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OSVRTI, PRIKAZI, RECENZIJE

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YUGOSLAVIA, THE STATE WHICH WITHERED AWAY*

Dejan Jović, *Jugoslavija, država koja je odumrla: uspon, kriza i pad Kardeljeve Jugoslavije (1974–1990)*, (Prometej, Zagreb, 2003), 531 pp., ISBN 953-6460-32-7 (hb), 165 Kuna (HRK); Serbian edition: *Jugoslavija, država koja je odumrla: uspon, kriza i pad Četvrtre Jugoslavije (1974-1990)*, (Samizdat B92, Beograd, 2003), 522 pp., ISBN 86-7963-174-4 (pb), 650 Dinars (YUD).

Yugoslavia, the State which Withered Away: The Rise, Crisis and Fall of Kardelj's Yugoslavia (1974–1990), I shall argue, offers a very well-argued and coherent explanation of the political processes that led to Yugoslavia's disintegration but not a conclusive answer to our question. The book – published in the same language both in Zagreb and in Bel-

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grade – tells the story of a failed attempt to impose the Marxist conception of the withering away of the state to a multinational society of former Yugoslavia.

According to the doctrine elaborated by Edvard Kardelj, Tito's second in command, the state, during the socialist transition, should, in all of its non-coercive functions, be replaced by associations of workers who were referred to as 'self-managing (or free) producers'. The two founding legal documents embodying this doctrine, the Yugoslav federal Constitution of 1974 and the Law on Associated Labour (1976) generated more than 5 million laws and regulations which were supposed to govern all aspects of public life in former Yugoslavia, both at the workplace and in the more traditional political sphere. More importantly, as Dejan Jović argues, this doctrine of socialist self-management shaped the ideological outlook of the Yugoslav communist elites well until the effective dissolution of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (the Yugoslav Communist Party), at its last and aborted extraordinary congress in January 1990.

But the book offers not only a story of a failed communist experiment, but also an explanation of the disintegration of the federal Yugoslav state. Its author, in the first chapter, examines and partially rejects eight competing explanations of the disintegration each of which postulate one of the following as the dominant or decisive causal factor in the disintegration: the economic crisis, ancient hatreds among the peoples of Yugoslavia, nationalism/nationalist ideologies, cultural differences among the peoples of Yugoslavia, changes in international politics (the end of the cold war), the role of individual political leaders (for example, Slobodan Milošević), the pre-modern character of the Yugoslav state (resembling an empire) and the peculiar structural and institutional character of the Yugoslav state. In his subtle and far-ranging analysis, Jović persuasively argues that all these factors, except the ancient hatreds, contributed to the disintegration of Yugoslavia but that none had been the decisive or dominant causal factor in this disintegration. Jović does not believe that a dominant causal factor type of explanation can always be offered in social sciences and argues that, in particular, no such explanation can be offered of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Instead, he is to offer a multi-factor explanation which incorporates both the subjective beliefs and actions of the principal political actors and the political and social context of their actions.

In the second chapter Jović outlines Kardelj's concept of Yugoslavia as 'a community of the common interests of free and independent peoples'; these interests were the common defence, common economic

policy and common economic interests and, most importantly, the 'building of socialism in the same way' (Jović, p. 138). Accordingly, the federal state apparatus in Yugoslavia was confined to the tasks of defence, foreign affairs and common economic policy while all other state functions were transferred from the federal state to the republics (federal units). Kardelj regarded these six federal units as states in the service of the working class of the national groups living in them. The federal republics, under Kardelj, become socialist nation-states. The federal state of Yugoslavia, according to Kardelj, could not perform the 'national' task and, if necessary, could be discarded.

In effect, Kardelj's doctrine allowed an almost unlimited autonomy to the communist leaders of each of the six republics. This is one reason, Jović argues in the third chapter, why almost all of them, including those of Serbia, endorsed the doctrine. However divided they were into factions, according to Jović, all Serbian communist leaders in post-1970s Yugoslavia were primarily loyal to the republic of Serbia and not to their national group, the Serbs, a large number of whom lived outside Serbia. In this they did not differ from the communist leaders in other republics. According to him, neither was Kardelj's doctrine imposed on the Serbian communist leaders nor, contrary to the post-1987 Milošević's accusations, did they betray Serb national interests (as they conceived them).

The first major challenge to Kardelj's doctrine, Jović explains in the fourth chapter, came from the severe economic crisis which, partly because of the sudden rise of world interest rates, Yugoslavia faced in the early 1980s. Fragmented into myriad 'organisations of associated labour' and divided into six separate and often competing economies based on the six federal units, the Yugoslav economy required a radical reform – including the centralization of the control of credit and of economic planning – if it was to overcome the crisis. Until 1989 the republics' communist leaders had refused to allow any such reform, fearing the loss of their autonomy and power; and, in spite of the rapidly falling standard of living, the workers, Jović maintains, feared such a radical reform as well.

The second major challenge to this doctrine, Jović explains in the fifth chapter, were the mass demonstrations as well as rioting of the Albanians in the province of Kosovo who in 1981 demanded the province become a federal republic, the seventh federal unit. Left without their paramount leader, Tito, who died in 1980, the communist leaders of all republics were united in rejecting the Kosovo Albanian demand and in condemning these demonstrations as counter-revolutionary. But there

was no unity in their views as to how to prevent and combat such radical challenges to the political system they inherited from Kardelj and Tito. Some argued that Kardelj's federal Constitution of 1974 needs to be modified and the political system reformed so as to stop the erosion of the powers of the federal state. Others rejected any major changes to the political system within which they enjoyed virtually unlimited power over their own federal units. According to Jović, from 1982 onwards the communist elite in Yugoslavia split into the two opposing groups, the defenders and the reformers of the Constitution. This split was along ideological and not ethnic or national lines: members of both groups were found in the communist elite of each republic. The reformists among the Serbian communist leaders, including Ivan Stambolić, demanded equal constitutional status of Serbia to other republics which would enable Serbia to re-establish the legislative control over its two provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina) which the Constitution of 1974 had in effect abolished. The defenders of the Constitution argued that no major change of any kind is necessary. In Jović's opinion, it was the conflict between the two ideologically based groups that ultimately split Yugoslavia in 1990 (p. 301).

The two opposed groups in the Yugoslav communist elite, Jović argues in the sixth chapter, in the mid-1980s started to seek support for their policies among the intelligentsia, including the dissident intellectuals and their sympathizers. By mid-1985 small groups of intellectual dissidents, in particular in Serbia and Slovenia, rejected Kardelj's and suggested alternative conceptions of Yugoslavia and of desirable political systems. Some Serbian dissidents claimed that Kardelj's doctrine is a betrayal of the communist concept of 'brotherhood and unity' of the Yugoslav peoples while others argued that its aim was to split the Serb nation in Yugoslavia into separate states and thus prevent its political unification. Jović believes that in their attempts to overcome the opposition of the defenders of the Constitution, the communist reformists allowed limited publicity to some of these alternative doctrines, often only in order to reject them publicly in the communist-controlled media. The message to the communist defenders of Kardelj's Constitution was that, unless they want to face the consequences of these dissident radical doctrines, they had better settle for a reform of the existing political system. This tactic had no effect and, as the impasse regarding the constitutional reform continued, the communist leaders appropriated some of the non-communist radical doctrines in a further—ultimately equally unsuccessful—attempt to intimidate their ideological opponents.

This was, according to Jović, what an impatient Serbian constitutional reformist, Slobodan Milošević, attempted to do in 1987. Facing a growing grassroots movement of Kosovo Serbs who were demanding

political action against the violence and abuses of power by Kosovo Albanians, Milošević, until then an otherwise undistinguished leader of the Serbian Communist Party, appropriated some of the rhetoric of dissident Serbian nationalism. This elicited an enthusiastic response among the Kosovo Serbs and their sympathizers and enabled Milošević and his faction to take control over their grassroots movement and to use it in Milošević's takeover of the leadership of the Serbian Communist Party. As Jović notes, Milošević and his faction relied not only on the rhetoric of Serb national pride and their historical superiority, but also on the communist revolutionary rhetoric: faced with the continuing unrest in and the emigration of the Serb population from Kosovo, Milošević was urging the Communist Party of Serbia to act quickly and decisively, using if necessarily, revolutionary, that is, non-institutional, means. In short, Milošević was also preaching a return to the communist revolutionary past. But he faced the opposition of the powerful established communist faction led by Ivan Stambolić which was backed by the huge patronage network of his uncle Petar Stambolić, one of the stalwarts of Tito's regime in Serbia. This 'institutionalist' faction stood for constitutionally approved means of change and reform and for institutional continuity. For reasons which are still not fully explored, Milošević's faction was able easily to remove the 'institutionalist' faction from power and to establish an activist and 'revolutionary' regime which, in late 1987, launched a massive propaganda campaign in support of its call for the unification of Serbia, that is, for the removal of the political and legislative autonomy of the two provinces. Through a series of mass rallies Milošević not only consolidated his grip on power in Serbia but emerged as a Serb national hero, fighting for the freedom of the Serbs from the oppression of non-Serbs and of Serb traitors. Having removed the defenders of the Constitution from power both in Vojvodina and Kosovo and established his control over the whole of Serbia, Milošević was able, in 1989, finally to reform the Constitution of Serbia if not of Yugoslavia. By removing the legislative autonomy of these two provinces by unilateral amendments to the Constitution of Serbia, he carried out a partial and rather belated reform of the kind the communist reformers of the Yugoslav Constitution had strived to achieve since 1982. Equally revolutionary was his support for the mass rallies in the republic of Montenegro which were from October 1988 aiming at the removal of the communist leadership in this republic and its replacement by his supporters. As it became clear that Milošević thus intended to extend his power beyond the borders of Serbia, the Slovenian communist leaders (who, as Jović points out, were until then favourably disposed to Milošević and his faction) publicly criticized the Serbian communist leadership for its

role in these demonstrations. The Serbian leaders responded with a thinly veiled threat that similar 'anti-bureaucratic' mass rallies may extend to Slovenia and that, consequently, the Slovenian leaders may be replaced in the same way that the Montenegrin ones eventually were.

As I shall suggest below, this was an empty threat: Milošević and his faction were never in a position to abet or organize such an action in Slovenia. Instead, in early 1989 they broke all relations with their Slovenian communist colleagues and, later, imposed an economic and police blockade on the republic of Slovenia.

In the seventh chapter, which covers the political developments in Slovenia, the author notes that already in the mid-1980s the Slovenian intellectual dissidents not only rejected any joint political action with Serbian dissidents within Yugoslavia but came to reject the Yugoslav federation as their common state. As the growing pressure of the constitutional reformists in Yugoslavia to centralize decision making in the federal state appeared to many Slovenians, including the communist elites, to threaten to transform them into a powerless minority in Yugoslavia, the influence of those intellectual dissidents on public opinion in Slovenia increased. Like Milošević and his faction in Serbia, the Slovenian communist leaders needed both to counter this pressure of their communist political opponents in Yugoslavia and the growing political influence of the alternative and dissident groups. Like Milošević and his faction in Serbia, for this purpose they appropriated dissident nationalist rhetoric and started to cooperate with the dissident groups in Slovenia in organizing mass protests against the alleged threats of the Yugoslav Army to take over control of Slovenia. The mass mobilization consolidated the power of the Slovenian communist leadership enabling it in 1989, as it had enabled Milošević, to unilaterally amend the Constitution of Slovenia; the amendments gave the Slovenian government the legal means of nullifying any Yugoslav federal law and government directives. Thus from the parties of the political vanguard of the working class, the communist parties of Serbia and Slovenia were transformed into populist and nationalist parties while their leaders, Milošević and Kučan, came to be popularly perceived as national and not as communist party leaders. Milošević's attempt, at the extraordinary congress of the Yugoslav Communist Party in January 1990, to reintroduce the revolutionary communist concept of democratic centralism in the Yugoslav Party organization was bound to be fail: the Slovenian Communist Party was, by then, no longer bound by any communist doctrine, least of all by democratic centralism. The Slovenian walkout from the Congress, Jović maintains, marked the end of Kardelj's or Fourth Yugoslavia: not being able to defend Kardelj's doctrine of Yugoslavia from

the constitutional reformists and, later, 'revolutionaries', the Slovenian communist leaders decided to leave Yugoslavia. This, Jović suggests, was, quite close to the spirit if not to the letter of Kardelj's doctrine (who was a Slovenian himself): a return of a centralized Yugoslav state, from the viewpoint of this doctrine, would have been historically retrogressive and, in comparison, the dissolution of Yugoslavia appeared a preferable if not necessarily much more progressive development.

In short, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Jović argues, should be explained, at least in part, as a result of the struggle of the two opposing elite groups, those of the reformers and those of the defenders of Kardelj's Constitution. Unable to prevail in the existing communist party institutions, the opposing communist leaders looked for support first among the dissident groups in their own republics – Slovenia and Serbia – and then among the mass of non-communist citizens. This turn to the dissidents and to the masses transformed the communist parties of Serbia and of Slovenia into nationalist parties ready to discard Yugoslavia as a state they shared. While Milošević never abandoned his commitment to Yugoslavia (however reduced it may be), already in early 1989 he was ready to exclude Slovenia from any Yugoslav state.

This does not mean, Jović states, that in battling their opponents the opposing two groups intended to dissolve Yugoslavia: their original intention was either to reform or to preserve Kardelj's conception of Yugoslavia. According to his explanation, the dissolution is a result of a long series of often unrelated actions of political actors who, in acting in this way, did not intend and did not anticipate that final result. The evidence Jović presents is most persuasive and the most comprehensive evidence presented in a scholarly work of this kind to date: not only a huge number of published sources, many of which rarely used before in scholarly discussions of Yugoslavia, but a large number of personal interviews he conducted with the principal political protagonists as well as unpublished material from the archives. This evidence points to a highly complex and multifaceted interaction of communist party elites first among themselves and then between these leaders and the emerging dissident 'counterelites', none of which makes the final result of these processes, the state dissolution, inevitable or in any sense preordained.

According to Jović's explanation, it was the continuing conflict over the reform of the political and economic system (established by Kardelj's doctrine) among the communist elites that prevented the emergence of any conception of Yugoslavia, acceptable to all the elites, which could replace the increasingly discredited Kardelj's doctrine. This, he su-

gests, was the first and most important causal factor in a series of such factors that led to the disintegration of the Yugoslav state.

But Jović's own evidence could be perhaps adduced in support of a somewhat different casual explanation. This explanation, similar to Jović's, assumes that Yugoslavia could have been held together only by a political consensus among its political elites. But this political consensus disappeared not because the opposing elite groups held different ideological views on Kardelj's Constitution (as Jović argues) but because one group—Milošević's faction—threatened to remove their opponents from power by revolutionary, that is, non-institutional, means. According to this explanation, the conflict between the defenders and the reformers of Kardelj's Constitution was not the most important factor in the destruction of the minimal political consensus required to keep Yugoslavia together. Milošević's revolutionary preaching and action (the 'anti-bureaucratic' mass rallies) went beyond the confines of the ongoing conflict of the communist elites over Kardelj's doctrine: in effect, he held that only revolutionary and unilateral action can remove from power the defenders of Kardelj's Constitution and all others who opposed his views. It was his revolutionary posture towards his opponents that finally destroyed the existing political consensus (which was already gravely undermined by the ongoing conflict) and prevented any other type of consensus from arising.

The reasons for this are quite obvious: once his call went out to remove from power the opponents of his centralizing conception of Yugoslavia by revolutionary action, the question for his opponents was no longer how to reach a consensus with him and his revolutionary group but how to defend their own grip on power from the revolutionaries. And he himself was not, at the time, after a consensus but after the removal of his opponents. Even if Milošević was somehow to retract his call to revolutionary action, issued first in October 1988 as a thinly veiled threat to the Slovenian leaders, his opponents would have had no reason to put any trust in a revolutionary as he showed himself to be. Paradoxically perhaps, it was not Milošević's nationalism that led his opponents in Yugoslavia to mistrust him—at the time they used the same.

As Jović points out, the Yugoslav federal army's general staff, faced with the disagreements in the Yugoslav Communist Party, was politically disoriented and proved incapable of acting on its own. This ruled out the use of the army—a largely conscript force—to take over power and hold Yugoslavia together by sheer force. kind of nationalist rhetoric as he did—but his revolutionary posture and rhetoric which was, indeed, threatening to the established communist elite.

Of course, to say that the dissolution of Yugoslavia was the final effect in the causal link which started with this call to revolutionary action in 1988 is not to claim that the dissolution was from then on inevitable. His call only ended the existing political consensus among the political leaders who were then in power in Yugoslavia. Other leaders and their factions who were not in power at the time – such as the Stambolić led faction – could have reached a political consensus of another kind. But short of a further change of leaders or factions in power – at least in Slovenia or in Serbia – there was, after 1988, little if any chance of reaching the required political consensus among the political leaders in Yugoslavia.

My explanation differs from Jović's in the ranking of the causal factors that both of us acknowledge: according to my explanation, Milošević's call or threat of revolutionary action against other elites was a more important or higher ranking causal factor than the continuing conflict among the political elites over Kardelj's doctrine, yet both factors were indeed causally necessary for the final effect, the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Jović's evidence in his book does not allow us to decide which of the two rankings is correct. For this reason his book does not appear to provide a conclusive answer to the question in our title. But the book seriously raises the question as to whether we shall ever get a conclusive answer, that is, whether there is a single causal explanation of the dissolution which offers the only correct ranking of the causal factors involved. The question of the correct ranking of the causal factors for the disintegration of Yugoslavia perhaps, as Jović suggests, cannot be settled within the framework of our contemporary social science.

Like Jović's, my explanation does not justify any attempt to assign personal responsibility for the dissolution of Yugoslavia to a single person or a single political faction or group. For, as Jović emphasizes, the dissolution of Yugoslavia was an effect of various actions which did not aim at achieving that effect. Neither Milošević nor his opponents in 1988 intended or even anticipated the dissolution that took place in 1990. Therefore, even if Milošević's call to revolutionary action caused other communist leaders to abandon any attempt to reach political consensus with him, from this it does not follow that he and his faction is the only group to be held responsible (or to be blamed) for the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Jović is certainly right to emphasize that all political actors in former Yugoslavia had a choice to act otherwise than they did at the time. Milošević could have decided not to threaten his opponents but to seek consensus; likewise, the Slovenian communist leaders, in 1988 and

later, could have ignored Milošević's empty threats and, instead of preparing to leave (and to dissolve) Yugoslavia, they could have tried to find a common ground with all other Yugoslav (and Serbian) communist leaders so as to contain and isolate Milošević's faction. They had a choice to try and save Yugoslavia in spite of Milošević's threats against them. They did not choose to do so for the political and ideological reasons which an observer can easily approve or disapprove of. Regardless of our approval or disapproval of the choices they made, they had a choice to do otherwise. All these leaders are personally responsible for the choices they made but, as Jović suggests, they cannot be held personally responsible for those effects of their choices which they did not anticipate – and sometimes could not have anticipated. In view of this, the claim that any one communist group at the time was solely or mostly personally responsible for the demise of Yugoslavia does not contribute to the explanation of its dissolution. Jović, for one, refuses to pass judgment on the political actors in this period and thus refuses to assign personal responsibility for the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

But the evidence Jović presents falsifies most of the explanations which pin the blame for the dissolution to individual political actors, such as Milošević or to any of the other single causal factors he explores in his first chapter. This is why Jović's book presents a major breakthrough in scholarship on former Yugoslavia, marking, I believe, a turning point in the scholarly study of its disintegration. Without producing new evidence, scholars are no longer justified in assigning either causal responsibility for the dissolution to a single causal factor or personal responsibility for the break-up to individual political leaders and their political movements. Those who pursue the latter without presenting new evidence would be primarily displaying their personal and/or political preferences and not contributing to the scholarly debate on this question.

In its systematic and comprehensive explanation of political developments in former Yugoslavia this book has no rival: to my mind, it is the most significant scholarly work published in any language on the dissolution of Yugoslavia to date. In this way, it is a superb example of not only meticulous and unbiased scholarship but of a coherent and systematic explanation in the social sciences. Its publication in one and the same linguistic variant in both Belgrade and Zagreb suggests that in the new states the intellectual interest for Yugoslavia survived both the dissolution of Kardelj's Yugoslavia and the split of the Serbo-Croat language into several separate national languages.