

Serbia between salvation and disaster: Privatization is good, only its consequences are evil

Mira Bogdanović

The language of social justice and defense of workplaces has the potential to unite much wider layers of working class than insistence on the rule of law and private property rights.¹

Transition to political pluralism and market economy has led in Serbia (and elsewhere in the region) to a vast conversion in the intellectual caste. The choice was between (neo)liberalism and/or nationalism. Ex-Marxists and communists had practically overnight turned coats and offered their services to the new political power. Moreover, they also substantially contributed to its installation by paving ideological ground for the radical change and subsequently to its stabilization and maintenance by widespread historical revisionism. The question inevitably arises whether their previous and present political and ideological profiles were nothing but conformist and opportunist adjustment to the ever current *status quo*. In the present article I shall scrutinize the new liberal position of the once outstanding members of well-known *praxis* school of critical Marxism.

The break with Stalin in 1948 had in Yugoslavia far-reaching consequences in many fields. An attempt was made to abandon the Soviet model of economy in substituting centralism by decentralized selfmanagement and introducing selfmanagement model in all spheres of society. However, what concerns us here is the change in philosophical paradigm underlying these efforts. In order to part with the received scholastic Marxism-Leninism, the Yugoslav ideologues, a new generation of communist intelligentsia, also active

What is then the genuine historical left in contrast to the sugar water of liberal ideology, conjuration, incantation and moralistic preaching?

(age permitting) in the communist partisan resistance 1941-1945, went back to the sources of the doctrine. They re-discovered previously neglected Marx' early works from 1844. The focal point of these economic-philosophical manuscripts was the theory of alienation. Much attention was given to re-establish the continuity between the "young" and "mature" Marx denied by the Soviet ideologues, and to strongly affirm the humanist character of Marxism. Philosophers of this orientation, concentrated primarily in Zagreb and Belgrade, found a common ground in the journal *Praxis* (dubbed after the central concept they discovered in Marx and Gramsci's cryptic name for the philosophy of Marxism to mislead the prison authorities), founded in Zagreb 1964. The same year they started Korčula Summer School (an island in the Adriatic), which attracted notable contemporary philosophers of various orientations from East and West. Some of them were Ernest Mandel, Karel Kosík, Herbert Marcuse, Ernst Bloch, Henri Lefebvre, Thomas Bottomore, etc. The critical method they adopted from Marxism was directed not only against Soviet Marxism and Western capitalism, but was also applied in the analysis of their own society. This stance brought them into conflict with their own Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Their mutual irritations had lasted for years and led in 1974 to the termination in the neo-Stalinist crackdown of both the journal and the School.

The Belgrade section consisted of eight scholars, purged from the Party in 1968 and from the University of Belgrade in 1975. For years they contested the Party's decision. When Yugoslavia started to disintegrate in the 1990s the Belgrade Eight went through a dramatic development: Mihailo Marković and Ljubomir Tadić (with less prominent backing from Svetozar Stojanović and Trivo Indić) ended as Serbian nationalists, Zagorka Golubović, Miladin Životić, Dragoljub Mićunović and Nebojša Popov chose the side of anti-Milošević camp and anticommunist liberal option. Mićunović was co-founder of the Democratic Party – a formation simultaneously (neo)liberal, clerical, nationalist and social-democratic, whose leader was Zoran Đinđić. Mićunović, by now octogenarian, still sits in the Serbian parliament for one of the numerous splinters of the Democratic Party.

The Zagreb *praxis* section proved resistant to the charms of nationalism and liberalism.

Does the left exist in Serbia?

Nebojša Popov published in *Republika*² an essay *Does the left exist in Serbia?*. The next issue of *Republika*³ carried a report from the panel in Media center for a miniscule audience under the title *Does the left in Serbia exist at all?*⁴. The audience was presumably so scarce because neither the liberals trust Popov's liberalism, nor the leftists his leftism. Liberals already have what they need, only expecting further gains, and the left does not need what Popov has to offer. Popov, Golubović and Pešić share more or less explicit



Nebojša Popov

and systematically developed view that the left has always been (original) liberalism.⁵

Zaga Golubović has been persistently defending this vision burdened with many contradictions and general confusion for a number of years. In her prime an ardent communist, born into communist nest, she now de-legitimizes from human-rights-private-property-perspective socialism, the most important form of the historical left (with all its faults), and promotes original liberalism as the only genuine historical left. She negates the leftist character of socialism and even attributes to liberalism achievements of socialism in, as she puts it, “the social sphere.” Her implicit point of departure is the theory of totalitarianism. I have extensively analyzed her views in another publication.⁶ Her historical revisionism leads her to nostalgia for the pre-communist regime, typical of the new power holders. Her anticommunist vision logically ends in giving equal status to the communist resistance in World War II and the anticommunist collaborationist chetniks.⁷

In her contribution to the panel on Popov’s views, Golubović wisely avoided following historical path of the left, either because she does not know much about it, or because it would ruin her construction of the past. At first

sight Nebojša Popov starts off in that direction, only to give up as soon as he started. Instead, he follows the historical path of Liberty, in fact of Serbian liberalism, the historical left as he sees it. “I believe that there are enough elements that enable us to speak of the left, in spite of the vagueness of the concept in the academic sense of the word. The most important question for me is not who considers him to be on the left and presents himself as leftist, but how he participates in the solution of some essential problems in a longer span of time, to be precise, of two centuries that Serbia exists in modern times.”⁸

Alleged “vagueness of the concept in the academic sense of the word” allows him to comfortably neglect anti-capitalism in various nuances regarding closer or more distant targets and means in superseding capitalism or ameliorating its less agreeable aspects, as the essential trait of the left. Simultaneously Popov becomes his own victim due to his subjective-arbitrary-authoritarian interpretation of the left, a logical consequence of his confounded criteria. So, like in the case of Zaga Golubović, liberalism alone belongs to the left. Is Nebojša Popov himself on the left? In any case he has always been in the vanguard: once of the working class, now of the capitalist one.

“The whole period [two centuries, M.B.] runs in seeking formula for the establishment of a minimum normal state and normal society, different from that what one understands as *populus* and what the populists mainly use as a concept that encompasses members of the ethnic community – ancestors, those now living and the offspring – experiencing this community as a warm lap in which there is place for all those who have sense of belonging to the *populus*; there has been no affirmation of the normal state of modern age, meaning the constitutional democracy ...”⁹

“Normal state and normal society”, “constitutional democracy” are not safeguard against populism. Take for example The Netherlands, a country which meets Popov’s idealized strict criteria in full, where both left and right populism (thoroughly compatible with liberalism) happily co-exists and flourish. Moreover, this once backwater country had also passed through a long and laborious process of modernization.¹⁰ This example alone demonstrates complete absence of international comparative perspective, which is typical of the works and views that will be considered in this article. Both authors and readers lack an adequate orientation in the political and historical context.

Popov writes that the formation of a modern state “in elementary sense” has not been completed in Serbia till the present day. “Therefore one could say that like in every other such case when immaturity, minority are at work, adolescence reigns, so that we can say that in all these periods adolescence was in power. Figuratively one could speak of permanent circulation of a very loud, dynamic and aggressive population, that we do not lack, which is usually referred to as juveniles. Thus, we are under permanent pressure of that what is colloquially called teenage crowd.”¹¹

Zaga Golubović shares Popov’s arrogance regarding citizens of Serbia. Actually about the people, since she ironically puts citizens in inverted commas. Departing from a misconceived theory

of personality developed by Sigmund Freud, she sees in superego, *as an external physical agency* (equal with the Leader, the Party and, of course, parents),¹² the main culprit for the alleged frustrated modernization of the Serbian society during two past centuries. She psychologizes a complex multifaceted problem and the solution she suggests is education aimed at a complete, non-authoritarian personality, (*without superego?*), capable of critical appreciation of choice and of personal development. But who is going to educate the educators?

Golubović also neglects the fact that the first studies on the authoritarian personality came from democratic and liberal states. Ivan Šiber writes: “The most frequently quoted work in social science is *The Authoritarian Personality*. On the problem of authoritarianism over 2 000 works were published until 1990. Yet there is until now no conclusive evidence on the [causal, M.B.] relation of authoritarianism as a personal trait and functioning of democracy.”¹³ It seems that Golubović herself does not know what to begin with this overblown mono-causal explanation and, without noticing that she contradicts herself, cites rebellious character as one of important national traits of Serbian nation!¹⁴ If anything is anti-authoritarian, then it is rebellion.

Both Popov and Golubović uncritically idealize ‘original’ liberalism, forgetting that the original liberals in the 19th and 20th centuries were against giving right to vote to the destitute adolescents. Scornful attitude of our ‘original’ liberals to the impoverished and dis-empowered majority leaves the question open as to who is supposed to carry out fundamental reforms: the elite is also lacking necessary qualities apparently for two centuries now. Or are the ‘original’ liberals those capable of doing it?

Next to the neglect of comparative perspective, views such as these also completely abstain from historical sociological and political analysis of social forces and their inter-relations in the context of socio-political conflicts and

struggles. Therefore such views belong into the sphere of magic and religion, even more so since the central point they share, as Zlatko Paković observes, is the taboo of private property.¹⁵

Popov sheds his ambivalent light on the glory of liberal heritage and fortunately does not omit to mention its practical opportunism and tragic blunders. “‘The founding fathers’ of modern age constitutions, leaning on religious beliefs and liberal principles, had tried to found them on firm convictions regarding natural rights of men to freedom and equality, security of personal property and pursuit of happiness. Upon these foundations of constitutional democracy [...] as is well known, there have been many sediments of concrete events which call them into question, even brutally negate them: let us only mention wars, colonization, slavery, genocide, ruthless exploitation of men and nature, but it cannot be denied that they are after all part of the history of modern age. These ideas and principles have survived cruelty of fascism, nazism and Stalinism, and even now, in the chaos of forced globalism, they appear as regulative ideas in seeking an alternative to this state of chaos.”¹⁶

The same holds for the socialist ideas and ideals carried out in the practice, but Popov chooses liberalism in spite of all, without asking himself where it can possibly lead again. He even mentions totalitarianism of the neoliberal turn. So, we now got three of them: the left one – communism, the right one – fascism, and the libertarian one – neoliberalism. But the ‘original’ liberalism can also be authoritarian, as I shall try to demonstrate by the example of historical Serbian liberalism, re-vitalization of which should save Serbia from disaster, and whose historical failure should explain miserable situation in which Serbia now withers.

“Protagonists of ‘wild capitalism’ are now creating an order that sharply differs from classical capitalism, by absolutizing private property and market, which is quite favorable for some kind of totalitarianism. Even if we could believe in the possibility of wonders, the

prospects that the wonder will indeed occur are nil. One of the greatest wonders would be that ‘wild capitalism’ could renew the whole of capitalism and liberate it from ever deeper crises.”¹⁷ Even ‘tame’ capitalism could not do it. Popov regrets lack of unity on the left (meaning primarily liberals) – however, on the platform he proposes, genuine left can never be united. He is craving for normal, tame capitalism, for normal society with normal and happy private property owners on a massive scale, for capitalism that has never existed and cannot exist, for capitalism as Utopia. Once upon a time he was a communist and the exchange of one Utopia for another should not be surprising.

“If a genuine left existed, there would not be so many jobless, poor and hungry, and the society would not be decaying as quickly as it does now, not only due to wars, but also due to plunder and foul privatization.”¹⁸ One would expect Popov to expect salvation from some new socialism. But he sticks to basic principles of liberalism. The center piece of his essay is a new Constitution and private property, the Holy Grail of converted communists: “[...] private property is the basis and stimulus of entrepreneurship not of public authority. On the contrary, it is the stronghold safeguarding citizens’ autonomy, for its [public authority, power, M.B.] limitation and its degeneration.” (Note a charming lapsus). And how much constitutions in Serbia had been worth and how long they had lasted, knew Jovan Skerlić. After the regicide, when King Aleksandar Obrenović was brutally massacred in 1903, he noticed that Constitutions in Serbia were eaten for breakfast. After all, it is common knowledge how much respect the letter and spirit of Constitutions and laws in general enjoy in the region.

Vesna Pešić elucidates and develops further Popov’s fixation in her contribution. She praises Nebojša because “he has excellently grasped and stressed [...] the role of private property. Earlier, too, when we were in those dissident circles, we have always

talked about the citizen not being able to have independence from political power, if he does not possess at least a minimum of some kind of economic independence. Such economic system is the system on which independence is founded and a way to limit state power.”¹⁹ In other words, a pauper cannot be a citizen - is that why Golubović has put them in inverted commas? That is why the historical original liberals had limited rights of non-possessing individuals. In short, she confuses economic security and private property. By the way, our peasants have been for decades sole proprietors of well nigh the whole of agricultural land, but this has not led to their political independence. What measure of private property is necessary to gain political autonomy? An apartment? A car? Or should every citizen, in order to outgrow puberty, acquire his own (in this case flour and pasta) factory, as did Vesna’s ex-party boss? Who would in that case pull spaghetti? Members of the political council of the Liberal Democratic Party, activists and supporters like Vesna Pešić, Latinka Perović, Vuk Drašković, or perhaps the uncrowned king of the NGO scene Miljenko Dereta, who, incidentally, was also LDP parliamentarian? Or the spaghetti production is to be left over to the plain property-less authoritarian paupers who will smoothly adjust to the authoritarian factory order? Zaga Golubović will have to admit that any kind of liberalism, original or otherwise, stops at the factory gate and that authoritarianism she so abhors, still has some indispensable practical purpose and value. And the question to Vesna Pešić and Nebojša Popov: do in the constitutional democracies members of the populus possess any significant amount of property so that they can determine not only their own, but also destinies of many others?

I would say they do not. If Popov and Pešić have relevant data regarding this matter, why do they hide it?

Zaga Golubović is also very generous in praising Popov. However, she presents his views in a very confused manner. As a member of the panel Popov did not protest. Why not? Golubović: “Instead of ‘neoliberal concept

of property, [it is necessary] to define clearly principles of property relations on the basis of the new structure of society’...” I do not understand this. Can anybody help me? And further even worse: “In ever more aggressive onset of neoliberal ideology of the consumer society, original liberalism (of Kant’s Categorical Imperative and theoretical principles of J. S. Mill) is cast away and instead of proclaiming the principle of greater importance of personal property over social property, domination of private property is being inaugurated and therefore a society with extreme inequality and growing poverty of the lower social strata in the ‘modern consumer’ – ‘fluid’ society.” Has it not always been so, except in the period of strong welfare state which is now undermined and abolished? A bit more of Golubović prose: “[It is necessary] to find those responsible for the bad consequences of privatization and for mass unemployment and hopelessness...” In other words: privatization is in itself good, it only has bad consequences. And the topping: “Analysis of structural and political conditions due to which ‘... the working class, who had for decades enlarged the value of social property, ... is now massively pushed away into superfluous people’.”²⁰

But neither Popov, nor his prophet Golubović point their fingers into direction of private property and privatization as such. That is why their lament sounds false and hollow. As we have seen, privatization is a *sine qua non*, only it produced, as Popov says, a state of chaos. Is Zaga Golubović deep in her heart against privatization and therefore produces this gibberish and gets completely lost in the chaos she partly personally produced? Or do we have here to do with bad conscience (good old *superego*): as a communist, Golubović must have been against private property and for nationalization/socialization of the means of production; she now wants a return to the *status quo ante*, which was violently interrupted by communist dictatorship. It is so pathetic to follow her effort to place herself on the left without understanding that she has chosen the wrong side.

Nebojša Popov again: “The Constitution, as a fundamental act of a community not only determines organization of the state, but the foundation of economy and society as well. In that respect a remark of economics professor Ljubomir Madžar is essential: [he] finds that the present Constitution [2006] has been a huge step forward by eliminating social property as the foundation on which the [previous] order rested, but this has not been done radically enough, so that there are still powerful remnants of the ‘egalitarian syndrome’.”²¹

Fourteen years ago, in an article *Hot chestnut of trade unionism and the authoritarian neoliberalism* I have analyzed various views on the role of trade unions in the Serbian transition. Ljubomir Madžar took at that time the most radical anti-trade union position. He advocated free capitalism in which private property had to be liberated from any restriction and constraint so as to motivate owners for rational use of resources. “‘It is in the nature of things’ that trade unions have a ‘particular interest’, they artificially rise wages and decrease employment. Besides, the collective character of trade union decisions makes a flourishing of strictly personal tastes and preferences – ‘individuals do not fit into them’ impossible. The law of demand and supply will solve everything by itself. In other words, everybody has to cope alone, without interfering with the free entrepreneurship, which is elevated to the height of supreme common interest. ‘In a system in which all power in an enterprise was formally placed in the hands of the employed, and where full sovereignty of decision making was located in the labor factor in production and all other business processes – it was difficult to find out who it is against whom trade union defends its class interest.’”²² The only way out of this trap, which is simultaneously logical and functional, is a real and unadulterated insight into the interests of the employed, who in the long run and due to their numerous representation in the community as a whole, cannot essentially differ from the broadly conceived societal interest. That means

that the trade unions should in the first place renounce opportunistic strategies of representing narrow professional and class interest²³ ... [...] Trade union action will have most success when it leans on the platform of authentic societal interest, which today means the fastest and most consequent possible transition to market economy and systematically institutionalized parliamentary democracy.”²⁴ What is the difference then between one time trade unions as despised party transmission belts of the authentic societal interest and the present-day trade union as a transmission of the authentic societal interest? I guess only in the expectation that trade unions should now defend the interests of capital and thus eliminate their own reason for existence.

In contrast to Madžar, Vukašin Pavlović writes in the same volume:

“[...] trade unions have to represent persistently and continually present interests of the workers and all those employed, disregarding immediate or further promises offered to it. Only in that way trade unions fulfill their task of interests representation in the civil society with respect to the state policy.”²⁵

Popov and ‘original’ liberals, no wonder, do not pay much attention to trade unions. All that Popov mentions is that the *ancien régime* did not allow articulation of trade union interests. Does he think that in the opposite case unions would support ‘original’ liberalism?

The pitiful present condition of Serbia, Popov rightly observes, can only be grasped by following its genesis. “Any serious consideration of alternatives to the present state of affairs presupposes above all solid knowledge of past and current events both in Serbia and in close and more distant environment. Something like that, as we know, is not easy at all due to powerful barriers piled up in petty and grand narratives of mostly dynastic and party literature. The framework and results of general and political historiography are too narrow for broader and thorough studies, especially in the field of culture,



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which is the broadest field of emergence and development of views on already realized and possible directions of historical development.”²⁶ It is not at all difficult to engage in historical research, neither do powerful barriers exist. Everything is accessible, even that what the communists forbade, sometimes with good reason. Or is what we are dealing with here actually idleness of mind? If “the populus”, who does not engage in the study of history at all, is dejected, somnolent and drugged by the Balkan variety of capitalism and/or propaganda of capitalism better than the present one that is expected to dawn, this should not affect the world of critical intelligentsia. But the wakeful critical intelligentsia had uncritically taken on the ‘original’ liberalism.

“The breakup of socialist Yugoslavia represented a major cultural and material setback for the working class. Inside the impoverished country, left isolated on the periphery of the EU, the social dynamics of the last two decades were necessarily interpreted as a lag behind the alleged global prosperity. This worldview opened wide space for the influence of liberal ideology.”²⁷ In the critical circles of ex-Yu there is fortunately some resistance against historical revisionism regarding rehabilitation of collaborations and fascists, only because they were anticomunist. However, there are also other

acceptable forms of historical revisionism, like for example the history of Serbian liberalism.

The authoritarian original liberalism: Our past is our future?

Nebojša Popov recommends reading recent historical studies, among others those of Latinka Perović and Olga Popović-Obradović, in order to follow the genesis of “the ravel” and “the state of chaos” in which Serbia has been languishing for two hundred years. When one reads recommended literature one can see projection of liberalism into the very beginnings of Serbian history as a modern state and its debacle then and in a straight line a hundred years later, when the ‘liberal’ wing of the communist party of Serbia lost against the authoritarian option: that was, according to Perović and Popović-Obradović, the cause of present misery. Little attention is paid to the impossibility of that project due to lacking liberalism’s driving force, so-called middle classes. Popov himself goes even further back in history, to the beginning of 19th century and cites a whole row of supporters of “constitutional constitution” (pleonasm is his). He did not go into the views of these two historians and I shall present them in short.

In her foreword to the posthumously published works of Olga

Popović-Obradović, Latinka Perović sees in Serbia after bloody dynastic change in 1903 a black-and-white clash of two political philosophies: pro-western and Slavophile, individualist and collectivist, liberal and populist, capitalist and socialist, reformist and revolutionary, modern and patriarchal. It is clear which one is desirable and why has Serbia been floundering in blind alleys until the present day. From the very beginning, even before the Liberal Party had been founded, the future liberals saw the thorough modernization as the task of the young independent state (from 1878). “Rule of law, personal and political liberties and responsible government – these were the principles which the Liberal Party consequently upheld in its history, both when it enjoyed the support of the royal court and when the court turned its back on the Liberal Party.”²⁸

Živojin Perić, (allegedly) discovered and very affirmatively presented, as Latinka Perović writes by Olga Popović-Obradović, shows the authoritarianism in all its glory of the ‘original’ liberalism of those times and provokes amazement at the admiration it now enjoys in the writing of these authors. Indirectly also Popov’s, since he recommended reading of these studies. “According to their [liberals] conviction, the foremost task of Serbia was internal modernization, whose inseparable aspects were strict rule of law, personal and political liberties and responsible government. At the same time they brought to light strong reserves regarding democracy, not only the one that originated from the spirit of the French revolutionary tradition, but also regarding democratic ideas of European liberalism of that age, which had in terms of doctrine and in the practice already accepted broad, even universal franchise, and which had conceived of parliamentary regime as a political system where the monarch lost tangible political power. That is why they, advocating the principle of division of power and parliamentary government, rejected the dominance, even total power, of the parliament, for which Serbian Radical Party was struggling. Instead, liberals insisted

on the active role of the Crown and particular political significance of upper layers of society which would be safeguarded by limited franchise and upper house in parliament. Defined in this way, liberals’ political ideology rested on the principles of liberal democracy. [...] Although consistent with the principles of liberal democracy this political ideology carried a conservative imprint.”²⁹

What do we see here? In the first place we see that Serbian liberals at that time were lagging behind their European counterparts. That concept was outdated not only when it reached Serbia, but also now, when Živojin Perić is being awakened from the dead. Is this ‘original’ liberalism the left, now advocated by Popov, Pešić, Golubović, Popović-Obradović? The difference between Popović-Obradović and aforementioned scholars is that she indeed sees that something here is not quite kosher. She seems to be puzzled how it is possible that liberal principles (Popov’s and Golubović’s left) are actually conservative = rightist, since there are already at that time movements that call them into question from the left. Popović-Obradović does not write about that. And the Serbian Radical Party at that time, against which Perić fulminates (with apparent approval from his present-day admirers), is closer to the then progressive and now conventional meaning of democracy, than the authoritarian,

aristocratic Liberal (alternatively named Progressive!) Party, which practically denies popular sovereignty seated in Parliament.

However, this is not all to it. Liberalism and fascism in every form share common hatred of the left. Who can then be surprised by Živojin Perić’s sympathy for the nazis, whose name, in the revisionist revival, adorns now the elementary school in his native village of Stubline? Olivera Milosavljević has written on the collaboration of this man with the German occupation power 1941-1944. As soon as begin June 1941 he was appointed member of the Legislative Council of the Ministry of Justice, in charge of legislation³⁰. In other words, he must have participated in passing and authorizing racial and antisemitic laws.

In contrast to Olivera Milosavljević, Popović-Obradović writes that Perić continued to live in Belgrade after German occupation (April 1941), and was employed as a legal expert in the collaborationist government of Milan Nedić. In May 1943 he was appointed to preside over Council for linguistic supervision of laws, attached to the Ministry of Education and Religion. At the close of the war Perić “left” Serbia and joined his family in Switzerland, where he died 1953.³¹

Živojin Perić’s political vision with its contemptuous attitude towards the



Serbian Radical Party

people, inevitably leads one to associate it with the like “antipopulist” and aristocratic stream of thought presented by Popov and Golubović. Besides, Liberal Party’s orientation much praised by Perović and Popović-Obradović, towards the fortress of conservatism on European periphery, the Dual Monarchy (as against Radical Party’s orientation to Russia), geographically the closest ideal of liberalism and individualism (as against Radical Party’s collectivism), cannot explain how it is possible that Croatia, a part of Austria-Hungary at that time, without something like the Radical Party, the culprit for all Serbian misfortunes, had similar historical career until the present day.

Popov does not stand still at the nature of ‘original’ liberalism and pays more attention to culture under socialism, a system of almost total repression. He presents many manifestations of the liberated spirit (interpreted in liberal sense, other freedom does not exist and cannot exist under socialism), “liberation of spiritual creativity from the restricting limits of the ruling ideology of Marxism-Leninism”, forgetting that all those examples of creative breakthrough were financed by socialism. He himself had as a communist also participated therein and profited from. In this context Golubović, suffering like Popov, from memory loss, stresses in Popov’s *Republika* essay the need for settling accounts “with the old left ‘which has liquidated almost every form of critical opinion’” and the need “to critically re-evaluate ‘some repressed and demonized currents of liberalism’³²”. Popov *con suis* affirms within the new hegemonic paradigm liberal heritage. There are no obstacles to that but nobody listens to him.

Nebojša Popov dedicated in his essay several critical sentences to Goran Musić (“some fellow, his name is Musić: Vesna Pešić in the audiovisual report from the panel – youtube), who criticized *from the left* Popov’s (petty) private property vision, “unraveling” of the present “chaotic situation”, without understanding that he actually is on the right. He reproaches Musić

“doctrinalism” (read: dogmatism). However, Popov himself & Co. approach reality from a doctrinaire (read: dogmatic) point of view: isn’t the dogma of private property the very essence of liberal ideology?

Gore Vidal, an offspring of a notable American patrician family, has written apart from exciting satirical novels about American past and present, an immortal aphorism on the American political party scene: *There is only one party in the United States, the Property Party ... and it has two right wings: Republican and Democrat*. It seems that all so-called relevant political parties in Serbia (and in the region) are Property Parties with only one right wing. Isn’t that what Popov, Golubović are fighting for? Are those who see in private property an obstacle to genuine democracy and equality going to be deprived of right to exist because they advocate demolition of the constitutional order?

A short comparative historical reminder

I have mentioned the absence of comparative perspective in the works of our “genuine” liberals. Comparative historical research, summarized by Rueschemeyer, Stephens & Stephens shows a completely different picture of the subject matter.³³

I have to stress, in order not to be accused of being doctrinal (read: dogmatic), that the authors are not Marxists. Rather they are Weberians. The results of their research demonstrate that the most consequent and persistent fighter for democracy in the conventional sense, was the working class. That was not because it was the most oppressed of all, but due to its capacity to become gradually aware of its condition. In the historical context described by the authors, the working class was, in contrast to small peasantry and agricultural workers on grand estates, most of all capable of self-organization. Democracy as we know it (Popov’s ideal not realized in Serbia) has fully developed in highly developed capitalist societies of the West, that had undergone

comprehensive industrialization and capitalist development. Such development has also of necessity brought forth a massive and powerful working class. In less developed societies democracy is more often exception than the rule and even when democratic institutions do exist, genuine democratic practice is not on a high level.

“The classics of nineteenth-century political theory also tended toward the view that the transformations wrought by capitalist development would bring democracy. But their reactions to this prospect were very different from what one might expect knowing their twentieth-century heirs. Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill were apprehensive about full-fledged democracy, and they were not alone in this. Their fear of ‘false democracy’ (Mill) and of ‘the tyranny of the majority’ (de Tocqueville) expressed the anticipations of many Liberals and bourgeois conservatives of the time. By contrast, at the left end of the political spectrum Marx opted for full democracy and saw in universal suffrage a major step in the transition from capitalism to socialism. His ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ was not so very different from de Tocqueville’s ‘tyranny of the majority’, except that for Marx this was a vision of hope and for de Tocqueville it was one of disaster.”³⁴ Živojin Perić belongs here too.

The authors of this collective comparative study also blow up the myth (widespread in our situation), that the middle classes (in Anglo-Saxon tradition synonymous with what one in socialism, in the French tradition called bourgeoisie) are the cornerstone of democracy. In their view middle classes did not have a consistent attitude, or rather they were consistently fickle. Central methodological approach they use is the class concept, class power and class coalitions. “Class power is in our view intimately related to the development of, the increasing organizational density of, civil society. This proposition seems at first glance similar to – but in reality quite different from – claims of modernization theorists and pluralists that the growth of

intermediate groups and associations tends to be supportive of democracy. [...] The middle classes played an ambiguous role in the installation and consolidation of democracy. They pushed for their own inclusion but their attitude towards inclusion of the lower classes depended on the need and possibilities for an alliance with the working class. The middle classes were most in favor of full democracy where they were confronted with intransigent dominant classes and had the option of allying with the sizable working class. However, if they started feeling threatened by popular pressures under democratic regime, they turned to support the imposition of an authoritarian rule.”³⁵

What is then the genuine historical left in contrast to the sugar water of liberal ideology, conjuration, incantation and moralistic preaching? Vesna Pešić is aware of Popov’s position as being classical liberal and asks the appropriate question: how can we find here anything resembling the left? She then proceeds to create a link. The link in her view is *inclusion*: for two hundred years Serbian state has demonstrated incapacity to include all its citizens into community, leaving out individuals/groups on the basis of creed, nationality and sexual orientation, i.e. violating the principle of equality and liberty of all its citizens.³⁶ Pešić herself necessarily remains stuck in liberal terms, namely in liberalistic reduction of the left, although she is at pains to prove something else. She mentions the exclusion of LGBT population, a marginal group whose struggle for tolerance I heartily endorse, but she seems to forget that private property magic excludes a huge majority, including also LGBT people. There are not many who live of love and of private property.

“Just like many banks and states of today, the bourgeois society, as the frame in which the market operates, is facing bankruptcy. In one form or another, labor issues are returning to the political scene. It remains an open question whether new organized labor will stem from the transformation of the old

unions or the merging of grass root local initiatives as happened in Zrenjanin – whatever the case may be, the working class in Serbia has a new chance to establish independent, democratically structured organizations with their own body of ideas and methods of struggle. [...] Connecting workers beyond their own workplaces comes across as the underlying theme for any future project. This joining of forces would have to be based on the democratically elected structures controlled by the workers themselves in order to prevent dependency on individuals. [...] Moreover, this type of workers’ organization would have to rediscover the rich historical traditions of workers’ movement in the region. Armed with its own program, the working class could assertively set its foot in the political scene and stop being dependent on support from sympathizing individuals standing outside of the movement, borrowed ideologies and improvised solutions, which go against interests of the working class as a whole. Organizing workers as a class, with a political program and clearly defined class goals, would finally unfasten the straight jacket of ‘pro-European’, nationalist, or any other ideological variation of the present order, and open perspectives for the constitution of a socioeconomic system in agreement with the real interests of the vast majority of the population.”³⁷ Musić did not further elaborate on the peculiarities of Serbian original liberalism. I did it instead in order to show two totally opposing views that cannot both be on the left.

History is in spite of all *magistra vitae*. Zaga Golubović writes: “In the whole period of Serbian people’s history, leftist orientation has been repressed and uncritical attitude towards the right has taken root.”³⁸

Well then – let’s review the integral Serbian modern history and let’s confront the leftist ‘original’ liberalism with the ‘rightist’ ideas and ideologies that in her view dominate the Serbian history. If we thereby make use of the theoretical apparatus developed by the

criticized authors we shall not get very far. Or we shall end on the wrong spot.

The best in the contributions that appeared in *Republika* is the question Vesna Pešić asked in the latter issue of *Republika* referring to Popov’s essay in the former issue: How can we find here anything resembling the left? If this is the best Serbia’s alternative mainstream can produce, what then is the worst?

Notes:

¹ Goran Musić, Radnička klasa Srbije u tranziciji 1988-2013, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe, Beograd 2013, 74.

² *Republika*, Br. 564-565, Beograd, godina XXVI (2014) (R1).

³ *Republika*, Br. 566-567 (R2).

⁴ This article is full and improved version translated into English of my essay published in *Republika*, 582-585, a monthly journal founded by Nebojša Popov (now retired editor-in-chief), as a comment on Popov’s essay published in his home journal, and a panel dedicated to his views held in Belgrade *Media center* on January 10, 2014. Pešić and Golubović, together with the author, elucidated on that occasion his approach to the subject matter – history and present state of the left in Serbia. My article was crippled before publication, extensively censored by the present editor-in-chief. Presumably it was a tribute to Popov and his close allies Zaga Golubović, Vesna Pešić as well as other figures in the same orbit, who also appear in my article. One time fervent fighters against Stalinist censorship when they were victims, employ now the same methods when someone dares to criticize them.

⁵ Vesna Pešić did not belong to the *praxis* group – she came into prominence as the leader of anti-nationalist liberal Civic Alliance, which merged with the ultra neoliberal Liberal Democratic Party, a splinter from the Democratic Party.

⁶ Mira Bogdanović, Konstante konvertitstva – Hod u mjestu: Od Đilasa do Đilasa,

- Centar za libeterske studije, Beograd 2013, 177-190.
- ⁷ Zagorka Golubović, *Moji horizonti: mislim, delam, postojim, Žene u crnom*, Beograd 2013, 213.
- ⁸ R2, 6.
- ⁹ R2, 6.
- ¹⁰ Mira Bogdanović, *Dopis sa izvorišta: uspon i propast konsocijacije u Nizozemskoj, STATUS- magazin za političku kulturu i društvena pitanja*, broj 15, proljeće 2011, Mostar, 60-70. www.status.ba.
- ¹¹ R2, 6.
- ¹² Zagorka Golubović, *Autoritarno nasleđe i prepreke za razvoj civilnog društva i demokratske političke kulture*, in *Između autoritarizma i demokratije*, Srbija, Crna Gora, Hrvatska, Knjiga II, Civilno društvo i politička kultura, urednici Dragica Vujadinović, Lino Veljak, Vladimir Goati, Veselin Pavićević, CEDET, Beograd, CEDEM, Podgorica, CTCSR, Zagreb, Izdavač CEDET, Beograd 2004, 233-246, 245.
- ¹³ Ivan Šiber, *Politička kultura, autoritarnost i demokratska tranzicija u Hrvatskoj*, in *Između autoritarizma i demokratije*, Srbija, Crna Gora, Hrvatska, Knjiga II, Civilno društvo i politička kultura, urednici Dragica Vujadinović, Lino Veljak, Vladimir Goati, Veselin Pavićević, CEDET, Beograd, CEDEM, Podgorica, CTCSR, Zagreb, Izdavač CEDET, Beograd 2004, 247-261, 258.
- ¹⁴ R2, 7.
- ¹⁵ Zlatko Paković, *Danas*, 15. 08. 2014.
- ¹⁶ R1, 16.
- ¹⁷ R1, 17-18.
- ¹⁸ R2, 6.
- ¹⁹ R2, 7.
- ²⁰ R2, 6.
- ²¹ R1, 13.
- ²² The author alludes to the legitimization formula in socialism of the working class being the ruling class. It could not e.g. strike against itself.
- ²³ The concept of class has all but disappeared from political discourse. Madžar refers here to *stalež*, which means social layer.
- ²⁴ Mira Bogdanović, *Vruć kesten sindikalizma i autoritarni neoliberalizam*, *Nova srpska politička misao*, God. VII (2000), No. 1-2, str. 317-329, quotation on pp. 323-325.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ R1, 18.
- ²⁷ Musić, 75-76.
- ²⁸ Latinka Perović, *Predgovor knjizi Olge Popović-Obradović, Kakva ili kolika država: Ogledi o političkoj i društvenoj istoriji Srbije XIX – XX veka*, Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, Beograd 2008, 23, 29.
- ²⁹ Olga Popović-Obradović, *Kakva ili kolika država: Ogledi o političkoj i društvenoj istoriji Srbije XIX – XX veka*, Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, Beograd 2008, 302-303.
- ³⁰ Olivera Milosavljević, *Potisnuta istina- Kolaboracija u Srbiji 1941-1944*, Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, Beograd 2006, 140. For general context see also Olivera Milosavljević, *Savremenici fašizma 1, Percepcija fašizma u beogradskoj javnosti 1933-1941*, Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, Beograd, 2010 and Olivera Milosavljević, *Savremenici fašizma 2- Jugoslavija u okruženju 1933-1941*, Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, Beograd, 2010.
- ³¹ Popović-Obradović, 2008, 300-301.
- ³² R2, 6.
- ³³ [Faculty.washington.edu/asc22/Sinker-Site/Pols%20204/Rueshemeyer Stephens.pdf](http://Faculty.washington.edu/asc22/Sinker-Site/Pols%20204/Rueshemeyer%20Stephens.pdf), RSS.
- ³⁴ RSS, 243.
- ³⁵ RSS, 245-247.
- ³⁶ R2, 7.
- ³⁷ Musić, 76. Zrenjanin is a town in Serbia, where a failed experiment in insider privatization of a pharmaceutical company took place. Popov, himself from Zrenjanin, and his *Republika* played an important role in this matter.
- ³⁸ R2, 7.