Does Each Regime Get the Critical Juncture it Deserves?
Yugoslavia in 1948 and 1988

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Abstract

A popular saying in the countries of the former Yugoslavia is that people get the leaders they deserve. This paper suggests a re-statement of this rather fatalistic folk wisdom: each regime gets the critical juncture it deserves. My goal is to assess if the social science version is more plausible. The paper compares Yugoslavia's two critical junctures: 1948, when the country broke with Stalin and 1988, when a wave of worker and nationalist protest peaked. A key dilemma can be located in the critical junctures that semi-authoritarian regimes face. It does not seem possible to blend elite learning and elite ideological adjustment (as in 1948) with popular participation and mobilization from below (as in 1988). What promotes one closes off the other. Regimes like socialist Yugoslavia, which see themselves as superior to their neighbors, may feel they are above this dilemma. This is precisely what makes it more likely that they will fall prey to it. This also means that not every regime gets the critical juncture it "deserves." More advanced, open and liberalized regimes may receive "harder" critical junctures, those that are more difficult to control and that lead to a spiral of increasing uncertainty.

Introduction

There is a common saying in the countries of the former Yugoslavia according to which people always get the rulers they deserve. This paper suggest a re-statement of this rather fatalistic folk wisdom: each regime gets the critical juncture it deserves. My goal is to assess if the social science version is more plausible.

The analysis of critical junctures is of relevance generally, but it is especially important for the countries of Eastern Europe. The twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall is a chance to look back to that turbulent period, the most recent big critical juncture for the region. Yet for all its importance as *annus mirabilis*, 1989 is just one among several critical junctures that the countries of Eastern Europe have passed through in the past century or so. Indeed, it can be said that, instead of developing along relatively smooth trajectories, Eastern Europe has advanced in fits and, as Alexander Gerschenkron put it, "spurts."[1] A full understanding of the political history of the region needs to take such critical junctures into serious consideration. More concretely, we need to understand how they come about, what internal political dynamics characterize them and how we can avoid the potentially disastrous outcomes that critical junctures can produce.

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1   Here, I refer to Gerschenkron's (1977) work on the Austro-Hungarian empire in which he writes that what economic development occurred in the country happened in spasmodic "spurts." See also Berend (1986).

In approaching these questions, this paper looks closely at one East European country – Yugoslavia – and at two of its critical junctures – 1948 and 1988. The year 1948 is shorthand for the Yugoslav break with Stalin, while 1988 marks the high tide of popular mobilization that eventually led to the end of socialism and the break-up of the country. In 1948 the country faced international isolation and the distinct possibility of Soviet invasion while in 1988 a similar doubt hung over the country's continuing existence, due to domestic political conflicts.

To summarize the main points at the outset, this paper locates a key dilemma in the critical junctures that semi-authoritarian regimes face as they try to move forward in a positive direction. It does not seem possible to blend elite learning and elite ideological adjustment (as in 1948) with popular participation and mobilization from below (as in 1988). Both of these characteristics may be seen as desirable – as something that a regime should strive for – but are ultimately incompatible. Elite learning is facilitated if politicians are protected from popular pressures. State repression can achieve this, as the Yugoslav secret police demonstrated in the late 1940s and early 1950s. If we would like to introduce popular voice to the critical juncture, so that citizens have some say over the policies by which they are governed, the conditions for elite learning crumble, as in Yugoslavia in the late 1980s.

Comparative critical junctures

The goal of this paper is to contribute to the literature on comparative critical junctures.[2] This literature has done much to sensitize us to the importance of critical junctures for the subsequent development of countries. But it has not given us insights into what occurs *within* critical junctures.[3]

Since the concept of "critical junctures" can be used in many, more or less rigorous ways, it is important to be clear on the usage adopted in this paper. A critical juncture is here seen as a period in which a regime is gripped by an intense crisis of political legitimacy, where traditional political practices no longer function, where fundamental issues regarding the construction and existence of the polity are at stake, and after which important changes usually follow. The analytical task is to learn more about how these short but very consequential periods of time work: whether there is any structure to such "unsettled times,"[4] any method to such "moments of madness."[5]

Since critical junctures are so fluid, at least a few firm footholds are required. This paper proposes

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2   The work which launched the concept of critical junctures is the book by Collier and Collier (1991). On critical junctures in general see Pierson (2004) and Capoccia and Kelemen (2007).
3   An enlightening exception to this is Beissinger's (2002) book.
4   Swidler (1986).
5   Zolberg (1972).

that the presence or absence of two factors be analyzed: elite learning and popular mobilization. It is thus possible to imagine a typology of critical junctures in which one, both or neither of these elements are present. Political elites in ambitious regimes may think that they can balance both and thus get themselves into a lot of trouble. The Yugoslav regime in the 1980s is a good example of the pitfalls of such beliefs. Due to their experiments in workers' self-management, their non-aligned foreign policy, and general decentralization and liberalization, Yugoslavia saw itself as superior to the rigid state-socialist systems of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Due to this real or imagined superiority, Yugoslavia's critical juncture would turn out to be more complicated than those in other East European countries. In Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, challengers from society could plausibly blame their situation on a foreign invader (Soviet Union) and their grotesque domestic cronies. As such, the conflictual situation was simplified in a way that made extrication from socialism easier: there was a clear enemy and toppling it was the goal. Just as the story was one of the "state against society"[6] in the crackdowns of 1956 (Hungary), 1968 (Czechoslovakia) and 1981 (Poland), the fall of communism could be interpreted as society returning the favor.

In Yugoslavia, the Party was not an outright enemy. More accurately, there were some "good guys" in power and the cleavages between them and the "bad guys" were much less clear. Furthermore, socialism itself was not unpopular. Because of the indigenous resistance effort in World War II and the positive moves of the regime following the break with Stalin, the Yugoslav regime had an additional reservoir of legitimacy. As Bunce has argued, "being popular was in fact a *problem* for the Yugoslav Communists."[7] Or rather, it was a problem for the extrication of the country from the socialist regime once the regime had exhausted its positive and progressive impulses.

In this sense, Yugoslavia's critical juncture has more in common with the Soviet Union's critical juncture. This is rather ironic since in most of its post-war history the regime had defined itself in opposition to the Soviet Union. But because both countries had indigenous revolutions, the similarities may outweigh the differences. Indeed, the Soviet Union's terminal crisis was rather similar in its key elements: the presence of good guys in power (Gorbachev), popular mobilization of both a labor and nationalist character, followed by the dissolution of the state, nationalist violence and a series of wars.[8] Just as in Yugoslavia, elites did not manage to find a joint solution to the crisis and in the end the country broke apart.[9]

The other main foothold inside the turbulent events of a critical juncture can be found by recognizing the trend of rising uncertainty that is usually characteristic of such periods in time.

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6   Ekiert (1996).
7   Bunce (1997: 347).
8   See Beissinger (2002).
9   China, up until Tienanmen, shows many similarities to Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union.

The danger in critical junctures is that uncertainty may increase too much, to levels which actors may not be able to handle. They may thus be drawn towards the option of "clubbing" it, as Frank Knight aptly describes it, so as to simplify the world around them.[10] This was the danger that was averted in 1948 (after some initial clubbing) but not in 1988.

Such uncertainty is tackled by political innovators that step into the fluid situation and offer various solutions to the crisis situation. In the language of Machiavelli, they use their *virtù* to impose form on the matter of *fortuna*.[11] The difficulty is that, in the process of attacking the contingencies that arise inside a critical juncture, such political innovators inevitably create more uncertainty. When they engage the sources of uncertainty that arise in the political environment – for example social protests – they will further energize and embolden them. This is, roughly speaking, a summary of Yugoslav politics in the late 1980s: a spiral of increasing uncertainty.

The next section deals with the critical juncture of 1948 and the one after that with the critical juncture of 1988. The decision to treat only two episodes means that a substantial part of the country's history is glossed over. Even here, it may be possible to locate a number of smaller critical junctures, for example 1965 (the year of a big economic reform), 1968 (student protests), 1971 (uprising in Croatia), 1981 (uprising in Kosovo). The years 1948 and 1988 were chosen because they are the "most critical" of these critical junctures.[12]

The critical juncture of 1948

The Yugoslav communists ended World War II as victors. They had liberated the country thanks to an indigenous resistance movement and without the help of the Red Army. However, at the time they were perhaps the most rigid followers of Stalin and the Soviet model. Immediately after the war, nobody even thought of the possibility that Yugoslavia should follow its own vision of socialism.

The Yugoslav communists set about building a typical Stalinist system. Indeed, they did so with unmatched vigor. They established a command economy just like the Soviets, initiated the collectivization of agriculture, and suppressed all political opposition. Yugoslavia went ahead with its first five year plan before any other East European country. Unlike Czechoslovakia or Poland, which wanted to accept Marshall plan aid before the Soviet Union stopped them, Yugoslavia rejected the Marshall plan for ideological reasons. What more, Yugoslavia signed a contract with the Soviet Union regarding the joint construction of key strategic industries. They even hinted that, ultimately, Yugoslavia was to join the USSR as another federal unit. In the words

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10 Knight (2006 [1921]: 347).

11 On Machiavelli as a theorist of "regime change" and "delegitimized politics" see Schmitter (2007: 325) and Pocock (1975: 159-166).

12 This only underwrites the point of Andrew Abbot that each path or trajectory between two turning points can always be further partitioned by locating smaller turning points. The flipside of this is that in each turning point various stages and trajectories can be located, which demonstrates the fractal character of the phenomenon (Abbott 1997).

of Edvard Kardelj, one of Tito's right-hand people, the Yugoslavs:

"would like the Soviet Union to regard them, not as representatives of another country, capable of solving questions independently, but as representatives of one of the future Soviet Republics, and the CPY[Communist Party of Yugoslavia] as part of the All-Union Communist Party, that is, that our relations should be based on the prospect of Yugoslavia becoming part of the USSR."[13]

However, during the course of the late 1940s, Yugoslav leaders grew increasingly dissatisfied with the way Moscow was treating them. From unflinching devotion to the USSR, they switched, slowly and painfully at first, to questioning of the older revolutionary brother, and then towards open conflict. Conflict arose over issues like the alliance between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, over Tito's approach to Trieste, over the infiltration of Russian spies into the Yugoslav army and secret service, over the negotiation of joint companies, and over the cancellation by the Russians of the Soviet-Yugoslav trade agreement on which Yugoslavia's five year plan depended. When the resolution of the Cominform damned Yugoslavia to isolation from the communist world, Yugoslavia entered a period of high uncertainty. A quote form the political memoirs of the Croatian historian Dušan Bilandžić can illustrate this sense of confusion:

"Evening of June 28th 1948. I'm listening to the speaker of Radio Belgrade who read the text of the Cominform resolution and the response of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Around midnight, my commandant, the Serbian Đuro Zrnić storms into my apartment and says: 'Did you listen to the radio? I think, commissar, that it was terrorists and provocateurs that took over the radio station and said that we had a fight with the Russians, which is just impossible. Come on, you are the political commissar. Call the political headquarters of the Yugoslav People's Army and find out the truth.' Oh, Đuro, it's true. I was at three meetings in two months, May and June, when they read us the letters of Tito and Stalin, which you did not know. The situation is dramatic."[14]

The situation was indeed dramatic. In 1948, the Soviet Union had seven divisions on the Yugoslav border. In that year and the following, a total of 896 border incidents took place.[15] The immediate response of the Yugoslav communists to their eviction from the communist bloc was to become even more rigid in the orthodoxy of their communist policies, to become, as Rusinow has put it, "*plus Staliniste que Stalin.*"[16]

But shortly afterwards they shifted course. They backed away from central planning of the economy and introduced the market. They introduced workers' councils. They abandoned previous efforts to collectivize agriculture. They loosened the political control they held on people's private lives, public discussion, and freedom of speech. In the 1960s they went further to undertake a

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13 Quoted in Ulam (1952: 128-129).
14 Bilandžić (2006: 23)
15 Seroka and Smiljković (1986: 7).
16 Rusinow (1977: 34).

reform, *de facto* a dismantling, of the secret service apparatus. The Party was reformed and decentralized. An industrial economy emerged, which became open to world competition and yet managed to export, in ever-increasing rates, to West European markets.

Yugoslavia also recorded other developmental results. The country went from an illiterate majority in 1938 to a 15 percent illiteracy rate in the mid 1970s. Life expectancy jumped from 46 years in 1938 to 68 years in 1972. In 1938, Yugoslavia had one radio set per 68 people (last in Europe) and in 1973 it had one radio set per two people, and one TV set per seven people. Seven out of ten families had electric stoves instead of wood burning ones.[17] Yugoslav citizens, unlike their East European neighbors, enjoyed the freedom to travel and often had the means to do so as well. Table 1 presents some data on changes in personal consumption patterns.

If Yugoslavia diverged in a positive way from the rest of the communist bloc it is due to the fact that it went through the additional critical juncture of 1948. The country managed to handle this episode – after the initial crisis of ideological faith and its accompanying increase in repression – in a positive way. They abandoned the disastrous policies of high Stalinism which they were previously implementing with vigor. It may very well be that, given the disastrous character of Stalinist policies, any shift away from Soviet practices would have produced beneficial results.

It may also be true that Yugoslav success would not have been possible without the substantial amounts of aid handed out by the US government. In the roughly three decades after World War II the US gave Yugoslavia more than 3,5 billion US dollars in military and economic aid.[18] These amounts go above and beyond what any West European country received in Marshall plan aid. This help was not given to the Yugoslavs to "build socialism", but only, in the phrase of Harry Truman, "to keep Tito afloat." If Tito and his advisers were quite lucky, they were also quite shrewd, and their skill in navigating Cold War divides, playing one side off against the other, and profiting in very palpable terms needs to be acknowledged.

Elite learning in the late 1940s and early 1950s

The decisions that put the new system in place were the difficult calls made by Tito and his inner circle at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. The way this re-orientation took place is itself of considerable interest. When the first signs of conflict with the Soviets arose, Tito and his closest aides started looking for answers. Given their ideological indoctrination, the only logical place that they could look for clues on what to do were the classics of Marxism.

At first they re-read Lenin's "State and Revolution", but then turned to Engels' "Anti-Dühring" and Marx' "Civil War in France" as well. In Marx, Tito's right-hand men found the idea of a "free association of producers" what they were to call workers' self-management. The key group,

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17 Doder (1978: 65, 197).
18 Doder (1978: xii).

consisting of Milovan Đilas, Edvard Kardelj, Boris Kidrič, Vladimir Bakarić and Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo bounced ideas off each other. Supposedly, the group's chief ideologue and intellectual Đilas, explained the idea to Kardelj and Kidrič as they were parked in a car outside his house. They then pitched the idea of self-management to Tito, who reluctantly accepted. Tito is perhaps an exception among communist leaders in that he had no intellectual ambitions whatsoever and no need to be acknowledged as an intellectual. He left that to his associates, Đilas at first, and then Kardelj, after Đilas' fall from power. Tito was skeptical about the idea of self-management until they reminded him of the war-time slogan "Factories to the workers!" With that, he accepted.[19]

Subsequent breaks with Stalinist orthodoxy, which were held so dear for so long, were made in similar fashion: through a discussion of men who were equals at the time, who were comrades in arms during the war, and now again in their showdown with the Soviet Union. They first accepted the market as superior to central planning. Boris Kidrič, formerly in charge of the industrial planning apparatus now argued the necessity of accepting the market "if we do not wish, by opposing objective economic laws of a given period, to ruin quality, assortment etc." Planning would still exist, but "only in the sense of general and defining proportions."[20] Vladimir Bakarić argued similarly that "it is true that other socialist countries deny the market, which does not mean that they do not have it. But because they deny it, they are unable to solve many problems."[21] Bakarić was instrumental in the subsequent abandonment of the collectivization of agriculture and the shift towards a mixed system with considerable room for private ownership of smaller plots of land.

All members of the high elite were in the middle of having their world views altered. Đilas traveled to America to visit the auto industry in Detroit and came back a changed man. Tito gave interviews to American magazines *Life* and *Time* and more or less hailed America as a beacon of liberty. Even Aleksandar Ranković, then the feared chief of the security apparatus which was to be dismantled in the 1960s, was sent to the US so as better to acquaint himself with the Western way of life.[22] Although Ranković himself had no intellectual pretensions and very limited faculties in such areas, he was quite important in the ideological shift that had to be disseminated downwards to ordinary rank and file communists. As Đilas put it, Ranković was responsible for "the twisting of arms", and Đilas for "the twisting of brains."[23]

The following episode throws more light on how the learning process made way among the top echelon of Yugoslav communists. The topic has to do with investment funds, which were to give credits to firms, instead of grants. The discussion is between Kidrič and Vukmanović-Tempo:

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19 Rusinow (1977: 51).
20 Kidrič (1979: 80-81).
21 Quoted in Sekulić (1987: 116).
22 Jakovina (2003: 363).
23 Doder (1978: 98).

"Kidrič immediately responded: 'That would be returning to capitalism!' After a heated discussion Vukmanović spent a sleepless night reconsidering. He eventually decided that Kidrič had been right and telephoned him in the morning to say so, only to discover that Kidrič had decided that Vukmanović was right: 'But no!', Kidrič said, 'I too spent the night worrying, It doesn't at all mean a return to capitalism. On the contrary, we must accept the principle of credits for investments.'"[24]

When Đilas published the series of essays which eventually sent him to prison, he did not only attack the political establishment of which he was part. He also attacked it as if from outside, and without the prior consultation that had accompanied previous intellectual breakthroughs. He had broken the rules of how learning proceeded within the elite group. Consider the following paragraph written by Đilas in which he comments – not without a dose of disgust – on how decision-making proceeded within this select group. Yet, it is hard to imagine things being much different in more advanced and open democratic polities:

"At intimate suppers, on hunts, in conversations between two or three men, matters of state of the most vital importance are decided. Meetings of party forums, conferences of the government and assemblies, serve no purpose but to make declarations and put in an appearance. They are only convened to confirm what has previously been cooked up in intimate kitchens."[25]

Tito's political instincts told him that Đilas' suggestions would drive the country into potentially catastrophic instability and thus towards Soviet military intervention. He disposed of Đilas to protect his own position and the international position Yugoslavia achieved thus far. The fall of Đilas was not just a blow for the liberal faction within the Party, but it was also the end of the subtle process of social learning described above. Subsequent ideological shifts were orchestrated by Edvard Kardelj, arguably a more rigid intellect than Đilas, and the learning process in the elite was never reconstructed. After all, when one friend sends another to jail, the word "friend" no longer seems appropriate.[26]

Perhaps it is here that we come to the limit of what the Yugoslav system, flexible though it was, could possibly achieve. Đilas's insubordination was interpreted by Tito as a call for multi-party pluralism, and this is the one thing that Tito could never stomach. Even later, when the Russian threat receded, multi-party elections were never a seriously considered option. And that is a shame since, after about the late 1960s or early 1970s, the progressive steps taken by the Party started to be outweighed by regressive steps. If the current establishment was unable to solve the new set of problems, then the reasonable way to proceed would have been to offer the chance to govern to

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24 Rusinow (1977: 64).

25 Đilas (1957: 82-83)

26 At this point, the analogy drawn by Rusinow (1977: 343) between the Yugoslav politicians and the American "founding fathers" stops being useful. Nonetheless, it is understandable that Tito and the others were upset by Đilas' essays since he attacked not only the "new class" for its corruption but also the wives of politicians. This was hardly a smart move on Đilas' part. He was, however, always seen as an eccentric personality, more philosopher than politician.

somebody else. But this always was – and in the world's remaining communist regimes continues to be – beyond what communist elites can stomach.

To summarize, Yugoslavia's divergence from its East European neighbors and the launch of its "third way" between Western capitalism and Eastern etatism was possible because of the ideological re-thinking of the Yugoslav political elite unleashed after the critical juncture of 1948. This in turn, was possible because the regime's repressive capacities were employed for a short while in order to discourage potential challengers. After the initial episode of repression ended, the regime was able to move in the direction of market oriented reforms coupled with a general liberalization and decentralization of public life. From these changes, significant gains followed for the vast majority of the country's population.

The critical juncture of the late 1980s

In 1948, Yugoslav elites enjoyed the benefit of isolation from popular pressure. Communists had achieved a clear monopoly of coercion within the country and were not afraid to use it. In this climate, elites were given time to search for answers. In the critical juncture of the late 1980s popular mobilization would feature quite prominently. The use of force against society was not a serious option, thanks in large part to the breakthroughs of the previous generation. At the same time, there was no process of learning within the elite that would help guide the formulation of joint answers to the crisis situation.

How did the crisis come about? Although the economic crisis was real and deep, the political crisis was much more severe. Table 2 presents some data on key macroeconomic indicators. The core economic problem was high inflation. By the end of the decade it had reached three-digit and four-digit figures. Understandably, this had negative ramifications on the economy and society at large. Additionally, bottlenecks in supply led to shortages of some key consumer goods like coffee, detergent and gasoline. But on many other economic indicators, the country fared rather well. Almost all of the country's imports were covered by its exports. Yugoslavia was re-orienting much of its exports towards the more demanding West European markets and away from East European markets which operated on an administrative "clearing" basis. Foreign debt was high, but was in absolute terms five or six times smaller than the debt of Mexico or Brazil, countries that were most hit by the debt crisis. Besides, GDP was three times the size of the debt and Yugoslavia did not have any trouble in paying the credit installments.[27]

The crisis was really one of political legitimacy. It was additionally worsened by the fact that it was happening in the public's plain view. Every day, citizens could observe the incapacity of the elites to come to the solutions that the country needed. Oddly, politicians were endlessly talking about all the false steps they had made, which hardly served to inspire confidence in them. The

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27 Vjesnik, 11 April 1987.

federal government, which was in charge of most economic policy, was continuously making matters worse with its frequent intervening measures accompanied with numerous exceptions, *ad hoc* and unpredictable reversals followed by reinstatements which again came with new exceptions.

As intellectuals, analysts and the public at large discussed the crisis, a new genre of "crisisology" arose. Table 3 gives the number of books with the word "crisis" in the title published in the 1980s. The trend is clearly upward until the late 1980s followed by the disappearance of the genre after 1990. This can help us place boundaries around the critical juncture. In 1990, multi-party elections gave clear mandates and legitimacy to political actors. This helped to resolve much of the political crisis even as the economic crisis continued to get worse.

The economic model that the country had tried to implement since the constitutional changes of 1974 was failing. The federal government tried to spur on economic growth through a series of measures. The goal was to strengthen the disciplining effect of the market, promote technological innovation, cut domestic demand in order to promote exports, control wages and prices, and control the level of indebtedness. In these attempts the government was supported by the International Monetary Fund with whom Yugoslavia had a long history of cooperation.[28] Efforts at "stabilization" turned out to have destabilizing effects as the common denominator of all reform suggestions was cutting wages, or holding them fixed while prices moved up. Since an improved balance of payments was by itself hardly an inspiring goal, workers struck to avoid a reduction in their living standards.

Commentators and analysts had great difficulty in determining what exactly was going on in Yugoslavia. The rise of the strike movement was just an example, although a very important one, of the activation of Yugoslav society after the relative calm of the 1970s. For example, the Serbian sociologist Neca Jovanov, defined the following groups as "exploited and stripped of their political rights": the unemployed, Roma, pensioners, the non-Albanian population of Kosovo, peasants, students, citizens, scientists, those employed in culture and education, experts, artists, people who had left Yugoslavia and were employed as "guest-workers" in Western Europe, small private owners, journalists, and those in the free professions." It is hard to imagine a group he left out (perhaps workers!).[29] What could emerge out of this social ferment he could not say. Instead, he used the old adage about the "bureaucracy" being the common enemy of them all. It was not original, but it was the correct prognosis, as this was the enemy that Milošević attacked in his "anti-bureaucratic revolution."

Designating the "bureaucracy" as the enemy was a conventional thing to do in Yugoslavia. The exact meaning of the word "bureaucracy" is difficult to pin down, as the word was used so often

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28 Yugoslavia was one of the founders of the IMF after World War II (Woodward 1995: 82). Woodward's book provides an in-depth guide to the reform policies.
29 Jovanov (1989).

with many slight redefinitions and reinterpretations. Bureaucratization was a danger to socialism, that much was agreed upon. It was the natural consequence of all Stalinist central planning; it was Đilas's enemy; it was Tito's enemy too when he criticized the leaders of the various republics (he commented that they had collected the "cream" from "wage labor"). At last, it was the enemy of Milošević as he attacked the leaders of governments in Vojvodina, Montenegro and Kosovo. Usually, the term denoted an estrangement of the political establishment from the people, the unjust and unlawful accumulation of privilege and the complication of the decision-making process to such an extent that nothing at all is being done. Interpreted in this light, fighting the "bureaucracy" also means fighting for ordinary citizens and against corrupt political parasites. Perhaps it is then not so surprising that people felt strongly about "bureaucracies."

In the 1980s an atmosphere of unease developed in the country, what has been referred to by Ramet as "apocalypse culture."[30] Many were aware that the regime's capacity to develop the country was exhausted. One commentator noted that he heard many people talk of how a "new 1945" or a new "1948" was required.[31] Once it started happening, however, the new critical juncture took on a very different dynamic. The key difference was the presence of a wave of popular mobilization and the absence of a process of elite learning that would allow for the formulation of common answers to the crisis situation. During the 1980s, political elites communicated mostly through the media or at Party congresses, which were themselves essentially large media events. Nothing like the tight group of war-time friends that Tito had around him existed by the late 1980s.

Popular mobilization in the late 1980s: workers and nationalists

In the next section I discuss the topic of popular mobilization during Yugoslavia's final years.[32] The story of the late 1980s can best be described as the parallel escalation and radicalization of both mass and elite behavior. Both strikes and nationalist protests started as rather benign and moderate. In the course of several years they escalated into conflicts that were much more intense. Nationalist protests were especially difficult to control as they activated deeply felt ethnic insecurities. Although nationalism arose in practically all republics it was in Serbia that it developed into a large scale popular movement. Serbia was burdened by the problem of Kosovo, a province of great symbolic importance to Serbs that was populated by an Albanian majority. Kosovo's status in Yugoslavia, and by extension the status of Serbia, was the central political problem of the 1980s. Constitutional changes were proposed by Serbian politicians which were meant to strengthen the position of Serbia and tie its two provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina, closer to Serbia proper.

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30 Ramet (1985).
31 Goldstein (1989: 13).
32 The role of popular protest in the dissolution of Yugoslavia is a neglected topic even among specialists on the country. A recent book by Nebojša Vladisavljević (2008) moves this literature forward considerably by providing a comprehensive account of nationalist mobilization as well as discussing worker strikes.

In terms of mobilization from below, it was strikes that were perhaps the most well known form of protest in Yugoslavia. They had occurred infrequently but regularly since the 1960s. The manner in which strikes were handled illustrated the more benevolent and tolerant nature of Yugoslav socialism compared to other countries in the region.[33] The main characteristic to note is the decentralized character of industrial conflict. Strikes were very much firm specific. This, however, started to change in the late 1980s as the number of strikes and their size (number of participants) increased. Table 4 gives data on the strike wave that hit Yugoslavia in the 1980s. For the first time, strikes spilled over factory walls and took on a wider social significance.

Several individual strikes had a great impact on the Yugoslav public. A particularly long and difficult strike was that by miners in Labin, a Croatian town.[34] While the miners still stuck to their mines, other workers decided to take to the streets. In Macedonia, workers from a glass factory occupied the assembly building in Skopje. Pictures of workers in their blue overalls sitting where politicians usually sit were a clear sign that worker protest had escalated.[35] The procedure was repeated by the workers of the Slovenian steel giant Litostroj. They went to the streets together with their director and then occupied a large conference hall in Ljubljana.[36] An especially common target was the Federal Assembly in Belgrade. Workers of several companies protested in front of the Assembly building or inside it. Among the first were miners from Đurđevik, Bosnia; workers from Zmaj, a machine factory in Zemun, near Belgrade; and workers from a shoe and apparel factory Borovo, in Croatia.

Along with strikes, nationalist protests also grew in momentum.[37] It is difficult to say which came first. Strikes were more visible in 1987, while nationalist "meetings" were more visible in 1988. However, grassroots protest by Serbs in Kosovo was developing already around 1984 and 1985. In any case, establishing which came first is less important than understanding the co-evolution of movements. At times, these two strands of popular protest crossed paths.

For example, a typical strike was really a stoppage lasting several hours in which workers held a spontaneous meeting. Often workers made use of the institution of "*zbor*" ("gathering" or "assembly"), officially the supreme body in all companies. This form of protest had proven itself as safe and tolerated by elites. At first, workers used it to put forward typical strike demands such as higher wages. But soon, it was used by workers and other groups to make very different statements, such as the resolution of problems in Kosovo or constitutional changes that would strengthen the position of Serbia in the federation.

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33 On strikes see Jovanov (1979: 130-182), Županov (1977), Arzenšek (1984: 59-78), Fočo (1989: 61-92).
34 Kuzmanić (1988).
35 Vjesnik, September 3, 1987.
36 Delo, December 10, 1987.
37 For a list of nationalist "meetings" see the Appendix to this paper. This list is incomplete but it can give some indication to the frequency of protest in 1988/1989. For more in depth analysis see Vladisavljević (2008). Unfortunately, he does not provide hard data on the protests.

For example, in September of 1987, after the tragedy in Paraćin, Serbia, where an Albanian soldier killed himself and four soldiers of other nationalities, a "*zbor*" was held by Serbian and Montenegrin workers of the main electric utility company to express outrage.[38] Similar overlaps were visible in the many names given to nationalist protests: gatherings of working people, gatherings of brotherhood and unity, protest meetings, solidarity meetings etc. Once it became clear that "meetings" would be tolerated they spread as the dominant protest form. The worker gathering or "*zbor*" left the factory and went into the street. For example, fans of the football club Partizan had a "meeting" to protest the unfair replacement of their head coach.[39]

At first, most protesters displayed quite a high degree of loyalty to the regime. They sang songs about Tito and carried his picture. Later, Tito was replaced by Milošević in both songs and pictures. Often, workers would demand that officials address them, the most sought after politician being Milošević. In retrospect, Milošević will be remembered as the butcher of Yugoslavia. But at the time, he was a politician who inspired hope in many people. Unlike many other politicians, Milošević spoke in a clear and coherent manner, with little ideological jargon. He seemed genuinely enthusiastic and energetic, unlike so many other top ranking politicians.

When the workers of two large Belgrade companies, the vehicle factory 21 Maj and the engine factory Rakovica came to protest in front of the Assembly, they demanded to see Milošević. They left only after he had addressed them, and did so while chanting "We trust Sloba." The very next day another group of workers came to the Assembly and entered the building. They too decided to go only after Milošević spoke, famously ending his speech by saying that "everyone should go back to their work task."[40] The following statement of the Rakovica trade unionist Milan Nikolić provides perhaps the clearest insight into what the workers wanted:

"If somebody in this country, somebody who makes policy and determines its social and class content and consequences, gave us a guarantee that things would improve for the economy and the workers and for Yugoslavia as a whole in the foreseeable future, we would accept even greater sacrifices. The uncertainty to which we are abandoned is killing us."[41]

The uncertainty would continue to increase. Spurred on by the timid reaction of authorities – and by the support given by Milošević – nationalist protests became much bolder. At first, the goal of nationalist protesters was to "talk" to officials and to "inform" them of the difficulties that Serbs and Montenegrins experienced in Kosovo. Such "conversations" then morphed into explicit demands that certain politicians resign. On several occasions, politicians unpopular with the

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38 Vjesnik 5 September 1987. On Paraćin see Jović (2009: 263-264).
39 Vjesnik, 15 October 1988.
40 Vjesnik, 5 and 6 October 1988. "Sloba" is short for Slobodan, Milošević's first name. See also Vladisavljević (2008: 156)
41 Vjesnik, 3 October 1988.

crowd attempted to make speeches and – when they were meet with jeering – resigned their position on the spot![42]

The best known nationalist meetings were those at which protesters demanded the resignation of officials in Vojvodina and Kosovo, Serbia's two provinces that were supposed to be integrated more closely with Serbia. Similar demands were made of officials in Montenegro, a smaller republic that was in Serbia's political orbit. It was often workers and unions of key local companies that led the protest. For example, this role was played by the machine factories Jugoalat in Vojvodina and Radoje Dakić in Montenegro. Resignations did ensue after some resistance.

Milošević had emerged as the leader to which the protesters looked. He had also profited by the "cadre changes" in Vojvodina and Montenegro as people loyal to him were appointed. In a setting in which no actor or institution had clear legitimacy, Milošević used the meetings to buttress his own position and interpreted them as democratic manifestations of popular will:

"There is nothing more reasonable or honest than citizens and especially communists voicing their discontent [...] Those are the rules of the game that exist in bourgeois democracies, which we look down upon as second order, purely formal, democracies. And in our country, in a society that has achieved the highest level of democracy that humanity has known [...] respecting the will of the people, the citizens, the working class should be sacred [...] From 1950 till today, day in, day out, we have been telling citizens, working people that they are the basic actor of the political system, that they govern society in an equal way, that power in this country belongs to them [...] And now it is all here, the people, democracy, freedom of expression and the public sphere. And all of a sudden, it is interpreted as a dangerous and negative phenomenon."[43]

The problem was that these meetings were turning explicitly towards violence and hatred. By late 1988 if not earlier, nationalist protest was clearly attracting more extreme groups, often those associated with the war-time Četnik movement in Serbia. The messages from the crowd were no longer benign. Some examples are: "We want weapons", "Send the army to Kosovo", "We will kill Vllasi" (the most prominent Albanian politician from Kosovo).

Things reached fever pitch when Albanians in Kosovo engaged in their own counter-mobilization. Once again, a key role was played by the workers of the most important companies in the region, such as the miners of Trepča. In November of 1988 Albanians held a large protest which was met by a counter-protest in Belgrade. In February of 1989 the miners of Trepča decided to stay in their pits and threatened collective suicide. Solidarity was demonstrated in several places outside Serbia including Ljubljana, where many high profile Slovenian politicians spoke. To that Serbia reacted with another huge meeting in Belgrade. Milošević was again the main speaker, this time answering calls from the crowd to arrest Vllasi.[44] A state of emergency was declared in Kosovo.

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42 Vjesnik, 10 and 11 October 1988.
43 Milošević (1989: 258-259).
44 On the conflict between Slovenia and Serbia see Belić and Bilbija (1989).

The country had broken apart.

In 1990, multi-party elections gave clear legitimacy to those elected. This removed much – though not all – of the political uncertainty. Heightened inter-republic conflicts and ethnic tensions finally escalated into war in Croatia, and then in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nothing reduces uncertainty like war. Conflict was radically simplified into an "us vs. them" situation, and all societal complexity was brushed aside as political elites asked their populations for support and patience while armed conflicts lasted.

Concluding remarks

What can then be said about the question from this paper's title? My answer to the question – whether each regime gets the critical juncture it deserves – is a counterintuitive "no." Often, more advanced regimes are handed a "harder" critical juncture, while more backward regimes are dealt an "easier" one. There may be "advantages of backwardness" when it comes to critical junctures.[45] Due to their much more negative experiences with communism, the countries of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary were given simpler critical junctures. In Yugoslavia, the popularity of socialism as well as the presence of "good guys" in the Party-state complicated the extrication from socialism tremendously.

The dilemma is whether a semi-authoritarian regime can balance popular participation and elite learning. Often, what sustains one destroys the other. Actors in more advanced and ambitious regimes, such as Yugoslavia, may feel they are beyond such a dilemma. This "superiority complex" is precisely what makes it harder for them to avoid falling prey to it. An ideal regime would have no problem achieving both. But semi-authoritarian regimes such as socialist Yugoslavia are obviously regimes with limited capabilities. The world's remaining socialist regimes, as well as other forms of semi-authoritarianism, are likely to feel the horns of the dilemma in a similar way.

Yugoslavia also showcases how critical junctures have their own version of Gresham's law operating: "bad protest" squeezes out "good protest." Ultimately, nationalist demands squeezed out those put forward by labor. Indeed, socio-economic demands were first re-interpreted in an ethnic light and then pushed to the side. A similar logic was at play with elite responses. Reasonable attitudes were progressively abandoned in favor of more extreme positions. Most obviously, Milošević presents an example of how a socialist politician opportunistically supports nationalist protests, becomes their leader and then pushes the whole situation closer to violent conflict and war. It is indeed unfortunate, that if Yugoslavia in the 1980s had anything close to Machiavelli's political entrepreneur and innovator, it was Milošević. But arguably, nobody else showed much energy and spirit in tackling the crisis. Since the fragmented communist elite

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45 Also a reference to Gerschenkron (1962).

communicated only through the media, a "race to the bottom" logic prevailed in elite behavior, just as it did with popular protest.

When political elites have their heads in the sand, as they did in Yugoslavia for much of the 1970s and 1980s, the accumulation of problems may lead to similar spirals of increasing uncertainty. Yugoslavia was always a regime that produced a lot of uncertainty, due to its convoluted decentralization and incoherent blend of liberalism and socialism. But if Frank Knight is correct in arguing that a life free from uncertainty would not appeal to us,[46] then the question becomes one about the temporal distribution of uncertainty. Regimes that "progress" by limping from one critical juncture to the next are engaging in quite risky behavior. The trick is to somehow spread out uncertainty across longer stretches of time.

Critical junctures, as a form of "resolving" the key problems that countries accumulate, are thus a high risk strategy. At the same time that they allow for big leaps not imaginable in more settled times, they also pose higher risks in making the wrong decision. After the break-up of Yugoslavia, the consequences of the bad decisions made in the late 1980s and early 1990s are still being felt in many of the former republics. Such detours into various forms of nationalism, authoritarianism and violence have made the transition towards democratic, market-oriented and stable regimes very difficult.

Elections provide a key mechanism which can help avoid the high-risk strategy of critical junctures. They can spread uncertainty which critical junctures would otherwise accumulate. At the same time, the types of advances that elections can bring about are more limited. In short, while critical junctures are a high risk-high payoff strategy, elections are a low risk-low payoff strategy. In the past two decades since the fall of the Berlin wall, the countries of Eastern Europe have demonstrated how elections, by themselves, bring about a rather shallow democracy. The main contribution of elections should be viewed in the way they prevent critical junctures from wreaking havoc.

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46 Knight (2006 [1921]: 348).

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Table 1 – Structure of personal consumption (percentages)

	1955	1965	1975	1980	1985
Food	52,7	42,8	38,0	38,3	37,8
Tobacco	3,5	3,1	3,4	2,8	2,8
Travel	2,4	6,3	10,8	12,2	12,3
Culture and Entertainment	1,1	3,3	3,9	4,1	3,9

Source: Sirotković (1989: 40)

Table 2 – Macro-economic trends

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Growth of domestic social product (annual percentage change)	2,3	1,5	0,5	-1,0	2,0	0,5	3,6	-1,1	-1,2	0,8
Inflation (annual percentage change)	21,8	46,0	29,5	39,1	56,7	75,7	88,1	118,4	198,7	1255,7
Real wages (annual percentage change)	-7,5	-5,0	-3,3	-10,3	-6,1	2,8	10,1	-6,7	-7,8	5,2
Exports to "convertible" markets (in millions of US dollars)	5 655	6 441	5 853	6 270	6 588	6 515	6 463	8 534	9 666	10 619
Exports to "clearing" markets (in millions of US dollars)	3 316	4 433	3 309	3 600	3 614	4 079	3 786	2 876	2 977	2 817

Source: Žižmond (1991: 10, 170); Central Bank of Yugoslavia Newsletter (November-December 1989)

Table 3 – The "crisisology" genre

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Number of books with "crisis" in title	0	0	0	5	4	4	9	9	10	10	10	1	0	1

Source: The list was compiled through a search of the catalog of the National and university library in Zagreb (www.nsk.hr).

Table 4 – Strikes

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Number of strikes	253	216	174	336	393	696	851	1685	1,002
Number of participants	13,504	13,507	10,997	21,776	29,031	60,062	88,860	288,686	211,367

Source: Stanojević (2003: 293). Fočo (1989: 62) reports slightly different figures in which the strike wave continues to increase in 1988. He reports that there were 1,851 strikes in 1988 with a total of 386,123 participants.

Appendix – List of nationalist "meetings"

A list of "meetings" was complied based on the coverage provided by the daily newspaper Vjesnik. Each of these locations – towns or companies – witnessed one or more such protest in which nationalist demands were raised and/or a clear demonstration of support for Serbian politicians was made. The time period is from July 1988 to March 1989. The list does not include all "meetings" but can nevertheless help demonstrate the scope of the phenomenon.

Towns: Beograd, Novi Sad, Kosovo Polje, Nikšić, Nova Pazova, Bačka Palanka, Titograd, Kolašin, Titov Vrbas, Priština, Smederevo, Kovin, Dečani, Sombor, Cetinje, Vršac, Niš, Andrijevica, Kragujevac, Kikinda, Pirot, Surdulica, Prokuplje, Vranj, Leskovac, Požarevac, Srbobran, additional towns in Šumadija and Pomoravlje, Knin and Benkovac in Croatia.

Companies: Jugoalat, Jugodent, Jedinstvo, Hidroelektrana Đerdap, Termoelektrana Viskeza, Kemijska Industrija Zdravlje, Lateks, Lemind, Građevinsko poduzeće Radan, Industrija ugljena Inus, Fabrika hrane Panonka, Crvenka, Majevica, Pobeda, Industrija građevinskih mašina Radoje Dakić, Solana Bajo Sekulić, Željezara Boris Kidrič, ŠIK Javorak, Ugostiteljsko poduzeće Onogost, Tvornica vijaka vineks Vitina, Vunarski kombinat Beograd, Industrija obuće Beograd.