

# On the conception of politics of the *Praxis* group: Exposing the limits of its universalism

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## Introduction

The *Praxis* group, around which Yugoslav avant-garde Marxist philosophers gathered, was the most radical group of criticism against the Communist Party during the 1960s and 1970s. But in spite of its radicality, the group never became a political opposition to the Party. There was a certain reluctance among the group members to go beyond theoretical criticism and to establish themselves on the political ground. It seems to me that this hesitation is just another side of their radicality. Their claim, in its extremity, was to abolish the Party that represented the universal interests of the people, because the form of its existence was thought to be nothing but that of monopolising decision-making power. They saw this as the alienation of universal human essence of what they called *praxis*. But is it really possible that universality exists as a full presence without any particular body that incarnates it?

In this paper, I argue that the political strategy adopted by the *Praxis* group was largely a consequence of their particular interpretation of Marx's philosophy. I use Ernesto Laclau's reconceptualisation of the relation between the universal and the particular to elucidate this. I will start my argument by following Marx's project to identify the proletariat with universality by depriving the former of its particularity, for it was this line of Marx's thinking that the *Praxis* philosophers followed. With the total absorption of the particular by the universal, he supposed a total human emancipation that transcends political emancipation which is partial, and predicted the disappearance of the political field. In the second part, I will show that this total elimination of the political can never be achieved, applying Laclau's reformulation of the relation between the universal and the particular. Since the relation between the universal and the particular is always that of articulation in which each resides in the other by making each other impure, the realm of the political where this process takes place cannot be excluded from the understanding of human societies. In the third part of the essay, I will examine the official discourse on social criticisms, which aimed at denouncing the *Praxis* philosophers by insisting the Party to be the only agent of social criticisms because it was the bearer and representative of the universal interests of the working class. This discourse finds its effectiveness in the claim that

the identification of the Party as an absolute subject with the class can be justified by the objective laws of historical movements. However, I will show that the dimension of universality of either subjectivity or objectivity is incomplete and thus it is impossible to regard the Party as a universal consciousness. In the last part, I will move on to the discussion on the *Praxis* group's understanding of politics, and try to disclose their supposition of transparent totality in which all particular interests are absorbed. By showing the impossibility of supposing this harmonious totality in which subjective human consciousness is finally emancipated without assuming an absolute agent that can be the bearer of the universal interests, I will insist that their attack against the Party exposes limits of their universalism of subjectivity.

### 1. Marx's conception of politics

One of the main characteristics of bourgeois society conceived by Marx was its separation between the political sphere and the economic sphere, that is, the distance between the state and civil society. By criticising Bruno Bauer in *On the Jewish Question* (1843), he claimed that political emancipation does not necessarily involve human emancipation, leaving questions in the economic sphere of egoistic civil society untouched. The problem seen by Marx lies in the fact that the state conceives itself as universality, which is false in his view.<sup>1</sup> In order to expose its falsity, Marx posited a true universality whose bearer is the proletariat as a universal class. According to the Marxist understanding of historical development, along with the victory of this universal class, the separation of the civil society from political life disappears and there will no longer be antagonisms because there will no longer be any social classes. In other words, with the total emancipation of the proletariat, the sphere of the political, conceived as a realm of antagonistic conflicts among the classes, was thought to be abolished.

This claiming of true universality by Marx is understood by Ernesto Laclau as the last stage of modernity in which attempts were made in order to identify universality with reason. Laclau writes:

A last stage in the advance of this rationalistic hegemony took place when the gap between the rational and the irrational was closed through the representation of the act of its cancellation as a necessary moment in the self-development of reason: this was the task of Hegel and Marx, who asserted the total transparency, in absolute knowledge, of the real to the reason.<sup>2</sup>

Marx identified the total hegemony by the proletariat with this total transparency in which the gap between the social reality and the universal reason would be abolished.

The body of the proletariat is no longer a particular body in which a universality

external to it has to be incarnated: it is instead a body in which the distinction between particularity and universality is cancelled and, as a result, the need for any incarnation is definitely eradicated.<sup>3</sup>

But the problem here is that the one who represents the universal reason is a particularity that is historically formulated through social development, and the question to be asked is whether a certain particularity is able to fully represent the universal without any remainder. In order to give an answer to this question, let us first see how a particular demand reaches the universal level, following Marx's description of the process of the struggle between the workers and the capitalists. He writes:

The organisation of strikes, combinations, trade unions, marches simultaneously with the political struggles of the workers, who now constitute a great political party under the name of Chartists.

It is under the form of these combinations that the first attempts at association among themselves have always been made by workers.

The great industry massed together in a single place a crowd of people unknown to each other. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of their wage, this common interest which they have against their employer, unites them in the same idea of resistance — combination. Thus combination has always double end, that of eliminating competition among themselves while enabling them to make a general competition against the capitalist. If the first object of resistance has been merely to maintain wages, in proportion as the capitalists in their turn have combined with the idea of repression, the combinations, at first isolated, have formed in groups, and, in face of constantly united capital, the maintenance of the association became more important and necessary for them than the maintenance of wages. This is so true that the English economists are all astonished at seeing the workers sacrifice a good part of their wages on behalf of the associations which, in the eyes of these economists, were only established in support of wages. In this struggle — a veritable civil war — are united and developed all the elements necessary for a future battle. Once arrived at that point, association takes a political character.<sup>4</sup>

We can first notice from this quotation that once the workers unite and take the form of a combination, dual aspects appear: the concrete demand, i.e. the maintenance of their wages on the one hand, and on the other hand the maintenance of the association that enables the workers to unite and “make a general competition against the capitalist”. Here, in order to make their particular claim against the capitalists that repress them, the workers have to transcend their particularity to reach the universal level of general competition of political character. The common interests now become more important for the workers than their concrete demands as Marx continues:

The economic conditions have in the first place transformed the mass of people of a country into wage-workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass of people a common situation with common interests. Thus this mass is already a class, as opposed to capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have only noted some phases, this mass unites, it is constituted as a class for itself. The interests which it defends are the interests of its class. But the struggle between class and class is a political struggle.<sup>5</sup>

As the class becomes a being for itself, the commonalties between the people transcend the particular demands and the interests of the people will become one and the same thing with the interests of their class. But here, the next question will be raised: Does this overlapping of the particular interests and the universal interests become fully transparent? If we follow the model of the Hegelian dialectics, the answer is yes. For according to this model, the interests of the class for itself are already immanent in the class in itself. And with the development of this internal movement of the reason, the proletariat as the universal class is going to represent all particular interests of the people. When the history reaches this level, the particularities are all absorbed by the universal without leaving any residue, and there will therefore be no antagonisms that are the features of politics separated from the civil society. Hence, the distinction between the particular and the universal is cancelled, and with this cancellation the sphere of the political is eliminated. The consequence is the following:

The essential condition of the emancipation of the working class is the abolition of all classes, as the condition of the emancipation of the third estate of the bourgeois order, was the abolition of all estates, all orders.

The working class will substitute, in the course of its development, for the old order of civil society an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will no longer be political power, properly speaking, since political power is simply the official form of the antagonism in civil society.<sup>6</sup>

The emancipation of the working class as a universal class leads to human emancipation. At this final stage, there will be no class, no antagonism, and therefore no struggle between political powers. In short, the project of Marx was to show the necessary coincidence of the proletariat and universality of reason and to posit the world without political powers as the final stage of the emancipation of human beings.

## **2. Politics as an encounter of the universal and the particular**

But what if commonalties that people share are neither immanent in the class or pre-exist before the political struggle against the oppressing force, but rather the identification of a particular body of the working class and the universality that it

incarnates is the result of articulation which is historical and contingent? If this is the case, the process of political struggles never ends. Marx writes that “[i]t is only in an order of things in which there will be no longer classes or class antagonism that *social evolutions* will cease to be *political revolutions*”,<sup>7</sup> but I doubt whether there is such an order of things where the realm of the political is completely eradicated.

Laclau’s rethinking of the relation between the particular and the universal helps us to understand the significance of the political field that Marx intended to exclude. He rejects the idea that there is a final symmetry between the universal and the particular body, and thinks their relation as what is produced as a result of articulatory practices, which will take place in the political field. The universal does not exist in the way in which it precedes any particulars or subdues them. It is not an underlying principle that is applied to the particular case. Rather, the universal comes into being and acquires its meaning through the particular body, but which particular body represents universality is not predetermined at all. In other words, the universal is empty and this emptiness allows particular agents to occupy that empty place.<sup>8</sup>

This rejection of universalism as an underlying essence, however, does not lead him to the direction of advocating pure particularism, for there is no particular claim that does not refer to a certain universal principle that is shared by other members of the community. In order for a particular agent to make a claim that can be objectively justified, it necessarily has to touch the dimension of the universal, and the place where these two, the universal and the particular meet is the realm of the political.<sup>9</sup> Linda Zerilli argues that it is not possible to think of politics if we rely on the idea that the universal and the particular constitute the oppositional poles of a binary couple, which is the idea that has dominated the philosophical tradition for a long time. The relation between the two are not that of two separate areas that exclude each other, but of political articulation by which both are mutually contaminated and “each is rendered impure by the irreducible presence of the other”.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the political is the field in which particular identities are enabled to make claims by elevating themselves to the universal level while the universal is given contextually specific meaning through those particular bodies. And since which particular body becomes hegemonic in the struggle to place itself in that empty place of the universal is not predetermined, contrary to the Marxist understanding of history, the articulative process is open-ended and is never closed. Hence, it is impossible to sustain the idea that politics disappears in the last instance.

In the Marxist tradition, however, the particular body of the working class was supposed to fully represent the universal. But as I argued, this link is not that of necessity and cannot be transparent. And in order to claim this transparency, it was necessary to introduce a special agent, a mediator, namely the Party that bridges the chasm between the particularity of the body of the proletariat and the universal reason. The Party was thought to play its historical role of representing interests of the working class. Laclau puts it in the following way:

Between the universal character of the tasks of the working class and the particularity of its concrete demands an increasing gap opened, which had to be filled by the Party as representative of the historical interests of the proletariat.<sup>11</sup>

The Party in this way came to incarnate absolute subjectivity and became the transcendental Subject that was supposed to have all knowledge of the objective truth and thus transcend the separation of subject and object of experience. However, this position of the Party is ambiguous by its nature, for it was introduced because of the very impossibility to bridge the gap between the universal and the particular. And this ambiguity has always haunted the Party's discourse when attacking other social forces, as I will show in the next part.

### 3. The Party's attack against the *Praxis* group

What characterised the former-Yugoslav political system was the system of self-management. The idea of self-management was discovered as a result of the break of the country with Stalin and the effort to fill out the theoretical vacuum in Marxism after the Stalinist interpretation was found unsustainable. The interesting aspect regarding this idea was that it was supported by “[b]oth exponents and critics of the Yugoslav experiment in workers’ self-management”.<sup>12</sup> “Exponents” here of course refers to the Party officials and “critics” to those avant-garde Marxists who gathered around the journal *Praxis*. Therefore, there was little disagreement over the idea itself of the self-management between the former who “consider[ed] the institutions of workers’ self-management and social self-government as the essence of the new system of direct socialist democracy in Yugoslavia”<sup>13</sup> and the latter group who “agree[d] that self-management and direct democracy constitute the answer to the phenomena of alienation”.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the group “continued to be targets of increasingly severe domestic criticism and repression”<sup>15</sup> until eight professors were fired from the Belgrade University and the journal was stopped being published. The reason for this attack against the group was the radicality of its criticism which went beyond the tolerance of the Party. The *Praxis* Marxists laid their theoretical basis on the theory of alienation which was developed by Marx in his youth. Although I will examine their philosophy in more detail later in this essay, it should be made clear here that their claim to abolish all forms of alienating human labour — be it economic, political or cultural — led them to see the Party as an authoritarian organisation that could hinder the realisation of direct democracy and de-alienation of human beings. Thus, carrying the theory into its extremes, the ultimate goal of the group was the abolition of the state power, the withering away of the Party.

However, taking literally the idea itself of the withering away of the Party, it does not necessarily follow that, in spite of the apparent attacks from the Party against the *Praxis* Marxists, there was a serious discordance between the conceptions of the group and the Party officials about the course which social development would

follow. In fact, in 1960, Tito himself touched upon this aspect of the state's role in his speech. Tito says that "[t]he state is most certainly essential in the conditions of the transitional, socialist society. [ . . . ]. But its functions gradually decrease, accordingly as they are taken over by the society".<sup>16</sup> But this comment is immediately followed by the next statement:

It would be wrong to lay down a time limit for the withering away of the State, or rather the functions of the State. Because that depends on society itself, on the higher or lower rate of development of socialist social relations, on social consciousness and the conditions which obtain, above all, the material and moral-political conditions.<sup>17</sup>

Then, what will be the factors that determine the ripening of the conditions for the decreasing of the State's functions? Who has the authority to say that conditions are now ready for the Party's withering away? It seems to me that one of the reasons why the Party fought against the group was that it had to claim the authority to affirm all the social conditions. For it should not be someone outside the Party that can criticise the existing conditions of the society but only the Party as an absolute subject that must have the objective knowledge of the social development.

Edvard Kardelj's article<sup>18</sup> on social criticism is a good example that demonstrates the Party's attitude toward the social critiques. It also shows how the official discourse is constructed in order to justify the Party's rightfulness about representing the working class and positing itself as the sole agent of social criticism. Kardelj's endeavour in this article is, in short, to establish the close link between the working class and the Party as its representative, and to show the total overlapping of these two. In the first part of the essay, he defines the properties that a "genuinely socialist criticism of society"<sup>19</sup> has to possess. He writes:

First, there is no doubt that it [social criticism] must express the social goal reflecting the social-economic and political interests and aspirations of the working people who are by dint of their position in society the most progressive social force; secondly, it must be guided so as to reveal, spur, strengthen and qualify all those who are, objectively, the social-historical motive force impelling society forward toward that goal; thirdly, all elements of criticism, from substance to methods, means and language, must be kept under control and guided by a profound sense of responsibility toward maintaining such a distribution of power among social forces as will guarantee conditions conducive to the assertion of progressive socialist factors.<sup>20</sup>

From this argument, it is clear that Kardelj thinks that it is not enough that the progressive social forces exist, but that there should be an agent that guides these forces as a true source of socialist criticism, which is the Party as a reflection of the

socialist consciousness of the working people. As it is the true agent to guide the society, Kardelj writes that

it must be capable of countering not only criticism levelled from explicitly anti-socialist positions but also the type of uncontrolled criticism which, blind and disoriented, disarms socialist forces, thereby wittingly or unwittingly acting as a fetter on forward-looking socialist consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

Kardelj thinks that the truly socialist criticism must not only fight against the anti-socialist criticisms, but also those that may claim to be socialist but can be false, which he implicitly refers to the *Praxis* critiques. By drawing the line between the true socialist criticism and the false one, Kardelj tries to authorise the Party as a universal subject that holds the place of the objective truth from which all the justifiable criticisms can be made.

But on what basis is it possible to say that the Party is the universal consciousness of the working people? What is the ultimate proof that asserts the Party to be the sole subject of knowledge? It is because of the impossibility of giving answer to these questions that Kardelj cannot but resort to the opposite notion, i.e. objectivity, in the last instance. For example, he writes:

It [the quality of criticism] is determined above all by the people engaged in it in line with their own personal abilities and the interests of the social forces arrayed behind them, with whom they are *objectively* identified, independently of their will. It is also determined by the people who adopt such criticism as weapon in their own social action, or who fight it for the sake of their social interests — not because it is criticism, *but because of its social-historical content*.<sup>22</sup>

This statement shows that Kardelj, being unable to account for the Party's pure presence as universality in and for itself, endeavours to resort to an objective ground where the Party finds its universality. He says that the identification of those who engage in the social critiques with the social forces is not a matter of will but of objectivity. This amounts to saying that it is not that the subjective will of the Party intervenes in the course of history, but that its position is predetermined by the latter. Moreover, he insists that what matters is the "social-historical content" of criticism and not the subjective act of making criticism. Without having a content socially and historically required, that is, a content justified within an objective totality, a criticism cannot be anything adequate at all.

However, one question will be raised here; is there an absolute agent that is able to guarantee the objective necessity of the overlapping of the Party and the people's interests, which also certifies the social-historical correctness of true criticism? As I argued in the previous pages, the identification of the particular body of the working people and universality is not a matter of necessity but that of historical and

contingent articulation. A particular body engages in political struggles in order to occupy the empty place of the universal, but the perpetual occupation of that place is not possible. The universal remains empty and this emptiness is what gives every political agent the possibility of becoming hegemonic in the political field. What the hegemonic force in society, the Party for instance, fears most is to open up this possibility in which other social forces fight for the place that it now occupies as a privileged subject. But since the absolute guarantee for the legitimacy to monopolise that place does not exist, the only thing the Party can do is to introduce the notion of objective totality in which it situates itself as universality. Thus in order to guarantee its existence, the Party as the Subject, which should subsume objects under itself, cannot but resort to its reverse, i.e. the Object. But this objectivity is not a being of full presence, since it also requires the agent to affirm its universality, that is, the Party for example. The relation between subject and object is not that of mutual exclusion, but dependency. Or, putting it in other words, the relation between subject and object is that of mutual contamination, and this leads to the conclusion that each necessarily lacks universal dimension unless each resides in the other as a result of articulation. Therefore, the Party cannot stand for universality without requiring objective totality and vice versa. It is this deficiency that both subject and object have immanent in themselves that leads Kardelj to distinguish what he calls the genuine criticism from the criticism made by the *Praxis* group. If the social criticism truly is what he claims to be objectively justified, there is no need to fight against the emergence of other criticisms. For criticisms other than the genuine one will naturally disappear as the historical development takes place, and this development will in any way reveal what is going to remain as a truly socialist criticism. In fact, Kardelj explains this aspect of natural selection among different criticisms as follows:

It is true of present-day socialist society, and will probably true for some time to come, that progressive thinking must gradually, and frequently laboriously, break the ground for itself. But that is a characteristic of the whole history of mankind, a natural law as it were, and need not be conceived of as merely a negative aspect in such a process. An organic selection takes place between the truly new and qualitative, that is, between what is socially possible an imperative in terms of social progress, and the short-lived contrivances of the human spirit which are either devoid of social-historical value or simply erroneous.<sup>23</sup>

He says here that the criticisms that do not have “social-historical value” or are erroneous are going to be short-lived and disappear. If this process takes place as a natural development of history, why does he have to secure from other forces of criticism his and the Party’s position that by its nature should possess the real ability to criticise society?

This is because the objective assertion of the Party’s existence as a universal consciousness is finally impossible. And in order to avoid this conclusion, all it can do

is to continuously differentiate itself from other forces by calling them false.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the universality the Party claims to have can gain its presence only by excluding those factors that will hinder its supposed presence as universality.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Kardelj endeavours to discredit the *Praxis* critics on the basis that they are deviating from the objectively justified criticisms of the Party. He writes:

Our subjectivistic social critics are indeed being overpresumptuous in claiming to speak on behalf of the dialectical negation of the existing, particularly in view of our earlier conclusion that a large part of such criticism “negates” the very inception of the new, rather than old, within the existing. Such “dialectical negation” of the “existing” becomes ludicrous in its identification with the “principle” of “anti-regimism”. Those propagating such concepts do not stop to inquire into the nature of the alternative to the “existing” or into the objective significance or place of one or the other element in the “existing” as part of the process of social-historical advancement. Consequently, they cannot or even will not comprehend that “anti-regimism in principle” is in its social-historical significance just as senseless as “pro-regimism in principle”.<sup>26</sup>

Kardelj calls the *Praxis* Marxists “our subjectivistic social critics” by which he shows the difference between those critics and the real critics who are supposed to have knowledge of the objective conditions of the society. He denounces the *Praxis* critics by reason that they do not question the real composition of the objective world but question everything in the existing society. But the argument of the *Praxis* Marxists makes Kardelj’s accusation difficult to sustain. For they never intended to criticise the Yugoslav society as a whole, but to question the ineffectiveness of the self-management system in specific fields, applying the dialectical method whose validity Mihailo Marković finds as follows:

An important practical implication of the dialectical method is the important distinction between criticism as an “abstract negation”, aiming at total destruction of the criticized object, and criticism as a “concrete negation”, *Aufhebung*, aiming at the abolition of only those features of the criticized object which constitute its essential inner limitation, while presenting all those other features (properties, elements, structures) which constitute a necessary condition for further development.<sup>27</sup>

Marković makes it clear that they are not for the total negation of the “existing” and that only those elements that limit the social development should be negated. This coincides with Kardelj’s understanding of dialectical negation, which he thinks should be applied according to the objective condition of the elements that structure the society. Nevertheless, he excludes from the circle of real social critics those *Praxis* theorists by calling them “subjectivistic”, which implies that they are lacking objec-

tive knowledge. In a way, what Kardelj was afraid of was not the theoretical discordance between him and the group, but that there were possibilities for other forces to represent the voice of the people, which could become political opposition to the Party. Gerson Sher interprets Kardelj's psyche in the following way:

Thus it was not so much their [*Praxis* Marxists'] goal of creating a new socialist culture to which Kardelj objected as the immanent danger (especially if they should meet with obstacles along the path to their primary goal) that the *Praxis* Marxists should constitute a political faction prepared for political struggles. In this struggle the adversary, Kardelj feared, was to be the Party itself. And to the party minded individuals like Kardelj, a struggle with the Party signified no less than an outright struggle for power and a grave challenge to the basic structure of socialism in Yugoslavia.<sup>28</sup>

It seems that his fear was confirmed when the students' movement took place in Belgrade in 1968. Although the demands of the students were leftist in character and were not against the self-management system at all, the fact that this kind of revolt could occur frightened the Party officials. For from that time on, it became possible for them to predict the emergence of political opposition that would doubt the one-party system and open up the way to a multi-party system. Thus, the Party saw the university intellectuals who had been educating those students as agitators of the movement, which finally resulted in their dismissal and the banning of the journal.<sup>29</sup>

Then, was it true that the *Praxis* philosophers tried to form an oppositional political faction as Kardelj feared? The answer is no. At least until 1970, when some of them started to publish articles on actual political programmes and actions,<sup>30</sup> their activity remained in the sphere of purely intellectual investigation. This is because those Marxists thought that they should not devote themselves to political fights, which are the phenomena within the alienated field of politics. In the international edition of *Praxis* in 1968, they published an article defending themselves from the criticism against them.<sup>31</sup> And it was in this article that they clarified their basic understanding of politics and political power, which had no attraction for them for the reason that they were the sources of alienation. They write:

our critique is not (and we don't want it to be) a political one, and therefore it is the one which is found exclusively in the sphere of direct political action, which is a daily and common matter and oriented toward pure actuality of the existent. For we are not political and we don't want to be! This is because we cannot be a "political opposition" against anything and anyone. The struggle for power is neither our field nor personal preoccupation, and much less our sole obsession.<sup>32</sup>

As can be seen in this statement, the *Praxis* Marxists were not for the pursuit of political power. According to them, the sphere of the political should be devoid of the

fighters for power. Otherwise, it can only be the place of alienation where every decision is made regardless of the people's will. And it was expanding this sphere of alienation that the group found the Party responsible for. It was not the aim of the group to represent the people in another way by replacing the Party, for it would only create another form of alienation. What they wanted is the realisation of the ideal of the self-management system where direct decision-making was made by the working class and not by those who exercise power under the name of the working class. They write:

Those who struggle for power in the traditional sense live and act not within the interests, but against the interests of the working class and its historical role, and they want to exercise power "under the name" of the working class. We don't want to exercise power under any name, because we don't want to exercise it at all.<sup>33</sup>

However, is it possible that this kind of sphere exists, which is devoid of any political struggle for power? Is not this unwillingness of the *Praxis* Marxists to engage in the power struggle their excuse of avoiding the conflicts that are necessary for the real change of political structure and the change of society? I will discuss in the next part of the essay what the seeming boldness of their claim to abolish any power signifies, and will try to reveal the close kinship between the philosophers and the Party.

#### **4. The philosophy of the *Praxis* group and politics**

Following Marx's understanding of politics, the *Praxis* Marxists conceived the sphere of the political as that of alienation. In this sphere, the representatives of the people make political decisions, but the people's will is hardly reflected. Even in those countries where the socialist revolution took place, this phenomenon of alienation never disappeared, because in these countries "a single, monolithic, authoritarian party monopolized all political power".<sup>34</sup> Instead of realising political emancipation, not to mention human emancipation, the Party became the sole organisation of political power, as Marković states in the following way:

The party as a typically bourgeois type of political organization tends to be perpetuated. It is true that the social composition of the rank and file membership of the "communist" party shows a shift toward the working class but the organization is even more authoritarian, and ideological indoctrination ever more drastic. The fact that there is only one such organization which monopolizes all political power is hardly an advantage over bourgeois pluralism. Real suppression of political alienation will materialize only when all monopolies of power are dismantled, when authoritarian and hierarchical organizations such as the state and party gradually wither away and one replaced by self-governing associations

of producers and citizens at all social levels.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, what the philosophers aimed at was the withering away of the political power, which was represented by the Party. But as I showed earlier, the Party in Yugoslavia was not against this idea of the withering away of itself. What mattered was not the idea itself but who to represent or incarnate the idea, and objectivity was what they, especially Kardelj, resorted to in order to claim the validity of themselves as the only agent of this representation. However, if the total transparency of the representation of the universal class by the Party is not possible, the objectivity they relied on cannot be total or complete. The opposite is true as well: there is no total subjectivity which absorbs objectivity without residue. And contrary to the Party's seeking its ground in objectivity, it was in subjectivity that the *Praxis* Marxists found universality of human beings. Now let us briefly see what kind of place the notion of subjectivity occupies in the philosophy of *Praxis*.

The philosophical project of the *Praxis* Marxists started as a critique of Stalinist dogmatism, which, according to their interpretation, reduced subjective human consciousness to a mere reflection of the objective movement of history. The *Praxis* philosophers attempted to restore the former to what they thought as its relevant position. That is to say, they regarded the position of subjectivity of human consciousness as the one from which the power for social change comes. The immense possibility this subjectivity has in itself was what they called *praxis*, which they posited as human essence. Under the regime such as that of the Stalinist, this human *praxis* is under total alienation, which is an absolutely inhuman condition. In order to make a more humanist society, the philosophers thought that it was necessary to analyse and criticise the phenomena of alienation and emancipate subjective possibilities of human beings, which would also change the objective world. The philosophers in this way assumed the realisation of a harmonious totality, regulated by the universal principle actualised by true subjectivity.

The political dynamics that makes possible the articulation and re-articulation of the universal and the particular opens up a field of undecidability, which will threaten this kind of idea that tries to construct a complete totality of the social. I think the fear of this slippery ground of undecidability is a key to understanding the rejection of politics that can be seen in the philosophy of the *Praxis* group. In the 1960s and 1970s, the *Praxis* group of Yugoslav Marxist philosophers was indeed the dominant group of criticism of the Party, however, the group never became "the core of an outright oppositional political movement".<sup>36</sup> Rather than forming a political organisation, the group's criticism remained within the sphere of intellectual activity. The key reason for this, I think, lies in the method of criticism they adopted, which is the self-criticism of the self-management ideology. The system of self-management that the Party introduced in the early 1950s advocates the self-decision-making of the workers themselves. The critique made by the philosophers was not to question this system itself, but to fully realise the ideal of that system. In the words of Renata Salecl:

According to the *Praxis* philosophers, the predominant 'etatistic bureaucratic' conditions in Yugoslav society prevented the emergence of the 'proper self-management socialism.' They called for a programme to abolish the gulf between the ideal and the real and to put into effect the concept of self-management. In other words, the opposition criticised the establishment in the name of a purified version of the establishment's own ideology.<sup>37</sup>

In this way, the group accused the Party of monopolising the political power of decision-making in spite of its official claim of self-management socialism.

The core of their critical method is the notion of alienation, which was embraced by young Marx by developing the Hegelian dialectics the importance of which, according to Marx, "lies in the fact that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, objectification as loss of object [*Entgegenständlichung*], as alienation and as supersession of this alienation".<sup>38</sup> In this process, the opposites of knowing and being, or in other words the subject and the object are identical. But at the second stage of objectification, the subject expels part of itself as an object and they form an oppositional relation. At the final stage, the distinction between the two is superseded and the two are unified into totality. Young Marx developed this idea in the humanist direction which conceives the second stage as a negation or alienation of labour as human essence and the third stage as a retrieval of that essence. The *Praxis* philosophers identified this human labour with the subjective creativity which all human-beings have as a potential, and named this kind of being 'the being of *praxis*'. They conceived this subjectivity of the being of *praxis* as a universal value for all human-beings, and this identification of subjectivity and universality led them to attack the Party for negating the universal human potential by widening the gap between the ideal and the reality of self-management socialism.

It is worthwhile noting that for the *Praxis* Marxists, the ground where this workers' full decision-making takes place was not thought to be a field of competition among particular agents to hegemonise the universal. Since the universal norm of *praxis* regulates the field, the antagonistic dimension of politics was excluded. Their rejection of the idea of a multi-party system, for example, is the extension of this refusal of politics. Rejecting every form of political institutionalisation as an evil source of alienation, the philosophers were not "for a multi-party system, but for a system without parties. They would prefer to see the withering away of the state, bureaucracy and political parties, including the communist party".<sup>39</sup> On the one hand, their supposition of universal subjective consciousness as a regulative norm leads to this radical idea of getting rid of the party itself, but on the other hand, it can be seen as an attempt to neutralise the impact of conflicts among the particulars that resulted in their reluctance to step into the political arena and become an oppositional force in the Yugoslav society. Instead of entering the field of political fights and conflicts, they rejected it at once, presupposing a harmonious totality in which "the party as the carrier of objective truth"<sup>40</sup> withers away. At this final stage, objectivity

was thought to be brought back to the subjective side and the distinction between subject and object was supposed to dissolve.

However, as I argued earlier, if one cannot eliminate the political field, the gap between the objective truth or universality and the subject cannot be bridged. Nor can an absolute subjectivity overcome objectivity. In Laclau's words, "I am a subject precisely *because* I cannot be an absolute consciousness, because something constitutively alien confronts me; and there can be no pure object as a result of this opaqueness/alienation which shows the traces of the subject in the object".<sup>41</sup> And what takes place in the political sphere is this mutual contamination and re-articulation of the relation between subject and object. Therefore, if one can think of such a thing as perfect symmetry between subject and object and their harmonious relation, it is only possible by assuming an absolute agent that mediates the gap between both of them, i.e. the Party as a bearer of objective meaning. The *Praxis* group's refusal to form a political opposition under the excuse that every political body restricts the realisation of human *praxis* can be interpreted as a fear of losing the guarantee of totality in which the chasm between subject and object is bridged. And since this supposition of the guarantee is nothing more than the supporting of the Party, the criticism of the group can be regarded as another side of the same coin of the one-party regime. They supposed the universality of human essence would be realised with the withering away of the Party, but since that universality necessarily presupposed a particular agent such as the Party, their claim of abolishing the political was easily transformed into the sanctioning of the regime, which shows the limits of their universalism.

#### Notes

- 1 Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question, Early Writings*, Penguin Books, 1975, 1992, p. 220.
- 2 Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, London: Verso, 1996, p. 24.
- 3 *Ibid.*.
- 4 Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, trans. H. Quelch, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1910(?), p. 188.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 189.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 190.
- 7 *Ibid.*.
- 8 See especially Laclau, "Universalism, Particularism and the Question of Identity," "Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics," *Emancipation(s)*.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 26, p. 48.
- 10 Linda M. G. Zerilli, "This Universalism is Not One," *Diacritics*, vol. 28, no. 2, Summer 1998, p. 4.
- 11 Laclau, *op.cit.*, p. 25.
- 12 Oskar Gruenwald, *The Yugoslav Search for Man: Marxist Humanism in Contemporary Yugoslavia*, Massachusetts: J. F. Bergin Publishers, INC., 1983, p. 150.
- 13 *Ibid.*.
- 14 *Ibid.*.
- 15 Gerson S. Sher, *Praxis: Marxist Criticism and Dissent in Socialist Yugoslavia*, Bloomington/

London: Indiana University Press, 1977, p. 195.

16 Josip Broz Tito, "Building Socialism and the Role and Tasks of the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia" (Report to the Fifth Congress of the Socialist Alliance of Working People), *Selected Speeches and Articles 1941–1961*, Zagreb: Naprijed, 1963, p. 263.

17 *Ibid.*

18 Edvard Kardelj, "Notes on Social Criticism in Yugoslavia", *Socialist Thought and Practice*, no. 21, 1966. Kardelj was the Party's main ideologue and politician until his death in 1979, who was also the advocate of self-management socialism.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 5 (italics added).

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

24 Laclau explains this move of the Party as follows: "The vanguard party, as concrete particularity, had to claim to have knowledge of the 'objective meaning' of any event, and the viewpoint of the other particular social forces had to be dismissed as false consciousness. From this point on, the authoritarian turn was unavoidable", Laclau, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

25 Jacques Derrida points out that the pure presence of one system of discourse is constructed by excluding the other that is supposed to contaminate the inner system. For example, deconstructing Saussurean linguistic model which privileges 'speech', he shows how the totality of that system emerges as a result of excluding the element that does not belong to it, which is 'writing' (See especially, Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp. 34, 37). Extending this aspect to analyse discourse in general, it can be said that every discourse has to have its excluded outside as a foundation of its totality.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

27 Mihailo Marković, Introduction to *Praxis: Yugoslav Essays in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. Mihailo Marković and Gajo Petrović, Dordrecht/Boston/London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979, p. XXXIII.

28 Gerson Sher, *op.cit.*, p. 202.

29 See *ibid.*, pp. 209–239.

30 Examples of these articles are: Steven Večar, "Le monopolisme de partie et la puissance politique des goupes"; Svetozar Stojanović, "The June Student Movement and Social Revolution in Yugoslavia"; Nebojša Popov, "Streiks in der gegenwärtigen jugoslawischen Gesellschaft", *Praxis* (International Edition), vol. 6, no. 3–4, 1970.

31 "À l'occasion des critiques les plus récentes adressées à *Praxis*, *Praxis* (International Edition), vol. 4, no. 3–4, 1968.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 514.

33 *Ibid.*

34 The Belgrade *Praxis* Group, "The Meaning of the Struggle for Civil and Human Rights", *Telos*, no. 19, Spring, 1974, p. 187.

35 Marković, *op.cit.*, pp. XXXIV–V.

36 Gerson S. Sher, *op.cit.*, p. 243.

37 Renata Salecl, *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism After the Fall of Socialism*, London/New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 60.

38 Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, Early Writings*, p. 386.

39 Oskar Gruenwald, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Laclau, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

## プラクシス・グループと政治的実践

——普遍主義とその限界——

茂 野 玲

旧ユーゴスラヴィアにおいて、最もラディカルな党批判を行ったのは、雑誌『プラクシス』に集ったマルクス主義者のグループである。ただしその急進性にかかわらず、彼らの批判活動は学問的領野にとどまり、決して政治的な対抗組織を構成するにはいたらなかった。この論文は、彼らが政治的領野へと踏み込むことがなかったわけを、彼らの政治理解の分析を通して明らかにしようとするものである。

プラクシス・グループの政治理解は、大部分マルクスのそれに基づいている。マルクスは政治闘争を階級闘争としてとらえ、この闘争はプロレタリア階級の勝利とともに消滅すべきものと考えていた。というも、プロレタリア階級はマルクスによって、普遍的理性と同一視されており、すべての人々の利害がこれによって代表されうると考えられたためであり、またこの階級が唯一の政治的主体となる場では、複数の主体による権力闘争は不必要になると考えられたためである。しかし実際のところ、ある任意の階級が普遍的なものを余すところなく体現することは可能なのか。プロレタリア階級といえども、それは歴史のあるいは社会的に構築された、ひとつの特殊な階級であり、「この特殊性とそれによって具体化される普遍性との間には、必然的に溝が存在する」とエルネスト・ラクラウは想定する。両者の関係は、決して互いに互いを排除しあう、あるいはどちらかがどちらかを吸収するといった関係なのではない。ラクラウによれば、それは「特定の歴史的、そして社会的な諸条件のもとで接合しうる、必然性を離れた関係なのである。」

しかしこの偶然性は、古典的マルクス主義的歴史理解においては、排除されるべきものとされる。したがって、普遍性とそれを体現するプロレタリア階級の特殊な身体との間の裂け目は、何ものかによって埋められねばならない。「党」概念は、このような詰め物としての役割を果たす。党はこうしてプロレタリア階級を代表し、そして導く全能の主体としてその普遍性を獲得する。それはあらゆる経験や知識の客観性を保証するが、しかしそれでは党それ自身の普遍性は何によって保証されるのであろうか。

党は、プラクシス・グループの批判活動を、客観的正当性を欠くものとして攻撃した。しかしここにおいて、党が自らを普遍的構築するためには、逆に客体の普遍性に頼る以外ないことが明らかにされる。このように主体 / 客体の関係もまた、どちらかがどちらかを支配する関係なのではなく、それぞれの欠如を互いによって埋めあう関係なのである。

旧ユーゴスラヴィアは、その労働者自主管理制度により知られており、一見すると、より直接的な民主主義制度を体現していたように思える。しかし党は、自主管理という普遍的理念を実現へと導くのは党以外にありえず、それは客観的法則によって定められているという態度により、その権威主義的側面を強化した。プラクシス・グループは、このような権威主義的組織としての党を批判し、

また党の存在はあらゆる意思決定の力の独占形態であるとして、その消滅を望んだ。彼らは党の消滅により、彼らが「プラクシス」と呼んだ人間本来の創造的意識の解放、真の人間の主体性の解放が実現されると考えた。そしてマルクスが予期したように、そのような人間解放の暁には、あらゆる疎外形態が消滅し、また疎外の源泉としての政治的領野も消滅すると考えたのである。彼らにとって、政治闘争とは疎外状態を悪化させる権力闘争であり、したがってそのような闘争への準備は彼らのなかには全くなかったのである。

しかしながら普遍的なものは、その現前のために必ず特殊なものを必要とし、また先に述べたように、両者の溝を埋めうる何ものか——例えば党——の存在なしで現れることはない。したがって彼らの普遍的主体性の主張は、無意識的にすでに党存在を前提としており、これは彼らの想定する普遍性の限界を示すものであると考えられよう。