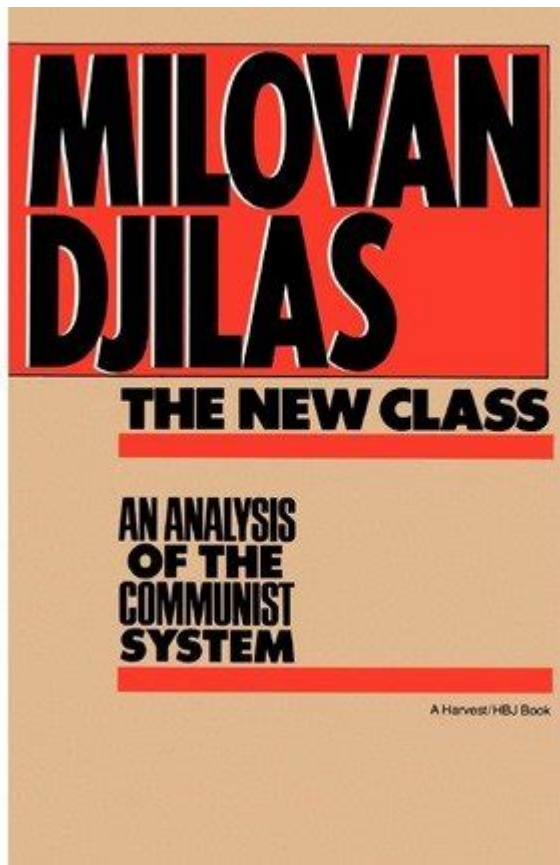# Milovan Djilas The New Class

Milovan Djilas: The New Class is a pivotal work that explores the complexities of political power and social structures in the context of Yugoslav socialism. Written by Milovan Djilas, a prominent Yugoslav politician, writer, and dissident, this book challenges the orthodox views on communism and provides an incisive critique of the ruling elite in socialist states. Djilas's work is not just a historical account; it is a profound philosophical examination of the nature of power, class, and the implications of a one-party state.

Background of Milovan Djilas

Early Life and Political Involvement

Milovan Djilas was born on June 4, 1911, in Montenegro, then part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. His early exposure to poverty and the political turbulence of the region significantly shaped his worldview. Djilas became involved in the communist movement during his university years, eventually rising through the ranks of the Yugoslav Communist Party during World War II.

- Key Events in Djilas's Early Life:
- Joined the Communist Party in 1932.
- Became a prominent figure in the Yugoslav Partisan movement during WWII.
- Held various high-ranking positions post-war, including vice president of the Yugoslav government.

Break with Tito and Political Disillusionment

Djilas's relationship with Josip Broz Tito, the leader of Yugoslavia, was initially one of alignment, but it soured as Djilas grew increasingly critical of the bureaucratization of the communist regime. His dissent culminated in his expulsion from the Communist Party in 1954, primarily due to his opposition to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the growing bureaucratic elite.

- Factors Leading to Djilas's Break with Tito:
- Disagreement over the direction of Yugoslav communism.
- Advocacy for political pluralism and democratic socialism.
- Criticism of the bureaucratic ruling class, which he termed the "new class."

Overview of "The New Class"

Concept and Structure

"The New Class" was published in 1957 and quickly garnered attention for its daring assertions.

Djilas's fundamental thesis is that a new ruling class has emerged in socialist societies, one that is not based on traditional class distinctions but rather on the control of the state apparatus. This "new class" consists of bureaucrats, party officials, and other elites who wield power without accountability to the masses.

- Key Themes in "The New Class":

1. Bureaucratic Control: The ruling elite's monopoly on power.

2. Alienation of the Masses: The disconnect between the government and ordinary citizens.

3. Ideological Manipulation: Use of ideology to justify the ruling class's existence.

4. Corruption and Injustice: The moral decay within the leadership.

Historical Context and Impact

Djilas wrote "The New Class" during a time of significant upheaval in Eastern Europe, particularly after Stalin's death and amid the rise of reformist movements. His critique resonated with many intellectuals and activists who were disillusioned with the communist regimes in their own countries.

- Impact on Political Thought:

- Influenced dissidents and reformers across the Eastern Bloc.

- Contributed to the discourse on totalitarianism and authoritarianism.

- Became a reference point for discussions on political legitimacy and class struggle.

Key Arguments and Analysis

The Nature of the New Class

Djilas's characterization of the "new class" is multifaceted. He argues that this class is distinct from

traditional aristocratic or capitalist classes, as it derives its power from its control over the state rather than ownership of the means of production. The "new class" is described as:

- Characteristics of the New Class:
- Self-serving: Primarily concerned with maintaining its own power and privileges.
- Cohesive: United by shared interests in preserving the status quo.
- Ideologically Rigid: Often resorting to dogma to suppress dissent and maintain control.

Critique of Marxism

Djilas's work also serves as a critique of Marxist theory itself. While he acknowledges the historical significance of Marxism in the struggle for social justice, he argues that its application in practice often leads to the emergence of a new oppressive class. Djilas emphasizes:

- Problems with Marxism:
- The failure to account for the bureaucratic tendencies in socialist states.
- The disconnect between theory and practice, resulting in a betrayal of revolutionary ideals.
- The inherent contradictions within communist ideology that lead to authoritarianism.

Relevance to Contemporary Politics

The insights offered by Djilas in "The New Class" remain relevant today, particularly in discussions surrounding the nature of power in modern states. His analysis can be applied to various political systems, including those that claim to be democratic but exhibit signs of elitism and bureaucratic control.

- Contemporary Applications:
- Analysis of political corruption in modern democracies.
- Examination of the role of elite groups in shaping public policy.

- Insights into the rise of populist movements as a reaction to elite disconnection.

Conclusion: Legacy of Milovan Djilas

Milovan Djilas's "The New Class" is a seminal work that transcends its historical context, offering timeless reflections on power, class, and ideology. Djilas's courage in critiquing the very system he once supported positions him as a significant figure in the history of political thought. His exploration of the dynamics between the ruling elite and the masses serves as a reminder of the constant vigilance required to safeguard democracy and prevent the emergence of new forms of oppression.

In conclusion, Djilas's insights encourage a critical examination of contemporary political structures and a reevaluation of the principles that underpin them. His work is not just a critique of the past but a call to action for those who aspire to create a more equitable and just society. "The New Class" remains a crucial text for understanding the complexities of power and the importance of accountability in governance, resonating with anyone concerned about the health of democracy in the modern world.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who was Milovan Djilas and what was the significance of 'The New Class'?

Milovan Djilas was a Yugoslav communist politician and writer who became a prominent critic of the communist regime. 'The New Class' is significant as it critiques the ruling elite in communist societies, suggesting that a new class of bureaucrats and party officials had emerged, which undermined the original ideals of socialism.

What are the main themes explored in 'The New Class'?

The main themes in 'The New Class' include the nature of power and privilege in communist societies,

the betrayal of the revolutionary ideals by the ruling elite, and the impact of bureaucracy on socialist principles. Djilas argues that the new class prioritizes its own interests over the welfare of the public.

How did 'The New Class' influence political thought in the 20th century?

'The New Class' influenced political thought by providing a critical lens on the dynamics of power within communist regimes. It sparked discussions about the role of intellectuals and bureaucrats in shaping policy and governance, and prompted debates about the nature of class struggle beyond traditional Marxist definitions.

What was the reaction to 'The New Class' from the communist authorities?

The reaction from communist authorities to 'The New Class' was largely negative. Djilas faced censorship and was imprisoned for his views, as the book challenged the legitimacy of the ruling party and exposed the contradictions within the communist system. It was seen as a threat to the established order.

In what ways does 'The New Class' remain relevant today?

'The New Class' remains relevant today as it addresses issues of elite power, corruption, and the disconnection between leaders and the populace. Its insights into the dynamics of power structures can be applied to various political contexts, making it a useful reference for understanding contemporary governance challenges.

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