

Democratic Politics Today

Pavle Gantar

The question that has been puzzling me ever since the uprising of the totalitarian movement in Yugoslavia was established is how to conceive - if this is at all possible - an efficient democratic response that would be able to limit to the destructive power of mass totalitarianism, which seems to be on its victory march throughout Yugoslavia.

Indeed, this question addresses the old issue of the fragility or vulnerability of democratic politics when it is faced with political strategies that do not obey the »rules of the game«.

But in the case of Yugoslavia the problem is even more complicated and difficult - the social order in the broadest sense of the word - is not a democratic one, and most certainly not in terms of classical representative democracy (cf. Bobbio, *The Future of Democracy* 26-26). Therefore the circumstances in Yugoslavia are far removed from the circumstances that Mannheim had in mind in his work *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, where a liberal political order with all its pitfalls and problems, is threatened by totalitarian politics.

The question for the democratic, political strategy in Yugoslavia is how to cope with the totalitarian politics supported by the political system and, somehow, the inevitable outcome.

It is commonly known that in response to the deep economic, social and political crisis of socialism in Yugoslavia three political strategies have developed.

The »status quo« strategy advocated by the federal political elite which seeks to prolong the existing balances of power.

The strategy of totalitarian reconstruction of Yugoslavia on the premiss of strong centralist and monetarist state with an open revival of stalinist political practices.

The strategy of democratic reconstruction, with all its implications in the economy, polity and society. There is no unique concept: nor does any concept belong only to the so-called alternative politics.

Democratic politics today in Yugoslavia faces huge imbalances that might become fatal:

1. What we observe nowadays is that all proposals for the democratic reconstruction of society and its politics (legal state, free election, representative democracy,

parliamentarism, civil society etc.) are attacked and refused by the ruling party and elite, and at the same time it has become evident that the political system with all its institutions and devices is very vulnerable to totalitarian demands. Very recent developments (the application of martial law in Kosovo) have shown that the status quo politics is already captured by the pressure of totalitarian politics. Federal state institutions and political organizations have become the vehicles of totalitarian reconstruction.

2. Opposite to this the democratic coalition in Slovenia is still very fragmented and unable to carry out the strategies that would stop the »export« of the totalitarian model to as yet unconquered regions (republics) in Yugoslavia.

The institutional politics in Slovenia which is, in a vague sense, democratically oriented tries to avoid direct confrontation within the institutions of political systems. Or put another way: it seems that they still play the »positive sum game«, although it is obvious that there is a »zero sum game«. In this light the *basic weakness* of democratic politics becomes evident: *democratic politics presupposes the pluralist structuring of the polity (political space) which involves nondemocratic politics too, but if the latter wins supremacy, then the pluralism is gone.*

3. *Democratic political strategy*: in elaborating such strategies one has to have in mind the following elements:

a/ That: some sort of tacit or explicit agreement with totalitarian politics seems impossible, for the characteristic of the latter is the tendency of self-perpetuating and seizing as yet unconquered spheres and regions.

b/ The only feasible policy seems to be to persist and strengthen the divergent social economic and political development by setting very definite limits to totalitarian politics (i.e. a point to which it can go - but the problem is that it has gone too far).

c/ To strengthen the civil society in terms of self-organization of democratically oriented political subjects and to exercise pressure for institutional changes that would, at least in Slovenia, codify the level of democratization already achieved and set forth on the path for further democratization.

Yet, the success of such policies cannot be guaranteed. The great advantage of totalitarian politics is that it promises the deprived and frustrated people much more than it is able to achieve (well-being...), but the problem has that this becomes evident only after the tragedy is already happened.