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East of Eden: Civil Society Under Communism and After It

(Vzhodno do raja: civilna družba pod komunizmom in po njem, DZS, Ljubljana, 1992)

In the 1970s a new democratic opposition appeared in East-Central Europe. Contrary to the opposition during the 1960s, which contrasted communist ideals with communist reality, the new opposition abandoned (communist) ideals. For the new opposition the distinction between civil society and the state was the essential condition for democracy (p. 26). Once this distinction was created within East-Central European societies, not only was democracy achievable, but (consequently) the possibility of a controlled departure from communism was opened up.

Compared with all other communist countries, the Yugoslav combination of charismatic authority and self-management was the most inimical to the formation of civil society. This combination limited the possibilities for a peaceful departure from communism in the Yugoslav case. In the final period of the selfdestruction of the Yugoslav communist system in the 1980s civil society was efficiently restored only in Slovenia. It existed also in Kosovo (p. 106). In the rest of the former federation the emergence of civil society was retarded. Since the final disintegration of communism the inherited fusion of society and state in Serbia has been reconstituted in the form of a fascist-communist movement. With this movement a controlled departure from communism for the major part of the former federation was no longer possible.

The subject of Mastnak's analyses is the process of *controlled*, peaceful departure from communism. He deals with the problem of *revolutionizing* the process, which reached its climax in the events of 1989.

A controlled and peaceful departure from communism was supposed to be secured by an *evolutionist* approach to democratic change. This strategy, contrary to expectations, simultaneously induced *revolutionism*, which is the 'active principle of totalitarianism' (Kolakowski). The evolutionistic strategy produced what it wanted to do away with. What was wrong with the strategy?

A kind of 'fundamentalist' approach appeared within the opposition's notions of the future political community. In this respect only the Slovenian conception of civil society was an exception. It was initiated by the new social movements and was promoted politically by the Slovenian Association of the Socialist Youth (ZSMS). This conceptualization of civil society 'was centred on representative democracy and opposed to any kind of - not only working-class - substantive definition of democracy. One of the essential these was that "democracy should be formal. Without normal procedures it is not possible" (p. 60-61).

In other cases the democratic opposition wanted something more: the future political community was imagined in terms of exceeding parliamentary democracy; the concept of the community was formed from the perspective of a universalist critique of modern civilisa-

tion. Kuron suggested the combination of the parliamentary system and direct democracy (p. 109); Havel found that parliamentary democracy could be only a transitional solution, as the aim of changes to the 'post-totalitarian system' should be a democracy of proud and responsible members of the *polis*, which has not characterised the members of the industrial consumer society under traditional parliamentary democracy. Havel's approach was fundamentalist: conceiving the relation between democratic opposition and communism as a conflict between truth and untruth, between good and evil, he promoted the democratic opposition ('anti-political politics') to an exclusive agent of the truth. In this way 'fundamentalism with a human face' produced a mirror image of the communist polity. Paradoxical roles were attached to the late communist authorities and the democratic opposition: as the former became alienated from the society, it generated the distinction between civil society and the state, while the latter, being oriented towards a blurring of the distinction between civil society and the state, acted as the seed of a new totalitarianism (p. 134).

The second cause of the revolutionizing of the 'departure process' was the inflexible 'non-political' political strategy of the democratic opposition. The non-political evolutionist movement was usually successful in delegitimizing the communist political system, but it was unsuccessful in processing the result. The movement had no positive notion of politics. Without political society the productive restructuring of the political system was not possible. "What this movement produced was a frustrated political society within a curbed civil society" (p. 88). The frustrated politics of the curbed civil society erupted on the surface as 'revolution'.

The third cause of the 'revolutionism' was the nature of civil society's power structure. Real, existing civil society was politically and democratically underdeveloped. It consisted of social groups, "which scientific socialists labelled as lumpenproletariat, (...) marginal urban groups, the rural poor and semi-proletarians, (...) politically and economically frustrated and impoverished provinces. These social powers, when they started to speak, did so in crude populist tones" (p. 158). In Slovenia the smaller part of this kind of civil society performed totalitarianism from below at the beginning of the 1980s: it was the well-known experience of the oppression of youth subculture by 'direct democracy'. This feature of civil society was not the monopoly of its traditional part. Even democratic civil society had undemocratic features, which could be illustrated by the conflict within the alternatives in the first half of the 1980s ('established' alternatives versus the 'hard-core scene'). What is more, the 'demonic' potential of civil society in its pure form becomes evident where civil society loses the state: the Serbs in Croatia are an instance of a community where *unimpeded* civil society has begun to live (p. 142).

The combination of all the factors, i.e. the tendentious fundamentalist conception of the democratisation strategy, the consequent non-politics of the democratic opposition and the authoritarianism of civil society, caused the transformation of the evolutionist 'departure strategy' into the '1989 revolutions'.

With the '1989 revolutions' civil society became the state: it rose to power (p. 140). In this transition both civil society and the 'occupied' power were questionable. Besides the original authoritarian potential of civil society, its authoritarianism was exacerbated in communism because civil society functioned as a counterweight to totalitarianism. Civil society was been the last articulated negative expression of authoritarianism (p. 171). On the other hand, the political power which was 'occupied' by civil society was not differentiated: communism left the political space, which was defined by undifferentiated functions of the state apparatus. Such an 'unorganized' polity mediated the increasing disappearance of the distinction between state and civil society. Primarily it fostered post-communist populism, which mobilised the totalitarianism of civil society in the form of primitive anti-communism, forming a coalition between the authoritarianism of the neo-traditional political power and traditional civil society. This politics was personified in the charismatic leader (p. 192-196).

In short, 'the real existing nonsense' of civil society in power had strong anti-democratic potentials (p. 141). With the transformation of civil society into political society, the *distinction* between civil society and the state was effaced. As the distinction between civil society, which limits the state, and the state, which restrains the violence and destructiveness of civil society, is an essential condition for democracy, its disappearance blocked the formation of a democratic polity.

Under communism civil society was formed within a programme of national emancipation. This nationalism was centred more on sovereignty than on the territorially-defined exclusivist community of an ethnicity. It was a pragmatic political programme which was to enable admission to the process of integration, as the nationalist protagonist believed that these processes promoted their interests (p. 198-199). Along with this pragmatic policy, the cultural nationalism affirmed national identity, viewing the national state as a guarantee for the preservation of identity. A few critics of this nationalism exposed the incompatibility between the 'magic ideology of the national essence' and civil society, which is based on the principle of creative individuals shaping their own truths. They warned that "... the ideology of soil, blood, ancestors, fatherland... could be transformed into one of the sources of totalitarianism" (Kermanuer) (p. 63).

Pragmatic nationalism is the 'formula' for the realization of the people in the form of a political community. If the realisation of the political community is blocked, the pragmatic nationalism would be transformed into fundamentalism. Applying its 'anti-nationalistic policy' to the East, the Western world prevented the political realisation of the peoples of Eastern Europe. In this way the West promoted the formation of popular communities (p. 204). The popular community is oriented by a substantive and total aim: the uncompromising realization of the highest value - the people's essence as an exclusivist ethnicity.

In the Yugoslav case the West fought nationalism with a policy of preserving the crumbling Balkan empire. In this way it created constellations, which induced violent conflict between nationalism and the empire. The West thus prepared the ground for the clash between the

hard core of the empire (the sovereign's army) and the people. The West is co-author of the Yugoslav catastrophe.

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In the good tradition of the articulation of civil society, Tomaž Mastnak addresses his book to the civil public. As the important parts of the former civil society have been transformed into the state, only fragments of the former civil society still exist. Mastnak's book is based on the hope that these remnants of civil society's are not definitively drowned. Mastnak's book is the book of that section of the former civil society which did not want to become the state.

My central question is an academic one. It concerns the concept of civil society *unimpeded* by the state. Civil society is a relational notion: we can define it only in relation to the state. This means that 'civil society' without a state is not a civil society, not even an unimpeded one. If we conceive chaos and latent or active war as an 'unimpeded civil society' (Mastnak's case of the Serbs in Croatia), then we use a concept of civil society which is not in relation with the state. Such an approach is Mastnak's initial definition of civil society... In my opinion, chaos cannot be grasped by the notion of civil society. The case of the populist movement, which 'swallows' civil society as well as the state, is similar: this movement is not civil society, and the repressive apparatus subsumed by this movement is not the state. Since the Serbian populist movement, the so-called 'anti-bureaucratic revolution', caused the disintegration of the state according to this pattern, in all parts of the former federation which have been exposed to this revolution, the state does not exist. Kosovo is one such case. The populist movement destroyed the state in Kosovo, so that civil society - Albanian as well as Serbian - could not exist there. The Albanians are not in a relation with the state, but with Serbs. In this conflictual relation they cannot define themselves as civil society (citizens), but primarily as Albanians.

Mastnak's critique of inappropriate Western policy in the case of the disintegrated Yugoslav empire implicitly reveals a surprising coherency in this policy.

Before the disintegration of the empire, the West frustrated national communities which wanted to leave the empire. In this way it pushed them to fundamentalism. When the empire disintegrated, when the war started, the West changed its policy. It recognised new states and excluded the rest of the former empire from the international community. In this way this policy legitimized the fundamentalisms which it had stimulated by its previous non-recognition of pragmatic nationalism on one hand, and made impossible the rationalisation of the Serbian populist movement on the other. Serbia was left to its nationalistic fundamental-

ism. In short: in the first phase the West helped the shift of the emancipatory parts of the empire towards fundamentalist nationalism, and in the second phase it prepared a breeding ground for the Serbian populist movement, which - thanks to this policy - revived on the basis of the ideology of an *expelled* community.

The inappropriate Western policy is appropriate to animating nationalist fundamentalism. In these terms this policy has been coherent.

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