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Mapping the Paths of the Yugoslav Model: Labour Strength and Weakness in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia

ABSTRACT ■ This article addresses three interrelated issues. First, it re-assesses the legacy of Yugoslav self-management and looks at the reasons why this particular historical legacy provided labour in Yugoslavia with certain advantages not in evidence elsewhere in East Europe. Second, it tries to give a theoretically founded explanation as to why the paths of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia diverged in terms of the strength of trade unions. And finally, it proposes a typology within which to organize the experiences that these countries and their labour movements have gone through in the last decade and a half.

KEYWORDS: Croatia ■ labour ■ Serbia ■ Slovenia ■ transition

Introduction

Most scholarly work on labour in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has emphasized its weakness as a socio-economic and political actor. The most systematic cross-country study published to date adopted as its main explanation for this weakness the thesis of a negative legacy of worker disempowerment inherited from the communist period (Ost and Crowley, 2001). However, an important challenge to this view of universal labour weakness has been offered by Stanojević (2003a), who has claimed that at least the case of Slovenia should be seen as an example of labour strength.

Stanojević agrees that legacies are important but emphasizes that they were not the same across CEE as a whole. The case of Yugoslavia provided an example of a *beneficial* legacy. Stanojević engaged in a polemic with Arandarenko, who in his chapter on Serbia in the Crowley and Ost volume (Arandarenko, 2001) argued both that Serbian labour should be regarded as weak, and that the Yugoslav legacy was important in explaining this weakness. By contrast, Stanojević insisted that the historical legacy cannot explain the marginalization of labour in Serbia, since Slovenia

inherited the same legacy. Rather, the different types of intervention by the political elites were crucial as an 'intervening variable' which mediated this legacy. Especially important was the reaction to the massive nationwide strike wave which swept over Yugoslavia in the late 1980s (documented in detail in Stanojević, 2003a). Slovene elites responded to these pressures with gradual market-oriented reforms, all the while offering compensation to the trade unions in the form of social and wage benefits and a privatization policy based on internal buy-outs. Serbian elites led by Slobodan Milošević chose instead a policy of aggressive nationalism and scapegoating; while pretending to speak in the name of labour, they offered it no substantive gains.

Since both Arandarenko's and Stanojević's accounts are well argued and persuasive, perhaps a frontal juxtaposition of them is not really helpful. Instead, I propose we adopt a more nuanced approach. This requires that Croatia, the third key former Yugoslav republic, be added to the comparison. Because Croatia is an interesting combination of the seemingly diverse elements of the Slovene and Serbian stories, adding it to the picture allows for a more balanced analysis. In doing so, I hope to construct a more suitable basis for comparison.

The discussion so far has left open three controversies that I try to address in this article. First, was the Yugoslav legacy a favourable one? If so, what were these advantages and how did they come about? Here, I offer an interpretation of the Yugoslav legacy which locates the sources of workers' strength in the exceptional position of Yugoslavia in international politics following Tito's break with Stalin. This set the country on a peculiar trajectory which strengthened the hand of labour by making it necessary for the political elite to offer new concessions to its main constituent in society, the working class. Yugoslavia thus began several decades of societal engineering, including the project of self-management. The actual implementation of a participative system of industrial relations is less important than the underlying fact that labour was empowered in its dealings with the political elite in a way that did not occur elsewhere in East Europe. This empowerment should be seen as an unintended consequence of international rivalry and conflict.

The second question is why the paths of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia have diverged. Here I draw on Stanojević's thesis of the key intervention by the political elites during the crucial early years of transition. I also draw on the approach of historical institutionalism, particularly the literature on critical junctures (Collier and Collier, 1991). My argument is that the cause of the divergences in the three cases is located in the political events of the late 1980s and early 1990s and the main orientations of leading political groups within the three countries. The critical juncture should be viewed as a fluid period in which political actors try, most of all, to reduce uncertainty. Dealing with the labour movement was not the

only preoccupation of the political elites at the time. But labour unrest did provide an important complicating factor, since responding to workers' demands in some way was imperative in reducing uncertainty and holding on to power. The interactions and events that played themselves out during the critical juncture set the three countries on significantly different paths.

The third issue at stake is whether such terms as 'weak labour' and 'strong labour' are applicable to the Yugoslav successor countries. I suggest that much of the misunderstanding between Arandarenko and Stanojević comes from the fact that the debate operated in terms of such polar opposites. I try to offer a different way of classifying the cases involved. In this I follow the lead of Kokanović (2001), the author of the most systematic account of Croatian labour written so far. Although her analysis is also a contribution to the Crowley and Ost volume which adopts the unifying theme of labour weakness, she refrains from endorsing such broad judgments. Instead she suggests that Croatian labour is simultaneously strong *and* weak, and so intuitively hits upon an important point. I try to tease out this point in the final section of this article, and to give it a sounder analytical foundation, relying also on comments made by Upchurch (2006a). In doing this I offer a new way of typologizing the observed cases, which may perhaps be useful for other CEE countries as well.

The Yugoslav Legacy

I accept the important point made by the legacy thesis, namely that the past matters. It matters because it provides the starting point once the beginning of the transition to a full-blown market economy and multi-party democracy is made. The question then is whether there are certain characteristics of the Yugoslav experience which set it apart from other CEE countries. While Arandarenko argues that workers' power under Yugoslav self-management was a myth (2001), Stanojević insists that workers had significant power in Yugoslav society (2003a). I believe that both judgments are fundamentally right and are not necessarily in contradiction.

The first imperative of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe was economic growth, which would enable them to catch up with more developed countries. These countries are best viewed as latecomers to development that wished to make use of the state as the main instrument of progress (Gerschenkron, 1962). But they were also built as 'workers' states' (Ost and Crowley, 2001), which means that the political legitimacy of the elites rested on the consent given by the working class. In exchange for their consent the workers received job and wage security as well as certain social policy, health and housing concessions.

There is, however, an important difference between the 'Soviet social contract' (Kubicek, 2004: 23) which produced the 'Leninist' legacy of state socialism (Ekiert and Hanson, 2003), and the one struck in Yugoslavia. Following Tito's break with Stalin, the above-mentioned material concessions offered to the workers in the context of a hierarchically organized and centralized economy were not enough. The Yugoslav elites needed to offer something more in order to justify putting the country through a precarious period of international uncertainty. In trying to develop its special model of development, Tito's intellectual advisers such as Milovan Đilas and Edvard Kardelj came upon the idea of self-management and workers' control of factories through workers' councils. This meant a decentralization of the economy by allowing for many elements of the market. But since the genuinely Marxist orientation of the political leadership made a complete and explicit switch to the Western capitalist camp unacceptable, market reforms went hand in hand with simultaneous building of socialist self-management. In fact, the two were seen as inextricably linked.

It is important not to over-estimate the differences between the legacy of state socialism on the one hand and the legacy of the self-managed market socialism in Yugoslavia on the other (Bunce, 1999). However, one of the key differences that should be taken into account is precisely the position of the labour movement. Whether workers' councils actually provided for real participation is an empirical question that can be answered by recourse to empirical evidence alone. Unfortunately, the evidence is inconclusive and both critics and supporters can call certain studies and surveys to their defence. Since there was very little genuinely systematic and comprehensive research, most of the available analyses probably suffer from selection bias. It is very likely that some companies, sectors or republics managed to achieve more participation than others.¹

In my view, the power of workers' councils is of secondary importance. More important is that a decentralized economy avoided the state socialist solution of politicians and managers forming a coalition aimed at controlling the workers, in which the manager is fully a political appointee and has the right to enforce various disciplinary measures, such as to arrest workers. This would be the Stalinist way of organizing an economy. Most of the time, Yugoslav companies enjoyed substantial autonomy. Of course, managers depended in considerable part on their political connections and exercised these when necessary. Generally speaking, however, it was in their interest to maintain good relations with the workers' councils and the trade unions. Managers also frequently acted as representatives of the company when political decisions were made that affected its interests. Resisting attempts at intervention and redistribution from well-off companies to poorer ones was a common goal of the workers and their managers. This produced a quasi-corporatist

or micro-corporatist insider coalition of workers and managers aimed mostly at market survival. Working in a precarious but still sufficiently free environment, managers became more and more professional, a trend which was picked up by research. This research also showed that managers were not really hostile to worker participation (Pusić, 1992).

Even so, workers sometimes engaged in strikes. Because of the relatively more developed market orientation of Yugoslavia and its federal organization, the country's labour market was segmented and workers were unable to build links across workplaces (Arandarenko, 2001; Woodward, 1995). This meant that industrial action was restricted to the company level and did not take the form of societal protests against the state. As research showed, strikes were usually motivated by material grievances, were aimed against management and took the form of short work stoppages, usually not longer than a day (Jovanov, 1979).

Most importantly perhaps, such strikes were generally very successful. The strikes were embarrassing for everyone, management, Party and trade unions. They were a signal that all the usual ways of resolving issues, including involvement by the trade union as an organization working to avoid social conflict, had failed. It was in everyone's interest to end the strike as quickly as possible, before the media caught on to the story and politicians tried to exploit the situation for personal political gain. Thus strikes ended in quick and complete victory for the workers, resulting most often in pay rises even if this was detrimental to the market operation of their companies.

Strikes revealed a political bargain between the working class and the political elites which was peculiar to Yugoslavia. Such collective action was especially interesting in that it threw light on this authority structure whose precise contours were not visible in less conflictual times. By striking, the workers were engaging implicitly in 'direct communication' with the political elites, their partner in the 'grand coalition' which underwrote the entire social edifice (Županov, 1987). This dependence of the elites on the workers made their response to industrial action in Yugoslavia qualitatively different from other CEE countries where more overt coercion could be used. And so, workers learned that short strikes paid off and added them as a key element to their 'repertoire of contention'. This grand coalition of workers and politicians was aimed against managers, but strikes as the main mechanism of activating the coalition were not invoked frequently during the 1960s or 1970s.

However, by the late 1980s strikes became very frequent. A decade of stagnation, rising inflation and high debt complicated the economic situation to the extreme. The federal government responded by trying to implement various austerity measures, as suggested and propagated by the International Monetary Fund. For the first time, market-oriented reform offered no compensation for the workers: liberalization was now

disconnected from building self-management. In response to such reforms, workers struck. The wage increases they won gave a further impetus to inflation, soon creating a vicious circle which made such increases self-defeating. By then the grand coalition was put under severe strain, workers left their factories to protest in front of government buildings. The space was now open for politicians to take control as well as to redefine and capture the struggle of the workers.

Self-management was the central but not the only institutional innovation introduced by the Yugoslav communists. Of the many others, 'social ownership' deserves special mention. While in other CEE countries ownership of companies was in the hands of the state, in Yugoslavia it was transferred to society. This invention was supposed to resolve the problems associated with both private and state ownership. It was argued that in both systems, capitalism and etatism, there exists a class which owns the property. Both societies are class-based societies. In order to bring about a fully classless society, a change to a new type of ownership was required (Horvat, 1984).

Social ownership produced a feeling of closer attachment and identification of workers with their companies, contributing to slightly higher productivity (Kraft et al., 1994). Workers' attachment resulted in a willingness to make sacrifices as well as to fight for 'their' companies. The main consequence of social ownership was that expectations were formed on the part of the workers regarding how the transformation of social property should be conducted in order to meet demands of social justice. Once the transition to capitalism began, workers would press strongly for employee buy-outs as their preferred way of privatization. Management, as the other side of the quasi-corporatist insider coalition, was a potential partner in an insider buy-out scheme.

To conclude the section of this article that deals with the Yugoslav legacy, it should be stated that the main advantage of the Yugoslav model was in the way the various coalitions among the key actors in the political economy were aligned. While avoiding the state socialist (Stalinist) coalition of management and politicians against workers, the Yugoslav system was organized so as to allow the formation of an insider (micro-corporatist) coalition of workers and management directed against politicians. In times of exceptional crisis, this coalition gave way to the grand coalition of workers and politicians directed against management. This third scenario was possible thanks to the fact that the Yugoslav elite could not rule by coercion and crush strikes with brute force, but had to use softer forms of rule instead. Self-management is thus important primarily for its political consequences; its importance as a system which could promote a participatory company is secondary. The possible realignment of these coalitions was one of the main issues of the 1990s.

Explaining the Diverging Paths of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia

Despite sharing a common legacy, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia diverged significantly after independence. In Slovenia, a robust and strongly institutionalized model has emerged. In it, the trade unions have an important say, both in national tripartite negotiation and through a well-developed and centralized system of collective bargaining.² Workers were also favoured in the privatization process through insider buy-outs, which was the most common method of privatization inside companies, especially those of a labour-intensive character. This meant that the insider coalition of workers and managers has managed to survive (Stanojević, 2002, 2003b). Trade unions enjoy considerable public support, more so than in Croatia or Serbia.³

In Croatia, a system emerged which was more conflictual and weakly institutionalized (Kokanović, 2001; Zakošek, 1996). Only very recently has the social atmosphere calmed enough to allow for a more focused attempt at building tripartism and concertation. Unlike in Slovenia, the system of collective bargaining is decentralized and most collective agreements are signed at the company level. Because of its many conflicts with the semi-democratic government, the trade union movement has suffered from fragmentation, which has weakened it (Bahtijari, 2001). Regarding privatization, workers were disadvantaged as the government decided to pursue a strategy of public auctions and direct deals, and so could hand-pick future owners. A feature of Croatian privatization was the replacement of old managers with new, politically preferred ones. This broke up the old coalition of workers and managers (Franičević, 1999). Exactly how many companies suffered this fate is very difficult to say, but it appears to be a substantial part of the economy (Pusić, 1992). Social ownership was wiped out with a legislative strike of the pen.

Serbia provides the most mind-boggling story. After the authoritarian episode of the 1990s, the political system changed fundamentally after 2000. Various 'perverse' characteristics of the labour relations systems under Milošević were replaced with more easily recognizable forms. Systematic data and information are scarce, but it seems safe to say that out of the three it has made the least progress in establishing collective bargaining and tripartism (Arandarenko and Stojiljković, 2006; Upchurch, 2006b). Little privatization took place during the 1990s, but even so Milošević managed to place his cronies in management positions. Privatization took off after 2000 and is following a strategy similar to the Croatian one, namely direct deals and tenders, with insider buy-outs being more rare. Social ownership formally exists but has become irrelevant, as the government controls the choice of future owners and mostly acts as it sees fit. The key characteristics of the different systems are presented schematically in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Basic Information on Labour Relations Systems in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia

	Union density	Bargaining coverage	Dominant bargaining level	Strikes and industrial action	Tripartism	Social pacts
Slovenia	37%	90–100%	National, but sectoral and company levels developed as well	Very high in early 1990s; general strike 1992; almost negligible now	Economic and social council since 1994	Four from 1994 to 2003
Croatia	35–40%	50–60%	Company, sectoral almost entirely absent	No data; but very high in 1990; interrupted by war; general strike in 1993; resurgence in late 1990s; since then in decline	Attempts throughout the 1990s; legal foundation for Economic and Social council in 1996; started real work only after 2001; recent improvements	One in 2001
Serbia	40%	No data	Company as well as sectoral (but data is unreliable)	No data; general strike in 1991; rare during the 1990s; high in early 2000s; since then in decline	Perverse tripartism throughout the 1990s; Socio-Economic Council established in 2001; re-established in 2004; recent improvements	None so far

Critical Junctures, Political Elites and Trade Unions

What accounts for the differences between the three cases? Like Stanojević (2003a, 2003b), I argue that we need to focus on what happened in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This period should be seen as a critical juncture, a highly volatile and dynamic period in which the future was relatively open. This time period, from approximately 1988 to 1992, should be seen as a 'major watershed in political life' which has had the tendency to 'establish certain directions of change and foreclose others in a way that shapes politics in years to come' (Collier and Collier, 1991: 27). It is also a period which privileges the input of agency over that of structure.⁴

In my view, the main characteristic of a critical juncture such as the break-up of Yugoslavia is the presence of extreme uncertainty. A condition of uncertainty is one in which actors find it very hard to formulate what is probable, and the solutions which they have normally used are no longer applicable. Actors cannot pinpoint their own interests and those of others. They try to make sense of the situation by using the ideational interpretations that are available and so work to reduce uncertainty (Blyth, 2002; Bunce and Csanádi, 1993).

All these features apply to Yugoslavia in the late 1980s. The institutional framework of the federation was not working; the decade-long economic downturn and high debt problem seemed irresolvable; international lenders were insisting on reform; and finally, workers were striking in ever increasing numbers, adding perhaps decisively to the crisis of ungovernability.

The primary goal of any political elite which finds itself in such circumstances is to find a way to reduce uncertainty and to retain or win positions of power. It can be argued that among all the republics, the biggest burden was on Serbia and its leadership. Serbia had the worst economic situation among the politically relevant republics, faced the explosive problem of Kosovo, had the most interest in keeping the country together by all means necessary and the strongest commitment to preserving some kind of socialism. In responding to the situation of extreme uncertainty, Slobodan Milošević made use of the available ideas and interpretations such as nationalism, and utilized these to make sense of the chaotic situation. By re-interpreting the dichotomy between exploiter and exploited in nationalist terms, he pushed the entire political situation closer to war. Nothing reduces uncertainty like war. By locating an external enemy and homogenizing any internal discontent around the ethnic cause, the societal situation was radically simplified. The extreme uncertainty of 1989 and 1990 required an equally extreme 'solution'. The cure, however, was even worse than the illness. Once war began the nationalist tendencies of the elites in Serbia and Croatia came

into full play. The nation naturally came before any other demand, including the demands of workers.

However, since Slovenia was isolated from this war, nationalism there quickly lost importance. The first free and competitive elections in 1990 brought to power a right-wing nationalist coalition, but the elections of 1992 reversed this by bringing in a coalition government headed by the LDS (*Liberalna demokracija Slovenije*/Liberal Democrats of Slovenia). This party then proceeded to shape Slovene politics for more than a decade. LDS was mostly a pragmatic centrist party and as such it was willing to offer cooperation to the unions and accommodate workers' interests. One of their first decisions was to pursue a decentralized privatization policy. This privatization model turned striking workers into owners and so had a clear anti-strike effect (Stanojević, 2003b).

In Croatia, power was won by the HDZ (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*/Croatian Democratic Union) and its charismatic leader Franjo Tuđman. The orientation of HDZ was clearly nationalist and populist, and its attitude to the unions hostile (Zakošek, 1996). It rode the wave of war-induced patriotic feeling and nationalism with great skill. It also used these sentiments to sideline demands coming from the labour movement. HDZ won power in 1990 and retained it until 2000. In this decade of single-party government, the HDZ repeatedly confronted the unions, making the relationship with them difficult and strained. It was not only that the unions needed to obtain concessions regarding wage and policy issues from an unaccommodating government, it was also that the government had a strong authoritarian bent. The 1990s were thus filled with conflicts which sometimes spilled over into broad demands for democratization. In the context of a weak opposition and a marginalized parliament it was the unions that took over much of the role of the political opposition.⁵

In Serbia during the late 1980s, Milošević took over the Serbian League of Communists. After 1990 he turned it into SPS (*Socijalistička partija Srbije*/Socialist Party of Serbia), his main vehicle of authoritarian political rule. Unlike Slovenia and Croatia where the old trade union confederation reformed and struck an independent course, in Serbia Milošević was able to take control of it. The main trade union SSS (*Savez sindikata Srbije*/Confederation of Trade Unions of Serbia) was thus not able to provide the kind of leadership offered by the ZSSS (*Zveza svobodnih sindikatov Slovenije*/Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia) or SSSH (*Savez samostalnih sindikata Hrvatske*/Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia). Instead, it supported the wars and maintained the traditional role of trade union as transmission belt. The SSS and SPS cooperated, but this was purely formalistic and did not produce any real gains for workers. The smaller but independent trade union confederation *UGS Nezavisnost* tried to take the leading role, but was objectively handicapped by a much smaller membership base.⁶ The three scenarios are

summarized in Table 2. Effective trade union influence in Slovenia was possible thanks to the combination of the two conditions indicated: the absence of militant nationalism as legitimation for the political elites, and the political independence of the main union confederation.

It should be noted that the input of agency during the critical juncture is important on the side of labour, not just on the side of the politicians. In securing the autonomy of the main trade union from political tutelage, the contributions of Dušan Semolič in Slovenia and Dragutin Lesar in Croatia especially stand out. The relatively beneficial legacy of self-management does not automatically produce competent and able trade unions. Translating the significant company-level discontent of workers as manifested in the strikes of the late 1980s into a capable trade union organization with national confederations as autonomous and powerful political players was no easy task. The main product of the self-management legacy should have been just that: a strong autonomous trade union movement built around the main confederation. Arguably, the reform of the main confederation was accomplished more successfully in Slovenia than in Croatia. While Semolič continues to this day as leader of the labour movement, Lesar had to leave union work in 1995.⁷

After 2000, both the Croatian and Serbian trade unions hoped that the time had finally come to win real victories for labour. But by then both countries were treated as latecomers to reform by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Upchurch, 2006a). These actors filled the political space with ready-made solutions, leaving very little for the new centre-left and democratic governments to negotiate with the trade unions. The biggest conflicts were fought between the unions and the government on the issue of

TABLE 2. Government–Trade Union Interaction After Critical Juncture

	Has nationalism become exhausted as the main legitimation for political elites?	
	Yes	No
Is the main trade union confederation autonomous and strong?	Yes	Slovenia Croatia
	No	Serbia

labour market reform, making it yet again impossible for these countries to replicate something similar to the Slovene path. Although the new governments wished to bring the unions on board, the necessity of rejoining the international community meant that the World Bank and IMF would shape policy priorities. In resisting foreign advice, Croatian and Serbian politicians had nothing like the ideas of 'gradualism' which played this role in Slovenia.

How Can We Organize the Cases?

What typology can be offered to organize the cases involved? Is the simple dichotomy of strong versus weak labour useful? In this third and final section of my article I present a typology for analysing the position of the labour movement, especially its standing in the national politics of a country. This typology is a matrix organized along two dimensions, producing four possible patterns. These are summarized in Table 3, which presents a logic similar to that of Table 2.

This typology offers a more nuanced approach and a more useful comparative framework. I suggest that we need to differentiate between the dimensions of societal and political power. Here I apply the distinction between associational and structural power which was originally used in a different context (Silver, 2003; Wright, 2000). A suggestion has been

TABLE 3. Four Patterns of Labour Movement Influence

		<i>Dimension of political power</i>	
		Are unions involved in political decision-making?	
		Yes	No
<i>Dimension of societal power</i>	Yes	<i>Pattern 1: Inclusive:</i>	<i>Pattern 2: Conflictual</i>
Are unions capable of membership mobilization and public protest?		Slovenia (1992–2004)	Slovenia (1990–2) Croatia (1990–2003) Serbia (1990–2) Serbia (2000–03)
	No	<i>Pattern 3: Junior Partner</i>	<i>Pattern 4: Irrelevant</i>
			Serbia (1990s)

made by Upchurch (2006a) that such a distinction may be useful for analysing the former Yugoslav republics, since it seems that in many of these countries the unions have associational but not structural power.

I suggest that we should speak of societal (instead of associational) and political (instead of structural) power. These are broadly regarded as analogous. Societal power rests on such capacities as high trade union density (representativeness), the ability to organize public protest or the ability to sway public opinion. Political power rests on the ability to influence top-level decision-making, through corporatist institutions, centralized bargaining and the practice of social pacts.

Such an analytical distinction is hinted at in Kokanović's comment, noted earlier, that Croatian labour is simultaneously strong and weak. I have tried here to flesh out what this actually means. It can be argued that the SSSH was strong in that it had societal power but was weak because it could be excluded from access to political power.

The first of the four patterns is the 'inclusive pattern'. Here, unions are capable and strong organizations on both dimensions. They wield considerable influence and can apply political pressure because their public image is favourable and their ability to sway the public is strong. Often these capacities reflect the fact that their membership is high, but it is also possible that unions with fewer members may enjoy a recognized position as public representatives of the employed and thus possess the ability to apply pressure through the public sphere.

The second pattern is 'conflictual'. Here, unions see themselves as capable actors and possess influence in the societal sphere. However, their attempts to influence political decisions are met with resistance and hostility. As a consequence, conflicts ensue. This is a pattern in which there is a mismatch between the political influence that unions – and the public – think they ought to possess, and what they do get from politics.

The third case I call the 'junior partner pattern'. Here, unions are not really significant actors. Membership is weak and confidence among the public low. If labour is included in the decision-making process it is only thanks to the goodwill of a political party; should this party change its policy or lose office, the unions would be dropped and with no real consequences. Such unions would always be in danger of becoming irrelevant. The cases under consideration in this article do not fall within this rubric, but it is possible to imagine such cases.

The 'irrelevant pattern' is the fourth possibility. Here, unions do not have the capacity to mobilize for action, and no one asks their opinion. They are of very little consequence.

Slovenia can be placed in the 'inclusive' category for the majority of its post-independence history. In the initial period between 1990 and 1992 there was considerable hostility between the right-wing government and the labour movement, with conflicts including a large protest over the

government's proposed privatization law in 1991 and a general strike led by ZSSS demanding the establishment of free collective bargaining in 1992. But during the long period of centre-left government which followed, unions were incorporated into the policy-making process. However, a change of government in 2004 brought a new phase of contestation, given the government's attempts to promote a neoliberal agenda.

Croatian trade unions have had to act within the conflictual pattern for most of the last decade and a half. Two exceptions were the signing of the 'War Agreement' in 1991 in which the unions promised to maintain social peace while fighting continued. The government promised to consult with the unions on key issues of reform, a promise which was never kept. This agreement was terminated soon after the most dramatic fighting ended. It was followed by conflicts between the government and the unions, such as the general strike organized by SSSH in 1993 to demand a system of collective bargaining. The second exception, possibly also placing Croatia briefly in the 'inclusive' pattern, was the social pact signed in 2001. This was however ended once the first proposals to deregulate the labour market were floated.

Serbian labour falls within the 'irrelevant' category for most of the 1990s. It is important to note that it was artificially immobilized, through political intervention. Before this occurred, workers engaged in a series of conflicts such as the general strike led by textile and metal workers in 1991. In 1992, following international sanctions, an agreement was signed with the government guaranteeing that no workers would lose their jobs despite the new situation of international isolation. However, employees were soon being sent on 'forced leave', and the economy spiralled downwards. This may suggest an odd version of the 'inclusive pattern'. But soon after this, the main trade union was brought firmly under political control, meaning that Milošević had pulled the rug from under the feet of the labour movement. After political circumstances had changed in 2000, SSS was able to commence an internal reform, and the labour movement revived. Evidence for this can be found in the rise of industrial action and social protest in 2000, and the subsequent role of labour in toppling Milošević (Marinković, 2003; Upchurch, 2006b). Since the unions formulated opposition to and led protest against neoliberal reform after 2000, Serbia is best placed in the 'conflictual' category for this period.

It is important to note that while some patterns which emerge from the critical juncture are stable, others are not. In the latter case a dynamic forms which includes inherent contradictions and prevents the emergence of stable patterns (Collier and Collier, 1991). This holds for the 'junior partner' and 'conflictual' patterns. These are unstable in the sense that a country cannot stay in either category indefinitely without shifting to either the 'inclusive' or the 'irrelevant' patterns. This would mean that

the typology offered here is a special case of the more general strong labour–weak labour dichotomy.

The question that naturally presents itself now is where the Croatian and Serbian cases are heading after political change in 2003 and the clashes with a liberally inclined government agenda. The inclusive option, is the one in which unions would finally be allowed to participate in the political decisions which are of concern to them. In the case of Croatia, there is some encouraging evidence to suggest such a shift, while in the case of Serbia somewhat less. However, before judgment is passed on this issue, it is appropriate to state that the transition so far has strained and scarred the labour movements. In both countries there is a high degree of inter-union conflict and competition, as well as an organizational crisis within the largest confederation, SSSH in Croatia and the reformed SSSS in Serbia. Serbia is additionally burdened by still acute symbolic issues, of which the future of Kosovo looms especially high (Arandarenko and Stojiljković, 2006). More importantly, the mobilizing power of Serbian unions seems to have declined. As yet, the clearest signs of a shift to the ‘inclusive’ pattern, namely the development of a robust collective bargaining and social pacting system, have not been observed in either Croatia or Serbia. The opportunity to do so has now arrived in Croatia and will put to test the trade unions’ societal strength.

The Slovene path seems secure, the neoliberal pressures of the right-wing government which took power in 2004 notwithstanding. Although it is still possible for both Croatia and Serbia to join Slovenia on this path, the fact that they would do so more than 15 years later has serious implications. Both countries would return from this detour with substantial nationalist baggage. This applies especially for Serbia, as workers have been tainted by their connection to the Milošević regime and the dangerous possibility of channelling worker discontent in chauvinistic ways is still a distinct reality.

The implication of the analytical approach developed in this article is that the opportunity to strike a clear pro-labour path is provided only during critical junctures while certain options are simply not available any more. For instance, the option of genuinely favouring workers during the privatization process, as practised in the Slovene case, is no longer available to Serbia and Croatia. This means that the gains won by labour will be increasingly smaller as the detour continues. The implication of such a theory is that Croatian workers will benefit less than the Slovene, and Serbian workers even less than the Croatian.

Concluding Remarks

Although this article has focused on only three former Yugoslav republics, it is legitimate to ask whether this line of thinking has implications

for other CEE countries. There are obstacles to comparison because of the somewhat different historical legacy of Yugoslavia and the idiosyncratic nature of politics during the 1990s (almost social democratic and corporatist in Slovenia, authoritarianism of varying intensity in Croatia and Serbia). These, however, are not insurmountable.

Here I suggest two conclusions. First, a more general analysis of the various CEE countries in terms of the typology outlined earlier is possible. Would the Baltic countries fall under the 'irrelevant' pattern? Would Hungarian unions during the rule of the ex-communist MSZP fall within the 'junior partner' category?

Second, another possible way of extending the argument of this article to other cases would be to re-examine the political events of the early 1990s to see whether these have had the tendency to establish resilient patterns of government–trade union interaction.⁸ How have critical junctures constrained politics in the Czech Republic or Poland, for instance? How important were issues of timing in the Slovak case, where the end of the isolationist interlude under Vladimír Mečiar was followed by an emergency effort to catch up and thus to neoliberal reform? These are just some of the questions that come to mind.

Finally, there is a substantial potential follow-up agenda for the former Yugoslav countries. We need to know more about the forms of labour action in Croatia and Serbia. We also need to know more about specific developments during the early years of transition. Other former republics such as Bosnia-Herzegovina or Macedonia have been entirely ignored in this article. There is a wealth of topics still under-researched which may provide material for new and useful theories.

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NOTES

- 1 At the very least, caution should be used before the Yugoslav companies are labelled participative, since there seems to be very little participation in companies in the successor countries. Anecdotal evidence as well as more reliable data suggest this for all of the countries under consideration here, including Slovenia (Stanojević, 2002). While formal bodies of worker representation moulded after the German codetermination model exist in Slovenia and Croatia, these have not been used so far for genuine worker involvement with company decisions. However, this does not mean that relations between workers and management are not frequently cooperative

- in the sense that they work hard together on their main aim of increased productivity and market survival.
- 2 In Slovenia (as in Austria) the Chamber of Commerce and Industry acts as representative of the employers, and until a change in the law adopted in 2006 it enjoyed mandatory membership for all companies. This results in a very high rate of collective bargaining coverage.
 - 3 According to research conducted by the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana (Živa Broder, personal communication), the Faculty of Political Sciences in Zagreb (Goran Cular, personal communication), and information given in Arandarenko and Stojiljković (2006).
 - 4 Of course, lengthening the temporal perspective may turn what seems initially like the input of agency into the constraint of structure. However, a cut-off point needs to be introduced somewhere, as the danger of continuously lengthening the period under observation means introducing an infinitely receding causal starting point. This is especially problematic when one deals with Yugoslavia: the temptation to explain contemporary differences in terms of the legacies of the 19th century (or even a few centuries further back), or by arguments about national character, is especially strong.
 - 5 While the 1990s were in general quite turbulent, the later years were more so. By the end of the decade workers' patience had run out and they formed 'headquarters for the defence of companies' which tried to resist privatization abuses. These also had the more important role of showcasing the wide discontent with the ruling HDZ. Many of these workers had also fought in the war, making for a clear link between the war and the (somewhat lagged) labour unrest. Similar unorthodox forms of industrial action appeared in Serbia, with 'crisis headquarters' organized in companies before and during the anti-Milošević revolution.
 - 6 The contribution of autonomous unions in Croatia and Serbia to the (re)democratization of these countries during the 1990s has not yet been sufficiently acknowledged. They were consistently among the most pro-democratic actors, often more active in pushing for political change than the various opposition political parties.
 - 7 Lesar is now a parliamentary representative of the centre-left Croatian People's Party (HNS). Semolič's career moved in the opposite direction as he was briefly a member of parliament, elected in 1990 for one of the smaller social-democratic parties, before becoming president of ZSSS in 1991. Curiously, he was elected to the post of ZSSS president without even being a member of the union.
 - 8 Avdagić (2005) follows a similar line of argumentation in her comparison of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic.

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