

Preface

In *The New Totalitarian Society* Professor Emil Vlajki tackles some of the major themes that have preoccupied social scientists in this last decade: the end of the bipolar international system, economic globalisation, the clash of civilisations, the resurgence of nationalism, the question of human rights, etc. In this new book, he continues the reflection he has begun with *Les Misérables de la modernité* (Montréal: Éditions du Méridien, 1999). Using an overall philosophical framework to combine insights from many other social science disciplines Professor Vlajki argues that the triumph of "profit-oriented rationality" (which could be taken as the philosophical characterisation of globalization) is rapidly turning into a new and powerful form of economic, political, and military domination.

This is not a philosophical attack on rationality nor is it a political denunciation of Western societies that have made of rationality their central value. On the contrary, Professor Vlajki maintains that Western societies represent the most advanced stage of civilisation, and that therefore it is both natural and moral that they should be dominant in the world. Indeed, since historical progress is based on relationship of forces, domination is inevitable. Hence, it is preferable that it be founded on rationality rather than on race, religion or nationality. What Professor Vlajki denounces is the degeneration or reduction, as it were, of rationality into "profit-oriented rationality." Having prevailed over all other values in parts of the West, "profit-oriented rationality" (or to put it less philosophically, neo-classical liberalism) has ceased to be at the service of humanity and is increasingly becoming anti-human, and the source of individual and societal pathologies both in the countries that have made of rationality their central value, and at the global level. Two

aspects in particular of "profit-oriented rationality" -- the market economy and liberal democracy -- are being progressively imposed around the world without taking into account indigenous cultures and local socio-political realities. This imposition, moreover, even when done through brute military force, is always justified in the name of humanitarian principles.

In the second part of his book Professor Vlajki examines in detail how such a process has taken place in former Yugoslavia. This is the most complete, and perhaps best, account of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. It ends of course with the latest episode of such a process: NATO's aggression against Serbia in the name of the defence of (Albanian-only) human rights in Kosovo. The collapse of the former socialist republic of Yugoslavia has usually been explained as the result of the internal resurgence of the regressive forces of nationalism and ethnic intolerance, which the belated intervention of liberal democracies has not been able to put under control. Professor Vlajki shows however that the West -- the United States and Germany in particular -- have played a much more direct role in the process of disintegration. They have encouraged it and played different groups against one another as the process moved on in order to isolate and neutralise the Republic most reluctant to embrace all the rules of "profit-oriented rationality" -- Serbia. The arguments and evidence presented to make this case are powerful, and they are especially so since Professor Vlajki is a Croat from Dubrovnik who at the time of events lived in Bosnia and knew most of the major actors in the conflict.

Part III is a reflection on the way the New Totalitarian Society builds cases for "humanitarian intervention" and sells them to public opinion. Professor Vlajki carefully

dissects the "pattern of lies" woven by governments, public relations agencies and news media. He also examines the structural liens that link these different actors and throws new light on the function of many agencies and movements generally perceived as having a progressive political character.

The achievements of "Western civilisation" are not likely to be equalled, let alone surpassed, by any other civilisation for centuries. Any form of domination, however, must be decent both for the "masters" and the "slaves." Hence, Western civilisation must replace the ruthlessness of "profit-oriented rationality" with a more humanistic form of rationality (one could say "capitalism with a human face"). If this is not the case, the domination of Western civilisation will fall prey to its internal contradictions and engender reactions from the dominated civilisations that might either lead to a more balanced relationship of forces but may also risk a violent and bloody reversal of the current roles of "masters" and "slaves".

Professor Vljaki cannot be neatly put within the traditional political categories of Left and Right. He is above all a "humanist" deeply rooted within the tradition of "political realism" to which he gives new life by bringing out its philosophical roots. Although *The New Totalitarian Society* will undoubtedly stir debate on the Left and the Right (not only among "ideologues" but also among "specialists" who may find it difficult to move beyond the narrow confines of their discipline), it is a book that offers much material for reflection to all social scientists, self-righteous social activists, and politicians.

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