

## TWO APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING SFR YUGOSLAVIA.

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### SPLENDOURS, MISERIES, AND POTENTIALITIES OF SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA (THE BERLIN THESES) <sup>1/</sup> (5,800 words)

#### 0: INTRODUCTORY

##### THESIS 1: WHY WRITE A BOOK ABOUT S.F.R. YUGOSLAVIA, WHAT IS ITS FOCUS

Contrary to all human and even biological continuity, the capitalist denial of all time, history, and tradition that does not issue in „profit now“ leads to termination of many species, possibly including *homo sapiens*, certainly including humanity and sapience. Therefore, a critical overview of salient aspects of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia or SFRY (as I shall for brevity call the 1945-89 society) is urgently needed; a critical utopian horizon is the proper way to judge alienation and disalienation.

Only the long-duration fateful aspects can be focussed upon. The need for SFRY independence, Tito's great invention, as presupposition to any self-government is taken for granted; I do not deal here with the foreign relations of SFRY, including Tito's second invention of the “Non-aligned” movement, nor with the strong pressures on SFRY from the USSR, and then the world capitalist market and its institutions. Nor do I deal with nationalisms, which become fateful only from the 1970s on, and then because of class necessities. Nor, regretfully, with religion – though I argue that matters of salvation and belief were at the core of SFRY.

The red thread is a use of Marx's concepts of alienation versus emancipation in permanent shuttle to and from SFRY economics, beliefs, and politics. His “self-government of the producers” is my concrete utopia.

This entails a strategic limitation of extensive analyses to the period 1945 (or even 1950) to 1972. After that no new factors appear, only the old drawbacks get aggravated.

The analyses are accompanied by hypotheses about the SFRY's essential tension and about its beginning and end, as sufficient for this attempt.

The essential tension in SFRY is indicated by these citations from Boris Kidrič, the Politbureau member in charge of the economy, between 1949 and 1952:

„T[he basic question] of exploitation of man by man in the system born of the socialist revolution is who disposes of the surplus labour – and behind this questions sooner or later the even more fateful one arises of who in fact appropriates the surplus labour.

State socialism [necessarily grows into] a privileged bureaucracy as a social parasite, the throttling of socialist democracy, and a general degeneration of the whole system, [and there comes about] a restoration of a specific kind, a vulgar State-capitalist monopoly.

The socialist democratic rights of the direct producers [are the obverse of] the process of abolishing monopolies; basic is – the right of the working masses to self-management at all levels of socialist State power.”

The same view was later formulated by the loyal Marxist opposition of some intellectuals.

My stance or *Haltung* is one of looking backward from the mostly scandalous years 1972-89 and its fully scandalous downfall in the worst imaginable variant of mutually embattled dwarfish classes leading brainwashed mini-nationalisms. This is what has to be explained.

## PART 1: ECONOMICS, CLASSES

### THESIS 2: ACCUMULATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The precondition for independence, well-being, and modernisation of SFRY was a rapid industrialisation. The capital for it came from a new “socialist primitive accumulation,” much less cruel than the capitalist one but making for permanent stresses and exploitative pressures. The pressures were tempered by a need for wide plebeian support from below, which ruled out dispossessing peasant smallholders. Capital came later in part from US and international capitalist loans (in 1950-61 around 2.5 billion US\$) predicated upon the geopolitical importance of the Yugoslav armed forces.

The attendant major social shift in SFRY 1950-72 was the move of between 1.5 and 2 million peasants to the cities. In 1969 the peasantry fell under one half of the total population for the first time since the Neolithic. By the ‘80s private peasantry seemed to have been less than 1/5 of the population, though many unskilled workers could return to the farm in crises. Another major social shift was the rapid mass production of the first modern proletariat and intelligentsia in this part of the world.

Finally, the source of sufficient capital accumulation was left unresolved. The rise and disposal of the surplus value arising from labour-power, to be balanced between industrialisation, defence, and standard, became a crux. It was the underlying locus of all achievements and discontents.

### THESIS 3: CLASSES AND THEIR PYRAMID IN SFRY

Classes are strategic nodes between the circulation of goods needed for life and everything else in the human production of life; they are based on unequal appropriation of surplus labour. The strength and reproduction of classes is not exclusively economical but tied to human productivity in the domains of material production, of societal control, and of the symbolic imagination.

The SFRY class spread was in 1971 composed (out of a total of 20.5 million people) of: ruling class, 0.8 million; various middle classes, 4.5 to 5.5 million; peasant smallholders, 7.5 million (+ private artisans 0.5 million); manual workers (in industry, transport, building, services), around 7 million (the 1 million workers eventually abroad came partly from working class and partly from peasantry). Since they were unequal in power, control of the conditions of production, material privileges, and collective consciousnesses, this is a class pyramid, albeit of recent formation after much upward mobility and counteracted by officially egalitarian and factually plebeian pressures.

Distinct working-class fractions emerged, based on qualification, income, gender, and permanence of employment. Probably there were at least five: the highly skilled workers (9% by 1970) participated more actively in politics and self-management, while on the other end the unskilled ones were more rebellious but less politically conscious and far less organisable. The unskilled and semi-skilled fraction plus a growing number of semi-legal peasant-workers in the 1970s-80s comprised perhaps half of this class, and together with women workers (who were

ca. 30%) probably 3/4. Fractions of the middle classes went from the lowest of technicians and clerical employees to the engineering, scientific, and humanist intelligentsia.

#### THESIS 4: THE RULING CLASS

It seems clear that there were classes of manual workers in agriculture and in industry plus services, a ruling class of collective possessors of economic and political command, as well as intermediate or “middle” classes. The rulers were an oligarchy, and specifically a *politocracy*, of about 300.000 people, with families ca. 800.000

This was officially tabooed or, more rarely, argued against because the Party/State core did not own but only administered the strategic heights of the economy, so that its members could not dispose of it. Yet in Marx’s view property reposes upon *appropriation* of goods and services by classes in power. While legal status and sanctions are important, they do not determine the central power relationships inherent in all appropriation.

Furthermore, in Marx’s terms of a daily dynamic compulsion for appropriation of labour’s surplus value, there was exploitation of the working class – and other working people – in SFRY. This underlies all the ideological and territorial quarrels within the politocracy about distribution of this surplus. The surplus remained constant at 2:1; that is, 2/3 of the surplus labour ended up outside the enterprises and the workers’ disposal.

#### PART 2: SFRY PARADIGMATICS: THE TWO SINGULARITIES

##### THESIS 5: POLITICAL CONTRADICTIONS, PRINCIPAL AND SECONDARY

A State ruled by a Leninist party, permanently menaced by world capitalism, has to look to its ideological and material defences. However, *the principal contradiction* in SFRY after the first few years was one between the budding oligarchy and self-government of the people – that is, who decides how and for what to use the accumulation or surplus value. A small part of the Party tried to think about a disempowerment of oligarchy. But since the Party’s professional core out of class interest shied away from bottom-up democracy outside, it could not allow it inside either. The politocracy and society lived with three major denials or repressions: of the peasantry, the women, and the not fully employed workers. A secondary impasse resulted in the form of a veto power by the regional oligarchies, which became nationalist and chauvinist as against the federal power top.

The depth events below the historical flow can be illuminated as two groups of major SFRY singularities – within a permanent tension between plebeian democratic power from below versus elite or vanguard domination from above.

##### THESIS 6: THE SINGULARITIES' HYPOTHESIS

The first is a group of *creative plebeian singularities*. It began as a communist-led popular or plebeian revolution, that created the strong Partizan tradition of do-it-yourself-on-the-spot applied in the fighting units, in the network of territorial power, and in the political organisations, all participating in an in-depth experience of self-determination. It continued after 1945 as popular enthusiasm for reconstruction of a devastated but now liberated country. It culminated in the secession from Stalin and some top leaders’ rediscovery of their own Partizan roots in Marxian self-rule, which led them to strengthen local centers of power down to the basic territorial units and

to slowly introduce self-management in the nationalised enterprises, with centralised but potentially supple planning (the Kidrič model). It established a horizon of ethnic fraternity and socialist democracy from below.

This first group of singularities can be read as the Communist Party's (further as Party) historical block or tacit alliance with the plebeian classes forged at the end of the 1930s and during the Liberation War, refusing fascist imperialism, bourgeois exploitation, and as of 1948 Stalinism. Its strongest bastion was in the self-management system within production and services. In the 1960s it was waning, while no possibility of open pressures by the plebeian classes within a socialist democracy was being developed.

The second is a group of *suicidal class singularities* caused by the consolidation of a ruling class that regrouped from the end of the 60s on as partly a financial "technocracy" and partly as three major and three or four minor ruling groups in the constituent republics, halting further emancipation of labour and of the public sphere, abolishing efficient planning, and introducing a slide towards nationalism. It held repressively together until the end of the Cold War.

This stagnation or Yugoslav Brezhnevism lost connection to mass energies from below, while the economy grew into a patchwork between a largely uncontrolled profit motive and consumer market with an inefficiently decentralised "command economy" of the Soviet type. In an unfavourable international political and economic climate, the split oligarchic classes became as a rule ready to turn into neo-comprador bourgeoisies at the service of foreign financial capital.

### PART 3: SFRY SYNTAGMATICS: *LES VINGT GLORIEUSES* [THE 20 GLORIOUS YEARS] AND THE DOWNTURN (1945-72)

#### THESIS 7: PERIODISATION OF

SFRY From the above flows a periodisation of SFRY history:

##### 1/ Upward development (to ca. 1961)

--ca. 1945-52: post-war reconstruction and consolidation, centralist fusion of Party and State, command economy from top down;

--ca. 1952-61: introduction of limited self-management, monolithic unity of Party and State continues, high economic growth;

##### 2/ Plateau stall (ca. 1961-72)

--ca. 1961-65/66: counter-offensive of the conservative majority of politocracy, by the end of this period a self-conscious ruling class;

--ca. 1966-72: the lukewarm battle for direct democracy through extension of self-management to the power top has been lost; the ruling monolith fragments into a polyarchy of "republican" power-centres, which with the turn to a not systematically contained profit principle mostly slide into nationalism; beginning of significant economic decline;

##### 3/ Downward slide (ca. 1972 on)

--post-1972: stagnation and ad-hocery, sharp economic decline. This Brezhnevism could be perhaps divided by Tito's death, that is: up to 1980, stronger role of politocracy as a confederal polyarchy, after 1980, crisis and weakening in all respects.

This tallies with world history insofar as the major break occurs in the mid-70s. Signalled by the oil crises, it was characterised by the exhaustion of the major impulses arising out of victory against fascism: the militarised Welfare State, the separation of the "Soviet bloc" into a fenced-in subsystem of centralised State planning (leading to Cold War), decolonisation and the

Non-Aligned movement. Before that break, revolutionary political pressures allowed economic growth outside the capitalist metropolitan areas, violating exclusive profit logic. It is followed by a period of erosion, crisis, and breakdown of the antifascist phase and eventually the return to “pure” profit capitalism, to all of which Yugoslavia became a prime example.

#### THESIS 8: THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The Party was the backbone of SFRY ideology, power, and development. In a Leninist revolution, the Party’s role is decisive also after the seizure of power, so that every turning point in mass history is simultaneously a critical internal Party matter. SFRY was a Party-State. Very soon, the Party became a centaur: the head part was a State-Party, the main rump were ideal or careerist followers. Yet there permanently smouldered within it the tension between the horizons of liberation and domination.

Insofar as it was a real backbone, the Party was a possible feedback instrument for plebeian class interests from below. But since there was no democracy inside it, such pressures were inchoate, an eager or unwilling execution of decisions from the leadership. Insofar as it was a fictitious backbone, the Party was a Stalinist „transmission belt“ from the core to the population and all institutions. The „cold“ and „warm“ currents clashed within it up to 1972. But in the meantime the class composition of Party had drastically changed.

In the 1950s the Party ceased to be a predominantly peasant one without becoming a working-class one but growing into a party of employees and office-holders. Thus, after the first post-war decade it was a party of people working (or not) by sitting down, rather than of the manual labourers standing up. Finally, it was left without peasants and young people – the latter returned in the careerist ‘70s – and with relatively few and unimportant women and workers. Thus, it became a party of the ruling class allied to some middle classes and supported by a minority of active workers.

The Party’s legitimacy was based initially on the revolutionary achievements of plebeian upward mobility, which changed the life of millions for the better, and the attendant defence of independence. As emancipatory horizons waned, it shifted increasingly to the population’s standard of living. This collapsed in the ‘80s.

#### THESIS 9: SELF-MANAGEMENT I: THE PROMISE, THE ACHIEVEMENTS. THE LIMITS

“Self-management” – beginning with Workers’ Councils in industry – was excogitated by the 1949 Communist Party Politbureau as a way out two major problems that could not be solved by centralised State command: first, the need for renewed popular consent and participation in a seriously threatened country; second, the need for rising productivity while preserving social justice. It unleashed major energies and expectations from the working class and the whole “working people” for a thorough redistribution of power downward. When in the 1950s independence was preserved and the economy took off, pressure from below gained for the Workers’ Councils a veto on the appointment of enterprise manager and decision power on workers’ income after subtraction of State taxes; self-management was extended to State agriculture, trade, construction, transport, and communications, and later to education, culture, and health services. The battle turned in the ‘60s to how is the net income to be divided between the enterprise and its Workers’ Council vs. the State. Yet the radical 1949-52 project by Kidrič of “council democracy” from top to bottom, accompanied by flexible planning with input from below, had been abandoned, so that how to decide democratically about investment priorities, prices, subventions, and foreign trade was left to the oligarchy.

The Workers' Councils were not a full workers' control, since the appointment of managers was strongly conditioned by the municipality and 2/3 of the net income were taken by the State without any worker say. Yet in its heyday of 1958-68 they made for a significant worker participation: more in shop-floor and income matters, less in investment decisions. The self-managing collective was composed of manual workers, technicians, professionals, and clerical staff with equal rights of decision, no one could be expelled except for a clear reason and following detailed procedures. The collective had no property rights in the net worth; the results of its activity were sold through the market. All employees of an enterprise were deemed "producers," including those under 18 and trainees, and elected biennially a non-remunerated Workers' Council of 15 to 120 members, with 3/4 of shop-floor workers, as the supreme management body. The council met monthly, and any member of the enterprise could be present. In 1950-58 membership in Workers' Councils or its subcommittees involved about one in eight out of over 3 million workers. In the 1960s the spread between minimum and maximum income (not counting perks for the top) was between 1:4 and 1:7, and rising. My impression is that up to 1972 the workers' incomes were decent for those who had an apartment (but many didn't), whereas for the skilled workers and the upper half of staff they were good, and for the top staff at times opulent.

Training workers was especially acute in a country where before 1945 there were few industrial, managerial or scientific skills available and 2/3 of the youngsters still had 4 years' schooling or less. A large programme of adult education during the first 15 years, received generous financing. In its culmination of 1967/68, there were 236 so-called Workers' Universities, which held almost 10.000 courses with 311.000 participants and over 20.000 lectures with 2 million listeners; their number fell abruptly after 1970.

The Workers' Council elected a Managing Board of 3 to 11 members as executive organ for current decisions, which in the 70s began to be packed by specialists and to overshadow the parent body. Even before, though power was up to a point shared by the Director and his technical staff with the highly skilled and skilled workers, women and lower ranks only counted in case of general dissatisfaction.

What was the economic performance of Workers' Councils? In Horvat's view, up to 1968 very good:

*TABLE 1: GROWTH OF YUGOSLAVIA IN DIFFERENT HISTORICAL PERIODS (in %)*

<i>PERIOD</i>	<i>GNP</i>	<i>EMPLOY- MENT</i>	<i>FIXED ASSETS</i>	<i>GNP GROWTH DUE TO BETTER EFF. <sup>a</sup></i>
<i>Capitalism 1911-32</i>	3.28	1.87	3.52	0.71
<i>Capitalism 1932-40</i>	4.67	0.72	2.59	3.16
<i>Etatism 1946-54</i>	5.91	4.76	9.99	-1.04
<i>Self-government 1956-67</i>	10.31	4.44	7.84	4.44

a/ EFF. = efficiency, defined as growth of output attributable to *technical progress*, obtained after subtracting the contribution of labour and capital.

After 1969 the decline of nominally still existing self-management in all rubrics would have been equally abrupt.

At its height self-management yielded amazing results, absorbing the shocks of urbanisation and of decision decentralisation by creating collective commitment and comradely care. Special praise is due to the vertically organised, truly self-managed and independent, “interest communities” for health, education, science, and culture, neutralised in the 70s, which introduced the first wedge of democracy into traditionally patriarchal relations. Did self-management economically perform well? In micro-economics odds are that yes, in macro-economics only if and when certain macro-knots were smoothed out—and after 1965, they were not.

#### THESIS 10: SELF-MANAGEMENT II: THE STALL BETWEEN SELF-GOVERNMENT AND OLIGARCHY

Decentralising without empowering the plebeian classes created a middle layer of powerful State/Party officials in the governments and communes of the constituent republics, anxious to conserve their positions, for whom power was synonymous with opening jobs and extensive economic development. Paid out of taxes on production, this stuck-in-the-mud fraction of the oligarchy became the main drag on self-management and democratisation. Therefore, “extensive” industrialisation was not abandoned.

In the ‘60s the production of raw materials and fuel began substantially lagging behind the production of consumer commodities, many plants operated well below capacity. The economico-political system was blocked by the split inside the Party/State both at the federal centre and in the assertive republican centres between equally pernicious conservative etatists and “free marketeers.” A compromise was adopted which allowed for much uneconomical decentralisation without specialisation. Despite obfuscating verbiage, there was perpetuated a ghetto of Workers’ Councils as “productive” micro-structures only, which reduced them to a caricature. Huge disparities in regional living standards, which had diminished in the 50s, rose again. An attempt at a major reform in and after 1965 failed because of straddling central issues. True, there was an initial sharp rise in workers’ productivity, largely due to the extension of self-management downward to the “economic units,” while food imports were reduced to roughly the pre-1939 level. However, national income growth and efficiency of investments fell drastically, the trade deficit soared to 30% of Gross National Product in 1971 and kept rising. The reform of banking created independent capital lenders and burdened enterprises with huge debts, leading to a wave of strikes from end of the 60s on.

This means that the peasants and manual workers were neutralised, impoverished, and atomised. The majority of the middle classes was mired in consumerism, the small radical wing of the humanist intelligentsia was powerless and persecuted. Federal funding was discontinued, except for the armed forces and foreign policy. The ideological and political paralysis after 1965 grew ever more acute in the unfavourable international economic climate of the 1970s. The resulting stasis continued for a quarter century:

*TABLE 2: DECLINE OF THE SOCIAL SECTOR, 1960-1985 (growth in %)*

	<i>AVERAGE PER ANNUM 1960-70</i>	<i>AVERAGE PER ANNUM 1970-79</i>	<i>AVERAGE PER ANNUM 1979-85</i>	<i>TOTAL 1979-85</i>
<i>SOCIAL PRODUCT (1972 prices)</i>	6	4.5	-0.5	-3.1
<i>CONSUMPTION PER PERSON</i>	5.7	4.5	-1.3	-7.7

(1972 prices)

<i>REAL PRODUCT (per employee in social sector)</i>	4.3	1.8	-3.5	-19.5
<i>REAL NET INCOME (per employee in productive social sector)</i>	6.8	2.1	-4.7	-27.9

The main consequences were: conspicuous economic instability and low productivity, leading in the 1970s to the second-worst inflation in Europe; alteration of the balance of power between the federal centre and the republics in favour of the latter; and increasing social polarisation reversing the post-war trend, so that a majority of young and unqualified workers could scarcely make ends meet each month.

#### PART 4: LES VINGT MINABLES [THE 20 SHAMEFUL YEARS] AND THE ALTERNATIVE

##### THEESIS 11: ACHIEVEMENTS AND DISAPPOINTMENT

In the first two decades of SFRY the economic and political gains of the plebeian majority were indeed revolutionary: national independence and mass upward social mobility for the plebeian classes, with full employment, free social services (eventually extended to peasants too), and a huge growth of schooling. Up to the middle '60s, the ruling class formed a historical block with the manual workers and most middle classes in a common effort for a rapid productive and cultural build-up, benefiting a large majority. The hopes and the potentialities accompanying an Industrial Revolution in one generation were great. And the disappointment is correspondingly huge.

##### THEESIS 12: ALTERNATIVE HORIZONS: OLIGARCHIC ECONOMISM VS. RADICAL DEMOCRACY

Due to cultural and economic backwardness and to the absence of a rooted working-class culture, the Yugoslav revolution was necessarily at least as much a "bourgeois-democratic" as a "proletarian" one. It was a peasant revolution led by that combination of dissident intellectuals and internationalist working-class traditions as channelled by Stalinism which was the Communist Party and its youth wing. Any worthwhile mode of living would have to be arrived at by doing after the revolution, almost simultaneously, *the work of capitalism* insofar as a primitive accumulation to build up industry and tertiary services was quite indispensable, not least to achieve a productive agriculture, as well as *the work of communism* by creating a new alloy of the ideological, the economic, and the political – a new unity of solidarity.

Self-management had vigorous roots in the Partizan movement that routed the fascist invaders in World War 2. Its strategy rises from the ranks; the Partizan system was a self-management system applied to war. However, this alternative was rejected out of fear for the oligarchy's rule in favour of a „market socialism.“ The market was mystified as a socialist invisible hand and panacea, and ideologically twinned with crass "economism" that denied transparent politics in favour of oligarchic power and quantitative economic investment, jettisoning central planning with feedback from lowest levels. The ensuing course led to disaster.

The main lesson is that political and ideological emancipation is indispensable for a full reorganisation of production in a "socialist" State. Self-management in production and radical democracy are mutually dependent, co-variant.

The interests of the working people are in the long run incompatible with a management of the economy dominated by reproduction of capital, and with the management of societal life dominated by secrecy and monolithism. However, the logic of collective action in favour of socialism in one country was opposed to the logic of capital internationally. Giving in to this second logic, in the last 20 years of SFRY instead of governmental guardianship over sectoral balance and infrastructural investments for sustained growth and declining class and regional inequality, plans and investments were oriented to the needs for foreign earnings and to loans and projects with capitalist financing from abroad). The dismantling of the Welfare State began in SFRY before the world capitalist offensive of the 70s, but for analogous class reasons.

### THESIS 13: THEORIZING THE SFRY EXPERIENCE I: SOCIALISM, POLITICS, THE VANGUARD PARTY

I refuse the notion of „Socialism“ as a separate societal formation, a period on a par with capitalism or feudalism, with connotations of statics and fixity. I cannot dispense with the term, but it is useful only if considered as a field of forces polarised between class society alienation and communist disalienation, connoting dynamics and fierce contradictions on all levels. In this disalienating sense socialism is not simply an economic alternative to bourgeois society but also, and primarily, a cultural alternative, a different civilisation – the coming about of a different relationship between people as well as of people with nature. Its communism is to be measured according to the degree the society realises the slogan, “From each according to his capacities, to each according to her needs.” Socialism can never be „built“ as a house, finished once and for all (especially not „in one country“). The purpose of socialism is to shift the balance of forces between class society and communism: it necessarily begins with commodity or capitalist production relationships, regulated by exchange value; when the shift is complete, there is no socialism but only communism, regulated by use value.

Capital and its civilisation means command over labour; communism means that labour commands itself (Marx). Since the struggle is not primarily economic but ideological and political, socialism is necessarily *a political society*.

In other words: the aporia of necessary long-duration class, gender, and other negative characteristics within the struggle for a classless society (see Thesis 14, 1-2.) enforces a strategic modification to Marx’s semantics, where politics had the exclusive sense of antagonistic

collisions based on class interests. After the 20<sup>th</sup> Century revolutions, however, we know also of “non-antagonistic contradictions within the people” (Mao). Without civil-society politics to resolve them, only the State remains for that job – a necessary, but very one-sided politics from above. This became the major fault of Leninism, growing out of a backward patriarchal reality.

*Communism cannot abolish politics*, that is, oppositions within the civil society between groups with differing interests. Today we may redefine politics as existing outside class antagonisms too, so that its germs could well be present in and intertwine with class politics (what else is C1 in the “transitional period”?). The State cannot really be abolished until its necessary functions are taken over by associations of producers as well as associations of citizens – civil society – in manifold institutions of direct democracy from below.

It follows that a sincere – not Stalinist and counter-revolutionary – *communist party or league* (however its name might change) is to be understood as a key lever for neutralising the deleterious effects of the State as intermediary after the revolution. However, for this purpose it needs to change from an instrument primarily of violence to an instrument primarily of learning and education (including educating the educators) for the most complex task of permanent revolutionising. As soon as power is stabilised, it cannot remain only or even primarily a State-Party.

THESIS 14: THEORIZING THE SFRY EXPERIENCE II: COMMUNIST EMANCIPATION  
AND THE STATE (variation on and updating of *The Jewish Question*)

1. The problem of the relation between, on the one hand, the original Marxian project of true communism, that is, full social emancipation of people, and on the other official State and political emancipation is the problem of the relation of real plebeian, directly democratic communism that liberates and empowers people (we may call it C1) vs. official State-Party communism, partly quite real but emancipatory only to a degree and beset by temptations to repression (we may call it C2).

When the State freed itself from capitalist class rule while preserving, in the anthropological sense, a capitalist organisation of production and bourgeois law, the working people or plebeians were not freed from the “capital relationship,” that is, the exploitation of labour and all particular egotisms that arise from it. This was accompanied by other class alienation factors: the legacy of patriarchal despotism, gender discrimination, city vs. country, intellectual vs. manual labour, and so forth.

Political and legal emancipation through the State is, of course, a big step forward. It is the final step of human emancipation possible in the hitherto existing world-order and macro-framework of States and classes.

However, when people proclaim themselves socialist/communist through the medium of the State they still remain non-communist (not C1 but C2), because they acknowledge themselves only through an intermediary, as in a lay religion: the State is the intermediary between people and their freedom. Similarly to a State which professes religion, the so-called communist State is the imperfect State, and communism is regarded by it as the supplementation and sanctification of its imperfection; communism necessarily becomes a means, and the State – a hypocritical State.

2. The limits of applicability of this argument, itself adapted from Marx’s *Jewish Question*, are:

First, in (important) contrast to other-worldly religion, this-worldly communism understands the imperfection as a temporary postponement of perfection, until the productive forces of a people are developed and outside threats eliminated – which practically means, so far as we can see in the ever worsening capitalism, when hell freezes over.

Second, the knot of Yugoslavia and the world in the time of polyphonal revolutionary dynamics in productive forces and production relationships is much more convoluted. Neither the economy nor government nor ideology were in the 1940s what they used to be in the 1840s.

A central hypothesis for understanding SFRY is that the Party/State government was a two-headed Janus (at least in 1945-72). It was not only a factor of alienation, but also the initiator and lever of real liberation – up to a certain limit (the liberation is important and the limit is important!).

Liberation: banishment of occupiers and collaborators – capitalists, bureaucrats, and mercenaries – hence independence of the country as a prerequisite for all other moves toward self-government; nationalisation and creation of a unified planned economy (Kidrič); realisation of a bourgeois revolution in a patriarchal-comprador and despotic country; first steps toward a communist solidarity (the Welfare State). This opened the doors to full freedom or disalienation, its emblem was policy. It was a road to C1.

Limit: at the same time, the Party/State government was an intermediary, custodian, and protector of a liberation that increasingly turned towards oppression; the oligarchy became a class *in statu nascendi*. It closed the doors to Marx’s full human emancipation, its emblem was the police. C2 was fossilising and fencing in C1.

The potential dialectics of these two horizons and currents within the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party and the State was suffocated by the Stalinist tradition of monolithism and non-transparency. To this were added the economic, as well as ideological, pressures of capitalism from outside, and then increasingly from inside as well.

But the “State-communist” (C2) horizon cannot be really secularised, for it is the alienated form of a transitional stage in a potential human emancipation from millenary State power, patriarchal violence, and class exploitation. These alienations demand a schism between the earthly and the heavenly horizon, operative also in that potential transition. The State-communist stance can be abolished (sublated) only in such a socialist society where direct plebeian self-government would prevail over etatism and other alienations. The basis of this cohabitation would then not be State communism but plebeian communist (C1) emancipation.

Real and integral political democracy is communist (C1): it restrains and humanises the often necessary State. State communism (C2), however, empirically knows man in his uncivilised form, man in his fortuitous existence, man as he has been corrupted by our patriarchal and capitalist society, alienated, handed over to the rule of inhuman conditions and elements. Official communism may dream of and postulate the sovereignty of man as the highest being, but this being is different from the “really existing” man. In real communism (C1) this creation of fantasy and dream would be tangible reality, present existence, material principle – carrier of self-determination and self-awareness. Marx’s “transitional period” is the growth of people from communism as State power to a fully democratic communism. This is the criterion for any measure and institution in it.

3. In periods when State government is born violently out of society, when liberation through the State is the form in which people strive towards their liberation, in this time of special self-confidence, the State seeks to suppress its prerequisite, the society of citizens, and to constitute itself as the real fullness of man, devoid of contradictions. But the State can achieve this only by coming into violent contradiction with its own conditions of life, only by permanent repressive violence, and the drama necessarily ends with a change in the character of the State or a change in the character of the society.

Only when real, individual people re-absorb in themselves the abstract citizen of the State and when individual human beings have become in their day-to-day life, work, and relationships integrally human beings, only when people have recognised and organised their own powers as *societal* powers, and, consequently, no longer separate social power from themselves in the shape of *State* power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished (Marx).

However, whenever the State (C2) suppresses plebeian democracy from below (C1) – Stalinism, today PR China – this is a counter-revolution that annuls the beginnings of disalienation (Enlightenment, Welfare State, attempts at self-government). The metamorphosis of Luxemburg’s slogan “socialism or barbarism” in conditions of hegemonic world capitalism is: “Communism (C1) or counter-revolution into savagery.”

*Note*

1/ These Theses were written for a lecture at the Inkrit 2014 conference in Berlin; my thanx go to W.F. Haug, Thomas Weber, Oliver Walkenhorst, Jan Rehmann, Boris Buden, and to suggestions from the discussion.

A CHRONOLOGY OF S.F.R. YUGOSLAVIA

3,100 words

Compiled by D. Suvin<sup>\*/</sup>

1941

March- April: The monarchist government joins Hitler's Axis. Huge demonstrations in Serbia lead to its fall. Hitler bombs Belgrade in April, the Yugoslav army collapses after 11 days. The king and government flee to Britain. Yugoslavia is occupied by Germans, Italians, Hungarians and Bulgarians, with a fascist Croatian "NDH" (including also Bosnia) and a quisling Serbia under German rule

June-August: Mass genocide of Serbs in NDH leads to armed resistance, soon led by the illegal Communist Party, which calls for mass uprisings after the attack on USSR. First attacks on Axis and quisling groups lead to mass reprisals, up to 100 people shot for each German soldier. Croatia opens the infamous Jasenovac concentration camp where hundreds of thousands of Serbs, Jews, and others are killed.

Sept.-Oct.: Partizans and Chetniks (traditional Serbian irregulars) liberate a vast zone in southern Serbia. The agreement between Tito and colonel Mihailović collapses at end of the year amid the German liquidation of the "republic of Užice".

1942-1943

Mihailović's Chetniks decide for open collaboration with Italians and a covert one with the Germans against the Partizans. Tito's headquarters move between Bosnia and Montenegro, returning to Serbia in 1944. Illegal city and guerrilla struggles are intense from Slovenia to Macedonia, also in Albania with Tito's instructors.

Sessions of an all-Yugoslav Antifascist Council of People's Liberation (AVNOJ) are held in Sept. 1942 and Nov. 1943; the second one proclaims a Yugoslav Federation and forms a de facto government. Italy capitulated in Sept. 1943.

1944--May 1945

An agreement brokered by Churchill results in formation of Tito-Šubašić coalition government recognized by the Allies, de facto dominated by the Partizans. The Chetniks incorporate all other Serbian quisling forces and continue collaboration with Germans. Soviet armoured troops collaborate in liberation of Belgrade.

The country's infrastructure is almost totally destroyed, a very few cities are mainly spared. The victims are ca. one twelfth of the 1941 population, mainly civilians.

1945 (second half)-1946

First elections with universal voting rights over 18 years, where the hugely popular Tito's People's Front receives officially over 90% of votes, confirm a federal republic.

Agrarian reform shifts tens of thousands of families from mountainous areas into plains, whence the *Volksdeutsche* – Germans colonised from C18 on -- have been banished. New Constitution of Jan. 1946 defines a federation of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia (with the two autonomous units of Vojvodina and Kosovo), Montenegro and Macedonia. Tito remains prime minister and commander of armed forces.

The Catholic Church demands favoured status incompatible with separation of State from all churches, and decides on official enmity leading to major confrontation.

Rationing of food and textile is in force until 1953 (it returns semi-legally for food and gasoline during the 1980s).

First law of civil marriages and full equality of genders proclaimed. Beginning of federal voluntary youth actions (railways in Bosnia, highway Belgrade-Zagreb) with hundreds of thousands of participants; first village working cooperatives. General Mihailović convicted and executed. First two film-making companies formed. Nationalisation of all banks, and of all major private enterprises (de facto already sequestered as enemy or collaborators' property).

Head of Croatian Roman Catholic Church archbishop Stepinac is convicted of wartime collaboration and jailed (after some years, this was commuted to house arrest in his village, he died in 1950).

### 1947

Most ambitious first Five-Year Plan proclaimed, counting on help from the USSR. Intense work on rebuilding the totally devastated country is concluded in 1948 with a return to pre-war production level in many industrial branches. Difficulties in supply, especially of agrarian products, remain until 1951.

Strong Soviet efforts at extending their secret service to Yugoslavia rebuffed. Soviet-Yugoslav mixed societies and arrogant behaviour of Soviet experts and emissaries generate much resentment.

### 1948

Stalin's disapproval scuttles efforts at a Balkan federation with Bulgaria and Albania. On June 30 the accusations of the Information Bureau of Communist Parties (Informbiro) against the CPY and its answer are published in main Yugoslav newspapers. In July the long planned 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPY is held, from which Stalin's supporters have been excluded, and which endorses Tito. In the following five years, almost 56,000 people are arrested as "Informbiroovci"; the worst treatment was on the stony islet Goli otok (1949-55).

### 1949

A vast campaign for a quick "collectivisation" of villages is inaugurated, in the mistaken hope of both raising agrarian productivity (for which machines were lacking) and proving orthodoxy to Stalin. Pressures result in formation of thousands of "work cooperatives".

Soviet-Yugoslav mixed societies are dissolved.

A thaw begins in cultural affairs, rigid ideas on "socialist realism" are challenged and eventually disregarded.

### 1950

In June, a Law on managing economic enterprises by Workers' Councils is passed. It sought both to re-establish popular support in a seriously endangered country and to bolster productivity. Still, the State kept two thirds of net surplus, and the territorial communes had a veto on the general manager.

In 1950 (and again 1951) Zhukov hands to Stalin plans for invading Yugoslavia.

In October, the US government signed a help package of 38 million dollars; others were

forthcoming from 1951 on as army supplies. (The full help plus loans from USA 1949-61 is estimated at 2.5 billion dollars, apparently more than half of it for the armed forces 1951-57.)

### 1951

The Parliament of Serbia passes a law prohibiting the veil and chador for women. A federal law on elementary schooling excludes religious instruction from schools.

Yugoslavia protests against the Western decision to hand the Free Territory of Trieste to Italy. This major contention, festering from 1945 on, will be resolved in 1954.

The compulsory purchase of grain from peasants is abolished.

The federal government refuses Western conditions for help with investments.

Zagreb group of artists "Exat 51" formed, proposes to break down barriers between art and modern life (ended in 1956).

### 1952

At the Ljubljana congress of Union of Writers, keynote speech by prestigious writer Miroslav Krleža drives nail into the coffin of compulsory "socialist realism".

6<sup>th</sup> CPY Congress in Nov. 1952 is in sign of thaw, Party name is changed to League of Communists, Politbureau into Executive Committee, Tito delivers a memorable attack on the degeneration of USSR Party.

Break of diplomatic relations with Vatican.

### 1953

New Constitutional Law defines Yugoslavia as based on self-management, institutes a Federal Assembly Council (House) of Producers, also a President of Republic who was at the same time premier, Tito elected to the latter post. He remains president until his death.

People's Front renamed as Socialist League of Working People.

Signature of "Balkan Pact" between Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey in defensive function against USSR.

Forcible village collectivisation revoked, almost all cooperatives dissolve.

October '53 to Jan. '54: Series of articles by Politbureau member Djilas favouring both more democracy and reduction of CP's role to ideology.

GNP per head ca. US\$ 300.

### 1954

Early in the year, "the Djilas Affair": at the Central Committee meeting he is stripped of all Party functions. Later he returns his membership card, and is arrested several times for publication of his critiques abroad, serves in all nine years in jail (the same one he was in during the monarchist regime as communist student).

In the following year or so, nearly one third of LCY (Party) members resign or are expelled, due to the collectivisation failure, the Djilas affair, and general tiredness of that generation. The Party ceases to be mainly peasant and becomes mainly office-centred.

Tito visits India.

In the Roman arena of Pula the yearly festival of Yugoslav films is initiated, a review which continued to 1990 (as of 1992 it shows only or primarily Croatian movies). Self-managing

moviemaking groups flourish until the beginning of the 1970s

### 1955

Khrushchev visits Belgrade, a declaration is signed affirming sovereignty and equality of socialist countries.

Executive Committee of LCY calls for higher living standard, the revolutionary generation should in their lifetime feel the fruits of their work and sacrifice.

Tito visits Egypt and Ethiopia.

Red Star factory in Kragujevac begins production of small FIAT car, the legendary Fićo, that becomes emblem of Yugoslav consumerism (920.000 cars produced in 30 years)

First volume of *Yugoslav Encyclopedia*, general editor Krleža, published in Zagreb. (All 8 volumes are out by 1971, constituting a major monument of Yugoslav history and culture.)

### 1956

A return visit of Tito to Moscow results in Declaration of party relations based on different ways to socialism. Full normalisation of relations with all countries of the Soviet bloc, that become important export goals for Yugoslavia.

First meeting of "Sterijino pozorje" in Novi Sad, a yearly review of best Yugoslav theatre performances, which continued to 1990 (as of 1992 it serves primarily Serbian theatres).

Meeting of Tito with Nehru and Nasser results in Brioni declaration on peaceful coexistence, disarmament and aid to "underdeveloped" countries (already worked out at the Bandung conference a year ago). This becomes basis of The Non-Aligned Movement, where Tito plays a leading role. He travels frequently throughout the world.

In Summer, Soviet army intervention against Hungarian revolt, street fighting in Budapest. Tito is against the first intervention but judges the second one unavoidable.

### 1957

First Congress of Workers' Councils in Belgrade. Good proposals and complaints, but economic macro-problems are not touched upon.

Yugoslavia recognises GDR (East Germany), West Germany breaks off diplomatic relations.

Moscow meeting of 64 communist parties, Yugoslav LCY signs the Manifest for Peace but refuses to sign the Declaration of 12 Parties.

New Five-Year plan 1957-61 adopted, is fulfilled with much success.

### 1958

First workers' strike in Trbovlje coal mine, Slovenia.

7th Congress of CPY marks a standoff: a step back to centralised command methods in politics is accompanied by praise of self-management. An ambitious and lengthy Programme is stripped of analysis of Stalinism because of Soviet protests against its draft. Soviet government reneges on credits allotted to Yugoslavia.

Normal emissions of Yugoslav television begin, almost entirely left to federal units.

1959

Yugoslavia becomes associate member of GATT (later WTO), and full member in 1965.

1960

Tito endorses Khrushchev's proposal on general disarmament.

Consultation of 81 communist parties in Moscow condemns Yugoslav revisionism, largely because of Chinese pressures.

1961

First conference of heads of "non-aligned countries" in Belgrade. Final declaration condemns all wars, affirms peaceful coexistence, and presents non-alignment as alternative to division of world between armed blocs.

Novelist Ivo Andrić receives Nobel Prize for literature.

1962

Soviet armaments introduced into Yugoslav air force.

May: at a mass meeting in Split Tito makes a famous speech criticising "some communists" for chauvinism and disruption of Yugoslav unity.

Dušan Vukotić's cartoon *Surrogate* receives an Oscar as first non-US cartoon.

1963

The "Jugoeksport" enterprise begins sale of foreign commodities payable in foreign currency.

April: New Constitution, certainly the best one in SFRY history and known as "The Self-Management Charter", comes into force. State is renamed as Socialist (instead of People's) Federative Republic, the federal Assembly is divided into five houses four of which are by profession, Presidency is disjoined from premiership.

Major earthquake in Skopje; the city will be rebuilt with funds from the whole of Yugoslavia.

Tito visits USA, talks with Kennedy. US Senate reconfirms most favoured nation status.

1964

Beginning of joint Yugoslav-Romanian work on damming the Djerdap straits, thus ensuring safe Danube navigation, finished in 1972.

Second conference of Non-aligned countries in Cairo (47 full members and 10 observers), adopts a "Programme for peace and international cooperation".

8th Congress of CPY discusses the economic background of national problems, reaches no solution.

Bimonthly periodical *Praxis* of independent Marxists started in Zagreb, accompanied by international Korčula Summer school (as of 1963), has large international echo, is denied funding in 1972.

### 1965

Tito appeals to President Johnson for Vietnam peace talks, the Non-Aligned support this stance and condemn US intervention.

New exchange rate and devaluation of the Yugoslav dinar, now in a 12.5 ratio (instead of 100) to US\$.

Large economic reform to bolster the flagging economy initiated with 30 laws in federal Assembly, based on the concept of opening Yugoslav economy towards the world. Since it was a compromise between centralists and republican power-wielders and rejected extending self-management vertically upwards to the seats of power, on the whole it failed.

Jadranska magistrala (Adriatic littoral highway) finished.

### 1966

Pepsi Cola bottled in Yugoslavia appears on the market.

Entrance visas for foreigners eliminated, passports available for all citizens. Tourism is a significant source of income and foreign currency, workers going to western Europe a second one.

4<sup>th</sup> Plenum of LCY Central Committee condemns the secret service UDB and its powerful head Ranković, who resigns. While representing a rejection of Soviet -style police State, the proceedings were murky and based on use of military intelligence against the civilian one.

First electrical blackouts in Belgrade.

### 1967

New foreign commerce and currency rules liberalise economic relations with foreign countries.

Yugoslav diplomatic offices in Washington, Ottawa, San Francisco, Chicago and Toronto attacked by émigré terrorists, probably a consequence of downgrading UDB a year earlier. Such *ustashi* (Croatian fascist) attacks will continue roughly once-twice per year inside or outside Yugoslavia.

New Statute of LCY defines it as the ensemble of communists and of their Leagues in the constituent republics, a further step towards fragmentation. Specific nationality of “Moslems” recognised for Bosnia to counter rival Croatian and Serbian claims.

The executive of Croatian cultural organisation Matica hrvatska publishes the “Declaration on the name and situation of Croatian literary language”. As response, at the annual meeting of the Union of Writers of Serbia a group publishes a Memo contesting this. LCY forums condemn both documents as nationalist.

Federal Assembly votes Constitutional Amendments I-IV which reconstitute a House of Nationalities in the Parliament.

Tito leads Yugoslav delegation at the Moscow meeting of “socialist countries” discussing the situation after Israeli-Egyptian war and votes for help to Arabs.

Aleksandar Petrović’s movie about Roms “Skupljači perja” (*I Even Met Happy Gypsies*) gets prize for director at Cannes Film Festival.

### 1968

The Central Committee of LCY discusses the mass employment of Yugoslavs abroad, largely in Germany, counting by then 400 thousand people (it will reach one million by the early ‘70s). It confirms the legality of such procedures but asks for better treatment of workers.

Growing friction between Serbian and Kosovo CP leaders. Serbian CPY Central

Committee expels nationalist ideologue, writer Dobrica Ćosić.

June: mass student protests in Belgrade, asking for reduction of class differences, bureaucracy and unemployment, also reform of universities; Belgrade University renamed "Karl Marx University", main slogan "Down with the red bourgeoisie". Clashes between police and students. Finally Tito holds a speech in which he agrees with many student demands and asks them to disband. Party top decides it cannot tolerate any political force outside of CPY. Strong repressions with arrests and beatings follows.

August: USSR troops invade Czechoslovakia and oust Dubček's "communism with a human face". Central Committee of CPY condemns this action, the "Brezhnev doctrine" and any victimisation of smaller countries by the big powers.

At end of year demonstrations in Kosovo asking for separate federal republic. Constitutional Amendments VII-XIX strengthen the role of constituent republics and provinces, rename Kosovo as Autonomous Province.

### 1969

In view of resurgent Soviet threat, new defence law institutes capillary "territorial defence" and foresees total guerilla resistance

9th Congress of CPY institutes Presidency of LCY composed of "republican" and "provincial" representatives as a sign of growing regional independence and brokering. In July, first open conflict between Slovenian and federal governments over international funds. End of year sees major restrictions on use of electrical energy in places. .

Veljko Bulajić's epic battle movie "Bitka na Neretvi" (*The Battle of N.*), with prestigious international cast earns Oscar nomination and becomes the best known Yugoslav movie abroad

Želimir Žilnik's movie "Rani radovi" (*Early Works*) gets first prize at Berlin Film Festival, is withdrawn in SFRY as "black".

### 1970

Third conference of Non-aligned countries in Lusaka.

University opened in Priština, capital city of Kosovo Autonomous Province.

### 1971

Tension between federal and Croatian CPY leadership that finally opts for nationalist support and is at Tito's insistence condemned at the Dec. meeting of CPY Presidium, Zagreb leaders resign.

New agreement between federal republics on division of currency incomes.

Dušan Makavejev's movie *W.R. – Mysteries of Organism*, exploring relations between communist politics and sexuality, is released, but "withdrawn by producer" in SFRY.

GNP per head officially ca. US\$ 800 (see 1953).

### 1972

Purge of Croatian leadership, ca. 350 people demoted, most prominent oppositionists arrested.

July: USSR and Yugoslav prime ministers sign agreement on cooperation in technology. Yugoslavia becomes an observer at the meetings of Soviet bloc economic body (SEV).

October: Purge of Serbian CPY leadership.

### 1973-79

Constant worsening of economic situation in the country, and of conflicts between richer and poorer republics, also between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs.

World economic environment worsens for smaller countries after 1973 Near East war and the oil shocks. Exchange rate of dinar fluctuates from 1973 on. Foreign debt skyrockets, also indebtedment of population.

New Constitution proclaimed in 1974, probably the longest in the world and without effect on economic and political contradictions, despite much talk about delegation of powers and similar. SFRY becomes a semi-confederacy, power of federal centre is constantly eroded. .

Independent mega-banks become a dominant factor in SFRY economics.

Tito's last foray into world affairs is at the 6<sup>th</sup> conference of Non-aligned countries in Havana 1979, where SFRY clashes with Cuba's advocacy of Soviet camp.

At end of decade serious inflation begins, real incomes begin to fall steeply.

### 1980-91

1980: Death of Tito. Grave economic crisis begins.

1981: inflation reaches 30%. "Apparitions of Virgin Mary" begin at Medjugorje in Hercegovina, traditionally centre of Franciscan-inspired *ustashi* fascism. From 1982 growing dependence on IMF and World Bank loans. Articles such as coffee, sugar and cooking oil begin disappearing from commerce, gasoline for cars is rationed.

1984: Winter Olympic games in Sarajevo, the major sports event in SFRY history. Inflation hits 58% that year, 162% in 1987, 251% in 1988.

1986: Slobodan Milošević comes to power in CP of Serbia, eventually decides to play card of anti-Albanian nationalism which earns him huge popularity and full power.

First McDonald's restaurant opens in 1988.

From mid-1989 Slovenian and Croatian ruling classes give signs of deciding on separation, opt for multi-party system. Slovenian and Croatian delegations walk out of extraordinary CPY Congress in Jan. 1990, which thus implodes. In Dec. 1990 Slovenia formally secedes, in 1991 Croatia follows. They are recognised by Germany in Dec. 1991. End of SFRY, beginning of Yugoslav Secession Wars (still smouldering).

\*/ My thanks go to Dejan Kršić, Milena Dragičević Šešić, Matko Meštrović and Hrvoje Klasić, and for movie tips (but not only) to Nenad Jovanović.