

ARCHIBALD REISS'S CRITIQUE OF SERBIAN POLITICAL ELITES: MORAL DECAY AND INSTITUTIONAL DEFICIENCIES OF POLITICAL ORDER AND ITS PRACTICE IN SERBIA AFTER THE GREAT WAR

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Abstract: *Archibald Reiss claims that moral decay of political elites, the lack of genuine patriotism, disrespect to war heroes, morally and intellectually questionable scientific and educational elites along with widespread political corruption are almost fatal deficiencies of political order and society in Serbia after The Great War. Although Reiss's considerations were critical and realistic, he proposed substantial corrections of moral codes and practices of the Serbian post-war political as well as intellectual elites. His propositions fluctuated from the glorification of virtues of a Serbian common man and warrior to neutralization of morally and culturally adverse influences from the West. Archibald Reiss's views of political, national, and cultural patterns in Serbia show a great deal of overlap with the standpoint of the famous legal and political theorist Slobodan Jovanovic. Reiss's warnings and advice are meaningful and relevant today and represent his lasting and vivid legacy.*

Keywords: Archibald Reiss, moral decay, lack of patriotism, political corruption, questionable intellectual elites.

INTRODUCTION

Archibald Reiss had a significant role in the Serbian society in the post WW I era. Among many things he did for Serbia and the Serbs, he left his political testimony and moral reflection over conditions in the Serbian society, especially about the political actors, institutions, and political culture and practice.

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His insights are frank, open-minded, highly critical, strict, precise, and well-intentioned. Most of all, as many researchers have pointed so far, Reiss's insights in the social and moral habitus of the Serbian society, as well as the social and political elite, are relevant today.

The set of Reiss's insights were exposed in a posthumously published short book, "Listen, Serbs". The book was written in 1928. The first edition waited decades to be published. "Listen, Serbs" got its first edition in 1997.

As the title suggests, this small book is the warning and imperative. A warning always comes out of the full awareness of the specific situation when someone is in jeopardy. On the other hand, the urgent tone in the title of Reiss's book indicates that warning implies what the Serbs should do to overcome their own political mistakes and false beliefs.

In the preface of his book, Reiss clearly describes his approach. His primary aim is to discover the truth about the social and moral virtues and deficiencies of the Serbian society.

Reiss's commitment to truth is presented in the following quotation: "I will not hide anything important from what I saw, because a true friend is not the one who flatters you, but the one who tells you the truth, the whole truth" (Rajs, 2006: 2).

Reiss was completely aware that the moral and political flaws of the Serbian society and politics might be fatal to it. He noticed the extent of influence of the Serbian moral and political weaknesses in their community: "Some of your shortcomings, if you do not eliminate them, will be fatal to your nation" (Rajs, 2006: 2).

Given the fact Archibald Reiss participated and played an active role in the state administration, his theoretical stance about politics, morality, and society is like the stance of the observer who is the actor of a process that he observes.

Also, Reiss's analysis is not uttered in the form of a scientific system. It is a set of direct observations and critical judgments. It encompasses description, explanation, and critical assessment of the political events, social processes, and political and social actors. As it was pointed out in sociological literature, Reiss made a concise and fruitful overview of political values, moral orientations, and psychological profiles of all social strata in Serbia in the post WW I era (Šuvaković, 2012: 354).

The Reiss's sociological portrait of the Serbian society was complete. He considered social status, moral flaws, and virtues of the social strata: peasantry, intellectuals, public officials and administration, soldiers, military officers, and the wounded or handicapped soldiers.

Among many moral as well as political flaws, moral decay of political elites, a considerable level of political partisanship, the lack of genuine patriotism, disrespect to war heroes, morally and intellectually questionable scientific and educational elites along with widespread political corruption are almost fatal deficiencies of political order and society in Serbia after The Great War.

In his views about the political, moral, and cultural shortcomings of intellectual and political elites, Archibald Reiss was very close to the famous law and political theorist Slobodan Jovanovic. It might be noted that there is a significant level of similarity between these two scientists and public intellectuals. The relevance of their profound and well-grounded insights is presented even today. This circumstance suggests that the warning tone of their writings and pessimistic standpoint were justified.

This paper will have three parts. In the first part of it, I am going to expose Reiss's moral and political objections about the political and ethical shortcomings of the Serbian society. The second part of the



work will be focused on Slobodan Jovanovic's moral and political objections about the political and cultural patterns in Serbia. Also, after the comparison of Reiss's and Jovanovic's writings, the relevant similarities between them will be singled out and discussed. In the concluding part of this work, it will be pointed out what the main contributions are of Reiss's analysis of moral and political patterns and habitus in Serbia of his time.

REISS'S INTERPRETATION OF SOCIAL AND MORAL DEFICIENCIES AND VIRTUES IN SERBIA BETWEEN TWO WORLD WARS

After the heroic victory over enemies in the World War I and the unification with Croats, Slovenians, and other nations in one state, Serbia became the most influential political community in the first Yugoslavia. Despite the legacy of epic and majestic war victory, new political and social circumstances posed a new challenge for political elites and society as a whole. It was evident that unique circumstances will clearly show moral and civic virtues, but also the shortcomings of the Serbian culture, primarily political and intellectual elites.

Although he devoted much more attention to the analysis of morals and shortcomings of the Serbs, Reiss was utterly aware of their social and moral virtues.

Patriotism, honesty, hospitality, democratic manners, egalitarianism, and pride are the most significant and widely spread virtues of the Serbian society. Those moral excellences belong mostly to the peasantry. The peasantry was the morally healthiest part of the Serbian community.

In the eyes of Archibald Reiss, the peasantry had only two significant flaws: the lack of industry and commitment in their primary economic activity – agriculture and a strong inclination to leave home and land and to live in big towns and cities.

Unlike peasantry, public officials and administration, along with intellectuals, are burdened with various moral and political deficiencies that might be fatal to the Serbian society and state.

The list of moral and social shortcomings is very long, and it is made very precisely.

The first moral flaw relevant to politics is morally inconsistent relations towards war enemies.

Despite war hostility, the Serbs often enable their enemies to use their economic resources and gain a huge amount of profit. The post-war economic cooperation between the Serbs and Germans or Hungarians shows how the Serbs can easily forget their sufferings and national tragedy. This kind of oblivion is a clear example of the disrespect to their own victims and war efforts. The tendency mentioned above ruins the core of the nation's self-respect. "God knows how much you suffered in the war with the Austrians, Hungarians, and Germans, how much they plundered your poor country, how many of your best brothers and sisters were tortured and killed because they were patriots... Thousands and thousands of Germans, Viennese, and even Budapesters come peacefully to acquire wealth, and you allow it" (Rajs, 2006 :11).

Along with the mentioned moral flaws goes one more similar. An inconsistent relation to previous western enemies is connected with uncritical and blind imitation of western values and practices: "The representatives of the same Germany that was your ruthless enemy are celebrated by the "flower" of your capital's intelligence, which is proud to be modern" (Rajs, 2006: 11).



At the same time, the Serbian elites show the high-level of negative emotions towards wealthier and more prosperous nations. Jealousy and envy are two dominant emotions in communication with more successful nations and their representatives.

Reiss noted that within the elite, there are contradictory emotions. Serbian intellectual, as well as the political elite, has affective oscillation that ranges from the uncritical glorification of more successful foreigners to envy and jealousy that is often felt very strongly towards them. One of the examples of this tendency in the reaction is intense feeling of xenophobia that is directed towards the successful people from abroad: "Those among you who would like to be considered the ruling class are xenophobes and, what is worse, their xenophobia is not a consequence of excessive nationalism, but strange envy. You are jealous of more educated, elegant, and advanced strangers than you. It is unbearable for them when they have to admit that these people are above them. Then they hate them, despise them, and if it doesn't pay to drive them away, they find all possible ways to persecute them" (Rajs, 2006: 12)

An unbalanced, irrational, and disoriented attitude towards more powerful nations is an obstacle to a clear picture of friends and opponents in the international arena.

Reiss also noted that intellectuals are obsessed with external omens of status and power. They prefer formal education and honor of university position over knowledge and personal and social responsibility. For the Serbian intellectuals, as Reiss saw them, it is more important to have social influence and power over moral autonomy and conscience.

Scientific research and knowledge are not the top priority. The spirit of scientific research and critical reasoning is not bolstered and encouraged in communications with students. Strong repulsion in intellectual circles is also felt towards every individual who stands out from the average with his dedication, responsibility, work, and talent. Morally and intellectually exceptional personality is controversial and is the subject of suspicion of people of average moral and intellectual qualities.

Intellectual superficiality, along with a lack of moral consciousness dominate the Serbian universities, despite the fact that they are found to serve an entirely different purpose. Instead of promoting the spirit and practice of meritocracy, the Serbian intelligentsia bolsters averageness and detests anybody capable of elevating from the mediocre mentality in Serbia: "Noble society" thus does not allow any of its members to rise above the average. By all means, it tries to prevent the path of the one who dares and wishes to step out of its ranks. Therefore, the real intellectuals of this country, and there are many of them, do not succeed in Serbia, so they leave the fight discouraged. That is why the most important positions in the administration and elsewhere are most often occupied by people of no value. That is why your administrative staff is clumsy" (Rajs, 2006: 13).

The stagnation of society is an inevitable and harmful consequence of the prevailing moral "climate" in the society. However, Reiss makes critical remarks of the political morality of the Serbian intellectual and political elite on its attitude towards the state, laws, and fundamental moral and political values appropriate to democracy.

Avarice, the propensity to corruption along with the capability to instigate political and value cleavages in society, are the significant shortcomings of the Serbian intellectuals that directly refer to politics and the public sphere. The propensity to corruption could be best seen in the obsession with money. The vast majority of the Serbian intellectuals are greedy and morally questionable in their search for money.

The intense obsession with money puts aside any social or moral virtue. When money is at stake, neither patriotism nor honesty matters: "Since it is driven by profound feelings, "intelligence" kneels



down in front of the cash. The more money someone has, no matter how dishonorably acquired, the more they respect him and, at the same time, envy him. The “king of money” rules your intelligence. According to it, a man can do anything provided there are many banknotes in the pocket. Honor is an unknown value at the “intelligence” stock market. An honorable man is considered a fool, and only the one who knows how to turn events to his advantage is appreciated. Naturally, patriotism does not go with such feelings. Therefore, this beautiful virtue is completely lacking in your “intelligence”. What it wants to plant as patriotism is just pure envy of others. Many members of the “intelligence” would coldly sacrifice freedom, and the survival of their country, if it were beneficial to them” (Rajs, 2006:22).

Besides these moral and social flaws, the intellectuals in Serbia have a complex of superiority. They simply regard themselves as intellectually, morally, and politically “higher” than the rest of the society. “When people from the city gain some prosperity and come into contact with a more refined life, they are usually inclined to consider themselves higher than people from the countryside, who live simply. It was much worse with your young people after returning from abroad. They considered themselves superior. They contemptuously called others — those who did not have a university degree or some similar paper — peasants. And they gave themselves that ridiculous common name “intelligence”. These people of poor spirit do not realize that true intelligence is not acquired only through studies, even the highest ones. True intelligence is a natural gift, and an ordinary peasant can be a hundred times more intelligent than a university student or professors with half a dozen degrees” (Rajs, 2006: 9).

Almost fatally and wholly alienated from society, the intellectuals sooner or later, become prone to corruption. Such moral and social constellation establishes a morally decadent value system. The ruling value system appreciates only personal success measured in terms of the amount of money and real social power and influence.

Also, the perverted value system respects force and powerful nations. That is the reason why war enemies such as the Germans regain trust and respect in the eyes of the Serbian intelligentsia. At the same time, the system of values disregards as irrelevant honor, human dignity, and national pride: “An honorable man is considered a fool, and only the one who knows how to turn events to his advantage is appreciated. Naturally, patriotism does not go with such feelings. Therefore, this beautiful virtue is completely lacking in your “intelligence”. What it wants to plant as patriotism is just pure envy of others. Like all immoral beings, the intellectuals admire the force, even when it is most abused. This led her to reconcile almost immediately with the worst enemies of her country, the Germans, after the war. Only ten years after the last cannon shot, they are accepted as the privileged” (Rajs, 2006: 26).

Education, talent, imagination, clear and rational thinking, genuine intellectual capacities, and values are just façade. The intellectuals in Serbia always want to become socially influential, enormously wealthy, and politically powerful. Will for the power of various kinds is the genuine preoccupation of the Serbian intellectuals.

There is one more flaw that might be attributed to the academics. That is their unhidden propensity to instigate deep and intense political cleavages and to ruin the authentic Serbian values: “They should be at the head of those whose task is to rebuild the country after years of tribulation, it should harmoniously regulate cooperation with your brothers after they have been liberated thanks to your war victims and to steer the country on the path of progress, which would be easy with such a bright people and a rich country like yours. What did they do, however, they destroyed and degraded all the good you had. It is thanks to them that the simple yet very sublime spirit is less and less encountered that has enabled your people to remain intact despite the centuries of oppression” (Rajs, 2006: 28).



Reiss's concluding remarks about the Serbian intelligentsia are negative and pessimistic. Most intellectuals in Serbia are prone to corruption, and they are power-seeking people, not committed to spiritual values and scientific work. Usually, their personalities represent a decadent mixture of greedy, intellectual superficiality and the lack of patriotism: "Instead of acting positively, your scholars have responded negatively. Instead of building, the scholars were breaking down. It is a hotbed of rot and corruption, from which you suffer so much. If you let them continue, you will lose your land. Clean the house, sweep away all the arrogant and harmful puppets. Do not be overshadowed by people who have virtually no value, but whose lousy example is immensely dangerous to the spiritual health of your people" (Rajs, 2006: 29).

After a detailed analysis of the intellectuals, Reiss directed his study to politicians, public officials, and administration. Reiss's writings on politics might be considered as the study of political pathology. He recognized almost the same moral and intellectual shortcomings. The flaws of political elites are substantively connected with the deficiencies of intellectuals. To be more precise, Reiss claims that there is a mutual connection between the increase of the role of the intellectuals in Serbia and the appearance of moral decay of the political elites: "With the increasing power of the scholars, people started to realize what personal benefit they could gain from the membership and active role in political parties. They create interest in taking advantage of your party policy, so now you have professional politicians who make a living from it. What am I saying - they amass wealth? If before the war you had politicians who, in their already foreign-distorted spiritual structure, had in mind only what they considered suitable for the country, your parliament was already flooded with people who sought personal gain in those political passions. The race for ministerial positions has begun! Your assembly was no longer an expression of the people's will" (Rajs, 2006:31).

Besides greed and unscrupulous power seeking that might be attributed to all political actors, other characteristics of Serbian political life are the highest possible level of political clientelism, partisanship, and the tendency of the political elite to capture a state.

Presence of greed and unscrupulous power seeking as substantial determination of the Serbian politician could be noted in the following passage from the Reiss's book: "Your politicians have rushed to regain power and governance. It never occurred to them that the first ranks should be left to those who sacrificed themselves for the fatherland. On the contrary, they tried to remove all veterans from important positions by all means possible. These, in turn, were still too tired from the superhuman efforts they had made, so they allowed it. Politicians no longer knew any limits of their selfishness and ambition. The best way to become rich quickly is to become a minister!" (Rajs, 2006:35).

Politics is the best possible means of becoming rich and powerful. It is sure that there is no social activity that enables quick, easy, and assured success. The "fatal attraction" of politics lies in the fact that politics is the source of enormous power. To maintain his position, any politician tends to form a network consisted of loyal cooperatives. They are in specific relations. The relations are based on an exchange between unquestionable loyalty and benefit. Those who are loyal to political leaders will get their share of various interests.

On the other hand, politicians could only maintain their positions thanks to a large group of loyalists who are ready for anything possible to protect their posts and position of their leader. The political system based solely on the mutual exchange of benefits between the political leader and his associates is called the clientelistic political system. Although the expert in the fields of chemistry and forensics, Archibald Reiss anticipated politically and socially relevant concepts such as clientelism.



The political clientelism is manifested in two ways. First, the political party has a dominant role in political life and society — no room for any kind of sensible political activity except engagement in the political party. As proof for this claim, Reiss points out that there are political representatives of society, except those who come from political parties: “All parliamentarians, or almost all, today belong to political parties, so they have become mighty. Above all, they introduced iron discipline into their membership to hold it well in their fists. Not a single MP, who belongs to a foreigner, must vote as his conscience dictates. His vote is determined by the party, and the party has only one thing in mind: to stay in power if it has it or to come to it if it does not exist. No minister may carry out any reform he deems necessary without the approval of the party. The party has a president, who often has much more real power than the head of state himself” (Rajs, 2006: 40-41).

Also, the omnipotency of political parties is visible in the fact that party elites exclusively determine who will be a public servant. The only criteria for getting a job in the government or any other part of public administration is either loyalty to a political party or membership in it: “Politicians are omnipotent. Politics interferes with everything and governs everywhere. If there is a position in the government, no matter how important, the choice is not decided by the merits of the candidate, but by political connections. He may be the most ignorant, the most dishonorable man. If he is a “protégé” of the party’s foreign politician in power, he will defeat the most professionally and morally qualified man” (Rajs, 1997: 54).

Between the two world wars, the state was entirely controlled by politicians. The political system and state administration were under the substantial influence of party elites. They subjected the country to their interest. Reiss discovered a mutual bond between the omnipotence of the politicians and widespread corruption. As a substantial influence of politicians from the ruling parties is present everywhere, the fraud is deeply rooted in the state from bottom to top.

Reiss’s conclusion was simple: the omnipotence of the politicians is harmful to the state and society as well as is the lack of moral restrictions of academics involved in politics.

SLOBODAN JOVANOVIĆ’S VIEWS ON INTELLECTUALS AND POLITICS - A QUEST FOR CULTURAL REDEFINITION OF POLITICAL ELITES AND PRACTICE

Slobodan Jovanovic was one of the leading Serbian intellectuals for many decades in the first part of the 20th century. He wrote a lot in the different areas of scientific research, such as history, politics, law, philosophy, political theory, etc. As a politically sensitive writer, he made significant remarks on the Serbian intellectuals, their civic engagement, and its consequences on political, social life. These remarks were exposed in the essay “On cultural pattern”, published in Canada in 1963.

Like Archibald Reiss, Jovanovic noted that politically engaged scholars are showing extremely harmful moral and political tendencies. Their rude political ambitions pave the way for ethically immoral actions. Without moral restrictions, their political activity is reduced to grabbing positions and infinite enjoyment of the various political privileges. Those tendencies are epitomized in the concept of a half-intellectual that is prevailing in the Serbian society of Jovanovic’s time.

The half-intellectual has neither moral nor cultural pattern. He is led by an intense desire for social success. To achieve social success, the half-intellectual does not respect any demands of morality: “the half-intellectual finished school with success, but in terms of cultural education and moral upbringing-



ing, he did not get anything...He does not respect and appreciate spiritual values... Along with spiritual values, he rejects moral discipline... In social competition, this primitive with a degree is fighting without any moral restrictions” (Jovanovic, 2005: 51).

In the political arena, the half-intellectual is ready to do anything to grab money and positions in the state administration. Mostly, the half-intellectual does not have genuine political ambitions. His ambitions are to become socially recognized and wealthy: “The political aim of a semi-intellectual is not political. It consists in becoming rich and occupying high positions. He does not know of any higher and more general goals” (Jovanovic, 2005: 52).

Jovanovic found out what is the crucial reason why half-intellectuals were so widely presented in Serbia. It is the uneven development of human capacities, and the lack of care for the improvement of other relevant abilities that make a man a fully educated person. “Not a small number of scientists have realized that science and culture are not the same. A scientist is often developed one-sidedly. He extends his intellectual capacities and disregards others. The cultured man is not one-sided. He cares not just for his intellectual abilities but also improves sensitivity and morality” (Jovanovic, 2005: 51).

Overcoming the opposition between the cultured man and the one-sidedly developed intellectual is the key for establishing intellectually superior, morally sensitive, and politically responsible elite. Such an elite lacked Serbia. It is up to the educational system to enable full development of human capacities. The task of society is to bolster the continual improvement of all men’s abilities. The result of the education process should be the adoption of civic and political virtues like “love for individual freedom, political patriotism, and legal equality”.

Along with these political and civic virtues, Jovanovic insists that a politician specifically should develop and continually improve his sense for temperance: “Among many attributes, for politicians, the most important one, is self-discipline. The one who cannot control himself, will certainly not be capable of controlling others. In politics, it is not enough to be arduous; it is also necessary to be temperate” (Jovanovic, 2005: 62).

CONCLUSION

It is noticeable that Archibald Reiss and Slobodan Jovanovic saw that one of the problems of Serbian political and public life lies in the substantial moral imperfections of the Serbian academics. Their common opinion is that public intellectuals are often the examples of moral decay. Although both scholars established the same diagnosis about politics and morality, they differ in proposals on how to solve problems in the political system and public life. While Reiss insisted on the return to the pure righteousness of common man, especially peasantry and warrior, Jovanovic’s idea was the reaffirmation of humanistic ideals in education as a substantial part of education for everyone.

Both Jovanovic and Reiss claimed that the connection between politics and morality is necessary and rare in Serbia. They knew that only through progress in individual and civic virtue, educational system, and development of responsible public political culture would it be possible to improve political life, social and personal morality of those who run power and decide about the state and nation.



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