

## Chapter 8

### 'They Came as Workers and Left as Serbs': The Role of Rakovica's Blue-Collar Workers in Serbian Social Mobilizations of the Late 1980s<sup>1</sup>

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It certainly sticks out as an oddity that among the volumes of books written about the events leading up to the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia, a country officially built on workers' self-management, not a single one deals with organized labour. It is often assumed that individuals with high material well-being and supposed cultural openness were in the best position to counterweight the activities of regional political leaders (e.g. VeJVoda 1996: 22-4). Following this reasoning, one encounters laments over the nationalist turn of the Serbian dissident intelligentsia (e.g. Magaš 1993: 49-77) and a keen interest in various civic initiatives dealing with issues of ecology, pacifism, feminism, religion or youth counter-culture (e.g. Bokovoy, Irvine and Lilly 1997), but there is little inquiry into the activities of blue-collar workers. The weight given to mobilizations based on ethnic identity and new social movements as the main protagonists of democratization and change, seems all the more misplaced when one looks at the ever increasing figures of industrial action and their presence in the media of the time. To a large extent, it was the striking industrial workers who sensitized the Yugoslav public to controversial political issues and opened a space for other mobilizations in the second half of the 1980s.<sup>2</sup>

The neglect of labour could partly be explained by the theoretical re-orientation of social researchers from class to other identities during the past three decades (Heerma and van der Linden 2002). Inside Yugoslavia, this general tendency was additionally emphasized by the peculiarities of the local political and intellectual milieu. As the 1980s were coming to a close liberal opinion makers (market-oriented enterprise managers, and reform-minded

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<sup>2</sup> The number of strikes went from 247 instances, with 13,507 workers involved, in 1980 to 1,851 strikes, involving 386,123 workers, in 1988. These statistics place Yugoslavia among the countries with the highest strike activity in Europe at this time (Fočo 1989: 6).

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party functionaries) increasingly viewed the working class as an obstacle to the further modernization of the country. The blue-collar workers allegedly formed a coalition with the hardliners in the party apparatus which prevented any decisive reform attempts (Županov 1983). In Serbia, this sentiment continued to be present in the public discourses throughout the 1990s, since the opposition movement and student protests perceived the new regime as the continuity of communist rule. Manual workers in state owned companies, along with pensioners and rural population, allegedly formed the backbone of popular support for Slobodan Milošević (Mimica 1997, Ilić 1998: 74-9).

The event most often used to illustrate the historiographical cliché of working-class support of strong leaders and authoritarian politics is the protest of blue-collar workers from the Belgrade industrial suburb of Rakovica, in front of the Federal Parliament in October 1988. The workers supposedly arrived in a militant mood, armed with economic grievances, but decided to return to work after hearing a speech delivered to them by the League of Communists of Serbia leader Slobodan Milošević. At the time, journalist Jagoš Đuretić described the rally in the following words: 'people arrived as workers and left as Serbs' (Đukić 1992: 266). Ever since, this phrase has been habitually used in popular<sup>3</sup> and academic discourses (Marković 2014: 61) to describe the alleged ease with which the workers abandoned their long-term class interests for nationalist demagogy.

This chapter questions popular assumptions about the nature of the bonds between the labour movement and the leadership of the Serbian League of Communists in the late 1980s. The idea is not to simply reverse the dominant lines of explanation by arguing that labour was somehow immune to nationalist ideology, nor to paint an idealized picture of industrial

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. see Paković, Z. 2011. *Tri štrajka, Politika* (Kulturni dodatak), 11 June.

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workers in full accordance with the virtues projected onto them by the ruling socialist ideology. Some participants and observers were inclined to claim that workers held essentially anti-nationalist outlooks but happened to be manipulated by a deceitful leadership (e.g. Popov 2011: 13-32). What these seemingly sympathetic views have in common with those focusing on the power of ethnic identities or authoritative political culture is the denial of any agency attributed to workers themselves. In both cases labour appears as a passive recipient of ideas and organizational forms from above. By describing the changing alliances between the political bureaucracy and workers in the case of Rakovica this text will try to shed light on the sheer complexity of this relationship, as well as the ability of organized labour to shape independent interpretations of the crisis, impose its grievances to official discourses and rally around autonomous initiatives.

### **The Blue-Collar Community**

Even before the wave of industrial actions brought Rakovica into the national headlines in the late 1980s, the media, citizens, and politicians alike perceived it as Belgrade's foremost working class community. Rakovica delegates were at the forefront of vocal attacks against bureaucratic privileges and national divisions among the Yugoslav working class already in the late 1960s during the controversial Sixth Congress of the Yugoslav Federation of Trade Unions. The clashes in the 1968 congress culminated when three hundred out of one thousand delegates walked out of the hall in protest against the leadership's renunciation of secret voting procedure, trade union support of government plans to introduce participatory fees in the healthcare system and raise the retirement age (Carter 1982: 159-68). The municipality and its residents were associated with straightforward blue-collar attitudes held

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to be essential for the maintenance of the workers' self-management system.<sup>4</sup> A glimpse back at the distribution of the industrial workforce across the Yugoslav capital in the early 1980s does not seem to back up this widespread belief. The statistics show that Rakovica, with some 12,000 metal workers and 3,000 employed in the rubber industry, lagged behind the larger blue-collar municipalities, such as Zemun, home to over 27,000 industrial workers, or Palilula, which was located closer to the city centre and still registered over 20,000 residents employed in industry and mining (*Statistički godišnjak Beograda* 1989: 266).

However, a closer look at the city topography might partly explain what set Rakovica apart from other neighbourhoods. Both Zemun and Palilula were positioned in Belgrade's northern part, on the lower edge of the Pannonia plain close to the Danube River. The wide space of the plains allowed for the factories to be set up with a significant distance between them, often separated by roads and residential areas. In the South, the Rakovica industrial basin was a gateway to the hilly Central Serbia, squeezed in the long and narrow valley along a stream. The factories there were built in a straight line, one right after the other, with no clear-cut borders thus forming a colossal assembly line of sorts. In the morning when the first work shift would start the crowds of people arriving to the factories through the narrow strip at the entrance of the basin resembled crowds entering a busy football stadium. This density produced a strong feeling of common predicament and shared identity. As one trade unionist from the time remembers, if a strike would break out in a single sector of one factory, within

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<sup>4</sup> See for instance the way in which high LCY official Kiro Gligorov describes Rakovica as the place where 'genuine workers words always come to the fore' in Žujović, D. 1983.

*Ostvariti Opredeljenja, IMR: List radne organizacije Industrije motora Rakovica*, November 22.

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one hour the news would spread through the grapevine and become the main topic in all other enterprises.<sup>5</sup>

Metalworkers formed the core of the basin's industrial workforce. Most of them were concentrated in two large motor factories: The *Rakovica Motor Industry (Industrija Motora Rakovica, IMR)* which produced tractors and engines, and *21. maj*, specialized in motor vehicle engines. Situated between the two showpiece enterprises was a tire producer *Rekord* – the factory with the lowest wages and hardest working conditions. The top position in the Rakovica inner hierarchy was always reserved for the nearby *Tehnogas*, the extractor of natural gas, whose managerial board served as a springboard for many functionaries of the Serbian League of Communists, including two figures which marked the republic's politics in the 1980s – Ivan Stambolić and Slobodan Milošević.<sup>6</sup> Rakovica's proximity to institutions of state and party power, as well as the personal connections between the factories and the leadership of the Serbian communist party, additionally contributed to the visibility of the municipality and its political and economic prestige.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with IMR trade unionist M. Kljajić in Belgrade, 21 March 2011, conducted by the author.

<sup>6</sup> Ivan Stambolić was trained as a metalworker in Rakovica. He worked briefly on the IMR shop floor as an apprentice parallel to pursuing law studies at the University of Belgrade. Before occupying key posts in the city and the republican party in the late 1970s and 1980s, he was the executive manager of *Tehnogas*. Slobodan Milošević also worked as the general director of *Tehnogas* in the mid-1970s.

<sup>7</sup> Between 1980 and 1988, the IMR factory paper reports no less than five official visits Ivan Stambolić made to the enterprise as a city and republican official. Four LCY Central

IMR was a rare enterprise with a pre-war industrial tradition. Most of the other facilities were founded by socialist authorities in the Soviet-inspired push for rapid industrialization in the early years after the end of World War Two.<sup>8</sup> Still, the settling of the workforce and greater expansion of production activity came only in the 1950s with the introduction of workers' self-management. This decisive turn brought about a decline in the influence of central economic planning, closer contact with Western partners and license rights to modern technologies. In the second half of the 1960s, this gradual opening up toward the world market culminated in the official economic policy of *market socialism* (Prout 1985: 47). The period marked an attempted transition toward the strategy of intensive economic growth through the usage of more up to date technologies, better integration into the global division of labour and a more prominent role for specialists and trained cadres inside the enterprises. The political mobilizations were toned down and there was an attempt

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Committee representatives as well as the Vice-President and the President of the Federal State Presidency addressed the workforce in that same period. Foreign statesmen were often given a guided tour through Rakovica as a part of the protocol upon their visits to the capital, among them the President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak and the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi.

<sup>8</sup> Starting from the basic ideas about intensive industrialization laid out in Stalin's *Short Course*, the Yugoslav communists believed that, with the assistance of the Soviet Union and other friendly countries in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia could accomplish a grand modernization project in a relatively short time span. The methods used to raise productivity during this period included centrally determined five-year plans, shock brigade work and norm breaking. This was an attempt to compensate for the lack of modern tools and expertise with improvisation, the omnipresent enthusiasm for reconstruction and political agitation.

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to secure support for the reforms inside the factories by connecting workers' rights and higher wages with stronger enterprise autonomy and more market influence (Turkish-Comisso 1979: 51-4).

The modernization push along market lines developed a wide-ranging manufacturing sector and comparatively sophisticated consumer culture extending far above Yugoslavia's overall level of development. The usage of consumer goods as an incentive in raising work productivity caused imbalances between light and heavy industries. As extractive and steel industries were unable to support the desired levels of production, manufacturing became dependent on the volatile world market for imports of raw materials, components and technology (Prout 1985: 28). Employment levels stagnated as companies struggled to stay competitive and introduce modern machinery. The late 1960s witnessed widespread disappointment with the results of pro-market reforms (Rusinow 1977: 202).<sup>9</sup> In Rakovica, as a result of greater exposure to world market prices, imports and domestic competition the steady rise in the output of IMR engines and tractors came to a halt in 1967, followed by the fall in total income and cuts in employment levels (Spasojević 1977: 73-80).

In the early 1970s, the Yugoslav state made a break with the liberal economic course. The economic crisis and social stirrings of the late 1960s provoked a partial return to the developmentalist model, a stronger role for the state and struggle against technocracy inside the factories. The official ideology rediscovered the egalitarian values of the Yugoslav

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<sup>9</sup> The slowdown of industrial growth triggered political stirrings and an outpour of working class dissatisfaction inside the trade unions and the party. The 1960s also witnessed a wave of wildcat strikes in single enterprises (see Jovanov 1979).

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revolution and placed more emphasis on production skills instead of professional knowledge. Based on long-term bilateral contracts with Eastern Europe and developing countries from the Non-Aligned Movement, revenues once again started depending more on increasing the quantities produced rather than on price competition and marketing (Woodward 1995: 275-7). The orientation towards the government sponsored export of motors and tractors brought much desired stability in Rakovica's production. IMR was once again in a position to find secure outlets for its tractors and sources of steady inflow of hard currency. By 1981, almost 40 per cent of the factory output was exported to Egypt and India through state-run import companies (Spasojević 1977:73-80).

During the 1970s the need for a greater deliberation of socio-political organizations like the party and the trade union in business decisions, as well as the shop floor control of the professional management, was once again recognized as the key element of self-management, standing above company autonomy in relation to the party-state. The main institutional reform, which was supposed to ensure workers control over technocracy, thus preventing new forms of domination was 'BOALization' [*ourizacija*]. In the course of the decade, the new Constitution<sup>10</sup> and the Associated Labour Act [*Zakon o udruženom radu*], in

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<sup>10</sup> The 1974 Constitution granted unprecedented political rights to each republic.

Furthermore, in the case of Serbia, it strengthened the autonomy of its two provinces - Kosovo in the south and Vojvodina in the north. Making the decision-making on the federal level dependent on the consensus of the republics and extending the two Serbian provinces veto power over decisions of the Serbian parliament, the new constitution encouraged the already existing tendency toward radical decentralization of political and economic life in the Yugoslav Federation.

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particular, laid down the normative groundwork for reorganization of the economy. Each factory was divided into several BOALs (Basic Organization of Associated Labour), defined as the smallest part of the enterprise which constituted an economic-technological entity, and whose financial performance could be assessed independently by market or other means (Prout 1985: 65-70).

This ambitious institutional rearrangement was supposed to enhance the practice of self-management in several ways. Firstly, the workers would supposedly regain control over the factories, as the decision-making process in workers' councils of smaller units would be positioned closer to them. Secondly, the more direct link between the personal wage and the performance of each BOAL aimed to enhance productivity and foster good entrepreneurial practices. Thirdly, the decentralization and transfer of many state functions directly to the factories and other alternative institutions would equip the workers to take over the running not only of their own enterprises, but the society as a whole. In due course, factory councils would assume responsibility for all the tasks of the traditional state (Jović 2009: 142). The self-managed association from below was supposed to counter the isolationist tendencies developing within regional party-state bureaucracies (cf. Dević, this volume).

As the short description of the development of Yugoslav socialism until the late 1970s above shows, the system oscillated between market and political control over the economy. Accordingly, the ideological bedrock of Yugoslavia's allegedly distinct path to socialism carried ambiguous meanings. In periods of stronger pro-market orientation at the party apex, workers' self-management was seen primarily as the freedom of workers in a single enterprise to make their own business decisions and maximize incomes, regardless of the wider social implications of their activity. In years when the party aimed for the increased

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role of planning in its economic policies, the emphasis was put on the class dimension of workers self-management (Turkish-Comisso 1979: 209-27). At times of growing social inequality and insecurity in the market, the party leadership encouraged workers to raise their voices against the privileges of the management and demand redistribution of income brought about by greater involvement of the state.

### **The Battle over the Interpretation of the Crisis**

The death of Josip Broz Tito in May 1980 symbolically marked the end of prosperity based on extensive economic growth and hefty investments. The rising prices of oil imports and deterioration of the terms of trade for Yugoslavia's exports made the LCY leadership more attentive to the fact that the country was in a highly vulnerable position on the world market. Despite three decades-long successful industrial development, the economy remained an exporter of low quality finished goods at relatively high costs of production (McFarlane 1988: 92). In 1981, once the price of borrowing for a decade long investment spree was finally calculated, the federal government realized that the country was standing on the edge of bankruptcy with over \$20 billion in foreign debt (Sörensen 2009). The establishment was forced to give up the developmentalist course of the 1970s and enter into hasty debt reprogramming agreements with Western governments and economic reform programs under the tutelage of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The new orientation demanded the improved competitiveness of domestic industry by putting it into closer exposure with the world market. A widespread consciousness started to emerge inside the party and enterprise elites about the need for another wave of reforms. In the winter of 1984, the federal party Central Committee initiated a broad debate on the state of the party and society in roughly 70,000 branches countrywide, in preparation for the 13<sup>th</sup>

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Session of the Central Committee (Höpken 1985: 37-8). The draft document sent out to the party base was a cryptic text, which tried hard not to step on the toes of any of the leaderships in the republics and autonomous provinces, instead extending an abstract call for unity in hard times. Nevertheless, in a community such as Rakovica, where there was a tradition of blue-collar grievances being expressed in political terms, and where the social and economic tensions were brewing since the first signs of a new economic slowdown in 1979, even the slightest softening of the official institutions towards pro-market reforms inspired an avalanche of reactions.

In Serbia, where, apart from Slovenia, the activity of oppositional dissident circles was the strongest<sup>11</sup>, the campaign was conducted as thoroughly as possible, aiming to

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<sup>11</sup> These two republics offered the largest space for oppositional thought and dissident activity throughout the 1980s. For much of the decade the main ideological strands standing in opposition to the status quo of the 1970s remained intertwined and found no clear political expression within the party-state. The Serbian and Slovene communist leaderships were challenged by neo-liberal opinion makers in the media and economic institutions calling for less state control over the economy, grass-root civic associations demanding more democracy, labour resistance to austerity policies and nationalist-minded intelligentsia claiming that national rights of certain republics and their largest ethnic groups were endangered inside the federation. For a good overview of nationalist influenced cultural production in Serbia and Slovenia at the time from the perspective of the conservative fraction inside the party see the report made by the Central Committee of Croatian League of Communists in: Nikolić, K., Cvetković, S., Tripković, Đ. 2010. *Bela Knjiga – 1984. Obračun sa „Kulturnom kontrarevolucijom’ u SFRJ*. Belgrade: Službeni Glasnik, 61-251.

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mobilize all potential forces still oriented towards the traditional party and state structures. In Rakovica, some 6,000 party members participated in discussions extending over three months. Non-party members were also encouraged to attend and received guarantees that no sanctions would be applied against those who spoke out in critical tones. During those three weeks, the factory meeting rooms were transformed into vibrant places where workers stood up and spoke passionately about all the problems they thought needed to be addressed. Workers raised their voices against the so-called non-productive sectors, which allegedly moulded distribution to their own advantage and exploited the industry.<sup>12</sup> In regards to broader society, speakers focused mostly on the lack of respect for manual labour and social differentiations, which were unacceptable for their understanding of socialism. The initial impulse of the workers faced with the crisis was to demand a grand redistribution of wealth.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In order to back up their grievances workers embraced the theoretical concept, introduced by the official Marxist economic theory and the accounting system, of rigorous separation between those jobs which allegedly create new value and those living off this value. The creation of common wealth was in the hands of direct producers and it was the matter of political decision making to determine how to allocate this value where needed while recognizing the crucial role of manual labour in society. The non-productive sectors of the economy, personified by the state apparatus, but also administrative staff within the enterprises, were therefore often perceived as a necessary evil, if not outright freeloaders, living off the value created by workers and using political influence to skew income distribution to their advantage.

<sup>13</sup> Žujović, D. 1984. Ocene, zaključci, stavovi... *IMR: List radne organizacije Industrije motora Rakovica*, 30 October, 4.

Nevertheless, the party leadership was not ready to make another turn to the left. The global political context was very different from the late 1960s. The planned economies of Eastern Europe were stagnating. In the West new ideas about market freedom were slowly replacing state interventionism as the guiding economic paradigm. A significant part of the political and economic elite inside Serbia was starting to view the developmentalist economic reforms of the previous decade and radical political decentralization as grave mistakes. The dissident voices and the younger politicians such as Ivan Stambolić and Slobodan Milošević alike saw the 1970s as a missed opportunity to continue with the market modernization policies of the 1960s and bring Yugoslavia closer to Western models of development. Once the conclusions from the branch meetings in the campaign around the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the Central Committee filtered through to higher bodies, it became obvious that the Serbian leadership was looking for a very particular theme around which it planned to construct its arguments. No occasion was missed to stress the atomizing nature of Associated Labour Act as the root cause of all factory problems and the need for a unified Yugoslav market as the main solution. In his concluding remarks on the campaign, the chairman of the Rakovica municipal party committee looked back on the successful mobilization in the factories and concluded that the workers 'proved that they are ready to break all the boundaries isolating the BOALs'.<sup>14</sup> The main slogan was that of a 'united Yugoslavia' – interpreted as the overcoming of economic and political borders everywhere, inside the factories, the republics and the federation, imposed upon society by the political compromises of the 1970s.

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<sup>14</sup> n.a. 1984. *Energično u akciju, IMR: List radne organizacije Industrije motora Rakovica*, 11 December, 4.

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The official Serbian proposals for change thus worked on two levels – the micro reforms in the enterprise and the macro changes in the constitutional architecture of the federal state. The first set of solutions was focused on reaching greater independence and efficiency of economic subjects as well as stricter correlation between the earnings and distribution of enterprise income and the market laws. In other words, the program aimed at strengthening managerial structures inside the factories and reinstating the profitability criteria at the centre of enterprise business decisions. The second group of proposals consequently followed the same logic within the federal political frame. The federal government was supposed to introduce a common economic development plan for the country as a whole and increase efforts to integrate the internal market. The 1974 constitutional solutions had to be modified. Federal institutions thus had to be reinforced and Serbia had to gain greater control over its two autonomous regions. Once these institutional prerequisites were achieved, the economic liberalization and steady democratization of political life would allegedly help Yugoslavia transform into a coherent, functional state, in line with the global trends of the time (Milošević 1989: 30-37, Borak 2002: 127-37).

In principle, the workers inside Rakovica agreed with the conclusion of the pressing need for abandoning BOALs and the recentralization of the country. However, the ways in which they expected to achieve the centralization of economic and political life, as well as the end goals toward which this new unity would be utilized was another matter. At the November 1984 open meeting in Rakovica organized by the municipal party, where social scientists and politicians put forward their thoughts on the topic of growing social inequalities, the *21. maj* factory trade unionists, Milan Nikolić and Slobodanka Branković, led vocal attacks against the perceived privileges of the LCY elite. Pointing to the unequal distribution of flats in the city (cf. Archer, this volume), Nikolić questioned the legitimacy of

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'people who resolved all their problems' in top party positions. In his words 'in order to understand the problems of the proletariat, the leaders have to be proletarians themselves'.

The debate continued, heating up to the point where one worker called for the confiscation of all wealth gained through 'exploitation or appropriation of social property'.<sup>15</sup> Placing BOALs under firmer central management was seen primarily as a measure to reduce administration, raise the proportion of income dedicated to manual labour and make the professional staff more accountable to the shop floor.

In the course of 1986, invigorated by the election of younger, more confrontational politicians like Ivan Stambolić and Slobodan Milošević in the highest fora, the Serbian party accelerated its efforts to rescind the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina and made its demands for constitutional reform more public. As a result, the shop floor discussions inside Rakovica became increasingly politicized and connected to wider public debates. The workers usually dismissed the official Serbian proposals for constitutional amendments as too soft and insufficient. The metalworkers proposed a radical approach to centralization and revision of 1974 Constitution with far reaching democratizing impulses. Among all the ideas the direct producers presented, the one heard most often was the demand for the introduction of a Chamber of Associated Labour into the Federal Parliament.<sup>16</sup> In the Yugoslav political system all important economic decisions for the Federation as a whole were voted in the so called second house of the parliament (Chamber of Republics and Provinces), whose

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<sup>15</sup> Avramović, S.1984. Hitni potezi umesto teoretisanja, *IMR: List radne organizacije Industrije motora Rakovica*, 13 November. 4

<sup>16</sup> n.a. 1986. Stavovi iz IMR-a: Kako izaći iz krize, *IMR: List radne organizacije Industrije motora Rakovica*, 19 March, 4.

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delegates were selected from members of the republic and provincial assemblies, and made decisions based on consensus between delegations of each respective republic or autonomous province.<sup>17</sup>

Rakovica's workers shared the general feeling inside Serbia that Yugoslavia should be something more than a simple sum of politically self-centred republics and autonomous provinces. They argued that regional political and economic bureaucracies exaggerated particularistic national interests and identities, thus blunting the working class instinct for unity. Instead, or parallel to, an empowered Serbia, Rakovica promoted a new federal body, consisting of direct representatives of Associated Labour, which could potentially provide a counter balance to the disintegrative trends and release direct producers from the political tutelage of the republics and provincial politicians. In this scheme, the shortest and the simplest way to achieve a common market and federal cohesion was the political emancipation of the working class. The end goal of these proposals for political reform remained a more egalitarian society. In March 1986, the leading trade unionists and party activists from IMR were asked to present their opinion of a document drafted by the federal leadership, which attempted to reveal the causes of the crisis of Yugoslav political system.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the members of the Federal Chamber in the Federal Parliament were elected from the communal assemblies and decisions were made based on a simple majority vote.

<sup>18</sup> The discussed document was circulated in late 1985 by the LCY leadership under the title 'The Critical Analysis of the Functioning of the Political System of Socialist Self-Management' [*Kritička analiza funkcionisanja političkog sistema socijalističkog samoupravljanja*]. Together with the document written by the so-called Kraigher Commission three years earlier [*Dugoročni program ekonomske stabilizacije*] this document represented

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Apart from the already mentioned calls for the centralization of enterprises and a more cohesive federal state structure, IMR's reply stated the following: 'A critical analysis must offer guidelines for fighting against the established rich-man capitalist layer in our society, which represents a danger for the development of self-management and social property'.<sup>19</sup>

### **National Brotherhood and Class Unity**

Throughout the 1980s, the national question was also increasingly becoming one of the main concerns for the citizens of Rakovica. The community was home to approximately one thousand Serbian migrant workers from Kosovo and their families.<sup>20</sup> Kosovo workers' stories of unfair treatment of the region's Serbian population by Albanian politicians and police resonated strongly inside the factories. However, throughout the 1980s it is very hard to

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the main effort to find a common ground for political and economic reforms on the federal level in the 1980s.

<sup>19</sup> n.a. 1986. Stavovi iz IMR-a: Kako izaći iz krize, *IMR: List radne organizacije Industrije motora Rakovica*, 19 March, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Kosovo was an autonomous province inside Serbia with the majority Albanian population. The region was economically the most underdeveloped part of Yugoslavia and the place where social tensions were often expressed along ethnic lines. The multi-ethnic Partisan movement in Kosovo never laid strong roots under the German occupation. After World Two Kosovo was overseen by a strong police presence, while Serbs dominated the regional party-state. The decentralization and liberal policies of the 1960s and 1970s saw the cultural and political emancipation of Albanians and the local non-Serb elites increasingly occupied positions in local institutions. The economic slowdown of the 1980s increased ethnic tensions and accelerated migration out of the region (see Ströhle, this volume).

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differentiate the general concern over relations between different national groups from perceived class inequalities. For many Rakovica workers, the main problem was not the weakening of the Serbian national interest (which presumably came in tandem with the political decentralization brought about by the 1974 Constitution) but the conditions this new institutional set-up created for the expansion of bureaucracy and looser control of the federal authorities over the illegal appropriation of social property. There was a clear tendency to view nationalism as a secondary product of political alliance between local technocratic elites and regional party bureaucracies, both trying to protect their self-serving interests. As IMR's skilled metal worker, Miloje Stojković, explained in an interview given to the weekly *NIN*:

I am afraid that much of the funding which went for the faster development of Kosovo ended up for some other purposes. Many of my colleagues are of the same opinion. I am also convinced that many federal functionaries, as well as those in the province, knew what was coming and yet they kept quiet. We placed misled kids into courts [...] The counterrevolution is gaining ground thanks to Yugoslav disunity. I mean the disunity of the leadership, not the people...I met some Albanians during the time I served in the army and I remember them as honest, very dear people. In my building hallway, over there in Rakovica where I live, there is a guy named Nebih [presumably Albanian] and his family. A great man, a father, a husband, a neighbour...I do not see so many nationalists or so much nationalism as it is portrayed. Sometimes I come to think that it is exactly those people who push these stories, they are the ones trying to camouflage behind them.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The interview was reprinted in full on the pages of the factory paper, see:

Apart from the increasing number of strikes inside the factories and more open factional battles at the party apex, the most significant social stirring in Serbia in the second half of the 1980s was the shaping of the movement of Kosovo Serbs. In the course of 1986 and early 1987, various initiatives of local Serbs, dissatisfied with the treatment they received from the local authorities and the Albanian majority population, evolved into a unified, persistent and relatively well organized mobilization, with contacts to Belgrade-based dissident intelligentsia and parts of the Serbian party apparatus. These activists started organizing a series of protests with the aim of attracting attention to the alleged plight of national minority rights in Kosovo. The presence of people in the streets raised fear and paranoia inside the ruling circles. Recalling the events in this period of his political life, Ivan Stambolić described the atmosphere during the parallel meetings of the Collective Presidency of Yugoslavia and the LCY Central Committee in Belgrade during the summer of 1987 once the word spread that Kosovo Serb activists were gathering outside the Federal Parliament building.

The Presidency of Yugoslavia reaches no decisions, it just warns me of the gravity of the situation, of the real danger of the escalation of mass and broader movements in Belgrade and Serbia, and correspondingly of my responsibility. They are in possession of information that new trains are arriving from Kosovo, that Rakovica is

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Spasojević, S. 1985. Opori optimizam, *IMR: List radne organizacije Industrije motora Rakovica*, 5 February, 6.

rising up, that Smederevo [a steel plant city close to Belgrade] is on its way, that citizens are joining the protesters in the streets, that 'leaders from Francuska 7' [the address of the Serbian Writers' Association] are inserting themselves at the helm of the protests...the republican police refutes the alarming information about Rakovica, students, Smederevo, the new trains. Belgrade remains calm and worried. The confusion is widespread, dramatizations ever greater.<sup>22</sup>

Stambolić later realized that parts of the federal leadership were intentionally exaggerating the threat of street mobilizations in order to apply pressure on the Serbian leadership. The leaders of other republics were convinced that protests inside Serbia were an orchestrated affair used by Stambolić to blackmail the federation into granting more power to the Serbian party. By spreading panic, they wanted to teach the Serbian president a lesson on how such moves might easily backfire. However, the mere fact that the scare tactics almost succeeded reveals the restlessness and insecurities building up inside the leadership. In reality, it was Slobodan Milošević, for years Stambolić's right hand man, who secretly established contacts with the leaders of Kosovo Serbs. Despite these contacts, it would be wrong to assume that Milošević was in control of the mobilizations. More recent historiography shows that in this particular case, Milošević indeed followed the official line of the Serbian party and tried to pressure the protest leaders to abort the rally. However, these leading activists were temporarily sidelined in the movement amid strong pressure from below and the protest in front of the Federal Parliament went ahead as planned (Vladislavljević 2008: 103-4).

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<sup>22</sup> Parts of Stambolić's memoirs were published in Lekić and Pavić (2007: 269).

It is not clear why the Federal Presidency mentioned Rakovica explicitly as the potential place where trouble was expected. By that point in time, the spirit of mobilization has already entered most factories in Belgrade. *Zmaj* combine factory, for instance, located in Belgrade's municipality of Zemun, had a longer record of strikes than any Rakovica enterprise in the preceding years. Two reasons come to mind. First, as already mentioned, in political circles, as well as for the general public, Rakovica was already established as a symbol for working-class militancy. Second, both Stambolić and Milošević were at one point in their careers managers in Rakovica and it was assumed that they might still have direct influence there.

There is no indication that the blue-collar movement in Rakovica was in any way in contact with the Serbian leadership outside of the official channels in the same way that the leadership of Kosovo Serbs maintained contact with the party elite. Despite his background as an IMR apprentice and *Tehnogas* general manager, Stambolić never really managed to inspire much grassroots support in Rakovica and after a let down of the awakened expectation during the 13<sup>th</sup> LCY Central Committee Session preparatory discussions in 1984, his reputation was further tarnished. Milošević, on the other hand, was still not that well known inside the factories. The fact that he picked up the cause of Kosovo Serbs certainly helped boost his reputation among Rakovica's migrant workers from Kosovo, workers with a strong sense of national identity and all other citizens from the municipality who felt concerned about the portrayed predicament of ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, for a blue-collar milieu, where any type of ethnic differentiation among workers was traditionally taboo, and where the idea of nationalism as something alien and dangerous for the working class was deeply entrenched, the political message of Milošević caused no automatically positive

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responses. What Rakovica was more attentive to was the familiar rhetoric of working class importance for social progress and renewed industrial investments.

A sound program for industrial recovery was still the main preoccupation of the municipal delegates. In their eyes however, after years of foot-dragging at the top the chances for something like this to happen were tightly connected with political reforms. If a movement based on ethnic identity was also pushing for change and seemed to be making progress then there was no reason not to stand behind it. The proposed measures were allegedly not directed against the Albanian working class but rather the nationalist elements and Kosovo's party-state apparatus. The Serbian leadership's program of action which was about to unite all major social actors discussed in this text (Kosovo Serb activists, Rakovica's enterprise managers and blue-collar worker delegates in socio-political organizations) behind Milošević's fraction inside the party, had its own internal logic. The goal of a unified Serbia without the autonomous provinces would arguably reduce state bureaucracy and ease the tax burden on Associated Labour. Once the national question and constitutional status were resolved the party could finally focus on more important things, such as the fate of the working class and the failing economy. As Milošević pointed out to the members of LCY Central Committee in October 1988:

Kosovo is not the cause, but the consequence of the crisis of Yugoslav society.

However, the fact that it is a consequence does not mean that it should be resolved last. Harassment, rape and humiliation of the people cannot wait until we put inflation under control, reduce unemployment, increase exports, raise the living standards, implement democratic centralism and discuss the relationship between the class and

the nation. And the crisis is such that the only way to get out of it is through a thorough renewal of cadres at the key party, state, economic and cultural points, renewal which is necessary in order to conduct the socio-economic reform of Yugoslav society as a whole (Milošević 1989: 270).

### **The Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution**

Despite the points of agreement, protests based on ethnic identity and the blue-collar mobilizations did not cross each other's paths inside Serbia until the autumn of 1988. As one observer noted at the time, thanks to the spill-over of politics beyond the normative channels, the late 1980s were full of contradictory tendencies. The period was marked by the rise of national homogenization and reinstatement of party influence. However, simultaneously it witnessed a growing sense of social and political freedoms, thus making it hard to judge in which direction the situation would develop (Magaš 1993: 311). In Rakovica, the party was not the only organized force trying to develop a coherent interpretation of the crisis and ways to overcome it. The egalitarian values connected to workers' self-management did not disappear from the popular consciousness in the decade of reforms. They continued to circulate away from the public eye and found their clearest expression inside the local trade union branches. Feeling the heat of discontent from the shop floor, a new generation of trade union activists was pushed to the fore, not hesitating to organize their own public gatherings and draft their own demands.

1988 therefore witnessed simultaneous mobilizations of two groups inside Rakovica with programs based on two opposing visions of Yugoslav socialism. The party apparatus was stressing the importance of the Serbian national question, but it was also offering a pro-

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market view of self-management, based on the perspectives for increased incomes of the best performing enterprises and higher consumption levels of individual workers through liberal economic reforms. The second organized political actor was the local trade union, which based its program on the struggle against increasing social inequalities and for a greater political voice of the workers. In March that year, disgruntled by rigidity inside the higher trade union bodies, Rakovica's outspoken union activist Milan Nikolić decided to focus his activity on the local level and won the elections for the president of the municipal union organization. With him at the helm of the municipal union, joined by Slobodanka Branković, the female president of the *21. maj* trade union, and Milan Kljajić, as the serving president of IMR's union organization, Rakovica's blue-collar workers gained a municipal-level organization responsive to shop floor grievances and somewhat independent from the higher party-state fora. Nikolić's inaugural speech was telling of the changing mood inside Rakovica's factories.

It is the sad truth that we ourselves denounced self-management too easily. Incapable of mobilization, we failed to keep and develop it. Also, lately, there are calls for some kind of strong hand which will resolve the problems. For a big part it is our own fault. If we had resisted, they would not have been able to take it away. If we had fought we would have won! Therefore, we must start a new struggle for self-management, that inalienable right of the workers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> n.a. 1988. Milan Nikolić predsednik, *IMR: List radne organizacije Industrije motora Rakovica*, 15 March, 4.

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The passing reference to the 'strong hand', made by Nikolić in his inaugural speech, that could allegedly solve all of problems from above, shows that he was aware that the labour union was about to enter into competition with the new Serbian leadership for the support of Rakovica's blue-collar workers. Between May and October 1988, several work organizations from all parts of the country rallied in front of the Federal Assembly building in downtown Belgrade. The workers from the *Zmaj* combine factory poured out into the streets of Belgrade in June under the slogans *Long Live the Working Class, Down with the Bourgeoisie* and *You Betrayed Tito*. The workers from Belgrade's Zemun municipality followed the example set by the Bosnian miners and Croatian rubber workers earlier that year,<sup>24</sup> as well as the tactics of the Kosovo Serb movement, and decided to march on the Federal Assembly building.<sup>25</sup> In front of the Federal Parliament building, city and municipal officials addressed the crowd, but

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<sup>24</sup> In May 1988 some 400 miners from a mine in north-east Bosnia decided to organize a march to Belgrade. After reaching the Serbian border after some 70 kilometre long walk, the authorities organized buses and hosted them in Belgrade. In July, workers from the Croatian rubber factory *Borovo* stormed the federal parliament forcing the authorities agree to their demands.

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that despite the steady decentralization of political life in Yugoslavia along republican lines many factories chose to protest in front of the Federal Assembly. It is possible that the wrath of workers was focused on the Federal Executive Council [*Savezno izvršno veće*] since this institution was the main instigator of economic reforms and demanded consistent application of wage restraint. The other possible reason was that workers saw the highest party officials, formerly embodied by Josip Broz Tito, as the protectors of socialist values and a powerful instance that could potentially intervene into local affairs and act as workers' ally in the struggle with the management.

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the stage was also stormed by lower level trade unionists and ordinary workers. The gathering failed to present the authorities with a common list of demands but the *Zmaj* factory paper recorded the speech of an anonymous worker, which captured the general protest mood quite well:

Everyone receives their wages because of the fact that workers toil. How big has the administration become, how many secretaries and automobiles are there...where do we see this in the proposed constitutional changes? We want responsibility in front of the workers; we want to be able to remove those who perform badly. We have the right to demand the lowering of wages for those who do not produce. We have the right to demand expropriations of summer houses!<sup>26</sup>

Serbia's new party leadership principally ignored these blue-collar mobilizations. One can say that Milošević stuck to the rules of political federalism and refused to intervene in non-Serbian strikes as a republican leader. Even if that was the case, *Zmaj*, as a Belgrade-based factory, certainly fell under Milošević's jurisdiction. The fact is that Milošević already had a political battering ram in form of the movement of Kosovo Serbs. Under the increasing guidance from the top, their protests were spreading across Serbia. However, the Serbian party still did not have complete control over this grassroots movement and feared political opponents from other republics might use any incident to compromise Serbia (Vladislavjević

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<sup>26</sup> n.a. 1988. Protestni marš hiljade Zmajevaca, *Zmaj: List kolektiva Industrije poljoprivrednih mašina "Zmaj" Zemun*, 30 June, 8.

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2008). The rise of another social movement based on class identity, with great potential to spread through industrial cities, was the last thing the Serbian leadership wished for at that moment. The testimonies of former Kosovo Serb leaders reveal how the news of workers' mobilizations was not greeted with sympathy by Milošević. Recalling one of their meetings with Milošević, Milić Maslovarić and Milorad 'Migo' Samardžić, members of the protest organizing committee from Kosovo stated:

When we were at Milošević's office... that woman [the secretary] brought him that telex and said 'comrade President, they are on their way' and then Milošević started screaming 'get out, get out!', that's how mad she made him! Migo winked at me, but I was puzzled, not realizing what was happening. Later I found out how that same day, when we had our meeting with Milošević, the workers from Zemun's *Zmaj* walked out into the streets and gathered in front of the Federal Parliament (Kerčov, Radoš and Raiš 1990: 235).

The precedent which served as the entry point for the overlap of the movements based on class and ethnic identity was set on 4 October 1988. Two important events occurred on that day. Firstly, Rakovica's workers decided to follow the example of other work collectives and demonstrate their dissatisfaction in front of the Federal Parliament. Secondly, on this day Slobodan Milošević broke the reserved stance the Yugoslav party leaderships had toward industrial mobilizations and addressed blue-collar workers in downtown Belgrade. The march of Rakovica's workers was a spontaneous event by all accounts. Dissatisfied with the delay

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of their monthly wage, the *21. maj* workers walked out of the factory premises, calling on their fellow workers from neighbouring factories to join them in front of the Communal Assembly. Once in the centre of Rakovica, a voice from the crowd suggested they march to the Federal Parliament some ten kilometres away. The idea was accepted enthusiastically as 8,000 workers from different companies started to chant *Za Beograd!* (To Belgrade!).

An hour and a half later, the angry crowd was already in the centre of the city. Once in front of the parliament, the workers attempted to storm the building but were pushed back by the police and promised that someone will address their demands. All the functionaries that addressed the workers that day were booed except for one. Slobodan Milošević based his appeal exactly on the ability to encompass all the identities and grievances expressed by the crowd. He was seen as an economic reformer but also as the keeper of egalitarian revolutionary values; as the advocate of the Serbian people but at the same time as a firm believer in the unity of Yugoslavia. Unlike the other speakers who addressed the crowd from the staircase of the Federal Parliament, Milošević avoided the trap of operating inside the framework already set by Rakovica's trade union. Instead, the narrative of his speech was built up carefully to bring the crowd to his own terrain – the on-going reform push of the Serbian party.

Milošević started the address by repeating the much-cherished leitmotif of the party work inside the industrial milieus. The working class was the key to the unity of Yugoslavia and Rakovica was not fighting for its selfish interests. The strike was placed in the context of a larger movement against the disunity and self-serving bureaucracies. Rakovica's demands were lumped together with Serbia's struggle for economic liberalization and centralization of the political system, as well as the fight against the 'counterrevolution' in Kosovo. Milošević

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was careful not to name the protest demands one by one. The concrete calls for wage increase, tax burden deduction, resignation of high functionaries and the introduction of Associated Labour into the Parliament were buried under the broader theme of constitutional reforms. The closing sentences implied the closing of an unwritten agreement between Milošević and the working class:

In these hard times, the hardest since the war, rest assured that we all have our tasks, our workplaces and our responsibilities. Therefore, I suggest you go back to your work duties and give maximum efforts for the stabilization of our economy and the state inside the country... You can trust that we will immediately discuss all the questions you have raised here today. Therefore, nobody should wait any longer to fulfil their part of the job. Now everyone back to their own work tasks!<sup>27</sup>

That same afternoon media in all republics launched the story of Milošević as Serbia's strong man. His address in front of the Federal Parliament was immediately rendered as historic. The last sentence of the speech, in which Milošević demanded that everyone returns to their work duties, was emphasized in particular as a show of strength and authority. In Slovenia and Croatia, Milošević was presented as a dangerous populist, persuasive enough

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<sup>27</sup> n.a. 1988. Govor Slobodana Miloševića radnicima Rakovice: nećemo izneveriti zahteve', *IMR: List radne organizacije Industrije motora Rakovica*, October 18, 4.

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to manipulate and send the striking workers back to their factories<sup>28</sup>. Inside Serbia, the descriptions of Milošević's talent to communicate with the masses was not much different, only that in this case he was seen as embodying the popular will expressed in the street. Milošević was now depicted not only as the champion of the oppressed Serbian minority in Kosovo but as the protector of the working class against the alienated bureaucracies. No matter how they approached it, both sides contributed to the cult of personality increasingly building up around the leader of the Serbian party.

The Serbian leadership was reinvigorated by the increased attention given to class identity. The accusations of growing Serbian nationalism were to a large degree dispersed with images of the alleged blue-collar workers' support for the new Serbian leadership. If Milošević was indeed a nationalist, how was one to explain the stated fact that the social class which was the main carrier of socialist values stood behind him? It suddenly became hard to attack Milošević without simultaneously discrediting the idea of the working class as the

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<sup>28</sup> Đorgović, M. 1988. Oktobar u Rakovici, *Danas*, 10 November. When seen in the context of the speech as a whole, the last sentence of the speech, which would become iconic in the years to come, 'Now everyone back to their own work tasks!' could be understood as relating mostly to the functionaries themselves and the work ahead of them once they heard the workers' point of view. In interviews the author conducted with the former workers, many mentioned understanding the slogan in such a way. The 'contract' between the workers and Milošević therefore carried obligations for both sides. The new leadership had acknowledged the workers' demands and guarantees were extended that the working class will remain the cornerstone of reformed Yugoslavia. In return, the workers were to cease strike activities, tighten their belts and increase their work efforts.

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vanguard of social development. For the radical pro-market commentators this was not a problem. They anyway perceived labour as a burden on the modernization effort. In their view, the feared prophecy of an alliance between the 'weak and the incompetent', the blue-collar workers and the demagogical party leadership, was becoming a reality.<sup>29</sup> It seemed that most of the key players in Yugoslav politics profited from the projected picture of the anti-bureaucratic revolution as a blue-collar movement.

The front pages of the Serbian weekly *NIN* show how much time and effort were invested in creating a public perception of a bond between the new leader and the workers. The title page of the first October 1988 issue, published after the Rakovica strike, was split in two equal parts. One carried a picture of Milošević delivering a speech from the steps of the Federal Parliament. The second one captured a blurry mass of blue work coats gathered in front of the building with the portrait of Tito being the only recognizable insignia of the gathering. The title story of the following issue was the protest taking place in Montenegro and the use of force by the police against the protesters. The front page captured a demonstrator in a factory work suit, carrying the framed black and white picture of foundry operators, presumably a picture of him and his colleagues as young workers. The title read: 'Who dares to beat the workers?' In December 1988, the front page was yet again reserved for a group of workers gathered with raised fists around a portrait of Tito. In total, the scenes of blue-collar workers in action filled four front pages of the most influential Serbian weekly that year.

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<sup>29</sup> For a further elaboration of the concept and fears of the blocked reforms at the time, see an interview with the Slovenian intellectual Vojan Rus in Maloča, M. and Milović, Z. 1988.

Savez slabih i nesposobnih, *Danas*, 12 April, 17- 19.

Parallel to the increasing exposure the factory strikes received in the media, the dividing lines between them and the protests of Kosovo Serbs became thinner, as entire enterprises would join the top-down organized protests in Central Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro, collectively named the 'Anti-bureaucratic revolution'. The new Serbian leadership was firmly in place and the initial grassroot protests of Kosovo Serbs had evolved into a series of ambitious, top-down, government organized rallies focused on constitutional issues and support for Milošević. During the autumn and winter of 1988 enterprises in Vojvodina and Montenegro played an important role in the protests, which eventually toppled the regional authorities still hostile to the new Serbian leadership. The factory management did not try to prevent such mobilizations any longer since they were now part of officially endorsed political folklore inside Serbia. On the contrary, the management often facilitated the protests and acted as a spokesperson for the workers.

In Montenegro workers of a machine construction factory on the edge of bankruptcy *Radoje Dakić* formed the backbone of a popular movement directed against the republican government. In Vojvodina's capital, Novi Sad, the *Jugoalat* tool factory played the main role in the organization of a rally of close to 80,000 people, managing to unite workers from different regional enterprises, Kosovo Serb activists and ordinary citizens in overthrowing the party leadership of the autonomous province. *Jugoalat* The general director of *Jugoalat* was actively involved in the mobilizations and served as one of the key members of the negotiation team which forced the resignations of the regional party functionaries in Novi Sad.

## **Conclusions**

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The abstract notion of unity, whether of different national groups or the working class, was a constant theme among Yugoslav communists. The new Serbian leadership inserted fresh meanings into the traditional slogan by contrasting it to what it saw as a growing anarchy and the evolution of separate regional interests over the previous two decades. By placing Serbia in the role of the exploited victim of bureaucratic machinations and ever-increasing pushes for decentralization, the Serbian nation as a whole was assigned with attributes once reserved for the proletariat. In the official language, the term 'working class' was starting to be used interchangeably with the term 'Serbian people' [*srpski narod*], only to be completely overtaken by the latter in the early 1990s (Milosavljević 2005). Moreover, Milošević presented his program not only as Serbia's cry for equality, but much more, as a way to preserve the socialist revolutionary heritage. Yugoslavia could allegedly only gain from more centralization and marketization as these processes would unify the country and enable Yugoslavia to preserve workers' self-management by adjusting to rising global challenges.

For most citizens of Rakovica the question of how the proposed programme of increased unity through a stronger Serbia would resonate with workers in other parts of the country was never a controversial issue. Any hint at nationalism was typically perceived as an offence and furiously rejected. The uniformity of interests of different Yugoslav workers was a matter of common sense. It was assumed that once Serbian workers made their voices heard, the workers of other nationalities would automatically recognize the common cause and join them against the bureaucracies in their own republics. This politically naïve understanding of class solidarity, as something already given, was the result of decades of inculcation by the LCY presenting itself as the interpreter of the common interest. The Yugoslav system of market-influenced socialism, where producers often perceived other factories as competitors, had a hard time establishing self-management links beyond the

factory level, not to mention regional or federal connections. As a result, the negotiation of different grievances was always undertaken at the very top of the party-state apparatus under the slogan of inherent unity.

As we have seen, the blue-collar workers initially reacted to the crisis by rallying around the traditional slogan of the redistribution of social wealth. They were more prone to attack the managers and white-collar workers than to grant them more influence in the hope of rising future incomes. In order to change this, the Serbian party launched a streak of meetings and rallies in the blue-collar neighbourhoods, which tried to connect economic grievances with the national question and revive pro-market interpretations of self-management as a way of achieving a higher standard of living. A large segment of the working class, already accustomed to work incentives through the markets and consumerism, was potentially responsive to this interpretation of socialism, which focused on free economic exchange, greater enterprise autonomy and the struggle against a bloated state bureaucracy.

For the new modernization push along market lines to work, the blue-collar workers had to start tying their fortunes more closely with their own enterprise as a competitive unit. If any type of political solidarity was to be formed between workers of different factories, the party had to make sure these bonds were based on the assumed unity of national economic interests; for instance, the fair treatment of Serbian products on the Yugoslav market or protection from northern producers who allegedly enjoyed political favouritism in the federation. Otherwise, the wrath of direct producers could have been redirected towards management, white-collar technocracy and the banks, trading companies or the pro-market wing of the party. In this case, the whole market reform would end in failure.

The mobilizations inside Rakovica should be observed as a part of the overall social mobilizations during the final years of Yugoslav socialism but at the same time, the autonomy of the labour initiatives must be acknowledged. On the surface, many ideas heard in Rakovica meetings overlapped with those promoted by the new leadership. Nevertheless, their evolution must be observed separately. Rakovica's embrace of Slobodan Milošević did not ensue automatically and without reserve. Before the fall of 1988, Milošević was still perceived mostly as the champion of the Kosovo Serbs and not the working class. Many reformist ideas already circulated inside the factory halls, years before Milošević's faction came to power and started picking them up. It took an extensive media campaign and Milošević's personal guarantee for the endorsement of labour demands for his popularity to rise inside Rakovica.

Furthermore, the actual content and objectives of the reforms were often perceived differently by the industrial workers, on one hand, and the company management and political leadership on the other. The working class support for the new leadership was never unconditional. Already in October 1989, on the commemoration of the anniversary of Rakovica's protest in front of the Federal Parliament, the workers' representatives complained loudly about the government's failure to implement labour's proposals into the official program for constitutional changes. Above all, the demand for the introduction of the Chamber of Associated Labour into the Federal Parliament was ignored altogether, as it did not fit well into the desired concept of a lean and effective centralised state. For Rakovica's trade union activists, the final straw came in late 1989, when the Serbian government announced the introduction of collective bargaining. At this point, it became evident that the scope of pro-market reforms would extend well beyond the market socialism of the 1960s

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and that the very idea of workers' self-management and collective ownership were being abandoned in practice.

In many ways by 1990 the communal trade union leadership had already lost the battle for the support of Rakovica's workforce. Firstly, the political culture of protecting working class interests by leaning on the strong figure at the top of the party-state was still highly pronounced among industrial workers. After the death of Tito, Milošević was the first politician who managed to elevate himself to the position of the ultimate arbiter of social disputes. In the previous decades, the LCY ideologically justified its one-party rule largely by promoting the well-being of the working class. Once Milošević picked up the familiar discourse of working class rights, many workers tended to believe they had found a new protective figure in the party apex. Secondly, the lower rank trade union leadership and local blue-collar initiatives could never match the resources available to the party-state for spreading their message and mobilizing the workforce. Thirdly, the nationalistic hysteria made any politics based on non-ethnic identity, including class, come under suspicion of containing hidden motives. The general atmosphere of fear and encirclement was already well in place by the end of the decade and all energies inside Rakovica became focused on defence against the supposed hostile forces trying to break the country apart.

Subsequent events cast a long shadow on the interpretations of Yugoslav late socialism. More often than not, historians looking at the period discover nationalist politicians rising to power amidst general acclaim and people enthusiastically marching to war. In case traces of popular mobilizations are detected, they are quickly dismissed as orchestrated affairs. The 1980s appear as a dark tunnel at the end of which awaits an inevitable explosion. Rakovica represents just one out of dozens of examples of industrial

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action across Yugoslavia at that time. Therefore, no matter how limited their actual influence might have been, it is vital to keep shedding light on different labour mobilizations and other initiatives that do not fit into the dominant narrative of national homogenization. These micro histories expose the creative potential of ordinary people and introduce cracks into simplistic, teleological presentations of the past, which still dominate Balkan historiographies today.

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*IMR: List radne organizacije Industrije motora Rakovica*

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