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Croatian Dissidents and the Dissonance of the West (Julienne Bušić, Ed.)

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The book *Croatian Dissidents and the Dissonance of the West*, edited by writer and translator Julienne Bušić, was published in 2024 by the publishing house Školska knjiga in Zagreb. This volume is written in both Croatian and English, making it accessible to a broader Croatian and international audience. It consists of a preface, two introductory texts by editor Julienne Bušić and historians Zlatko Begonja and Luka Knez, four sections in which various historical sources are integrated, and a postscript.

The author of the *Preface*, historian Josip Mihaljević, pointed out that the volume combines a scholarly, documentary, and essayistic approach to the issue. He also provided a brief overview of the book's content. He concluded that there were two main reasons for dissatisfaction in communist Yugoslavia: the feeling of national inequality and limited political freedom, and that despite external differences, the Yugoslav communist regime cannot be considered milder or

more liberal than other totalitarian systems. He stated that the book systematically addresses the topic of the reception of Croatian dissidents in the West and contributes to an understanding of why the Croatian struggle for national independence did not receive stronger support.

Julienne Bušić in the text *Lifting the Veil: Western Betrayal of Croatian Dissidents* referred to key factors in the relations between the United States of America (USA) and Yugoslavia, which also clarify the American stance toward Croatian émigrés. The author believes that the essence of this issue lies in the geopolitical interests of the USA, which, since 1948 and the split between Stalin and Josip Broz Tito, viewed Yugoslavia as a useful tool in the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union. Given that the removal of Tito from power or the breakup of the Yugoslavia was not in the American interest, Croatian dissidents who put forward such demands did not gain space in the Western public sphere. On the other hand, the author highlighted the cases of Yugoslav dissidents Milovan Đilas and Mihajlo Mihajlov, who were often present in the Western media because, while criticizing communism and the Soviet model of governance, they did not question the

existence of Yugoslavia. Additionally, Bušić explained American policy toward Yugoslavia by describing the opinions of the American ambassador to the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, George Kennan, and the Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who proclaimed the struggle for human rights, except when it was not in accordance with American geopolitical interests.

She also reflected on the actions of the American intelligence services, which conducted various operations in communist countries aimed at weakening state authorities, while never undertaking such actions in Yugoslavia. On the other hand, American agencies often dealt with Croatian émigrés, interpreting their activities negatively. Additionally, the author analyzed a media blockade in the West that Croatian dissidents faced and pointed out the significant attention drawn by Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and his work, *The Gulag Archipelago*, while the report on the communist prisons in Croatia by the leading Croatian émigré Bruno Bušić went unnoticed, as did his assassination in Paris. Faced with such a situation, some Croatian fighters for independence resorted to radical actions, such as the

hijacking of an American airplane in 1976, to draw the attention of the Western public.

In the original scientific article *Shadows and Secrets: Yugoslav Intelligence Services and the Control of the Western Press*, historians Zlatko Begonja and Luka Knez explored how Western political interests shaped the media portrayal of Croatian dissidents and described the methods used by the Yugoslav State Security Service against Western journalists who interviewed these dissidents. Firstly, the authors pointed out that the Yugoslav communist regime, like all totalitarian regimes, was built on fear and suspicion, and that the strictest methods of monitoring were applied to Western journalists. The article is written based on the archives of the Yugoslav State Security Service and declassified American documents. Analyzing the intertwining of politics and media, the authors highlighted a telegram sent by Ambassador George Kennan to the State Department in 1962, in which he proposed that media should be used to promote the idea that it is in America's interest to maintain Yugoslavia as a communist state outside the Soviet bloc. The authors also mention the cooperation between Yugoslav and Western intelligence services against

Croatian émigrés, as well as the fact that the West did not support the demands of the Croatian Spring, while in other communist countries, it did not hesitate to encourage internal divisions that would weaken the regime.

Speaking about the methods employed by State Security Service, the authors pointed out that the Yugoslav services regarded all foreign journalists and professors who stayed in Yugoslavia as covert intelligence agents and conducted strict supervision over them. They described examples of Franjo Tuđman's contacts with German and French journalists in 1980, which were closely monitored by security service operatives, who seized recorded interviews that were later used in court as key evidence against Tuđman. Among the perspectives of the Western media, the example of Sweden stood out. As a neutral country during the Cold War division of the world, Sweden more openly criticized the repression of Tito's regime, and the Swedish media were thus under special scrutiny from Yugoslav intelligence services. Begonja and Knez concluded that Western countries sought at all costs to preserve Tito's regime and the stability of Yugoslavia, highlighting it as a positive example of communism, labeling the Yugoslav state system as "socialism with a

human face" in contrast to the repressive Soviet regime.

After two introductory texts, the first larger section of the book is titled *Risking Everything: Leaders of the Croatian Spring Speak to International Journalists* and contains six interviews given by Croatian intellectuals and political prisoners Vlado Gotovac, Franjo Tuđman, Ivan Zvonimir Čičak, Petar Šegedin, and Marko Veselica to foreign journalists. After their release from prison, they were all unemployed and forbidden to speak publicly. Through these interviews, they defied that order and faced new punishments. In 1978, the writer Vlado Gotovac was interviewed by *Swedish Television* about his views on the Croatian question, the West's attitude toward Croatia, the demands of the Croatian Spring, and his experiences in prison in Stara Gradiška, where he served a four-year sentence.

Next are two interviews published for the first time in this volume: interviews with Vlado Gotovac and Franjo Tuđman, conducted by French journalist Michel Barthelemy for *France Internationale*. The interviews took place in May 1980, just after Tito's death, and the recorded materials were seized by the State Security Service. Gotovac spoke about his oppositional

views and argued that the differences between the Soviet and Yugoslav regimes were marginal. He stated that Tito's death will not change anything, as the problem is the one-party system. He advocated for the revival of parliamentary life and explained the main conflicts from the period of the Croatian Spring. The same journalist interviewed Croatian historian and dissident, later the first Croatian president, Franjo Tuđman, who, as a scientist-researcher, addressed controversial issues in Croatian history, such as the Ustasha movement, explaining the historical roots of Croatia's striving for sovereignty, as well as his views on Tito and the Yugoslav system. He particularly emphasized the hypocrisy of Tito's regime, which advocated for the freedom of every nation, for instance, by supporting Palestinian demands, while at the same time facing the unresolved national issue in Yugoslavia.

The following is an interview by *Swedish Television* with one of the leaders of the student movement from 1971, Ivan Zvonimir Čičak, which was published in 1977 in the West German newspaper *Der Spiegel*. Čičak protested against the West's insensitivity to the situation in Yugoslavia and the disregard of the democratic

demands of the Croatian Spring. He described his experiences in prison, where he spent three years, nine months of which were in solitary confinement. He warned that in Yugoslavia, one can go to prison for telling a joke or singing a song, and he spoke about the fates of other dissidents who have been pushed to the brink of existence and marginalized. Among those interviewed by *Swedish Television* in 1978 was the writer Petar Šegedin, who pointed out that Croatia was under a state of emergency after 1971. He shared his views on the Yugoslav state system and the Serbian element, and he also warned about the unjust attitude of the West toward Croatian demands.

The last and most extensive interview is the one with the economist Marko Veselica, conducted in 1980 for *Der Spiegel*, for which Veselica was sentenced to eleven years in prison and four years of denial of the right to public activity. On this occasion, he elaborated extensively on the goals of the democratic movement known as the Croatian Spring, which he believed was supported by the majority of the Croatian people. He also discussed in detail about the inhumane treatment of political prisoners in Yugoslav prisons, specifically in Stara Gradiška, where he himself had

been held. He described methods of mistreating political prisoners who were perceived as the worst kind of criminals, along with the difficult lives of Croatian dissidents during and after their imprisonment. He believed that despite constitutional amendments, Yugoslavia was not even a true federation, let alone evolving into a confederation. He offered expert opinions on the economic issues related to the national question in Yugoslavia. He also expressed his surprise that the West did not show understanding for the Croatian issue in Yugoslavia and concluded the interview with an optimistic outlook on Croatia's future.

The second section of the book is titled *The Price of Opposition: Croatian Dissidents' Struggle for Democracy in the Communist Courts* and contains three texts. The first is a transcript of the final court statement by one of the leaders of the student movement from 1971, Dražen Budiša, during the trial in Zagreb in the summer of 1972, which is published in the book for the first time. Budiša began by rejecting all charges and denying the existence of the incriminated "counter-revolutionary group", presenting his own analysis of the events at the Zagreb University starting from the time of the Brijuni Plenary in 1966. He

highlighted two key events: the Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language from 1967 and the Tenth Session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia in January 1970. He stated that the student movement emerged spontaneously after the election of Ivan Zvonimir Čičak as student vice-rector in December 1970 and emphasized that the students supporting the movement primarily came from the poorest regions of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

He stated that students from all faculties in Zagreb participated in the strike and that the movement had the support of 90% of the students, remaining peaceful and free of any violent incidents. He continued to explain the main goals of the student movement, intending to present his political platform and address all points of the indictment, but he was repeatedly interrupted by the President of the Council, who warned him to stick to the subject. Consequently, Budiša gave up on presenting his statement further. Not allowing Budiša to discuss political topics, along with the sanctioning of the described interviews, indicates that the persecution of the Croatian dissidents can be explained by the fact that no one outside the communist

structures was permitted to engage in politics or publicly reflect on social issues.

The following text in this section is Franjo Tuđman's response to the court charges before the District Court in Zagreb on February 17, 1981. Tuđman disputed the accusations related to three interviews he conducted with a Swedish journalist in 1977, and with a German and a French journalist in 1980, in which he explained his scientific work. From the historian's perspective, citing precise data and facts, Tuđman spoke about Croatian emigration, the relations between Croats and Serbs as a key problem of the national question in Yugoslavia, the number of victims of the Second World War, and the issue of Jasenovac, as well as the discrimination of the Croatian people in Yugoslavia, emphasizing the regime's hegemonic policy. The transcript of Franjo Tuđman's final court statement during the trial on February 19, 1981, follows, in which he rejected the accusations of enemy propaganda and counter-revolutionary activity. He once again defended his scientific views and methods, suggesting that official data from the Republic and Federal Statistics Office be requested to confirm his estimates regarding the number of victims, but the court

rejected it. Tuđman emphasized that a historian should not be constrained by ideology in his work, and that his conviction would be evidence of the existence of the social relations he criticized in his research.

The third section titled *Silenced Voices: Records of Yugoslav Brutality* consists of two shorter texts. The first is Bruno Bušić's *Report on the Prison Situation in Croatia*, which was originally published in 1975 by the *Croatian Information Service*. Bušić described the inhumane conditions in the Zagreb House of Detention and the prison in Stara Gradiška, where he was held. However, all the shocking data provided did not sensitize the West, which largely ignored the evidence of the crimes committed by Tito's regime. Exceptions were organizations such as the International League for Human Rights, based in New York, which published a *Report on Repression in Yugoslavia* on December 19, 1972, included in the volume. They highlighted that after suppressing the peaceful student protests, Yugoslavia reverted to a system of strict communist rule and the old methods of the secret police, conducting mass arrests, interrogations, and layoffs.

The last section of the book titled *Breaking the Western Embargo on the Truth about Tito's*

Yugoslavia consists of two historical sources. The first is a summary of the conversation between Henry Kissinger and the Yugoslav ambassador to the USA, Bogdan Crnobrnja, on September 10, 1971. The reason for the meeting was Tito's upcoming visit to President Nixon, and the main topic was the activities of Croatian émigrés in the USA. Crnobrnja asked Kissinger to reconsider American policy regarding émigré activities. Kissinger promised to do everything in his power to prevent protests during Tito's visit, and to issue a public statement discouraging such actions. He also emphasized that Nixon held Tito in high regard. The entire conversation confirmed earlier conclusions about American policy toward Yugoslavia, where ideological differences and instances of human rights violations were overlooked due to geopolitical objectives. The second source is the *Declaration of the Croatian National Liberation Forces* from 1976 by Bruno Bušić. To compel five major American newspapers to publish the *Declaration*, a group of Croatian patriots hijacked an American passenger plane and dropped the flyers containing the text of the *Declaration* over several North American and European cities. The aim of the *Declaration* was to show Croatian determination

in the struggle for national rights. It was announced that Croats were once again starting the fight for freedom and national sovereignty, with the reasons for the renewal of that struggle, as well as its methods and goals, outlined.

At the end of the book, there is a *Postscript* by the historian Stipe Kljajić, which provides a brief overview of the book's content. The author believes that the sources in the volume demonstrate that communism in Yugoslavia was even more repressive than in comparable regimes due to the unresolved national question. They also illustrate that the Croatian dissidents were intellectuals whose idealism, confronted with the regime's brutality, was transformed into a belief in the impossibility of reforming the Yugoslav communist system. Finally, it should be noted that the volume contains several facsimiles of original documents that further support the most important conclusions. The book *Croatian Dissidents and the Dissonance of the West* is a valuable contribution to Croatian historiography and a step forward in researching the relations between the Western countries and Yugoslavia, with an emphasis on the Croatian national demands, representing a substantial incentive for future studies on this topic.

