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CATECHISM WITHOUT GOD: LEGAL BASIS AND IDEOLOGICAL PREMISES OF TEACHING MARXISM IN SCHOOLS OF SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA FROM 1945 TO 1991

Abstract: *The paper sketches a general timeline and defines key milestones in some fifty years long teaching Marxism within the state school system of the socialist Yugoslavia. The research relies primarily on relevant legal framework, especially the School Reform Acts of 1958 and 1974, and associated doctrinal writings. Through discourse analysis of these legal and doctrinal sources, the paper discloses the evolving role and purpose of teaching Marxism as an institutionalized belief that was meant to contend the traditional religion. By questioning the experience of this so-called school-Marxism, the study contributes to a better understanding of socialist secularism as a historical phenomenon, potentially also instigating new attempts at reconsidering whole series of old, yet still persisting controversies, such as interrelation of science and atheism, the role and place of moral education, or religious neutrality of school curricula.*

Key words: teaching Marxism in schools, socialist secularism, socialist Yugoslavia, atheist upbringing, non-religious education.

Our socialist way is all about practical implementation of Marxist science conforming to specific circumstances of our land in this particular phase of its development. This science is not our dogma, but a management and orientation tool in every single situation, no matter how complicated it may be.

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[...] Any deviation from such principles, whatever the excuse, means revisionism and betrayal of the working class and of the progressively oriented humankind in general.

Tito, 1959, *Djela*, Zagreb, Naprijed, p. 233

1. INTRODUCTION

Does school teaching in a democratic society mean just science-based education¹ or must it contain a moral upbringing agenda, too? The dilemma is both ancient and actual and it comes from the well-known David Hume's insight concerning the epistemological gap between objective facts and subjective values: the scientific, fact-based description of what the world is really like cannot provide any judgement on what it ought to be like. In other words, unlike scientific knowledge, moral truth relies barely on one's personal belief. Being unverifiable and contingent on interpretation, moral judgements are more likely to divide a community than to unify it. Hence, they give perfect legitimacy to liberal democracy: As a compromise-seeking forum, modern liberal democracy is less of a steady value-system, and more of a platform for its permanent (re)construction. Therefore, schools in democracy should not teach any particular moral system, but only peaceful coexistence among such systems. Apparently, education needs to be ideologically and religiously neutral (*i.e.*, secular).

What if there is knowledge that overcomes David Hume's fact-value gap by explaining values scientifically and objectively, though? Allegedly, Marxism was doing it. Supposedly having a deeper insight into the logic of the past, Marxism explained the classless society of the future not only as an inevitable end of history, but as a desirable political aim, too. To put it simply, it deduced political value from historical facts. As such, Marxism was conceived as a theoretical framework that drives political action – a proletarian revolution. But what did Marxism come to be in a post-revolutionary world? History teaches that Marxism, as a ruling ideology in Eastern-European peoples' democracies, was easily transformed from subversive worldview into a dogmatic mindset, or, as proven so many times before, into "a political ideology which gradually turned into a secular religion transforming political engagement of people into a religious zeal".² If it was really so, did then the compulsory teaching of the

1 In this paper science is perceived as knowledge or a system of knowledge covering general truths or the operation of general laws especially as obtained and tested through empirical method.

2 Radić, R., 1999, *Sekularizacija kao oblik prozelitizma u zemljama istočne Evrope, Tokovi istorije*, 1–4, p. 128.

Marxist credo in schools simply and necessarily become a new kind of catechism? The question is even more intriguing if the inherent atheism of Marxist thought is taken into account. The answer calls for reconsidering socialist secularism, but it also may shed a new light on the whole series of old, yet still persisting controversies, such as interrelation of science and atheism, the role and place of moral education or ideological and religious neutrality of school curricula, etc.

As a scholarly topic, though, teaching Marxism in socialist schools is neglected. After the collapse of Communism, critical studies dealing with the issue were rare, so nearly forty years old James Thrower's book *Marxist-Leninist 'Scientific Atheism' and the Study of Religion and Atheism in the USSR* still remains the state-of-the-art reading in the field.³ Moreover, the specific case of Yugoslavia is completely unresearched and beside a few recent studies on youth politics or the school system in the Socialist era, such as those of Marko Fuček,⁴ Igor Duda⁵ or Jana Bacevic,⁶ there has not yet been any specific research on this issue. On the other hand, judging from the abundance of sources still waiting to be revisited – doctrinal or academic writings mostly from the 1970s and the 1980s – this so-called school-Marxism in Tito's Yugoslavia was the most engaging topic, so it undoubtedly merits a serious scholarly reconsideration.

In this regard, the present study is no more than a first step on a new, underexplored road. Instead of elaborating all the features of school-Marxism in great detail, this research will make an effort only to outline a general timeline and define key milestones pertaining to some fifty years of teaching Marxism in the Yugoslav socialist school system. Methodologically, it focuses on the relevant legal framework – especially the School Reform Acts of 1958 and 1974 and the associated doctrinal writings. Resorting to discourse analysis of these normative and doctrinal sources, the study will try to track the evolution of vision and mission of the Socialist education and answer the question how was teaching Marxist atheist credo to fit within the concept of a secular socialist state.

3 For a closer inspection of scholar writing about the role and place of atheism in Soviet politics, see the bibliography in Shakhnovich, M., 2021, "Scientific Atheism" as an ideological construct and educational project (1950s–1980s), *Religijski-filozofski raksti*, 31, pp. 22–25.

4 Fuček, M., 2017, *Socijalistički mladi čovjek: sinegdoha kulturne politike prema mladima 1945–1960*, in: Bonfiglioli, C., Koroman, B., (eds.), *Socijalizam: izgradnja i razgradnja*, Zagreb – Pula, Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli.

5 Duda, I., 2015, *Danas kada postajem pionir – Djetinjstvo i ideologija jugoslavenskoga socijalizma*, Zagreb – Pula, Srednja Evropa – Univerzitet Jurja Dobrile u Puli.

6 Bacevic, J., 2014, *From Class to Identity, The Politics of Education Reforms in Former Yugoslavia*, Budapest – New York, CEU Press.

2. MARX V. GOD: LEGAL AND IDEOLOGICAL RIVALRY FRAMEWORK

According to Article 25 of the first Yugoslav socialist Constitution of 1946, the state and the church were separate.⁷ Furthermore, as it was specified by Article 38 of the same Constitution, such a provision explicitly proscribed separation between the school and the church.⁸ Since the same article stipulated that “private schools may be established only by law, their activity is under state control”, this separation clause may have been understood as a general constitutional provision with no exception.⁹ Tolerated by the government until then, catechism suddenly had to be banned from school curricula and classrooms.

Despite a unique constitutional rule on non-religious character of the socialist school system, there was no uniform Yugoslav response to its implementation. As an example, the ban in Serbia was introduced gradually and it implicitly relied upon a Ministry decision to remove catechists from payrolls and staff classification.¹⁰ In Croatia, however, teaching both religions, aka denominations, the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox, were steadily resisting up to 1952¹¹ and the then diplomatic clash between Yugoslavia and the Vatican over Cardinal Stepinac’s arrest and trial.¹² By the decision of the Croatian Council of Education and Culture – an administrative body at the rank of a state ministry – not only was catechism

7 Ustav Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije [Constitution of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia], *Sl. list FNRJ* [Official Gazette of FPRY], No. 10/46, Art. 25, Section 2, p. 77.

8 *Ibid.*, Art. 38, Section 5, p. 79.

9 However, the existing confessional schools for education of the clergy remained free and obviously exempt from implementation of this general rule. *Ibid.*, Art. 25, Section 3, pp. 77–78.

10 During a brief period between the autumn of 1944 and the spring of 1946, catechism was allowed as a facultative and extracurricular activity in Serbian public schools. If they were not compromised as collaborators during World War II, religion teachers, the so-called catechists, would have kept their positions and remained on the schools’ pay lists. Radić, R., 2002, *Država i verske zajednice 1945–1970*, Vol. I, Beograd, INIS, pp. 189–191.

11 For more on this see Spehnyak, K., 2002, *Javnost i propaganda Narodnog fronta u politici i kulturi Hrvatske 1945–1952*, Zagreb, Hrvatski institut za povijest, pp. 187–197.

12 In relevant Croatian and Serbian historiography, the Croatian *Law on People’s Schools* was often mistaken for a legal basis for the final abolishment of religious teaching in post-war Yugoslav schools (Zakon o narodnim školama, *Narodne novine NR Hrvatske* [People’s Papers of PR Croatia], No. 71/51, pp. 173–179). On the contrary, the Law did not consider this issue at all, and since it did not refer to the constitutional separation of the church and the state, it seemed implicitly in favor of catechism.

abolished in Croatian public schools, but any kind of priestly teaching or instruction at private gatherings was strictly forbidden.¹³

Such divergence among Yugoslav federated states, the so-called republics, may have been the consequence of a surprisingly slow and deficient legal framing of the new socialist school system at the federal level. Namely, the Yugoslav Federal Assembly first adopted the poorly elaborated Seven-Year Elementary School Education Law¹⁴ of 1945, then the brief and short-lived School Management General Act¹⁵ of 1955, both granted broad autonomy to state assemblies in the field of education. In fact, Yugoslavs had to wait until 1958 and the federal School System General Act¹⁶ to finally get a complete and instructive normative setting for their new school system.

2.1. THE SCHOOL REFORM ACT OF 1958: (UN)OFFICIAL SCHOOL ATHEISM

Complemented by a series of state legislations that followed its model, the federal 1958 School System General Act thoroughly elaborated the vision and mission of the new socialist formal education for the first time. Perceived as a system of education and moral upbringing founded on scientific basis and humanistic ideals of socialism,¹⁷ such schools were meant to raise young generations of Yugoslav citizens with intellectual and moral values of socialism¹⁸ able to enhance the socialist system through their further professional endeavors based on the achievements of contemporary science and technology.¹⁹ The conspicuous connection between contemporary science and socialism recognized by the School System General Act could have provided a solid ground for expulsion of catechism as non-scientific knowledge from the school system. On the other hand, it did not seem to suffice for justification of the harsh antireligious discourse in early postwar Yugoslav schools. As it has already been pointed out, science itself does not sustain any personal belief that cannot

13 Spahnjak, K., 2002, p. 197; Dukovski, D., 2001, *Rat i mir istarski: model povijesne prijelomnice 1943–1955*, Pula, CASH, p. 288.

14 Zakon o sedmogodišnjem osnovnom školstvu [Seven-Year Elementary School Education Law], *Sl. list FNRJ* [Official Gazette of FPRY], No. 84/45, p. 886.

15 Opšti zakon o upravljanju školama [School Management General Act], *Sl. list FNRJ* [Official Gazette of FPRY], No. 11/55, pp. 135–139.

16 Opšti zakon o školstvu [School System General Act], *Sl. list FNRJ* [Official Gazette of FPRY], No. 28/58, pp. 746–761.

17 *Ibid.*, Art. 14, p. 748.

18 *Ibid.*, Art. 3, p. 746.

19 *Ibid.*

be proved or checked and it makes no value-based judgements on such personal beliefs either: a simple fact that there is no scientific proof for the existence of God does not provide that it is either bad or good to believe in it. Therefore, the official antireligious attitude of the new communist regime was notoriously non-scientific, unless the very concept of science that the Yugoslav School System General Act referred to was an atypical one such as the Marxist one was.

Actually, Marxist philosophy cherished the fundamental interconnection of science and socialism in a way that the latter was considered scientifically grounded and inevitable, while the former was meaningful only if it was for revolutionary purposes. This comes from the two essentials of the Marxist thought: firstly, dialectics as a perception of nature being in endless motion and ever-changing, and, secondly, materialism, namely the perception of the human mind as a natural phenomenon necessarily susceptible to the very same logic of dialectic transformation. Consequently, the entire human culture and history result from creative struggles and alterations of the humankind's socio-economic context. Marx believed that "the truth reveals itself only gradually — that is to say, historically — because it is constantly in the making",²⁰ Seeking such truth means tracking the stream of global history in order to get an idea of its long-term direction and, eventually, the final goals to follow. In order to bear any fruit, such a quest requires a scholar's emancipation from the existing ideologies as apologies of the present-day human conditions – at Marx's time: the capitalism: "In order for a scholar to obtain to a neutral position he would need to be out with all class society",²¹ so "from a Marxist point of view, so long as class society exists, there can, in the nature of things, be no such thing as a point of view relating to social phenomena which is not — either explicitly or implicitly —partisan. All that we can hope for is to be possessed of the 'correct' view, and the 'correct' view is that which is in accord with the 'progressive' forces at work in society at that stage of development to which society has attained in the scholar's own day."²² To put it simply: to be scientific, a man's knowledge has to be in line with historical progress. Therefore, if such progress implies a proletarian revolution and a classless society on the horizon, then socialism is not a matter of political choice, but a historical necessity as a scientific fact. It is objectively determined. On the other hand, in such cases, the entire purpose of science is not to describe the world as it is, but primarily to make it better by recognizing and fostering its progressive flow. It is politically engaged.

20 Thrower, J., 1983, *Marxist-Leninist "Scientific Atheism" and the Study of Religion and Atheism in the USSR*, Berlin – New York – Amsterdam, Mouton Publishers, p. 80.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Yet, if there was a correct and progressive scientific viewpoint, Marxism claimed that there was no such thing as a correct or progressive religious viewpoint. “Religion corresponds to nothing out with the psycho-sociological areas of man’s collective life, and it is thus exhaustively explicable in terms of the pathology of man in society as hitherto constituted.”²³ Thus, in an advanced, classless, truly humanistic communist society there would be no place for religion. The latter was meant to fade and spontaneously vanish. Therefore, a transitional socialist state was only supposed to protect religious liberty patiently and passively, along with an active promotion of scientific worldview as an official standpoint. In practice, however, most of the Eastern European people’s democracies loyal to the Soviet model, including Yugoslavia in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, were occasionally diverging between periods of resigned tolerance to openly anticlerical campaigns against religion as a still influential reactionary weapon that had to be neutralized. Guided by Communist parties in their Prometheus’s mission to create a new socialist (hu)man able to comprehend and transform the world, such crusades were usually aimed at the institutions targeting younger generations as they had been considered less contaminated by the old and false ideologies of the preceding bourgeois regime.²⁴ The campaigns intensified after the ruling parties changed their strategy by replacing ‘labor efforts’ with ‘school studying’ as the medium of ideologization and the ‘working people’ with ‘the youth’ as the target population.²⁵ In the Soviet Union, as the leading socialist power, such antireligious politics became institutionalized eventually. Under Nikita Khrushchev’s leadership, the Soviet government started an extensive official scientific-atheist propaganda that lasted until 1961. It culminated at the 22nd Congress of the Soviet Communist Party that adopted its third Program directing “the Party organs to conduct systematic scientific atheist propaganda in order to clarify the inconsistency of religious beliefs and establish Marxist-Leninist philosophy as the only true worldview alien to religion.”²⁶ In 1964, a new scientific discipline called ‘Scientific Atheism’ was introduced as a mandatory subject in all Soviet universities, as well in most higher and secondary educational institutions. The endeavor had a twofold mission.²⁷ One was most certainly scientific disclosure of the implausibility of religion, its historical roots and reactionary historical role.²⁸ The other was dealing with a practical problem:

23 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

24 Fuček, M., 2017, pp. 19–20.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34.

26 Shakhnovich, M., 2021, p. 18.

27 *Ibid.*

28 According to the textbook *Istoriya i teoriya ateizma* produced by Novikov, M. P., Ivanov I. G. and Ugrinovich, D. M., as a teaching material on “Scientific Atheism” at

of eradication of religion both from people's consciousness and the new post-revolutionary order.²⁹ Just like Marxism itself, the Soviet Scientific Atheism was not only a social theory, but an ideological and political practice as well, an element of political socialization as “the process of induction into the political culture”.³⁰ The latter evidently did not support any sustainable co-existence with religion, but only a limited tolerance. There was no religion loyal enough to the Soviet socialism to cooperate with.³¹

Apparently, there was nothing atypical in the official attitude of Yugoslav communists loyal to Soviet model even after the Tito–Stalin split in 1948. Yugoslav communists even accentuated their antireligious stance in order to prove their ideological zeal and orthodoxy once the dispute with the Soviets had broken out. Political offensives against religion in their case entailed some distinctive features, though. A brief survey of the doctrinal writings of the time³² discloses a resolute rejection of administrative measures against religion. Indeed, the course of action in Yugoslavia rarely involved violent outbursts and was mostly reduced to systemic devaluation of religion as a detrimental and obsolete social phenomenon with no room in either school lessons or extracurricular activities, parent–teacher conferences, etc.³³ It was also repeatedly stressed that schools, universities and youth organizations, such as the Pioneers' Union of Yugoslavia,³⁴ have to be “emancipated from religious intoxication”³⁵ and fond of “science and knowledge instead of superstitions and religious deceptions”.³⁶

the Department of the History and Theory of Atheism at Moscow State University, According to Thrower, J., 1983, p. 149.

29 Thrower, J., 1983, pp. 151–152.

30 Powell, D. E., 1975, Rearing the new Soviet Man: Anti-Religious Propaganda and Political Socialization in the USSR, in: Bociurkiw, B., Strong, J.W. (eds.), *Religion and Atheism in USSR and Eastern Europe*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, p. 151.

31 Thrower, J., 1983, p. 145.

32 Milinković, B., 1985, *Bibliografija radova o religiji, crkvi i ateizmu*, Zagreb, Stvarnost.

33 For more on this see Janković, M., 1952, *Škola i religija*, Beograd, Narodna knjiga, pp. 45–50, or Bakovljević, M., 1952, *Vaspitanje i religija*, Beograd, Rad, pp. 72–121. However, there was no consensus on whether such antireligious propaganda should have been led openly and directly against the personal convictions of religious school children and their parents as Bakovljević believed (e.g., Bakovljević, M., 1952, pp. 35–37), or would it have been better to apply a more tactical approach – by convincing without offending religious feelings of pupils and their families, as Janković wrote (e.g., Janković, M., 1952, p. 49).

34 For more details about the role of the *Pioneers' Union of Yugoslavia* in the ideological struggle with antisocialist ideas and forces, such as religion and church, especially during the late 1940s and the early 1950s, see Duda, I., 2015, pp. 85–95.

35 Vuković, R., 1952, Za veću budnost i odlučniju borbu protiv misticizma i sujeverja, *Prosvetni pregled*, 6, p. 1.

36 Janković, M., 1952, pp. 5–6.

Likewise, in everyday school surroundings, teachers were not supposed to behave neutrally, but demonstrate non-religious convictions manifestly, being constantly supportive of the ‘progressively oriented’, aka non-religious pupils and students.³⁷

All of this, however, was deemed insufficient. On its own, scientifically founded education was often considered inapt to complete the ideological mission of the new socialist schools. As merely non-religious, such science-based education was insufficient to arise an atheistic consciousness in a child’s mind as a *sine qua non* of the future socialist (hu)man’s self-awareness.³⁸ Ergo, there could not be anything such as a religiously neutral school in socialism.³⁹ In other words, non-religious scientific education had to be complemented by seriously studied methods of an antireligious moral upbringing too. The latter was especially needed in an early postrevolutionary society such as the Yugoslav one, still strongly exposed to the influence of old religious superstitions and misconceptions. In fact, “the younger the socialist society was, the more antireligious and less non-religious the school upbringing had to be”.⁴⁰ Although only a recommendation far from an official instruction, these doctrinal writings duly reflect the party ideology of the time as the ultimate guideline and *ratio legis* of all relevant socialist legislation. Thus, even though the 1958 School System General Act did neither introduce nor justify any antireligious action in or by the school *ad verbum*, it undoubtedly legalized a line of reasoning that placed science in the service of a revolution.

2.2. THE 1974 SCHOOL REFORM ACT: A MARXIST (RE)EDUCATION

The Socialist Yugoslavia did not follow the Soviet lead for too long. After their culmination from 1952 to 1954,⁴¹ Yugoslav antireligious cam-

37 Franković, D., 1953, *Bitna obilježja socijalističke idejnosti i političnosti nastave*, Zagreb, PKZ, p. 178.

38 Bakovljević, M., 1952, p. 10.

39 Despite the 1948 Tito–Stalin split, Yugoslav communists kept resorting to Soviet literature translated and published in Serbo-Croatian, e.g., Andronik, A., 1953, *Može li nastavnik stojati na liniji nezameranja kad se radi o ateističkom vaspitanju*, *Prosvjetni list*, 13, p. 4; or Zavitajev, P. A., 1956, *Ateističko vaspitanje učenika osnovne škole na nastavi poznavanja prirode*, *Nastava i vaspitanje*, 8, pp. 473–479.

40 Bakovljević, M., 1952, p. 8.

41 According to Paul Mojzes, despite being less restrictive and more tolerant generally speaking, Yugoslav post-war communists were stricter towards religious liberty than Soviets used to be during the Stalin era, Mojzes, P., 1992, *Religious Liberty in Eastern Europe and USSR: Before and After Great Transformation, sine loc.*, East European Monographs, p. 346. Indeed, according to above-mentioned Milinković’s bibliogra-

paigns started declining steadily and, by the mid-1950s, Yugoslavs lost most of their enthusiasm for the topic, showing no particular interest in the Soviet Scientific Atheism during the subsequent decades.⁴² A certain revival did happen during the late 1960s, but mostly through the studies written in a neutral, more conciliatory tone: from then on, religion was not to be seen as a threat, but as a social phenomenon that found its place in a busy pattern of a socialist society. Such a shift seems all the more curious since it coincided with a broader educational reform introducing Marxism – an atheist doctrine *per se* – as a mandatory subject in high school and university curricula. Known as a system of ‘vocation-oriented education’ (*usmereno obrazovanje* in Serbo-Croatian),⁴³ such a comprehensive school reform was initiated by the Federal Assembly Self-Management-Based Education and Moral Upbringing Resolution of 1970.⁴⁴ Supported by the 10th Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia held in 1974,⁴⁵ the Resolution promoted Marxism as the very fundament of the Yugoslav school system. Studied sporadically within sociology, philosophy and history courses until then only in a certain number of mostly grammar and normal, aka teachers’ schools, Marxism was suddenly supposed to become a compulsory subject in all four years of the new ‘vocation-oriented’ high school education. Introduced after the constitutional redesign of Yugoslavia in 1974, this school reform was more elaborate than the 1958 one. First of all, it was legally framed in a dispersive

phy, most of titles dealing with this topic were issued between 1952 and 1954, at the time when the interest in religion started declining.

- 42 There are only two Yugoslav critical reviews on the Soviet Scientific Atheism, both from the late 1980s. They are the brief study of Aleksandar Đivuskij (Đivuskij, A., 1988, *Sovjetski naučni ateizam*, *Polja*, 351) concerning the work of the leading Soviet scholar in the field, Dmitry Ugrinovich, and the original literature review signed by Dragoljub Đorđević (Đorđević, D., 1987, *Šta je naučni ateizam*, *Filozofska istraživanja*, 3), that criticized this discipline for theologizing Marx and its (the discipline’s) atheism.
- 43 For more on vocation-oriented education, see Bacevic, J., 2014, especially chapter 2: *Vocationalizing Education: Conflict, Cohesion, and Dissent in Socialist Yugoslavia*, pp. 27–77.
- 44 *Rezolucija o razvoju vaspitanja i obrazovanja na samoupravnoj osnovi* [Self-Management-Based Education and Moral Upbringing Resolution], *Sl. list SFRJ* [Official Gazette of SFRY], No. 16/70, pp. 557–565. For more details on this Resolution and further achievement of its objectives see Bogavac, T., 1980, *Školstvo u Srbiji na putu do reforme: razvoj škola 1945–1975*, Beograd, Institut društvenih nauka.
- 45 See *Rezolucija o zadacima Saveza komunista Jugoslavije u socijalističkom samoupravnom preobražaju vaspitanja i obrazovanja* [Resolution on the Assignments of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia regarding the Socialist Self-Management and the Transformation of Moral Upbringing and Education], in: 1974, *Rezolucije Desetog kongresa SKJ* [Resolution of the 10th Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia], Beograd, Komunist.

way, that is to say through a series of eight reformed state and provincial legislations instead of a unique federal legislation.⁴⁶ Besides, each of the eight Yugoslav federal entities adopted its specific legislative strategy. For instance, while the Serbian Assembly adopted completely new legislation on the elementary and high school system, the Slovenian legislator only reformed the existing legal framework dating from the late 1960s.⁴⁷ All of them, however, followed the same logic and adopted a new normative discourse on education. As an example, instead of socialist humanism, the Serbian Law on High School Education and Upbringing started insisting on the Marxist doctrine as the didactic premise of education in schools,⁴⁸ calling for adoption of a dialectical and materialistic worldview as the outcome of secondary school education instead of socialist values.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, and perhaps contrary to the expectations, the 1974 Marxism-oriented school reform initiated no new waves of antireligious resentment. Paradoxically, by the early 1970s, Yugoslav schools became more religiously tolerant and labelled Marxist at the same time. Having nothing to do with any kind of more open and tolerant interpretation of Marx's doctrine, this reform rather echoed the loss of state interest in doing an anti-theist propaganda. The priorities had (been) changed: from then on, teaching ruling ideology was less about repressing revolutionary reaction and more about preventing internal challenges – potential dissidents and renegades from the communists' own ranks.

2.2.1. Dogmatic *v.* Humanist Atheism

A new reconciliatory discourse on religion was announced for the first time in the seminal book of the Bosnian socialist scholar Esad Čimić, one of the founders of Yugoslav Marxist sociology of religion, entitled

46 The timing of legal reform varied in all Yugoslav republics and autonomous provinces, so 1974, as the year of the reform, has been chosen by the Author with reference to the 1974 Yugoslav Communists' 10th Congress Resolution, which rushed Yugoslav legislators to fulfill the objectives of the earlier proposed school reform.

47 Zakon o spremembah in dopolnitvah zakona o osnovni šoli [Amendment Law to the Elementary School Education Act], *Uradni list SR Slovenije* [Official Gazette of SR Slovenia], No. 18/74, p. 1046 and Zakon o spremem bah in dopolnitvah zakona o srednjem šolstvu [Amendment Law to the High School Education Act], *Uradni list SR Slovenije* [Official Gazette of SR Slovenia], No. 18/74, p. 1049. The very first articles of both texts emphasize the promotion of Marxist worldview as the final purpose of school education.

48 Zakon o srednjem obrazovanju i vaspitanju [Law on High School Education and Moral Upbringing], *Sl. glasnik SRS* [Official Gazette of SR Serbia], No. 19/74, Art. 2, p. 850.

49 *Ibid.*, Art. 5, p. 850.

Socialist Society and Religion.⁵⁰ The book ended a decade-long apparent Yugoslav silence on religion and hinted at a detente that was slowly but surely to ensue between the communist state and traditional religion. Ćimić's principal idea, the one soon to become mainstream and a common place of the official Yugoslav Marxist doctrine, was rejection of militant secularization of the Soviet kind and a strong belief that the model of Yugoslav self-management socialism would weaken religion and cause it to eventually wither away all alone.⁵¹ Thus, there was no need to put a process that had already been spontaneously running under an institutional pressure. Meanwhile, as a strictly private affair, personal religious convictions of Yugoslav citizens had to be respected, inasmuch as they were constitutionally guaranteed. Atheization of the society was considered an inevitable outcome of the revolution from such perspective – a withdrawal of religious feelings rather than an official political agenda. In this respect, the scientifically oriented education of the time offers an illustrative example. Embedding a scientific worldview in a child's mind cognitively, the socialist school was about to advance a kind of 'methodological atheism' deriving directly from empirical scientific methodology equally valuable in and applicable to all other forms of human and social activities.⁵² Apparently, such Yugoslav 'methodological atheism' had little in common with the Soviet state-sponsored 'scientific atheism'. On the other hand, and strangely enough, it tried to keep a safe distance from the 'rational atheism' of the European Enlightenment as well. According to Ćimić, while the Soviet aggressive antireligious propaganda achieved no more than but inspiring a firm contra-revolutionary reaction, the 'bourgeois rationalists' were clearly overestimating the positive impact of the mass enlightenment by means of scientifically based and compulsory education.⁵³ Ćimić claimed that proliferation of education was a necessary, but surely an insufficient approach since only a radical change of human condition by means of revolutionary action could really liberate both human body and mind, emancipating it thus from idealistic misconceptions such as religion once and for all. Far from these two antireligious atheisms assimilated respectively into the Eastern and Western political traditions, the Yugoslav 'only truly Marxist', 'non-dogmatic'⁵⁴ and 'humanistic

50 For more on Esad Ćimić's role in the early development of Yugoslav Marxist sociology of religion see: Đorđević, D., 2007, *Skica za portret YU sociologa religije: Esad Ćimić (1931-) – Sociolog religije izворne misli*, *Teme*, 2.

51 Ćimić, E., 1974 [1971], *Drama ateizacije*, Sarajevo, Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, p. 99.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

53 Ćimić, E., 1966, *Socijalističko društvo i religija: ispitivanje odnosa između samoupravljanja i procesa prevladavanja tradicionalne religije*, Sarajevo, Svjetlost, pp. 13–16.

54 Marinković, J., 1987, *Ateizam kao odgojni ideal*, *Marksističko obrazovanje*, 4, pp. 162–163.

atheism⁵⁵ in peaceful coexistence with religion was praised as an alternative, the third way, quite in line with Tito's politics of non-alignment and his regime's further reconciliation with the church. Actually, the rising interest for sociology of religion in Yugoslavia came only after the agreement that Tito's regime signed with the Holy See in the summer of 1966.⁵⁶ Relaxed state-church relations changed nothing in the regime's firm opposition to church meddling in politics qualified as clericalism, but it introduced a new heresy: sectarianism, an openly antireligious behavior of the Communist Party members.⁵⁷ From then on, a Communist was not supposed to manifest his or her personal atheistic convictions verbally or, *a fortiori*, try to convince others of falsity of their religious beliefs, but keep building the socialist society instead silently and steadily.⁵⁸ "Rather than fighting religion, it is necessary to change the social condition that produces religion as an erroneous solution to a (dissatisfied) human position."⁵⁹ In practice, this historical compromise, that would prove a sustainable arrangement until the very end of the socialist Yugoslavia, did not imply any state concessions to any church regarding teaching religion in schools,⁶⁰ but only preparedness of the government to give up on anticlerical activities in schools.⁶¹ Thus, in most Yugoslav textbooks on Marxism, religion was treated in the already described neutral way: as an archaic, but still existing, form of social consciousness⁶² that could not be eliminated

55 Jurić-Arambašić, A., 1987, Pripreme za izvedbu nastavne jedinice „Marksovo shvaćanje religije”, *Marksističko obrazovanje*, 4, p. 190.

56 For more on this see Božić, M., 2020, Tito's Concordat – The 1966 Protocol on the Negotiations Between Yugoslavia and the Holy See from a Legal Perspective, *Pravni zapisi*, 2.

57 E.g., Frid, Z., 1971, *Religija u samoupravnom socijalizmu*, Zagreb, Centar za društvene djelatnosti omladine RK SOH, p. 40; Kurtović, T., 1978, *Crkva i religija u socijalističkom samoupravnom društvu*, Beograd, Rad, p. 376; Cvitanović, I., 1987, *Sloboda religije u socijalističkom samoupravnom društvu*, Novi Sad, Dnevnik, p. 19.

58 Ćimić, E., 1974, p. 100.

59 *Ibid.*, 99.

60 For political reasons, some of the arrangements achieved during negotiations between the Yugoslav government and the Holy See have been recorded only as informal verbal notes, *i.e.*, separate statements in writing and initialed by the heads of negotiating teams. Some of those, however, expressed pending issues yet to be discussed or even insurmountable differences, first of all severely opposed attitudes regarding teaching religion in public schools as the main demand of Vatican which the Yugoslav side fixedly and resolutely declined.

61 According to the head of the Vatican negotiation team, Agostino Casaroli and his memoirs, Casaroli, A., 2001, *Mučeništvo strpljivosti* [Croatian translation of Agostino Casaroli, *Il martirio della pazienza*], Zagreb, Kršćanska sadašnjost, pp. 340–341.

62 Haladin S., 1976, *Osnove marksizma*, Zagreb, Školska knjiga, pp. 103–105, or Čepo, Z., 1987, *Osnove marksizma*, Zagreb, Birotehnika, pp. 89–92, both used in Croatian schools.

by state administrative measures but was expected to disappear eventually through the evolution of a socialist social structure,⁶³ altogether with a further mass enlightenment of the population.⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that there was no mention of Atheism in any of these publications.⁶⁵

However, if religion was no more a taboo, but a social phenomenon worth studying as a teaching unit, schools did not become neutral institutions (*i.e.* widely open and free to discuss all competitive systems of thinking).⁶⁶ On the contrary, renouncing the anti-theist advocacy, the socialist school system did not lose its ideological foundation, but had rather strengthened it: becoming exclusively dedicated to forging new generations of Yugoslav citizens, socialist schools had to remain even prepared to fulfill their duty towards a lasting revolution.

2.2.2. Instruction or Indoctrination

Even long before Marxism would be introduced as a mandatory subject in all Yugoslav high schools during the mid-1970s, it had already been deeply integrated into school and university curricula and their doctrinal analyses.⁶⁷ As a matter of fact, a certain ideological component was evi-

63 Radenović, P. *et al.*, 1983, *Osnovi marksizma i socijalističko samoupravljanje*, Beograd, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, pp. 97–99 used in Serbian schools.

64 Jordanoski S., Kartov, V., 1977, *Марксизам и самоуправување*, Skopje, Prosvetno delo, pp. 121–126, used in Macedonian schools.

65 However, there were some serious distortions in the mainstream, too. In some textbooks, namely, there was no mention of religion at all (*e.g.*, Majer, B., 1987, *Temelji marksizma*, Ljubljana, Državna založba Slovenije used in Slovenian schools, or Bodrogrvari, F., Ifković, M., Szám, A., 1976, *Osnove marksizma i samoupravni socijalizam*, Novi Sad, Pokrajinski zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, used in Vojvodina schools). It was also the case with some textbooks from Serbia and Kosovo, but only because these didactic materials (despite having Marxism in their titles) were completely dedicated to self-management (*e.g.*, Perović, M., Perović, B., 1981, *Osnovi marksizma i socijalističko samoupravljanje*, Priština, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva SAP Kosova; Agani, F., Murtezai, E., 1982, *Osnovi marksizma i socijalističko samoupravljanje*, Priština, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva SAP Kosova; Živanov, S., 1986, *Osnove marksizma i socijalističko samoupravljanje*, Beograd, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva). On the other hand, the later editions of Jordanoski's textbook used in Macedonian schools took a more critical stance towards religion and even praised an atheistic education and moral upbringing as a necessary didactic method (Jordanoski, S., Ančevski, B., 1983, *Марксизам и самоуправување*, Skopje, Prosvetno delo, pp. 135–139). Apparently, some attempts at unification and standardization of so many various teaching methods and school materials have been undertaken in the early 1980s (Šušvar, S., 1984, *Omladina između ideala i stvarnosti*, Osijek, Konferencija SKH Zajednice općina, Centar za idejno-teorijski rad, p. 220).

66 *E.g.* Frid, Z., 1971, pp. 176–177; Bogavac, T., 1980, pp. 299–300; Cvitanović, I., 1987, pp. 14–15.

67 *E.g.* Sekulić, R., 1959, *Proces učeničkog saznanja osnova dijalektičko-materijalističkih zakonitosti u nastavi*, Sarajevo, Prosvjetni rad; Jovanović, S., 1961, *Ideološko-političko*

dent even in the basic school literature intended for learning elementary literacy – reading and writing skills.⁶⁸ Certainly, all the way from 1944, Marxism must have been included in teaching sociology, philosophy, history and all other humanities at least by a privileged use of the dialectical-materialistic method, as well as in all teaching units dealing with specific topics such as the class struggle, labor theory of value or the proletarian revolution.⁶⁹ As mentioned above, in some schools across the country, mostly grammar and normal ones, Marxism, as the ruling ideology, had a status of a compulsory school subject long before the 1974 Reform of the education system. Although not explicitly mentioned, Marxist ideas must have been a part of the Basis of Socialist Ethics, too⁷⁰ – a short-lived school subject designed for elementary school pupils during the earlier School reform of 1958.⁷¹ In spite of the entire previous experience, the teaching Marxism met serious setbacks at the time it became compulsory. The Yugoslav school system was poorly prepared for it, facing lack of properly educated teachers and didactic materials, especially relevant text-

obrazovanje mladih, Zagreb, Mladost; Babić, I., 1963, O marksističkom obrazovanju, *Naše teme*, 1–2; Debeljak, B., 1963, *O problemih marksistične vzgoje v škola*, Priručnik za mlade aktiviste, Ljubljana; Georgijevski T., 1963, *Nekoi problemi na savremenoto socijalističko vaspitanje na našata mladina*, Skopje, Prosvetni rabotnik.

- 68 From her analyses of the ABC textbooks published between 1944–1991, Radina Vučetić drew a conclusion that “these textbooks produced propaganda about life in a happy socialist society but, at the same time, they showed children that they should take part in the building of such a society. The obvious purpose of the writers of these textbooks was to create pioneers (young communists), who were to imitate and follow the offered idols, and they mainly succeeded in doing so. Instead of the world of imagination, they offered children the socialist reality, the supreme values of which were self-management, reconstruction and building, working campaigns and class equality, and the only models to follow were Tito, the Army and national heroes”, Vučetić, R., 2001, ABC Textbooks and Ideological Indoctrination of Children, in: Naumović, S., Jovanović, M. (eds), *Childhood in South East Europe: Historical Perspectives on Growing Up in the 19th and 20th Century*, Beograd – Graz, Udruženje za društvenu istoriju i Institut für Geschichte der Universität, Abteilung Südosteuropäische Geschichte, p. 251.
- 69 For an overview of Marxist inspired teaching of humanities in Yugoslav schools and the results of inquiry over schoolchildren’s knowledge about Marxist ideas and values see Bugarski, K. *et al.*, 1966, *Marksističko obrazovanje školske omladine*, Beograd, Jugoslovenski zavod za proučavanje školskih i prosvetnih pitanja.
- 70 Nastavni plan i program za osnovne škole [Elementary School Curriculum], *Prosvetni glasnik* [Ministry of Education Gazette], 7–8–9/59, pp. 167–168. This school subject intended to familiarize pupils with socialist values (such as gender equality) and the political system.
- 71 An hour a week of *Basis of Socialist Ethics* reserved for older students of elementary school (7th and 8th graders) was criticized and relatively soon removed from the Serbian school curricula (up to 1962, according to Petrović-Todosijević, S., 2018, *Otećemo svetlost bućnom vodopadu: reforma osnovnoškolskog sistema u Srbiji 1944–1959*, Beograd, INIS, p. 270), while it remained in all other Yugoslav federated states – republics at least up to the late 1960s. For more on this see Bugarski, K. *et al.*, 1966, pp. 12–14.

books adapted to schoolchildren.⁷² As a result, there were important gaps and differences in implementation of Marxism teaching as a compulsory school subject among Yugoslav republics and autonomous provinces.⁷³ However, the most important criticism concerned a dogmatic nature of this school subject. Yugoslav intellectuals of the time were quite aware of and worried because the concept of school Marxism as a system promoted a non-negotiable, narrow-minded and unquestionable doctrine resembling ‘the Truth’ as interpreted by religion rather than a set of scientific knowledge open to criticism and advancement.⁷⁴

In an attempt to disqualify such an objection, some Yugoslav Marxists tried to emphasize the revolutionary nature of Marxist teaching. Unlike contemporary science, considered a deviated and obsolete ‘bourgeois’ way of thinking, Marxism explained both how the world was running and how it ought to be running. It linked theory and practice very closely, being thus less of a philosophy and more of a proactive position towards human culture and history – a know-how for a (hu)man’s own emancipation from the capitalist yoke. Being all about the world in a constant flux and change, Marxism could not have been reduced to a sum of fixed definitions, but understood as a method of revolutionary action and reasoning the schools were supposed to initiate students into.⁷⁵

The most apparent problem with such an apology was the monopolistic position of Marxism that turned this critical method into an ideological pattern. Not only did the Marxist truth simply have to prevail over competitive conclusions of other scientific or philosophical methods,⁷⁶ but any serious

72 According to the Editorial Introduction to the *Marksističko obrazovanje*, review issue, No. 1 of 1981.

73 Slovenia and Croatia were the first to introduce Marxism as a compulsory school subject, but the number of hours reserved for its teaching was by far the highest in Bosnia and in Vojvodina. By the beginning of the 1980s, Montenegro and Bosnia still lacked their textbooks and used Bodrovari’s textbook as an excellent didactic material instead. For more details see Haladin, S., 1980, Osvrt na koncepciju i sadržaj nastavnih planova i programa u pojedinim republikama i pokrajinama SFR Jugoslavije, *Marksističko obrazovanje*, 2.

74 Warnings that the lack of critical approach would turn Marxism into a new kind of religious instruction was a common place in the relevant Yugoslav doctrinal literature of the time, e.g. Bosanac, G., 1982, Spoznajne i didaktičke granice ideologije, *Marksističko obrazovanje*, 1, p. 39 and further; Šuvar, S., 1982, *Vizija i stvarnost u socijalističkom preobražaju obrazovanja*, Osijek, Pedagoški fakultet, p. 263; Petrović, Z., 1983, Marksističko obrazovanje u procesu formiranja mlade ličnosti, in: *Osnovni problemi nastave marksizma u usmjerenom obrazovanju*, Sarajevo, Komunist, p. 6; Marinković, J., 1987, Učenje mišljenju ili vjeronauka, *Marksističko obrazovanje*, 4, pp. 79–82.

75 Bodrovari, F., Ifković, M., Szám, A., 1976, pp. 13–14.

76 According to Tomislav Bogavac, Documents of the 10th Communist Party Congress heavily criticized the school system because of its equal treatment of positivism, pragmatism and operationalism as methodological orientations of contemporary

and critical discussion over its official version had never been welcome. After all, the main reason why Marxism was introduced in schools only in the mid-1970s concerns the defiled purity of its doctrine as perceived by the ruling party. Namely, the authority of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia was seriously challenged by the Belgrade students uprising in June 1968, then soon again, by the mass manifestations of Croatian nationalism (known as Croatian spring) that culminated in 1971. While the inspirators of the first were commonly associated with the so-called *Praxis* circle of Marxist thinkers supposedly under a strong Western influence and in line with the broader processes of liberalization taking place in Serbian politics and economy during the early 1970s, the second series of events was related to rising populism among Croatian communists themselves.⁷⁷ These leftist, liberal and nationalist dissidents were stigmatized as advocates of subversive non-party interpretations of Marxism that were not to be tolerated anymore. The state response, *inter alia*, was an urgent introduction of a party-approved doctrine in school curricula.⁷⁸ As Jana Bacevic pointed out, this doctrine “[...] wasn’t Marxism as general political philosophy that the regime wanted to see more strongly represented in the curriculum: it was the ‘correct’ form of Marxism as the ideology and interpretation of reality, as opposed to the supposedly ‘dangerous’ interpretations championed, among others, by the Praxis philosophers, that was supposed to ‘take root’ in the minds of school students”.⁷⁹ The real role of Marxism in Yugoslav classrooms was keeping an orthodoxy alive without encouraging critical thinking.

3. CONCLUSION

School in Socialist Yugoslavia had never intended to be a neutral one. As it was stated in the first Yugoslav School System General Act of 1958, the socialist school education and moral upbringing were serving a revolu-

bourgeois science that contested the importance of theory in general, and Marxist theory in particular. Bogavac, T., 1980, p. 303.

77 E.g. For Andrija Stojković, such harmful Western influence was associated, *inter alia*, with the Frankfurt school, foremost to Adorno and Marcuse, whose philosophy Stojković, together with Stipe Šuvar, denoted as a kind of allegedly abstract-critical Marxism. Šuvar, S., 1973, O marksizmu i školskom marksizmu, *Beogradsko školstvo*, 69, p. 5; Stojković, A., 1975, Za kakav se marksizam i marksističku filozofiju zalažemo, in: *Marksističko vaspitanje i obrazovanje odraslih danas – Simpozijum marksističko vaspitanje i obrazovanje odraslih danas*, Beograd, Andragoško društvo SR Srbije, pages without pagination; see also Bogavac, T., 1976, *Nastava marksizma i marksistička zasnovanost obrazovno-vaspitne prakse u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi*, Beograd, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, pp. 32–34.

78 Bogavac, T., 1976, p. 15.

79 Bacevic, J., 2014, pp. 67–68.

tionary goal – building of a socialist society. In the early postrevolutionary period, it meant resorting to militant atheism of Marxist origin to counter-balance the traditional religion as a remaining and still strong reactionary agent. Curiously, later decline of such antireligious zeal would coincide with the introduction of teaching Marxist ideology in schools that became compulsory by the mid-1970s. Most unexpectedly, this so-called school-Marxism led to a far higher tolerance towards religion. Conspicuous absence of atheist propaganda, as well as of any devaluation of religion in textbooks of the time, reflected a general shift in the attitude of the Yugoslav Communist Party and government towards religion starting the mid-1960s.

However, it is still questionable if this relaxed and balanced politics was an advancement towards further secularization of the socialist school education. It is doubtful that it was because of the very nature of the Yugoslav school-Marxism, or of Marxism in general. Allegedly scientific, Marxist teaching claimed to reveal historical determinism and foresee the future as a never experienced, yet firmly and steadily expected classless communist society at the end of History. From a Marxist perspective, communism was not a contingent political choice but a result of historically determined and unreversible process – a postulated and undeniable Truth. As such and from a strictly epistemological point of view, it was no more than another system of belief: it was quite different from the traditional religion in its form and substance, but still unproven and unquestionable, thus equally irrational. The fact that it was introduced into the school curricula at the time of the party purges targeting leftist, liberal and nationalist dissidents from Communists' own ranks account for such school-Marxism as a closed state-backed doctrine that was meant to teach new generations thinking without slipping into ideological deviations.

Thus, had school-Marxism really been a form of catechism, it was not inasmuch so because of what it taught, but because of the way it was taught. A dogma that aspired to be considered a science; an instruction that struggled not to be perceived as indoctrination. It was but a new anti-theist or, to say the least, an atheist religion trying to repress and replace the traditional one.

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VERONAUKA BEZ BOGA:
ZAKONSKI OSNOV I IDEOLOŠKE PREMISE
MARKSISTIČKOG OBRAZOVANJA U ŠKOLAMA
SOCIJALISTIČKE JUGOSLAVIJE OD 1945. DO 1991.

Marko Božić

APSTRAKT

Rad nudi skicu opšteg toka i ključnih mesta u pedeset godina dugom razvoju marksističkog obrazovanja u školskom sistemu socijalističke Jugoslavije. Rad polazi od analize relevantnog zakonskog okvira – posebno dve osnovne zakonske reforme socijalističkog školskog sistema iz 1958. i 1974, kao i prateće doktrinarnе literature. Analizom diskursa normativnih izvora i doktrinarnih tekstova, rad razotkriva evoluciju ideološke uloge i svrhe marksističkog obrazovanja kao institucionalizovanog verovanja koje je konkurisalo tradicionalnoj religiji. U tom smislu, propitivanje iskustva jugoslovenskog školskog marksizma doprinosi boljem razumevanju socijalističkog sekularizma kao istorijskog fenomena, ali i podstiče nova promišljanja starih kontroverzi kao što su odnos nauke i ateizma, moralnog vaspitanja, verske i ideološke neutralnosti škole itd.

Ključne reči: marksističko školsko obrazovanje, socijalistički sekularizam, socijalistička Jugoslavija, ateističko vaspitanje, areligijsko obrazovanje.

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