

To cite text:

Badurina, Marino (2023), "Who Were the Liberals and Conservatives in Yugoslavia in the Late 1960s and Early 1970s? Conflict between Centrist Factions", *Philosophy and Society* 34 (4): 571–590.

Marino Badurina

WHO WERE THE LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES IN YUGOSLAVIA IN THE LATE 1960S AND EARLY 1970S? CONFLICT BETWEEN CENTRIST FACTIONS

ABSTRACT

The article challenges conventional political classifications, arguing that real-world politics defy simplistic labels due to pragmatic factors, internal and external influences. In the Yugoslav context of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the terms "conservatism" and "liberalism" were complex, entangled in Cold War dynamics and intra-party struggles. The article explores the intertwined nature of nationalism and socialism, suggesting that even communism as ideology historically stemmed from collectivist nationalism. It delves into the liberal-conservative entanglement (mostly in Serbia, with some reflections on the other Yugoslav Republics) during this period, highlighting the blurred lines between these labels. The article discusses a political centrism that emerged, reflecting not only on the Yugoslav position, but possibly also a deeper Central European tendency. In so doing, it refrains from definitive answers, presenting a complex picture of events, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of historical causality and human identity within the socialist prism.

KEYWORDS

nationalism,
democracy, socialism,
liberalism,
conservatism,
Yugoslavia, centrism

If we had no problems, we'd invent them to reassure ourselves that we exist.

U. G. Krishnamurti

The conventional political divide, encompassing labels such as liberal, conservative, left-right, and the like, proves insufficient in capturing the intricacies of real-world politics. Political positions frequently converge due to pragmatic considerations and external, or even internal, influences. It is conceivable to adopt a more skeptical stance regarding the imperative for social scientists to rigidly define and categorize political attitudes. Advocacy for a nuanced and



context-dependent approach becomes pertinent, contending that inflexible definitions and categorizations may constrain our comprehension. Instead, fostering a critical and interdisciplinary perspective that challenges established norms and encourages a profound analysis of complex social phenomena is advisable.

In the Yugoslav socialist context, the terms “conservatism” and “liberalism” were used within the framework of Cold War dynamics, when the former sounded pejorative, or within intra-party currents and power struggles where it was opportune to avoid both labels. During the 1960s and 70s, the Cold War vocabulary was still largely ideological. It was crucial to identify oneself as a liberal or a conservative, a socialist (Eurocommunist) or a dogmatist (Stalinist), a Western sympathizer or a Sovietophile (Russophile) etc. In the Western imagination, it was easier to explain one’s ideological position and economic interests rather than delve into ethnic, national, linguistic, and other cultural and historical differences. The West encouraged such rigid dichotomies within the Eastern Bloc, and even the communist ideological-Manichean worldview didn’t hinder this. This ultimately prevented agreement and convergence between these sides, some kind of liberal-conservative socialism (Leszek Kołakowski) and establishing a position akin to a political center. However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Yugoslavia entered an experimental phase that sought to reconcile both components, both on an ideological and national level. It seemed as if lasting, almost final, interethnic and ideological compromises and agreements were within reach. So, the chosen time period is indicative of significant developments within the Yugoslav context, and it sheds light on the challenges and dynamics inherent in socialist systems.

The relevance of the topic is reflected in the attitude toward several elements. Firstly, in regard to Yugoslav socialism’s unique model. Yugoslavia, from the 1950s onward, Yugoslavia, led by Josip Broz Tito, pursued a distinct form of socialism known as “self-management socialism”. This model aimed to decentralize economic and political decision-making, giving more autonomy to workers and enterprises. Understanding the ideological and political divisions within Yugoslavia helps illuminate the complexities of this unique socialist experiment. Secondly, in connection to liberalization and pluralism, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a period of relative liberalization in Yugoslavia. In addition to the market-oriented economic reforms of 1965, this era witnessed heightened political and cultural openness, characterized by a relaxation of state control. Examining the liberals of this time provides insights into the extent of political pluralism and the boundaries of dissent within a socialist system. On the other side, the same period also witnessed a conservative backlash against the perceived liberalization. Certain prominent figures within the Yugoslav leadership and society were uncomfortable with the increasing openness and sought to reassert control. One might also assume that the conservative stance gained prominence in opposition to the processes of decentralization of state and Party organization within Yugoslav socialism in the period under review. However, the dynamics between

liberals and conservatives in Yugoslavia were not unequivocal or unidirectional, reflecting broader trends within socialist systems. Socialist states often grappled with issues of centralization, ideological conformity, and the balance between state authority and individual freedoms. By studying Yugoslavia, one gains insights into how these challenges manifested in a specific context. Finally, as Yugoslavia was a multi-ethnic and multi-national state, the tensions between liberals and conservatives were closely related and intersected with issues of nationalism and state unity.

Nationalism, Modernity, Communism

Firstly, in this article, we start from the assumption that it is wrong to view nationalism and socialism as opposed and competing ideologies (Mevius 2009: 377; Van Ree 2000: 25–26; Van Ree 2015: 10). Modern nationalism historically preceded socialism and communism. Disagreements can exist only regarding whether nationalism is the birthplace of modernity, and simultaneously non-Western modernity (Liah Greenfeld, Partha Chatterjee, partly Anthony D. Smith), or whether modernity produced nationalism (Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, etc.). In both cases, all modern ideologies (socialism, communism, liberalism, conservatism, fascism, Nazism, etc.) have emerged from a combination of both.

In any case, all these modern ideologies would be unthinkable without the first and fundamental (national) premise that the people and the nation are sovereign, and that the nation is basically a sovereign community of fundamentally equal members, however the membership is defined (Greenfeld 2019: 54). From this vantage point, it can be posited that communist regimes in power were, fundamentally, a manifestation of the collectivist (multi)ethnic nationalism paradigm. Communism (and communism in power even more) is, in fact, an ideology and practice that varied the primary ideas of nationalism and attempted to extract some socio-economic maximum from concrete historical experience while syncretically combining and mixing old ideas in new conditions.

This, of course, does not mean that the so-called “national question” was not a burning issue throughout the existence of socialist Yugoslavia (as well as earlier) and that various conceptions, ideas, personal, and political fates were not decided on it.¹

In general, the notion that ethnic nationalism was purportedly expelled from the communist world in 1945, only to abruptly re-emerge in 1989, has already been challenged. Namely, communists everywhere, from Cuba to North Korea, sought national legitimacy and, to a certain degree, ethnic legitimation. Moreover, communism is an ideology that during its entire duration (also in the *realpolitik* sense) from 1848 to 1989 developed within the era of nationalism that gave birth to all other modern ideologies (Mevius 2009: 378).

1 For an overview of the national question and political conflicts in socialist Yugoslavia, see Burg 1983; Ramet 1992; Haug 2012.

Historically speaking, liberalism spread between collectivist civic (France) and individualistic civic nationalism (England), while communism oscillated between collectivist ethnic and collectivist multi-ethnic nationalism. Conservatism remains a sort of enigma there. More a reflex than an ideology.

In all areas of Yugoslav social life, the Yugoslav communists wanted to create a discontinuity with the past, but in the national question, they were still conservative. Even if the ultimate goal was the withering away of the state, nations were not intended for extinction. This duality burdened Yugoslavia both as an ideological concept and as a state (Jović 2004: 284).

The liberal-conservative entanglement came to the forefront in Serbia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. There, qualifications like “liberals” (or “anarcho-liberals”) and “conservatives” were perhaps most consistently used. Often, conservatism was simplistically equated with the *status quo*, while liberalism was seen as almost revolutionary reformism.

Another problem, from contemporary perspective, is that political conflicts in Yugoslavia throughout its existence are often viewed through the prism of permanent state of emergency and crisis, as if there was never any “political normalcy”. Hence, the relationship between liberals and conservatives becomes a pivotal issue. Later events, wars, and conflicts in that region confirmed such a belief, but it still doesn’t mean that everything always led to such an outcome. That implies writing history from the end, not from the beginning.

Nevertheless, even if that is the case, there is nothing precluding us from retrospectively examining the Western hemisphere, which Eastern Europe later endeavored to emulate. Did not the West emerge victorious in the Cold War, among other factors, due to the successful fusion of liberal and conservative ideologies (with Ronald Reagan being the most conspicuous manifestation of that fusion) against the communist adversary – a dynamic that was absent in the East? Was there ever a prospect for a comparable convergence in the Yugoslav context, not to mention the Eastern Bloc?

It is a common belief that in 1972, the so-called conservatives in Serbia clashed with the liberals, although those very liberals had previously paved the way for them. Of course, these conservatives were just the battering ram of Josip Broz Tito (Đukić 1990: 6). But did the liberals merely pave the way for those conservatives, or were they somewhat conservative themselves? On the other hand, were those considered conservatives also liberal? In the end, Marko Nikezić himself, as the president of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Serbia (1968-1972) and the leader of the liberal faction among Serbian communists, said: “I had no idea how vast the conceptual differences were between us” (Nikezić 2003: 7). Perhaps because these conceptual differences were not so great, until the moment when the actual conflict took place. Only post-festum, on both sides, everything wanted and had to be explained so strictly causally. Causality in history is always a question of identity. Identity is a fiction composed of fragments of information that serve no purpose other than to hold that causality together. Logical explanations derived from this causality are just tools in the conflict that thoughts and ideas inevitably

produce. This question delves into the very nature of historical material and the possibility of historical research or explanations of everything through logical and prolonged cause-and-effect relationships. Here, we won't delve into the potential (a)causality of all events but attempt to provide a more complex picture of events and potential convergent elements that existed back then and pulled the nature of the Yugoslav political system at the time toward the center. We do not intend to offer answers, especially not definitive answers, to why centrifugal forces eventually prevailed.

On the other hand, besides all liberal and conservative labels, we assume that all those who belonged to the League of Communists, even the majority of those who did not but had a share in the contemporary public space, looked at the world through the prism of socialism. In that context, socialism did not function as an ideology or tendency but as a basic frame of reference, a social and mental (cultural) process that was almost taken for granted, as Miroslav Krleža once stated: "Socialism is not a program but history being realized" (interview for *Politika*, January 1, 2, and 3, 1967) (Štajduhar 1993: 368).

"Liberal Conservatives" and "Conservative Liberals"

In his existential-absurdist novel *Ferdydurke* (published in 1937), Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz warned about a crucial change that occurred in the 20th century. Until that point, human society was distinctly divided into two factions: those advocating for the status quo and those advocating for change. However, an unprecedented historical acceleration rendered this division obsolete. History began moving beneath people's feet. Suddenly, both the status quo and change embodied movement. It became conceivable to be simultaneously conservative and progressive.

This implied that, even within the political sphere, liberals and conservatives could converge. Merely stating that some advocated for change and progress while others opposed it was no longer sufficient (Proch et. al. 2019: 2–3).

However, the nature of human thoughts and ideas perpetually seduces towards divergence, division, and segregation, the need to distinguish, on any basis. How did this look in the context of Yugoslav politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s?

In the early 1970s, Latinka Perović (secretary of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia, 1968-1972) explained to Belgrade journalists that the League of Communists had become so "generationally differentiated" that between these generations, "whole worlds exist" (Bešlin, Žarković 2021: 793).

In a speech at the extended session of the Belgrade University Council on December 9, 1970 (later published under the title "The Identity of Serbia"), Nikezić succinctly summarized his blend of conservative-liberal views. The national question was an opportunity for him to ask: "[W]hether everyone will need a party, national, or local visa, or will a person be valued as much as they contribute to society" (Nikezić 2003: 202). It was an individual-focused

perspective. Also, one of the fundamental premises that characterized these Serbian liberals was their opposition to traditional equating Serbia with Yugoslavia and the belief that Serbia had its own politics, identity, and interests (*ibid.*: 203).

However, it turns out that he did not harbor illusions about any historical shortcuts in social development: “[O]ur limitations in most areas now are more a matter of development, of level, than of institutions and regulations. There are tons of these regulations, and also the same number of institutional solutions” (*ibid.*: 206). So, despite the nominal desire to overcome tradition, the recognition that it cannot be defeated by institutional reorganizations and legal paragraphs falls under a conservative reflex.

Something similar was said earlier, at the Commission for Interethnic Relations meeting in January 1969, regarding the shift of the political decision-making focus, questioning: “[I]s this a bit too simplified, will everything disappear with the new Constitution, with these amendments?” (AJ, A.CK SKJ, XXII-IA-K.4/9: 25.).

On the other hand, in Zagreb (capital of the second biggest Yugoslav republic of Croatia) during those days and years, the prevailing sentiment could have been somewhat different. In the early 1970s, a delegation from the Italian Communist Party (PCI) visited Yugoslavia, including Zagreb and Belgrade. On this occasion, they met with both younger figures (Savka Dabčević-Kučar, Miko Tripalo, Pero Pirker) and older politicians (Vladimir Bakarić, Edvard Kardelj, Veljko Vlahović). A comprehensive account of these meetings was provided by the Italian communist Giancarlo Pajetta, generally well-informed observer of Yugoslav affairs. He says he encountered a vibrant atmosphere in Yugoslavia, but observes that, in terms of “loudness and polemical tone”, the older politicians did not differ from the younger ones. On the contrary, nominal conservatives such as Kardelj and Bakarić were actively engaged in the process of constitutional reforms aimed at further decentralization and democratization of the Yugoslav state and society (APC, FG, Esteri 800. (Yugoslavia), 1971: 1).

However, Pajetta emphasizes being particularly struck by the sharpness of Pero Pirker and the exaltation of Savka Dabčević-Kučar. Dabčević-Kučar addressed the generally inadequate degree of reforms in contemporary socialist countries. Specifically, she expressed concern that they should not be complacent with a situation in which there is a perception that nothing more was accomplished but “the chain has loosened, and the collar no longer tightens as much”. She argued that socialism must once again become desirable, even in the most developed capitalist countries. According to her, Yugoslavs had regained faith in individual freedom but had also realized that institutional solutions lagged behind social development (*ibid.*: 8).

This last part represents almost a complete contrast to the views of their Serbian counterparts and politically aligned figures of the same generation. The latter argued that, although solutions may appear excellent on paper, they do not automatically translate into a change in social reality. Clearly, the Croatian leadership was then in a state of almost revolutionary sentiment. At the

same time, not only Marko Nikezić and Latinka Perović but also personalities like Mirko Tepavac, a politician from the autonomous province of Vojvodina (who served as the assistant minister of foreign affairs until 1969 and as the minister of foreign affairs of Yugoslavia from 1969 to 1972), asserted that certain issues, such as the national question, could never be conclusively resolved, remaining perpetual: "In fact, there is no way for it to be finally resolved in the sense that a set of measures and achieved changes is declared as a state of complete resolution of this problem, after which it would no longer reappear".²

In this regard, were Serbian liberals perhaps more inclined toward conservatism, exhibiting greater skepticism than their counterparts in Croatia, especially through the conviction that socialist self-management and constitutional changes would not magically solve deeply rooted societal problems? Yugoslavia, in its political leadership, was otherwise torn between two almost archetypal motives: the desire to base itself as a complex state on the principles of moderation, balancing, caution, and conciliation and, on the other hand, to ensure some permanent, principled solutions through rational legislation. One of the main architects of this Yugoslav constitutional-legal laboratory was above mentioned Edvard Kardelj, who, in maneuvering between these two principles, seemed to want to simultaneously be both Plato (searching for the formula to impose order and structure, as in his *Republic*) and Aristotle (harmony of interactions, accepting reality as it is). Ultimately, we can say, in the national sense, Yugoslav communists generally behaved more like Aristotle, and in the social sense, like Plato.

Also, Nikezić regarded the enduring relationship between the ruling party and the intelligentsia with a rather detached perspective: "Personally, I don't believe it will ever change completely. Regarding the workers' movement, especially the communist parties, this segment of the intelligentsia, unlike the technical part, is much more inclined towards radical movements. In socialist countries, if we look at what happened, not the impressions but the facts confirmed by history, for a while, they are apologists, and afterward, they are mostly in opposition" (Nikezić 2003: 207). Here, he even admits that this oppositional intelligentsia is inclined towards the new (radical), while those in the League of Communists, due to the nature of their position, lean towards maintaining the old. Yet, this was part of the overall dynamics of the 20th century where it was unclear what was new, what was old, or one could simultaneously be for both the old and the new.

Ultimately, he defined himself as a "revolutionary democrat", wherein "revolutionary" could be interpreted as a link to the party's history and revolution - again, a conservative reflex, and "democratic" indicating a preference for evolutionary changes. Undoubtedly, the leading figures of the Serbian leadership, who were oriented towards reform and were in contrast with much of the tradition and the "mentality of the milieu", were not inclined towards repression and authoritarianism personified in the monolithic and mass Party

2 „Samoupravnost i nacionalno pitanje“, *Borba*, 20.1.1969.: 4.

(Bešlin, Žarković 2021: 799; Bešlin 2022: 313). But of course, just because they were considered liberal, it doesn't mean that, at least for a time, they didn't genuinely rule and did everything to push forward their ideas and visions.

Later, in early 1972, during a meeting with directors and chief editors of newspapers, radio, and television, Nikezić would vary his thesis, actually his skepticism, about the impossibilities of democracy in underdeveloped conditions: "Persistently continuing the self-management and democratic course, we must realistically assess the possibilities of democracy in Yugoslavia, possibilities that can only grow with industrialization. In our revolution, its plebeian character is certainly its driving force. But, for democracy, in addition to that, culture is needed. It requires more than explosions" (Nikezić 2003: 247).

He then expressed the essence of the problem: "There were talks that we don't have theoretical answers. There is no straightforward answer – to categorize everything as progressive or conservative. First, it's very complex. [...] Additionally, here, the national question enters obliquely and diagonally cuts across all our social problems. I won't say it changes them fundamentally, but it certainly makes them even more complex" (ibid.: 246). Nationalism, therefore, isn't just one of the ideas or ideologies; it is like a diagonal that cuts across everything, with ideologies as vertical, and the reality of life and the flow of time as a horizontal line.

Consequently, for Nikezić, conservatism, provisionally speaking, was simply: looking back and embellishing the past and backwardness (ibid.: 260). This should be partially read as self-criticism because, in relation to its (embellished) recent past, communism could then be considered a conservative order. However, even nominal opponents of the "liberal course", members of the older generation of Serbian communists like Petar Stambolić and Draža Marković, thought similarly.

Draža Marković noted in his diary: "I don't have the strength to take responsibility for everything we're entering into, but I also don't want to remain indifferent to what I've lived for and fought for. I am determined to the end. I am not a conservative, and I cannot become one. However, I don't agree with unrealistic daydreaming and abstract, schematic, dogmatic democratization" (Marković 1987 (1): 98). Later he adds: "As dangerous and harmful as liberalism is, in our conditions of still relative backwardness, conservative bureaucracy, primitive dogmatism, is equally dangerous" (ibid. (2): 163.).

This is a somewhat elitist shared position between Nikezić and Marković. In outcomes, it stems from conservatism. On the other hand, Draža Marković was aware that from another perspective, he himself could be considered a liberal. After the showdown with the liberals in 1972, he said: "Had I not been one of the key figures in the clarifications at the time, and in a way an introductory speaker in the meeting with Tito, which had significant political weight in the first 'post-liberal' period, the dogmatists from Vojvodina would have included me in the list of 'liberals'" (Đekić 1990: 240).

Reportedly, Petar Stambolić defended the liberals for a long time, even in front of Tito: "Comrade Tito, apart from the people you have in these republics

and this leadership, the rest are nothing but bureaucratic rags and leftovers" (Glišić 2010: 113).

Yet, this simultaneous distancing from both "liberalism" and "conservatism" reminds one of the politics of the complex center, which is mostly inclined towards the rhetoric of "neither this nor that" and which takes into account the enduring human imperfection that prevents any utopianism and settles for possible approximations (Soltan 2002: 22). So, the formula was "neither liberalism nor conservatism", negative determination instead of the reverse, "both conservatism and liberalism", which would be closer to what Leszek Kołakowski later, in the late 1970s, termed "liberal-conservative socialism".³ This was the formula for a kind of centrism.

But where did Kołakowski get that from? Possibly, these tendencies, which implicitly or explicitly always circulated in the political-ideological space, can be seen as a kind of deeper Central European reflex, in which a blend of ideological and geopolitical center arises. When carefully examined, all the things Yugoslavia prided itself on – self-determination of nations, federalism, self-management (derived from the idea of self-government), and non-alignment (neutrality) – were mostly Central European concepts, as a response to internal complexity and pretensions from both the East and the West (Johnson 1996: 10; Mark et. al. 2019: 5–8). However, during the period when Central Europe, as part of the Eastern Bloc, was "kidnapped" (Milan Kundera), Yugoslavia could be considered, if not small Europe, at least small Central Europe, a kind of reserve position of Central Europe, a continuation of the hope that was once placed in the Habsburg Monarchy or its transformation into some Danube-Adriatic-Balkan federation, where nations had, to begin with, their cultural and economic self-government. These ideas found their continuation in Austromarxism, then in the Second and Half-International (the so-called Vienna or centrist International), but they didn't stop there; they evolved both politically and later geopolitically. Austromarxism ultimately influenced ideas about the self-determination of nations in both the Wilsonian and Leninist variants (Balikić 2020: 197–198).

The political development of Yugoslav communists, who were fundamentally Leninists, Bolsheviks, and children of the Third International, shifting towards ideas they had previously rejected, can be illustrated through the example of the

3 Friszke, Koczanowicz, Internet. Here is how Polish historian Andrzej Friszke summarized the influence of Kołakowski's text: „His article 'How to Be a Conservative-Liberal-Socialist', published in the late 70s, was somehow humorous but shaped the way of thinking of my generation. This is more or less how we all thought at the time. Those three components of our views were kept in balance, none of them had a priority. I mean, of course, there were people who were more liberal and those who were more socialist, but this balance was somehow present. Kołakowski has shown that those views and values are not mutually exclusive. He also advocated that recognising all of those elements can prevent us from treating any one of them as an absolute, as a dogma. This text speaks for the dominant intellectual current of the 70s, the 80s and the 90s, and *Gazeta Wyborcza* was one of the mediums for those ideas”.

relationship between the Slovenes Henrik Tuma and Edvard Kardelj. Henrik Tuma, was a member of the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party as early as 1908 (founded in Slovenia and emerged as a breakaway from the Social Democratic Party of Austria). After World War I, he was no longer politically active but continued to write from the position of left-wing socialism, defending young Slovene communists, etc. However, in the early 1920s, he rejected Russian communism as a model and advocated for its own path to socialism.⁴ Kardelj later criticized him in his *Razvoj slovenačkog nacionalnog pitanja* (1937), mainly due to Austromarxist and social democratic views on the national question as purely a matter of cultural autonomy (Kardelj 1979: 75–76). Nevertheless, the 1948 break with Moscow represented a partial vindication of Tuma's early views and social democracy in general, which was considered reactionary by the communists. In the decades after the late 1940s, geopolitical centrism in Yugoslavia (called the Non-Aligned Movement), as well as its separate internal (self-management) path, became subjects of fundamental agreement, and consensus. The space of conflict, in this center, was initially methodological, eventually evolving into conceptual conflicts.

It would be oversimplified to say that this smaller, narrower center (the older generation) pragmatically based itself on balancing interests, balancing power relations, while the younger center believed that things could still be resolved on a principled basis. In reality, both sides combined both principles, with the crucial difference being that the younger generation of liberals wanted to govern without resorting to repression. However, liberalism penetrated Yugoslavia for other reasons as well. As Vladimir Gligorov said: "Various experiences of socialist injustice led the citizens of Yugoslavia, especially intellectuals, to discover liberal principles. The Yugoslav system (self-management) did not a priori reject pluralism and the market, and part of the defense of that system relied on essentially liberal arguments" (Gligorov 2014: 15).

The basic political trope is that "left" and "right" are polar opposites, and their agendas always exclude each other. According to this logic, the left always seeks more equality and economic redistribution, and the right seeks more freedom, a smaller bureaucratic apparatus, privatization, etc. This remains the case when social sciences use the language of technical rigidity and definitionism. As Samuel T. Coleridge once said: "A dull mind distinguishes things only by dividing them". However, social and humanistic sciences, through their rigidity, actually manipulate all the elementary facts of human psychology (and even biology), encouraging all artificial compartmentalizations in both the present and the past (Alvesson et. al. 2017). After all, the human biological and psychological foundation does not know the concepts of "left" and "right", "liberal" and "conservative", "progressive" and "regressive". This, of course, does not mean that society and culture do not cause and bear the consequences of such divisions, but it also means that if we approach them only structurally and in

4 A more comprehensive biography of Henrik Tuma (by Dušan Kermavner) in *Slovenski biografski leksikon* at: <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi732812/>

a purely constructivist manner, we can miss some important facts and possibilities related to human responses to crises, bridging gaps, and converging between such constructed positions (Bakker et. al. 2020: 613–612).

The implications of this can be much broader than just situationist ones, those that by the nature of things and the power relationships of the ruling political party, over time, necessarily approach the center, something akin to the median voter theorem (Downs 1957). In summary, while the traditional median voter theorem might not directly apply in non-liberal societies with limited political competition, the underlying principle of strategic positioning in response to public sentiment can still be relevant, although in different and often more complex ways. Yugoslavia, perhaps with its “market socialism”, was a good testing ground for such a theorem. They wanted to tread the middle path. However, to preserve this middle path, a dose of conservatism as a reflex was necessary, although not necessarily conservatism as an ideology (Okutan 2013: 128). There was no definitive answer to the question of what to utilize more on the path of reform and problem-solving: accumulated experience or the power of rational solutions? In the long term, communists were not conservatives, but in the short term, within their own era, as a kind of historical microcosm in which everything, the beginning, the process, and the end, were compressed, they leaned towards conservatism. They increasingly relied on their historical experience rather than ideology and abstract ideas generated by reason. All generations that survived World War II could not extinguish the conservative thread within them because they were faced with potential outcomes of human nature and actions that did not suggest that every progress was solely and exclusively a positive thing. Much later, Latinka Perović summarized it like this: “[...] [B]ut, you know, they were mature people and what I deeply respected about them - they knew the people and were very cautious. Now it will be said that their conservatism was largely motivated by their self-love. But they also feared what could come out of that people. [...] It’s not just a matter of political will, how to motivate that people to move, to go towards something better, more civilized” (Milosavljević 2010: 39–40).

Yugoslav communists, generally speaking, relied on an almost Burkean principle (Edmund Burke), according to which a social organism seeks change like any natural organism, but preferably so that individual organs and the whole organism develop harmoniously. The nature of power and rulers is such that they never favor sudden changes but gradual reforms (Okutan 2013: 132). So, Yugoslav reforms meant a constant attempt to harmonize individual organs (e.g., republics) and the entire organism.

The Common Fate of Communist Liberals and Conservatives

Marko Nikezić and Latinka Perović, as leading Serbian communists during the brief period from 1968 to 1972, shared the belief that Yugoslavia belonged to everyone, that it was not just an extension of Serbia, and that, at least for the time being, it represented the common interest of all its components. However, during

discussions within various bodies and committees within the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia regarding interethnic relations, one could sense their maneuvering between a broader democratic and more skeptical, even elitist approach. During one of the discussions in the Commission of the CC LCY for interethnic and interrepublic relations in January 1969, Perović expressed her intolerance towards the usual populist dramatization in party documents. For example, when a paragraph in the document related to the fight against political opponents read, “[...] the League of Communists calls on all organizations and all its members to be vigilant and uncover attempts, tendencies [...]” she would add, “I think we need to relieve the Party of some obligations that should be the responsibility of the security service” (AJ, A.CK SKJ, XXIII A-K.4/9: 8). Such a stance, suggesting that certain matters should be returned to institutions and not necessarily managed by party committees, was enough to label them as liberals. She also demanded that parts mentioning “reactionary and conservative forces” be removed, leaving only “nationalistic and chauvinistic” elements (ibid.: 53). In the end, she somewhat elitistically concluded: “We had principles and good policies regarding national relations, but a relatively small number of communists understood these policies” (ibid.: 82).

Significantly, Nikezić was also against “dogmatic democratic” formulations, such as those stating “that a community cannot survive, let alone develop successfully, without complete equality of all nations and nationalities, etc.” (ibid.: 20).

His rhetorical strategy, however, often went in a different direction. He could express the most revolutionary ideas but aimed to bring them back to reality: “Precisely because our ambitions are so great in terms of social transformation, we should say that we have inherited age-old antagonisms [...] civilization, cultural, national [...]. For example, Serbs and Albanians have been competing for centuries, and suddenly we accept the entire bill. We need to uproot these roots, bear the consequences; in a historically short period, we need to resolve the issue of relationships where almost all tradition is against us” (ibid.: 21). This articulation of views is significant not because Nikezić pretended to support change while in a defeatist manner invoking centuries-old traditions that prevent it, but because he consciously or unconsciously posed a dilemma: either effect almost instantaneous change in consciousness or the alternative is withdrawal from a society that shows neither the desire nor the capacity for such change. Thus, this perspective is both *realpolitik* and utopian, negating itself, and condemning itself to failure and isolation. His words could be perceived as mere deception, empty words, or equivocation, although his desire for change was genuine and authentic.

A similar genesis is found in his attitude towards Yugoslavia: “Perhaps I am a statist, perhaps I am wrong, but right now I do not see the disintegration of Yugoslavia as something that would be realistic, let alone something progressive or serving the interests of any of its nation” (ibid.: 23). The key here might be the word “now”, suggesting a stance towards Yugoslavia not based on some fraternal internationalism but rather on *realpolitik* because “we are small and

struggling for survival [...] and now you will start to slice up Yugoslavia like salami and want to maintain the independence and sovereignty of each nation. So, it doesn't seem realistic [...]" (ibid.: 24).

The thing with the Yugoslav doctrine was that from the start, it was considered *per se* as something that had disrupted the original communist (Soviet) doctrine, raising difficult questions and offering its answers. This led to the formation of a counter-doctrine that created its own dogmas, unquestionable beliefs, and boundaries. After that, creating an alternative within this alternative became challenging.

According to some viewpoints, the Serbian and Croatian reformist leaderships couldn't agree because they lacked awareness that they represented a political alternative. They couldn't admit to themselves that they were an alternative (Lakićević 2011: 137). Perhaps, this means that genuine alternatives could never have existed. There could only have been another vision of the center, conceptually different from figures like Draža Marković, Edvard Kardelj, Vladimir Bakarić, and even Tito himself. Such balancing led to a form of centrism, perhaps not consciously explicit but where you attempted to achieve a creative blend of certain moderation and the extremism inherent in your origins as a revolutionary authority, where you couldn't escape your own shadow.

This interplay of light and shadow manifested not just between people but also within the individuals. One could say that, at one point in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were two kinds of (communist) liberals: monologue liberals (actually liberal conservatives) like Edvard Kardelj, Vladimir Bakarić, and Draža Marković, who were nominally liberal but only for themselves, with a considerable reluctance to share that liberalism with others, fearing what others might do with that freedom. Therefore, *selfish* liberals seemed destined to end up in conservatism. Serbian liberals (Marko Nikezić, Latinka Perović, Koča Popović, etc.) were examples of dialogical liberalism (conservative liberalism). However, almost paradoxically, any kind of moderation within the Yugoslav social(ist) alternative, which by default persisted on the principle of movement, divergence, new paths, etc., could also be perceived as a weakness, a mirror image of subversiveness. In Yugoslavia, both liberals and conservatives, as they couldn't agree on stability, perpetuated change. Ultimately, the only one who could retain the privileged role of stabilizer was Josip Broz Tito. He remained the only Yugoslav ("a Yugoslav by vocation", as he once expressed) and the only centrist (at least as the center of power), while all others had to be defined differently, struggling with various labels: nationalist, unitarist, conservative, liberal, progressive, dogmatic, etc. Such Tito's position can also be linked to his Bolshevik genesis and, in general, the Soviet model of establishing intra-party opponents along a similar model: rightists, leftists, Trotskyists, anarchists. However, all these categories were fluid and had their developmental dynamics that depended on the current or accidental circumstances in which the regime found itself.

Being an equilibrist didn't help others, and it couldn't preserve their political positions. Tito himself admitted this, saying about Serbian liberals just

before their removal: “I must admit that I was surprised how they maintained balance in Serbia during the Croatian movement” (Milosavljević 2010: 164). But they weren’t rewarded for it.

The question remains whether Yugoslavia was inherently defined as a community and state where the *status quo* was possible and desirable. Certainly not ideologically, but politically it was. Kardelj expressed this essence at that time when Ljubomir Veljković, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Ekonomsko-politika*, asked him why there were accusations of anarcholiberalism, technocracy, etc., when it was known that this wasn’t true. Kardelj replied: “You know what, what you advocate and popularize leaves no room for us. What are we supposed to do within that”, referring, of course, to the role of the Party (Lakićević 2011: 44). Such an approach didn’t drastically differ from the rest of the Eastern Bloc. Kolakowski summed it up best in 1966. in his speech at Warsaw University, marking the tenth anniversary of the 1956 events, provocatively stating that it might not be as bad as it was before 1956, but, at the same time, it was not as bad only because the authorities didn’t want it to be that bad – not because some kind of institutional safety valves were put in place (Friszke, Koczanowicz, Internet).

In the same year (1966), Desimir Tošić, a Yugoslav emigrant in London, wondered whether Bakarić and Kardelj were for real liberalization or for the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Lakićević 2020: 334). It did not occur to him to put the conjunction *and* instead of the conjunction *or*.

The problem was that all major personnel and political changes during socialist Yugoslavia were always interpreted as defeats. The dismissal of Aleksandar Ranković in 1966 was a defeat for conservatives and Serbs, the removal of the Croatian leadership in 1971 was a defeat for reformists and Croatia, and the replacement of Serbian liberals in 1972 was a defeat for liberalism and Serbia, etc. In reality, these were defeats not just for certain currents, republics, or nations but above all of political fusionism. Fusionists were pushed to the margins. The voices of fusion could only be heard in opposition. For example, a great fusionist was Milovan Đilas, then a dissident, who was opposed to multi-party systems but said that democratic forces should operate within the League of Communists (ibid.: 351). Nobody within the Party could take this seriously, possibly considering it a clandestine maneuver similar to the one in the 1950s when Đilas was dismissed under the accusation of introducing multi-party systems through the back door.

Therefore, the task of fusion was transferred to the next generation, which ultimately resulted in a toxic convergence – in the form of Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević.

In the latter half of the 1980s, Milošević finally dealt with the generation of Serbian communists epitomized by Draža Marković, Petar Stambolić, and Stambolić’s nephew Ivan Stambolić, with whom he had been closely associated. The slogan that Serbian liberals had given space to conservatives who later beheaded them came back as a boomerang. Now, the young and seemingly technocratic generation led by the relatively young Slobodan Milošević dismissed them.

Certainly, the old generation of recentralizers shared with Milošević a general critique of "statism" at the republican and provincial levels, demands for the restoration of the diminished statehood of SR Serbia and its unsustainable legal and political status, along with criticism of the principle of consensus in decision-making at the Yugoslav level. However, they never advocated for the violent imposition of solutions; instead, they wanted decisions to be accepted by everyone, even if it meant accepting the principle of outvoting, which they supported (Miletić, internet; Kamberović et al. 2021: 320–328).

On the other hand, the irony of political fate is that some of those who had been considered dogmatists since the 1970s and hadn't contributed to bridging the gap between conflicting factions spent a long time trying to coexist with Milošević's new and more aggressive syncretism in the late 1980s. One such figure in the Yugoslav leadership was the Croatian politician Stipe Šušteršič.

Šušteršič and his pamphlet *Prodor tudih ideologija* (1973) are exemplary case of reflexive conservatism, even with elements of a more coherent ideological position of conservatism. In this text, Šušteršič attacked practically everything a conservative could attack: "technocrats" and the "technical civilization", "statism", "neo-Stalinism", which he termed political conservatism, and "liberal democracy" (Šušteršič 1973: 7–13). He was, of course, against "nationalism" too, as he saw it as a toxic combination of massiveness and bureaucratism. He introduced a distinction between "old" (traditionalist) and "new" bureaucratic nationalism, although the only apparent difference among them was that the old nationalists, whether they were members of the traditionalist intelligentsia or defectors from the revolution and the Party, were identified and removed from positions of power, while some "new" ones might still exist in the power structures (ibid.: 15). From this the conclusion can arise that the only alternative could have been a sort of socialist ideological aristocracy, a Party *juste milieu*. Nominally, Šušteršič spoke of the revolutionary nature of the League of Communists and the reactionariness of all others, but historically, it was evident that the League of Communists was for conservation, gradual evolution, while all others were for more dramatic changes. Šušteršič concluded: "The League of Communists paid dearly for neglecting the theoretical, ideological offensive against nationalist ideology in the past period and for not conducting it decisively, openly, and persuasively in all nations and environments. It seems that this weakness has not yet been overcome today" (ibid.: 15–16). Obviously, Yugoslav communist, at that point, fought that battle more through historical experience, and nationalists, in the meantime, had exploited dominant ideology for their purposes. Partially, an attempt was made to counter this with a kind of Vladimir Bakarić's concept of the Croatian socialist self-managing nation, which Šušteršič also supported, and which would ultimately depoliticize and relocate national identity into the sphere of private life (Đurašković 2022: 1113, 1124–1125). However, the chances that such a self-managing nation would dissolve inter-ethnic conflicts through a sort of depoliticization were similar to those of the socio-political clash of ideas and concepts dissipating into what Edvard Kardelj later termed the "pluralism of self-management interests",

intended to be a surrogate for a multi-party system. Both concepts, intricately developed from the 1960s, experienced defeat by the end of the 1980s.

The pattern of changes in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and early 1970s, roughly speaking, was that the broadest front of moderate reformers (initially comprising both older and younger generations) wanted to mobilize the masses against the old dogmatism (Constitution of 1963, economic reform of 1965, the removal of Aleksandar Ranković, etc.). Then these masses, in some places (such as Croatia), further propelled reformers by seeking their own revolutionary moment. Due to this “dramatic dialectical dance” reformers were divided again into conservatives and those who wanted to continue and perpetuate changes, even at the cost of eventually losing control over the masses. It’s essential to note that at that time, both leftists (Praxis) and liberals (like some kind of “red aristocracy”) and more conservative communists shared skepticism towards the masses. It seemed that only the syncretic Croatian leadership (*proljećari*) was in favor of a mass movement. However, it was more logical to expect an agreement between such elitist Serbian and populist Croatian leadership, as, in the old Yugoslav tradition, only interethnic agreements, especially Croatian-Serbian ones, had weight and calmed tensions. But in the given situation, it would be more rational to expect liberals and conservatives within one republic to agree (Marko Nikezić and Draža Marković). The downfall of the Croatian Spring at the end of 1971 and the removal of liberals in 1972 were, in fact, Tito’s ironic version of this unattained historical agreement, only instead of following the principle of “both-and”, in his organization, it happened in the manner of “neither-nor”.

Consequently, Nikezić’s assertion that only Croatian communists themselves and their democratic course “can beat the nationalists in Croatia and anywhere among us”, and that bureaucratic centralism and conservatism could never achieve this, was seen as clear support for the accused Croatian leadership (Bešlin, Žarković 2021: 816). It was both a principled and tactical statement, understandable in the context of an all-out (*en bloc*) confrontation with part of the Croatian leadership. Still, it revealed the strategic inconsistency and unconvincing nature of Serbian and Yugoslav communists, as it must have been evident that nationalism couldn’t be defeated by democracy, especially considering that they were nearly synonymous concepts. A certain fuse was needed, sort of a safety valve, preferably a conservative-liberal one. This fuse was never established. The centrist position was nominally denied but continued through other means. Serbian liberals went into historical isolation, and conservatives or recentralizers (in this context, this term can be understood in multiple ways) remained halfway. So finally, they ended up the way political Centers usually do, ever since the time of the French Revolution and the National Assembly: “Notably, those in the middle or the center, who did not make up their mind one way or the other, were called ‘the swamp’. It is vital to remember that both those of the left and those of the right were nationalists” (Greenfeld 2019: 53).

Milošević’s “Antibureaucratic Revolution” in the late 1980s was precisely presented as a typical reckoning with this “swamp”. But at that moment, it was

only once again confirmed that revolutions, whether genuinely historical (tragic) or merely farcical, were essentially just reevaluations of the societal value system. Every revolution (and "revolution") led to the need for some new future revolution, which would be declared both completed and incomplete. This seemed to be the Serbian and Yugoslav "closing of the circle".

Conclusion

The political upheavals that Yugoslavia experienced in the late 1960s and early 1970s confirmed their far-reaching consequences only two decades later in the war and dissolution of the country. The existence of differences regarding the state and social structure of Yugoslavia was not specific to that period alone; it was something that characterized the Yugoslav community from its very beginning, including the first Yugoslavia from 1918. However, one might question whether it's a mistake to put everything on the same plane of continuity. Does not history, political life, and even human life consist of many separate moments, and discontinuities, which we only later put into perspective and give them a coherent explanation? As Marko Nikezić used to say: "Participating in movements, a man does not know exactly what he is participating in" (Nikezić 2003: 245). The other part of that duo, Latinka Perović, in the decades that followed the split of 1971-72, would be more definitive in her assessments. Perhaps the nature of her historiographical profession, to which she dedicated herself after her political resignation, directed her towards seeking clearer cause-and-effect relationships, establishing continuity, etc. In such a causal perspective, fragmentation and division must first exist, and only then can an inevitable conflict arise. But perhaps it's the other way around. An open conflict had to first occur for any awareness of fragmentation to arise at all. To use a parable, a young and healthy organism is never aware of its individual parts; it functions as a more or less harmonious whole. Only with time and years, when individual organs or joints begin to manifest themselves through sensations of pain or stiffness, does a real awareness of their existence emerge. However, these fragmentary discomforts actually say something about the state of the entire organism. Conflict, therefore, in a way, was necessary for the younger generation in Yugoslav politics to emerge, and for the older generation to prove that they still exist and are relevant. Fragments (reformist currents in republican leaderships) that wanted (or could) become the center were doomed to perish. The center (Josip Broz Tito) that they wanted to turn into a fragment resisted. To confirm himself as the center, he needed to take control and restore coherence, precisely through a conflict with the fragments. He did not realize that he himself was acting from a position of a fragment. Every "new course" proclaimed from then until the dissolution of Yugoslavia (or even later) represented an attempt to stretch the original utopianism that danced on the edge (or over the edge) of tyranny, a combination of forcing particularities and imposing various kinds of "liberation" (class, national, religious, civil, etc.). These two poles, universality and particularity, seemed no

longer reconcilable. A balanced, so-called common-sense approach seemed to be out of trend. Such a social and political constellation had to spill over into the fields of science, thought and analysis, which themselves followed the internal fragmentation on one side and the final, often rigid, even moral and idealistic interpretations of the nearer and further past on the other side. Instead, it is hoped that, to achieve a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of political attitudes and behaviors, researchers can adopt more flexible and critically reflective methods when studying political ideologies and behaviors, both in the past and present.

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Marino Badurina

Ko su bili liberali i konzervativci u Jugoslaviji krajem 1960-ih i početkom 1970-ih? Sukob između centrističkih frakcija

Apstrakt

Članak dovodi u pitanje konvencionalne političke klasifikacije, tvrdeći da stvarni politički događaji izmiču pojednostavljenim oznakama, što zbog pragmatičnih faktora, što zbog unutrašnjih i spoljnih uticaja. U jugoslavenskom kontekstu kasnih 1960-ih i početkom 1970-ih, pojmovi „konzervativizam“ i „liberalizam“ bili su kompleksni, uslovljeni hladnoratovskim dinamikama i unutarpartijskim borbama. Takođe, članak ističe povezanu prirodu nacionalizma i socijalizma, sugerišući da se čak i unutar okvira vladajućih komunizama razvijao kolektivistički etnički nacionalizam. Bavi se složenom naravi liberalno-konzervativnih odnosa (uglavnom u Srbiji, s nekim osvrtima i na druge republike) tokom ovog razdoblja, ističući zamagljene granice između tih oznaka. Članak se suzdržava od definitivnih odgovora, predstavljajući kompleksnu sliku događaja, naglašavajući višeslojnu prirodu povesne uzročnosti i ljudskog identiteta unutar socijalističkog okvira. Članak raspravlja o svojevrsnom političkom centrizmu koji se pojavio, odražavajući ne samo jedinstveni jugoslavenski položaj, već moguće i dublji srednjoevropski refleks.

Ključne reči: nacionalizam, demokratija, socijalizam, liberalizam, konzervativizam, Jugoslavija, centrizam.