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WITH SLOBODAN PRALJAK ON SOCIALISM AND THE DROWNING MAN

Praljak, in his profound love towards art, appeared in my office where I worked as the editor of three editions in the publishing company *Mladost*, among which "The End of the Century" was the most ambitious. There was still time left between then and the end of the twentieth century to publish a collection of about hundred novels which were to illustrate the atmosphere that such an important milestone evokes, the end of a century and the beginning of a new millennium.

Praljak liked to discuss possible references to the period, but he was trying to convince me not to leave out the books which were in any way foretelling great changes certainly to take place by the end of the century. "Socialism will leave the world scene. Either social progress will overthrow it or it will fall on its own because of its utter powerlessness. It is already dead!" – the man with three university degrees, but at heart innocent and untainted as a child, was telling me. He was diligently presenting his social and economic arguments, but because I am suspicious by nature I believed that the fall of socialism was closer to utopia than reality.

I had an unpleasant experience with the system but even that did not help me. In 1963, when I was twenty five years old and my first novel *Čangi* was published, a huge political case started in order to remove that very harmful novel from the literary scene. The novel was destructive according to then leading and ruling authorities. The court proceedings started from the political top (Aleksandar Ranković rated the novel extremely damaging at the consultative meeting with party secretaries). The novel was considered to be against the state and national interests. I managed to avoid the prison but it was a close call. I was on thin ice, politically speaking, and the newspaper editors did not dare to publish my articles.

In spite of such terrible personal experience, I thought of socialism as a very powerful and heavily controlled mechanism and I was not able to see the Achilles' heel which I could use to shake it. However, I could not or I did not know which other arguments to give to Praljak besides the banal ones – *they* have in their power the police, army, legislation, surveillance, intelligence and discipline and it was not possible to defeat such power and to take over. Praljak then gave me a mathematical proof: he has calculated the ratio of the price of bread and milk and inflation. The calculation showed that the fall of socialism, at least in the case of Yugoslavia, was not some distant future but it was very reasonable to expect it in the course of two years. His assessment turned out to be more than correct.

In the meantime Praljak wanted to write a script based on my condemned novel and make a movie based on that script. Twenty years passed since the legal and political prosecution of the novel and Yugo-socialism was not so strict any more. Besides,

during the Croatian spring in 1970, an extended edition of the novel *Čangi* was published by *Znanje* under the title *Čangi off gottoff*. A breath of freedom was flowing through Croatia and I have even interpolated the court proceedings and documents in the story with lot of irony towards the sixties.

Suggestiveness of the film and the way it can be used for brainwashing was noticed by Lenjin already in the beginning of the revolution as one of the most efficient tools. Film was completely submitted to the ideology. Josip Broz has followed that school. He was also a regular visitor of Yugoslav film festival which was taking place in spectacular Arena in Pula. On one occasion, Praljak, Mujičić and I were accredited for culture section of the newspaper. We were primarily interested in the quiet resistance to the official stream which was more and more present in the film production of the time. Praljak was actually a superb connoisseur of the film scene but he would also spot the specific Yugoslav way of avoiding the steel grip of the ideology.

There I have also seen some moral qualities of Praljak which one can not fake. This event is described in more detail by Kemal Mujičić. On that day, one life if not two would have been over if Praljak had not immediately, without a second thought, jumped into the sea and, in spite of the risk, managed to save the drowning man. Praljak did not brag in the least. He simply considered it his basic human duty.

The funds were not approved for the script based on my novel on the contest published by the Ministry of Culture. Socialism was probably still powerful enough, and not yet in the phase of surrender. They were not ready to finance something which would make them a laughing stock. We have entered the contest too soon!

Things were happening very fast. The man with three university degrees had no time to commit himself to the demanding job of directing and shooting a film. And even if the shooting had started it probably would not have been finished. The aggression has reached gates of Zagreb.

Alojz MAJETIĆ

/signed/

writer

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