

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

AS-9
Kulturkampf -- or Shadow Debate?

Bircaninova 28b
Belgrade, Yugoslavia
March 16, 1963

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
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Dear Mr. Nolte:

The struggle over culture in Yugoslavia continues, with none of us any the wiser as to its origin, purpose, seriousness or eventual outcome. Marshal Tito, following his speech to the People's Youth (see AS-8), elaborated his views still further in a meeting with leading Yugoslav journalists. The discussion at various party forums has gathered momentum since then, and there have been some tangible consequences in actual cultural policy. But the discussion itself and its political context have raised more questions than they have answered.

President Tito met with the Executive Committee of the Yugoslav Press Association on February 6, but the edited text of his remarks was not released until eight days later. It was officially reported that the interview had been at the journalists' request; and it was rumored, quite unofficially, that they had come partly to complain of excessive interference from on high in their day-to-day work -- interference which, they felt, had on occasion made them look rather foolish. One may cite at least two such occasions. The first concerned the repression of Communists by the Iraqi revolutionaries, which the Yugoslav press failed to report for almost a week after Western wire services had begun telling the story; only after the Soviet press, equally inhibited, had picked up the Western reports were the Yugoslav papers permitted to do so. The second instance concerned the deletion from reports of recent Soviet statements (such as Khrushchev's speech in East Berlin and the Pravda editorial of February 10) those remarks tending to argue that the Yugoslav Communists had changed their policy since the criticism made of them by the 81 Communist parties in the Moscow declaration of October 1960.

Whether or not such matters were in fact discussed, the edited text of Tito's remarks gave no hint of them. The first third of the interview was devoted to practical problems of journalism, but it consisted mainly of folksy advice: print fewer photos of "obscure personalities, various Tshombes and the like" and more of "workingmen and work collectives" who "could serve as an example and an inspiration"; develop more specialists on internal problems; report in greater socio-economic depth on foreign countries; be more diplomatic in criticism, and so on. But not all these remarks were entirely innocent, as it turned out. Tito questioned, for example, "whether it is necessary and expedient to publish such a large number of various smaller papers, which come out weekly, fortnightly, etc."; and a few days afterward at least one fortnightly was informed that it would cease publication. As yet, it is not clear whether consequences will flow with similar speed from such remarks

as "a certain number of persons who have little connection with our party, the League of Communists, have entered it. I am not in favor of a purge, but I am also not in favor of the League of Communists having for members careerists who will exploit their membership for personal ends."

Half the interview was devoted directly to the cultural struggle, and it is worth quoting at some length:

"Some people have shouted loudly against me over what I said about culture.... I have heard that individuals on whom my words found their mark have been reproaching me, and asking whence I had the right to criticize negative manifestations in the cultural field. They say: Tito knows how to conduct politics well enough, but he is not competent to deal with cultural affairs.

"But, comrades, those who say such things do not grasp what a Communist party is, what socialism is, or what communism is. I am not only responsible for industrialization and agriculture, but I am also responsible for culture itself, because I am not only the President of the Republic but I am also the Secretary General of the League of Communists. And, as the Secretary General of the party, I am responsible before both history and the people for a correct course in our country's development. Therefore such people should grasp and remember that it cannot be otherwise. Moreover, as an average man who looks at art, I can know what is good and what is not. I cannot grant that something is good if it is not.

"The abstract trend occupies a dominant position in Yugoslav painting. Little by little realists have been pushed to the background and prizes mostly awarded to abstract artists. Of course, the artists themselves are not to be blamed, but rather those responsible leaders -- Communists who had the power to dispose of funds and who awarded prizes to those who should not have gotten them....

"To be sure, in realism there are also weak and good works, every possible variety. A work which is a photograph, for example, is no good. But it is still possible always in realism to go forward. And modernism is not abstraction. It is in a sense a component part of realism, except that it is a step forward. And here too there are good works.

"I have thought it necessary to speak about culture, believing that others will also say what they think. No one who dislikes it should think that I will take back what I have said. I stand on it.... Our press should be careful to start not a 'witch hunt' but constructive criticism. For those artists who have been oriented toward abstraction, because it has been very profitable, should be helped to take a more correct path.... But we shall not help them by buying up their worthless paintings.

"Matters must be differentiated. Modernism too has beautiful works, but an abstract painting can serve only as decoration. And such a painting can decorate a room. Abstraction can be used for that purpose, but it cannot be a trend in painting which will deny

realistic creativeness. We will not take any administrative measures against our artists, because that would be against the program of our League of Communists. Let those individuals make what they wish, but let them do it at their own expense. If a private person wants to buy their work, let him do so. But we are not going to spend any more government money, millions, for such paintings. I shall fight against this most energetically. We must reward those people who really deserve it... and not to do so because of the snobbery of certain Communists who buy such pictures and sculptures. Let them maintain their snobbery out of their own pockets and not with the funds of the community. Therefore, our artists should not be frightened that we are now going to take some special measures. That would be nonsense. And the press should take care not to exaggerate, to calm matters, but also to criticize constructively...."

Tito then went on to call for "bold criticism," regretting that "in our country it has become customary that people are very much offended by criticism." He professed himself "astonished that even in my words considerable sharpness is found." And, he continued: "I think that such concepts and such an atmosphere are quite hazy and poisoned by negative Western influences. Of course, this does not mean that one should now start some sort of hunt against the West. In the West it should not be thought that all this is aimed against Western culture, because we too are part of that culture. We always gladly accept everything that is positive and good, but there are also some things there which have no connection with culture and which they themselves do not consider part of their culture. And among us just this penetrates and usurps the character of Western culture.... For example, different kinds of cheap literature are being translated in our country.... But this is not an expression of Western culture, which is very high, but of that which is also considered negative in the West. It is clear that this is done to break up our socialist order. And we should not permit this. This must be said to all our artists: writers, painters and others.... And we will not stop at what we have done so far...."

The interview then turned to "integration" in the field of culture. "If we want to create a socialist culture," Tito said, "then we must have a uniform program for it. This culture must be Yugoslav. Each individual republic and each individual nation cannot create its own separate socialist culture, because this would again be separatism which would inevitably lead to serious relapses sooner or later. We must... create a single socialist culture which, being Yugoslav, would be the property of all our nationalities." After acknowledging "a whole series of problems which are specific for each individual republic," Tito declared:

"When culture is in question, however, and particularly the schools, in my opinion there must be preserved that fundamental thread of general Yugoslav education which must be the same -- that is, Yugoslav -- in each republic, although certain national features can also be retained.... Education in the spirit of Marxism and Leninism should be joint and uniform.... The program must be changed in the sense that, for example, children should not be told too much about the past of their own people only, or about various

prominent figures from the past, because this past thus becomes exaggerated and the children thus get quite erroneous conceptions about the other nationalities in Yugoslavia. This means that these school programs should now be corrected.... That which is negative, or that which was perhaps positive in the past but is negative today, should be avoided in schools and in school programs...."

As in his speech to the People's Youth, Tito again linked the cultural struggle with the nationalities problem, the conflict among the regions for the allocation of resources. And once again, he followed the tendency he has been taking in the last year but had eschewed in the first fifteen years of his regime: namely, to appease the more developed northern peoples who have been financing the development of the backward south. This time, he made an important admission: "I agree that the means created on the soil of Slovenia, Croatia and partly also in Serbia, which have been given to the undeveloped republics and regions, have not always been invested in projects for which they were intended. It should not have been permitted that various monumental buildings and other projects were built there that are currently unnecessary; but the purpose should have been to build as rapidly as possible the industry and other projects which must be built. For we cannot expect, for example, the Slovenes to wait and not to raise their living standard and salaries until the living standards have been raised in other regions...."

These, then, were the highlights of Tito's interview. In the month that has followed since its release, there have been tangible consequences in the cultural field and a broadening discussion in various party forums. These, and the broader political context in which they have occurred, have been anxiously watched by observers seeking to comprehend the meaning of the cultural struggle. There are almost as many theories as there are observers, so that perhaps the best procedure here would be simply to record some of the pertinent facts, and indicate some of the questions that they raise.

Here in Belgrade, one of the first tangible consequences was the closing of the fortnightly newspaper Danas (Today), a cultural review which, at least in the minds of its editors, had played a unique role in the intellectual community. The paper was not popular, nor could it expect to be, for its literary level was roughly that of L'Express or the New Republic (minus, of course, the oppositional political emphasis). Its editors claimed a circulation of 5,000; its detractors in official circles now say it never sold more than 200 copies. (This is no more to be believed than the assurances of two high regime officials to recent Western visitors that the principle of "non-alignment" is enshrined in the new Constitution -- which, when one reads that document, it is not.) At any rate, Danas was subsidized for more than two years by the Serbian organization of the Socialist Alliance; and when it was closed the reason given was financial.

Few doubt, however, that political considerations were also involved. Danas was not (indeed, could not be) a journal of opposition. Its editors and most of its contributors were socialists, in the broader sense of the word. The paper was, moreover, "Yugoslav" in a principled way -- printing in Belgrade in the Latin (Croatian)

alphabet and opening its pages to contributors from Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo and Skopje. Yet Danas did have a fairly clear position -- one which seemed more than permissible two years ago but is no longer so. The paper stood for liberalization, democratization, and above all openness to the advanced culture of the West. It could not and did not go so far as the Polish Po Prostu of 1956; yet its editors doubtless viewed it in the same light. So, obviously, did the regime. Any remaining doubts on that score were dispelled when three plainclothesmen marched up to the periodical counter of the Economists' Club in Belgrade, and tore up the copies there of Danas' last issue, with much hulabaloo about "What's this doing here? Don't you know this rag is forbidden?" etc. In the overgrown village that is Yugoslavia's capital, an incident of this kind is universally known within a few days; and Danas soon disappeared from the newsstands on which it had been displayed.

Few other consequences of the cultural campaign have been quite so dramatic, although apparently a rather vigorous and open struggle developed within Studio 212, an experimental theater organization, over whether or not to start rehearsing the not-yet-approved play, The Centaurs, by Darko Tatić. (The tendency of the play may be understood from its title: a centaur, of course, is half-man, half-beast.) Yet the official press, and the participants in various discussions, have told enough to hint at many a private drama. For example, all the cultural councils in the Belgrade area have been restaffed: fewer intellectuals and experts, more party people. Publishers' schedules as well as theater repertories "are being reconsidered." A conference of journalists has been informed that "cadres policy" would have to be reviewed. Perhaps the most chilling story published thus far was the report (Borba, March 13) that in Zagreb "certain showrooms and art galleries have remained empty because some painters had cancelled the already announced exhibitions and... not a single artistic council of these galleries was able to find a way out.... There was not one single member in these councils who would speak with artists and possibly express willingness to shoulder a part of the criticism and responsibility."

This anxiety of the artistic councils -- manned in large proportion by Communists -- underscores an element that has also been clear in the discussions: namely, that the struggle is largely, even primarily, one within the Communist ruling group. When Tito mentioned people who "shouted loudly against me," on grounds of his incompetence to judge culture, he was not referring to the man in the street or even to prominent non-Communist figures such as Ivo Andrić. (The latter, who stays miles away from such controversies, is nevertheless said to have reassured young writers fearful of a return to Stalinist methods with the laconic comment: "History never repeats itself.") Tito's struggle, quite plainly, is with other leading Communists, and it has been a favorite indoor pastime here attempting to identify them. Careful note is taken of which Communists in the various party plenums and committee meetings stress "integration" of culture, the necessity for greater Communist activity, the harmful aspects of Western influence; and which direct their attacks at penny dreadfuls, movie magazines, esthetic ignorance and insufficient funds for education and cultural institutions.

What has also been noteworthy is who has remained silent. These include not only all the major figures of Yugoslav artistic creation, but also some very high leaders of Yugoslav Communism. It is, of course, possible that some of these will speak out later; but at the moment there appear to be several curiosities. For one thing, although Jovan Veselinov, the leader in Serbia, and Blažo Jovanović, the leader in Montenegro, have more or less plumped for a "hard" line, and Lazar Koliševski, the chief in Macedonia, has taken a "softer" approach, the most prominent and respected of the republican leaders-- Dr. Vladimir Bakarić in Croatia -- has stayed out of the discussion altogether. His deputy, Nikola Sekulić, who conducted the inevitable plenum in Zagreb, smothered the subject with ambivalent phrases; while Dr. Bakarić instead chose this time to publish a long series of articles in Borba on economic theory. The articles are saturated with erudite Marxist reasoning, complex equations and tables of statistics; but their tendency is clearly to place state economic policy on a more rational, less "political" basis through higher wages for skilled workers, higher after-tax income for more productive industries and enterprises, less subsidy of inefficiency, and (although this is implied rather than stated) greater freedom from central control. In a certain sense, the Bakarić articles may be taken as the authoritative rejoinder of the decentralizers to a series of articles on price formation a few months ago by Mijalko Todorović, a Federal Vice President and a Serb whose conclusions were quickly disputed by Croat and Slovene economists. Dr. Bakarić's timing may have been coincidental, but it does appear from Tito's speeches as well that the economic debate among the nationalities and the cultural question are in some (as yet not clear) way linked.

The most curious silences have been those of the two putative successors to Tito and survivors of the original Partisan high command (which also included Djilas, Hebrang, Žujović and Pijade): namely, Aleksandar Ranković and Edvard Kardelj. Ranković is generally considered a taciturn man, but after all he did deliver the main report on ideological problems at the central committee plenum last summer. His only "contribution" to the current discussion has been to chair a meeting of the central committee's organizational-political secretariat. The account of this meeting in the Party weekly Komunist was strange, indeed. The lead paragraph stated that the meeting discussed "certain manifestations in our cultural life," publication of Marx's complete works, the work of district committees, party cells in maritime and river traffic, and other financial and current matters. The account then went on to discuss every one of these matters in great detail except culture, about which not a single additional word was said. It is possible that the meeting's decisions on culture were of the kind best unpublicized; yet there is also a widespread feeling here that Ranković, anxious not to prejudice the succession in any way, has carefully been staying out of the line of fire.

The silence of Mr. Kardelj has been even stranger. He has been, after all, the regime's chief theoretician on domestic and international questions, the main author of the party program adopted at the last congress in Ljubljana in 1958. He has also been the butt of implied criticism from the Russians, who in arguing their case that Yugoslavia has been reforming its "revisionist" ways have cited

the speeches of "Comrades Tito, Ranković and other leaders"; the Albanians have made the same point the opposite way, by attacking the Ljubljana program and other speeches by Tito and Kardelj. Since his return from the Far East, Kardelj had been so quiet that there had been speculation that his political career was over, that he would be the principal sacrifice in an ideological accommodation with the Russians. Although he was chairman of the Constitutional Commission, his name was not mentioned in connection with it even on the eve of its meeting (March 6) to adopt a final draft of the new Constitution. There were rumors that all the major leaders were huddling at Brioni, with Kardelj's own position among the matters to be clarified.

The meeting of the Constitutional Commission only clarified that Kardelj had not disappeared altogether. He did chair the session and delivered the main report, but this merely deepened the mystery. He indicated that the text of the Preliminary Draft (presented last fall after nearly two years of preparation) had been "considerably changed," but he devoted most of the report to describing the scope of the nationwide discussion and why most of the suggestions made could not, for one reason or another, be included in the new draft. All this was rather vague, and Kardelj himself said that more detailed explanations would be given later. (They have not yet been made public.) There was nothing vague, however, about his conclusion. "Finally," he said, "there remain four completely new proposals on which the Constitutional Commission is to say its word.... First, there is a proposal to change the name of Yugoslavia to the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, in order to emphasize its socialist character. Second, there is a proposal to change the flag, that is, that it be red (instead of red, white and blue -- AS), with the state emblem.... Third, for practical reasons, it is proposed to introduce the office of a Vice President of the Republic, who... would replace the President of the Republic in case of absence and deputize for him on specific matters in which he is empowered by the President of the Republic. And fourth, it is proposed to go over in principle to a 42-hour workweek...."

It was embarrassingly clear to one and all that these new suggestions had been made not as a result of the discussions which 6,000,000 Yugoslavs attended and in which 300,000 are said to have spoken, but by a single man: Tito himself. Kardelj said as much by noting twice in his speech that "certain questions of principle were discussed in the Executive Committee" of the party. It also seemed to many that Kardelj was not personally enthusiastic about the changes; his formulations -- "there is a proposal," "it is proposed" -- were surely noncommittal and brief.

On the proposals themselves, it is generally agreed here that the last -- the 42-hour workweek -- was a "sweetener," especially since Kardelj indicated that it would be implemented only gradually. It was designed to sweeten, of course, the taste which was indubitably left by the first two proposals: the "Socialist Federative Republic" and the red flag. These two are, most charitably, interpreted as evidences of Tito's old Communist spirit and, least charitably, considered token offerings to Khrushchev in his duel with Mao. In neither way are they popular either with

the general public or the stratum of Communist lawmakers, ideologists, theoreticians and jurists which labored so long in the framing of the Preliminary Draft.

The third proposal -- the creation of a Vice President -- perhaps offers some hint of an explanation of what has been going on. In the present Constitution, Tito combines in his person the roles of chief of state and chief of government, holding the offices of President of the Republic as well as President of the Federal Executive Council. Kardelj and Ranković are among the four Vice Presidents of the Republic, and in practice one of the four, usually Kardelj, has deputized for Tito on those occasions (mostly ceremonial) where his presence has been impossible. It should also be noted that Tito holds the job of Secretary General of the League of Communists, while Ranković replaced Kardelj several years ago as head of the Socialist Alliance, the mass organization created in the war as the People's Front.

This was a nice division of authority, and the Preliminary Draft seemed to be aiming to perpetuate it. The draft's chief innovation, in power terms, was the separation of the Presidency of the Republic from the Presidency of the Federal Executive Council, the latter post conceived in similar manner to the Premiership in Gaullist France. This would free Tito to some extent from the legal, economic and administrative work that necessarily occupies the Council on a day-to-day basis. It was said that Tito had offered this post to Dr. Bakaric, who however preferred for reasons of health to remain in Zagreb. Meanwhile, the Preliminary Draft conferred on the President of the Federal National Assembly (hitherto a powerless figure) the right to deputize for the President of the Republic in the event of protracted absence or inability to discharge his functions. When the Preliminary Draft was unveiled last September, officials privately passed the word that this post would go to Kardelj, while Ranković would soon relieve Tito as Secretary General of the Communist League.

Now this scheme has been upset. There are few here who believe that the new Vice President of the Republic, with powers to deputize on specific matters, will be other than Ranković. Quite apart from any possible political differences, or Kardelj's lack of enthusiasm in presenting the proposal, Ranković has the reputation of a capable administrator while Kardelj does not. Some here say that the change has been made simply to provide Ranković with a suitable post in the government apparatus -- for Tito may be loath now to yield the leadership of the League of Communists without holding a party congress, which for many reasons seems inopportune. Others say that Kardelj may yet claim the post of President of the Federal Executive Council and, since he is a Slovene and Tito a Croat, it is necessary to redress the national balance with Ranković, a Serb; it should be noted, however, that the current favorite in speculation over the coming "Premier" is Jovan Veselinov, a Serb. Still others maintain that herein is the definitive regulation of the succession, with Rankovic in (bolstered by Veselinov) and Kardelj out -- stuck in the ceremonial

post he designed for himself, but shorn now of potential power. And those who hold this view argue that Kardelj has lost out for reasons of foreign policy: he is the chief architect of the ideology of "non-alignment," which has proved a failure, and he is the "revisionist" par excellence in the eyes of the Russians, Chinese and Albanians.

These speculations must not be taken too literally: the jobs have not yet been officially created, let alone distributed, and in fact the text of the new Draft Constitution has not yet been made public. Yet it does appear that the struggle over culture is taking place in the context of a larger struggle within the Communist high command -- a struggle in which the real issues are the succession, the nationalities question and, especially, relations with the Soviet bloc. One intelligent observer here suggests that the entire discussion of culture is a "shadow debate," a foggy substitute for the real discussion (which cannot be publicly held) of how far Yugoslavia can and should go toward alignment with Moscow, a means of taking the party's measure on such tricky issues as "Western influence" and "socialist realism."

One may only guess at such connections; the party is playing matters extremely close to the vest. Yet there are at least two bits of evidence, one small and one rather large and obvious, suggesting that the cultural debate and the foreign-policy question go hand in hand. The less substantial evidence is a newspaper report of just one of the many plenums held on culture; one of the first, this one was held in Bosnia-Hercegovina, and the rapporteur was the Montenegrin Veljko Vlahović, who ranks second only to Kardelj as a party ideologist and who led the Yugoslav delegation to the East German Communist congress in January. The brief report stated that Vlahovic had discussed the cultural scene and also, at the members' request, clarified some aspects of the international situation.

The more obvious connection, of course, is that Tito launched this kulturkampf immediately upon his return from Russia and has pursued it at a time when, it is now clear, Khrushchev is also doing battle on a grand scale with revisionists, liberalizers, modernizers, abstract painters, and intellectuals who wish to probe the Stalinist past somewhat too deeply. But is Tito closing ranks with Khrushchev for the struggle against the Chinese -- or a compromise with them? Or is he simply making noises about the intellectuals to provide Khrushchev with tactical ammunition?

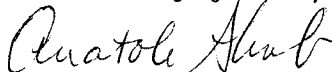
These questions defy convincing explanation at the moment. Even more complex is the relation of the cultural and the international questions to the nationalities struggle. Shortly after Tito's speech to the People's Youth, a Yugoslav friend remarked to me: "I can't understand it. I've been reading Tito's speeches for eighteen years and now for the first time he's appeasing the Slovenes. Why? He must want their support for something else -- but what?" Perhaps, we jointly mused, to neutralize their discontent while clamping down on the intellectuals. Perhaps also to neutralize the potentially greatest source of resistance (for the Slovenes and Croats are Roman Catholic) to firmer ties with Moscow. A few weeks later, we each hit separately upon an even more startling "perhaps":

to prepare the way for the political eclipse of Kardelj (rightly or wrongly, the symbol of decentralization) and the anointing of Ranković.

All this may be the wildest demonology; The Slovenes may deserve to be appeased on purely economic grounds, and Tito may be open-minded enough to have changed his stance in the light of the evidence of the 1961-62 recession. On the cultural front, he may actually be modifying even sterner demands being pressed by the "mountain boys" in the party. On the succession, there is still not a whit of hard evidence that anything has changed; and so long as Tito remains unmistakably and overbearingly Number 1, Number 2 does not much matter.

Yet there is no denying, with the air full of rumored shakeups, reorganizations, changes, that Belgrade is a tense and uneasy city. The common feeling is that something must "give" soon -- if not here at first, then in Moscow and afterward here.

Cordially yours,



Anatole Shub

Received in New York March 20, 1963.