‘Social literature swindlers’: the r/evolutionary controversy in interwar Yugoslav literature

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Published online: 19 December 2017

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Abstract Political and literary controversies on the Yugoslav literary left, known as *Sukob na ljevici* (Conflict on the left), remain famous for their culmination points, such as Miroslav Krleža’s book of essays *Moj obračun s njima* (My reckoning with them, 1932), his “Predgovor *Podravskim motivima* Krste Hegedušića” (The foreword to the *Podravina motives* by Krsto Hegedušić, 1933), Bogomir Hermann’s (alias A.B.C.) subsequent invective “Quo vadis, Krleža?” (1933), Krleža’s later “Dijalektički antibarbarus” (Dialectical antibarbarous, 1939), and the one-issue journal *Književne sveske* (Literary volumes, 1940). As the historiographic memory of these controversies is mainly concentrated on the authoritative personality of Krleža himself, the arguments of his opponents are mostly remembered as arguments of ‘the others’ and are granted only marginal validity. This article gives an account of the debates of the *Conflict*’s first stage (1928–1934), which were manifold and profound, and which foreshadowed the literary and ideological positions of the *Conflict*’s later, culminating stages. By taking into account the dynamic and complex international context that serves as a backdrop to the *Conflict*, this paper explores the developments in the Yugoslav ‘counterpublic’ literary sphere, especially with a view to discussions, debates, and polemics over the emerging *social literature*. Particular attention goes to the group of authors gathered around *Socijalna Misao*, Zagreb’s sociological and cultural journal edited by Božidar Adžija. As this journal’s most productive authors were derogated as ‘social literature swindlers,’ which affected their marginal position in the cultural historiography of this period, the aim of this article is to offer a proper analysis of their particular position on the literary and political left.

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Keywords Social literature · Evolution versus revolution · R/evolutionary controversy · Counterpublics

Art is said to be the mirror of life. As for literary criticism, one could say that it is a mirror of art. And if journals contain both works of art and of criticism they are, accordingly, also mirrors—but mirrors of mirrors. From artwork, as from criticism, one can reconstruct the life of an epoch: social, economic, and cultural.

Theodor Balk,

“Kabaret jugoslavenskih revija”

The counterpublic sphere

Throughout the Yugoslav interwar decades, harsh political circumstances precipitated the transposition of political activism towards the literary sphere that functioned as “the only arena of political struggle” (Lasić 1970: 33). Being severely limited by restrictive laws concerning the publishing sector (cf. Šubić Kovačević 2016), the Yugoslav literary sphere gradually strengthened its own position as a “counterpublic sphere” (Negt and Kluge 1993; Fraser 1990). Moreover, it “took on *even those* assignments that earlier belonged to other forms and means of action” (Lasić 1970: 35, italics S.L.; cf. Mađarević 1974: 19; Iveković 1970: 194; Bogdanov 1940: 36–37; Visković 2001: 121; Kalezić 1975: 71, 80, 98, 154). Throughout the 1920s and especially at the turn of the decade, these disobedient counterpublics were propelled by international developments, such as Russian *proletkult* (until 1920), RAPP (Russian association of proletarian writers, 1928–1932), the Second conference of proletarian and revolutionary writers in Kharkov (which began on 6 Nov. 1930), and the dissolution of RAPP (by Decree of the Central committee of the All-Union Communist party [bolsheviks], issued on 23 April 1932). Aside from the Russian ascendancy that in the 1920s came only with delay, the ‘infection’ by revolutionary and proletarian literature stemmed also from Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and the U.S.¹

In what follows, I present a new perspective on the interwar literary counterpublics insofar as I examine these counterpublics with a view to two major political currents, their common ideological backdrop, and their political and aesthetic disagreements: I call them *communist revolutionary struggle* and *social democratic evolutionary politics*. Between the world wars, the greatest stumbling block between the confronting sides relied on the following: in reaction to communists advocating for a radical overthrow of the regime, social democrats argued for step-by-step politics and gradual development towards socialism (Vujić 2014: 61, 87; Redžić 1977: 290; Kalezić 1975: 35). In Croatia, for instance, the prohibited SRPJ(k), i.e., KPJ (Communist party of Yugoslavia) maintained a

¹ Although I discuss the Yugoslav debates with a view to their intersections with the counterpublic literary spheres of Berlin, Vienna, Prague, Paris, and Moscow, in this article I delimit my scope on the correspondances with Berlin and, partly, with Vienna. For the importance of German literary debates for the Yugoslav discussions, cf. Jovan Popović’s article “O socijalnoj literaturi” (1933). For a recent study on the development of committed literature in France, cf. Peyroles (2015).

continuous connection to the idea of *revolution*, whereas the reformist and legalist party of SDS HS (Social democratic party of Croatia and Slavonia) consented to a reformist agenda. This political difference between the communist *revolution* and the social democratic *evolution* (gradual, deferred revolution) proved to be pertinent also in the realm of cultural activism. Here, the most important political quandary—henceforth called the *r/evolutionary controversy*—consists of the debate *over the priority of revolution or evolution*, i.e., whether the liberating socio-political process is something which is precipitated by means of the “liberation of whole classes in economic and political terms” (Ross 2008: 101) or whether it first and foremost presupposes the “liberation on the level of the individual” (101). That said, their interwar rivalry of *revolution* and *evolution* was a reflection of differing ideological positions as to the character and the urgency of social (economic, political) and cultural (spiritual) renewal: whereas the proponents of *revolution* asserted that a social revolution (the revolution of the ‘base’) is a precondition of any possible change in the realm of culture (‘superstructure’), the advocates of *evolution* upheld the belief that there is no just social revolution before an appropriate cultural evolution has taken place (on, e.g., Cesarec’s outstanding position in this regard, cf. Iveković 1970: 44). In sum, in the interwar period *revolution* and *evolution* functioned as what is in political theory called “political concepts” (Norberg 2015: 647): pitted against one another, and being sites of perpetual argument (primarily between communists and social democrats, but not exclusively), one served the other as its counterconcept.

However, these schematic juxtapositions, reflecting the seemingly insurmountable ideological, political, and social gap between interwar communism and social democracy, should be scrutinized with due diligence and patience: although the *evolutionary* position was supported predominantly by social democrats, it would be misleading to assume that the communist idea of *revolution* advocated “a simple upheaval of the forms of state”² and thus neglected the importance of cultural agenda altogether. Similarly, social democratic *evolutionary* politics did not necessarily commit itself to disreputable reformism and ill-famed “ministerialism”³ but—as will be shown below with regard to several authors published in *Socijalna Misao*, the journal that was representative of the left wing of the social democracy in interwar Yugoslavia—it also jettisoned those who did not pursue progressive political and cultural aims to the expected point. Therefore, rather than considering the juxtaposition of interwar communism and social democracy as an ideological, political, and social gap that would be gridlocked, permanent, and thus transtemporal, this juxtaposition will be perused under thorough consideration of the dynamics and turnabouts in the respective political and cultural field. In fact, it is the supreme aim of this article to point to the importance of the social democratic contributions to the development of leftist counterpublics, which in the post-WWII communist historiography was severely understated, both by the historians

² Jacques Rancière takes Marxist and psychoanalytic models of revolutionary change as exemplary for such “simple upheavals” (2009: 99).

³ “Ministerialism” refers to numerous social democrats who abandoned the socialist-revolutionary cause and entered the governments of reactionary and fascist regimes (cf. Stipetić 1980: 112; Očak 1982: 51).

committed to KPJ and by the anti-systemic historians, who challenged the official communist historiography from liberal and nationalist positions.⁴

By way of playfully paraphrasing the title of the last chapter of Enver Redžić's monograph *Austromarksizam i jugoslavensko pitanje* (Austro-Marxism and the Yugoslav question 1977), one can surmise that the mutually exclusive opposition of communism and social democracy in the postwar period experienced a 'historical negation.'⁵ Subsequent to Tito's proverbial 'no to Stalin' (in 1948), the ideological contrasts between communists and social democrats began to fade, which was partly due to the establishment of the one-party state, where the ruling KPJ, thanks also to Yugoslavia's exemplary position in-between the globally confronted political blocks, could tolerate the challenges and even appropriate the legacy of social democracy. In the 1950s, Yugoslavia unfolded the dormant potential of originally socialist ideas, according to which social reproduction should be governed directly by producers and state property transformed into social property (cf. Vujić 2014: 125). Later, many prominent intellectuals were committed to the "demolishment of the dogma" (first and foremost, of Stalinism), advocating the "freedom of creation and research" in place of ideological "nihilism and liquidationism" (Mikecin 1976: 150). With that, social democratic authors such as Antun Vujić nowadays maintain that the Yugoslav postwar political leadership rested on its denied interwar social democratic legacy (2014: 21). Vujić even interprets social democracy as a "latent and dimmed side of communism that periodically gains strength in times of its democratization and stifles in times of bolshevization" (115). Therefore, the reach of social democratic step-by-step politics is to be differently perused when dealing with social democratic parties that attempted to rectify the injustices of the interwar capitalist and protofascist regimes and when exploring social democratic legacies that awakened the dormant emancipatory potential within the framework of an established socialist state. Given that within the framework of interwar Yugoslavia the reach of cultural evolution could not have been as comprehensive as when endeavored in the postwar socialist regime, in what follows I will trace the limits and possibilities of interwar cultural *r/evolution* as pursued by representative communist and social democratic intellectuals.

The international backdrop of the Yugoslav counterpublic literary sphere

For the inspection of the Yugoslav counterpublics, attention to multiple turnabouts, crossovers, and revisions of respective political positions is mandatory. The discussions on the political and cultural left were conducted along various and often changing axes: dialectical materialism confronted its simplified concomitant, the so-

⁴ For a good illustration of these positions, cf. Mađarević (1974) as the advocator of the first and Lasić (1970) as the proponent of the second one.

⁵ "X. Nacionalno oslobođenje Jugoslavena i stvaranje jugoslavenske države—Istorijska negacija austromarksističke teorije nacionalnog pitanja" (X. The national liberation of the Yugoslavs and the creation of the Yugoslav state—a historical negation of the Austro-Marxist theory of the national question, Redžić 1977: 431–471).

called ‘vulgar materialism’; political *telos* and revolutionary optimism opposed pessimism and defeatism; the absolute of revolution competed with the absolute of literature; the development of proletarian art was discussed with a view to the appropriation of bourgeois literary traditions; the artistic invocation of talent challenged the imperative of dialectical consciousness; revolutionary contents and political tendency (Ger. *Wirkungsästhetik*) confronted apolitical undertones of the aesthetic form... As the strivings for emancipation were sometimes pursued by emphasizing one side of the binary opposition in question and in the next moment by emphasizing the other, and as abrupt reversals in proclaimed political aesthetics were not uncommon, the interwar counterpublics need to be observed with regard to these dynamic shifts and with an eye to the overall social developments to which they were closely connected (Iveković 1970: 222–223; Mađarević 1974: 19).

For a start, let me mention that before 1928 in non-Soviet countries no consistent cultural and literary front existed. As for Germany, in the early 1920s the debates on the literary left were only beginning to address political questions (cf. Fähnders & Rector), which culminated at the end of the decade and in the first half of the 1930s. Throughout the 1920s, the term “proletarian-revolutionary” was primarily a political term, used by communists to underpin their distinction from social democrats (Gallas 1971: 81), and did not refer to any particular literary movement. Up until 1929, it remained unclear whether the proletarian-revolutionary literature was literature written *by* the proles or written *for* the proles, or both: Is its revolutionary character expressed in its contents or should it also be accompanied by new literary forms? Should literature only mimetically depict life as it is or rather offer perspectives for the proletarian struggle? (72)

As for the situation in Yugoslavia, in the years following the end of WWI and throughout the 1920s, leftist literary reflections were predominantly published in Miroslav Krleža’s journals *Plamen* (Flame, 1919, co-edited with August Cesarec) and *Književna republika* (Literary republic, 1923–1927). Similarly as in Germany, although highlighting their ‘inflammation’ by the spirit of revolution, these journals—and this particularly applies to *Plamen*, whose name reflected Lunačarski’s *Plamia* (Flame, cf. Krtalić 1988: 174)—did not yield elaborate reflections on revolutionary or progressive literature. As Krleža once summarized, *Plamen*’s historical materialism had a “sentimental, romantic and *Sturm-und-Drang* character; [...] our Marxism petered out in a provincial and petty-bourgeois environment and was more resistance and rejection than some systematized activity.” (1923: 38)

After *Plamen* and *Književna republika* disappeared from the counterpublic horizon, in 1928, a year rich in political events, a concatenation of new journals ensued: In Zagreb, Stevan Galogaža reissued *Kritika*,⁶ an “uncompromising and polemical” journal (*Nova literatura* 2.2 [Balk, Th. (T.K. Fodor) 1929]: 64).⁷ In the

⁶ *Kritika* was originally founded by Galogaža in Zagreb in October 1920. After editing three issues in 1920, in spring 1921 Galogaža moved abroad so that throughout 1921 and 1922 the journal was edited by Ljubo Wiesner and Milan Begović, editors of a more traditional intellectual profile. After his return in 1928, Galogaža launched another journal, *Vedrina* (Delight), which was soon closed for the sake of taking up *Kritika* again (Iveković 1970: 100–105). Iveković also highlights that *Kritika* was the only literary journal that on the eve of the dictatorship (6 Jan. 1929) upheld a direct connection with the idea of

same year, Božidar Adžija launched *Socijalna Misao* (with Gojko Berberović), and in Belgrade the Bihalji brothers began with the communist journal *Nova literatura* (1928–1930), a literary community whose aim was to “connect the Yugoslav literary forces with the best international ones” (*Socijalna Misao* 2.1 [1929]: 12).⁸ Simultaneously with *Nova literatura*, they founded the publishing house *Nolit* (NOva LITeratura—new literature),⁹ which had a program consistent with the famous German publishing house *Malik* (cf. Mađarević 1974: 127). *Kritika* and *Socijalna Misao* were soon followed by *Stožer* (1930–1935), *Literatura* (1931–1933), and *Kultura* (1933) that all meticulously tracked international critical and literary production.¹⁰

Simultaneously, in the same year and month of *Socijalna Misao*’s first issue (October 1928), in Berlin the association BPRS (“Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller”/The association of proletarian-revolutionary authors) was founded.¹¹

Footnote 6 continued

communist revolution (103–104). Because of such editorial activity, Galogaža was arrested at the end of 1928; the journal was confiscated (Mujčić 1980: 5).

⁷ References consist of the author’s name and the year of publication, as listed in the reference list. If the quote is part of a section without title and author, the year, issue, and page of the particular journal are included in parenthesis.

⁸ Editors were Pavle Bihalji, Oto Bihalji-Merin (1–3 [1929]), and Branko Gavella (4–12 [1929]). The journal’s editorial board gathered, among many others, international collaborators like Albert Einstein, Georg Arco, Henry Barbusse, S.M. Eisenstein, Maksim Gorki, Aleksandra Kollontaï, George Grosz, Panait Istrati, Egon Erwin Kisch, Zdeněk Nejedlý, Gerhart Pohl, Erwin Piscator, and Aleksandr Serafimovič. Among the Yugoslav authors the most prominent board members were Branko Gavella, August Cesarec, Stevan Galogaža, and Dragiša Vasić. Besides the editorial office in Belgrade, there existed branches in Paris, Brussels, Prague, Berlin, Vienna, and Bucharest.

⁹ The edition committee was composed of Oto Bihalji-Merin, Josip Kulundžić, Milan Bogdanović, and Gustav Krklec. *Nolit* developed a rich literary series, including André Baillon’s *O jednoj Mariji* (1936/*Histoire d’une Marie*, 1921/The Story of a Marie), Upton Sinclair’s *Metropola* (1930/*Metropolis*, 1908), Agnes Smedley’s *Sama* (1932/*Daughter of Earth*, 1929), Ernst Erich Noth’s *Najamna kućerina* (1933/*Die Mietskaserne. Roman junger Menschen*, 1931/The Tenement), Ernst Glaeser’s *Klasa 1902* (1931/*Jahrgang 1902*, 1928/*Class 1902*, 1929), and many others.

¹⁰ In *Stožer*, that was initially edited by the editorial board and from issue nr. 5 on by Jovan Popović, several pertinent articles were published, such as Stevan Galogaža’s “Smisao književnosti i dužnost pisaca” (1931), Milan Durman’s “Pseudosocijalne tendencije u našoj književnosti” (1931), and Bogomir Herman’s (B.H.M.’s) “Za ispravnost i jasnoću” (1931). *Literatura* was another journal launched by Galogaža, a monthly focused on novellas “written only by the best authors” (1.1 [1931]: 23). The aim was not to be just another literary journal but to offer insights into “truly best literature” (23). Some of the most important *Conflict* articles are published here. Special attention goes to N. Simić’s and Galogaža’s attacks on surrealism (Simić 1932; Galogaža 1932c), as well as to several texts where Galogaža “clarifies the terms” (“raščišćavanje pojmova”) regarding *social literature* (1932a: 27). In this journal, the pertinent “Prilog tumačenju pojmova o socijalnoj književnosti” (1932) was also published, written by Vaso Bogdanov (alias N. Kostin). According to a small notice in *Kultura* (1.5 [1933]: 400), *Literatura* was suddenly closed in 1933.

Finally, *Kultura* was launched as an “artistic and strictly scientific” journal (*Kultura* 1.1 [1933]: 1), particularly oriented towards economic, social, and natural sciences that were inspected from the standpoint of dialectical materialism (*Kultura* 1.2 [1933]: 57). It was edited by painter and critic Đuro Tiljak. After the first issue, Tiljak decided to dispense with belletristic contributions and to concentrate on scientific articles.

¹¹ It was founded on 19 October 1928. Its first president was Johannes R. Becher (cf. Gallas 1972: 11; Mađarević 1974: 127). BPRS was closely linked with the International union of revolutionary writers, established in 1925 in Moscow (Gallas 1972: 16), that in 1930 organized the famous Kharkov conference.

It was active until 1933,¹² which was also the last publishing year of *Socijalna Misao*. Furthermore, Oto Bihalji-Merin, a prominent Yugoslav intellectual, founder of the aforementioned publishing house *Nolit*, was among the members of the editorial board of the utmost important Berlin leftist journal *Die Linkskurve* (1929–1933), and for several years its chief editor (Gallas 1971: 47). Bihalji-Merin was also the only one among Yugoslav intellectuals to participate in the Kharkov conference in 1930, albeit as a German representative (Kalezić 1975: 76). Therefore, it is not only evident that the late 1920s and the early 1930s were rich with publishing activities and debates but also that the Yugoslav counterpublics were concurrent with the international literary and political developments. From this it follows that the discussions in Yugoslavia need to be observed with view to the international scene they have been part of. As in 1933 and 1934, both in Yugoslavia and internationally, several essential cuts signaled the end of this abundant stage I delimit my observations to the period from 1928 until 1934 as representative of the early stage of Yugoslav literary counterpublics.¹³

In Yugoslavia, this period has been categorized as the “stage” (Lasić 1970) or “movement” of *social literature* (Kalezić 1975). As this movement, however, did not yield a uniform literary front but contained rather heterogeneous groups of authors who nevertheless showed similar inclinations, Lasić speaks only of their “convergence towards a common platform” (1970: 71, 81). Authors who wrote social literature and critics who reflected upon it were concentrated around the above enlisted journals from Zagreb and Belgrade. Indeed, all these journals held rather similar views and it is beyond doubt that they all comprehended literature as a means towards social, socialist, both *revolutionary* and *evolutionary* ends. Thus it follows that the primary perspective from which this literature should be perused is not its artistic value but its political commitment (cf. Iveković 1970: 220). In this sense, if one is tempted to interpret art and revolution as “two forms of total transcendence,” as Lasić did (1970: 12–14), one has to keep in mind that, when compared to Krleža’s position—which is adamantly appropriated and propagated by Lasić himself—these two forms cannot be equated and discussed as equivalent and exchangeable: neither does the political *revolution* necessarily lead to the liberation of all, nor is the aesthetic, artistic, cultural *evolution* sufficient to propel changes in the economic and institutional base. Paraphrasing Miklós Szabolcsi, one can capture this friction by claiming that the *revolution* is either political, or it is none. At the same time, “a revolution without an [evolution] is really a pseudo-

¹² After 1933, it existed only as a small illegal group, with 7–8 members. It was officially closed in 1935 (Gallas 1972: 71).

¹³ Lasić discerns between four stages of the *Conflict*: the initial “period of social literature” (1928–1934) and the subsequent “new realism” (1935–1941) were followed by the period of “socialist realism” (1945–1948) and the “new orientations,” i.e., the breakdown of the literary left (1949–1952) (1970: 27–28). Besides the “cartel of social literature” (authors Galogaža, Popović, Herman, Bihalji, Keršovani) and the “social literature swindlers” (the “masked quills with leftist paroles”: Adžija, Štedimlija, Magdić, 1970: 81), Lasić’s categorization maps out individual positions of Vaso Bogdanov (who suffers from leftist “infantile disorder,” collaborating with the cartel authors, however not sparing them from his critique) and Milan Durman (“straying social writer,” 1970: 81). Except for the last quote, the expressions in the brackets are originally from Jovan Popović’s article “O socijalnoj literaturi” (1933: 267).

revolution.”¹⁴ Although after Krleža’s “Predgovor *Podravskim motivima* Krste Hegedušića” (The foreword to the *Podravina Motives* by Krsto Hegedušić), where he insisted on “artistic forces” (1933: 272) and refuted creation that abides by “rational resolutions and directives” (267), serious splits occurred, in the late 1920s and still at the beginning of the 1930s the Yugoslav leftist journals did not make a decision between literature and politics; in their perspective, literature *was* politics. At that time, and especially when compared to Krleža’s position, the fine distinctions between these journals were less significant. Having this in mind, when perusing the polemics these journals comprise one should adjust the optics and put aside the ‘aestheticist’ standards of ‘high literature.’ Moreover, this requires eliminating the perspective of literary critique altogether and reading the respective texts with the eyes of a social scientist or a political theoretician.

Regarding the subsequent changes and shifts in these debates, Vlado Mađarević makes pertinent remarks as to the necessity of taking into consideration the dialectical character of the r/evolutionary process. In *Književnost i revolucija* (Literature and revolution, 1974), a critique of Stanko Lasić’s study *Sukob na književnoj ljevici* (Conflict on the literary left, 1970), Mađarević points to the imperative of interpreting the *Conflict* “dialectically,” that is, to study the starting positions and orientations of the confronted sides “with regard to their relative developments, and not as absolutes” (1974: 19). In line with this, the confronted groups that participated in the *Conflict* obtain their justification with regard to the particular historical stage of class struggle. According to Mađarević, in times of calm and stable social development art tends to invert to ‘its own’ questions, as well as to the anthropological, emotional, and ontological problems of man. (This corresponds with my understanding of *evolution*.) In contrast to this, in *revolutionary* times, times of accelerated historical pace, not only anthropological but also (or primarily) sociological and economic problems come to the fore. Here art becomes “the only possibility of aesthetically disguised expression and formation of the revolutionary consciousness” (19). Art breaks out towards its “genuine creative commitment” (19), notwithstanding the fact that the quality of its artistic expression may lag behind its political scope. In fact, when reactionary social forces tend to misuse the “traditionalist sentimental national romantics,” which are sometimes nothing more than “‘privatized,’ self-oriented ‘pure’ literature,” used as a “medium of stultification of social consciousness” (19–20), this passage to revolutionary activism becomes imperative.

In line with these remarks on two historical phases of political struggle (*evolution* vs. *revolution*) one can conclude that the major difference between social democrats and communists relied on their diverging estimations of the current stage of the political and cultural struggle. Whereas the social democrats believed that the envisioned cultural aims could still be achieved by way of persistent cultural work and gradual transition towards socialism, the communists believed themselves already in the midst of a civil war.

¹⁴ Originally, “a revolution without an avant-garde [in art, A.E.] is really a pseudo-revolution” (Szabolcsi 1978: 14, qtd. in Erjavec 2015: 4). Erjavec paraphrases this when he says that avant-garde art represented sort of a “precondition for an authentically radical political revolution” (280).

Due to the literary historians’ concentration on the later stages of the *Conflict*, the journals from the *Conflict*’s initial phase, and especially the discussions over social, committed literature are nowadays still by large overlooked. These discussions revolved around the question of ‘swindled social literature’ and were conducted between two groups of authors and literary critics: between the social democratic journal *Socijalna Misao* on the one side and the communist journals *Nova literatura*, *Kritika*, *Literatura*, *Stožer*, and *Kultura* on the other. In querying the thesis on the immanently political character of these literary disputes, I will first delineate the common socialist—r/evolutionary—backdrop against which they emerged. Then I will observe which fine distinctions became decisive when the political-literary field split into the two confronting camps of the literary ‘swindlers’ and the so-called literary ‘cartel.’

A common platform: convergences and divergences

Criticism of the mere *evolution*

It has already been said that the discrepancies between communists and social democrats depended on their differing views on the character and the urgency of revolution: whereas the communists highlighted the preponderance of political or social *revolution* (and thus strived to accelerate this progress), the social democrats believed that there is no (just) social revolution before an appropriate cultural *evolution* has taken place.

The communist critique of *evolution* is perhaps best exemplified by Vaso Bogdanov’s (N. Kostin) review of August Cesarec’s study *Psihoanaliza i individualna psihologija* (Psychoanalysis and individual psychology, 1932). In his rather supportive presentation of Cesarec’s book, Bogdanov used the opportunity to critically discuss the work of the Viennese social democrat Alfred Adler, an Austro-Marxist whose influential *individual psychology* gained many supporters in Yugoslavia (cf. Kalezić 1975: 56–66; Kovačević 1987: 24–27). Bogdanov belabored Adler for his claim that “[f]irst one needs to change the people and then they will change the social constitution.” (1932a: 127) In other words, the “communism of goods” can only succeed but never precede the “communism of souls” (127). On this occasion, Bogdanov was reminded of Adler’s Zagreb lecture, where the author responded to questions from the audience. For those familiar with the Austro-Marxist poetics of “hybridity” (cf. Perica 2017), Adler’s answers come as no surprise: he did not make suggestions as to whether children should be brought up as atheists or believers but suggested that it is important to establish harmony between these two opposites; and he did not dismiss the possibility that even a capitalist could make himself useful in society (128). By way of critically reacting to Adler’s claim that the problem of modern society is not as much capitalism as it is “individualism and egoism” (130), which could be overcome by means of new collectivism, and referring to Adler’s persuasion that—even under the given circumstances—what needed be changed was not the prevalent mode of production

but the people themselves, Bogdanov dismissed individual psychology *in toto*. He claimed it to be nothing more than “futile work” (130).

Besides this communist critique, published in the journal *Literatura*, one has to consider that *Socijalna Misao*, although a social democratic journal, also was openly critical of political compromises social democracy was prone to, both in the past (WWI) and in the present (1920s), both in Yugoslavia and internationally. The journal’s editor Božidar Adžija was a former Prague student (Seferović 1961: IX), originally influenced by Tomáš Masaryk, the interwar president of Czechoslovakia. Throughout the 1920s, Adžija was one of the fiercest critics of Croatian, Yugoslav, and international social democracy. Subsequently, realizing its proneness towards conformist and conservative politics towards the end of the 1920s Adžija developed into a communist: finally, in 1935 he became member of KPJ (Iveković 1970: 197). Regarding Bogdanov’s communist critique of Alfred Adler, one has to consider that even *Socijalna Misao* as the most influential organ of the left wing of Croatian social democracy was similarly critical of the Viennese type of social democracy. Nevertheless, even among the Viennese comrades discernible differences existed, e.g., between Alfred Adler and another Adler—Max—who stood more to the left. *Socijalna Misao* referred only to Max and never to Alfred. It also published Max Adler’s text “Ostvarenje marksizma” (Realization of Marxism, 1933) that was written especially for this journal.

Adžija’s critical stance towards social democratic *evolution* is manifest in his statement that even if *social politics* can make achievements and conquer obstacles delivered by capitalism, it should never be confused with *socialism*. The evolutionary social politics is a child of capitalism: no matter its merits in the struggle for the improvement of the working conditions, as long as these conditions are defined by capitalists and not by workers themselves, one cannot speak of socialism (Adžija 1933: 2; cf. Seferović 1961: XVII, XXIII). In this regard, Adžija warned against the illusions social democrats were prone to in the past, in particular, of expecting too much from social politics. From his 1928 caveat that one would need “other, more radical means” if one intends to achieve a “full renaissance of today’s society” (Adžija 1928) to later uncompromising critiques of social democratic political losses (Adžija 1932), his development from the far left wing of social democracy towards communism was evident. This statement that from a certain point one would really need “more radical means” in order to transgress towards socialism was, furthermore, a symptom of an important ideological shuffle on the political left—a shuffle that spurred some of its agents towards the left and others towards the right.¹⁵

Socijalna Misao’s overall criticism of the merely *evolutionary* or merely reformist omen of the international and Yugoslav social democracy can also be illustrated by an article by Milivoj Magdić. In 1930, he published the text “Od

¹⁵ After losing the mainstay of their social democratic cultural front—the journal—its authors took up or continued their collaboration with various other, compromising media and institutions. Besides Adžija, none of them joined the communist movement. Some of them consented to compromises with NDH, a Croatian satellite state of the Nazi regime (1941–1945), which is probably the main reason why they were ignored by the postwar communist historiography. As leftists and social democrats, they were uninteresting to 1990s historiography as well.

Proudhona do Forda” (From Proudhon to Ford), a critique of the Serbian socialist Dragoljub Jovanović who as a “French student” (Magdić 1930: 170) was supportive of utopian socialism and of the forerunners of contemporary social democracy Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Anatole France, and Jean Jaurès. Jovanović’s support of a “twofold struggle” is of great significance for the discussion of the *r/evolutionary controversy* between communists and social democrats. Social democrats maintained that as no ideology and no socialism can be simply imposed ‘from above’ or ‘from without,’ one needs to implement this twofold struggle, consisting of both *social* and *cultural action*. The communists, although they did not neglect the importance of the cultural agenda, were critical of the utopian and often individualistic understanding of social action, from which the social democratic cultural action commonly departed. In the second part of his article “Od Proudhona do Forda,” published in 1931, Magdić briefly presented this contested tradition of French utopian socialism. The text was opened by a quote from Jean Jaurès’s *Histoire socialiste de la révolution française* (1901–1907), where French Revolution was interpreted as fulfilling two main preconditions of socialism: democracy and capitalism (Magdić 1931a: 7). Departing from the latter, Magdić presented the bourgeois omen of the French Revolution with its Jacobin leaders Robespierre, Danton, and Marat, who “were neither communists nor socialists” but merely “petty-bourgeois democrats” (7). Further on, he presented the reader with the generation of utopian socialists Babeuf, Blanqui, Fourier, Saint-Simon, Cabet, Louis Blanc, and Proudhon. Magdić claimed that Dragoljub Jovanović’s recourse to Proudhon, whom Magdić characterized as the “most reactionary among all utopian socialists” (9), displayed not only Jovanović’s petty-bourgeois character but was, moreover, “typical of our society” (10). Therefore, with his essay, and especially with this last remark, Magdić did not only criticize utopian socialism but, and perhaps first and foremost, he criticized the overall profile of the local intelligentsia. Contrary to the ingrained distance and pedagogizing stance towards peasants and workers, Magdić envisioned a type of proletarian intellectual that was, still, only becoming (8). Although he was of intellectually petty-bourgeois origin himself, Magdić was particularly critical of the ‘pedagogic’ distances and hierarchies still inherent in this first phase of leftist intelligentsia.

The petty-bourgeois profile of leftist intellectuals

Magdić’s “Od Proudhona do Forda” is significant because it displays intensive preoccupation with two evidently Gramscian (or Brechtian) problems: first, the necessary extension of social, i.e., political action through cultural action and, second, the precarious and often dubious position of leftist intellectuals. In what follows, I will inspect these problems in more detail.

The insistence on learning before going to action and the belief that workers first and foremost “need to apprehend the whole economic problem” (Adžija 1929: 37) was characteristic of the often criticized pedagogic attitudes of social democratic intellectuals. This topic was, as noted above, critically assessed by the social democratic authors of *Socijalna Misao* themselves. In “Socijalizam i inteligencija” (Socialism and intelligentsia 1930), an article that serves as a sort of introduction

into these matters, Adžija critically defined intelligentsia as the “social strata that, thanks to its school education, obtains a certain social position” (14). This social strata was particularly impervious towards socialism, the reason for which was school education that—especially in high schools—taught the students the “imagined superiority over the others” (14), thus introducing distinctions between “patricians” and “plebeians” (14). Another reason was socialism’s critical distance from nationalism: if “nationalism” implies state nationalism, chauvinism, and militarism, then socialism must be both anational and antinational. However, if “nationalism” refers to common language, history, institutions, and traditions, then “the internationalism of the socialist movement is not synonymous with anationality or antinationality. And as to the socialist movement, the ideal has ever and always been exclusively free people.” (15) Adžija thus tackled the complexities of the local intelligentsia but he also assigned it the duty to realize these problems, to solve them and to take the lead on the road of social development (16).

Similarly, in “Smisao radničke kulture” (The meaning of workers’ culture, 1930), Mirko Kus-Nikolajev departed from Max Weber and criticized both the traditional (academic) style of teaching and the direct agitation: if the first is cynical and pedagogizing, the latter is “vulgar” and dependent on paroles. With the help of a neither-nor choice, Kus-Nikolajev insisted on genuine workers’ culture as the alpha and omega of culturally committed work. In his opinion, the educator’s and the pedagogue’s first duty was to acquaint himself with the psychology of the proletariat (153). Thus he did not only maintain that comprehending proletarian views and everyday experiences was more essential than knowing the ABC of Marxism by heart; he also argued for proletarian pedagogy (154), encompassing both the education of the student and the education of the lecturer. Herewith he implied the instruction taken from Marx—“We must emancipate ourselves before we can emancipate others” (Marx 2000: 48)—and explicitly referred to more recent reflections on the proletarian pedagogy, authored by Angelica Balabanoff and Gertrud Hermes.

As expected, not only the pedagogic attitudes but also the literary production by the local intelligentsia was jettisoned as petty-bourgeois. The first issue of the relaunched *Kritika* in May 1928 was opened with the text “Tragikomedija slobodnog pera” (Tragicomedy of the free pen 1928) that was paradigmatic for the penitent *auto-da-fé* of many authors who decided to make themselves useful for the revolutionary cause. The text was written by Stanko Tomašić who primarily published in *Socijalna misao* and who in 1929 ventured the very first leftist critique of Krleža. In “Tragikomedija slobodnog pera,” an important aesthetic and political dilemma was brought to the fore that soon became a persistent theme in the early stage of the *Conflict*: the discrepancy between aesthetic idealism and brute economic reality. Whilst petty-bourgeois authors were still writing about “a lady with a rose on her shoulder” (3), the pertinent “economic question [of] one sack of potatoes per month” (3) was thoroughly ignored. When glancing back at 10 years of writing experience, Tomašić realized the “tragicomedy” of his earlier idealistic writing and exclaimed, “I was a wig and a crinoline on the potato sack!” (3).

The ethical regime of literature

The possibilities of cultural action were most vividly discussed with a view to the revolutionary role of literature, i.e., with view to the “symbiosis” (Mađarević 1974: 17) of literature and revolution. The educator’s duty of acquainting himself with the psychology of the proletariat was in *Literatura* explicitly transferred to the realm of literary production: when speaking of “the organization of consciousness” by literary means, V-S¹⁶ maintained that authors should learn to know the workers not in order to teach them lessons in dialectical materialism but in order for they themselves to make a professional contribution to the production of goods (V-S 1932: 34): not only in this way can the risk of literary professionalism be prevented, by conjoining workers and writers a new type of literary creation will arise (33). Undoubtedly, such an apprehension of literature, its political-revolutionary “use” (Felski 2008), was close to what Jacques Rancière critically denominates as the *ethical regime*: “In the ethical regime, works of art have no autonomy. They are viewed as images to be questioned for their truth and for their effect on the ethos of individuals and the community. Plato’s *Republic* offers a perfect model of this regime.” (2002: 135) However, when discussing the interwar political literature, one has to keep in mind that Rancière’s jettisoning of the ethical regime is a brainchild of postwar—and also postrevolutionary—times and of the revolutionary (not exclusively Rancière’s own) melancholy conditioned by the structural inconsistencies of Marxist party politics.¹⁷ Departing from this disappointment, Rancière reaches out for the tradition of Saint-Simonianism and utopian socialism, political traditions that in the interwar period were radically discarded by both communists and the left-wing social democrats: if in postrevolutionary, post-1968 period Rancière’s Saint-Simonianism is welcomed as a plausible way out of the party authoritarianism, in the interwar discussions on the left it was precisely utopian socialism that all aforementioned leftist positions, communists as well as the left wing of the social democrats, were adamantly refuting (here, cf. again Magdić 1930, 1931a). Therefore, a straightforward rejection of the *ethical regime*, as typical of the contemporary reflections on the ‘politics of literature’ (Rancière 2010) or the ‘politics of literarity’ (Chambers 2005), cannot be taken as an appropriate theoretical outset for a serious reconstruction of the interwar literary politics. Instead, I chose Mađarević’s advice that the strong ethical overtones should be understood historically and dialectically (1974: 39). As the new, emerging political subject needed a stable ideological, humanistic footing—a “principle of hope” that would help him “overcome social chains and spiritual alienation” (39)—this ethical regime should be interpreted as consistent with the historical need of “the jump away from the mere immediacy of a troll and towards true humanity” (Lukács 1971: 662).

¹⁶ Pseudonym undeciphered.

¹⁷ Rancière rounds off his essay “The aesthetic revolution and its outcomes” with the following remark on the necessary melancholy of art’s commitment: “Aesthetic art promises a political accomplishment that it cannot satisfy, and thrives on that ambiguity. That is why those who want to isolate it from politics are somewhat beside the point. It is also why those who want it to fulfil its political promise are condemned to a certain melancholy.” (Rancière 2002: 151).

The first ethical demand, without exception, was to dispense with larpurlartism. In *Nova literatura*, Oto Bihalji-Merin (alias O. Biha) asserted that “[l]’art pour l’artisme is a matter of the complacent [...]. The historical-materialistic critic must apodictically refuse such creation. This is not because he is inclined to negate but because he wants to gather forces that would, despite everything, make a decision towards the future.” (1929b: 57) In *Socijalna Misao*, the critiques of detached aestheticism were articulated against a similar backdrop. Stanko Tomašić jettisoned larpurlartism as a criterion according to which literary styles and groups were differentiated (1929a: 114). He asserted that the contemporary literary praxis ended in deadlock, embracing the “intellectual absurdity of Tolstoi” (114). It “omit[ted] to oppose the evil as well as the absurdity of the West-European larpurlatism” (114). In his periodic report on new books, Tomašić mocked the apolitical morality of the ‘free will’: “Free will? A nice thing for meditation, sir, but thoroughly useless in life. I used to find it only in novels written by authors who were younger than forty... But yes—please pardon this small digression of mine—it’s the marmalade at stake here, and not free will.” (1930: 60)

All contributors to the inspected journals advanced the idea of committed, progressive literature. For them, the question whether literature was a political phenomenon was beyond dispute: “There is one thing we are perfectly aware of: we perceive literature exclusively as a means in a struggle.” (Štedimlija 1932: 10) This statement, forgotten for decades, was, in 2007, recaptured by Chantal Mouffe, who in “Artistic activism and agonistic spaces” claims as follows: “This is why I consider that it is not useful to make a distinction between political and non-political art. From the point of view of the theory of hegemony, artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order *or* in its challenging and this is why they necessarily have a political dimension.” (2007, italics I.P.) In other words, there is no such thing as apolitical literature. Departing from a similar premise, Stevan Galogaža inferred in the communist *Kritika* that “those who stake a claim for neutrality have, in fact, already taken sides” (1928: 21).

From this follows another pertinent ethical dimension: as literature is inherently always tendentious, a literary piece that explicitly formulates its tendency is not necessarily progressive. So did Lazarević posit that “every artwork, simply for the fact that it exists, is tendentious. There is a purpose in every creation, which makes every artwork tendentious.” (1932: 141) By the same token, *tendency* cannot be the sole mainstay of literary progressiveness; more important than tendency itself is the particular “critical light” that is thrown on social phenomena (Lazarević 1933a: 40, italics B.L.). Lazarević referred to an unnamed “social writer” who aestheticized and glorified working people’s suffering as a “sublime moral beauty” (41): according to Lazarević, such literature may be tendentious, but it surely is not social. In this sense, as literature is necessarily political, the question is only which and whose politics it supports. Or, as Bogdanov put it, the question is: “whom do you serve?” (1932b: 195)¹⁸ In the influential article “O socijalnoj literaturi” (On

¹⁸ This resonated with Milivoj Magdić’s article “Pojave u našem književnom životu,” published in *Socijalna Misao*, also in 1932. Magdić strove to scientifically clarify the terms and contradictions *social literature* was freighted with. In line with the general leftist stance on tendency in art, he first refuted the presumption of allegedly “pure,” “nontendentious” art (26). To those authors who claimed pure artistic

social literature), published in the journal *Kultura*, Jovan Popović explained *tendency* on similar grounds. He maintained that, principally, as every literature is necessarily tendentious, tendency is not something that comes from without but something that the author carries within himself, even unconsciously. *Tendency* surely is not that “ugly, peculiar, vulgar, malicious” matter, as it is viewed by l’art pour l’artisme (1933: 266).

These observations were accordant with the status of *tendency* in the international theoretical literature. In 1932, Lukács suggested exchanging the misleading term of “tendency” with “partisanship” (Lukács 1980; cf. Gallas 1971: 67, 148): as literature is necessarily tendentious and as proletarian-revolutionary literature inevitably brings to the fore the revolutionary goals of the proletarian class, explicit tendency necessarily is superfluous and enforced. Moreover, not only Galogaža, Lazarević, and Popović but even the ill-famed Yugoslav normativists, such as Milovan Đilas or Radovan Zogović, refuted the “vulgarized tendencies, that is, the reduction of the artwork’s idea to watchword and catchphrase” (Lasić 1970: 134). Therefore, and contrary to common assumptions, in their endeavor to achieve the “symbiosis” of literature and revolution (Mađarević 1974: 17), social writers jettisoned both the “abstract absolute autonomy” and the “vulgar sociological utilitarianism of literature” (179).

Another trait of the *ethical regime* was the orientation towards literary contents. In the international discussions, the importance of revolutionary contents and of the therefrom resulting realistic form was, first, put down to the historical urgency of swift revolutionary action (cf. Lunačarskii 1919: 19) and, then, supported by the argument of winning the masses (cf. Gallas 1971: 62). Václav Běhounek’s article “Ruska literatura za doba pjatiletke” (Russian literature during the First pyatiletka), published in *Socijalna Misao* in 1932, insisted that proletarian literature presents “typical images of a collective that definitively and energetically dispenses with the class epoch of humanity” (146). The thesis was that the proletarian literature writes about “the heroes of communist work, fights passivity and petty-bourgeois subjectivism” (146). This thesis, written in the aftermath of the Kharkov conference, was appropriated by Branko Lazarević, who in the same issue of *Socijalna Misao* interpreted proletarian art as a “sign of progress”: “It is the expression of the spiritual strength of the proletariat in its cultural endeavor towards new life values.” (1932: 141) Lazarević differentiated between the artwork’s aesthetic value (its formal elements) and its moral, i.e., ethical value (contents): whereas the form is a mere sublimation of the ‘real’ and is as such typical of bourgeois art, the content cannot be detached from the artwork’s social origin. “As long as there *exist* classes—capitalists and proletarians, *the exploiters and the exploited*—the content cannot be universal to *all* people.” (141, italics B.L.)

Footnote 18 continued

ambitions he answered ironically: “Those Italian writers who accept the Fascist doctrine are not ashamed of it. They admit that they can only be tendentious, that there is no objectivity, no ‘pure’ art. Why are some local gentlemen ashamed of their positive ideal? They have the right to the affirmation of their ideology [...]” (26) In the following lines, Magdić defended social literature from attacks from the right, thereby supporting the positions of Veselin Masleša and Jovan Popović.

Similar demands on progressive literature were put forth by Vaso Bogdanov who in the communist *Literatura* dismissed pessimistic literature, which “epitomizes the vainness and senselessness of everything” (1932b: 193). Instead, Bogdanov argued for literature that “bears the firm belief in the possibility of changing this unfortunate life” (193): “This literature does not depict death. Death is extolled only by those who have had enough of everything, even of life. In contrast, the great majority of humanity has not even lived yet [...]. That is why it wants to hear and read about life, not about death.” (193) Bogdanov’s vitalistic and programmatic criticism of the bourgeois death drive, his criticism of art’s servitude, and the elaborations on the irrelevance of artistic talent present a perfect embodiment of the political *telos* of the time, sustained by vitalistic and even militant optimism. The bourgeois depictions of the world ‘as it is’ were discarded for the creation of the world ‘as it should be.’

Sometimes, this even meant dispensing with the universalistic omen of the proletarian struggle. Like Lazarević in *Socijalna Misao* and Bogdanov in *Literatura*, in his *Socijalna Misao* article “Marksizam i individualna psihologija” (Marxism and individual psychology) Mirko Kus-Nikolajev contrasted the proletariat with the bourgeois class. If the latter was thoroughly “individualistic and egocentric,” the proletariat was “collectivistic”: “Thus we face two worlds that are different not only with regard to economy but also with regard to their morals, i.e., we meet two moral qualities between which there are neither connections nor transitions.” (1932a: 42) In his subsequent “Ušpon naše kulture” (The rise of our culture), he stated that the proletariat does not “promote ideas of universal human culture. Every culture develops under certain social conditions that result from respective relations of production.” (Kus-Nikolajev 1932b: 106) As far as “our” social literature is concerned, “there exists only proletarian literature as opposed to bourgeois literature” (106). Similar antagonism was promoted by a *Stožer* article, “Smisao književnosti i dužnost pisaca” (The meaning of literature and the duty of writers), where Stevan Galogaža claimed that

[i]f a writer does not struggle for those who work, he is not a writer. In such a case, he provides services of a footman or a wageworker. This is then called a servant and not a writer. He may sleep on soft bedding, but this bedding is a very uncertain one, and he sleeps with his consciousness off. (1931: 106)

Therefore, as it is evident that in contrast to ‘pure art’ and its socially disinterested aestheticism, all inspected journals departed from the same premises, where were the stumbling blocks? What incited the discussions on the Yugoslav literary left?

‘Left radicalism’ against ‘left bourgeoisie’

Due to its sharp focus on the later controversy between Krleža and his communist ‘others’ (cf. Krleža’s *Moj obračun s njima*/My reckoning with them, 1932), literary historiography overlooked the importance of a dispute that marked the very beginning of the *Conflict*: the controversy between the so-called ‘cartel’ (authors

publishing in *Nova literatura*, *Kritika*, *Literatura*, *Stožer*, and *Kultura*) and the ‘social literature swindlers’ (*Socijalna Misao* authors). In contrast to the cursory views that the “polemic discussions on literature’s role in society [were] spurred by Serbian surrealists (Milan Dedinac, Koča Popović, Marko Ristić, Oskar Davičo, etc.), gathered around the Belgrade journal *Nadrealizam danas i ovde*” (Brozović 2015: 137), it should be stressed that the respective debates evolved aside from and even earlier than the dispute on surrealism.

In *Socijalna Misao*, several texts presented criticism that was akin to what Walter Fähnders and Martin Rector called “left radicalism,” or to what Helga Gallas, regarding the debates in *Die Linkskurve*, classified as “left opposition”: as a reflex reaction to the Russian RAPP, in *Die Linkskurve* a related group of authors, who propagated proletarian literature (literature written *by* the proles and *for* the proles), jettisoned elements of cultural action that were not authentically proletarian. This group attacked the ‘left bourgeoisie,’ as represented by Alfred Döblin, Ernst Toller, Kurt Tucholsky, Il’ja Erenburg, Panait Istrati, Boris Pil’nak, and Theodor Plivier (Gallas 1971: 48–49). In Yugoslavia, a corresponding critique of the left bourgeoisie was written by Stanko Tomašić, the aforementioned author of the *auto-da-fé* “Tragikomedija slobodnog pera,” published in *Kritika* in 1928, and of the text “Književni kriterij današnjice” (Contemporary literary criterion), a *Socijalna Misao* text from 1929, where he attacked larpurlartism. With his 1929 article “Književni rad M. Krleža (Marginalije uz premijeru ‘Gospode Glembajevih’)” (Literary work of M. Krleža [Marginalia considering the premiere of “The Glembaj family”]), Tomašić ventured the very first leftist critique of Krleža. He discerned three phases in Krleža’s work: the “revolutionary” phase (*Simfonije*/Symphonies, journal *Plamen*, with Krleža acting as a “lunatic”), the documentation phase of “social physiognomies” (stories and novels published in *Plamen* and *Književna republika*), and the “domesticated” phase (represented by plays *Golgota*/Golgotha, 1922; *Galicija*/Galicia, 1920, later entitled *U logoru*/In the camp; *Adam i Eva*/Adam and Eve, 1922; *Vučjak*/Wolfhound, 1923; and especially by the “bourgeois” pieces *U agoniji*/In agony, 1931, and *Gospoda Glembajevi*/The Glembaj family, 1929). Whereas *Golgota* and *Galicija* still contained “desperate, neurasthenic” poetics, with *Gospoda Glembajevi* Krleža’s literary “template” reached its climax (33). Predictably, this was the moment when Krleža was finally accepted by the domestic bourgeois intelligentsia: Tomašić concluded that with *Gospoda Glembajevi* Krleža had turned into the phenomenon he was earlier eagerly refuting, both privately and as Marxist (33).

Tomašić’s harsh criticism proved to be too radical and was soon dismissed by the critics from the communist camp as well as by the authors publishing in *Socijalna Misao*. Although Krleža’s style was in no way proletarian, critics fond of Karl August Wittfogel’s and other related transitional interpretations of literary development perceived Krleža as a pertinent literary figure on the way towards ‘genuine’ proletarian literature. Oto Bihalji-Merin (O. Biha), the aforementioned co-editor of *Die Linkskurve*, co-editor of *Nova literatura*, co-founder of the publishing house *Nolit*, and—significantly—a representant of the ‘left bourgeoisie’ himself, acclaimed Krleža for his depiction of the disintegration of the bourgeois epoch because Krleža took into focus not only one individual perspective but

encompassed the “epoch” as totality (1929a: 203). Furthermore, he acclaimed Krleža as a milestone in the development of social drama (203). As for *Socijalna Misao*, the journal did not uphold Tomašić’s antikrležian stance either: Milivoj Magdić, the critic of Dragoljub Jovanović’s utopian socialism, dismissed Tomašić’s texts as “talented novellas with no relation to the discussed matter whatsoever” (1932a: 60). Like Oto Bihalji-Merin, Milivoj Magdić acknowledged in Krleža the merit of attacking the bourgeois class at its weakest point (cf. also 1932b). However, Bihalji’s and Magdić’s support for Krleža were not of the same kind. Between their texts, published in 1929 and 1932, tide change became evident insofar as Magdić’s 1932 acknowledgment of Krleža is already articulated against another backdrop than was Bihalji’s 1929 defense. Namely, already in 1929 Rastko Petrović (R.P.¹⁹) remarked that Krleža was “intimately tied to baroque and Goya” and that he was reluctant to join the artistic collective *Zemlja* (‘Earth’) because the “ideology these artists bring along [was] foreign to him” (1929: 315–316). Around 1930, the conflict was undoubtedly whirling below the surface (cf. Mujičić 1980: 5) and in 1933, with his “Predgovor Podravskim motivima Krste Hegedušića” Krleža only brought it to the fore.²⁰ But already in 1932, when Magdić sided with Krleža, it was in a decisively altered atmosphere. In “Zadaci književne kritike” (Tasks of literary criticism), Magdić posited that “[p]roletarian art does not work with means that imply a mechanical transfer of clichés from other fields of the proletarian struggle. It works with literary means.” (1932d: 94) Although the criticism of the “mechanical transfer of clichés” had been sound in many positions on the left (cf. Lunačarski 1919; for later positions, cf. Vučković 1935: 81–82), it is significant that in the years 1932 and 1933, Magdić (as well as Kus-Nikolajev) chose precisely Krleža’s understanding of *talent* as the proper measure of artistic value. This was the time when the Kharkov theses rapidly imbued the Yugoslav literary debates. Although he initially supported them, Magdić soon became their fierce critic, choosing Krleža’s viewpoint as the politically and aesthetically more justifiable position. Concomitantly, Krleža’s *Moj obračun s njima* had already been in preparation (Bogdanov 1940: 71).²¹ Although this book of polemics was primarily a confrontation with conservative literary critics, as well as with several leftist authors publishing in *Socijalna Misao* (Božidar Adžija, Kalman Mesarić, Stanko Tomašić), the conflict between communists and those social democrats who sided with Krleža (Kus-Nikolajev, Magdić) was undoubtedly whirling below the surface. Finally, Magdić opened his 1932 “Zadaci književne kritike” with a quote from the recently published *Obračun*: “I am convinced that around me there are people who believe that in literature results can be achieved only by literary means *and by nothing else*.” (1932d: 94, italics I.P.; Krleža 1932b: 304–305) About a year after, in “Krležina estetika” (Krleža’s aesthetics), Magdić glanced back at the development of Marxist literary critique, which culminated in the Kharkov demand for “full

¹⁹ I thank Vesna Vuković for deciphering the pseudonym.

²⁰ Lasić also remarks that criticism against Krleža is noticeable already in 1931 but not “constituted” before 1932 (1970: 95).

²¹ Some of its constituent texts were previously published in journals, e.g., the opening article “Pro domo sua” was published in *Književnik* in 1930 (3.2 [1930]: 58–67).

fidelity and loyalty of the proletarian writer to the goal of the proletariat and its struggle” (1933: 67). He notified that these demands went too far and that their realization turned out to be impossible. Regarding this, he completely endorsed Krleža’s position:

Krleža is well aware that “every particular artistic emotion is of social origin and that the proper higher scope of art should be to elevate this aesthetic emotionality towards higher levels of social harmonic uniqueness.” However, he is also aware that the main question in poetry remains that mysterious power of expression, that is not the same as its technical shape or the formal accomplishment of the poetic material but first and foremost the power of talent. (68)

The second attempt at a radical leftist critique of Krleža, this time coming from the communist side, occurred with Bogomir Herman’s (A.B.C.) “Quo vadis, Krleža?” that was published in *Kultura* in 1933. The text unmasked Krleža’s views as biased, which was due to his “solypsistically bizarre egocentrism” (Lasić’s paraphrase of Herman 1970: 120). Herman read Krleža politically and asked as follows: Is the creative ‘I,’ the *talent*—as extensively advocated by Krleža—necessarily and always a result of social context or can we account for its spontaneous emergence *ex nihilo*? If it is necessarily a social fact, then the disregard of its social embedding would lead to serious political flaws, as characteristic of aestheticism and *l’art pour l’artisme*. Namely, it is through the ‘I’ that political ideas enter literature and make use of it as an ideological weapon. And it is only by means of “solipsistic mystification” (1933: 307) that one can abstract from these material, social conditions to such an extent as to acclaim literary experience and creation as “dark as the sea at night” (Krleža, “Predgovor,” qtd. in Herman 1933: 307), that is, as impervious towards political decisions, artistic goals, and social purposes. This is why Herman warned against the mystification of the ‘I’ and argued for its problematization in terms of *homo politicus* (307). The Communist Party reacted to this and commissioned a letter that was published as written by “a group of readers of social literature” but actually by the Politburo Secretary Milan Gorkić (real name Josip Čizinsky; cf. Gorkić 1933). Herman’s critique was dismissed as “sectarian” and “Trotskyist” (Očak 1982: 201). With that, a preliminary appeasement was achieved.

At this moment, notwithstanding his heterodox aesthetic views and thanks to his political activism and the huge influence he exerted on many generations of Yugoslav communists, Krleža was still able to ‘rescue’ himself. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Kharkov conference, it became clear that the prospective cultural front needed authors as influential as him. It suffices to recall that the dissolution of RAPP in 1932 opened the gate for a progressive appropriation of the classical literary tradition and the renewed inclusion of the artist who were previously considered as insufficiently proletarian. To illustrate, by the time “Quo vadis, Krleža?” was published, pertinent rearrangement of positions in the German journal *Die Linkskurve* had already been completed: after in 1931 the journal’s chief editor, Oto Bihalji-Merin, was forced to resign from his position (Gallas 1971: 47), and after Georg Lukács (in office since summer 1931), Johannes Becher, and Karl A.

Wittfogel were outmaneuvered as well, with the 1932 dissolution of RAPP the left opposition in *Die Linkskurve* lost its support and the recently ousted ‘bourgeois’ editors were back in office again. Thus, a new epoch for progressive literature arose: RAPP’s exclusivist ideas of proletarian culture were exchanged for the idea of an encompassing, collective socialist culture that addressed the masses. In his article “Unsere Wendung” (*Die Linkskurve* 3 [1931]), Becher argued that the Party needs to reach the people and that this is possible by means of the “novel for the masses” (Gallas 1971: 63). This turnaround on the international literary and political scene I believe to have been the fulcrum point where Krleža was expected to enter. The Yugoslav literary field had already made theoretical steps towards a unified cultural front and what the scene was waiting for was Krleža’s literary commitment to this new stage of progressive literature.²² Indeed, in 1932 Krleža allegedly agreed to write a novel on the “military-Fascist dictatorship” in Yugoslavia (Očak 195). As such a book would imply exile and publication ban, he asked for the support of the Comintern. Concomitantly, throughout 1933 he awaited a response regarding the financial support for a new journal. However, due to manifold and nowadays almost incomprehensible reasons, Krleža relinquished this commitment. When on 1 Jan. 1934 Krleža launched the journal *Danas* in Belgrade, with the co-editor Milan Bogdanović and without the patronage of the Comintern (cf. Očak 1982: 195, 209, 211; Iveković 1970: 227), this already marked the final schism on the literary left, with no prospects for reconciliation.

A conflict at the roots of the *Conflict*: social literature swindlers

Preceding and simultaneously with the first exchange of blows between Krleža and his ‘others,’ in *Stožer*, *Literatura*, and *Kultura*,²³ a series of texts epitomized the clash within the group of advocates of social literature. This early dispute between the so-called literary ‘swindlers’ and the ‘cartel’ evolved around several aspects of the *ethical regime*, which were even more relevant to the leftist *r/evolutionary controversy* than the part of the *Conflict* that evolved around Krleža’s persona. As already shown, in Yugoslav debates many reflexes and follow-ups to the international literary and political developments can be observed. However, whereas on the international literary left the disputes primarily focused on the ‘proletarian’ and ‘revolutionary,’ i.e., ‘proletarian-revolutionary’ literature, the Yugoslav clash of opinions pivoted around the term *social literature* (Lasić even speaks of *social literature* as an “unmistakenly Yugoslav movement,” 1970: 69).

²² Mađarević remarks that when compared with the debates on the international left, such as the one between Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukács, the Yugoslav left had a personality comparable to Brecht–Krleža—but that it undoubtedly lacked a personality like Lukács (1974: 63). I believe that it was precisely the opposite: whereas the discussions on the Yugoslav literary left were theoretically preparing the field for the popular front (as it was at the beginning of the 1930s advocated by Lukács, Becher, and others), it was the ‘Yugoslav Brecht’—or, even more—the ‘Yugoslav Becher’ who was missing.

²³ As *Nova literatura* was published until 1931, and *Kritika* only in 1928, they did not partake in these debates directly.

For this reason, some theoretical lineaments of the term and its historical precedents are necessary.

The term *social literature* reflected the fact that the Yugoslav proletariat as a political subject was almost non-existent when compared to countries with more ‘developed’ capitalism. *Social literature* addressed and included not only factory workers (urban proletariat) but also peasant masses that in Yugoslavia far outnumbered the factory workers (the peasants constituted more than 2/3 of the population, whereas the workers made up only 10%; cf. Janićijević 1984: 252). As indicated above, despite the political differences between the authors gathered around the social democratic *Socijalna Misao* on the one side, and around the communist journals *Stožer*, *Literatura*, and *Kultura* on the other, all disputants held rather similar positions regarding the contents and the political reach of *social literature*. Up to a certain point, each side published respectful reports on the activities of the other.

Throughout all journal issues, *Socijalna Misao* authors upheld the stance that art is necessarily a social (sociological) phenomenon, dependent on the “economic structure” as the “final soil whereupon all ideological phenomena are based” (Kus-Nikolajev 1929: 69). In 1932, Branko Lazarević repeated Kus-Nikolajev by saying that “artistic style is economic necessity” (1932: 139). A year later, Lazarević maintained that literature is an expression or reflection of “the historical movement of new productive forces” (1933a: 42). Lazarević attempted to vindicate social literature from ongoing conservative criticism, according to which social literature was dogmatic and lacked a sense of aesthetics and beauty. He repeatedly stressed that literature is a “reflection of necessary socio-economic events in the historical development of society, manifesting itself in class opposites and struggles” (1933b: 38). Therefore, if social literature is attacked as an invention of some “dogmatic sect” (38), this dogmatic element is contained in its essential social character: as the standard of the modern man’s social consciousness, literature is necessarily reliant on this man’s belonging to a particular social class—either bourgeois or proletarian (40).

But more interesting than the vindication of social literature against criticism from the right was the quarrel over its contents and political horizons as it evolved on the left. The quarrel was incited by Stevan Galogaža’s *Stožer* article “Smisao književnosti i dužnost pisaca” (1931). Galogaža defined literature as antagonistically representing the very material conditions that engender literature in the first place:

Literary development is a reflex of a struggle between two kinds of people, placed at particular places and determined by the system of production. [...] Literary content implies the understanding of reality from the point of view of the one or the other type of people. Therefore, literature is economico-politically conditioned; by the same token, literature acts upon the social life in return. (105)

In *Stožer*’s next issue, in the article “Pseudosocijalne tendencije u našoj književnosti” (Pseudo-social tendencies in our literature) Milan Durman noticed the “phenomenon of social mystifications”: as literature is always social and something

like ‘non-social literature’ would be *contradictio in adiecto*, he tried out other criteria for defining *social literature* instead (1931: 139). Durman interpreted *social literature* in connection to modern social movements: literature is *social* only when it is “consistent with modern social movements, which are in return conditioned by the development and progress of productive social forces. [Thus, *social literature*] acknowledges the primacy of material life conditions.” (139) Durman proved to be deterministic about these conditions when he declared that there is no progressive literature without progressive developments in the economic base. As the social base in Yugoslavia was still underdeveloped, he concluded that one cannot expect anything but pseudo-social literary production, written by pseudo-social writers, who are nothing but petty-bourgeois intellectuals (140). Now, even if these conjectures did present the mainstream of Yugoslav left literary criticism, and although the petty-bourgeois profile of Yugoslav intellectuals was disclosed and belabored by these intellectuals themselves, Durman’s sweeping materialism was nevertheless challenged. In the same journal, Bogomir Herman (who was soon to be remembered as A.B.C., that is, as the author of “Quo vadis, Krleža?”), here however writing under the pseudonym B.H.M.) noticed that Durman’s materialism led to defeatism and passivity: the assumption that there can be no social literature where there are no modern relations of production “seems very materialistic. But—what can we do!—it is not correct.” (1931: 171) Herman maintained that it is misleading to observe literary work only as an expression of ripened social forces. Writers can also be social forerunners, “affecting still amorphous but possibly mobile elements of their milieu in the direction of their appropriate spiritual organization” (171). In other words, he claimed, instead of “scholastic rigidity,” literary criticism needs “dialectical versatility” that takes account of particular time and space (171).²⁴ Only thanks to this dialectical skillfulness is it possible to regard Erich Maria Remarque as a reactionary in Germany and Miroslav Krleža as a progressive in Yugoslavia.²⁵

From this it follows that both *vulgar materialism* (according to which political and historical processes are completely dependent on material relations in the economic base, which is Durman’s position) and *proletarian-revolutionary*

²⁴ This was attempted by Milivoj Magdić in his article “Zadaci književne kritike” (1932d). Refusing the exclusivist perspective, that was characteristic of the earlier stages of proletarian literature (e.g., RAPP), Magdić presented the thesis on the threefold character of Croatian social literature: the peasant, national, and proletarian character. These three types of social literature were perceived in their temporal succession: the type of the modern proletarian intellectual (that was still inexistent) was expected to emerge from the contemporary social intelligentsia. Similarly, as “national-democratic maximality” was followed by “peasant maximality,” so too should the currently emerging social literature result in a new type of “social maximality” (95). As for the contemporary state of *social literature*, Magdić again acknowledged its merits for erecting several pertinent literary assumptions, which altogether allowed for the creation of truly proletarian literature (94).

²⁵ It is interesting how in this article, published in 1931, Herman acknowledged Krleža for his “social-critical works” (171), which radically changed in his 1933 invective “Quo vadis, Krleža?” If in 1933 Herman rebuked Krleža for solipsism and defeatism, in 1931 he still maintained that, casting a retrospective glance at Krleža from some future point of view, one would indeed criticize his “lack of belief in progressive forces of our milieu” (172) and his skepticism and individualistic ideology that “still contains much of the idealistic-aristocratic material” (172). However, it is indisputable that Krleža’s social criticism was not “swindle and mystification” (172) but a “precious pioneer work” (172).

exclusivism (according to which only proletarian writers can create genuine revolutionary literature, which is the position of Stanko Tomašić) have in the aftermath of the Kharkov conference been recognized as misleading. This is evident also among the authors of *Socijalna Misao*. It is worth reading “Uspon naše kulture,” a 1932 text by Kus-Nikolajev, who departed from Karl A. Wittfogel as “an outstanding proletarian cultural worker” (1932b: 106). Simultaneously with Magdić (cf. note 24), Kus-Nikolajev elaborated on three successive stages of proletarian literature: In the first phase, reflecting resignation and pessimism, bourgeois culture dominates the proletarian attempts at liberation and the working class remains completely dependent on the ideas of the bourgeois intelligentsia. This first, “anti-bourgeois phase” (106) is the phase of the proletariat’s gravest socio-economic weakness. The second phase is already characterized by the proletariat’s gradual liberation from bourgeois influences. Here, radical jettisoning of every trace of bourgeois traditions is typical. For this reason, although outstandingly active, this phase is still only defensive. Kus-Nikolajev depicted it as the phase of “analysis and critique,” as it could be found in works by Upton Sinclair, John Dos Passos, Friedrich Glaeser, Henry Barbusse, and others (107). It is only in the third phase that the proletariat reaches full “social and spiritual strength” (107). This phase is not destructive and defensive but constructive and offensive (106). Its peaks are epitomized in works by Vladimir Stavski, Fedor Ivanovič Panferov, and Fedor Glatkov (106). Kus-Nikolajev observed that Yugoslav literature, social literature included, still lingered in the first phase. Here, Kus-Nikolajev shared the belief with Milivoj Magdić, but also with Jovan Popović and Bogomir Herman (cf. Herman 1931), that Krleža was a rare but outstanding Yugoslav representative of the second phase.

Notwithstanding Herman’s criticism of Durman’s determinism, “Pseudosocijalne tendencije u našoj književnosti” is important not only because Durman was the first one to use the word “swindlers” (“švindler[i]” 142) but because he also attempted to critically revise the whole panoply of literary works that claimed to be social. Durman maintained that social literature cannot be judged by one-sided standards of literary form or of literary content. Only naive swindlers believe that social literature is about workers, factories, and suffering; it “is not about *what* is written but about *how* it is written” (142). A writer who feels obliged to sympathize with workers and to demonstrate his humanism without ever becoming a worker and writing from the proletarian standpoint is, as Ernst Toller observed, nothing but a “*privatier* who aestheticizes” (143). Durman concluded that the only way to distinguish between an authentic social writer and a swindler is to take into consideration his whole life and attitudes, including not only his social background but his private life as well. This standpoint was also supported by Stevan Galogaža, who in his programmatic text “Što se ne može primiti kao socijalna književnost” (What we cannot accept as social literature), published in *Literatura*, departed from Rosa Luxemburg’s claim that “only someone who is inflamed can inflame others” (Galogaža 1932b: 146). Thus, as a criterion for the inspection of texts submitted to *Literatura*, Galogaža suggested not only the inspection of the literary piece in question but also of its author. Furthermore, he refuted the ingrained individualistic belief that “style is what a person is” and posited that “style is what the class is”

(148). He observed that just as a petty-bourgeois author adopts the views and attitudes of the working class so too, unfortunately, do proletarian authors begin to write as petty-bourgeois (of which Galogaža provided several examples). The reason for this proletarian misproduction was that the petty-bourgeois style was generally viewed as the epitome of literature ‘as such.’ Accordingly, Galogaža’s and Durman’s advocating for an unmistakable proletarian perspective implied that only those authors who did not adopt literary “tools of individualistic worldviews” (148), as typical of the petty bourgeoisie, could be conceived of as social writers.

If Durman’s “Pseudosocijalne tendencije u našoj književnosti” and Galogaža’s “Što se ne može primiti kao socijalna književnost” appeared in *Stožer* and *Literatura*,²⁶ similar invectives against ‘social literature swindlers’ were also published in *Socijalna Misao*, the alleged refuge of the ‘swindlers.’ In this journal, *social literature* was primarily defended against the invectives from the right, e.g., in Magdić’s article “Pojave u našem književnom životu” (Phenomena in our literary life, 1932c: 26). Likewise, Kus-Nikolajev critically inspected the very term *social literature*, trying to dissociate it from conservative writing. Namely, “even the most reactionary literature under certain circumstances can be social, taken that it observes social complexity as a whole” (1932b: 106).

The schism was spurred by Savić Marković Štedimlija’s 1932 article “Simulanti u socijalnoj literaturi” (Social literature swindlers). Štedimlija took a critical stand on authors who due to “mercantile or personal reasons” merely ‘produced’ social literature, without, however, sharing the ideology of the rising social classes and without partaking in collective emancipatory strivings: that is why the “social writer” was a very unprecise term and should be exchanged for a better one (10). Štedimlija defined one of the mainstays of social swindling: he mocked the common belief that “literature ought to sprout from life, to take its juices from life, *to root in life*” (12, italics S.M.Š.) because such literature, once it gets inspired by life, hovers above reality, disconnected and disinterested in life’s “facts” (12). Štedimlija attacked several representatives of *social literature*: Petar Lazić, Novak Simić, and Rade Drainac. Although still applauding Galogaža for his *Stožer* article “Smisao književnosti i dužnost pisaca” (1931), at the end of the paper he nevertheless defended Krleža, whose play *Gospoda Glembajevi* was at that time criticized by an article written by “Josip Dombaj” (Novak Simić), published in the Sarajevo journal *Mlada Bosna*. Here the story becomes tricky and begins to resemble a thriller novel: although an admirer of Krleža himself, Novak Simić followed Galogaža’s instruction to critically review *Gospoda Glembajevi* as bourgeois and decadent (cf. Mujičić 1980: 5; Petrak 1993). Interestingly, at the end of “Simulanti u socijalnoj literaturi” Štedimlija added a footnote where he mentioned another text he had submitted for publication in *Stožer* in 1931. He says that “then it was impossible to publish it” but does not say why, only that “[l]ater I have withdrawn it for personal reasons and it will not be published at all.” (13) Given the fact that almost simultaneously, when it was “impossible to publish” Štedimlija’s article in *Stožer*, in this very same journal Durman criticized the “pseudo-social tendencies”

²⁶ One should not forget another pertinent article, “O socijalnoj literaturi” (1933), written by Jovan Popović and published in *Literatura* (cf. note 13).

and the “swindlers” (1931), one can conclude that as early as in 1931 the constitutive fissures on the literary left became evident.²⁷ Therefore, against the assumption that it was Krleža who sparked the *Conflict* or that it was Krleža who was its main ideological relais, in the *Conflict*’s first stage the main controversy arose between the communists and the social democrats, and not between communists and Krleža. Even if Krleža did mark the trigger point where the subliminal controversies between the communists and the social democrats came to the fore, the conflict between the ‘cartel’ and the ‘swindlers’ was an autonomous phenomenon, with its agents reaching out for or refuting this author just as with the help of an authority they defined their own political and aesthetic standing.

The dispute over *social literature swindlers* reached its peak with Štedimlija’s second article on this topic, “Kartel socijalne literature” (Cartel of social literature), published in *Socijalna Misao*’s first issue in 1933. Štedimlija departed from Krleža’s and Cesarec’s *Plamen* and *Književna Republika* as journals with clear social-political orientation. Contrary to these two journals, Štedimlija asserted that all journals that appeared afterwards developed into “purely commercial companies” (1933a: 9). The journals were not mentioned by name but one easily guesses that Štedimlija was referring to *Nova literatura*, *Kritika*, *Literatura*, and *Stožer*. According to the author, these journals were “companies” that expected profit in return: “Therein consists the reasons for the failure of these journals, both ideological and commercial.” (9–10) Whereas the commercial interest in these endeavors was so evident that it aroused suspicion among the readers, even in the ideological regard they did not reach the standards set by *Plamen* and *Književna Republika*. Due to their struggle to win readers, competition occurred in the field of social literature. This precipitated the establishment of literary cartels whose aim was to outrule the competition and to establish a monopoly. Another effect was that the cartel subdued criticism: when confronted with a critique whose ideological orientation was not a proper Marxist one, the editors promptly accused the respective critic “of being a capitalist servant, perhaps even a denunciator” (10). According to Štedimlija, those who remained outside the cartel were easily and quickly identified with the nationalist positions of, e.g., Miloš Crnjanski, Rade Drainac, and Ivan Nevistić (11). In the final result, the social literature cartel made its authors dependent—both ideologically and financially—and therefore loyal (11). By disabling criticism, the “cartel” was reluctant to any kind of “control” (12), thus authorizing itself with a self-righteous “etiquette of entitlement” (12), which in the end did not allow for literary development. Unfortunately, for these provocative theses, Štedimlija offered neither precise information (journal titles, authors) nor other facts that could support them.

Several months after Štedimlija’s polemic text, Jovan Popović published an article in *Kultura* that seems to have repeated this criticism of the mercantile interests in social literature: in “O socijalnoj literaturi,” he maintained that what was sometimes derogatively called *social literature* sought to give the modern man orientation in new economic and political circumstances. Popović suggested a “clarification of the terms” regarding social literature (1933: 266). Like Štedimlija,

²⁷ Cf. note 20.

he noticed the mercantile reasons that subdued its revolutionary orientation. The “speculative spirit” (266) of bourgeois publishing enterprises discovered in social literature a new alluring commodity so that gentlemen refurbished their companies and sold social literature surrogates. However, unlike Štedimlija, Popović went a step further and openly enumerated the respective mercantile agents—detecting them among the very collaborators of *Socijalna Misao*, the journal where Štedimlija published his “Kartel socijalne literature”! Besides the “literary eunuchs from the right,” he pointed to the “masked quills with leftist paroles,” who published for Zagreb publisher *Binoza* and in journals *Socijalna Misao* and *Snaga* (267). Štedimlija and Magdić were nominally mentioned, and Vaso Bogdanov was described as suffering from “leftist infantile disorder” (267). Undoubtedly, this was the point where tacit mutual disapprovals on the literary left were released to the fore. Moreover, if in the beginning the criticism of swindling in social literature was common to all literary critics on the left, and addressed against sentimental and conservative aestheticization of social subjects, from this moment on the scathing criticism was exchanged among the protagonists of this very same literary left.

Štedimlija’s subsequent “Sloboda umjetničkog stvaranja i socijalna literatura” (1933b), published in the very last issue of *Socijalna Misao*, was an implicit reaction to Popović’s invectives. More distinctly than before, Štedimlija bounced back to Krleža’s invocation of talent and artistic freedom, as put forth in “Predgovor Podravskim motivima Krste Hegedušića” (published in April 1933). He endorsed the “freedom of artistic creation,” “the freedom in choosing and addressing the subjects of art,” as well as “the freedom in choosing the particular art form” (195). He did acknowledge that “in times of acuminated class and social conflicts” (195) the admission of artistic liberties could jeopardize the “necessity of the consistent and uniform presence of the class” in question but he nevertheless insisted that art must be approached from a different angle than the “practical-utilitarian” one (195). If the expectations on art were articulated in a way that required the artist to change his aims and methods, then this clearly led to the “destruction of freedom of artistic creation” (196). Štedimlija found flaws in the argumentation of literary ‘utilitarians,’ accusing them of utterly nonmaterialistic attitudes and expectations, because they “assume[d] that the results and the nature of artistic creation could be regulated and determined by means of previously adopted measures and plans” (196). Here, Štedimlija insisted on the persuasion that the freedom of artistic expression relies in the free shaping of life’s conditions and circumstances, as experienced by the individual artist. Besides the endorsement of artistic freedom, in the last paragraph Štedimlija came back to the previously adumbrated slavish position of authors who belonged to the ‘cartel.’ He concluded that the obedience the cartel demanded was in no way different from the obedience of authors who wrote for bourgeois journals and publishing houses. Moreover, it was hypocritical. Departing from this persuasion, Štedimlija saw no reason why an author who was a servant to a bourgeois master would change to a socialist one (196). In other words, the expectation that the exploited artist should move from his old capitalistic employer to the new one (the “cartel”) and thus simply exchange one company for another was based on the misconception that “one can remove the consequences irrespective of their causes” (196).

Interestingly, this text provoked no significant reactions. In 1933, in “Kulturna kronika” (Chronicles of culture), a regular division in *Literatura*, Stevan Galogaža invoked Štedimlija’s speculations on social literature as a “*social shop*,” on the “*cartel* of social literature,” and on the chicane to which the authors from without the “cartel” (1933: 14, italics S.G.) were putatively subjected to. He appealed to Štedimlija to provide exact proofs of his accusations and payed no further attention to this topic.

Finally, the development of *Socijalna Misao* from ‘allied company’ towards a competitor and, moreover, ideological antipode can be demonstrated on the articles by Milivoj Magdić. It has been noted that Magdić, similar as other critics (e.g., Oto Bihalji-Merin), was an outspoken supporter of Krleža (cf. his two articles on Krleža’s *The Glembaj family* 1932a, b). What shifted him to the ‘right,’ was the fact that he never abandoned Krleža.

His “Zadaci književne kritike” was introduced by quotes by Miroslav Krleža and Aleksandr Tarásov-Rodiónov. Two main theses were relevant here: First, Magdić maintained that the petty-bourgeois character of the Croatian literary and cultural field did not allow for any other protest than the individual one. Proceeding in a Krležian manner (cf. Krleža 1932c: 177–178), Magdić enumerated forged literary and cultural formations by counts who were not counts (Ivo Vojnović), by noblemen who were not noblemen (Ksaver Šandor Đalski), by aristocrats who were not aristocrats (Dragutin Domjanić), and by peasants whose peasantry was delimited to mere paper inventions (Petar Popović Pecija). Somewhat epigonally, Magdić summed up with a reference to Krleža’s *Moj obračun s njima*: the presence of peasantry in local literature was hypocritical because it was nothing but the “village viewed through the glass rectangles of a smoky Zagreb coffee house” (92; Krleža 1932c: 178). After “Pojave u našem književnom životu,” that also was published in 1932, Magdić’s “Zadaci književne kritike” is significant because it attempted to analytically extend the notion of *social literature*. Literary texts that belonged to *social literature* were multiple: according to Magdić, they also encompassed literature that was related to the Croatian peasant movement (here he implied HSS—Croatian peasants party) because this literature presented a considerable part of Croatian society and therefore could not be excluded from something which was denominated as *social literature*. Precisely for this reason, Magdić insisted that literature usually perceived as “social” should *stricto sensu* be called “proletarian” (1932d: 93). In contrast to authors emerging from the peasant movement, which was primarily national in character, a proletarian writer must be a “dialectical materialist” (93). To such a writer, the positions of bourgeois writers are necessarily alien. Magdić asserted that the proletarian literary movement should not, however, be exclusive but that it should involve people from other classes as well: people who by way of struggle and revolutionary change have been transformed and joined the proletariat. In contrast to his later text “Krležina estetika” (1933), where Magdić was already critical of the developments that came in the aftermath of the Kharkov conference, here he implemented the Kharkov conclusions without reservation: from proletarian writers he demanded dialectical consciousness and that they write from the standpoint of their class. Consistent with the Kharkov conclusions was also his criticism of the dangers coming from both the right and the left: especially

dangerous was the so-called “leftist opportunism” that masked itself with “‘left’ radical parables” (1932d: 94) and forbade any other literature than that of the proletariat (meant was, undoubtedly, Stanko Tomašić). It is in this context that Magdić argued for an elaborate classification of various streams of contemporary literary production and that he maintained that “[p]roletarian art does not work with means that imply a mechanical transfer of clichés from other fields of the proletarian struggle” (94). However, the fact that he chose Krleža for the illustration of this thesis (the aforementioned Krleža’s statement “there are people around me who believe that in literature, goals are accomplished by literary means only and by nothing else,” Magdić 1932d: 94) was unequivocally polemically addressed against the ‘cartel’ critics.

Conclusion

The in-depth inspection of the *Conflict*’s first stage demonstrates that the debate over *social literature* presented the groundbreaking political controversy on the Yugoslav literary left, one that mirrored the overall ideological gap between *revolution* and *evolution*, communists and social democrats. As oppositional political activity was forbidden, literary counterpublics were used as a platform where this *r/evolutionary controversy* over political orthodoxy and renegades, true activists and swindlers was carried out. Regarding the particular role of the journal *Socijalna Misao*, and although I disapprove of many of his analytical standpoints, I agree with Lasić’s notice that this journal “pleaded for proletarian literature and culture—both in its programmatic or theoretical and in concrete critiques. Thus it cannot be erased as inexistent.” (1970: 64) Indeed, although *Socijalna Misao* was one of the forerunners and mainstays of Yugoslav leftist literary discussions, literary and cultural historiography, interested primarily in the opposing fronts of the communists on the one side and Krleža on the other, foreclosed the important role this journal played in the early development of interwar leftist, revolutionary, both political and literary counterpublics.

As demonstrated above, the literary positions of *Socijalna Misao*’s social democrats undoubtedly were far more to the left than hitherto supposed. The journal’s contributions to the contemporary literary and cultural debates were openly critical towards the tradition of utopian socialism, social democratic ministerialism, Austro-Marxist individual psychology, and numerous other international trends in social democracy. Although since approximately 1931 *Socijalna Misao* authors were especially inclined to Krleža (and particularly after Herman’s ferocious 1933 article “Quo vadis, Krleža?”), the significance of their contributions to the *r/evolutionary controversy* relies on the fact that during the *Conflict*’s first stage, their views on literature undoubtedly were far more to the left than Krleža’s own. Moreover, it is thanks to them that various problems of leftist and revolutionary aesthetics entered Yugoslav literary discussions for the first time.

Finally, in the watershed year 1933, when Krleža became the central axis of the *Conflict*, the *r/evolutionary controversy* shifted away from the debate over *social literature* towards *social literature*. After Krleža’s declaration that “it is not up to us

to determine the art of the future” (1933: 10) and that art’s origin is not of “rational kind” (11) but that art comes from “cerebellum [...], from the intestines, from bowels, principally from hidden corporeal wants, dark passions and egotistically impure drives” (11), the authors publishing in *Socijalna Misao* began to openly oppose communist literary programmatism not by demanding more *evolution* (which still would be defined in political terms) but by invocations of *artistic autonomy*. Taking the year 1933 as a fulcrum point, my central argument is that in contrast to the later developments, in its first stage the *Conflict* presented a genuine *political controversy over revolution and evolution* in art and literature. In the period 1928–1934 the dynamic literary debates, carried out against the backdrop of and in strong connections to the discussions on the international left, were more democratic, more versatile and pluralistic, and also more political than in the subsequent stages, in which the debate over the politically appropriate literary forms, contents, and aims gave way to the question of Krleža’s and surrealists’ vindication of literary autonomy. In other words, as these debates began pivoting around Krleža’s persona and his political heterodoxy they successively lost their r/evolutionary force, thus personalizing a dispute whose original significance was ideological, political, and undoubtedly cultural.

Acknowledgements Open access funding provided by University of Vienna. The paper goes back to a fellowship granted by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW/JESH Program). The project “Factory of literary practice” was conducted during a research stay at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb (IEF).

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