12-1986

Intellectual Fermentation in Yugoslavia

Paul Mojzes
Rosemont University, Rosemont, PA, pmojzes@rosemont.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree
Part of the Christianity Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol6/iss7/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University.
When one talks to visitors, both Western and emigrant, about what is happening in post-Tito Yugoslavia, one gets the impression that economic problems, mainly the disappearance of some consumer goods from the market and a rapid inflation, are the only significant developments. That impression gets quickly confirmed during a visit to Yugoslavia, as one talks to friends and strangers. The Yugoslavs are unusually quick to complain to each other and to foreigners about the bad state of affairs, particularly in economic activities. In this respect Sharon Zukin's "Yugoslavia at the Edge" (Worldview, September 1984) accurately analyzed the situation in the country. What is not apparent in this preoccupation with the economic perils, which indeed are real enough, and which may even drive the Yugoslavs back into Soviet arms unless they receive effective aid by Western countries, is the exciting intellectual exploration which is taking place in the post-Tito years.

Religious Developments

Space has developed for much more public expression of intellectual fermentation than had been the case before 1982. This is even true in respect to religious freedoms, the main focus of my interest. In July 1984 a conference in Belgrade was organized by a small group of Protestant church leaders to share their experience of life in socialism with some clergy from newly socialized countries of Africa and Latin America. The conference was small yet it achieved its limited goals. Surprisingly it was filmed by a Belgrade TV crew which was in the process of making a series about the smaller religious denominations under the guidance of a Belgrade University professor of ethnography with the aim of introducing these groups' activities to the viewers
in the best tradition of public TV. New religious periodicals are being published, such as Hrišeanski Pregled [Christian Survey], publication of the Pentecostal Church. A new ecumenical publishing venture among Protestants is being also talked about. The government seems increasingly willing to allow building of churches. After years of rejection the government finally allowed the building of St. Sava Orthodox Church in Belgrade and another at Jasenovac, the site of the former concentration camp where many Serbs were killed by Ustašes during the war. A huge national Eucharistic Congress was held by Roman Catholics at Marija Bistrica on September 8 and 9, 1984, at which 300,000 people gathered—the largest religious gathering in Eastern Europe outside Poland. Also one of the largest mosques in Europe was completed.

A large number of seminars and lectures were organized on the relationship between the government or Marxist ideology and religion. The most significant was an international interdisciplinary colloquium on "Science and Faith" in Ljubljana, May 10-12, 1984, jointly organized by the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers and the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Sciences. It seems that the gathered Marxists scholars and Christian theologians tended to agree that science and faith are not necessarily in conflict though disagreements do exist.¹

Not everything has improved in church-state relations. In some regions the government is stricter in its implementation of an order that foreign visitors can deliver the sermon in a church only if the intention is registered with the Council for Religious Affairs fifteen days in advance. Thus it happened that the Methodist Bishop of Cuba and other clergy from socialist countries were not

¹Aksa Bulletin (Keston College), No. 5 (August 23, 1984), pp.4-5.
able to address the Methodist Churches during their visit for the above mentioned conference. Individuals are still persecuted for their religious convictions, especially in the armed services.

The most difficult problems to resolve, with no solution in sight, are various church claims to best represent the interest of the nationality with which they are historically identified. This has the possibility of negatively affecting the very tenuous and strained relations between national groups in Yugoslavia.

It is also now publicly admitted by Marxists that there is a great degree of divergence among them in how to deal with religion. The most prominent Marxist scholars of religion have regained high visibility which many lost during Tito's repressive measures in 1972. People like Marko Kerševan and Zdenko Roter openly call on the Communist Party not to take a single ideological theoretical stance toward religion but rather to follow a more pragmatic attitude; saying that life does not tend to present clear stereotypes but a happy confusion of often contradictory manifestations, including those who have come to combine elements of both Christianity and Marxism.¹

Greater Pluralism among Scholars

Greater stretching of limits traditionally imposed by the government can be seen in philosophical, sociological and other theoretical studies. One of the most revealing and courageous is the book by Esad Cimić, Politika kao sudbina [Politics as Destiny].² The subtitle, "contribution to


²(Belgrade: Mladost, [1982?].) First edition was printed in 5,000 copies, followed by another edition in 20,000 copies attesting to the interest the book evoked.
the phenomenology of political suffering," aptly describes this account of the painful career of the well known sociologist of Sarajevo University which ended not only in his expulsion from the League of Communists but later also the loss of employment at the University. Ćimić, somewhat of a maverick, got in trouble for examining the cultural climate of Sarajevo in the process of which he apparently stepped on some Communist Party leader's toes. In this book he names names, places, recounts conversations of duplicity, cowardice, careerism, opportunism at highest places in the Communist Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina and at the University, though he also acknowledges the more rare cases of courageous support given to him by a few of his colleagues. The devastating moral impact of intimidation, social ostracism, illegal seizure, censorship, and destruction of his book, Covjek na raskršću [The Human Being at Crossroads] which nearly led to his psychological breakdown, portrays an ambient of intrigue and manipulation sometimes believed to be traditional in Sarajevo, but which is certainly also the product of deformities of communist rule which ostensibly propagates self-management, but in fact still operates under conditions of despotism. Ćimić does not tend to see the source of his past problems in the communist system itself but agonizes as to what causes a Communist like himself to be caught in a web of great difficulties out of which there seems to be no salvation unless one is willing to repent for sins never committed and show abject self-incrimination. Attempts to defend one's character and actions are considered by people in power as the unforgivable mistake.

Paranthetically one may note here that there is greater willingness in Yugoslavia not only to publically admit that mistakes have been made, but that culprits are

---

1 Later he received a teaching position at University of Zadar, to have finally been invited to Belgrade University where he currently teaches sociology.
actually named in the media. For instance, it is now being admitted that the so-called "Dachau Processes" in Ljubljana in 1948 and 1949, which led to a number of executions and the imprisonment of former anti-Nazi inmates of the Dachau camps, were travesties of justice. The trials were not only reversed and the victims rehabilitated but attempts are now being made to publicize these perversions of justice. Likewise an investigative commission of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia mentioned by name three prominent political leaders of Macedonia as culprits of the catastrophic misinvestment into a factory which never opened for production because it could not operate without loss. This raises expectations that instead of vague admissions of mistakes of the past, specific political leaders may have to face consequences of their wrongdoings.

Philosophical studies and essays generally have a small circulation but the Yugoslav journals ought to be read more widely because some of the most radical analyses of socialism can be found in them. One such study is by Zagorka Golubović, Staljinizam i socijalizam [Stalinism and Socialism,] which undoubtedly deserves an English translation. The author considers that the revolutionary period in Russia from 1905 to the middle 1920s which aimed at giving the working class a more prominent role in decision making was betrayed by means of aberrations already in evidence in the early 1920s under Lenin. She maintains that by the end of the 1920s Stalin carried out a counter-revolution which brought to power a new bureaucratic social class in the Soviet Union (note her insistence on the class not merely elitist character of

1Boro Krivokapić, "Priznanje" (part 3), NIN (October 7, 1984), pp.50-52.
the rulers, thus signaling the end of the socialist revolution and the ascen-
dancy of a pre-capitalist social system in which the working class is deprived
of meaningful participation in decision making perhaps more radically than
during the tsarist regime. The workers, in whose name the new social class
rules, are manipulated and repressed; one of the few weapons the workers
have to protest their exploitation is non-cooperation. Thus Dr. Golubović
maintains that the critique of Stalinism, i.e. the critique of countries of
"really existing socialism," which, in fact, still practice forms of Stalinism,
is the necessary prerequisite for the development of a humanistic and dem-
ocratic form of socialism.

Similar conclusion about the social structure of Eastern societies in which the
party has monopoly were reached by Ivan Kuvacic. Since the communist party
monopolizes the power all significant conflicts take place within the party,
particularly at its top. Yet the analysis of these conflicts is a tabu topic
in those countries, though it seriously affects them causing a stagnation both
in economy and in Marxist scholarship, concludes Kuvacic.

The Yugoslav philosophers are keenly aware of the world wide crisis of Marxist
thought and they have devoted a good deal of their efforts to organize con-
ferences and to publish papers noting that this crisis has profoundly affected
Yugoslav Marxism as well. Many journals have published articles on it, and
Theoria, the publication of the Philosophical Society of Serbia more so than
others. Beside numerous Yugoslav Marxists there are also contributions of

---

1 Ivan Kuvacic, "O Marxovom pristupu proučavanja društvene strukture,"

2 Aspekti krize Marksizma, Theoria (Belgrade), Nos. 1-2 (1983), pp.3-190.
Western philosophers as well as the Pole Stefan Morawski and the Czech Milan Pruha.

Among the Yugoslavs one can detect three alternative reactions to the crisis in Marxism. One group sees the crisis in Marxism as an opportunity for its renewal and reconstruction. They are hoping to discover in Marx's own thought some as yet insufficiently developed themes which may bring new inspirations to Marxist thinkers as they face the challenge of interpreting and changing the modern world. Most of these Marxist are also engaged in an intense critique of prevalent Marxist ideologies which they consider to be perversions of Marx in his name, which actually harm the working movement and liberation of the human being.

The second group sees no such solution because it considers this to be not merely a crisis in Marxism but of Marxism. They maintain that the reason for the crisis should not be traced only to the followers of Marx and Engels but to the profound difficulties in the work of Marx's own theory. Thus one needs to be rather selective as to which parts of Marx can still be salvaged. Basically one needs to go beyond Marx, but not necessarily against Marx. Marxism is primarily a methodology of social analysis to which not only Marxists' societies but Marx himself is to be subjected. As Mihailo Marković writes, "Time has corroded even that which is best in Marx . . ."¹

The third group, smallest but most daring, says the crisis can be resolved only by an abandonment of Marxism, and perhaps of all "isms". They talk of the disarray of Marxism and its impotence as a theory of liberation. In the name of human liberation a philosopher needs to reject Marxism.

¹"Kriza marksizma zI nove mogućnosti njegovog razvoja," in ibid., p. 19.
What all three groups have in common is the most decisive rejection of Soviet-type Marxism (in socialist parlance, "really existing socialism," which many of them blame as being among the main culprits of the crisis of Marxism as it shows the moral and theoretical bankruptcy of the ideologists of regimes based on power and exploitation.

An issue of Filozofske studije, another publication of the Philosophical Society of Serbia, explores the relationship of philosophy, ideology, and terror. The authors provide far-reaching radical critiques of the use of terror in communism. First a young Belgrade intellectual, Leon Kojen, considers political liberalism a more satisfactory theory than that of its rivals, including Marxism. Neven Sesardić, a young Zagreb philosopher, critiqued Marxist utopia. He points out both Marx's fatal mistakes in economic theory, and then denies the neo-Marxist attempts to base their continued sustenance of Marxist belief by depending on "early" Marx's philosophical speculations about alienation, praxis, and utopia. Sesardić concludes that both Marx's economic and utopian thought have failed and is surprised to see some Marxists still hoping to find something to cling onto in a writer who wrote a century and half ago.

Lenin is the next target. Kosta Ćavoški's "Revolutionary Machievellianism," points out the Bolshevik, and specifically Lenin's application of Machievelli's doctrine, going far beyond Machievelli because Machievelli defended the application of his principles to the real needs of the state, while the Bolsheviks misused the law in the name of a distant future ideal. Ćavoški, a legal expert, shows in detail the massive use of terror in the name of these imaginary goals.

in which the absence of morality causes an evaluation of policy only in terms of its efficacy.¹ A reader is practically forced to the conclusion that Lenin introduced a morally abhorrent system devoid of redeeming values.

And lastly Nikola Milošević, a well known intellectual and Belgrade University professor of philology, presents the social psychology of Stalinism.² Milošević demonstrates that Stalinism did not use mere manipulation in order to get its way with the masses but used ruthless terror which, when combined with manipulation, produced a personality trait analogous to the Persian Shiite ketman, a form of double-think in which people act most of their lives pretending that they believe what those in power demand of them even if it is diametrically opposed to their own convictions. They act in such a way that they often exaggerate their supposed ideological loyalty in the hope that perhaps someone who knows them well or is clever will actually realize their true but hidden convictions.

From the above it is obvious that the challenge against totalitarianism by thinkers arising from within the Marxist tradition is quite serious. A few have even stated that as long as the League of Communists maintains its political monopoly there can be no democratization of Yugoslav life. But all of them insist on pluralism of thought.

Reactions by the Regime

Needless to say those in power do not take these challenges lightly but attempt by various means, mostly by intimidation, to silence them. Much of the attack comes through the press which tries to create the impression that these intel-

lectuals conspire to take power, that they are an opposition party to the regime, and that they and their publications ought not to be subsidized financially by the government. Which other government in the world, they wonder, financially subsidizes its own opposition? The attempt is then to create a consciousness of "we" and "they," namely, "we" would be the Communist Party, the government, and the people, and "they" would be the Marxist critics. The critical intellectuals have thus far been able to withstand attempts to be presented as "dissenters" or "dissidents" maintaining they have the same right to voice their opinions, even if they are different, as those in power.

Another tactic is intimidation by the police and the courts. The trial against six Belgrade intellectuals charged with illegal association for the purpose of overthrowing the government, which started Nov. 5, 1984, and which is being dragged out probably for lack of believable evidence, is one such attempt. Similar in purpose is the mysterious death of Radović, the only industrial worker in the group which carried on with a "free university". He had called for independent unions on the pattern of "Solidarity," and was probably killed by the secret police.

Another means of intimidation is financial. Many professors have lost their teaching positions, the "Belgrade Eight," the famous Praxis philosophers who lost their teaching positions in 1975 did reach satisfactory compromise with the government in 1981 when they were given jobs at the Institute for Social Studies which, in order to accommodate them, has been incorporated into Belgrade University. But the stipulation is that the financing of their research is to be reviewed every five years, with the possibility, of course, of withholding the support.
Censorship is another weapon in the arsenal of the government. Yugoslav censorship works post-publishing. If the prosecutor finds a book or article objectionable he can take it to the court and the court can order confiscation and destruction of all unsold copies. By that time, however, some books are usually already in circulation and therefore the author's ideas are not entirely prevented from being disseminated.

**Causes of Flexibility**

What saved Čimic, the Praxis philosophers, and others from being silenced or crushed? How does one explain this greater freedom in a country which still shows vestiges of a police state? Why is the post-Tito era more flexible for the expression of variety of views than the Tito era? The crux of the answer can be found in the exercise of leadership. Presently a rotational collective leadership is based on a careful balance of representatives of all national groups. The authority of these leaders cannot compare with Tito's. Partly this is due to the economic mismanagement of former years (including Tito's) which brought a significant lowering of the standard of living creating widespread anger against those leaders who brought the country into trouble but seem unable to take it out of trouble. These same leaders cling to power despite pressure to infuse "new blood." The criticism of leadership has taken huge proportions though there is still reluctance to single out people by name. But they are unable to prevent the general criticism of both economic and political policies. The leaders now in power were brought in by Tito in the 1970s or are remnants of the "old guard" partisans of World War II and many find them strictly second rate in ability and creativity. The economic difficulties created a critical mood in the country and people seem to demand better leadership, whose authority is not tainted.
The second reason is the inability of the political leaders to agree on many issues. Tito's arrangements for collective rotating leadership avoided a scramble for power and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, which is quite an achievement. But it lead to a static arrangement which can maintain the status quo, however it seems unable to bring about necessary reforms and deal with crises creatively. Thus the arrangement is good to prevent the domination of the federation by one of the republics but not good to solve problems affecting the federation or the conflicts between the republics. Basically the country is lead by eight party elites which rule over eight practically sovereign political units and economies (the eight are the six republics and two autonomous provinces).\footnote{Illustrative of the degree of sovereignty is the selection of a flag for Kosovo, where Albanians are in the majority, which is identical to the flag of the state of Albania. The other republics have divided themselves on this issue and seem unable to decide on the appropriateness of such a choice.} This development goes beyond what is stipulated by the Constitution and is a result of Tito's agenda of decentralization which lead to what are for all practical purposes eight sovereign states with little coordination. The republican bureaucracies are usually locked into power struggles, which Tito himself was able to control. However no such authority currently exists.

It is this power struggle between the elites which gives opportunity to the intelligentsia to escape the wrath of local officialdom. If one is suppressed in Bosnia, one may get an invitation to work in Serbia. If one is persecuted in Belgrade one may get an invitation to teach in Zagreb. Thus, for instance, the play "Golubnjača", which was staged in Belgrade depicting some of the conflicts between Serbians and Croatians in Lika was banned in Croatia and Vojvodina, but received an award in Slovenia. Or when the Central Committee of the Croatian Communist Party published a \textit{White Book} about alleged anti-
state writers citing primarily Serbian and Slovene writers, the book was banned in Belgrade by a court. This court action probably prevented further publication of similar books attacking Serbian philosophers for anti-state writings. Likewise it is believed that the present trial against the six Belgrade citizens is being pushed by federal prosecutors, while the Serbian leadership seems to be inclined to release them.

The third reason is the change of generations in leadership. The old guard consisted of people in favor of "iron hand" policies against dissent and pluralism. The younger bureaucrats appear to be more liberal and flexible. As long as the old guard for instance, dealt with the Parxis philosophers the problem could not be resolved; now the younger party leaders seem more willing to find constructive solutions and permit not only their continued scholarly work but also its publication and dissemination.

Yugoslavia continues to face many unresolved problems, is still captive to some totalitarian practices, and its citizens still face many economic, political, social, and intellectual deprivations. But in many ways there is not been progress which has sufficiently noticed abroad. Courageous affirmation of liberties by individuals makes for increased freedom for all Yugoslavians.

As long as Yugoslavia's government continues to be concerned about its international image whether for economic or foreign policy reasons, our expressions of concern and support of such pluralism, which is part of the human rights agenda signed by Yugoslavia in the Helsinki Accords, can help make such freedom a greater reality.