

# **“Working Class Gone to Heaven”: From Working Class to Middle Class and Back**

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This paper problematizes the relationship between the working and middle classes in socialism, which was characterized by consumer culture and state of welfare. It also tackles the extinct middle class in the post-socialist context of the economic crisis and economically defined but politically void “new” working class. The economic realization of the Yugoslav socialist model – a hybrid of planned and market economies – combined the capitalist idea of the state of welfare with the communist execution of social rights. The socialist consumer culture, “searching for welfare”, established a homogenous middle class as a proof of its own social success, leaving the “working class” to be conveniently invoked only in ideological manifests of the governing nomenclature. The discussion about the capitalist restoration of the post-socialist period gives precedence to the lament over the extinction of the middle class and its high standard of living over the issues of class relations. On the other hand, the majority of the 286,075 unemployed and 15,230 of the employed who did not receive their salaries in the first quarter of 2015 are low-skill or vocational workers, i.e., the working class. This new relationship between the working and middle classes problematizes the socialist inheritance of transformation of the working class into the middle class, the recent phenomenon of economically defined working class without a political meaning, the post-socialist class inequality between the employed and the unemployed, and the emancipation of the worker as “the scorned subject” and his mobilization without being necessarily included in the middle-class political activism for the “general good”.

Keywords: self-management, post-socialism, working class, middle class

## **INTRODUCTION**

When the 2008 global economic crisis hit Croatia, as it did other Western countries, the threatened existence of the middle class raised the loudest

concerns. The middle class was presented as the greatest loser in the recent crisis, despite warnings from economic analysts that the variables characterizing the middle class have not even been defined (Tomić 2010)<sup>1</sup> and that the middle class accounts for only about 20% of the population (Grenac 2013). However, this small percentage reflects only the neoliberal stratification of social classes, which has started even before the crisis.

According to Krašovec, the middle class is considered the pillar of society, "the warranty of social stability and democracy"; in the "post-socialist East", it is also the "historical subject that brought us closer to the Western values and living standard" (Krašovec 2014). The reasons for these premises in post-socialist Croatia and other successor states of Yugoslavia may be found in a half-a-century long tradition in non-production jobs; the fact that technocrats, bureaucrats, and workers in socialism were blended into a single class defined by its access to the resources that determine prosperity; and the situation where a large proportion of the population was running away from "arduous and routinized jobs in industry and agriculture" (ibid.) and into the salariat.<sup>2</sup> This is also supported by the fact that the separation between the middle and working classes in socialist times was not characterized by a class conflict, which is typical for capitalism, generally because there was neither a fundamental class of capitalists nor a specific distribution of surplus value.

A more recent, mostly economic and political discussion about the capitalist restoration of the post-socialist period, unfortunately, overlooks the

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<sup>1</sup> "From a historical perspective, this social group consisted of those who belonged neither to the so-called working class, nor to the ruling class. Today, they represent a broad social group composed of people within a particular income range, who share a similar living standard and even social and cultural values. Furthermore, subjective perception of the ability to satisfy basic needs (or wishes?) is also important, including the need for health care, a stable and well-paid job, and solved housing problem, but also the possibility of education, and even affordability of travelling, movie-going, theatre-going, and so on. However, as there is still no consensus on the exact definition of the middle class in any country (region, or even the world), various criteria variables are in use. Economists prefer the so-called "hard" variables, such as salary or total income, occupation, degree of education and similar, whereas sociologists are more inclined to use "soft" variables that imply various social and cultural values. Of course, what a middle class would be in one country (or during one time period) according to one definition, it would not be in another country (or time period) according to that same definition" (Tomić 2010). We should notice that the criteria variables listed here to define the middle class match the definitions of wellbeing that are expanded by the economist Angus Deaton with "other aspects of wellbeing including freedom, education, autonomy, dignity, and the ability to participate in society" (2013: 9). If we add that "the social class is not defined solely by a position in the relations of production, but by the class habitus, which is 'normally' (i.e., with a high statistical probability) associated with that position" (Bourdieu 1984: 372), the possibility of having a broadly defined middle class allows for understanding the socialist transmutation of the working class into the middle class with respect to the lifestyle, which is one of the theses of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Salariat is a paid, permanently employed workforce that makes as much money as provided by the state budget. "Below that elite comes the 'salariat', still in stable full-time employment, some hoping to move into the elite, the majority just enjoying the trappings of their kind, with their pensions, paid holidays and enterprise benefits, often subsidised by the state. The salariat is concentrated in large corporations, government agencies and public administration, including the civil service" (Standing 2011: 7).

issues of class relations and focuses exclusively on lamenting the extinction of the middle class and its high living standard. Current sociological research of social classes, mostly performed in Croatia and Serbia using Bourdieu's cultural class analysis approach, attempts to look at the cultural, economic, and social capital as inseparable wholes in order to understand the constitution and reproduction of social classes. The main argument against this approach is that it "fails to make the crucial distinction between the notion of class and the notion of class reproduction [...] and between the economic capital and its role in class formation and other forms of resources which are not economic" (Levačić and Žitko 2015). This argument is corroborated by the official 2015 labor statistics for Croatia. According to the Croatian Employment Service's data, there were 285,906<sup>3</sup> Croatian citizens registered as unemployed, while 15,230<sup>4</sup> of the employed – according to the Croatian Tax Administration's data – did not receive a salary in the first quarter of 2015. The social stratification analysis indicates that these people are mostly low-skill and vocational workers, i.e. the working class. In other words, their economic status can hardly be affected by the cultural and social capital in the sense of changing their position on the social ladder. Nevertheless, we should not give up on Bourdieu's analysis lightly, first of all because it allows us to question "symbolic boundaries", "reality perception", and self-perceived class identities in socialism and post-socialism, which have never been a subject of local ethnological research.

In the light of the above-mentioned statistical data and current research findings in the field of anthropology of work and workforce, the question arises of what is the real social position of the deteriorating middle class today, not only in Croatia, but also globally. There is also another related question: "Where is the Post-socialist working class?" (Stenning 2005). Ethnographic contribution to the theoretical dispute over the previous and current status of classes and to the description of their historical changes seems to be an important aspect of understanding the economic, social, and cultural differentiation that we witness today. In that respect, conducting in-depth interviews to scrutinize the everyday life of workers,<sup>5</sup> the status of unemployment, and the history of leisure time in socialist and post-socialist time periods may be immensely useful.

Therefore, it seems of particular interest to address the question of relationship between the working and middle classes today and to problematize

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<sup>3</sup> <http://statistika.hzz.hr/Statistika.aspx?tipIzvjestaja=1> (accessed 19 February 2016).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.jutarnji.hr/istina-o-broju-radnika-koji-ne-primaju-placu-ima-ih-nesto-vise-od-15-000--a-ovo-je-popis-poslodavaca-koji-ih-ne-placaju/1350290/> (accessed 27 January 2015).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of workers' everyday life, individual understanding of a self-determined worker's identity and social validation of work, see "In the world of iron and steel': On the ethnography of work, unemployment and hope" (Potkonjak and Škokić 2013: 74–95).

the socialist heritage of working class turned into the middle class and the post-socialist rise of the new inequality between classes. We are now only going to outline the possible answers to these questions as they may be relevant for future ethnographic research.

## **SOCIALIST SELF-MANAGEMENT AND WORKING CLASS**

As Gal Kirn pointed out, the idea of abolishing class inequality had already been present in the Yugoslav resistance movement during World War II. The revolutionary moment of the resistance was not aimed exclusively at the elimination of Nazism and Fascism. There was an additional transformative moment in the partisan fight under the leadership of the Communist Party. It was the elimination of the existing social order, thereby putting an end to the existing relations between classes on the one hand, and providing the solution of the national question on the other (Kirn 2010: 210). After World War II, a number of political, social, economic, and cultural problems plaguing the desolate and war-devastated country had to be dealt with simultaneously and at several levels. Thus, the young socialist state created a sort of a shortcut to the efficiency based on the idea that particular social interests, as part of the class problem, could be solved by abolishing class inequality. The questions of ownership, labor, and workers occupied the central place in political discussions about what type of a society Yugoslavia was to become. These discussions continued until its breakup, shifting from the political to the economic area only to blend, eventually, into a national-economic issue.

In the first years after World War II, the communist idea of the abolition of private property and its distribution to workers was buttressed by a "political invention" called "self-management" (Kirn 2010: 211). As Lev Centrih summarizes, all that is needed to abolish not only private, but also state ownership is for the working class to get into power. And then he adds: "However, they omitted to define how it would be carried out. They left it to their [i.e. workers'] inventiveness. In that sense, the Yugoslav experiment in self-management was supposed to be an initial signal, an attempt to simultaneously transform both the state and the Party" (Centrih 2010). Besides, "fostering democratic relationships in production and creation of workers' councils" was a political response of a Yugoslav ideologist Edvard Kardelj, one of the creators of this model, to differentiate Yugoslavia from the countries in the Soviet Block. It also meant to provide a "valid alternative to any rebellion against the system" that occasionally arose in these countries (Unkovski-Korica 2014: 8-9). In order to be set apart from the Soviet model

of state-socialism, Yugoslav self-management in later years of its development in the 1960's and 1970's was shown to be a good example for other socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc, which "established various collective bodies in enterprises through which workers' representatives can, mainly in an advisory capacity, take part in the passing of certain decisions", and for "workers' movements in the developed capitalist countries". Furthermore, "some thirty countries had started to apply various, most often consultative, forms of workers' participation in management or are preparing to establish such institutions" (Pribičević 1978). Despite criticism that self-management was not completely compatible with the requirements of modern economy, it was a political, economic, and social phenomenon that fit into left-oriented programs directed at modernity and progress, while incorporating the idea of classless society and betterment of entire humanity (Rorthy 1999: 230). The Yugoslav socialist concept of classless society<sup>6</sup> was to be realized by leaving the production management to workers and ensuring welfare for all.

It turned out that this initial signal was not successfully executed. Although the Party's centralization was somewhat lax and companies had a good deal of autonomy, it was not enough to accomplish the utopian ideal of workers' self-management of production. Workers' councils, as workers' decision-making bodies, were not able to carry out political and economic reforms, probably because they replicated the attitudes and decisions of the ruling elite but without any sufficient intrinsic motivation for the revolution from within (Kirn 2010: 213). In addition, workers showed little interest in participating in decision-making bodies or, if they did, there were too few of them to ensure the workers' control over the labor process, means of production, and capital. The newspapers issued by the Sisak Ironworks', *Vjesnik Željezare* [*Ironworks News*] and *Željezarac* [*Steelworker*],<sup>7</sup> talked about continuous problems such as the chronic lack of interest among workers in joining Workers' councils, lack of understanding between the workers and the management, frequent thefts of raw materials, and idleness and loss

<sup>6</sup> Tomić-Koludrović and Petrić emphasize that "standard sociological terms, such as the 'middle class', were simply not used over a long period in the analyses of stratification of Yugoslav society, as they were perceived as part of the vocabulary of what was labeled as 'bourgeois sociology' and were consequently thought not to correspond to the new realities of the socialist society" (2014: 112). [...] "the key ideological terms in the initial period of Yugoslav socialism were 'working people' and 'one-class' or 'classless society'. In addition to what was known as the 'working class' in the pre-socialist times, the newly coined term 'working people' also referred to what was labelled as 'other workers' and 'working peasantry'" (ibid.: 114).

<sup>7</sup> The workers newspaper of Sisak Ironworks, *Vjesnik Željezare* [*Ironworks News*], was published from 1956 to 1994, while the newspaper *Željezarac* [*Steelworker*] was published from 1983 to 1991. Sisak Ironworks was one of the largest ironworks in socialist Yugoslavia and employed even up to 14,000 workers when the production was at the highest (see Potkonjak and Škokić 2014: 79).

of camaraderie. Headlines such as "There is still indiscipline in factories" (*Vjesnik Željezare* No. 6, issue. 2-6, 1957: 4), "Millions lost" (*Vjesnik Željezare* No. 1, issue 12, 1963: 3), "Private over social interests" (*Željezarac* No. 14, year 2, 1984: 9), "Idlers, get out of the factory!" (*Željezarac* No. 28, year 5, 1987: 6–7), and "Sticky fingers everywhere" (*Željezarac* No. 34, year 5, 1987: 10) bear witness to the deviations and regressions of self-management, as well as regular newspaper articles on alcoholism as the main cause of high absenteeism rate among workers, the problem of high fluctuation of low-qualified workers, and ever-present requests for solving workers' housing problems.

However, even more serious were the comments about structural problems in the factory management related to the national economic policy. The complaints about the constant shortage of raw materials, insufficient cash flow, with cash mostly being spent on paychecks, and incessant pressure to increase workers' living standard were addressed to bureaucrats and technocrats as the true managers of the social property. In the time period from its establishment in 1954 to the Market reform in 1965, workers' self-management was characterized by a growing dependence on global market trends, including economic crises, by contracts with foreign and national banks, and by various economic debits. The consequent high inflation and bank debits, the turn to the unproductive sector, and the unemployment cycles required specialist knowledge. Managers, i.e., the technocratic middle class, took over the management of production and adopted a market-oriented approach. Although the technocrats from self-managing socialism were ideologically treated as workers, they were actually the dominant strategists of business management. This was an indication not only that class inequality was still present, but also that socialism was not advancing toward Communism but returning to capitalism. This was, however, called *market socialism*. In the context of such distribution of power over management, workers were offered the opportunity for advancement, for example, they were offered education in management. However, the wider strategy of increasing workers' living standard and promoting the state of welfare was shown to pay off more. Furthermore, "due to the termination of collaboration with the East, by the mid-1950's heavy industry had ceased to be the priority. The path to a better life was found in making a turn to light industry and production of consumer goods – usually through licensing agreements with western companies" (Duda 2005: 44).

**Svi traže radničku klasu u ovoj zemlji!  
Traže je znanstvenici na savjetovanjima da  
bi potvrdili svoje teze; traže je sindikati  
da bi i dalje bili njezina najmasovnija or-  
ganizacija; traži je politika da bi je podr-  
žala na slijedećim izborima; traži je Pa-  
rtija da bi imala kome biti avangarda  
Gdje je nestala ta naša radnička kla-  
sa?**

Figure: "Everyone is looking for the working class in this country! Scientists look for it at congresses to confirm their theses; syndicates look for it to continue to be its largest organizations; politicians look for it for the support on the next elections; the Party looks for it to have someone to be the avant-garde to. Where has this working class of ours gone?" (*Željezarac* No. 18, year 4, 1986: 1)

Along with public health care and social welfare, political strategists also offered to the citizens the benefits of enjoying consumer and popular culture. The working-class way of life, as defined by Raymond Williams, "is not the slum, not the back-kitchen and the copper, not the cap and the collarless shirt, though these have been, and to some extent remain, the external characteristics of working-class life, shot through by certain regional variations, and certain period effect [...] Working class materialism – the collective improvements of the common life – is objectively, in our circumstances, a humane ideal" (1957: 30, 31). The "principle of hope" as the driving force of utopia (Bauman 1976: 14) was mentioned in Josip Broz Tito's speech in 1949 on reducing working hours from 8 to 6 hours per day, so that workers could have more free time, but only after "we achieve our goal of having so many products that, even after every citizen buys whatever he or she wants, there will still be a considerable surplus left at depots [...] [a]t the same time, we will not reduce the wages, nor shall we increase the prices of food commodities" (Matošević 2015: 125).

The socialist society was defined as a consumer society also because its goal was to "satisfy the basic needs of broad working masses, as well as their need for material and immaterial culture" (Šuvar, as cited in Duda 2005: 59). The ethnography of everyday life in socialist Yugoslavia reveals "how cultural leadership and consensus regarding socialist ideology were established, secured, and reproduced, as well as negotiated and questioned at the level of habitual everyday practice" (Luthar and Pušnik 2010: 11). In addition to "organized free time" in the late 1940's and early 1950's, "having a vacation

at holiday centers for workers became quite a democratic form of vacation" in the later period of socialism (Duda 2014), when the working class spent more and more money on entertainment and leisure time.<sup>8</sup> This was also incited by the specific features of Yugoslav socialism: the borders were open and people were allowed to travel to and import products from the West. The initially hoped-for prosperous advancement of the community gradually turned into the prosperous advancement of an individual, and spending ability became the means of measuring as well as the status symbol of the middle class. Until 1970, every fifth citizen of Croatia had a consumer loan from some trading company (Duda 2005: 67). The socialist worker enjoyed benefits that his capitalist peer could only dream of: the allocation of living space, often in the same apartment building where the company's director lived; the opportunity to spend summer vacations in government-sponsored holiday hostels for workers, and weekends to rest up.<sup>9</sup> Informal networks, undeclared work, and moonlighting became *sine qua non* for maintaining the new standard of living, especially during economic crises and market shortages. The world economic crisis in the 1980's also caused changes in the Yugoslav "welfare system", which manifested in reduced and restricted employment and investments in health care, education, social welfare, and child protection, which led to strikes, decreased number of university students, and creation of salary-based criteria for the availability of public services (Kolarič and Svetlik 1987: 33–34). The lyrics of the song "Working class goes to heaven" from 1984 by the pop-band *Haustor* talk about workers leaving the country in search of a better life:<sup>10</sup>

It's better if you leave, circumstances changed  
The role in history has come to an end  
At half past four in the morning from platform five  
Working class goes to heaven  
bye, bye proletarians

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<sup>8</sup> This concept of workers' vacation "has completed its enlightening role of creating a national tourism market, or an audience to which a tourist product could be sold even in a social package. Tourism was part of some sort of a general social contract; it was both the symbol of and the shortcut to well-being, and it was also a tangible symbol and engine of modernization of everyday life" (Duda 2014).

<sup>9</sup> A rise in living standards is neither communist nor Yugoslav specificity. Politics of encouraging and enabling consumption and leisure time, as well as promoting economic growth, for the working class in the former Yugoslavia fits into the broader context of stimulation of demand in capitalistic world from the late 1960s (see Halle 1984 and his ethnography of blue collar workers at a chemical plant near New Jersey, North America). Nevertheless, the main difference between communist and capitalist workers is their free, or almost free, access to a "better life".

<sup>10</sup> Market socialism and economic crises to which it was susceptible created a category of workers that was intentionally elided in political discourse – it consisted of unemployed workers, who were transferred to the international work market via various international contracts. These people were "gastarbeiters", precarious workers or those with flexible employment contracts (further information may be found in, e.g. Woodward 1995; Kirn 2013; Buden 2012).



According to Kirn, Post-Fordism tendencies had already been conceived in self-management and resulted in increasing unemployment rate and work-related emigration. The neoliberal concept of earning in the late 1980's intensified the capitalist class conflict between the republics and led to "economic nationalism" (Petak 2004: 71), which eventually led to war. The citizens of the former Yugoslavia met the breakup of the country and the post-socialist era after having already been well-soaked in consumer culture and accustomed not only to blurred boundaries between the middle and working classes, but also to class asymmetry with relation to the regional accessibility of goods characterizing consumer culture.<sup>11</sup>

## POST-SOCIALIST CLASS POSITIONS

It was only after the social-to-private ownership transformation and privatization in the 1990's, followed by the economic crisis at the beginning of this century, that these two classes became overtly antagonized in a way that may be described as a true change in the class structure, i.e. new class inequality. Primož Krašovec explains that the changes in the social base in Slovenia, like those in Croatia, resulted from the "devastation of national industry in the 1990's through privatization, capitalist competition, and opening to the world" (2014). All this has contributed to "ever more drastic differences between the middle and working classes" (ibid.) primarily due to the increased unemployment rate among blue-collar workers. As Krašovec has noted, the economic crisis also jeopardizes a relatively safe existence of the middle class. In order to keep its position, the middle class "needs" a stable state, needs "the fight against clientelism", needs "the flexibilization of labor and layoffs" (ibid.). In his analysis of new political actors, Dean Duda makes a distinction between the political engagements of different classes. While big capitalists consider going to the national or local polls a "political picnic", which most often ends in failure or, at best, in a one-time success, the new middle-class generation of liberals believes that "being into politics" is a "necessity" (2015). Proleterianized and precarious younger middle-class generation, argues Duda, discursively cultivates the values of democracy, ecologic sustainability, common good, and communality, while discarding

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<sup>11</sup> In the analysis of an opinion poll carried out in all the former Yugoslav republics in 1990, Marko Grdešić concludes that the sense of belonging to Yugoslavia was not fragmented solely with respect to ethnicity, but rather that there were differences within the republics, depending on the affiliation to individual social groups or classes (2013: 177), and that economic elites in all republics were more ready to accept the breakup of Yugoslavia due to the accumulated financial and human capital (ibid.: 178).

ideological conflicts and nationalistic rhetoric<sup>12</sup> (ibid.). Yet, there is a sort of generalization of class groups that we should be aware of, if for nothing else, then for the historical heritage of socialism, which combined the social and cultural capital in a specific way. It is evident from the ethnographic material collected from laid-off workers from the Sisak Ironworks that they advocate values identical or very similar to those of the middle class. In their self-perception, they belong to an urban space, which may imply that they have a cultural capital and cherish "European values". They also do not harbor "a sentimental and melancholic attitude toward Yugoslavia" as a political creation (Luthar and Pušnik 2010: 17), but rather – in their memories – they transfer that "ideal social arrangement, well-being and prosperity, order and safety into the everyday realities and uncertainties of the present living conditions" (ibid.: 19).

An ethnographic study of unemployment and informal economy in Croatia today, conducted by Tihana Rubić between 2008 and 2011 among the long-term unemployed living in one of the districts of the city of Zagreb, indicated that this group of people created their own economic, social, and symbolic integrity and identity, which could be associated to socialism. Informants often managed to overcome the consequences of unemployment by ensuring income from informal work and informal transactions that were not necessarily based on money transfer. "To a cultural insider, these practices are well-known and *nothing new* in Croatia. According to narrative sources, in socialism, doing formal work in the morning was often followed by doing informal work in the afternoon i.e. 'moonlighting' [...]" (Rubić 2013: 103). An important role in "surviving" unemployment today is played by social contacts, i.e. social relations and social network, which were created and used as far back as socialism. This is shown by "direct experiences of making agreements with the institutions of e.g. (local) government based that were made orally in an informal way (including bribe and exchange of services) and based on which a number of vitally important problems like employment and housing were solved" (ibid.: 105). Although their illegal work activities meant cheating the system and a company in which they worked, which satisfied the subjective feeling of "social justice" at the time, today they make "'pleasant' memories about the time when they had worked in the company" (ibid.: 107).

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<sup>12</sup> At the 2015 Croatian parliamentary election, the freshly formed political party, Most, won 14 parliamentary seats and became the key partner for post-election coalition. In their election program, Most continuously highlighted expertise as the most important condition for the development of Croatia and voiced the idea that they were not interested in the past and left vs. right political differences. Eventually, they formed a coalition with the Patriotic Coalition (Domoljubna koalicija), which gathers, among others, several notorious fascist-loving political parties. Thus, today, we bear witness to ever deeper ideological gap in the Croatian society.

Another large qualitative study relevant for the discussion of the cultural and social capital accumulated in socialism and reflecting on the current class differentiation was carried out among 300 subjects in 19 cities in Serbia in 2001/2002.<sup>13</sup> By analyzing the collected data, the researcher Ivana Spasić examined the usefulness of Bourdieu's notion of *distinction* as applied to the contemporary Serbian society. In her study, the answers to questions such as "In your opinion, what social class or social stratum do you belong to?" and "What are the differences between social strata in our society today?" revealed important deviations from Bourdieu's concepts of class distance and class difference. Most informants self-identified themselves as belonging to the middle class and frequently pointed out two common motifs: "deterioration of the middle class" and "devaluation of education" (Spasić 2006: 147). What is interesting is that both motifs were repeatedly used by informants from different social groups, with different levels of education and different occupations. It is especially indicative that "the middle class" was discursively opposed to "the new money", which represented those who are tasteless, obscenely rich, and quite primitive. The superiority of the middle class in this study was based on the criteria of being educated, civilized, urban, moral, and antimaterialistic. Spasić claims that "numerous examples have indicated that there is a substantial gap between the objective position of the informant and his/her discursive practice of expressing social differentiation" (ibid.: 168). However, the fact that the Serbian society is structurally quite different from the French society, which Bourdieu used as the basis for his class theory, is not sufficient to explain the discursive power of symbolic identity. Only sporadically does Spasić refer to the socialist heritage as a possible reason for "having more latitude for expressing their personal choice in how they describe the society and their own position in it than what Bourdieu's scheme would allow for" (ibid.).

Lifestyle, available education, urbanization and modernization processes, and even the depleted notion of working class encompassing everyone who works, these are all possible reasons why the citizens of Serbia today, despite all the above-mentioned problems, find it difficult to accept the recently created social differences between social strata, i.e. the "illegitimacy of 'higher class'", unless it is based on a cultural distinction (ibid: 163). We would, probably, obtain similar research results in all republics of the former Yugoslavia. Thus, although Bourdieu's concept is not fully applicable to the societies of former socialist countries, it is definitely useful for our understanding of class transformation and self-identification based on the cultural

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<sup>13</sup> It is the empirical material collected for the project "Politics and everyday life: changes in motivation and expectations of citizens of Serbia" (serb. "Politika i svakodnevni život: promene u motivaciji i očekivanjima građana Srbije") at the Institute of Philosophy and Social Theory in Belgrade. The research results were published in the edited volume *Politika i svakodnevni život. Srbija 1999–2002* (2003).

and social capital. However, the real risk of this heritage is favoritism toward the middle class and simultaneous lamentation over its doom when it is not based on cultural or social values but exclusively on economic capital. As mentioned earlier, it is not the middle class that is materially handicapped, but the working class that no one mentions anymore, not even in rare pertinent occasions. It is, therefore, important to point out the ever greater economic inequalities in Croatia as the main transitional change in favor of the economic middle class and at the expense of the invisible, albeit large, unemployed and unpaid working class.

What Beverly Skeggs said may also apply to Croatia: "What we read as objective class divisions is produced and maintained by the middle class in the minutiae of everyday practice, as judgments of culture are put into effect" (as cited in Lawler 2005: 429). The mainstream middle-class values have been set up in Croatia by the very establishment of the independent state after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Political and economic talk of a better life coupled with the systematic destruction of the working class and workers provided the space for "200 rich families, while the rest of the citizens would live as Switzerland",<sup>14</sup> which probably meant that everyone will be living in prosperity. Workers' strikes led by labor unions in the 1990's were thwarted not only by war, but also by labeling strikers as non-patriotic and non-democratic instigators of "chaos and anarchy", such as high-school teachers who went on strike demanding an increase in salaries (Buden 2014). The process of social-to-private ownership transformation and privatization, accompanied by a range of malversations and criminal activities was, in the opinion of many syndicalists, more devastating for the Croatian industry than the war. As one syndicalist said: "We didn't know where we were heading with privatization and what capitalism really was" (Tomičić 2014).<sup>15</sup>

Dean Duda also draws attention to the absence of systematic criticism of social relations in post-socialist Croatia<sup>16</sup> (Duda 2012), which – together with the global pessimism of the Left (Gindin and Panitch 2000: 36) – has led to the ever more treacherous separation of economy from politics (Buroyow and Verdery 1999: 14; Duda 2015). However, the recent happenings

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<sup>14</sup> The idea of 200 rich families in Croatia is attributed to Franjo Tuđman, the first president of independent Republic of Croatia after the breakup of Yugoslavia, although there is no trace of any kind that it was his statement.

<sup>15</sup> "In the first ten years of the so-called transition, unemployment levels rose from 8 % in 1990 to 19.6 % in 1999, that is to 29.4 % if we take into account those who received no wages. In the same period, the rate of unionized workers declined from 90% to 50 %, while membership in the largest trade union confederation dropped by half" (Ivandić and Livada 2015).

<sup>16</sup> A complaint that Marxism as a critique of capitalist social relations was avoided in intellectual discussions is, for Duda, also important for other reasons – today, the rights of workers and their influence on the politics of companies have been reduced to a minimum and solidarity among workers has been systematically crushed (Duda 2012).

in Greece and Spain, the Union referendums in Croatia about workers' rights on the one hand, and the growing influence of the political Right in Europe (and particularly in Croatia) and anti-immigration politics on the other, herald the possibility of a new alliance within the workers' Left, which will act through the class position, independently of class place (Poulantzas 1975: 17). Workers today are not only those few employed in industry, but also a huge number of unemployed, unpaid, and precarious workers in the service sector. Many of them, although they would declare themselves as the middle class, have every reason to support a radical transformation of political, economic, and cultural relationships on the "totally frantic semi-periphery" (Tamas 2013).

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## "RADNIČKA KLASA JE OTIŠLA U RAJ": OD RADNIČKE DO SREDNJE KLASI I NAZAD

Ideja da su različite društvene nejednakosti dio klasnog pitanja te da će se razriješiti ukidanjem imovinske neravnopravnosti, u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji proizvela je politički višestruko označen pojam radničke klase. U svojoj je ekonomskoj realizaciji jugoslavenski socijalistički model bio hibrid planske i tržišne ekonomije (Žitko), s kapitalističkom idejom države blagostanja i komunističkom izvedbom socijalnih prava. Potrošačka kultura socijalizma u svojoj je "potrazi za blagostanjem" (I. Duda) klasno pitanje riješila uspostavom jedinstvenog srednjeg sloja kao dokaza vlastitog društvenog uspjeha te se pojam radništva zazivao samo prigodno, u ideološkim manifestima vladajuće nomenklature. Rasprava o kapitalističkoj restauraciji postsocijalističkog razdoblja zatamljuje pak pitanja klasnih odnosa postajući isključivo lament za ne-

stankom srednje klase i njezina visokog životnog standarda. Socijalna stratifikacija postsocijalizma pak ukazuje da je riječ o propasti većinom niže ili srednjekvalificiranih radnika, dakle radničke klase. Time se uvodi pitanje odnosa između radničke i srednje klase kojim problematiziramo socijalističko nasljeđe transformacije radništva u srednju klasu, zatim recentnu pojavu ekonomski definiranog radništva bez političkog značenja, pitanja postsocijalističke tvorbe nove klasne nejednakosti između zaposlenih i nezaposlenih te, konačno, pitanje emancipacije radnika kao "prezrenog subjekta" (D. Duda) i njegove mobilizacije bez nužnog uključivanja u srednjeklasni politički aktivizam za "opće dobro".

Ključne riječi: samoupravljanje, postsocijalizam, radnička klasa, srednja klasa