



MOVING TARGETS

Beyond Utopia

A Conversation with Milovan Djilas

E
I *In a recent interview to an English weekly you said that even after the collapse of communism, there will be new ideologies to keep history on the move, and that the ideological factor will still be very important.*

Milovan Djilas - The failure and collapse of communism does not mean the death of ideologies. The element of novelty in Eastern European countries, after the collapse of the political regimes and economic systems that claimed legitimacy on the grounds of Marxist ideology, is that no longer will there be only one ruling ideology, but *many* ideologies. My point, however, does not apply only to the ex-communist countries. Ideology is everywhere: in the organisation of every state, at the basis of all economic regimes, in everything. Indeed, there exist no politics, no collective action, nor even associated life without ideology. Nevertheless there is a great deal of difference between a totalitarian ideology—the ideology of closed social systems—and what we may call a “democratic” ideology. In totalitarian countries there are only *violent* ideologies. For example, America is not an ideological country, because it has so many ideologies that it is practically without one ruling ideology. Americans' only ideology is American democracy, which is included in the constitution, in social life and in the economy.

E
I *Don't you think that there is an ideology of the individual, of private initiative?*

Milovan Djilas - But this is just basic democracy. America and the West in general have won the Cold War because they were not ideological. The fact that they could attack communism from so many sides, and with so many

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spontaneous activities—and of course with as many different policies as there are independent member-states in the Alliance—was a very important factor in the disintegration of communism.

E
I *Yet history does not end with the defeat of communism, just as it did not in 1815, with Napoleon's and the French Revolution's final defeat.*

Milovan Djilas - No, history is not finished; it will go on. The reason why one might have this impression is that the entire world is presently going through an experience similar to the one Americans lived when World War II was over. For a moment it seemed to be the end of history, but only for a moment. In the future, history will develop.

E
I *This will require ideologies, or at least ideas.*

Milovan Djilas - Ideas, more so than ideologies. Indeed, new ideas will certainly appear, although I cannot specify what they will be. However, it is a possibility that we will see phenomena such as expanding Islamic fundamentalism, which is not only a religion: it is also another ideology. Personally, I am not frightened by Islamic fundamentalism. For the Moslem world to unite, it would take centuries, or at least decades. And for this to bring about a long religious and ideological war, it would require that all of Christianity be united as well. At the moment there is practically no sign of the Christian peoples rallying around some sort of Christian ideology. In the Christian world, what keeps people united and loyal to social groups are politics, nationality, the state—and not the church.

E
I *Then what the world will be like after communism is a question you cannot yet answer. But what the nature of the political struggle will be after communism is a question you probably can answer.*

Milovan Djilas - Yes. Eastern Europe will be democratic more or less in the way Western Europe is. But it will not become democratic at once, nor quickly. In the long run and in perspective, I am optimistic. Though not for the short term.

E
I *Western European society with its present characteristics is largely a result of the fear of communism. Its most typical feature, the welfare state, and the very idea that the government had to guarantee assistance*

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to the workers from cradle to coffin were accepted most of all due to fear of communism. Had there not been the fear that an impoverished working class would become easy prey to communist propaganda, there would be no national health system in Britain nor four-week holidays in France. But why, now that the revolutionary menace is no longer there, should capitalists in Poland or Russia grant the workers these privileges? Or has the role of the economy become too crucial in post-Keynes societies for these social conquests to be lost again?

Milovan Djilas - This influence on capitalism is the positive legacy of communism. Although I am not really qualified to answer you, I think that some of the internal forces in capitalism tend toward the welfare state as well. But I think that the welfare state is now a thing of the past, and that all those social achievements—for instance in Italy or France—are no longer the products of the fear of anti-capitalist revolution, but of the social atmosphere and of trade union activities. Society as a whole has become more human.

E
I *So at least in the immediate short term, you do not see the need for another ideology with a strong social content?*

Milovan Djilas - Undoubtedly some kind of utopia will emerge.

E
I *But you do not see it in the foreseeable future?*

Milovan Djilas - No, I can only guess as to this. I can only say that new utopias are possible, because the human mind is drawn to utopias, and because under favourable social conditions utopian concepts may still develop. There is practically no society without utopian aspirations. Our first utopia in power was communism. Nazism was a utopian formula as well, but a different, even contrasting one. We know why it was possible for communism to come to power; it was the product of the first stage of industrialisation. It was a scientific utopia, it really looked like science.

E
I *It seems to me, however, that at least in the early stages of the revolution, communism not only looked like a regime based on a "scientific" ideology, but in turn was also fascinated by science, for it had idealised the capabilities of the rational approach to reality, seen as capable of solving all the problems of the society and those of each of its members.*

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Milovan Djilas - Exactly. Communism as a totalitarian ideology had inherited an idea widely believed from the middle of the 19th century on up until just recently, which was that with science, *everything* was possible. Of course, in the process of scientific and technical development this is absolutely true, but it was extended from the physical world to the social world.

E
I *Is this why the utopia in power failed so badly?*

Milovan Djilas - Communism failed, but not completely. Characteristic of the communist utopia is that it was at the same time very pragmatic, because communists believed in science and—until our days, until recent years—used scientific methods in analyses and politics.

E
I *Could one then say that communist ideology was sucked into the vacuum of a utopia while communist practice was drawn into cynicism?*

Milovan Djilas - Yes. For example, between the February and October revolutions the most pragmatic, realistic politician was Lenin: not the democrats, nor the social-democrats. It was the same with Tito. In Yugoslavia, during the war the communists were the most pragmatic politicians.

E
I *This was possible because you were stronger from a utopian point of view?*

Milovan Djilas - Yes, this was inspirational to us, but at the same time we were realistic, even brutally realistic.

E
I *The utopian element seems to have disappeared among communist leaders in recent years. Don't you find that Gorbachev is a pragmatic politician?*

Milovan Djilas - He certainly is a pragmatic politician. To some degree, he can also be considered a great man, but he is a transitory person. He is a great man more for what he did not do, for what he refrained from doing, than for what he actually did. Actually his concrete achievements are not great, but the most important thing is that through his policies he did not stop the political and social processes under way in the Soviet Union, and he permitted the society to express itself and to organise. But he never really had a grand design and successively he tried to find support from different groups and currents. In the

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beginning he was not strong, not even in the party bureau. Party bureaucrats were inclined to have him as a leader because they were frightened by the danger of a political explosion. So they agreed to have as their leader a moderate man, a reformist, and only changed their mind when the process had gone too far. But by then Gorbachev had already moved to seek the support of the so-called "left", the democratic circles. He is not popular with them, but democratic circles have proved still willing to help him in the struggle against the party bureau.

E
I *They do so because they feel that they are too weak?*

Milovan Djilas - Well, the real struggle in the Soviet Union and inside the Party up to now has been about whether to have a legal state in place or to keep the predominant position of the Bolshevik Party. Gorbachev has done much to reinforce the state and the Parliament, and also, through it, to strengthen his personal power, of course.

E
I *Through the Parliament, and through Parliamentary power?*

Milovan Djilas - Yes, his personal role has until recently grown increasingly important, even more important than that of the institutions. I do not think he will be overthrown, not in the near future at least.

E
I *Do you mean that Gorbachev is a transitory actor, but that he still has some time to go?*

Milovan Djilas - Yes, he is weaker than before, but still strong enough to stay in power for a while. The left will help him continue to rule. Actually, his weakness is not so much tactical as theoretical, because for a long time he was convinced of the possibility of reforming the Soviet system. Probably now he no longer thinks so. But in the beginning, he believed in the possibility of restoring original Leninism; he believed that Leninism was good, but spoiled by Stalin and by party bureaucrats.

E
I *Do you mean he was a victim of his own propaganda?*

Milovan Djilas - Yes. At the beginning, his idea was to go back to the roots, to the origins of Leninism. He failed to understand the crucial fact that the Soviet system is a product of Leninism, and that Stalin is not separable from Lenin;

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there is no “good” Lenin and “bad” Stalin. This does not mean that Leninism and Stalinism were one and the same thing. In the heritage of every great man—as Lenin was, and he played a great role—there are always different elements. The ideas and example of a great historical personality always leave those that follow with different possible alternatives. Take Trotsky, Bukharin and Stalin, for example: each had a different reading of Lenin’s political legacy. Stalin won because his was the most realistic, the most pragmatic. The same thing could be said for Marx: there are several elements in Marx’s ideas even if the essential ones are those that have led to the Bolshevik revolution and “real socialism”. Historically, however, the only result of Marx’s thinking is a system—the Soviet system—that by now offers no possible reform. A system that cannot be changed must be eliminated.

E *You are very close to saying that Erich Honecker was right in his*
I *dogmatism then, and that he had understood that communism could not be reformed, at least in East Germany.*

Milovan Djilas - Yes. But he believed communism could continue for eternity.

E *How do you explain the active role played by Gorbachev in*
I *Honecker’s fall?*

Milovan Djilas - It depended on the developments of the Soviet domestic political struggle, and on the very negative factor that Honecker represented for Gorbachev’s policy. He was against Honecker, because Honecker was an obstacle to collaboration with West Germany. Honecker was also creating difficulties for the various processes of reform. Other die-hard conservatives such as Ceausescu found support in Honecker. Communist reactionaries began to stick together. I think that the Soviet Union also played a role in the overthrow of Nikolai Ceausescu and even more clearly in the overthrow of Todor Zhivkov in Bulgaria. I do not know whether it was directly involved, but surely it played a role.

E *Gorbachev’s original plan of reforming communism was somewhat*
I *successful in the eastern Balkan countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria, but not in East Germany, where Honecker was practically fired by Gorbachev. The result of which was that the regime collapsed completely, and the GDR disappeared. Wasn’t it an error for somebody, like Gorbachev, who still believed that communism could be saved?*

Milovan Djilas



Great Expectations

Milovan Djilas - I think that Gorbachev was against those regimes for domestic reasons, because they helped Ligachev and the conservative opponents.

E
I *Unsettling Honecker was an error for Gorbachev?*

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Milovan Djilas - He did not predict that the revolution in East Germany would go so far. His idea was to eliminate Honecker and stop the process, keeping in power someone like Krenz or Modrow. But then the German youth started to react. The same thing is happening in great Russia. At the time when he decided to recreate the Russian Parliament and the Communist Party of the Russian Republic, he did not predict the great developments that followed, as Boris Yeltsin and the others did. On the contrary, in Gorbachev's plan, Yeltsin was just to provide a balance against the conservative members of the old bureaucracy. This is why Gorbachev supported Yeltsin, and saved him two or three times. The problem now is that there is not only one Yeltsin, but a thousand Yeltsins.

I am speaking from another point of view: it is now a fact requiring no further proof that communism cannot be transformed into democratic socialism, as Gorbachev had believed, at least in a certain stage of his recent career as top Soviet leader. This is utopian. The idea of replacing totalitarian communism with democratic socialism is just another utopian ideal. Communist socialism cannot be transformed into anything. It may collapse, but cannot change. Indeed communism is collapsing for many reasons.

As you have yourself written, the most immediate reasons are its incapacity to compete with the West, and the fact that it is not adaptable to a modern economic system. This is all true, but what seems essential to me is that communism is an industrial feudalism, the social form of a revolutionary period—a period of violence when the problem of power, the problem of who is to own and control the means of production is much more urgent than the evolution, diffusion and technical improvement of the industrial system. Inevitably, however, when this phase is over and industrialisation reaches a certain level of diffusion and maturity, the revolutionary society must develop into a post-industrial society. Communist regimes cannot do this without substantial changes: not only political changes, but also changes in the ownership system. This, of course, means abandoning the concept of national or socialist property and introducing the concept of private ownership of the means of production, public companies and shares. This is the precondition to create post-industrial society, and it does not work without political democracy.

There are, however, two other major factors that have been underestimated in the disintegration of communism. The first is the challenge to the system by individual heroes such as Andrei Sakharov, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Alexander

Zinoviev and many others. For the last 20 years or so there have been these individuals rising up against the system, denouncing its falsehood: witnesses to the truth that everybody knew of, but was afraid to discuss. It was possible for these individuals only because of the connections they had in the West, that is, as long as the possibility to find support in the West was a real one. A second factor, more important even if not frequently remarked, is the passive resistance of the population. Communism, in its post-revolutionary stage, is totally incapable of providing any stimulus to the people, and this is mostly evident in agriculture and in industry. People do not work: they pretend to work or, at best, work only to survive, the bare minimum. There are no stimuli, because the system does not work by means of economic stimulation of work, but through political and moral appeal, though revolutionary and patriotic appeal.

E
I *Didn't these stimuli work in the past?*

Milovan Djilas - Yes, they did, but now they do not work any more. Political and world incentives worked in the beginning, when the countries to be under communist rule had been destroyed. In Russia, enthusiasm actually played some role during the period of industrialisation. But brutal—very brutal—means were used at the same time to extract from the people as much effort as possible. Such brutal means, if they were applied today, would not be enough; they can no longer be productive. Under the new social conditions and with the disintegration of ideology a new consciousness is forming. That is why I think the revolution presently under way in the Soviet Union will continue even after Gorbachev. It will not finish with Gorbachev even if the military, to take one possibility, must interfere with the current political evolution. The process Gorbachev has set in motion is irreversible, so that the West is correct in supporting him. Indeed the West could even be less prudent and more bold now.

Frankly, this cautious attitude seems excessive to me. The danger of the Soviet Union recovering its role as a real great military power is not a realistic one any longer, because of the revolutionary process that has taken place in all Eastern Europe and within the nations of the USSR, including that Russian nation itself. The West could therefore be more courageous, more energetic in openly helping the democratic revolutionary process. From my point of view, François Mitterrand understood this better than the other Western statesmen, possibly because the French have a better feeling for the importance of revolutions.

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E *You mean that in the political history of France, Mitterrand might*
I *have the background for a better perception of the importance of this epic change?*

Milovan Djilas - Yes. And the American policy toward the Soviet Union is not bad either. For example, the US role in the Baltic situation is very clever, very correct: they helped the struggle for independence, but at the same time they encouraged the Balts to find a compromise with Gorbachev, in order not to weaken him with an excessively rapid disintegration of the empire, something that could provoke a reaction in Soviet Union.

E *Your idea that whatever happens with Gorbachev, the process will go on,*
I *seems a bit inconsistent with your belief that the progressives will keep helping Gorbachev. If they really do so, it can only be out of fear that removing Gorbachev from his present responsibilities could put an end to the entire process of the opening up of Soviet society.*

Milovan Djilas - The position of the so-called "left" toward Gorbachev is ambiguous. They are against his semi-monopoly of power, but not totally against him. In Gorbachev's struggle against party bureaucracy, they support him. But everything does depend on Gorbachev's attitude, on his capacity to be elastic and intelligent enough to fight against bureaucrats and keep the support of democrats. I think he is intelligent. For example, he was seriously in conflict with Yeltsin, but has been able to diminish the contrast. However, he has badly miscalculated the gravity of the nationality problem. Only three years ago, in 1987, during the celebrations for the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution, he said that the national problem in Russia was ideally resolved.

E *Do you think that a violent clash among the various nationalities of the*
I *Soviet Union is more serious a possibility than a social conflict, a class war among fellow Russians?*

Milovan Djilas - The national element cannot be separated from the social one. There is something unpredictable in every nation. Every nation has its own centre of gravity if you will, its own tendency to develop separately, to have its own state, its own free culture. There is an ambition to be itself. All human beings have the natural ambition to have their own place in life, and the same is true of nations, with the only difference being that the ambition to national identity is connected with the past, with an ideology, with historical memories.

And even if for some nations it would be better for the moment to remain a part of the Soviet Union, they will in any case tend to separate.

E
I *What about a social conflict, a clash among the groups that are going to profit by the passage to a market economy and those that will see their position degenerate? Don't you think that there are factory directors, or people like them, aiming to become factory owners?*

Milovan Djilas - Oh, no. The development is not going in the direction that would make Gorbachev's bureaucrats the rich men and the owners. No. The development will be slow, similar to the development of the middle class in the West. One should not compare the situation in Eastern Europe with that of South America or the Third World. What is typical in South America is dictatorial power, but over private property. In the USSR the problem is how to change so-called socialist property into private property, into co-operatives, or other similar forms. Nor can we compare Eastern Europe with the Third World. This is a flawed comparison widespread in the West. Probably in the East they are *now* in this position, and will stay so until the process of change, the revolutionary process, is finished. But after this transitional phase, the ex-communist economies will quickly develop, and develop like Western Europe.

E
I *A more reasonable comparison therefore would be with Western Europe in 1946, after the war?*

Milovan Djilas - Exactly. For example, Czechoslovakia and East Germany are developed countries. Russia is poorly organised, but is fully industrialised. Consider the production of arms: there are over 20 million workers in the armaments industry. Imagine if they turned these industries toward civil production.

E
I *In the Western market?*

Milovan Djilas - Yes. It is a question of time. They have qualified technical manpower. Russia has two times as many engineers as the United States, but they are not properly used, not efficiently used: it is just a matter of a better use of human resources. In every communist country—and this is typical—there are more specialists than necessary. In Yugoslavia, for instance, we have more engineers and doctors than we actually need.

E *How do you explain this? Was there an investment in education for social promotion?*

Milovan Djilas - Sending people to schools is typical of communism. Communism is pedagogic in that the leaders always want to teach the people something. Perhaps you are not aware, but in Pristina, the little capital of Kosovo, there are over 30,000 students. And there is no economic reason for this. Most of them go directly from high school or college into permanent unemployment. Actually, this enormous mass of frustrated semi-intellectuals is the main social base for the recent nationalist activism among the Albanians of Kosovo.

E *This leads us to a question that we, in Western Europe, consider extremely important and interesting: the future of Yugoslavia and the future of Serbia. Starting with a comparison to the more or less similar case of destiny the USSR and the future of Russia, some people, including Solzhenitsyn and Zinoviev, say that the destruction of the Soviet empire is a necessary precondition for the salvation of the Russian nation. I do not think the same really applies to Serbia and Yugoslavia, that is, to save Serbia we must destroy Yugoslavia. Yet is a fact that since World War II, Yugoslavia's unity has been based on the principle "weak Serbia, strong Yugoslavia".*

Milovan Djilas - Actually, Yugoslavia cannot really be compared with the Soviet Union, except for some aspects. We may compare these two countries only in a very abstract way. For instance, both are multinational countries, but with an important difference. Contrary to the Soviet Union, in Yugoslavia we do not have the predominance of one great nation. We only have relatively small nations: Serbia is greater only if compared with the other republics, but it does not have a strong role, as Russia has had in the Soviet Union. Russia is an old empire: it started to enlarge itself in the 15th and 16th centuries, whereas Yugoslavia is a young state. Of course, if one considers the some two thousand years of European Byzantine and Roman culture, the Yugoslavs are old people, but Yugoslavia as a state is very young. It was created at the end of the Second World War.

E *But this does not apply for Serbia.*

Milovan Djilas - No, it does not. Serbia was created at the beginning of the ninth century. But Serbian predominance in Yugoslavia only existed between

the two wars—quite a short period—and generally it existed only in the political sphere, not in the economic or cultural areas. Its predominance was in administration and politics.

E
I *And in the army, as well.*

Milovan Djilas - Yes, but this is part of politics and administration. Economically, Serbia was always weaker than Slovenia and Croatia. This was the main contradiction in the administrative and political hegemony of the Serbs—an economic weakness and also a cultural one. Serbia was more backward than Slovenia: not terribly so, but a little backward. This of course created great difficulties, and a very strained situation in Yugoslavia. After the war and up until the present, no one could seriously speak of a Serbian hegemony in Yugoslavia. This is merely the propaganda of the nationalist forces in Slovenia and Croatia. On the other hand, Serbia was in some ways partly in an unfavourable situation. By the Constitution of 1974, two autonomous regions of Serbia, Voivodina and Kosovo, were allowed a degree of self-government that practically equalled that of the six republics forming the Yugoslav Federation. In all practicality they were put on the same level as Serbia, and as you probably know this provoked many conflicts. Recently, however, the Serbian Republic has recovered its powers over these regions, so that the problem has been constitutionally resolved, but this does not mean that it is resolved practically and politically. At the same time, in Yugoslavia there are other conflicts, mainly national conflicts, because there are many Serbs who live out of Serbia—the different statistics reflect different points of view: some say 40 percent of Serbs live outside of Serbia, others put the figure at 25 percent. In any case it means that large numbers of Serbs are not in Serbia, but in Bosnia as well as in Croatia. Actually, the same problem exists for Croatia: there are many Croats in Bosnia and many are in Serbia, too. Hence the problem is how to arrange relations in a mixed territory, a territory where people of different nationalities and different religions mix and coexist.

Another important aspect is religion. Of course, now that religion is becoming stronger and stronger—and so is the role of the church—this problem is becoming more serious, for the Serbs are Orthodox and the Croats are Catholic. The problem of the Slovenians is a little different. The opposition between Croats and Serbs is not really a national one: it is mainly a problem of different political and social tendencies. Between Serbs and Slovenians there is no common border, and this is the reason why no problem of nationalities

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exists: rather, it is a question of the different levels of development. Slovenia, more advanced economically, is moving faster toward democracy and the West European way of life, while Serbia changes at a slower pace. Of course, some of Croatian nationalist propaganda claims that is due to the religious factor, "Serbia is not a European country", is preposterous. If one paid any attention to these grounds, then the Greeks would not be European either, in spite of their contribution to Western culture. The same applies to the Romanians: they are Orthodox, but at the same time have a Latin culture and a Latin mentality.

E
I *You consider these countries to be fully European?*

Milovan Djilas - Yes, and from my point of view, Russia is also a European country—perhaps not as clearly as France or Italy, but it, too, is a European country in many ways. In its tendency toward predominance, Russia is also European. I would like to point out, however, that to this adjective "European" I do not attach any second meaning of moral superiority. In Europe's past, as well, there is a dark side. The religious wars after the Renaissance, for example, were extremely harsh. Of course, in many ways, the European culture is quite sophisticated, and it actually started the progress of humanity, but I do not idealise any civilisation, not in an absolute sense at least.

E
I *There is a rediscovery, on the side of the Catholics, of the contribution that the Orthodox can give to a rebirth of Christianity in our continent. The Pope's idea that Europe has to go back to breathing with two lungs, the Catholic lung and the Orthodox lung, is in a certain way a release from the inferiority complex from which Catholics have long suffered with respect to Protestants. Thus the way Croatian nationalists are moving now is certainly contrary to what European Catholics are presently doing. The latter are going the other way, toward the Eastern Church.*

Milovan Djilas - You are right. Croatian nationalism is partly the heritage of conservative national thinking.

E
I *Do you mean that Croatian Catholicism is a reactionary culture?*

Milovan Djilas - I do not think one can compare religions so as to say that one is better than the other. Each has its own qualities, because each is a human phenomenon. There is, however, a difference between Croatian Catholics and Slovenian Catholics. The Croatian Catholic influence is not strong in Croatia, I

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mean in the policy of Croatia. The Catholic Church, as an institution, is very strong, but it does not play a very big role in the political life.

E
I *Do you mean as an inspiration?*

Milovan Djilas - Yes, as an inspiration for political life. In Slovenia the situation is different. In previous times, the influence of the church in political life was decisive and now it is becoming even stronger; while, for instance, in Croatia there are no Catholic parties such as the Christian Democrats in Italy or in Austria.

E
I *While in Slovenia there is something like this?*

Milovan Djilas - Mainly tradition. Slovenians are closer to Austria, to Austrian traditions; in Slovenia the role of the church in political life is stronger than in Croatia.

E
I *But during World War II, when Croatia was a separate pro-fascist kingdom under the dictator Ante Pavelic, was the Catholic factor very important or was it just an excuse?*

Milovan Djilas - Only in part. Many priests actually helped Pavelic, mostly in Bosnia. The Franciscans helped Pavelic—not all of them, but many. The leaders of the Catholic Church behaved in different ways. Stepinac for example, the famous archbishop, was in a contradictory position. He was critical of Pavelic, but also partially helped him, because he was anti-communist. At the same time, he protested against the massacres of Serbs, while approving the policy of forced conversion of Serbs to Catholicism.

So Stepinac really was in a contradictory position. Historians are writing a lot about this problem: whether the Vatican played a role or not. I am not very familiar with this case, but I believe that the anti-communist policy of the Vatican played some role in the inspiration for Stepinac's policy. Pavelic, however, was not a fervent Catholic. His attitude was not basically religious. He was extremely nationalist, and he envied the Serbs because they had a national religion. What could probably be said in relation to Serbian Orthodoxy is that in the development of some nations, one peculiar religion played a more positive and greater role than the others: for instance, we cannot think of Russia without thinking of the Orthodox Church, although Russian Orthodoxy

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Asserting the Albanian tradition

is not comparable to Serbian Orthodoxy. In doctrines and rights they are the same, but as social and national phenomena they are different. You can see a similar difference between Spanish Catholicism and French Catholicism. They are not completely the same, because France is different from Spain, and the role of Catholicism in Spanish national history is much more important than it is in France.

E *Do you see a religious revival among Orthodox Yugoslavs comparable to*
I *the religious revival among Catholics?*

Milovan Djilas - Yes, there is a revival among the Orthodox as well. The Orthodox Church is relatively consolidated, although not to the extent of the Catholic Church. Yet it seems to be getting stronger and stronger. And the religious feelings in the Serbs, as well, are deeper than they were 20 years ago. After all, for the Serbs, Orthodoxy has at the same time a national meaning, implying the return to a national tradition, a rediscovery of themselves as a nation.

E *There are widespread suspicions that both the phenomenon of*
I *nationalism that appeared in 1971 in Croatia as well as the present one are not completely unrelated to Pavelic.*

Milovan Djilas - No, they are not connected with Pavelic. Certainly, in the President of Croatia Franjo Tudjman's movement there are radical elements which are in the tradition of Pavelic's state, of Pavelic's *oustasha* movement. There does exist a radical nationalist element. But Tudjman's personality and leadership has nothing to do with the *oustasha* movement. Some of their requests for Bosnia are nationalist and are similar to those of Pavelic, but they are not *oustashas*. Nor can they be considered a continuation of Radic's and Macek's pre-war movement, the so-called "Peasants' Party", which in the end was really nationalist. Although today's Croatian nationalists draw their inspiration from every national tendency of the past, generally more than anything else they are the perpetrators of Ante Starevic's Party of the Rights of the second part of the 19th century, during Austria domination, or better, during the Hungarian domination, because Austria had actually given Croatia to Hungary.

E *What, in your opinion, will be the result of this explosion of micro-*
I *nationalisms in Yugoslavia?*

Milovan Djilas - I am afraid not only for the unity of the Yugoslav Federation, but also, and even more so, for the violent consequences that its dissolution would inevitably involve. What worries me is that in Yugoslavia, secession is truly possible, even likely, but not easy.

The idea of the political unity of the Slavs of the South, what a previous issue of your Journal called "Yugoslavism", was weakened from the moment Yugoslavia was created by the conflict between Serbs and Croats. Pre-war Yugoslavia had been created by the illusion that Yugoslavs were one and the same people. But immediately after the end of the First World War, this idea became weaker and weaker. During the dictatorship of 1929, King Alexander started to realise this fact, but all possibility of establishing nationality rights was in contradiction with his absolutist regime. The communists, during the war and after the conflict with Stalin, tried to revive the Yugoslavist idea, although not as an integral idea—the idea of Yugoslavia as one nation—but through the idea of proletarian internationalism and brotherhood, and in practice through their absolute power. They were convinced that the unity of the Yugoslav people could be created through ideology, emotions and power. But even communist, ideological Yugoslavia faded rapidly. Now it does not exist any more. The Yugoslavist idea is strongest among Serbs, because they are dispersed in different republics. But we may say that in general, it is totally exhausted historically. It only survives in some persons as a feeling, and it exists only as the state's economic interest.

E *Do you mean that the people understand that common sense pushes*
I *Yugoslavia toward unity?*

Milovan Djilas - For some people the idea of a state community still exists: a common economy, cultural and political collaboration, a common federal state, or confederal state - not as a Yugoslav idea, but as the idea of a common state. The idea of a common nation died out many years ago, even in old Yugoslavia. The Croats, the Slovenians and the Serbs are quite different nations, although they do have common traits. These traits are the reason why they are so often in conflict. It is the danger of similarity. So as I was saying, the breakdown of Yugoslavia is really likely. But I repeat, it will not be easy. The intermingling of nationalities, the presence of Serbian minorities in Croatia and vice-versa, the complexity of interwoven interests is such that the secession of Yugoslavia is possible only through national civil and religious war between the Serbs and Croats. This will be different from civil war as we know it.

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This will not be like ideological war or class war. This will be war with the extermination of the civil population. If Yugoslavia disintegrates it cannot be without violence. I still believe there is the possibility of salvation for Yugoslavia, that it might continue its life and reorganise itself completely; but if separation takes place, it will be through civil war. I do not believe in a peaceful disintegration.

E *What do you think about the example of the process of European unification, based on the reconciliation of the Germany and France, two nations that historically have been terribly hostile to one another? The world is uniting all over. And the EEC example is certainly very meaningful. The Yugoslavs seem attracted by the EEC, but at the same time, they are trying to tear Yugoslavia to pieces, to destroy it. Don't you think that a form of unity could be found in bringing a kind of confederated Yugoslavia inside the EEC, so that what would be lost at a national level could be recovered at a supra-national level?*

Milovan Djilas - The attraction of Europe is strong in Yugoslavia. Of course it is stronger in the north than in the south of the country. I would say that it is probably strongest in Slovenia and Croatia, but not because the Serbs are not European or anti-European by mentality or by history. Serbs are European in



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mentality and culture. They have a strongly national individuality. Serbia is less attracted by the EEC only because it is slower in the process of democratisation, due to the Kosovo problem, and because Serbia has a very strong attitude toward its past. Another reason is probably that the party bureaucracy, the conservative party element, is stronger in Serbia than in Slovenia and Croatia. Serbia is a little more backward economically than Slovenia and Croatia.

Moreover, for centuries the Serbs had an independent state which they had created with their own forces. The past is still strong in the Serbian conscience: Serbs feel they have to be something separate, a nation with a political identity. But this is not a predominant element, it is temporary and will certainly change, in a matter of a year or two. The problem of Kosovo, instead, will continue for a longer period. Even with democracy in Serbia, the problem of Kosovo will not be resolved. That may be only the beginning of the resolution, because it could open new channels, new perspectives. But democracy will not resolve the problem, because it is a very complicated conflict between two nations with different traditions and different cultures. What is typical is that the Albanians now behave slightly differently than before: they are not the Albanians of the previous period. Ethnically they are the same of course—because ethnically this is not possible to change—but even ethnically they are more homogeneous than before.

E
I *They are not tribesmen any more?*

Milovan Djilas - They no longer have the tribal mentality, or at least it has only a secondary importance. Besides, before they did not have a strong intelligentsia. Now they have a very strong one and this intelligentsia is their ruling class.

Before, they had tribal leaders that royal Yugoslavia kept loyal by corrupting them. But this is not possible any more, because the Albanians in Kosovo have become a nation with a strong intelligentsia and with a working class. This means that it is not possible any longer to rule the Albanians the way royal Yugoslavia did. The approach must be different. Finally, there is another element of novelty that has emerged during the last two or three years: the greater role in the separatist movement, the anti-Yugoslav and anti-Serb movement, played by Stalinists inspired by Tirana. All the people arrested were Stalinist and not only Stalinist, but Stalinist nationalists. This is typical of the Balkans. Now those Stalinists are disappearing, and with the opening of Eastern

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Europe and the weakening of all the regimes, even Tirana is presently a new phenomenon in Kosovo: some nationalists have inclinations toward Western democratic ideas. But they are all separatist, anti-Serb and anti-Yugoslav. The Albanian Communist party in Kosovo has practically disappeared. Everybody has become a nationalist.

I cannot really tell you how to resolve the problem—because I am outside of the daily political scene and have no feelings for these realities—but personally I believe only in democratic forms and in the respect for human rights for everybody, for the Serbs as much as for the Albanians in Kosovo. This may be the beginning.

E I have to make two observations. The first is that democracy and the
I respect for human rights are political practices that encourage fragmentation, the framework in which separatism always develops. My second observation is this: basically you are saying that at least to an outside observer, the problem of Kosovo and the fact that Serbia cannot make up its mind whether or not to get rid of the Albanians, is preventing Serbia from moving toward Europe at the same speed as Croatia and Slovenia. Thus the risk is to endanger the unity of Yugoslavia and the future of Serbia, because of this obstinacy to keep Kosovo under Serbian rule. Maybe the faster the Serbians get rid of Kosovo, the easier it will be to save the unity of Yugoslavia and move with it toward Europe. But don't you think that granting independence to Kosovo may be a high price to pay in order to save Yugoslavia?

Milovan Djilas has held several top positions
in the Yugoslav Communist Party,
during the clandestine period as well as when it was in power.
Arrested several times between 1953 and 1966
for opposing Tito's personal rule, he has written several books,
the most famous being *The New Class*, 1957;
Conversations with Stalin, 1966; *Comrade Tito*, 1978.

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Milovan Djilas - Yugoslavia can be saved even without this. Albanian nationalists are not strong enough as to destroy Yugoslavia. They are strong only because Yugoslavia is disunited and there is conflict between Croatians, Slovenians, Serbs and Muslims.

E
I *But certainly Serbia is slow in recognising human rights, because the recognition of human rights automatically means that the Albanians have the right to self-determination.*

Milovan Djilas - Yes, but that does not mean that this will be respected in practice. Yugoslavs will not permit them to separate.

E
I *Then there would be no civil rights.*

Milovan Djilas - The Albanians will only be permitted to be in the opposition, if they are a *legal* opposition, with respect to the constitution.

E
I *You mean that they have to accept a minimum of cohabitation.*

Milovan Djilas - Yes, and if they break the law, they will be restricted. From my point of view, separatism is not a crime. If freedom of expression exists, then everyone should have the possibility of expressing an opinion, even in a separatist way. The other problem is separatist *violent* activities.

E
I *But once you did think of having Albania as the seventh Republic of Federal Yugoslavia.*

Milovan Djilas - This was not, and is not, realistic. That was only part of my communist idealism: it was quite utopian. Now I am against having an Albanian Republic inside Yugoslavia, also because this would complicate the religious problem inside Yugoslavia. Until now the role of Islam in Kosovo has been of secondary importance. Certainly there are some fundamentalist tendencies among the Yugoslav Muslims—we have Muslims in Bosnia, and they have Slavic origins—but these tendencies are still not strong. I think the alarm about Islamic fundamentalism is mostly propaganda, anti-Albanian propaganda to attract the West to the side of the Serbs. Until now such a phenomenon did not have a great importance, because the inspiration and orientation for Albania was not religious, but ethnic. The Albanians are not a religiously fanatic people.

E *And what about a Balkan Federation, as Marshal Tito had in mind after the war, or some form of unity along the EEC model?*

Milovan Djilas - This, too, seems utopian to me today. I do not believe in a Balkan common market, nor in a Balkan confederation outside the European Economic Community, nor even in a kind of Balkan Benelux inside the EEC. We may create some special link among the Danube countries in the cultural field. But I do not believe in any type of Danube community either. The best perspective might be collaboration and greater free trade through more permeable borders, cultural exchanges and economic complementarity. But political unity does not seem possible for the foreseeable future. The people of the Balkans are too different. Only the Serbs, Macedonians and Bulgarians are similar. The others are very different. Look at Romania. From many points of view it is Balkan country, but at the same time it has many non-Balkan aspects. The Romanians are something "in between".

E *The Romanian case is certainly an anomalous one. They were under Rome for about a century, then they lived for 2,000 in a Slavic world, yet still managed to keep their Latin culture and national character. This is almost incredible.*

Milovan Djilas - Yes, they kept their national character, and Roman influences are still very strong. But in spite of communism's modernisation policy, Romanian society is also quite Balkan, with its patriarchal forms of life, especially in the villages and within the family. Romania as a nation is fully European by means of its Roman past. The language is similar to Italian, but at the same time it is isolated and surrounded by Slavs.

E *Is this diversity the reason for your saying that you do not see any real possibility for Balkan co-operation?*

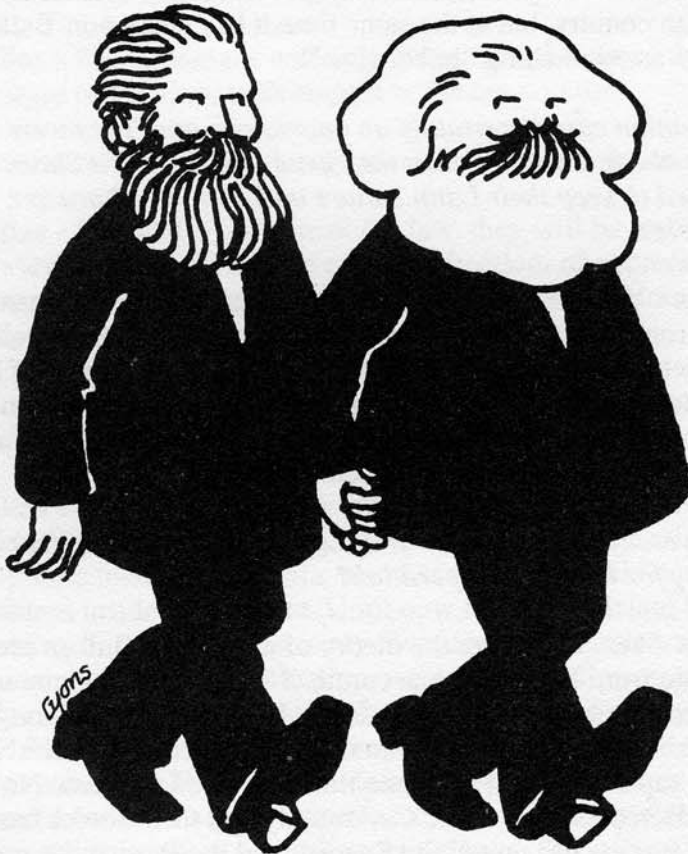
Milovan Djilas - Yes. I consider the theory of a common Balkan identity strongly separate from Europe as inaccurate. There are more elements that unite the Balkan countries to Europe than the Balkan peoples among themselves. A similar situation exists in the Iberian peninsula. The Spanish and Portuguese are separate, but at the same time they are European. Now that they are both in the European Economic Community and their border has been opened a little, Europe has united the Spanish and the Portuguese more than they ever were in the past.

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You mentioned the fact that Tito had a Balkan Federation in mind. This was not only Tito's idea, this was the idea of all socialists even in the pre-war period before World War I.

The communists merely inherited this romantic, anti-imperialist idea. But in reality it did not work, and not only because there were differences between the various Balkan nations and their national communist bureaucracies, but also because Greece was not communist. The idea was finally killed when Stalin broke with Tito, and that was really good for Yugoslavia.

E
I So it was Stalin who saved Yugoslavia from having Albania as a seventh Republic?



Marx, Engels and the permissive society

Milovan Djilas

Milovan Djilas - Yes. At that time we all agreed upon a federation with Albania and Bulgaria. But we were never very enthusiastic, so when the Soviet Union condemned Yugoslavia, and Albania and Bulgaria followed Moscow in the condemnation, this was a version of liberation.

E *There is a debate in Western Europe as to whether we should accept*
I *relations with Slovenia and Croatia, or support the united Yugoslavia. You probably know that some neo-nationalist forces in Germany already have relations with Tudjman's government in Croatia.*

Milovan Djilas - In the salvation of Yugoslavia, Europe and especially Italy are playing a serious role, because Western Europe is now anti-nationalist. This is also out of self-interest, since the new nationalisms which are developing in Eastern Europe are extremely dangerous for the future of Europe. Imagine, for example, the impact on European equilibria that a nationalist or racist Russia would have; it would be more dangerous than communist Russia.

E *It would be more dangerous, because a regime like that would have*
I *strong roots in the population?*

Milovan Djilas - Of course, but not only for this reason. Such a regime having made the transition to the market system at whatever cost would be much stronger economically, and at the same time would be militarily strong and aggressive. I do not think, however, that the general tendency is in this direction. It is going toward democracy: everywhere. Not easily, and not without conflict, but it is inevitably going toward democracy.

Today, as the backlash of 45 years of Soviet domination in the ex-satellite countries, there is a nostalgic revival of the myth of *Mitteleuropa* and of the Hapsburg empire. But I consider it to be a short-term phenomenon. I am of course aware of the nostalgia for the pre-World War I order that is widespread in Middle Europe. But this is just a reaction to the disillusionment of communism. I do not believe in any Austro-Hungarian unity.

E *Don't you find that the end of the century is quite depressing? After all*
I *the struggle for national independence and for socialism in the previous and present ones, Central Europe is back to square zero. In all practicality, two centuries of effort and revolutionary hopes have ended in nothing.*

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Milovan Djilas - Exactly. And I would add that not only did they end in nothing, but in human and social terms they have had a negative outcome. From a general point of view, however, it would be unfair to say that there is nothing positive in the legacy of two centuries of struggle for political modernisation in the framework first of national independence and then of socialism. We have already spoken of the humanisation of capitalism as a result of the fear of communism. I would add that socialist idealism also played an important role against Nazism and in the colonies' struggle for independence.

I know that I am at odds with contemporary historical schools, but I still believe that the victory over Nazism is of tremendous moral importance. Not only did it change the situation in Europe, as we could not even imagine united Europe without the victory over Nazism. At the same time, the victory over Nazism also fatally wounded communism, in the sense that victory over one such totalitarian aggressive system inevitably influenced minds to turn against the other totalitarian systems. I think that the impact of the victory over Nazism is underestimated today. It changed the world situation. For example, the struggle against racism is a consequence of the victory over Nazism. Nazi racism has discredited forever those political regimes such as the one existing in South Africa, and has changed the situation of other oppressed races and nations.

E
I *Is this your explanation of the sudden worldwide discovery of human rights and democracy?*

Milovan Djilas - This discovery is fundamentally connected with the victory over Nazism. The defeat of Nazism forever disqualified the theory that some peoples or races can claim natural superiority over others, and thus have the right to assert their superiority by destroying those they deem inferior.

Giuseppe Sacco, the Editor of *The European Journal of International Affairs*, interviewed Milovan Djilas in Belgrade on 29 June 1990