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SOCIAL INEQUALITIES FROM WORKERS' PERSPECTIVE IN 1960S SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA

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ABSTRACT – *This paper attempts to answer the question how the working class in Yugoslavia perceived the social inequalities that increased in 1960s Yugoslavia. By analysing letters, petitions and complaints that workers wrote to the highest political authorities in the country and by inspecting the statistics and analyses created by the highest political institutions of the State, the workers' views and reasons for their dissatisfaction are revealed. The main reason for their discontent was the growing socio-economic differences between them and the highest social strata, primary the managerial elite in the enterprises. From the workers' perspective, their unequal position was visible not only through their wages but also through their relations within the enterprises and other aspects of social life like housing.*

KEY WORDS – *social inequalities, Yugoslavia, workers, working class, self-management, 1960s*

INTRODUCTION

After 1945 and the introduction of the socialist system in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (from 1963 the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—SFRY), the position of the working class was fundamentally changed. The working class, nominally, took over political power, became the key social class and quickly introduced social ownership of the means of production (Perić, 1967, p. 158; Andrlić & Jovković, 1988, p. 105). However, the working class in socialist Yugoslavia had some specific features that were reflected even in the sphere of terminology. Yugoslavia was dominantly an agrarian society, and the influx of the rural population into urban areas brought massive social changes, especially in the mentality of the people. That was recognised by contemporaries as "the flight from the village" (Đurić, 1966, p. 17; see also Šuvar, 1970; Puljiz, 1970). The heterogeneity of the working class was visible "in spite of the socialist state's reification of the industrial workforce in official discourse" (Archer & Musić, 2017, p. 45). As Archer (2014) argues, "terminological shifts were made to the 'working people' (*radni ljudi* or *radni narod*) of Yugoslavia, a more inclusive and certainly more accurate conceptualisation than the 'working class'." During the 1960s, "working people" covered everyone working with socially owned means and performing physical or intellectual work either in material production or social (public) services (Perić, 1967, p. 158). The term was also promoted in the Constitution of Yugoslavia in 1963[1] and was used in a wide sense which included "all persons who live from their labour" (Andrlić &

1. "Ustav Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije", *Službeni list SFRJ*, 1963.

Jovković, 1988, p. 105). At the end of the 1960s, Yugoslav scholars (mainly in social sciences) extensively discussed this theoretical disarray. The editorials of the journal *Naše teme* organised an academic discussion on the concept of "working class." It turned out that there were different answers to the question who the working class includes. This debate was also an incentive for Stjepan Pulišelić to write his book titled *Suvremene klase u preobražaju* [Contemporary Classes in Transformation] (Pulišelić, 1975). He advocated a broader understanding of the working class, similar to Edvard Kardelj's view that the working class includes not only blue collars but also white-collars, scientists, researchers, cultural workers, organisers and managers (Pulišelić, 1975, pp. 86–88).

Theoretical discussions on the working class were partly caused by the emergence of social inequalities[2] within socialist Yugoslavia. Yugoslav jurist Radomir Lukić (1972/1973, p. 335) wrote in 1971 that "exploitation has now become so apparent and social stratification stemming from it so severe, that it provokes major problems". Despite the egalitarian principles on which socialist Yugoslavia was grounded, social inequalities and class differences existed throughout the socialist era and were constantly increasing during the period (Popović, 1977, p. 37; Allock, 2000; Archer, 2014, p. 140). By the end of the 1960s, the issue of social inequalities in socialist Yugoslavia was considered a fact and was recognised in social sciences. The studies emerged by the late 1960s, mostly in the field of sociology (Archer, 2014, pp. 137–138), and during the 1970s and 1980s much research was conducted (Archer, Duda & Stubbs, 2016, p. 9).

One of the first scientific events focusing on the topic of social inequalities was the Second scientific meeting of the Yugoslav Sociological Association called "Changes in Class Structure in Contemporary Yugoslav Society" held in Split in 1966. At the beginning of the meeting, one of its organisers, Miroslav Pečujlić (1967, p. 18), said that the implementation of the socialist system changed the type of social conflict in society. "Instead of a class strug-

2. "Social inequalities" is sometimes considered a synonym for "social stratification". Social stratification is a sociological concept that usually means a special kind of social inequalities viewed in layers, or strata. The concept raised and still raises much discussion (Rothman, 2016; Grusky & Weisshaar, 2014; Haralambos & Holborn, 2000, pp. 23–125; Saunders, 2001) in which I am attempting not to involve myself because it is beyond the scope of my article. I will rather apply Archer's (2014) approach who used the terms "social class", "social stratification" and "social inequalities" as "inclusive terms capable of representing numerous patterns of socio-economic differentiation and the (re)production of social inequality."

gle... conflicts between the social strata and oppositions between socio-professional groups started to dominate." Pečujlić (1970) later described six separate groups: unskilled and semi-skilled workers, highly skilled workers, clerical workers, higher white-collar workers or administrators, technocrats, and executives (Zukin, 1978, p. 408). Popović (1977) published the first sizeable empirical study on stratification in 1977 (Archer, 2014). The study argued that in Yugoslavia "the socialist society does not form *classes*, between which relations of exploitation and class antagonism exist, but it consists of social *strata* with some transitory class characteristics, between which *strata inequality* relations prevail" (Popović, 1977, p. 430). The study also concluded that in Yugoslavia four hierarchical groups of social strata exist: a) *Stratum of political and economic leaders*, which is divided into professional politicians and economic leaders; b) *Middle socialist strata*, which consists of advanced and university-level specialists in all areas of social work and administrative and similar routine white-collar workers with intermediate and lower education; c) *strata of workers engaged in production*, who have to the largest extent retained class features; d) *strata of private owners,* divided into farmers, peasants, industrial workers, artisans and other private craftsmen (Popović, 1977, pp. 40–41, 408, 430; cf. Archer, 2014). This paper is focused on the *strata of workers engaged in production*, the workers "who have to the largest extent retained class features." In everyday life, they were often called the "ordinary workers," or the real working class.[3]

Sociological studies dealing with Yugoslav social inequalities, especially those from the late 1960s and 1970s, are a valuable source of raw empirical data (Archer, Duda & Stubbs, 2016, p. 12–14). However, not many explored the lives of workers in a qualitative sense (Archer & Musić, 2017, p. 57). The groups researched were mostly members of the political, economic and cultural elites and only a few scholars conducted deeper research (e.g. by using interviews) on "ordinary people" or "ordinary workers" (Archer, Duda & Stubbs, 2016, p. 14). For example, Županov and Tannenbaum (1966) did research on the distribution of influence in Yugoslav enterprises, but the group researched can hardly be regarded as "ordinary workers". How did the "ordinary worker" perceive social inequalities? This is one of the questions that still need to be answered in historiography, and this is also the central research question of this article.

3. Instead of using those terms I will use the term "workers" to simplify reading.

The primary goal of this paper is to find out how the workers (*strata of workers engaged in production*) perceived social inequalities in their everyday life in the period of the "long" 1960s.[4] What was their perspective, and how did they see their position in society? What were the most common phenomena in which they saw social inequalities, and finally what did they do about it?

Although there are some relevant sources at micro level which can help us answer these questions,[5] there are also some understudied sources kept in the archival funds of the highest political institutions of the socialist state. Those archival records contain numerous letters (grievances, appeals, complaints, and similar) that ordinary people sent to the Yugoslav political leaders and the governmental institutions.[6] These records are a great treasure for historians who deal with the history of ordinary people in socialist Yugoslavia, including ordinary workers. The social composition of citizens who wrote letters to the highest governmental institutions showed that the relative majority were workers. In the late 1950s and during the first half of the 1960s the relative majority (more than 37%) of the all known social

4. By the "long" 1960s in Yugoslavia, I mean the period from 1958 to 1971 because it represents the most dynamic period of the Yugoslav political and economic system, the period of fully developed Yugoslav self-management. In 1958 the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) adopted the new Programme which they considered a "charter of self-management" (*Sedmi kongres SKJ*, 1958, p. 375, 377). The Programme announced a new phase in the evolution of the self-management system. The new market-oriented course was soon introduced, especially after the new economic reform in 1965. The Yugoslav economic system attempted to combine the two extreme economic poles, which is usually called market socialism (Marangos, 2013, p. 146; Prout, 1985). The economic reform was based on the economic (market) concept of the enterprise. However, the goals of the reform did not materialise, which caused many problems such as an increase in unemployment, growing inflation, new balance of payments problems, and severe recession. By the end of the 1960s, the reform was abandoned (Milenkovitch, 1973, pp. 55–56; Primorac and Babić, 1989, 196; Woodward, 1995, 247) and replaced by the concept of "associated labour" (Županov, 1985, p. 6).

5. In their research on the late socialist period, Archer and Musić (2017) advocate an approach based on the study of socialist factories, focusing on factories' archival holdings, print media and interviews with former workers.

6. In the SFRY, the highest political authorities were the President of the SFRY (Josip Broz Tito), Assembly of the SFRY and its Federal Executive Council whose archival material is kept in the Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. I also consulted documents sent to the republic level, choosing the Socialist Republic of Croatia (SRC), i.e. letters sent to the Parliament of the SRC and its Executive Council which are nowadays kept in the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb.

groups who wrote to the authorities were workers.[7] During the second half of the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s the number of workers increased (over 40%) (Mihaljević, 2016, pp. 211–214).[8] At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s the highest federal authorities received over 30,000 letters a year (*ibid*., p. 203). That means that every day more than 30 workers from almost every urban area of Yugoslavia wrote a letter to the highest authorities, which is a tremendous amount of sources for researching the history of "ordinary workers." In letters written by workers as well as through the statistics and analyses created by the highest political institutions of the State, the reasons for workers' dissatisfaction emerge. So I base this paper on workers' written communication with the highest governmental and political authorities.[9]

The features of this archival material open up another set of questions that will be answered in this paper. I will try to find out to what extent workers' letters and complaints enable us to understand the issue of social inequalities in socialist Yugoslavia. Can we, through the prism of these letters, find out something about the social atmosphere or the economic situation in Yugoslavia in the 1960s? What were the social conditions that induced workers to write letters, what were their motives for writing and what did they expect from the authorities? Were workers appealing to principles of self-management, social justice or perhaps laws in their letters? Finally, can this archival material confirm the dominant claims in social sciences about the increase in social inequalities and stratification in socialist Yugoslavia in the 1960s?

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7. In addition, there were farmers (18–23%) and civil servants (10–15%). The percentage of artisans was quite small (less than 3%). HDA-IVS, Bureau of Petitions and Complaints, Files (a), p. 1; Perić, 2001, pp. 270–271.

8. Apart from the increase in the total number of workers, the statistics on the number of letters sent to the highest state authorities at the beginning of the 1970s became more and more detailed. In the analysis of the Federal Bureau of Petitions and Complaints at the end of 1972, workers are no longer listed as a single category (workers). They were divided into four layers: unskilled workers (16,21%), semi-skilled workers (9,23%), skilled workers (15,61%) and highly skilled workers (1,97%). That also shows how the authorities started to reckon with the differences that existed within the "working class". HDA-SSRH, box 409, case no. 3696, p. 3.

9. In my recent book (Mihaljević, 2016), I have made an extensive analysis of the written communication between the citizens and the government of socialist Yugoslavia in the 1960s. In this article, I use some of the data and sources I gathered in that previous research, but here I deal with them from quite a different perspective. Due to the lack of space in this article, and the massive amount of these letters, I will show and cite only some typical examples as illustrations.

"HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE FACT THAT WE ARE CREATING A SOCIALIST BOURGEOISIE?"

Article 7 of the Constitution of Yugoslavia (1963) says: "Only work and the results of work shall determine a person's material and social position. No one may directly or indirectly gain material or other advantages by exploiting the work of others" (Horvat, Marković & Supek, 1975, p. 258). However, it is hard to say that exploitation vanished in practice. In early seventies, Lukić (1972/1973, p. 341) pointed out that "the type of exploitation which appears among self-managers [*samoupravljači*][10] themselves" is specific to Yugoslavia. He distinguishes three main types of exploitation in the Yugoslav self-managed economy: 1) between productive and non-productive branches of social activity; 2) between different work organisations/enterprises; 3) within individual self-managed organisations (enterprises) themselves (*ibid*., p. 342). The third type is the one that annoyed workers the most. The reason can be found in the fact that inequalities within the enterprises were the nearest and most visible to workers. Besides, many social services which the Yugoslav state provided to its citizens (like housing) "were connected to single enterprises" (Archer & Musić, 2017, p. 48). From 1958 "the enterprises had become more or less autonomous in the internal division of income" (Horvat, 1975, p. 167) and that opened a path for the increase in salary differences. Differences and inequalities among self-managers (*samoupravljači*) within the enterprises increased during the 1960s, and they stratified the self-managers in more layers, with the manual workers at the bottom and the technocratic-managerial elites on the top. Between those layers, disagreements and tensions were growing during the 1960s.[11] As Archer and Musić argue (2017, p. 47), "the increasing influence of the market and growing inequalities between the manual workers on the one hand, and the political and economic elites on the other, made the working class feel increasingly alienated and cynical towards socialist ideology." Although the authorities propagated the principle of social equality and the priority of the working class in workers' self-management, within the enterprises, someone had to run (manage) the business. Over time, hierarchical

10. The term *samoupravljač* means "a person who works in a self-management system." It included all people who worked in self-managed organisations. Cf. "Samoupravljač" at *Hrvatski jezični portal*, http://hjp.znanje.hr (accessed: 25.01.2018).

11. A similar process took place in other socialist countries of that time (see Bartha, 2013).

segmentation was inevitable and caused resentment in the enterprises. In the letters of disgruntled workers, directors and the managerial layer were a frequent target of their criticism and complaints.

An unequal distribution of material goods within the enterprises was the primary cause of workers' discontent. They frequently claimed that some individuals had the opportunity to get rich, while others, ordinary workers, were not able to provide a living for their families. Many workers stated that they had created all the public property, but that only managers were enjoying these goods. Some alleged that managers "have apartments and villas and cars, while workers barely make both ends meet, and to solve the housing issue they are usually in the last place regardless of the social conditions in which they live" (HDA-SSRH, box 406, file no. 1185, p. 11).

The pro-market economic reform in the 1960s caused significant differences in wage amounts (Parkin, 1969, pp. 361–362; Estrin, 1991, pp. 191–192; Estrin & Svejnar, 1993, pp. 687–688). Allegations of a vast discrepancy between ordinary workers' salaries and directors' salaries were widespread. In their letters, workers gave insight into numerous examples that demonstrated illegal practices by some directors and managers, and their irrational business decisions, unnecessary business trips, etc. For example, in a letter sent to President Tito in 1965, after the economic reform began, a worker claimed that the persons who were in some higher positions were privileged:

> *"By implementing the economic reform, which needs to reach the entire society, all privileges should be abolished, and all working people should be put in equal conditions, irrespective of their position and duty, i.e. that everyone should live from their work... In our society, a practice has emerged that individuals from this higher social layer use* [the public goods] *for personal enjoyment and long trips abroad or cruises on the Adriatic Sea, for the construction of private 'weekend cottages' free of charge, in fact, large and modern villas. They get cars at a lower price, receive large amounts for car maintenance, they use yachts free of charge and so on, and all of this is considered normal while working people tighten their belts because the prices have got too high... Now is the moment to abolish all the privileges that are contrary to the spirit of socialism and to our Constitution that states that all citizens*

> *of Yugoslavia are equal. How to understand the fact that we are creating a socialist bourgeoisie?... Such a policy of creating a big gap between those who produce and that higher and privileged layer creates negative consequences for both groups. The former become dissatisfied and latter become arrogant, and they believe their advantages are permissible."*
>
> *(AJ-KPR, box 229, Letter of worker Mrđarić Jovan sent to Tito, 1965.)*

The divergence between the workers and the directors was reflected not only in their income differentials but also in the distribution of other material goods, primarily the distribution of housing. Housing shortage was one of the most pressing problems of Yugoslav society (Vujović, 1979, p. 30). Social housing and the slogan "housing for everyone" was one of the symbols of social equality and the socialist system in Yugoslavia (Mandič, 1994, pp. 39–40). During the 1960s, the role of the state was gradually replaced by the responsibility of enterprises for the housing of their workers. Moreover, the enterprises were relatively autonomous in deciding on housing investments and allocation (Mandič, 1994, p. 40; Bežovan, 2008, p. 339).[12]

Although the egalitarian principle that each worker and his family had the right to housing was officially proclaimed, the number of those who enjoyed this right was limited. Poorly educated and low-qualified workers, who also had low income, often complained that they could not get adequate housing. Many workers who wrote to the authorities said that the social context of each worker should be taken into account when the housing distribution was regulated. They indicated the irregularities in housing allocations and loan assignments and objected to the criteria of housing allocation in their enterprises. They also complained about housing policy abuse and improper treatment because of the preference given to the highly educated workforce. Some of

12. After 1963, the government established new housing funds that attempted to produce real estate for the market. Flats for market were sold on credit, with individual participation in the form of 40–50% in cash. That was too much for an ordinary worker. Low-income workers, primary labourers, often could not get a loan for housing because the monthly loan instalments were too high for them. So wealthier citizens usually received these loans. Therefore, a particular paradox occurred—the higher social strata used the social housing the most, while the lower strata were forced to engage in a private construction or to rent apartments (Magdalenić, 1971, p. 65; Čaldarović, 1987, p. 111–112; Seferagić, 1988, p. 86; Simmie, 1991, p. 172; Le Normand, 2012). HDA-SSRH, box 125, p. 3.

them complained that they were long-standing employees in the enterprise and did not receive adequate housing, but that on the other hand there were employees employed just recently, who received new apartments. Besides, there were no uniform criteria for the allocation of housing in the enterprises' rulebooks (HDA-IVS, Bureau of Petitions and Complaints, Files [b]).

> *"Since 1952 I have been expecting a solution to my housing issue, and in the meantime, I have filed several petitions and complaints to the relevant local authorities of our city and to my work organisation.* [...] *I am a long-standing worker skilled in the butcher-sausage-maker profession, now employed at the PIK 'Belje'. As a long-standing employee, I was regularly paying a certain percentage of my salary for housing construction fund and thus participated in the improvement of the living standard of our commune... For years I have seen how apartments are given, how individuals receive apartments quickly... how some of them are defrauding with flats, and what about me? I am without housing just because I am an ordinary worker... The enterprise I work in is a large organisation; workers are investing substantial resources in housing and apartments are being built, but for whom? As the proverb goes: 'Who comes to the fire first, he warms up the most'."*
>
> *(HDA-SSRH, box 401, case no. 1314, The application of Josip K. – a plea for housing intervention addressed to the Federal Executive Council and to the President of Yugoslavia, 6 August 1969, p. 1.)*

Many other examples in the archives, which cannot be listed here, tell the same story of non-egalitarian housing distribution, preferential treatment, abuse of office, imprecision of internal regulations in enterprises, etc. From the workers' perspective, social housing was disproportionately allocated, and many of them were frustrated because they saw that local politicians, government officials and the managers of their enterprises came first in getting apartments. The analyses of these issues, which the Yugoslav authorities made, confirmed many of these complaints.[13]

13. See for example HDA-CKSKH, Organisational and political secretariat, box 12; HDA-CKSKH, D-Documentation, inv. no. 4445; AJ-KPR, box 242.

"SELF-MANAGEMENT IS FADING!"

In theory, the self-management system had safeguards against the creation of a managerial class: the "workers' majority on the managing board and the provision that members of self-managing bodies may be elected only twice in succession" (Horvat, 1975, p. 165). However, Stojanović (1975, p. 468) noted that social developments "had exposed contradictions within the self-government system itself: between social and group-particularistic self-government." Rus (1975, p. 106) argued that there was a domination of management over the collective, meaning managerial staff over the workers. In the 1960s and early 1970s, there were assumptions that social inequalities in Yugoslavia were caused by the machinations of some small groups of people, so that the "necessary solution lies either in more rigorous enforcement of the existing laws or their appropriate reform" (Vušković, 1976). Many workers' letters confirm these claims. They show that in some, especially smaller work collectives, individuals or small groups "usurped" the self-management mechanisms and imposed their own authority, and that they were only formally accountable to the self-managing bodies. There were also cases when some managers introduced new functions, only to increase their own incomes (Mihaljević, 2016, p. 282). For example, in 1965 an anonymous person sent a letter to President Tito stating that the workers' councils and steering committees are managing only "on paper" and he asked Tito: "Do you really believe that workers manage factories?" He states that the principle of rotation in managing is "a masquerade" because directors of the enterprises became presidents of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People and vice versa, so the same individuals held all the leading positions (AJ-KPR, box 226 [a]).

Tito received a similar letter from another worker, who wrote that in socialist self-management "everything is done the way the director and his closest associates say." He wrote that workers were unprotected because the trade union and the League of Communists protect "the interests of the management and the so-called intelligentsia." He also pointed out the problems of workers' everyday life: "I do not need to tell you whether a worker can live with an average of 20,000 dinars monthly income when you know what the prices are. A family of four does not have enough money for an apartment, electricity and bread, not to mention how much is needed for fuel, schooling of children and food and clothing" (AJ-KPR, box 226 [b]).

Six anonymous workers from the ironworks in Zenica wrote a letter to Tito complaining about the behaviour of their superiors. They said that at their ironworks "self-management is fading, and more and more managers are managing by themselves alone" and that the managers even speak about it openly (AJ-KPR, box 227).

Many workers wanted to stay anonymous because they did not want to expose themselves to potential adverse consequences if their managers found out about their writing. An unidentified worker wrote to Tito in 1968 saying:

> *"I do not have enough time now to describe everything I know that is going on within my work collective because I could be sacked or even locked out through a short procedure because who has the money is the judge... Let a determined, and decent man examine pay lists of regular and extraordinary income and black funds, and it will be clear to him: workers do not manage the factories, there is no distribution according to work, worker's self-management is non-existent. Who has an apartment and how did he get it and how many apartments does he have in his family? How do direct producers live off their income and how big is their income compared to the non-producers? Behind the mask of self-management, the same people are managing the way they have wanted for years..."*
>
> *(AJ-KPR, box 236, Transcript of an anonymous letter sent to Tito, 1 July 1968.)*

From the workers' perspective, there was an unfair distribution of material goods and social power, and that was a cause of their revulsion. These goods and power normatively belonged to workers and their councils, but in reality, it was in the hands of the executives. The number of production workers who were members of the workers' councils was small, and even those who were members had a rather weak influence (Jovanov, 1979, pp. 8–9). The social sciences in socialist Yugoslavia were familiar with the phenomenon of "usurpation of power" in enterprises. During the late 1960s and the early 1970s, Pulišelić (1975, p. 137) critically examined the process of "usurpation" in which individuals took power *via facti* (by personal act) and acted contrary to the demands of the work collective and its representative

and self-managing bodies. Vindictive behaviour by managers, particularly those in lower and middle management was not rare. Because of this, many workers suffered and felt permanently marginalised, or were even subjected to harassment (Županov, 1971a, pp. 22–23).[14]

Numerous workers' letters addressed to the highest political institutions and authorities show that workers were scared of using the regular appeal process within the enterprises. Many of them were concerned that they would lose the opportunity of a promotion or might even lose their jobs. These sources may be confirmation of Josip Županov's hypothesis (1971a, p. 22) that the disciplinary procedure within a self-managing organisation did not have many benefits for ordinary workers. Due to the lack of a standard procedure, workers were often in doubt where to turn for help. Regardless of whom he addressed with his appeal, the worker always faced the management of his work organisation alone and was in a subordinate position.

A job loss was a worker's most significant fear. For human dignity, it is vital to earn a living, i.e. to have a job. The Program of the LCY (1958, pp. 53–54) modified the basic Marxist slogan referring to the principle of access to and distribution of goods, capital and services. The slogan "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" was changed into "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work" which placed unemployed workers in a precarious position. As Susan Woodward argued (1995, p. 4), to be unemployed in Yugoslav socialism meant a loss of full citizenship rights and in fact second-class status. The "long sixties" began with very high levels of layoffs from industry and was followed by a stagnation in new employment in the second half of the decade that reduced the absolute size of the employed population (*ibid*., p. 201). Yugoslav economic reforms from the mid-1960s on, which included some elements of the market economy, caused an increase in the number of laid-off workers and, consequently, some new social problems. The reduction of workforce hit the smaller enterprises that did not have the financial resources to keep all their workers, and caused workers' complaints to the highest officials.[15]

14. Occasionally, there were also complaints from female workers about sexual harassment. See for example AJ-KPŽSS, box 103.

15. HDA-CKSKH, D-documentation, inv. no. 4445, p. 38; HDA-SSRH, box 125, p. 12; HDA-SSRH, box 409, p. 7.

The directors of the enterprises usually justified layoffs by explaining that the enterprise had an excessive labour force. Many workers wrote complaints because they considered they were undeservedly laid off and they indicated that under the pretext of redundancy various irregularities and even law violation occurred. A particular group of appellants were those who were laid off because they criticised the enterprise's administration and executives or pointed out irregularities and poor business performance (AJ-KPR, box 242, p. 8). The labour redundancy which increased from the mid-1960s was used by some directors to justify layoffs of workers who were unwanted because of their criticism and free speaking. It was not rare for leading managers to "create" conditions for someone to resign (Mihaljević, 2016, p. 280).

The issue of worker-director relations did not remain only in the letters of citizens. It caused strikes, which were previously considered impossible in a self-management socialist system. The outbreak of the first major strikes in Yugoslavia in January 1958 was a shocking event for the highest Yugoslav communist authorities (see more in Ivanič, 1986).[16] The miners' strike in Slovenia (Trbovlje) was the main topic at the extended Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the LCY meeting in February 1958. On this occasion, Josip Broz Tito himself stated that one of the key reasons for these strikes was a huge discrepancy of salaries between workers and management in work collectives (Despot, 2009, p. 91). Moreover, "Tito even adopted the words of the Trbovlje miners, pointing out he was not for wage equalisation, but the workers were correct: 'All our stomachs are equal!'" (Unkovski-Korica, 2016, p. 168).[17] Workers responded to another public speech of Tito's later in 1958, through which Tito sought to calm the situation after the miners' strike. His words were significant as evidenced by the letters of support he received from the workers themselves. Thus, for example, a worker writes to Tito saying that "his words were at the same time the words of millions of ordinary Yugoslavs, people and workers" (AJ-KPR, box 229, a).

16. Although the historiography usually considers the strike in Trbovlje as the first one in post-war Yugoslavia, that is not entirely correct. The first strike occurred in summer 1945 in quarries in Brač (Croatia), and there were some other smaller strikes in socialist Yugoslavia, but they did not have a significant impact on society (Radelić, 2012, pp. 186–190).

17. Vladimir Unkovski-Korica (2016, pp. 165–219) argues that the first major strikes acted as a spark which opened the factional struggles in the LCY that finally led to open discussion of the national question in Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslav economy had to rely more on market allocation of social services to increase its competitiveness on the international market. That also meant cutting the purchasing power of wages. Blue-collar workers, who had the lowest wages, responded with strikes (Popov, 1969; Wachtel, 1972; Jovanov, 1979; Woodward 1995, pp. 272–273).[18] Jovanov (1979, pp. 185–186) speaks of the contradictory position of workers who were in a subordinate position towards those who were supposed to represent them—the political, administrative and economic bureaucracy, and the financial oligarchy. Strikers were mainly blue-collar workers who had the smallest decisive influence in the work collectives, which was one of their reasons for strikes, beside their low income.

Workers' letters indicated systematic weaknesses in Yugoslav self-management. The government considered the self-management system a non-conflict system of industrial relations in which industrial conflict[19] was perceived not as normal but as a pathological phenomenon (Županov, 1971, p. 11). Županov (1971, p. 7) held that industrial conflict was inevitable even in workers' self-management socialism, despite its differences from Western capitalism and Eastern (Soviet) socialism. In workers' everyday life, sources of conflict remained, which is evident from the vast majority of their letters written to the highest political authorities.

Ten years after the first major strikes, workers were struggling with similar problems, but they did not go out into the streets in the troubled year of 1968. This is evidenced by letters like the one sent by a few workers from a Belgrade enterprise to President Tito in June 1968. However, they warned Tito about social inequalities and the position of the managerial elite that they considered inappropriate.

> *"We are very pleased with your statements which you gave on television about student demonstrations. We workers saw that*

18. From 1958 until the end of 1969, around 2,000 strikes occurred in Yugoslavia (Jovanov, 1979, p.185), but the mass media did not even mention almost 60% of them (Mihaljević, 2016, p. 512) because it was a taboo and kind of an oxymoron in workers' self-management. Furthermore, the government avoided the use of the term "strike" in public and usually replaced it with the phrase "work stoppage".

19. A term denoting the clash of interests between different individuals, groups and organisations in the industrial relations system. See more in Banaji & Hensman (1990); Haralambos & Holborn (2002, pp. 718–737).

> *students seek their rights and workers' rights with your help. Comrade Tito, all that the students require is fair and honest. The injustice that came between the workers and their managers and employers is unbearable. In enterprises, there are conflicts between honest workers and dishonest managers who boast with their* [Communist] *party membership card* [...] *and who ruined public property and became enriched. We workers work a ten-hour day and some even a sixteen-hour day and eat dry bread, and our entrepreneurs do not know what to do with their luxury. They have two or three cars and two or three houses, and we workers are sleeping in hovels and paying high rent for it. That is why we agree with the student demands to take away all unfair and illegally acquired property, as it was done after the war. Some of our prominent communists and directors were so enriched that they have overcome industrialists of the former* [Monarchist] *Yugoslavia. Their luxuries and their hedonism were unbearable, but we were helpless, and we did not have anyone to lead us and to organise demonstrations like our comrade students did. We workers were vigilantly guarded by the police and the army in order not to give our manifesto together with the students with whom we agree and with whom we will stay faithful to you Comrade Tito, and we will support and assist you in every work and in solving problems as long as we and you live."*
>
> *(AJ-KPR, box 234, Letter of Limani Isa and comrades sent to President Tito, 11 June 1968.)*[20]

In the self-management system, a director within the enterprise was an executive officer of the self-management bodies, but also represented the so-called public interest in the enterprise. That meant that he was appointed not only by the workers' councils but also by the local (municipal assembly) authorities, which ensured the influence of political factors. As Horvat (1975, p. 166) argued, this hybrid position was a constant source of conflict. In letters sent to the highest political authorities, workers considered the social power of managers (directors) to be excessive and illegitimate. They also considered it was contradictory to the principles of self-management because it negated the function that workers' councils and the workers

20. Cf. Despot, 2009, p. 110.

themselves should have had. However, although this image may be related to the actual situation in the enterprises, it may have been caused by the so-called negative social stereotype of the directors (Županov, 1985, pp. 275–277). Novak (1967, p. 137) argued that directorship came to be "one of the most attacked and criticized professions in the country" (Horvat, 1975, pp. 165–166). Some studies in social sciences carried out in the 1960s confirmed the existence of stereotypes about the directors of enterprises in socialist Yugoslavia. According to one of them, a director is "a man with a limousine, with a desire for authority, self-sufficient, prone to misuse of position, insufficiently competent" (Županov, 1985, p. 276). The reasons for such stereotypes Županov saw in the traditional negative attitude towards the "businessman" in Yugoslavia, as well as the need to find someone to blame. Namely, in the workers' eyes, someone had to be blamed for an increasing discrepancy between the institutional-normative ideals of self-management and the practice in which these ideals were not fulfilled. The most appropriate "culprit" was not an abstract bureaucracy or system, but a living man at the top of the hierarchy in the enterprise (Županov, 1985, p. 277).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Through letters sent to the authorities, workers spoke about their experiences, opinions, explanations and solutions, and by analysing them, one can learn more about the social context in which workers lived, including the professional and social relations inside the enterprises. Workers' letters in which they expressed their discontent with social inequalities were numerous. Apart from the hope that they would obtain a favourable solution for themselves, the most crucial factor that encouraged them to write to the highest political authorities was dissatisfaction with their own position in their enterprises and society in general. The growth of social inequalities between them and the higher social strata in the 1960s was particularly hard for workers because in official discourse the idea of social equality was one of the pillars of the ideology of socialist Yugoslavia. In their letters, workers criticised the behaviour of directors and managers in their enterprises and criticised the social position of the managerial (management) layer in general. That is why many of them referred to the principles of self-management, social justice and the rule of law and tried to warn the highest political authorities that these principles are being violated.

In their letters, workers expressed their dissatisfaction with things they saw as social inequalities and because of their unenviable position, which was often on the verge of poverty. The analyses of these complaints, conducted by the Yugoslav authorities, often confirmed many of the workers' claims as well as the irregularities in the sphere of labour relations. They also revealed that some of these issues were long-standing and had extremely negative economic and political impacts. The workers warned the highest political authorities that the managerial elite in the enterprises had "usurped" the self-management mechanisms, which enabled them to gain great power and acquire "unearned" material goods. From the workers' perspective, that overwhelming power was exercised in the most extreme manner in the case of layoffs.

The workers often pointed out that the socialist system should ensure the distribution of goods on the principles of "social justice". Apart from increasing income inequalities, the unequal opportunity of getting an apartment was one of the main reasons for their frustrations. To have a roof over your head is a basic human need crucial for every person's health and dignity. Many workers stressed that the problem was the criterion of housing distribution within the enterprises, which were relatively autonomous in deciding on housing investments and allocation. They also wrote to the highest state institutions saying that the distribution of socially owned flats and housing practice in general was inequitable. This fact supports Čaldarović's claim (1987, pp. 112–113) that blue-collar workers were systematically disadvantaged in housing distribution. It also supports the arguments made by Archer (2014) and Le Normand (2012) that discriminatory housing allocation was one of the leading causes of social divergence and inequalities in socialist Yugoslavia.

The content of the workers' letters supports the claims that existed in 1960s Yugoslav sociology that the social power in enterprises was concentrated at the top, in the hands of the directors and managerial bodies, while workers exercised very little power (Županov, 1985, p. 373). Unequal distribution of material goods within the enterprises and an uneven distribution of social power were the main sources of worker's discontent and a seed of discord between workers and the managerial layer. Županov (1971b; 1985, p. 11) considered that the distribution of power in the enterprises was a copy of the distribution of power in the macro-social system. No matter whether

the distribution of social power within the enterprises was caused by a constellation at macro level or not, the problem within the enterprises reflected the entire society. The social differentiation and stratification became a factor of disintegration in socialist society, which was recognised by some scholars even in the socialist period (Magdalenić, 1971, p. 70). Workers' letters and complaints bear witness to those trends in social development and to some extent reflect the social atmosphere in Yugoslavia.

Since the early 1960s the Yugoslav economic system had experienced severe problems like inefficiency, unemployment, economic and social inequalities, and social stratification as well.[21] The increase in social differences over time undermined the "social contract" between the political elite and the working class. That "contract" consisted of social benefits and social rights.[22] During the 1960s, the tendency of "independence" of managers appeared. According to Županov (1971, p. 8), they were constituting themselves as a separate managerial elite, independent from the political one. This process led to the position of the triangle of classes: political elite—workers—managerial elite.

Despite the propagation of the working class as a fundamental social class in the self-management system, in practice, a large number of workers were unsatisfied and considered themselves unequal to the managerial strata. The social inequalities and the lack of "social justice" in the enterprises intensified the frustration of workers who occasionally expressed their dissatisfaction by organising strikes. The way in which workers perceived social inequalities and the fact that they were looking for help from the highest political institutions and authorities may support Županov's hypothesis that industrial conflict was inevitable even in workers' self-management socialism.

The view presented in workers' letters to the highest political authorities cannot be generalised, and we cannot be completely sure in saying that this was the prevailing standpoint among workers. It may be even less identified with the real situation and real position of workers in society. Certainly,

21. Parkin (1969, p. 357) even argued that in the 1960s the system of class stratification similar to western capitalism emerged in Yugoslavia and some other socialist countries.

22. As Županov defines it (1996, p. 427), "the 'social contract' consisted mainly of social entitlements, such as free education, free healthcare, cheap housing, job security, the stability of wages and living standards (even though low), social security, old-age pensions, etc."

there were enterprises where workers were much more satisfied with their position and who did not consider the differences between workers and managers were too big or undeserved. Nevertheless, the huge amount of workers' letters and the analyses made by the political institutions confirm assumptions about the existence and increase of social inequalities in enterprises and the Yugoslav socialist system in general. In addition, many letters offer a picturesque insight into how workers saw their position and their daily lives. I think that at present it is hard to find a better source for studying workers' views on social inequalities in 1960s' Yugoslavia. Furthermore, the variety of information contained in the workers' letters can be a valuable source of research of other phenomena in socialist Yugoslavia. They can serve as a source for studying government-individual relations in Yugoslavia, as well as various other aspects of the everyday life of "socialist man".

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