

SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON WRITING  
ABOUT THE CAREER OF EDVARD KARDELJ

Tito's lingering illness and death in May of last year were extensively covered by the media world-wide. There was considerable concern about the viability of Yugoslavia's socialist system which has been perpetually fraught with the economic woes of a nation industrializing and one which is now experiencing rampant inflation and the rising cost and shortages of oil, a problem, incidentally, troubling both capitalist and socialist states alike. Governing a multi-national country with a recent history of violent nationalistic clashes without Tito, its strong man, to mediate, or, when necessary, intimidate those resisting the "socialist" Yugoslav ideal also occupied the press. The media, for the most part, however, gave the Yugoslavs a better than fifty-fifty chance of adjusting, difficult as it was surely to be. It also pretty much dismissed as improbable any immediate foreign threat to Yugoslavia's sovereignty--notably from the USSR.<sup>1</sup>

The press treated Tito's longevity and political survival, as might be expected, with reverence. For when Josip Broz died in his eighty-eighth year, his reputation as a World War II military hero was still intact and his triumphal confrontation with Stalin and Cominform "inquisitors" in 1948 had long since become legend. Among those, by the way, who have contributed to Tito's favorable press were East Europe analysts in the West who warmly greeted discord in the monolithic Communist camp. The long illness which preceded Tito's death also afforded reporters the opportunity to assess Yugoslavia's socialism as it had developed under his leadership. The economic system and the governmental apparatus--both linked to the "self-management concept"--are identified with Tito. So, too, is the policy of non-alignment which has characterized Yugoslavia's foreign relations since the mid-1950's. Credit or accountability for the successes or failures (the regime, as one might expect, has its formidable critics), has been largely over-simplified. Tito did not shape post-World War II Yugoslavia alone. He had considerable help in dealing with threats from foreign powers and with pressing social and economic problems internally. The input of, among others, Edvard Kardelj, a Slovene Communist whose association with Tito dates from the 1930's to Kardelj's death in 1979,<sup>2</sup> is little known outside Yugoslavia. Yet Kardelj's theoretical writings are of

importance, for they constitute the base upon which Yugoslav socialism is built.

Studying Kardelj, however, presents problems. Most of the literature on him, as with that on Tito, is essentially non-scholarly. The published works, especially those covering the World War II resistance movement or the period of the confrontation with Stalin, whether recorded by Yugoslavs, such as Djilas or Dedijer in memoirs,<sup>3</sup> or by foreigners, are reverential. British writers in particular have romanticized the war period and Tito's company of Partisans.<sup>4</sup> And one must not forget Louis Adamič's The Eagle and the Roots: his description of Kardelj, which appears also in Fitzroy Maclean's 1957 biography of Tito, is hagiographical. Adamič writes:

What struck Broz most about Kardelj was his steadfastness and his calm, equable temperament. He was also favorably impressed by the quiet efficiency with which he did his work. Efficiency was a quality by which Broz set great store. "Kardelj was so quiet," he said many years later, "that you hardly noticed him at first; but decisions were made, aims were achieved, and then you realized that it was he who had made the proposal, persuaded others to accept it, and put it into effect. No setback dismayed him. He was free of pretense and bluff. He eschewed fractionalism. His mind dwelt on essentials. After my first meeting with him I had no doubt that he was an honest man and a true revolutionary."<sup>5</sup>

Serious work on Kardelj will, of course, draw on this literature as well as from a variety of published documents. Among the more important are two collections. One is Dokumentni ljuške revolucije v Sloveniji, five volumes issued between 1962 and 1978,<sup>6</sup> containing much unmined material on Kardelj which does not appear even in the volumes of his collected works.<sup>7</sup> For the war period there is also the 130 to 140 volume collection on the Yugoslav national war of liberation.<sup>8</sup> The sections on Slovenia and on the General Staff should yield interesting information. Interviews with Kardelj's contemporaries, though aged and sometimes tending toward sentimentalizing their part in the story, will be of great value. Archival material, such as that now being assembled in Ljubljana at the party's Central Committee headquarters, are crucial to a definitive study; but this material is likely to be inaccessible for some time.

Most important in the area of Kardelj research for the immediate future is Štefka Bulovec's bibliography, published last summer (1980).<sup>9</sup> It lists all of Kardelj's publications, both in Yugoslav and in foreign languages, issued between 1928 and 1978. The number of entries in Bulovec's volume is 2,691 and represents both original works, reprints, translations, and editions of the same work in both Cyrillic and Latin alphabets. Yet, in spite of some obvious duplication, these printed works ought to keep Kardelj scholars occupied for a very long time.

Among other recent (1980) publications of relevance are new biographies of Tito by Dediđer and Djilas,<sup>10</sup> and, of course, Kardelj's Spomini. The latter, subtitled "Boj za priznanje in neodvisnost nove Jugoslavije," contains reminiscences and interpretive thoughts on the period 1944 to 1957. The editors of this work, which was dictated by Kardelj when he was terminally ill, have appended to it copious useful explanatory notes.<sup>11</sup>

Historians will be particularly eager to examine Kardelj's political career which spanned four turbulent decades. He survived most of his wartime comrades who had "gone to the hills" with Tito. Among these were Milovan Djilas, a vice president of post-war Yugoslavia whose dispatch to political limbo in the mid-1950's may have been expedited by Kardelj.<sup>12</sup> He also survived Alexander Ranković, a long time minister of interior and Yugoslav vice president as well, who was in 1966, as the popular account goes, relegated to riding his bicycle in Belgrade's Kalimegdan Park. Kardelj's part in the resistance, that is, his influence over the execution of the war and popular revolution, needs to be elaborated. One issue of particular interest to Slovenes regards a conflict between Kardelj and Arše Jovanović, a Royalist officer, over military strategy. Jovanović apparently was insistent that the resistance effort be focused exclusively in the hills of Bosnia; Kardelj was quietly, but determinedly, intent on preserving "his" revolution in Slovenia. The latter accused Jovanović of cowering at the prospect of having to fight a war which required "crossing roads and railroad tracks." Kardelj evidently prevailed, for the war resistance in Slovenia continued with the approval and encouragement of the General Staff.<sup>13</sup> (In the early 1930's Kardelj had become convinced that a social revolution required popular, i.e. peasant support. Tito and the underground party organization accepted Kardelj's rationale; they also agreed that the revolution ought to be linked to a broader anti-fascist effort, similar to that later announced as the Popular Front in 1936. Some would

later attribute the success of Partisan guerrilla operations, especially in Slovenia, to the pre-1941 popular base which had been established in villages at Kardelj's urging.)

A student of Kardelj will, of course, need to examine his input into Yugoslavia's domestic and foreign policy decisions. Kardelj is closely associated with the initiation and implementation of what is termed socialist "self-management."<sup>14</sup> This stands, at least in concept, for popular involvement in political decision-making (the delegate system) and for a decentralized, democratic system of economic planning. The most widely publicized "self-managing" institution is the worker's council, which analysts find comparable to Sweden's "industrial democracy" or to what is being called "shop-floor democracy" in parts of the United States where workers are gaining an increasing voice in formulating policy.<sup>15</sup> Kardelj's impact on Yugoslavia's foreign policy will no doubt alone require a number of tomes many inches or centimeters thick. Given that Yugoslavia is not a major world power, the policy Kardelj advocated, and perhaps even initiated, would certainly be characterized as at best very risky. Shooting down United States planes in the late 1940's and early 1950's (which Djilas says earned Kardelj a commendation from Molotov),<sup>16</sup> bucking the Russians during the 1948-49 Cominform confrontation, even to the point of preparing for a military encounter with the Soviet Union--as one source close to Kardelj at the time tells it--is pretty brave stuff. Moreover, in 1960 Kardelj, took on the Chinese in his book Socialism and War.<sup>17</sup> The point he made was that socialism could be achieved without a war between opposing camps. By then Yugoslav foreign policy had passed two landmarks. It had established a position of non-alignment (in response to both Eastern and Western pressures); while on the other hand it had accommodated to both Russia and the West by accepting the notion of detente and peaceful co-existence. The Chinese challenged the latter position and Kardelj presented them with formidable ideological arguments as to why they erred.<sup>18</sup>

Though Kardelj's real genius lies, no doubt, in his knack for enduring politically (to be fully assessed only when official and personal archival material becomes available), Kardelj's "claim to fame" for the present will have to rest on his ideological writings. Much like Djilas, Kardelj felt compelled to explain everything in terms of Marxist economic determinism. It would appear (excuse the lapse into amateur psychohistory) that feeling unjustly accused of heresy, as Kardelj and the fledgling Yugoslav socialist government did in 1948, led to serious questioning of the

ideological consistency of the accuser--in this case the Soviet Union.

Kardelj had had many years of preparation for his post-World War II role as theoretician of Yugoslav socialism. There was a two-year internship, from late 1934 to early 1937, first as a student, then as a lecturer of Marxism-Leninism, in the USSR.<sup>19</sup> There were the prison confinements in Yugoslavia (in Požarevac from 1930 to 1932 and two detentions in Ljubljana in 1938) which allowed time to read and meditate.<sup>20</sup> Such prison stays seem to have been particularly productive spiritually and intellectually for political detainees.<sup>21</sup> During these internments Kardelj reviewed literature on Slovene history and formulated his seminal work, Razvoj slovenskega narodnega vprašanja ("The Development of the Slovene National Question"), which was published in 1939 under the pseudonym of Sperans. In that book<sup>22</sup> he covered the span of Slovene historical development from the perspective of dialectical materialism, giving to the history of the Slovene people a Marxist structural framework. In writing Razvoj Kardelj said he hoped to invest Slovene history with a logic he felt was lacking in existing works about the Slovene past.<sup>23</sup> Kardelj would articulate in later ideological works--whether on self-management, on non-alignment regarding foreign relations, or on issues of nations and nationality--concepts that appeared in that first theoretical piece. All works will, of course, need to be studied by any who wish to trace Kardelj's intellectual evolution from the 1930's through the 1970's.

The kind of scholarly work that needs to be done on Kardelj and the period in general is beginning, and it is the Sperans work specifically, its intellectual roots, and Kardelj's reworking of later editions of Razvoj that have received the most attention. A major portion of the most recent volume of Zgodovinski časopis (33/4 [1979]) is devoted to this.<sup>24</sup> Here Janko Pleterški, for example, offers a provocative piece on the 1930's intellectual climate and the state of history writing of the time. For him it is a dynamic period, which anticipates a major transformation in Slovene historiography. The writings of Prepeluh, Slanc, Lončar, and Tuma--because of their occupation with workers' movements--laid the groundwork for Kardelj's opus. Pleterški also feels that the most important synthetic work of the period, Milko Kos' Zgodovina Slovencev od naselitve do reformacije (1933), strongly influenced Kardelj. For just a few years later Kardelj would depict the peasantry as the basic component of the Slovene nation and hail its growing national consciousness. In other words, for Kardelj, the

dialectic's instrument for objectifying the subjective became the Slovene peasant.<sup>25</sup>

Debates in journals in the mid-1930's, Sodobnost and Književnost among others, generated great interest in social history and sociological approaches to history. Some who participated in the dialogue had studied in Paris or were influenced by those, like Fran Zwitter, who did.<sup>26</sup> Kardelj's work, for Pleterski, is the culmination of several decades of experimentation with new approaches and techniques; and Pleterski points out that Razvoj would soon influence the writing of others.<sup>27</sup>

Pletherski also discusses Kardelj's understanding of the historian's function. It is a didactic one: to educate the masses and to show the way in the struggle for survival and toward advancement. Pletherski concurs: the historian, particularly a Marxist one, has indeed a moral commitment to society. In defense of this view Pletherski quotes E. H. Carr:

History must speak to the people, so that it can help them become better; it should be its [the people's] weapon in today's battles and its [the people's] tools in building a future.<sup>28</sup>

Some historians would take issue with that conception of the historian's duties. They would perhaps question that Razvoj itself is good history.

That, in a way, is what Bogo Grafenauer has done. In an article in the most recent Zgodovinski časopis and in a lengthy review of the 1970, i.e. third edition, of Razvoj<sup>29</sup> he evaluates Kardelj the historian. The latter piece is extraordinary for its boldness in criticizing his work at a time when Kardelj was still a major political force in Yugoslavia. In fact, most "Yugoslavia-watchers" at the time were betting on him to succeed Tito. And, Grafenauer's review is exceptional for its thoroughness in examining the four editions of Razvoj. It demonstrates the kind of scrutiny that should be applied to other aspects of Kardelj's work and career. In my opinion it is the best scholarly piece written on the subject of this paper.

Kardelj wrote Razvoj, producing a "grand synthesis" of Slovene history after having read only secondary works. Grafenauer can excuse this for the first edition given the circumstances under which it was written. Later editions should have benefitted, however, from the fact that Kardelj

was no longer under the political constraints of 1939. But Kardelj failed to keep au courant with Slovene historical scholarship, some of which his own work had inspired. Nor did he always heed the advice of historians who critiqued in detail various versions of Razvoj for new Yugoslav or foreign editions.<sup>30</sup> According to Grafenauer, if Kardelj had even consulted recent school texts in preparing for Razvoj's third edition, it would have been a better book. However, Kardelj was reluctant to alter his interpretation. For example, he refused to violate Engels' view of the small nation and its role in the revolution of 1848/49, though post-World War II Slovene historical scholarship had effectively challenged it.<sup>31</sup> Even factual errors were not always corrected. What suggests itself from reading "Grafenauer on Kardelj" is that perhaps Kardelj should have left the writing of Slovene history to the historians after World War II. His Sperans volume of 1939 might then have stood as a monument to the dedicated revolutionary.

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#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Many cited as a factor Russia's frustrating involvement in Afghanistan. Others, e.g. George Kennan, stressed the nature and strength of the Yugoslav military (the third largest force in Europe, one with a fundamental commitment to guerrilla combat); the unlikelihood of much support from the socialist East European states through which a land-based Russian invasion of Yugoslavia is imperative; and the certain objection of Western European countries, notably Italy, which would take offense at a Russian presence in neighboring Yugoslavia. See James Reston, "Kennan on Yugoslavia," New York Times, 10 February 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Kardelj was born 27 January 1910 and died 10 February 1979.

<sup>3</sup> See for examples Milovan Djilas, Conversations with Stalin (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1962); Vladimir Dedijer, The Battle Stalin Lost (New York: Viking, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> See for examples Fitzroy Maclean, Tito: The Man Who Defied Hitler and Stalin (New York: Ballantine Books, 1957);

F. W. D. Deakin, The Embattled Mountain.

<sup>5</sup>Maclean, op. cit., p. 49, citing Louis Adamič, The Eagle and the Roots (New York: Doubleday, 1952).

<sup>6</sup>Published by the Inštitut za zgodovino delavskega gibanja.

<sup>7</sup>Edvard Kardelj, Izbrano delo, ed. Josip Vidmar, 2 Vol. (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1977).

<sup>8</sup>Zbornik Dokumenta i podataka o narodno osvobodilačkom ratu Jugoslovenskih naroda (Belgrade: 1955).

<sup>9</sup>Stefka Bulovec, Bibliografija Edvarda Kardelja (Ljubljana: Založba Komunist, 1980).

<sup>10</sup>Milovan Djilas, The Story from Inside (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980); Vladimir Dedijer, Tito, 1980.

<sup>11</sup>Published by Državna založba Slovenije, 1980.

<sup>12</sup>Maclean, op. cit., p. 370.

<sup>13</sup>The source is a colleague of Kardelj's, but I do not yet have permission to quote him. Interview, Portorož, 20 September 1980.

<sup>14</sup>Samoupravljanje, 5 Vol. (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1979).

<sup>15</sup>CBS Television report on industry in Jamestown, New York, 2 August 1980.

<sup>16</sup>Djilas, Conversations with Stalin, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>17</sup>See Edvard Kardelj, Socialism and War: A Survey of Chinese Criticism of the Policy of Coexistence, trans. Alec Brown (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960).

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. Kardelj's point was that the forces of peace strengthen the forces of socialism.



<sup>19</sup> France Filipič, "Okoliščine in potek nastajanja 'Speransa,' Zgodovinski časopis 33/4 (1979), 553, footnote 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Filipič's article is very useful. It contains, among other things, a catalogue of what Kardelj read while in prison.

<sup>21</sup> Sremska Mitrovica became a virtual "university" for Communist party members, according to an inmate of the inter-war period. Interview, Portorož, 20 September 1980.

<sup>22</sup> Razvoj... has been issued four times: 1939, 1957, 1970 and 1977.

<sup>23</sup> See Razvoj... Introduction to first edition, 1939.

<sup>24</sup> A special offprint of the Zgodovinski časopis articles was put out by the Zgodovinsko društvo za Slovenijo on the fortieth anniversary of Razvoj's first publication.

<sup>25</sup> Janko Pleterski, "Zgodovinska misel slovenskih marksistov v času Speransove knjige," Zgodovinski časopis 33/4 (1979), 534.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> For an example, Pleterski, loc. cit., cites an article by Boris Zihnerl entitled "Smotri francoske revolucije v bojih slovenskih kmetov," published in Sodobnost (1939), 302-12.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 541.

<sup>29</sup> See Zgodovinski časopis 24/3-4 (1970), 312-33.

<sup>30</sup> Grafenauer was asked by Državna založba Slovenije to offer suggestions for the third edition (1970) of Razvoj. He made comparisons of editions one and two, took copious notes (available with Grafenauer's permission at the Inštitut za zgodovino delavskega gibanja), but Kardelj rejected a good number of Grafenauer's points. Hence Grafenauer felt it necessary to put himself on record with the scholarly community regarding Kardelj's work as a "historian." Zgodovinski časopis 24/3-4 (1970), 314.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 323, 330-32.