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16. The Crisis of Socialist Modernity (1980 to 1989)

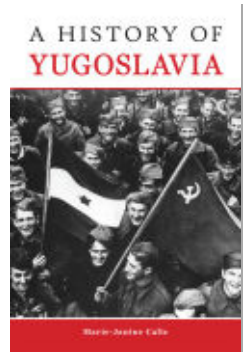
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PART V

AFTER TITO (1980 TO 1991)

16.

The Crisis of Socialist Modernity (1980 to 1989)

On the afternoon of 4 May 1980, in Split, the soccer game between two national league teams, the Croat Hajduk Split and the Serb Red Star (Crvena Zvezda) Belgrade, was interrupted early in the second half for an important announcement. The crowd learned from the stadium loudspeakers that Josip Broz Tito had died in Ljubljana after a long illness, shortly before his eighty-eighth birthday.

Yugoslavia froze in its tracks. The country was fully unprepared for his death; many were deeply distraught. “I remember this day very well,” recalled the journalist Gordana. “People were running in all directions. . . . Some were crying. . . . It seemed to me that it was as if they had to go and look after their firm or office because the father was dead.”¹ What was going to happen now that Tito was no longer there?

Tens of thousands gathered to say farewell when the famous Blue Train transported the coffin to Belgrade. The square in front of the central train station in Zagreb was “so packed with people that you could literally feel the breath of the people behind you on your neck. . . . Shock, sadness, and weariness about the unknown future were on people’s faces.”² Spontaneously the crowd sung a traditional, moving, and melancholic tune, a ballad from Tito’s homeland Zagorje that was well loved throughout Croatia: “*Fala!*”—Thank you!

Meanwhile, preparations were underway in Belgrade for the official state funeral. The attendance broke all existing records: 209 delegations from 128 countries, including four kings, six princes, 31 presidents, 22 prime ministers, and 47 foreign ministers, paid their respects to the Yugoslav president. Never before had the multiethnic state received so much international recognition and attention.³

Crisis

After Tito's death, things got bad quickly. Before the year was out, the socialist state of Yugoslavia had already slid into the most serious economic, political, and social-psychological crisis of its existence. In the wake of the second oil crisis and the global recession that followed it, production and productivity began to fall in 1979. All of Europe struggled with economic problems, but nowhere were the problems as devastating as in the socialist countries. Like the entire Eastern bloc, Yugoslavia's prosperity had been supported by the massive expansion of heavy industry in the early decades of the postwar era. The chase to catch up industrially had made growth and modernization possible, but it had also produced structures that had become outdated in the capitalistic global economy. At this point, the degree of flexibility was the decisive factor in mastering new challenges, such as a switch to highly specialized sectors like electronics or telecommunications.⁴ Yugoslavia's production was underfinanced and technically outdated. The bureaucratically cumbersome and privileged-based "negotiated economy" did not prove adaptable to the new global environment. Take the example of Zastava, once a very successful car manufacturer that had produced the legendary *fićo*. The story of its attempt to introduce the small car Yugo 45 to the American market speaks volumes—quality, service, and marketing were simply not competitive. In 1989 only eighteen cars were sold in the United States.⁵

Because demand for Yugoslav products shrank, the country's foreign trade balance slipped into the red. Like Poland and Hungary, Yugoslavia was also forced to parry the blow of decreasing revenue and foreign credit with a strict austerity course. Less expenditure caused investment, income, demand, and turnover to plummet. In 1983, Yugoslavia experienced negative growth.⁶ At the same time, inflation rose at an annual rate of 45 percent, even 100 percent starting in 1985. That same year, people's real income was only worth half of what it had been in 1980, so that the standard of living fell significantly.⁷ Social problems followed on the heels of the economic ones. "The inflation . . . doesn't care a whit about the official prognoses," wrote *Borba* at the end of 1985. "The majority have emptied their pockets, milked their household savings dry, put themselves on a diet . . . banned trips to the movies."⁸

The exorbitant reliance on credit in earlier years now took its toll. The state had taken on 85 percent of its liabilities between 1976 and 1981 and thereby amassed debts amounting to \$21 billion. The huge jump in interest rates on the international finance markets drained the country's foreign currency reserves. In 1982 alone, the government had to come up with \$1.8 billion just to service its debts.⁹ Budget deficits grew larger and larger, making it impossible to hide the fact that the borrowed funds had been squandered on major political projects, often with no consideration of efficiency. Gigantic

sums had simply vanished in the system: in 1988, only eight of the \$19 billion in loans could be linked to a specific borrower.¹⁰

As the economy shrank, the ranks of the unemployed swelled and exceeded the million-person mark in 1984. The younger generation was hit particularly hard. Over 60 percent of jobseekers were under the age of 24, and 74 percent of them were female.¹¹ Since the 1970s, it had become difficult to work abroad as a guest worker, so people from the poorer regions of the country now migrated to the more developed ones, especially to Slovenia and central Serbia. As incomes dropped, social unrest and strikes escalated. In January 1983, supply shortages sparked violent looting in Titograd and led, in 1987, to a widely publicized labor conflict in the Croatian town of Labin. A year later, in 1988, around four million people participated in nationwide mass public protests; even physicians, teachers, and journalists went on strike.¹²

Faced with this dramatic economic situation, the republics developed fundamentally different ideas about the types of reform needed. Implementing more restrictive monetary, finance, and foreign trade policies, which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) demanded if it were to approve more loans to the country, meant handing back greater control to the central government over the expenditures and revenue of the republics and establishing a more unified and centralized economic policy. During the phase of decentralization in the 1970s, the governments and banks of the republics and provinces had amassed considerable competencies that now thwarted attempts at macro-economic stabilization. The wealthier republics feared that federal regulation would be to their disadvantage; they argued instead that it was not the fragmentation of the domestic market that was responsible for the economic crisis but a misguided investment policy, the waste of funds through aid and subsidies to the poorer republics, and the exorbitance of these same republics. Not only did they want to pay less into the federal development fund, they now wanted even more authority in order to protect their industries from the pressure of competition. In 1985 alone, they blocked the passage of three laws designed to regulate exports.¹³

The economic crisis also intensified the conflicts over redistribution between the wealthier and the poorer republics. Because Slovenia and Croatia refused to contribute about 10 percent of their investment revenue to the development fund, the flow of capital and investments to the receiver republics diminished, which widened the gap even further between rich and poor. At 222.9 points, the index value of Slovenia in 1989 ranked far ahead of the Yugoslav average (= 100), followed by Croatia with 128.4 points. At the other end of the scale, Bosnia-Herzegovina garnered only 66.3 and Kosovo just 26.1 points, meaning that the Slovenians were nearly nine times richer than

the Albanians.¹⁴ Another crass difference existed even within Serbia. Since the Second World War, the level of prosperity had not improved in any other Yugoslav entity as greatly as it had in Vojvodina (about 29 percent) and had not worsened as drastically as in Kosovo (about 19 percent).¹⁵

Following Yugoslavia's successful phase of catching up with the West in the initial decades of the postwar period, the economic crisis in the 1980s pushed the country back down to a level below that of 1970.¹⁶ In 1984, the annual per-capita income in Yugoslavia was \$1,850. Poland and Hungary had similar averages, while the Soviet Union recorded an average of \$4,300 and East Germany of \$5,400.¹⁷ This was a hard blow to the Yugoslavs, both materially and psychologically.

While official statements at first assured people that the country was only undergoing a temporary setback in economic growth, by early 1983 even party functionaries were no longer mincing their words: the crisis was frightening, threatening, and bottomless. Party chairman Mitja Ribičič warned about "Polish conditions," and Jure Bilić, a member of the presidency, declared that many principles and programs of this united Yugoslavia were based "on illusions and sometimes even on fantasy."¹⁸ It took quite a while until authorities finally admitted the full extent of the depression and, in 1983, launched a program aimed at stabilizing the economy. For experts the program offered too little and came far too late.

After Tito: Tito!

Many people in Yugoslavia believed that Tito's greatest mistake—besides dying—was that he had not groomed a designated political heir. However, there is little evidence that another charismatic leader would have been able to perpetuate Tito's model of governance. Yugoslav society had since become far too diversified and divided. Many sides were pushing for more pluralism and a system in which competing opinions and interests could be openly articulated and settled: intellectuals, bourgeois middle classes, civil society groups, and the media constituted the critical public that demanded more freedom of opinion, democracy, and civil rights. Journalists working at more than 3,000 newspapers and magazines and more than 200 radio and television broadcasting companies made it clear that they no longer wanted to simply parrot party positions. In 1982 and 1983 there were still several cases of censorship, and the editors of *Danas* and *Politika* were forced to resign their posts.¹⁹ Yet the difference was that the number of publicly critical voices had become very large, so large, in fact, that in 1983 the ideology commission of Croatia's Communist Party abandoned its efforts to document comprehensively in its White Book the flood of articles, podium discussions, dramas, poems, novels, films, and critiques that denigrated the achievements of the revolution, socialist values, and even Tito himself.²⁰ The political leadership

in the republics also did not see the purpose of encouraging the emergence of a strong new integrative figure on the national level. The weaker the central government was, the more leeway the federal entities enjoyed to pursue their own interests.

The regime clung to the hope, against all odds, that Tito's integrative influence would continue after his death. Undeterred, the traditional relay race was held on his birthday, posters and T-shirts were printed, and huge, highly visible slogans were posted across the Yugoslav landscape. But the motto of "After Tito: Tito" sounded more like whistling in the dark than a defiant and determined assertion. It would take a wave of political trials and a new media law to lock the ideological coordinates once again.

In 1981, a group of Croat "nationalists" stood trial, including Franjo Tudjman. Tudjman was sentenced to two years imprisonment for propagating abroad that the Croat people were being discriminated and exploited. Among other things, he had told an émigré newspaper in 1977 that the number of victims who died in the Jasenovac concentration camp had been greatly exaggerated "for the sole purpose of creating some kind of collective and eternal guilt of the Croat people."²¹ In Kosovo, Adem Demaqi, editor of *Rilindja* and a cofounder of the Revolutionary Movement for a United Albania, was charged along with other Albanian activists, including the prominent communist Azem Vllasi.²² In Sarajevo, a trial was held in 1983 of Alija Izetbegović and twelve others on the charge of Islamism. They were accused of spreading propaganda in favor of a pan-Islamic state and of maintaining contact with the Iranian ayatollah's regime. The court found that the demands for the introduction of the sharia, the veiling of women, and the ban on mixed marriages represented attacks on the principle of "brotherhood and unity." The accused were sentenced to years of imprisonment.²³

What actually sparked the fight for more democratic rights was an operation by Belgrade police. In 1984, they stormed a private dwelling in which the Flying University had gathered to hear a lecture by the dissident Milovan Djilas. Six of the professors attending were arrested and brought to trial. However, the sharp-tongued defendants succeeded in transforming the trial into a tribunal against the repression of freedom of speech and to sway public opinion against the regime.²⁴ In a very similar way, the public was also mobilized by the conviction of Vojislav Šešelj, Bosnian-Serb sociologist, to eight years in prison for his article "What Is to Be Done?" In this article, he called for the restructuring of Yugoslavia into only four republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Macedonia. In his opinion, there was no justification for the existence of the autonomous provinces and the republics of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro.²⁵

Although most of these sentences were significantly mitigated later, the political trials electrified the public and ignited a widespread mobilization

of the (at first primarily Serbian) intelligentsia for more democratic rights. A group led by Dobrica Ćosić formed the Committee for the Defense of Freedom of Thought and Expression in 1984, which drew up a "Proposal for the Establishment of Rule of Law" two years later. This proposal called for free elections, a free press, an independent judiciary, and the abolition of the one-party system. The committee also wrote a petition demanding the release of the Bosnian "Islamists."²⁶

So, as it turned out, the political trials did not even come close to having the impact desired by authorities. Instead of intimidating dissidents and indoctrinating the public, they only underscored the legitimacy of demanding more civil rights. Nationalistic émigré associations located in the United States, Canada, Argentina, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland intensified their propaganda activities. Examples were the Croatian National Committee (Hrvatski narodni odbor), the terrorist group Otpor (Resistance), and the émigré magazine associated with it, *Nova Hrvatska* (New Croatia). Macedonian, Albanian, Slovenian, and Montenegrin separatists were also active.²⁷ By conducting these political trials, the regime inadvertently upgraded the status of these nationalists and other radical souls, turning them into champions for freedom of opinion and democracy. Politically, these groups profited considerably from this at the end of the decade.

The economic crisis was also accompanied by a serious political crisis of legitimacy. It even threatened the heart of Titoism, namely, socialist self-management. This very characteristic element of Yugoslav socialism had originally been introduced by Edvard Kardelj, who died in 1979, a year before Tito. The early success of socialism had been built on the postulate of industrial progress and social justice. However, the global crisis of industrialism and the transition to postindustrial society robbed socialism of its legitimacy and ideals. With unapologetic ruthlessness, scientists, entrepreneurs, journalists, and critical intellectuals began to deconstruct this key political myth. The crisis was addressed in the media and at countless public events held at universities, student associations, and institutes, where party functionaries, managers, and prominent political figures came under fire for their incompetence and extravagance. The problems of nepotism, profiteering, and corruption were also highlighted.²⁸ It now came to light that the system had brought about a "total bureaucratization of a socialist society" and produced new forms of alienation instead of leading to the withering away of the state.²⁹ Researchers proved that workers' self-management was no more democratic than state socialism or capitalism: employees turned out to be quite poorly informed; very few were familiar with terms like inflation, budget, amortization, and profitability; and only a minority had even a rudimentary knowledge about their own firms.³⁰ Real power lay in the hands of a self-aggrandizing

political caste of functionaries, factory directors, managers, and experts, who used the workers' collective only as a quasi-democratic guise for technocratic decision making. Eighty-six percent of all decisions in a firm were based on proposals put forth by its management.³¹

It was thought that economic decline was not the cause but the result of a far greater crisis in the social and political system.³² The League of Communists was accused of being the core of the problem since its eight provincial organizations had not been able to define and implement common policy in years. In 1983, the national parliament only passed eight of twenty-five important laws, while decisions on the rest were postponed for an indefinite period due to a lack of consensus. Federal decrees, where they existed, were simply ignored by the republics and provinces.³³ Furthermore, the party had long given more priority to the interests of civil servants, managers, and professionals—who, with time, had come to comprise a high percentage of its membership—over the interests of workers and peasants. The League of Communists insisted on exerting its influence in state institutions and societal organizations as a sort of centralized counterweight to the republics. The circle of those who occupied key political functions was relatively small, but these people thus had even more influence and remained at their posts all the longer. The party had established oligarchic power structures, which enabled decisions to be made in informal ways instead of going through official institutional processes. The state and the party were closely, far too closely, intertwined, which is why many believed it would be impossible to undertake structural reform.³⁴ Against this backdrop emerged a very serious problem of credibility: in 1986, surveys showed that 88 percent of young Slovenes and 70 percent of young Croats did not wish to become members of the Communist Party. In Serbia the figure was 40 percent.³⁵

In this charged atmosphere, an intense and amazingly frank public debate ensued about domestic reforms. It centered on three controversial questions: whether to have communist one-party rule or pluralist democracy, more or less centralism in the constitution, and a liberal market economy or socialist self-management. Wasn't it evident, as the Zagreb professor Jovan Mirić stated in *Borba* in 1984, that the excessive federalization of the 1974 constitution was responsible for the fragmentation of the domestic market, for a grid-locked system, and for reform coming to a standstill? Or was the opposite true, that perhaps the demands from Belgrade for an even greater centralized authority were the actual cause of all problems? In October 1984, Serbia presented proposals for reform that were to strengthen the federal government and curtail the veto rights of the autonomous provinces. Leaders in Kosovo, Vojvodina, Croatia, and Slovenia were incensed. The Slovenian central committee made it known immediately that any attempt to change the status quo

of the constitution would represent a serious threat to Yugoslav unity. This killed any further debate on long overdue reform.³⁶

“Kosova Republika!”

One year after Tito’s death, violent demonstrations took place in all of Kosovo’s larger cities. For Albanians, it seemed as if the time had finally come to fulfill their desire for full equality. Political frustrations and the lack of occupational prospects conjoined to feed the fires of discontent that first ignited at the University of Prishtina and soon spread across the entire province. Rallying around the slogan of *“Kosova Republika!”* demonstrators demanded the founding of an independent republic for all Albanians living in Yugoslavia, meaning those of Kosovo, West Macedonia, and Southern Serbia—not excluding the possibility of a later unification with Albania, as one of their leaders at the time, Bardhyl Mahmuti, explained. The radical-nationalist diaspora incited unrest to a dangerous degree, with the support of Enver Hoxha’s secret police.³⁷ The cause was widely supported because the constitution of 1974 had guaranteed the province extensive autonomy and representation in all institutions, including the federal presidency, but had not raised its status to that of a republic of equal standing. Even more disconcerting was that the Serb leadership was contemplating at the time whether to abolish Kosovo’s existing autonomous rights.³⁸

Nine people died in the unrest, more than 200 were injured, and the Serb patriarchate in Peć went up in flames. The party leadership condemned the irredentist-nationalist uprisings because they supported the idea of founding a Greater Albanian state. Following the unrest, the League of Communists and Kosovo’s educational system were purged, and martial law was imposed for a while. More than 1,600 men and women stood trial, 585 of whom were convicted. The League of Communists expelled over 1,000 members, many of whom then emigrated.³⁹

The uprising revealed the deeper dimensions of a problem that neither communism nor federalism could have solved. In the forty years since the end of the Second World War, no region had made such great strides in its development as Kosovo and still remained so far behind all others. The federal government had invested billions in the impoverished province—far too much from the standpoint of the donors, far too little from the standpoint of the recipients. In any case, Kosovo had undergone a dynamic development since 1945. The share of the farming population fell from 80 percent to 36 percent, and the situation in the education and health systems improved substantially. Nevertheless, the province continued to fall further behind. In 1947, the level of prosperity in Kosovo equaled 52 percent of the Yugoslav average; in 1980 it only reached 28 percent.⁴⁰ Social indicators also revealed discrepancies. The

illiteracy rate of people over the age of 10 was less than 1 percent in Slovenia but more than 17 percent in Kosovo.⁴¹ Kosovo became the code word for the failure of Yugoslavia's policy of cohesion.

Another contributing factor for the backwardness stemmed from the high rate of demographic growth among Albanians, which lay at 2.5 percent annually (compared to the Yugoslav average of 0.7 percent). On average, every Albanian woman bore seven children, causing Kosovo's population to double in twenty years. Thousands of people did not have adequate employment, and the unemployment rate was more than three times as high as it was in Yugoslavia as a whole.⁴²

Shocked by the riots, the Yugoslav government came up with a new plan to invest another \$2.5 billion into the development of the southern province by 1985. Actually, the Kosovars had no reason to complain. In the 1970s more than 30 percent of the financial resources from the Yugoslav development fund flowed into their province; in the 1980s this figure was up to 42 percent. However, the relative backwardness and the immense problems caused by economic cycles intensified the feeling among Albanians that they were being treated unjustly and placed at a disadvantage.⁴³

While the Kosovars believed that the status of a republic would finally free them from what they thought of as colonization and would increase their prosperity, local Serbs complained of discrimination and assaults. By then, Albanians constituted a clear majority of the population in the southern province. Between 1948 and 1991 their share rose from 68 percent to 81 percent, whereas that of the Serbs fell from 14 percent to 10 percent.⁴⁴ A third of the Serbs and Montenegrins left the region after the Second World War, a total of about 131,000 people. A real thrust in migration followed the 1981 unrest. Many non-Albanians saw no future for themselves in the province, and a "run for your lives" atmosphere grew. "You take your child to school, and she comes back saying that the teacher left Kosovo forever during the night. You go to the doctor and his cleaning woman tells you that the doctor moved to Serbia yesterday," explained one Serb woman. "Do you know what it means when all around you is collapsing?"⁴⁵ Every fourth Serb migrant cited economic motives for fleeing, while all the others feared insecurity, discrimination, or even physical assaults.⁴⁶

Real problems, vague and diffuse fears, and other emotional factors inflamed national passions and phobias on both sides in what were almost perfect mirror images of each other. Even though it is true that the province represented a rather abstract entity to most Serbs, many others still felt a strong emotional tie to their "Serb Jerusalem," the place that was home not only to the Orthodox patriarchate in Peć but also to the most important Serb churches and monasteries. Because of the myth-enshrined Battle of Kosovo, this region

was and is a type of national shrine and “a question of the spiritual, cultural, and historical identity of the Serb people,” as was stated in an appeal issued by twenty-one priests in April 1982.⁴⁷

In the early 1980s, Serbs began to see Kosovo as a metaphor for everything going wrong in the country, given the all-encompassing crisis facing them. In 1985, Dimitrije Bogdanović, a historian of Serbian medieval literature, published a work titled *The Book on Kosovo*, with which he provoked an emotional controversy by arguing that the Albanians had been intentionally ousting the Serb population out of Kosovo since 1912/1913. Although the Serbian Communist Party condemned the book as destructive and nationalistic, emotions got heated.

Kosovo became a public obsession through the case of Djordje Martinović, a farmer from Gnjilane, who showed up at a hospital severely injured on 1 May 1985. The brutally primitive and sexual mistreatment of this victim, which was drastically embellished with each retelling, became a metaphor for Serb suffering in Kosovo. One event then followed another. In September, Kosovo-Serb politicians submitted a petition with 60,000 signatures supporting the abolishment of the province’s autonomy and the removal of Albanian symbols of nationalism, such as flags and national coats of arms, from public life. In January 1986, 200 Belgrade intellectuals, artists, writers, church representatives, academy members, and professors sent a petition to politicians and the media demanding that the rule of law be reestablished in Kosovo. Suddenly consensus prevailed across all political camps, including several people who would be critics of Serb nationalism in the 1990s. The earlier struggle for freedom of speech and civil rights now took on a clear nationalist tinge. Kosovo came to symbolize the collective discrimination, humiliation, and victimization of Serbs by the Yugoslav state in general and by the Albanians in particular.⁴⁸

“No one may beat you!”

While Serbia’s political class was inching its way to the conviction that nothing could be expected out of Kosovo except trouble, the 44-year-old Belgrade party functionary Slobodan Milošević discovered that this was the topic that could further his own political career. During a trip to the southern province in April 1987, outraged Serbs told him that they had been beaten by police during a demonstration. His response—“No one may beat you!”—became the rallying cry with which Milošević promoted himself from then on as the man to rescue the nation from the supposedly indifferent leadership of the older party establishment. Milošević, who had been the former director of Beogradska Banka, one of Yugoslavia’s largest banks, now enjoyed a meteoric political career. In 1987 he became party chairman, in 1989 the president of Serbia.

Milošević presented himself as someone on whom both nationalists and communists alike could pin their hopes. He cultivated Serb national interests, opposed changes to the political system, and rejected multiparty democracy, while at the same time proposing liberal economic reforms. In his opinion, the key to overcoming the crisis lay in a unified, integrated, and liberalized Yugoslav market that would replace the autarkically operating mini-economies of each republic, a system in which each one could paralyze all the others. Therefore, he propagated the recentralization of Yugoslavia, starting with the abolition of the autonomous provinces within Serbia. With the help of mass demonstrations, he launched an “antibureaucratic revolution” against the caste of functionaries, the *foteljaši*, by which he was able to put his own coterie into place.⁴⁹ In a surprising coup in October 1988, he stripped power away from the leadership of Vojvodina and installed those who supported his political line. What drove him was actually not nationalism as such, but his cold-blooded instinct for power. Many Serbs were enthusiastic about this dynamic politician, who not only offered practical solutions to problems but also soothed the battered Serb soul. Blessed with considerable political talent, Milošević was above all the typical product of a system on the verge of collapse, a system that propelled a technocratic mover and shaker with the right instincts for the zeitgeist to the top. The consequences of his rise to power were so momentous because he mobilized and radicalized nationalistic moods, projected longings for a strong leader onto himself, and thereby neutralized democratic alternatives. More importantly, with his proposals for restructuring the federation, Milošević bulldozed Serb interests over those of all others and gave the debate about the constitution a new quality, which other parts of the country perceived as threatening.⁵⁰

The matter that overrode all else for the Serbs was that theirs was the only republic that was not completely sovereign since, for all practical purposes, it was a tripartite entity. The constitution of 1974 enabled the autonomous provinces within Serbia to block Serbian policies with their veto, but Belgrade was not allowed to interfere in their internal affairs. The Serbian leadership complained that their colleagues in Prishtina hindered almost every decision. Therefore, Belgrade was extremely interested in changing the legal framework and in centralizing all of Yugoslavia to a greater degree.

Among intellectuals, discontent was brewing. In September 1986, the widely read newspaper *Večernje novosti* (Evening news) published excerpts from a secret “memorandum” written by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU). Among its authors were such renowned intellectuals as the writer Antonije Isaković, the historian Vasilije Krestić, the economist Kosta Mihajlović, and the philosopher Mihajlo Marković. Dobrica Ćosić had only indirectly “inspired” the text. The memorandum caused a storm of indignation

within Serbia's Communist Party and the broader Yugoslav public. In dramatic words, it conjured up long-familiar nationalistic scenarios of various threats to Serbia and propagated its main paradigm, the self-stylization of Serbs as a victimized nation.

One thread of argument running through the fifty-page memorandum was that the crisis at hand put Serbia and the Serbs in a precarious situation. It plausibly described the economic setbacks, political disadvantages, and cultural humiliation resulting from a thirty-year history of exploitation and discrimination. In Kosovo, the Serb nation had been experiencing "open and total warfare" since 1981 and "physical, political, legal, [and] cultural genocide." Two new ideas were introduced: first, the Serbs in Croatia had been exposed to a clever and very effective policy of assimilation, which was hollowing out the unity of the nation. Second, a Slovenian-Croatian conspiracy for power, personified by the Croat Tito and the Slovene Kardelj, was responsible for all of this. In conclusion, the text called for the "full national and cultural integrity of the Serb people, regardless which republic or province they live in." This implied that national—Serb—unity had to be restored.⁵¹

While Serbian president Ivan Stambolić called for personnel changes as a consequence of this obituary for Yugoslavia and the media leveled a barrage of accusations against the academy, the authors protested the "illegal removal and publication" of an unfinished and unauthorized text that was obviously addressed to the Serbian government.⁵² Contrary to what was reported later, the memorandum did not contain any specific plans for "ethnic cleansing," let alone a finished and implementable war plan. The importance of this document lies in the dramatic depiction of the disadvantages and threats and the lament over the betrayal, conspiracy, and losses that Serbs had suffered, presented in emotionally stirring imagery. In a concise presentation, the text included all of the emotive, provocative, and controversial issues that the new Serb nationalism drew upon. To no small degree, the discourse mirrored the mood of nationalist intellectuals, who were sinking ever deeper into self-pity. The theories on victimization and conspiracy, presented always in the collective singular ("the Serb people"), showed the willful and intentional loss of any sort of capacity for empathy. They were implicitly antidemocratic and explicitly anti-Yugoslav.

A similar Slovenian document was published just a few months later in January 1987 as a special issue of the opposition literary journal *Nova revija* (New magazine). The tenor of the publication was also directed against the Yugoslav state using similar nationalistic stylistic devices. It presented what it called "Contributions to the Slovenian National Program" drafted two years earlier, in 1985. Unlike the Serbian memorandum, this publication was expressly addressed to the public. It argued that the Slovene people

were threatened with extinction, its language was being repressed, its economy exploited. The republic was being handicapped, overrun by immigrants, and militarily “castrated.”⁵³ One of the contributing authors maintained that Yugoslavia was pushing Slovenia toward “national catastrophe” and “national erosion.” If the nation did not forcefully defend itself, then it was doomed.⁵⁴

At this point, neither the leadership in Ljubljana nor the leadership in Belgrade adopted the standpoints of these nationalist intellectuals. Slobodan Milošević even started an “ideological offensive” against SANU and the Serbian writers’ guild.⁵⁵ However, by then the seeds for national solidarity movements had been sown.

From Alienation to Disintegration

Throughout the 1980s, the republics continued to drift further apart at an ever-accelerating pace. They cut themselves almost completely off from one another, politically, culturally, and economically. In doing so, people’s lives and perceptions became estranged from one another, and their understanding of the realities and experiences of other peoples dwindled. Topics like identity, sovereignty, and national interests increasingly dominated public discourse.

There was a great outcry in 1983 when the central government proposed a compulsory core curriculum for the schools in all republics. The purpose had been to create a common base of knowledge and to facilitate the transfer from one school system to another should a pupil move to a different republic. The Slovenes found it thoroughly unacceptable that half of the lessons in the disciplines of language and literature be dedicated to Yugoslav topics and the other half to topics dealing strictly with their national culture. Writers in particular were quite outspoken against what they saw as an insubordinate interference in Slovenian cultural sovereignty.⁵⁶ In the mid-1980s, when concerned historians commissioned a review of history books used throughout Yugoslavia, a surprising fact came to light: the curriculums of the six republics and two autonomous provinces shared no more than a minimum of common learning content. Topping the list of the nineteenth-century historical figures mentioned most often in all the curriculums was one man: Napoleon Bonaparte.⁵⁷

Politically, the relations between the republics had become quite beleaguered. A notorious example for the rocky basis of trust was the 1987 affair involving the food company Agrokomerc from the western Bosnian town of Velika Kladuša. The company’s director, Fikret Abdić, had accumulated a huge amount of capital by issuing promissory notes without coverage. He invested this capital in the firm and the local infrastructure and thus created an impressive political powerbase for himself in the region. In the end, the banks were left with unpaid debt equaling hundreds of millions of dollars, and the scandal forced leading Bosnian politicians to resign. *Pars pro toto*, the

scandal revealed the self-aggrandizement, self-indulgence, irresponsibility, and corruption of the leadership in the republics and exposed the entangled interests of politics and business. Many suspected that the Agrokomerc affair only represented the tip of the iceberg.

Against this backdrop, Slovenian leaders were no longer willing to make concessions to the welfare of Yugoslavia as a whole. Economic necessities and political divisions all spoke in favor of discarding the political ballast of Yugoslavia. This republic of two million represented 8 percent of the population, but financed over 25 percent of the national budget and about 18 percent of the development fund. Leaders demanded more sovereignty, including more rights for the territorial defense of Slovenia at the expense of the Yugoslav People's Army. The youth magazine *Mladina* started a campaign for military conscientious objectors and the right to do one's military service in the republic's own forces instead—a stab in the back for “brotherhood and unity.” When three journalists were arrested in June 1988 for their critical reporting on the federal army and the betrayal of state secrets, a massive wave of solidarity arose. In Slovenia, where traditions of democracy and civic activism were rather strong, a pluralistic civil society landscape had developed in the 1980s that consisted of intellectuals, peace movement activists, women's groups, human rights advocates, and youth magazines, among others. These people now mobilized support. Over one thousand activist organizations, churches, newspapers, schools, and factories signed a letter of protest on behalf of the accused.⁵⁸ Countless rallies aroused the public, and concerns about the Yugoslav state grew. In 1988, 59.5 percent of the population criticized the economic relations with Yugoslavia as being too close, and 72.6 percent felt federal politics had neglected Slovenian interests.⁵⁹

As the political leadership in each republic grew more hostile toward the leaders of the other republics, popular solidarity with the nationalist cause gained momentum. The polarization between Slovenia and Serbia continued to widen, because both Milan Kučan and Slobodan Milošević used mass demonstrations as political stages. Over the course of 1988, intellectuals, the media, and civil society groups in both republics came out in support of the reform programs of their respective governments, which in Ljubljana was aimed at attaining a fuller degree of self-determination and democracy and in Belgrade at attaining more centralization and state control.

The fronts between the republics became increasingly entrenched. “It was clear to me there was absolutely no chance for Slovenia without serious reform,” Milan Kučan later explained, turning a blind eye to nationalist trends within intellectual circles and civil society, in particular the verbal attacks on the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). The JNA leadership, on the other hand,

were convinced they would have to draw the line and defend the unity of the country.⁶⁰

Economic plight and the political incapacity to act perforated any willingness among the elite to compromise, accelerated the demise of legitimacy, enhanced the sense of meaninglessness, and intensified the loss of trust, all of which, in turn, undermined the central government's power to solve problems and produced reform gridlock. The pursuance of self-interest politics deprived the state of what little accountability it still had. The more complex and encompassing the crisis became, the more intransigently the adversaries behaved and the more improbable any strategies were to resolve it. Far more symptomatic for the situation was that all types of conflict were reinterpreted as genuine ethnopolitical antagonisms.