

Socialism during Summer Vacations

Reflections from the Korčula Summer School (1964)

HENRI LEFEBVRE

transl. Uroš Pajović

It was after his expulsion from the Communist Party of France in the late fifties that Henri Lefebvre began exchanges with Marxist thinkers in Yugoslavia, especially the group of Zagreb-based New Left theorists behind the Praxis Journal, in which Lefebvre both published and served as a member of the editorial-advisory board. He also participated in several Korčula Summer Schools, organized by the Praxis group in the form of a forum for critical Marxist thinkers from across the world. This text is Lefebvre's account of the discussions which took place in the 1964 School. [Editor]

Enter Yugoslavia by taking the road from Graz to Maribor, travel through Slovenia and descend towards the sea. Coming from industrial areas, you're now headed towards developing regions, from Central Europe towards the Hellenic Mediterranean and the Muslim East. At the same time, you traverse from capitalism into Yugoslav socialism. The road is good to look at, and to reflect: a triple traverse. What meets the eye doesn't always make it easy to discern what comes from industrial development, what from ancient Mediterranean civilization, and what from socialism in the real sense of the word. This analysis would demand as much attention as chess or bridge.

LEISURELY CONVERSATIONS

We get the impression of some joyful socialism, differentiated from the rigid socialism and an imposed capitalist prosperity alike. But, isn't it a consequence of being in the South, and of an ancestral friendliness? "A Dionysian Socialism?" — we would ask (*we* being a handful of the present French) the Yugoslav theorists in Korčula, between two lectures at the Summer School, drinking a glass of malvasia, the island's famous wine. Leisurely remarks which, in any other socialist country, would expose us to criticism.

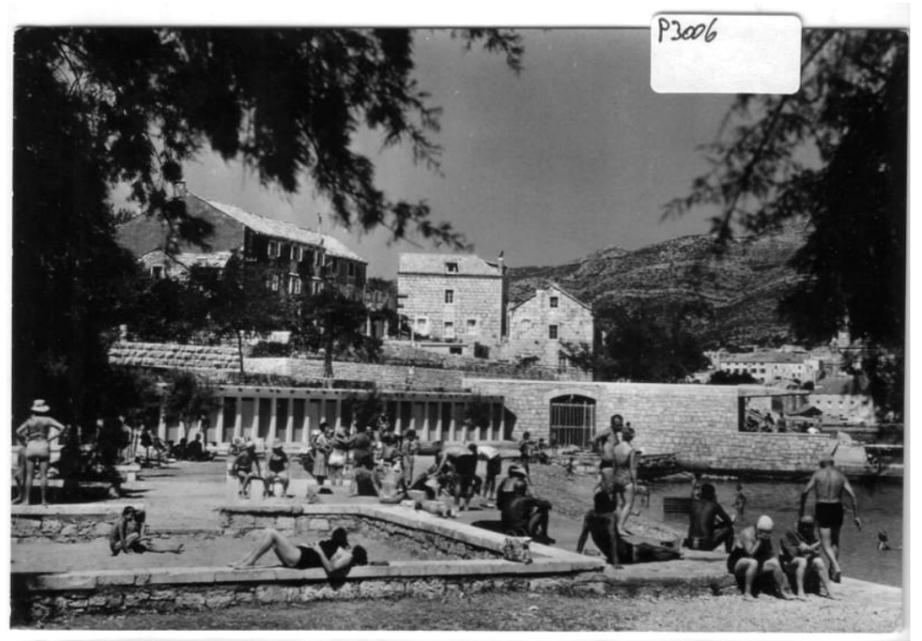
"Why not?" — replies one prominent Yugoslav Marxist philosopher, raising his glass; "why not? In this country, despite the

historical conditions which were as difficult as anywhere, people preserved the joy of living. They are open to lessons from outside, especially those from West Europe. This joy constitutes a part of their culture."

Were these conversations truly as meaningless as some respected scholars — be they Marxists or not — would assume? Surely not. How to explain self-management and its decisive importance in Yugoslavia? With the Greek-Latin tradition of the city-state? Or, with the Slavic tradition of familial communities, cooperatives? Or rather, with the great fight for freedom of one people capable of assimilating the best in the so-called Western culture? Shouldn't we speak of the fortunate encounter and fusion of all these elements?

The Summer School, which takes place in Korčula, on the island of the same name, every year becomes more important and more interesting. The School was founded by several writers and university workers in order to engender a truly free confrontation of socialism-oriented topics, outside of any and all ideological-political authority.

Participants, thus, believe in the plurality of roads towards socialism and interpretations of Marxism. They believe that Yugoslav theory and practice must also themselves create their way between doctrinaire rigidity and liberal eclecticism (which are elsewhere, in almost polemical terms, named dogmatism and



Postcard from Korčula

revisionism). Simply put, The Korčula Summer School becomes the most suitable place of encounter of people who understand each other, have the same language and same preoccupations, but yet differ in their experiences and ideas.

Every year, the School has an extensive yet precisely determined program (in 1964, seeking the definition of socialism). It is as different from a closed seminar as it is from a colloquium. There were around 120 participants this year. Among them were students, teachers at various levels, journalists and, by no means less importantly, several members of the Parliament.

ALIENATION

Fifteen days isn't a lot of time. Just enough to approach, as is usually said, the problematic of socialism. After several sessions, one could recognize the contours of a particularly widespread notion which was perpetually discussed: the notion of alienation. Three tendencies were noticeable.

For some, alienation is a way of being, or rather: a way not to be, passing reality as well as

the truth; it is an error or a misconception, a weakness of nature, of "being" or of "existence" against which we could fight, and even achieve total fulfillment. This current interprets alienation philosophically, within the framework of existential philosophy.

According to others, alienation has a clear and concrete sense only in relation to the analysis of the historic position of the proletariat, determined by capitalism, i.e. the rule of goods and money. The theory of alienation is resolved only in scientific cognition: political economy, history, sociology. Only scientific socialism can de-alienate people, beginning with the revolutionary action of the working class and the transformation of the means of production. For others, finally, the theory of alienation must be reconsidered, taking into account the modern world: the predominance of technology, the satisfaction of elementary needs. This satisfaction does not bring happiness, but rather degrades it to comfort and well-being. There is a certain technological or bureaucratic alienation which socialism also cannot avoid.

For Predrag Vranicki (University of Zagreb), alienation stems from the bourgeois and capitalist period; it's a historical fact. Socialism can overcome it, but that is merely one possibility followed by opposing possibilities, that is, the appearance of new forms of alienation: bureaucracy, false theories of the ruling party and rule of society, the misuse of that rule and the bad use of state power, etc.

It could be said that the most lucid among the Yugoslav Marxists resolved certain contradictions pertaining to capitalism, but caused new conflicts and battles. The famous distinction between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions could make sense, but only afterwards, after the resolution of the contradictions. How, then, to lead the struggle towards solving the contradictions of the socialist society? Who will direct this struggle? The Party? The scientific cognition? Philosophy? Some moral?

PHILOSOPHY AND ITS ROLE

From a barely set up discussion on alienation, a seamless transition was made onto a discussion on philosophy. Here, as well, different tendencies were to be observed.

According to some, Marx' work ends philosophy, thereon made up for by different sciences, or one particular science (political economy, history, sociology). According to others, philosophy goes on; the systematic coherence oriented towards the totality of knowledge and reality hasn't lost any of its value. Since the great classical philosophers (idealists), only the starting point, or the basis, has changed. The third current considers that the question doesn't consist in whether philosophy should be abolished in favor of science or preserved. The task is to realize the figure of man that has been developed and presented by classical philosophers, from Plato to Hegel. This requires a critique of the existing practice, including the socialist "praxis".

Gajo Petrović and Rudi Supek (Zagreb) insisted on this moment. The thesis according to which philosophy and its image (project) of man offer a criterion of social development caused attention among the audience members. This thesis motivated

critique, especially from Lucien Goldmann.

Herbert Marcuse (Brandeis University, USA) strongly set the problem of our epoch. He described the American society. The obstacles to the development of productive forces which Marx analyzed were overpowered by capitalism to a certain extent. Alienation, says Marcuse, did not disappear. Moreover, it is present everywhere and more powerful than ever before. However, it is not anymore being perceived. The individual does not feel alienated anymore. He adheres to what negates him. He agrees to it, tends towards it. Contradictions are softened, absorbed. Technics and technologies do not only bring new tools, but also new forms of organization.

How to deal with people seized by these forms? How to change the people who state that they are content? Only the minorities – the unemployed, "the poor," numerous but dispersed, then people of color, and the revolted youth – hopelessly confront the existing order. Such society can stagnate and rot. But it cannot at all transform.

THE FUTURE OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

As it seems, Herbert Marcuse thinks that Marxism lost its capacity for action in the most developed countries. It should be replaced by other methods of cognition and intervention, maybe those inspired by psychoanalysis, in order to lead the battle against the great human misery which cannot be removed by satisfying the elementary human needs.

Serge Mallet replied, with equal force, that these analysis, disputable also for the USA, have nothing to do with Europe and France, except as a miserable possibility that should not be counted on. He pointed out that sociological questionnaires are very superficial if limited to the usual questions, such as: "Are you happy with your life?"

Even outside a heavy recession, or the always possible crisis, the position of the working class in technically developed countries by no means justifies such radical pessimism as that of Marcuse. It carries new virtualities of consciousness and efficient action. Lucien Goldmann

then painted an exciting picture of contradictions and conflicts tormenting Europe, which will prevent history from stopping and prevent contemporary society from stagnating.

Finally, specific contradictions of the French society were underlined, especially the conflict between public and private, between collective (State) and individual – a conflict which more and more encompasses all the spheres of real life in France (economy, housing, urbanism, medicine, upbringing, etc). Everyone agreed on the decisive importance of the Yugoslav experience and self-management. Socialism should overpower technocracy using the most modern techniques (including cybernetics and information machines). This should be achieved on a societal basis of a complex network of organisms which represent and express all the social needs.

A dual conclusion can be drawn from these discussions. Marxism simultaneously proves both its diversity and its vitality. By leaving dogmatism and pure and simple methodology, by becoming a theoretical analysis of different "praxes," Marxism overcomes its own difficulties. It reaches unity higher than that artificially imposed on it through dogmatism. Regarding the Yugoslav thought, it is rapidly rising to the international and world level. It has the best chances. •

HENRI LEFEBVRE was a French Marxist philosopher and sociologist, best known for pioneering the critique of everyday life, for introducing the concepts of the right to the city and the production of social space, and for his work on dialectics, alienation, and criticism of Stalinism, existentialism, and structuralism.

This essay was originally published in French in *France Observateur* 746 (20 August 1964) and in Serbo-Croatian translation by Sonja Popović-Zadrović in *Praxis* 2, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 1965).

Editor's Remarks to the First Issue of Communiqué

Dear Reader, you are holding in your hands 1/7 of the first Issue of **Communiqué**, a print and online publication exploring the contemporary pertinence and potentiality of historical socialist concepts.

This issue is the beginning of a volume which will explore *self-management (using an English word which represents a rough translation of Serbo-Croatian **samoupravljanje** or French **auto-gestion**; the words **upravljanje** and **gestion**, though not entirely interchangeable due to the historical variations of their application, besides management, also imply the meanings of directing, determination, administration, organization, etc.).

The issue presented here looks at historical instances of self-management, the theoretical explorations and the contemporary understandings of the concept, from a broad array of different perspectives and fields, in an effort to bring an elaborate, and still pertinent, social concept back from the margins of academic discussion and everyday, practiced experience alike, and to investigate the many ways to approach it, as well as set the foundations for its (hopefully) manifold future elaborations.

The first issue of **Communiqué** features two new English translations of texts by Henri Lefebvre, previously only available in French and Serbo-Croatian, as well as contributions by Catherine Samary (on the importance and particularities of the Yugoslav self-managed way in socialism); Jovana Timotijević (on urban commons, the right to the city, and the management thereof); Elisa T. Bertuzzo (on autogestion in spaces of everyday inhabitation and movement beyond the Euro-American space); and Uroš Pajović (on plativity of self-management, and its implications in today's political landscape); and a visual exploration (on Vjenceslav Richter's Yugoslav pavilion at 1958 EXPO, an important and rare visualization and materialization of **samoupravljanje**).

I would like to thank the authors for their effort and willingness to be part of this publication, and to gift their time and knowledge to explorations of self-management.

With hope you will enjoy reading this, and all future issues of **Communiqué**,

in Berlin, November 2018
Uroš Pajović

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Communiqué Issue 1: Approaching Self-Management*, with translations of essays by Henri Lefebvre (1-2) and essays by Catherine Samary (3), Jovana Timotijević (4), Elisa T. Bertuzzo (5), Uroš Pajović (6), and a visual exploration (7). Edited by Uroš Pajović. Print run 50+. Available online at readcommunique.co November 2018. Berlin, Germany