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# The Contours of Social Criticism in Late-Socialist Slovenia

## IZVLEČEK

### GABARITI DRUŽBENE KRITIKE V POZNOSOCIALISTIČNI SLOVENIJI

*Tako kot na mnogih področjih družbenega življenja je samoupravni socializem tudi pri upravljanju družbene polemike oz. javnega življenja nasploh izkazoval dvoumnost in nejasnost, ki je bila vzrok mnogim posebnostim tega fenomena v Jugoslaviji. V ozadju Kardeljevega recepta za »družbeno odgovorno kritiko« je bilo leninistično razumevanje demokracije v socializmu, hkrati pa je bil jugoslovanski in slovenski prostor tudi pod vplivom zahodnih liberalnih konceptov. Upoštevajoč politični in ideološki kontekst poznega socializma, prispevek obravnava sistemski način soočanja z družbeno kritiko od konca šestdesetih do sredine osemdesetih let in ugotavlja, kakšen pomen je imelo to stanje za kasnejši razvoj demokratizacije. Preden so se v drugi polovici osemdesetih let zgodili veliki družbeni premiki, se je »pluralizem samoupravnih interesov« lahko v praksi artikuliral predvsem na način, da ni bil v kompeticiji s partijskim monopolom. V kolikor pa je do tega prišlo, je vodilna politična garnitura obračun najraje zaupala svojim »pooblaščenec«, sama pa zavzela arbitrarna stališča, prek katerih lahko prepoznamo nekaj ključnih značilnosti poznosocialističnega režima v Sloveniji.*

*Ključne besede: samoupravni socializem, družbena kritika, intelektualci, Zveza komunistov Slovenije, Edvard Kardelj*

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## ABSTRACT

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*Self-management socialism displayed ambiguities and vagueness in handling social controversy and public life in general, giving rise to numerous peculiarities particular to this social phenomenon in Yugoslavia. While a Leninist interpretation of democracy in socialism constituted the background of Edvard Kardelj's recipe for "socially responsible criticism," Yugoslavia and Slovenia were at the same time under the influence of western liberal concepts. Considering the political and ideological contexts of late socialism, the article discusses the systemic way of dealing with social criticism between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s, while trying to determine the impact of these circumstances on the subsequent evolvement of democratisation. Prior to the major social shifts of the second half of the 1980s, the "pluralism of self-management interests" could be articulated in practice primarily in a way that did not force it into competition with the Party. In those cases when this nevertheless occurred, the leading political establishment preferred to leave it to its "proxies" to deal with the transgressors, while itself taking on arbitrary positions that displayed some of the key features of the late-socialist regime in Slovenia.*

*Keywords: self-management socialism, social criticism, intellectuals, League of Communists of Slovenia, Edvard Kardelj*

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## Introduction

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In steering intellectual debates and in the public sphere in general, as in various other areas of social life, self-management socialism displayed ambiguities and vagueness, giving rise to numerous peculiarities unique to this social phenomenon in Yugoslavia that now make it difficult to compare the system or phenomenon with situations in central and eastern European 'real-socialist' countries. In the background of the idea of an organic connection between the social system and the engaged intellectual as a predisposition for a "socially responsible criticism," advocated by the leading Yugoslav ideologist, Edvard Kardelj, was essentially the Leninist conception of socialist democracy. This country, and its northernmost constituent republic of Slovenia in particular, situated at the intersection of liberal capitalism and state socialism, bore impacts of exposure to western intellectual and political currents, and the dynamics of public controversy were strongly correlated to the political (and judicial) culture, clearly distinctive in each of the Yugoslav republics.

Taking into account political oscillations, this article aims at profiling the cultural hegemony of self-management socialism between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s and ascertaining what this configuration meant for the vigour of the public sphere and the later democratisation process. Rather than scrutinising concrete forms of

individual intellectuals' engagement,<sup>1</sup> this article is based on an analysis of key theoretical texts and political documents in order to present the typology of the regime's classification of social criticism and the ways of dealing with its contents in the late socialist republic of Slovenia. The restraint in the use of repressive measures, the loose "rules of the game," which did not require a complete identification with the dominant ideology, the open borders, the mechanisms of catalysing public debate through the Socialist Alliance of the Working People (SAWP), the designation of the League of Communists [of Slovenia] (LC[S]) as the bearer of national interests, and a series of other influences led to the fact that even during the early 1980s there was neither complete identification nor direct opposition to the regime among the greater part of the intelligentsia. It is, therefore, difficult to draw a clear line between what was *allowed* to write or say in late-socialist Slovenia and what *wasn't*; however, any such attempt at illustrating the limits of acceptable social criticism should be taken as a basis for comparing the development of intellectual life within Yugoslav as well as central and eastern European contexts, and therefore as a prerequisite to the various debates addressed by this special issue.

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## Yugoslavia as a Model of Non-dissent?

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Although all socialist systems shared a common frame of reference, from which the leading party groups derived their politics of the day, the dissimilarities between these had magnified over the first two decades after WWII to such a degree that individual countries could have more in common with other political systems than with other socialist countries. The extent of these differences can be appreciated particularly in terms of the following key variables: level of economic development, type of political culture and mode of communist takeover.<sup>2</sup> In close connection to these factors, it is also possible to trace differences in the phenomena of dissent and opposition, in the importance of the integration of critics into society and party circles since the early post-Stalinist era. The vigour of social criticism was strongly related to the degree of a country's political dependence on Moscow, to the economic and ideological capacity of a regime to preserve the loyalty of its citizens, the ability to curb religious communities, the level of cultural interconnectedness and openness to the West.<sup>3</sup> Based on a survey of comparable factors that had a significant effect during the late-socialist period, the political scientist Rudolf Tökés remarked, towards the end of

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1 For details on the trajectories of different Slovenian intellectuals during socialism see Aleš Gabrič, "Vloga intelektualca kot političnega subjekta v enostrankarskem sistemu," in: *Slovenija 1948–1998: iskanje lastne poti*, eds. Stane Granda and Barbara Šatej (Ljubljana and Maribor: Zveza zgodovinskih društev; Univerza v Mariboru, 1998), as well as other contributions by the same author.

2 Chalmers Johnson, "Comparing Communist Nations," in: *Change in Communist Systems*, ed. Chalmers Johnson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 4, 28.

3 Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs, "Comparative Perspective on Dissent and Opposition to Communist Role," in: *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe*, eds. Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (Hants and Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 231.

the 1970s, that Yugoslavia had always been a peculiarity in this sense, as it solved its internal conflicts with methods that significantly reduced (though did not annihilate) the potential of the opposition in the country.<sup>4</sup>

The most frequently quoted argument distinguishing between eastern European dissent and Yugoslav forms of opposition to the socialist regime is a considerably lower level of repression compared to the measures that the critics in 'real-socialist' countries were subjected to, which was particularly evident from the 1960s onwards.<sup>5</sup> On account of that, Yugoslavia was missing one of the three conditions necessary for the existence of dissent delineated by sociologist Sharon Zukin in the early 1980s {1) public action, 2) criticism of the current conditions and their rejection, 3) administrative measures}, so that, to Zukin, Yugoslavia was "a model of non-dissent," as it inspired few statements that could be perceived as dissident and even fewer groups that could claim the status of dissidents.<sup>6</sup>

Before proceeding with an analysis of the status of social criticism in Yugoslavia, it is necessary to look at some preconditions that essentially defined its scope and significance in the specific Yugoslav environment. First, we should point out the "authenticity" of the Communist revolution in Yugoslavia, based on the wartime resistance movement under the leadership of the Communist Party, which rose to power principally owing to the majority support of the masses and only partially through assistance from Soviet troops, as was the case in east-central Europe.<sup>7</sup> The National Liberation Struggle and revolution became key social integrative factors and an integral part of civil religion as an amalgamation of spontaneous and manipulated creation in Yugoslavia. At and after the end of the war, much of a potential opposition was exiled or liquidated, while a considerable part of uncompromised adherents to the left wings of pre-war bourgeois parties and movements was drawn to participate in the Liberation Front, slowly merging with the Communist majority.<sup>8</sup>

Of particular importance for the handling of the domestic situation was the 1948 break with the Soviet Union, which made of Yugoslavia a valuable ally of the West. According to the Croatian publicist Daniel Ivin, at the triumphant VI Congress of the LCY in 1952, the Yugoslav party itself assumed the position of a collective dissident, a renegade, although in the belief that it was faithfully following Marx's ideals. Due to its constant interest in preserving a stable multi-ethnic Yugoslavia, the West, in most cases, did not cultivate such sympathies for Yugoslav dissidents as it did for

4 Rudolf L. Tökés, "Introduction," in: *Opposition in Eastern Europe*, ed. Rudolf L. Tökés (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), 18.

5 Božo Repe, "Podobnosti in razlike med slovenskim (jugoslovanskim) in vzhodnoevropskim tipom socializma," in: *Evropski vplivi na slovensko družbo*, eds. Nevenka Troha et al. (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2008), 414.

6 Jasna Dragovič-Soso, "*Spasioci nacije*": *Intelektualna opozicija Srbije i ožvljanje nacionalizma* (Beograd: Edicija Reč, 2004), 36.

7 Jože Pirjevec, *Jugoslavija: Nastanek, razvoj ter razpad Karadžrdjevičeve in Titove Jugoslavije* (Koper: Lipa, 1995).

8 Sergej Flere, "The Broken Covenant of Tito's People: The Problem of Civil Religion in Communist Yugoslavia," *East European Politics & Societies* 21, No. 4 (2007): 681–703. Aleš Gabrič, "Opozicija v Sloveniji po letu 1945," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 45, No. 2 (2005): 97–119.

their east-European contemporaries and denied them the support enjoyed by other fighters against Communism.<sup>9</sup> The foreign policies of western countries were quite reserved towards nationalist movements, showing only slightly more sensitivity to human rights issues; although their official representatives were willing to turn not one, but two blind eyes to this sort of problem, as the omission of Yugoslavia from US reports on the implementation of human rights protection following the Helsinki Conference or leniency towards the host country at the Belgrade follow-up meeting in 1977 clearly demonstrate.<sup>10</sup>

The most important social prerequisite to reduce the incidence of dissent in the Yugoslav socialist system was most certainly a peculiar interpretation of Marxism, established after 1948. Among western philosophers and sociologists the opinion became consolidated that the Yugoslav system was where socialist humanism was particularly well-anchored, and where, accordingly, emphasis was placed on greater respect of individual rights and the needs of man as a well-rounded being. The underlining of the system's distinctness from its Soviet counterpart was a sort of security valve for a controlled release of criticism of the authoritarian elements of 'real socialism,' which the self-management system was supposed to have long reckoned with. This obsession with "Stalin's phantom," which persisted among intellectuals for quite some time, distracted Yugoslav critics from searching for flaws in their own socialist development.<sup>11</sup> The introduction of self-management attained to a rather highly institutionalised articulation of interests in individual communities of producers (workers), but the political highest-class never gave free rein to self-management and continued to use the levers of both bottom-up and top-down control.<sup>12</sup> This is probably the very origin of the paradox of Yugoslav self-management, as the philosopher Slavoj Žižek defined the discrepancy between the continuous official campaign for joining the self-management process and the regime's actual fear that its citizens would indeed act out Communism, their cynical attitude towards the ruling ideology presenting the least threat to it.<sup>13</sup>

9 Daniel Ivin, "Pojav disidenata u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji," in: *Dijalog povjesničara – istoričara* 9, ed. Hans-Georg Fleck (Zagreb: Zaklada Friedrich Naumann, 2005). Krsto Cvić, "Dinamika političke promjene unutar komunističke vlasti: primjer SFRJ," in: *Disidentstvo u suvremenoj povijesti*, eds. Nada Kisić Kolanović et al. (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2010), 38.

10 Oskar Gruenwald, *The Yugoslav Search for Man: Marxist Humanism In Contemporary Yugoslavia* (South Hadley: Bergin, 1983), 277. Pirjevec, *Jugoslavija*, 351.

11 Predrag Matvejević, "Samoupravljanje u kulturno ustvarjanje," *Sodobnost* 27, No. 2 (1979): 190.

12 Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 170. Greuwald, *The Yugoslav Search*, 34–61. Richard Lowenthal, "Development vs. Utopia," in: *Change in Communist Systems*, ed. Chalmers Johnson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 114. Paul Shoup, "The Limits of Party Control: The Yugoslav Case," in: *Authoritarian Politics in Communist Europe: Uniformity & Diversity in One-Party States*, ed. Andrew C. Janos (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1976), 192.

13 Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London-New York: Verso, 2001), 91, 92.

Undoubtedly, this contributed to relativising the “feeling of hopelessness” typical of ‘real-socialist’ countries,<sup>14</sup> as did, specifically, the possibilities of travelling and working abroad. The resulting contacts with the West enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the situation there and the related critical distance to the problems of the liberal-capitalist system, neo-colonialism, US foreign policy, etc. Also significant, of course, was the increased standard of living, of great importance for Yugoslavia, even more so than for eastern European countries, and which in the very 1970s reached its highest point during the entire period of post-war development.

The attitude of the Yugoslav political establishment towards social criticism remains a very complex issue. In his well-known survey of the main currents of Marxism, Leszek Kołakowski pointed out that in Yugoslavia the public word may have enjoyed more freedom, but the repressive measures there were just as severe as in other socialist countries, and the elements of pluralism in social life could only stretch as far as it suited the leading group in the Party.<sup>15</sup> There should be no doubt, therefore, that in terms of personal autonomy and restriction of civil rights Yugoslav intellectuals were still much closer to their eastern European peers than to those from western liberal democracies. Indeed, the line between the permitted and the prohibited was quite blurred and dependent on the current political situation in individual republics, and particularly on the personal history of the author of the criticism in question. In individuals who put their head on the block it was important whether they were members of the League of Communists or former partisans, whether they had international connections or enjoyed a good reputation abroad. In fact, the regime strived to preserve its image as a liberal system and looked for alternatives to harsh repressive measures (e.g., reassignment from teaching to research institutions, pressure to move abroad).<sup>16</sup>

Censorship formally did not exist, but the establishment spread a wide web of formal and informal mechanisms with a censoring effect and could, through specific methods, also reach outside the state borders, particularly into the environment of the Slovene minorities in neighbouring Austria and Italy. Rather than by repressive measures, the autonomy of an individual was most often restricted by “friendly” or even cautionary conversations, by a system of punishment versus reward, that trapped them in the nearly undetectable position of self-censors. Despite the relinquishment of some of the most obvious mechanisms of ideological control - e.g., the abolition of agitprop following the Cominform rift - the control was maintained through boards, faculty councils and editorial offices, where members of regime socio-political organisations held the majorities. Outwardly, the autonomy of cultural institutions was preserved, but inwardly they were controlled and run by the so called Party cells (basic organisations of the League of Communists). This was particularly evident in the period of late socialism, when a certain illusion of freedom was maintained: the leaders imagining

14 Srdan Cvetković, “(Ne)Tolerisani disidenti / specifičnost jugoslovenskog socijalizma 1953–1985,” in: *Disidentstvo u suvremenoj povijesti*, eds. Nada Kisić Kolanović et al. (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2010), 110.

15 Leszek Kołakowski, *Glavni tokovi marksizma. Tom III.* (Beograd: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1985), 538.

16 Dragović-Soso, “*Spasioci nacije*”, 38. Cvetković, *(Ne)Tolerisani disidenti*, 110–16.

they were not censoring and the authors imagining they were not being censored. Within this framework, ironically latitude was obtained by the surface adherence to Marxist forms in, for instance, introductions and conclusions, camouflaging less conformist philosophical or historiographic contents.<sup>17</sup>

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## The Self-management of the Intellect

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“The social valorisation of mass reproductive forms of cultural activity” in the context of the restoration of ideological orthodoxy in the early 1970s implied a universal introduction of Marxist aesthetic criteria of art criticism and the “steering of currents of ideas,” in which there should no longer be any room for “ideas of the intellectualist value nihilism.”<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, Franc Šali, the responsible for culture in the Central Committee of the LCS firmly rejected the thesis that culture in self-management would shed the class criteria.<sup>19</sup> On the contrary, all philosophical, sociological and artistic-theoretical intellectual activities would have to be subjected to Marxist criteria. The Commission for Conceptual Issues of Culture with the Central Committee of LCS estimated that the penetration of bourgeois influences and the relativisation of the position of “scientific socialism” were enabled through the spheres of philosophy (the introduction of existentialism and phenomenology), sociology (reception of functionalism, structuralism and logical positivism) and art (separation of art topics from class topics, reception of consumer psychology, abstract avant-garde).<sup>20</sup> This was supposed to be countered by an in-depth Marxist criticism provided by communists in educational institutions, institutes and newspaper editorial offices.<sup>21</sup> These were supposed to take over the task of “gardeners who [would] not let just any weed bloom and overgrow”, as one of the leading Slovene philosophers put it.<sup>22</sup> The special role of generator and coordinator of Marxist (counter)criticism was entrusted to the Marxist Centre with the LCS established in 1972.

Taking into account the importance of the media in modern society, this sphere of social activity, too, was assigned a special role in the social transformation in keeping with the tenets of self-management. According to Edvard Kardelj, the public communication system had to reflect “the state of social consciousness in learning about collectively shared social interests.”<sup>23</sup> And for this social consciousness to be represented

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17 Gregor Tomc, “Cenzurirani punk: analiza primera cenzure Punk Problemov,” in: *Cenzurirano: Zgodovina cenzure na Slovenskem od 19. stoletja do danes*, ed. Mateja Režek (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2010), 244. Dean Komel, “Cenzura filozofije in filozofija cenzure,” in: *Cenzurirano: Zgodovina cenzure na Slovenskem od 19. stoletja do danes*, 285.

18 SI AS 1589/IV, b. 20, f. 121, Poročilo o delu Centralnega komiteja ZKS in aktivnosti ZKS med 3. in 4. konferenco Zveze komunistov Slovenije, 79–80.

19 SI AS 1589/IV, b. 551, f. 5790, Nekatera idejna vprašanja v kulturi, 22.

20 SI AS 1589/IV, b. 223, f. 503, Poročilo o dejavnosti ZK Slovenije v aprilu in maju 1973, supplement O idejnih tokovih v kulturi in njih izvori.

21 SI AS 1589/IV, b. 242, f. 730, Nekateri elementi za oceno družbenoekonomskih in idejnopolitičnih razmer v Sloveniji ter aktivnost ZKS (Ljubljana, 28. 11. 1974), 48.

22 SI AS 1589/IV, b. 1848, f. 87, Pristop k analizi idejne naravnosti izobraževalnega procesa, (Ljubljana, 8. 2. 1975), 4

23 Edvard Kardelj, *Smeri razvoja političnega sistema socialističnega samoupravljanja* (Ljubljana: ČZP Komunist, 1977), 220.

correctly, journalist-communists had to take upon themselves the responsibility of not letting any journalistic activity take place outside LC policy. In concrete terms, this meant acting in accordance with the instruction of the supreme body of LCS, which established that *“the struggle for an influence of the League of Communists over the press, radio and television [was] at the same time a struggle against the bourgeois concepts of freedom and autonomy, and against spontaneity in our social system.”*<sup>24</sup> It was particularly important that this instruction be adhered to by editors, who were organised in a special work group of magazine editors-communists, who were instructed to make sure, in the name of “the sense of formation of socialist consciousness,” that no article or other printed work be published which could “carry out a political diversion” through their contents.<sup>25</sup> As the high official Franc Šetinc informed his fellow journalists-communists, they were expected to perform “responsible” reporting, in other words self-censorship, which can be understood from his quote: “the freedom of creation and responsibility are just two sides of the same process, and there cannot be one without the other.” This responsibility included “friendly” control over one’s colleagues: *“It is not humane, in our relations to friends, to a colleague, to a journalist, not to be honest, straightforward in a Communist manner. It is a true humanity to help a person by timely drawing their attention to problems. [...] It is far better to help a person at the right time and even move them to another job if we think that they lack the conditions to exercise such a function.”*<sup>26</sup> In case the internal control proved insufficient, there was also an “expert analytical” group for the monitoring of press, radio, television, journalistic and editorial activities, newly founded with the Central Committee of the LCS, to keep a particularly close watch over the reporting.<sup>27</sup> In addition, a new law restricting the freedom of the press was passed in 1973.

We can draw the general conclusion that in the 1970s, the League of Communists maintained relatively strong control over the social state of affairs. After the political reckoning at the beginning of that decade, the situation calmed down and stabilised, the internal authorities recording a relatively stable security situation year after year. All this was, naturally, put down to greater political activity on the part of the LC, to the assertion of the SAWP as the largest front of socialist forces, and to the precedence given to political over administrative measures. At the same time, there was already the awareness of the subversive charge that a deterioration of the economy and a decline in full employment could have,<sup>28</sup> but the potential causes of instability on the threshold of the 1980s were still sought exclusively in an inadequate implementation of the principles of self-management.<sup>29</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that in the last decade of

24 SIAS 1589/IV, b. 302, f. 1256, Stenogram uvodnih misli Franca Šalija z razgovora s predstavniki slovenskih sredstev množičnega komuniciranja (Ljubljana, 11. 7. 1974), 9.

25 SIAS 1589/IV, b. 339, f. 2044, Kratka informacija o aktivnosti Zveze komunistov Slovenije v boju proti političnim odklonom v družbi in za njen nadaljnji razvoj (Ljubljana, 17. 3. 1977), 11.

26 SIAS 1589/IV, b. 286, f. 1065, Razgovor z aktivom komunistov – novinarjev (Ljubljana, 28. 10. 1974), 15/4, XVI/1, XVI/2.

27 Ibid., 65.

28 SIAS 1589/IV, b. 450, f. 3877, Zapisnik 14. seje predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije (Ljubljana, 29. 1. 1979), 2, 3.

29 SIAS 1589/IV, b. 453, f. 3891, Vojnopolična in varnostna ocena (Ljubljana, 9. 5. 1979), 22.



Kardelj's life, the principle of self-management reached the level of sole redemption, its deficient actualisation representing the cause, and its consolidation the cure for any social problem.

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### Within Certain Bounds

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“Social criticism cannot be separated from political struggle.” With this motto we could sum up the essence of the thought of Kardelj, who, believing that social critics are not beyond the objective conditions of struggle for socialism, set the key parameters for social criticism in self-management socialism. His fundamental work dealing with this aspect of public life, *Beleške o naši družbeni kritiki* [Notes on Our Social Criticism], which focussed entirely on the treatment of social criticism, was first published in 1965 in the magazine *Sodobnost*, and then in 1966 and again in 1985 in the form of a monograph. Essentially, his conceptions of social criticism held up until the collapse of the regime, in his later *chef d'oeuvre Smeri razvoja političnega sistema socialističnega samoupravljanja* [The Directions of the Development of the Socialist Self-Management Political System; 1977], his only additions were evaluations of some new phenomena of social criticism that had not been so widespread in the mid-1960s (the New Left, in particular).

It would be wrong to claim that Kardelj was not aware of the infrastructural value of social criticism and of the fact that an absence of criticism could pave the way to subjectivistic decision-making, bureaucratism and even political absolutism.<sup>30</sup> However, he did not fail to add an essential restriction to this relatively open conception of the public sphere: “But socialist society needs democracy in socialism, not democracy as a weapon in the fight against socialism.”<sup>31</sup>

Kardelj avoided directly prescribing a recipe for what the critical engagement of the “progressive” intelligence (a euphemism replacing Lenin's “honest” intelligence) should be, but by pointing out the consequences of public action he succeeded in achieving the very norm for an organic link between “progressive” criticism and the socialist form. The basic rule was that it should strive for synthesis, for a solution of problems arising from the materialistically conceived “objective nature of social movements.”<sup>32</sup> From it society – so Kardelj – did not require infallibility, but rather a socialist point of departure and destination. Intelligentsia as a class is not automatically the actor of social progress; as a reflection of objective processes it can be a projection of the most progressive as well as the most reactionary social currents; therefore it should not only clearly convey the socio-historical interest of the working class, but

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30 Edvard Kardelj, *Beleške o naši družbeni kritiki* (Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1985), 53, 54.

31 Kardelj, *Smeri razvoja*, 83.

32 The notion what ideal Marxist criticism of social practice and theory of the LCY by ideologists and cultural workers themselves should be can be gathered from the concept drawn up for the magazine of the Presidency of the Central Committee of the LCY called ‘Kritika’ (SI AS 1589/IV, b. 324, f. 1745, Okvirni projekat koncepcije petnaestodnevne revije Predsedništva centralnog komiteta SKJ (Beograd, 31. 3. 1976)).

transcend the role of expert medium and become “the creative subject of advanced social action.” Criticism is thus organically linked to socialist progress, from which its “humane” responsibility also arises. Distancing, or the “philistinism of clean hands,” is not acceptable, nor is critical judgement from the position of ideal (albeit Marxist) constructions; criticism should stem from the current social practice without becoming a prisoner of “everyday empiricist practice.”<sup>33</sup>

With respect to the restriction of the freedom of criticism, Kardelj had no doubt: “[S]ince the progressive forces of our socialist society are not neutral, like a speaker in the English Parliament, rather a protagonist of something specific - i.e., of the socialist social movement - it is clear that they cannot be limited solely to the formal defence of the freedom of criticism.” He allows a democratic battle of opinions that are “an organic expression of socialist socioeconomic relations,” and not of a “formalist absolute freedom.” Thus, criticism “cannot be ‘free,’ just like the political struggle for the restoration of old social relations is not ‘free.’” There is no absolute freedom, not even in self-management socialism, and in the context of class struggle any instance of criticism is a political act: “Social criticism from the perspectives of historical interests of two classes in diametric opposition is inevitably deeply contrasting. Within such relations any social criticism, however unbiased and strictly scientific or even abstractly theoretical it may seem, automatically becomes, to some degree or another, part of the political practice and therefore shares the fate of the political practice of one class or the other.” In this sense, criticism bears its own responsibility in relation to the effects of its action and at the same time determines the level of its own freedom, as the “more accountable to the truth and its socialist basis [it becomes], particularly when it comes to the fundamental issues of survival and progress of socialist forces,” the greater freedom it can enjoy.<sup>34</sup>

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## Breaking the Bounds

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“Responsible” social critics were therefore supposed to draw their own boundaries. For those “irresponsible” or even antisystemic critics who started “exploiting democratic freedoms” for their political battles, Kardelj saved various administrative measures, but advised prudence in their implementation.<sup>35</sup> Unless the constitutional order was under threat, which was a quite flexible category, and there was a danger of a counterrevolution, the principal Yugoslav ideologist preferred leaning towards the “preemptive” political battle, for which he was certain it could compensate for repressive measures almost entirely.<sup>36</sup> Still, this was not so much about introducing liberal principles, which Kardelj opposed all his life, as it was about a special strategy of settling accounts with opponents, which occurred particularly in Slovenia. It was, in fact,

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33 Kardelj, *Beleške*, 22, 56, 69, 85, 93.

34 *Ibid.*, 41, 45, 49, 52.

35 *Ibid.*, 48.

36 SI AS 1589 IV, b. 1219, f. 571, Razprava tov. Edvarda Kardelja na 18. seji P CK ZKJ (Ljubljana, 26. 4. 1976), 23/2.

a coordinated political campaign with the goal of “isolating” ideological opponents, the ability to apply differentiation to negative phenomena in society, while administrative measures were reserved for emergency situations and therefore did not spark discomfort among the general population.<sup>37</sup>

Based on the data on the low degree of political criminality and the estimates that in Slovenia there were only some 100 “adversely disposed” individuals who did associate among themselves, but failed to elicit a wider response with their ideas,<sup>38</sup> towards the end of the 1970s, the Presidency of the Central Committee of LCS reached the conclusion, which they also forwarded to their headquarters in Belgrade, that a positive atmosphere reigned among humanist scholars and artists and their agreement with the policy of the LC could be intuited.<sup>39</sup> Such an optimistic conclusion was not entirely ungrounded, although one should bear in mind that the majority of the intelligentsia clearly understood it was the monopoly of LC that threatened free cultural development, not the other way round.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, in most publicly exposed intellectuals, even those who would later abandon the hegemonic self-management cultural scheme, we could not recognize complete identification or direct opposition to the ruling system until the end of the 1970s or even later.<sup>41</sup>

To understand the position of social criticism in late-socialist Slovenia, it is very important to take into account the increased level of inclusion of the general public into the mechanisms of public discussion about socially relevant issues. Acting the part of the primary catalyst of expert as well as general social points of view was SAWP. In the context of self-management transformation, it was assigned particularly the role of a forum of democratic discussions about concrete pressing issues, through which it was to transcend the status of LC transmission and become a factor of self-management conscience formation.<sup>42</sup> To this purpose, Kardelj, pointed out the low threshold for entering this forum arena: *“Thus, a person need not have received a Marxist education and their ideological views need not be always and in every area aligned with Marxist ideology; one need not always agree with the opinions of the majority, either, to be committed to socialism as a form of actualisation of one’s socioeconomic and political interests.”*<sup>43</sup> But virtually in the same breath behind closed doors he added the warning that Communists should not allow the “enemies” to exploit “our” institutions and forums for their activity.<sup>44</sup> It would be wrong to assume, though, that the stressed integration of non-Communists into the building of self-management socialist society through SAWP would also mean that the League of Communists was (at least partly) relinquishing its political and

37 SI AS 1589/IV, b. 450, f. 3877, Magnetogram 14. seje Predsedstva CK ZKS (Ljubljana, 29. 1. 1979), 5/1-JK, 6/2-JK.

38 SI AS 1589/IV, b. 453, f. 3891, Vojnopolitična in varnostna ocena (Ljubljana, 9. 5. 1979), 26.

39 SI AS 1589/IV, b. 486, f. 4369, Idejni tokovi med inteligenco (Ljubljana, 13. 9. 1978), 2.

40 HU OSA, 300-10-2, b. 209, f. Intellectuals 1966–1983, Intellectual Ferment in Yugoslavia (Munich, 11. 11. 1980), 4.

41 See for instance Dimitrij Rupel, “Umetnostna proizvodnja in njene politike,” *Problemi* 17, No. 188 (1979): 63–70.

42 Kardelj, *Smeri razvoja*, 190, 191.

43 Kardelj, *Beleške*, 193, 194.

44 SI AS 1589/IV, b. 1219, f. 571, Razprava tov. Edvarda Kardelja na 18. seji P CK ZKJ (Beograd, 26. 4. 1976), 26/1.

ideological hegemony. The respect of its avant-garde and monopolistic role remained the prerequisite from which no social engagement emerging among the public before the second half of the 1980s could depart.

Significant data for determining the attitude of the authorities towards social criticism, which corroborate the above presented traits with concrete examples, can be found in the systematic survey of 76 highly visible critics compiled in October 1977 by the State Security Service (SSS).<sup>45</sup> It comprises individuals, almost a quarter of them members of LC, who were active in the fields of culture, education and research and who “in one way or another, publicly opposed or appeared against our sociopolitical order or LC policy.” Depending on the degree of opposition expressed against the socio-political regime and LC policy they were divided into three groups. The first group comprised 51 individuals, for whom it was assumed that sociopolitical organisations could “through concrete engagement, animate them to actively participate on the SAWP or LCS platforms;” in other words, that they could be co-opted into the system’s operation. The second group included 21 individuals “in purgatory,” whom the guardians of the regime considered still susceptible to the influences of sociopolitical organisations, but requiring further monitoring by the SSS. Deemed as “irreclaimable” were “only” four persons, whom the SSS was convinced required close surveillance.<sup>46</sup>

With a combination of strong socialist cultural hegemony and weak repressive measures, the Slovene Communist Party managed to preserve the action of the intelligentsia in its *Herrschaft* well into the 1980s, even absorbing the first direct attempts at articulating the opposition agenda through culture and journalism (the emergence of the *Nova revija* magazine soon after Tito’s death).<sup>47</sup> Eventually, by the end of the 1980s, this current of anti-communist oriented critics had consolidated as the key antipode to the LC. An equally substantial impulse, if not more so, towards the disintegration of cultural hegemony of self-management socialism came in the mid-1980s from the left-liberal milieu. The circumstance that truly expanded the limits of social criticism in the final years of socialism was, in fact, their realisation that the distinction between society and state – even a self-management state – could not be annulled. A notion of civil society emerged that did not necessarily follow the logic of political competition with the LC, but managed, perhaps even more easily this way, to introduce into public debate all those topics that had never been discussed before, and in some cases would never be afterwards.<sup>48</sup>

45 SIAS 1589/IV, b. 2606/6, f. sovrážna dejavnost, Pregled nekaterih kulturnih in prosvetnih delavcev (Ljubljana, 20. 10. 1977).

46 Viktor Blažič, Janez Gradišnik, Edvard Kocbek, Vinko Ošlak; all of them as a consequence of ‘bourgeois pluralism’ as a type of ‘hostile’ activity.

47 Stefano Lusa, *Razkroj oblasti: slovenski komunisti in demokratizacija države* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2012), 52–57.

48 Tomaž Mastnak, “Socialistična civilna družba, demokratična opozicija,” *Tribuna* 12, 1985/86, 8, 9.

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## Conclusion

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*A continuum of pluralism and monism.* This is the scheme in which the German specialist for the history of south-eastern Europe, Wolfgang Höpken, placed the development, limitations and the democratic potential of Yugoslav self-management socialism at the beginning of the 1980s, avoiding this way the use of western ideologically tinted categories of liberal democracy and totalitarianism. The Kardeljan *pluralism of self-management interests* could not, in fact, be defined by the criteria of bourgeois multi-party system or by the then current theory of interest groups.<sup>49</sup> Through structural decentralisation, in the last decade of his life, Kardelj as its chief architect succeeded in establishing a system that, at least at a normative level, enabled full participation in “socialist democracy.” Whereas in fact, in the public sphere that social criticism penetrated, he left a series of anchors for the “subjective forces” (LC members) to weigh this criticism down, so that it remained faithful to the “objective nature of social movements” beating to the pattern of the ossified Party establishment, of course.

We cannot fully dismiss the notion that the “self-managers,” even those without the Party membership card, took advantage, at least in part, of the opportunity of participating in joint decision-making. But Kardelj was unable or unwilling to grant them majority. He was convinced that they should be led into socialism by the hand.<sup>50</sup> In the complex structure of the Yugoslav self-management system, which reached its acme with the constitutional changes in the 1970s, LC therefore preserved the exclusive part of ideological and political avant-garde of the working class. Not only did this entrust it with the role of guarantor of the existence of the regime, but also with the role of social hegemon that had the right answer to all open issues concerning current and future development. Pluralism could only reach the areas from which the Party was prepared to withdraw, while “self-management” interests could only be articulated in a way that did not put them in competition with the Party interests.<sup>51</sup> Critical voices were not very audible in the “merry, spendthrift, hedonistic and megalomaniac” Yugoslavia,<sup>52</sup> until the crisis prompted the masses, too, to start questioning the foundations of self-management socialism. Until the circumstances matured, intellectuals could not express their radical criticism. At least for Slovenia it can be said that the loosening after “day X” (Tito’s death) found the critically-prone activists quite well prepared, as in the more impervious years they dedicated themselves to actively monitoring the situations in the West and East. Armed with the knowledge about newly emerging social concepts they could, cautiously at the beginning of the 1980s, then ever more assertively, enter the public sphere with their idea of (socialist) civil society and claim their share in the process of democratisation.

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49 Wolfgang Höpken, *Sozialismus und Pluralismus in Jugoslawien. Entwicklung und Demokratiepotential des Selbstverwaltungssystems* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1984), 404.

50 Jože Pirjevec, “Tito in Kardelj: od ‘tovarišije’ do sovraštva,” *Annales. Series historia et sociologia* 21, No. 2 (2011): 505.

51 Höpken, *Sozialismus und Pluralismus*, 405.

52 Dragović-Soso, “Spasioci nacije,” 90.

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## THE CONTOURS OF SOCIAL CRITICISM IN LATE-SOCIALIST SLOVENIA

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### SUMMARY

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Self-management socialism displayed ambiguities and vagueness in handling social controversy and public life in general, giving rise to numerous peculiarities particular to this social phenomenon in Yugoslavia. While a Leninist interpretation of democracy in socialism constituted the background of Edvard Kardelj's recipe for "socially responsible criticism," Yugoslavia and Slovenia were at the same time under the influence of western liberal concepts. Considering the political and ideological contexts of late socialism, the article discusses the systemic way of dealing with social criticism between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s, while trying to determine the impact of these circumstances on the subsequent evolvment of democratisation. It is principally based on an analysis of key theoretical texts and political documents in order to present the typology of the regime's classification of social criticism and the ways of dealing with its contents in the late socialist republic of Slovenia. The restraint in the use of repressive measures, the loose "rules of the game," which did not require

a complete identification with the dominant ideology, the open borders, the mechanisms of catalysing public debate through the Socialist Alliance of the Working People, the designation of the League of Communists as the bearer of national interests, and a series of other influences led to the fact that even during the early 1980s there was neither complete identification nor direct opposition to the regime among the greater part of the intelligentsia.

Despite the official assurance that it was not only necessary, but even indispensable, social criticism could not attain the position that it was supposed to have within "the pluralism of self-management interests". The Communist elite in power almost never acknowledged that it was justified and constructive, which however did not mean that it was entirely indifferent to its demands. In the period discussed, social critics could by no means interfere in the League of Communists' monopolistic authority or express doubts about the dominant ideological matrix. As a result of such self-assurance, communists always treated social criticism as an element of political struggle. The extent to which critical demands were taken into account usually depended on the argument of power of the critical exponent rather than the power of his/her arguments. Prior to the major social shifts of the second half of the 1980s, the "pluralism of self-management interests" thus could be articulated in practice primarily in a way that did not force it into competition with the Party. In those cases when this nevertheless occurred, the leading political establishment preferred to leave it to its "proxies" to deal with the transgressors, while itself taking on arbitrary positions that displayed some of the key features of the late-socialist regime in Slovenia. Well acquainted with the situations in the West and East, especially with the knowledge about newly emerging social movements Slovenian intellectuals however could, cautiously at the beginning of the 1980s, then ever more assertively, enter the public sphere with their idea of (socialist) civil society and claim their share in the process of democratisation.

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## **GABARITI DRUŽBENE KRITIKE V POZNOSOCIALISTIČNI SLOVENIJI**

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### **POVZETEK**

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Tako kot na mnogih področjih družbenega življenja je samoupravni socializem tudi pri upravljanju družbene polemike oz. javnega življenja nasploh izkazoval dvoumnost in nejasnost, ki je bila vzrok mnogim posebnostim tega fenomena v Jugoslaviji. V ozadju Kardeljevega recepta za »družbeno odgovorno kritiko« je bilo leninistično razumevanje demokracije v socializmu, hkrati pa je bil jugoslovanski in slovenski prostor tudi pod vplivom zahodnih liberalnih konceptov. Upoštevajoč politični in



ideološki kontekst poznega socializma članek obravnava sistemski način soočanja z družbeno kritiko od konca šestdesetih do sredine osemdesetih let in ugotavlja, kakšen pomen je imelo to stanje za kasnejši razvoj demokratizacije. Razprava na osnovi razčlenbe ključnih teoretičnih besedil in političnih dokumentov prikazuje tipologijo režimskega razvrščanja družbene kritike in načine soočanja z njeno vsebino ter njenimi nosilci v socialistični republiki Sloveniji. Zadržanost pri uporabi represivnih ukrepov, ohlapna »pravila igre«, ki niso zahtevala popolne identifikacije z vladajočo ideologijo, odprtost meja, mehanizmi kataliziranja javne polemike skozi Socialistično zvezo delovnega ljudstva, prepoznavanje Zveze komunistov kot nosilca nacionalnih interesov in vrsta drugih vzrokov so privedli do tega, da še na začetku osemdesetih let pri večini inteligence ne moremo govoriti niti o popolni identifikaciji niti o neposredni opoziciji režimu.

Kljub uradnim zagotovitvam o potrebnosti in celo nujnosti družbene kritike, ta ni mogla zavzeti pomena, ki naj bi ga imela v »pluralizmu samoupravnih interesov«. Vladajoča partijska elita ji ni skorajda v nobenem primeru priznala njene upravičenosti in konstruktivnosti, kar pa še ne pomeni, da je bila do njenih zahtev povsem ravnodušna. V obravnavanem obdobju družbeni kritiki vsekakor niso smeli poseči v oblastni monopol partije in podvomiti v ustaljeno ideološko matrico. Na osnovi te zaverovanosti je bila družbena kritika vedno obravnavana kot element političnega boja. V kolikšni meri so bile kritične zahteve upoštevane, največkrat ni bilo odvisno od moči njenih argumentov, ampak od argumenta moči njenega nosilca. Preden so se v drugi polovici osemdesetih let zgodili veliki družbeni premiki, se je »pluralizem samoupravnih interesov« lahko torej v praksi artikuliral predvsem na način, da ni bil v nasprotju s partijskim monopolom. V kolikor pa je do tega prišlo, je vodilna politična garnitura obračun najraje zaupala svojim »pooblaščenecem«, sama pa zavzela arbitrarna stališča, prek katerih lahko prepoznamo nekaj ključnih značilnosti poznosocialističnega režima v Sloveniji. A dobro poznavajoč dogajanje tako na Zahodu kot Vzhodu, sploh kar se tiče novih družbenih gibanj, so lahko slovenski intelektualci s svojo idejo (socialistične) civilne družbe v začetku osemdesetih let sprva previdno, nato pa vedno bolj odločno začeli vstopati v javno sfero ter terjati svoj delež pri demokratizaciji.