supreme authority of the Kremlin. It may also have been reckoned that the best way of bringing Tito down was to isolate him by organising world Communist opinion against him. The doctrinal issue on which Moscow could claim to speak with unchallengeable authority was a convenient peg on which to hang the denunciation and had the advantage of obscuring the essential question of national independence which might have put a strain on the loyalty of other satellites. Where Moscow seems to have blundered was not so much in their choice of weapon but in extraordinarily clumsy way in which they used it. It is inexplicable that Zhdanov whether or not he drafted the declaration should have allowed it to issue in a form which disclosed so patently and transparently to the world the Kremlin’s arrogant claim which had been discreetly veiled to exact unquestioning obedience from all to their order.

6. To sum up, as seen from Moscow it would seem premature as yet to assume that the Kremlin has permanently damaged or weakened its position. It remains to be seen if Tito is able to hold out. If he does or if he breaks away from the Eastern camp then indeed the Kremlin will not only have lost a local battle but may even have endangered on a far wider front the very discipline which they were seeking to enforce. But if in due course, with or without Tito, Yugoslavia returns to the fold I am sure that the lesson will not have been lost on the other satellite leaders and that the fetters will have been riveted on them more firmly than ever.

[FO 371/72583]

Keywords: Yugoslavia

1. Harrison, Sir Geoffrey W. (1908 - 1990) - British diplomat. Counselor in the British Embassy in Brussels (1945 - 1947), Minister in the British Embassy in Moscow (1947 - 1949), Head of the Northern Department, Foreign Office (1949 - 1951), Assistant Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs - Western Europe (1951 - 1956). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)