

Letters from Serbia - the 7th

Tito and Serbia

by László Végel

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Thirty years ago, on May the 4th, 1980, Josip Broz Tito, President of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, died. Yugoslav citizens had since 1945 officially celebrated the Marshal's birthday on the 25th of May, even though according to credible birth records Josip Broz was born in Kumrovec on May the 7th, 1892. In 1956 on Tito's suggestion a decision was made that the 25th of May should henceforth, aside from his birthday, also be the Day of Yugoslav Youth and Sport. This year in May Serbia evoked its past, even though that was in collision with the official trends. The old, strong Tito cult was replaced with Milosevic's, and already by the mid nineties amnesia began to be forced from the top down, even though before it there was no objective conclusion reached on Tito and his role. The character of the campaign against Tito which was fueled during the Milosevic regime isn't all that different from the character of Tito's cult. In the newly written school books partisans, along with Tito, were moved to the background and instead of them Draza Mihajlovic, a chetnik leader who dreamt of a Great Serbia, came to the foreground. This trend continued after the changes brought about by the end of 2000; it was to such a degree that some members of government applied themselves to the complicated task of finding and uncovering Draža Mihajlović's grave. But they have not found it till this day. After 1944 he was accused of cooperating with Hitler and sentenced to death by the communist people's court, and the place he was buried remained a secret most likely so as not to become a place of secret pilgrimage.

No one is contesting that Draža Mihajlović fought against the partisans more than

Pisma iz Srbije, 7.

Tito i Srbija

od Lasla Vegela

jun 2010.

Pre trideset godina, 4. maja 1980. preminuo je Josip Broz Tito, predsednik Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije. Njeni građani su od 1945. godine maršalov rođendan zvanično proslavljali 25. maja, uprkos tome što je, prema verodostojnim matičnim knjigama, Josip Broz rođen 7. maja 1892. u Kumrovcu. A godine 1956. na Titov predlog, doneta je odluka da 25. maj, pored dana njegovog rođenja, ubuduće bude i Dan jugoslovenske mladosti i sporta. Maja ove godine Srbija je evocirala svoju prošlost, mada je to bilo u koliziji sa zvaničnim trendovima. Davnašnji, okoreli Titov kult zamenjen je Mileševićevim, i već od druge polovine devedesetih u Srbiji je započeta jedna odozgo usmeravana amnezija, a da prethodno o Titu, o njegovoj ulozi, nisu izrečeni objektivni sudovi. Karakter kampanje koja je potpirivana protiv Tita za vreme Miloševićeve vladavine, ne razlikuje se mnogo o karaktera Titovog kulta. U novonapisanim udžbenicima partizani, a sa njima i Tito, potinusti su u pozadinu, umesto njih je u prvi plan izbio Draža Mihajlović, četnički vođa koji je sanjario o Velikoj Srbiji. Ovaj trend je nastavljen i posle promena koje su usledile krajem 2000. godine, do te mere, da su čak i pojedini članovi vlade prionuli na koplikovani posao pronalaženja i otkrivanja groba Draže Mihajlovića. Ali ga do danas nisu našli. Naime, posle 1944. godine komunistički narodni sud ga je pod optužbom saradnje s Hitlerom osudio na smrt, a mesto gde je sahranjen, držano je u tajnosti, vrlo verovatno zbog toga da ne postane mesto tajnih hodočašća.

Niko ne spori da se Draža Mihajlović više borio protiv partizana nego protiv Nemaca. Bio



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against the Germans. He was (also) Hitler's ally. Those who strive to increase the scale of Draža's personality explain these circumstances as the general's timely recognition of the communist threat – meaning, that cooperating with fascists is legitimized through anti-communism. This explanation falls in line with the trend in Serbian cities of renaming main streets that were named after Tito, or Tito's generals. As a rule they have been changed so as to bear the names of kings or such historic figures for whom at least a part of the public thinks are anti-Semites.

The names of streets bearing the names of Stalin's marshals and generals were also erased, which ended up being almost grotesque. Namely, at the time of last year's visit of Russian President Medvedev, the Russian ambassador in Belgrade, Alexander Konuzin, voiced Russia's disapproval over the removal of names of Russian anti-fascist generals from plaques on which street names are written in Belgrade – to which the government gave a promise that everything possible will be done to fix the situation. And so we find ourselves in the situation that Stalin's communist generals get streets named after them, while Tito's generals cannot have the same honor. This grotesque example actually shows that we have yet to honestly face what role Tito played, as well as honestly face the recent war past.

Today in Serbia Tito is considered one of the greatest enemies of Serbs, even though he was frantically mourned on May 4th, 1980 and the following days in the whole country, including Serbia.

je (i) Hitlerov saveznik. Oni koji nastoje da uvećaju veličinu Dražine ličnosti, tu okolnost objašnjavaju time da je general blagovremeno prepoznao komunističku opasnost, što će reći da se saradnja sa fašizmom legitimiraš antikomunizmom. Ovakvo obrazloženje je u skladu i s trendom preimenovanja onih glavnih ulica koje su u gradovima širom Srbije nosile Titovo ime, ili imena Titovih generala. Zamenjeni su, po pravilu, imenima srpskih kraljeva ili imenima takvih istorijskih ličnosti, koje bar deo javnosti smatra antisemitima.

U istom paketu brisani su i nazivi ulica koje su nosile imena Staljinovih maršala i generala, što se u krajnjoj liniji završilo bezmalo groteskno. Naime, ruski ambasador u Beogradu, Aleksandar Konuzin, uoči prošlogodišnje posete ruskog predsednika Medvedeva, izrazio je rusko negodovanje zbog brisanja imena sovjetskih antifašističkih generala sa tabli s nazivom beogradskih ulica, na šta je vlast obećala da će biti sve preduzeto da se stvar popravi. Tako smo se našli u situaciji da se ulicama daju imena Staljinovih komunističkih generala, dok Titovi komunistički generali ne mogu imati tu čast. Ovaj groteskni primer zapravo pokazuje da u Srbiji pravo suočavanje sa pitanjem Titove uloge tek treba da usledi, isto kao i suočavanje sa nedavnom ratnom prošlošću.

Danas se u Srbiji Tito ubraja među najveće neprijatelje Srba, mada su ga 4. maja 1980. godine, i narednih dana, u celoj zemlji, uključujući i Srbiju, frenetično žalili.



It was a Sunday. Citizens of Novi Sad were coming back from the local parks and camping grounds when, before the second (night-time) News broadcast, all electronic media interrupted their regular programming and broadcast the news of Tito's death. The preceding days were holidays; the First of May (International Workers' Day) was being celebrated and people, from the other side of the Danube, flooded the picnic/camping spots on Frushka Gora. In the park in Kamenica the "program" consisted of the traditional ox on a spit and people gave in to enjoying the barbecue decimating kebabs, chevapi (traditional grilled meat) and burgers. Before nightfall the traffic suddenly came back to life, but the city remained silent. For some time I wandered the streets until I finally entered a bakery. There was not a living soul inside, except for the owner who stood there all alone behind the counter; as it turned out later on, he was of Albanian origin. I ordered coffee and sat at a nearby table. I stared at the TV screen. The TV anchors, in dark suits, talked about the reactions of foreign state officials, the content of their condolence letters. As I learned later on the media had been preparing for this event for months. Very precise instructions were written out. Carefully selected music and documentary material had been prepared. It was known beforehand what kind of program will be shown when this worst of all scenarios happened – who will be the one to appear on the TV screens, etc. For the TV anchors several dark suits were made months in advance – ranging from dark brown to black. What's more, during the preceding four months, on days off, members of selected (media) headquarters had to report to the editorial staff. They had to leave telephone numbers where they could be reached at any moment.

The baker brought me my coffee and, standing alongside me having noticed how attentively I was watching the news he stayed by my table alongside me and stared at the screen. He spoke only after several minutes when he turned his gaze away from the TV. "The old man is gone", he said quietly, "and now things that had not happened before will happen, we will all come to grief, everything will be torn up.

I raised my head. I hadn't really been used to such openness. Intellectuals used to praise Tito, but I hadn't really heard any words of praise from kafana¹ goers. So I asked him –

¹ Kafana is a restaurant that is usually frequented more for drink than food - more of a pub than a restaurant. Live music is common. It is a big part of Serbian culture.

Bila je nedelja. Novosađani su se vraćali s okolnih izletišta, kad su pre početka drugog, večernjeg televizijskog dnevnika svi elektronski mediji prekinuli svoje redovne programe i emitovali vest o Titovoj smrti. Prethodni dani su takođe bili neradni, proslavljao se Prvi maj, međunarodni praznik rada, narod je pohrlio na Fruškogorska izletišta s one strane Dunava. U kameničkom parku na programu je bio tradicionalni vo na ražnju, izletnici su se prepustili zadovoljstvima roštilja, tamanili su ražnjiće, ćevapčiće i pljeskavice. Pred kraj dana naglo je živno automobilski saobraćaj na putevima, ali grad je ostao nem. Neko vreme sam se muvao ulicama, pa sam svratio u jednu poslastičarnicu. Nije u njoj bilo ni žive duše, vlasnik je usamljeno dreždao iza pulta, kako se kasnije ispostavilo, bio je albanske narodnosti. Naručio sam kafu i seo za obližnji sto. Zurio sam u ekran televizora. Spikeri su, u tamnim odelima, saopštavali reagovanja stranih državnika, sadržaje njihovih telegrama saučešća. Kako sam kasnije saznao, mediji su se mesecima pripremali za ovaj događaj. Bila su sačinjena vrlo precizna scenarija. Pripremljen je brižljivo odabrani muzički i dokumentarni materijal. Znalo se unapred kakav će program biti emitovan kad usledi ono najgore, ko će se pojaviti na ekranu, itd. Za njih je već mesecima unapred sašiveno nekoliko pari tamnih odela - od tamno smeđih nijansi do crnog. Štaviše, članovi odabranog štaba su tokom poslednja četiri meseca morali i slobodnim danima da se javljaju redakciji. Morali su da ostave sekretaricama brojeve telefona na kojima će biti svakog trenutka dostupni.

Poslastičar mi je doneo kafu i videvši s kakvom pažnjom pratim televizijski dnevnik, ostao je pored mog stola i zajedno sa mnom zurio u ekran. Progovorio je tak kad sam posle nekoliko dugih minuta skrenuo pogled na njega. Ode stari – reko je tiho - a sad će da bude što još nikad nije bilo, nagrabićemo svi, sve će da puca.

Digao sam glavu. Nisam baš bio navikao na ovu vrstu otvorenosti. Intelektualci su upućivali Titu hvalospeve, ali od kafanskih ljudi nisam baš čuo o njemu mnogo uzvišenih reči. Pa sam ga upitao, na šta zapravo misli, kad je pun ovakvih crnih slutnji što se naše sudbine tiče. Međutim, izbegao je odgovor, a

what did he mean by that, since he was full of dark foreboding when it came to our future. He, however, avoided answering and then (when he realized by my accent that I am not a Serb), still suspiciously, directly asked me what nationality I am? "Hungarian", I said. "Well then, take care because your people will also have a price to pay", he said with great importance. At this point he stepped back, as if he got scared of his own words. He stepped away with his head bent down, went behind the counter and continued watching the TV from there. He was fixated on coverage of citizens who were in tears.

I left my money on the table and left. Even thirty years after I still think about what should I have said to that Albanian baker? In vain I try to rethink that whole scene – I am never sure whether I could have given him an unambiguous answer.

The following day I was again full of doubts. Maybe I was just being neglectful, or aloof; maybe it was just out of habit, but most certainly not consciously, even less in protest that I went to work wearing jeans and a checkered shirt. However, at the moment I stepped out onto the street I stopped in my tracks. On a boulevard in Novi Sad passersby were mostly dressed in black. On their faces sorrow could be seen. Everyone was unusually quiet. I didn't know what to do. Should I go back to my flat and put on a dark suit? Are these people in mourning because of a directive from higher up? I had not known of any such directive. I spent the whole night in front of my TV: Yugoslav citizens were crying, what's more some were wailing, and I, being always suspicious, thought that the whole thing must be a setup since it isn't possible that the whole country was crying exactly as the media was reporting. But out on the streets I could see that the TV stations are broadcasting authentic coverage. Yugoslavia was indeed in deep mourning. Not even thirty years after am I able to say why exactly; maybe it started crying over its future on time?

I stood there in the busy street, wearing a pair of faded jeans and I didn't know quite what to do. Should I go back to the apartment and dress in something more suitable, and wear that to work – to the drama department of the Novi Sad Television channel? No, this I cannot do – this would be a sure sign of being spineless. I wasn't an anti-Titoist. During the seventies I didn't even know any extreme anti-Titoist even though by that time I had taken part in meetings which the government claimed were opposition gatherings. I know

potom – kad je po mom izgovoru shvatio da nisam Srbin – doduše donekle sumnjičavo, ali me je ipak direktno upitao koje sam nacionalnosti. Mađar, rekao sam. E, onda, čuvajte se, nećete ni vi jeftino proći, rekao je značajno. Na ovoj tački je, međutim, ustuknuo, kao da se uplašio sopstvenih reči. Povukao se, pognute glave, iza pulta i odande nastavio da gleda televiziju. Netrmice je zurio u snimke rasplakanih građana.

Ostavio sam novac na stolu, i izašao. I posle trideset godina razmišljam o tome šta je trebalo da odgovorim tom albanskom poslastičaru. Uzalud pokušavam uvek iznova da promislim tu scenu, nikad nisam siguran, da li sam mogao da mu dam jednoznačan odgovor.

Bio sam i sutradan prepun nedoumica. Možda sam bio naprosto nemaran, ili iz rasejanosti, najverovatnije iz puke navike, ali nikako svesno, još manje demonstrativno, na posao sam krenuo u farmericama i kariranoj košulji. Ali čim sam stupio na ulicu, morao sam da zastanem. Na novosadskom bulevaru prolaznici su bili mahom u crnini. Na licima ljudi tuga. Svi su bili neobično tihi. Nisam znao šta da radim. Da se vratim gore u stan i da i ja obučem tamno odelo? Da li su to ljudi u žalosti prema uputstvima s nekog višeg mesta? Međutim, ja ni za kakvo uputstvo te vrste nisam znao. Čitavu noć sam probdeo ispred televizora, građani Jugoslavije su plakali, štaviše, mnogi su glasno zapomagali, a ja sam, sumnjičav kakav već jesam, pomislio da je stvar izrežirana, nije moguće da čitava zemlja plače kako to mediji prikazuju. Ali na ulici sam se mogao uveriti da televizije emituju autentične snimke. Jugoslavija je bila zaista duboko ožalošćena. Ni posle trideset godina nisam umeo da kažem, zašto; možda je blagovremeno počela da oplakuje svoju budućnost.

Dreždao sam na prometnoj ulici u jednim izbledelim farmericama i nisam zapravo znao šta da radim. Da se vratim u stan i da obučem nešto prigodnije, i da u tome odem na posao, u dramsku redakciju novosadske televizije? Ne, to ipak ne mogu da učinim, to bi bio znak mog beskičmenjaštva. Nisam bio antititoista, u sedamdesetim godinama nisam ni poznao izrazitog antititoistu, mada sam u to vreme već učesvovao na raznim skupovima koje je vlast okarakterisala kao opoziciona okupljanja. Ali pouzdano znam da ni među kritičarima

reliably that even among those criticizing the system there were not any who would deny Marshal Tito's statesman format. It was only the Zagreb intellectual, Predrag Matvejević, who called on Josip Broz Tito to resign, but in his book with the greatest respect he acknowledged Tito's achievements. I wrote about Matvejević's book with great respect, even though I expected this to provoke a scandal. There was no scandal, and I got away with it without any great troubles. I am convinced that this also happened without any directive from higher above, but was the working of some overly-zealous culture bearers who wanted to gain some points this way. Because activities of this sort received privilege – since the regime did not react repressively, didn't threaten or punish, but rather gave privileges and positions.

I wanted to stay loyal to myself and because of this decided not to go back to the apartment to change, but I also didn't have enough audacity to show up at work in worn-down jeans. So I decided to stroll around the city and on every corner I could confirm that the peoples' sadness was true and deep, which strained me in no small degree. Shortly afterward I too fell under the influence of the general atmosphere.

I mourned for the old man in my faded jeans. This is how it happened then that I found myself, a couple of days after his death, at a human distance from the charismatic leader – this leader was greater than the country he created, which was later ruined in a bloody war by his followers, lackeys and servants. The worst thing about Titoism was what followed after Titoism. Those same masses that thirty years ago wailed in the streets only ten years later spoke of the beloved leader with hate. Those who were once his sycophants became hardcore anti-communists, those who used to be left-wing now prided themselves on being right-wing. Those who wanted to build a career fast – and there were many of them – they mainly denounced their past.

sistema nije bilo ljudi koji bi porekli državnički format maršala Tita. Jedino je zagrebački intelektualac Predrag Matvejević pozvao Josipa Broza Tita da podnese ostavku, ali u svojoj knjizi je s najvećim poštovanjem odao priznanje njegovim zaslugama. Sa uvažavanjem sam pisao o Matvejevićevoj knjizi, mada sam očekivao da će iz toga da se izrodi veliki skandal. Skandal je izostao, prošao sam bez većih nevolja. I uveren sam da se ni to nije desilo prema naređenjima s višeg mesta, samo su neki prerevnosni kulturtregeri hteli da na taj način steknu određene poene. Jer su zasluge te vrste podrazumevale povlašćenosti - režim najčešće nije reagovao represivno, nije pretio ili kažnjavao, već je radije delio privilegije i položaje.

Hteo sam da ostanem veran sebi, pa se zbog toga nisam vratio u stan da se presvučem, ali nisam imao ni dovoljno smelosti da se na radnom mestu pojavim u ofucanim farmericama. Pa sam rešio da prošpartam gradom, i na svakom koraku sam, s ne malom potresenošću mogao da se uverim da je žalost posvuda iskrena i duboka. Nedugo potom i ja sam pao pod uticaj te atmosfere.

U izbledelim farmericama sam žalio starog. Tako se desilo da sam se nekoliko dana posle njegove smrti našao zapravo na ljudskoj distanci s harizmatičnim vođom – taj vođa bio je veći od zemlje koju je stvorio i koju su potom njegove pristalice, njegovi lakeji i sluga, u krvavom ratu razorile. U titoizmu je najgore bilo ono što je posle titoizma usledilo. Ona ista masa koja je trideset godina ranije zapomagala na ulici, svega deceniju kasnije s mržnjom je govorila o obožavanom vođi. Njegovi nekadašnji uliznici postali su tvrdokorni antikomunisti, nekadašnji levičari sad su se busali u prsa na desnici. Oni koji su hteli brzu karijeru – a takvih je bilo mnogo – ti su se mahom odrekli svoje prošlosti. Sve naše nacionalizme na svoje krvave osvajačke



All of our nationalism was launched into bloody conquering battles precisely by ex-communists. All the poets who wrote him hymns – and almost every poet wrote one for the leader – erased from their collection of works those poems dedicated to Tito. It turned out, as if overnight, that everyone had been an oppositionist. Today even people who were fined by a police officer for crossing the street while the light was red declared themselves to be victims of that regime.

Everything has changed, except the elite.

If we take a look at the situation in Serbia today we have to say that this same paradigm of metamorphosis comes to light. The change of the political system has been achieved, but no real change of elite has happened. It is true that later Milošević's opponents had come to power, but soon enough they had found their way to the arms of Milošević's supporters. Those who were once against Europe now support European values wholeheartedly, those who used to be communists now are anti-communists, those who used to be left-wing are now right-wing – thanks to all of this the differences had slowly faded away; while the masses have become ever more indifferent. The person on the streets can see the value of the Dinar plummet and then he/she sits in front of the TV, changes the channel quickly as soon as he/she hears politicians preaching, without blinking, about how we are out of the crises. The political dailies are noting a continuous circulation decrease while the cheap and shallow TV shows, soap operas, are becoming more popular. The Balkans are not that dangerous – this is what some foreigners say when they wander to these regions and gladly waste their time on some Balkan exotics. Serbia is tired of grand metamorphosis. It has been a long, and overly hard, journey from Titoism to anti-Titoism. One part of the country is comfortably surrendering to nostalgia, while the other, at the mention of his name, wonders why that guy doesn't take part in the popular Big Brother reality show aired on what was once an opposition TV station? Or, why hasn't he been hired by Pink TV station for the Farma show? It could be that the same questions will be asked in several decades about Draža Mihajlović or Ratko Mladić. For now it seems that this is not likely – today they are national heroes of Serbia's wild capitalism.

pohode lansirali su upravo bivši komunisti. Pesnici, koji su mu pisali hvalospeve – skoro svaki pesnik je napisao svoju dvorsku pesmu – izbrisali su iz svojih opusa pesme posvećene Titu. Preko noći se ispostavilo da su ovde svi bili opozicionari. Danas se kao žrtve režima deklariraju i oni koje je saobraćajac kaznio jer su prešli kolovoz na crveno.

Sve se promenilo, osim elite.

Osvrnemo li se na današnju situaciju u Srbiji, moramo reći da do izražaja dolazi ista ova paradigma metamorfoze. Promena političkog sistema je izvedena, ali bez prave promene elite. Istina je da su na vlast došli Miloševićevi protivnici, ali oni su se veoma brzo našli u zagrljaju s Miloševićevim pristalicama. Oni koji su nekad bili protiv Evrope, sad zdušno zagovaraju evropske vrednosti, nekadašnji komunisti su postali antikomunisti, nekadašnji levičari sad su desničari – zahvaljujući tome razlike su postepeno izbledele. A mase su sve ravnodušnije. Čovek sa ulice pažljivo prati kako pada vrednost dinara, zatim sedne ispred televizora, ali brzo promeni kanal, čim čuje kako političari, bez da i trepnu, popuju o izlasku iz krize. Politički dnevni listovi beleže kontinuirani pad tiraža, sve su popularniji, međutim, jeftine i plitkounne televizisjke emisije, sapunske opere. Balkan nije toliko ni opasan, kažu stranci zalutali na ove prostore, i rado se zamajavaju nekim balkanskim egzotikama. Srbija se umorila od velikih metamorfoza. Bio je dug, i previše mučan, put od titoizma do antititoizma. Jedan deo zemlje se blagougodno prepušta nostalgijama, drugi se pak, na pomen njegovog imena, s nevericom pita zašto taj lik ne učestvuje u popularnoj emisiji Veliki brat nekadašnje opozicione televizije? Ili, zašto ga ne angažuje Televizija Pink za svoj rialiti šou na farmi? Može se desiti da će za nekoliko decenija isto da se pitaju na pomen imena Draže Mihajlovića ili Ratka Mladića. Za sada za to, međutim, nema izgleda, oni su danas nacionalni heroji u srbijanskom divljem kapitalizmu.

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