 Movements of Society or Social Movements? Ideology and Political Dynamics in 1980s Eastern Europe

The struggles of 1989, when the Communist states of Eastern and Central Europe were swept away in one great wave of protests, were greeted enthusiastically by social movement analysts and are still considered a model of nonviolent resistance resulting in large scale political change.\(^1\) The corresponding period of time also constituted a chaotic and prolific moment in the development of social movement analysis, a time of upheaval when established models were coming into question in favor of new, more nuanced approaches (the “framing” perspective) or syntheses of the various old theoretical approaches (Tilly and Wood 2004, Tilly and Tarrow 2007, McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, Meyer 2006). The spirited non-debates and reductionist tendencies that allegedly characterized the 1970s and 1980s literature, as well the classical works of Arendt and Smelser, were firmly upended in a revolution much less heralded than the one that swept through Europe a few years earlier.

This fortuitous timing, oddly, did not result in many studies of Eastern European social movements emerging from the new perspectives. Apart from a few studies loosely based in the framing perspective (Oberschall 1996, Kenney 2005),

\(^1\) It is somewhat puzzling that few have pointed out the similarities between 1989 and the coordinated uprisings now taking place in the middle East. The demonstrators in Eastern Europe achieved everything and more that the current protests are after, without the benefit of easy communication provided by cell phones and social media today.
the tried and true old frameworks prevailed. They provided the most rigorous and useful studies of variation in the region’s social movements, especially Oberschall’s important comparative study inspired by the political opportunity model that dominated the 1970s literature.² Others, especially Ost (1991, 2006) wrote insightful single case studies that described the process of movement formation in great detail but offered only meager guidelines for comparative analysis. It would seem that Tarrow’s warning, in 1991, that the old models of social movements developed to explain the West were insufficient for the study of Eastern European social change, has been little heeded since. Eastern European revolutionary change in the late 1980s, even after having passed into Eastern European history, is nevertheless still a “moving target” for social movement analysis (see Tarrow 1991).

Case selection bias may be one explanation for the failure of new ideas in social movement analysis to significantly penetrate the Eastern European experience. Often, outlier cases such as Yugoslavia are omitted in the sociological literature on transition, perhaps because they do not fit into the ‘power of the people’ anti-Communist narratives that proved so irresistible at the time or because social currents in those places were not easily explained by the more recent theories in movement analysis. Short of reviving classical social movement theory, with its emphasis on mass dynamics and disorganized if not chaotic revolts, most analysts understandably treated the cases as true outliers and omitted them from the

² Although Oberschall combines aspects of the political opportunity and framing perspectives in this study, it is his conception of the weakening of Soviet rule as a political opportunity that remains its major contribution.
typologies. As Andreas (2007) points out with regard to China, scholarship on the Cultural Revolution has followed the shifts in academic fashion from non-rational social psychological explanations to the rationalistic resource mobilization approaches and on to culturalist/framing approaches. Scholarship on Yugoslavia, on the other hand, never seems to have meaningfully left the first phase, with most analyses of social movements in the 1980s and 90s focusing on “true believers’ blindly devoted... and prone to fanatical, violent behavior in moments of collective excitement” (Andreas 2007: 438).

Another literature that has included the less romantic cases where Communism did not beat a quick and relatively bloodless retreat has mostly avoided the spirited debates of social movement theory, often eschewing sociological explanations altogether. In these studies, the direct role of social movements is often removed from the analysis, made peripheral, or assumed to be so similar across cases as to contribute little to our understanding of variation in outcomes (Kenney 2003, Stokes 1993). I argue here that it is unnecessary to abandon the focus on comparative social movements in order to understand variation in Eastern European political outcomes and still include outlier cases, as long as two conditions are met. If the typology is broadened to include the critically important role of ideology in framing movement dynamics across the continent, and social movements in Eastern Europe are considered regardless of whether they can be credited with the direct overthrow of Communist states, an explanation can be put forward that is rooted in social movement analysis and yet is sensitive to the very
contradictory outcomes that the outlier cases demonstrate. The experience of Yugoslavia is outlined in detail and then briefly compared to the “big four” anti-Communist success stories (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany) to broaden understanding of Eastern European social movements and the specific variables that accounted for their successes and failures. Newly available data on social movements in Yugoslavia (Lowinger 2009) makes such a comparison feasible perhaps for the first time, and the framework may yet prove relevant for understanding variations in outcomes among social movements currently unfolding elsewhere.

It is argued here that 1980s movements in Yugoslavia, in contrast to those in Poland, East Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, occurred in a unique context that produced a very different type of movement. Factors unique to Yugoslavia included a weak to nonexistent Soviet influence, a comparatively much sparser history of indigenous anti-Communism, the absence of one dominant non-Communist nationalist ideal or pre-existing state formulation, and a much more lenient approach toward social movements on the part of the federal authorities. The struggles in Yugoslavia were rooted in a different ideological milieu altogether and thus advocated an altogether different agenda. The details of the different movement style in comparison to those elsewhere in the region will be fleshed out below. For now, it suffices to say that popular uprisings in Yugoslavia in the 1980s were not the neat social movements of Poland or East Germany, conceived by a political vanguard to thrust the people out from under the thumb of Soviet-style
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Communist rule. Rather, they were movements of a whole society, in which masses of people organized to save the status quo from a too rapid transition from Communism that was already well under way. The comparison is built from the author’s own data on Yugoslavia collected between 2005 and 2007 at archival sites in Croatia and Serbia, relying mainly on Oberschall’s data on the other four countries. A new theoretical model and typology describing the differences among the movements in Eastern Europe is then proposed, in part derived from Polanyi’s framework in *The Great Transformation*.

**Social Movements in Eastern Europe, 1980-1989**

McAdam (1995), in a chapter mostly devoted to explaining diffusion of anti-Communist movements across Eastern Europe, offers a helpful distinction between movements driven by “a single challenging group” empowered by new political opportunities or an influx of resources, and more “revolutionary” movements in which “the boundaries between challenging groups” soften or disappear and the crisis enveloping those in power becomes generalized and detached from “specific origins” (McAdam 1995: 223). He describes the diffusion of movements in Eastern Europe as a revolutionary situation:

[Revolutionary situations are created when] the resulting pressures (of systemic crisis) dramatically weaken the regime, thus encouraging collective action by all groups sufficiently well organized to contest the structuring of a new political order...Animating this revolutionary cycle was what might be termed a “democracy/market economy” master frame. First developed in Poland, this frame stressed the importance of democratic governance, free markets, and the elimination of Party privilege as the keys to national renewal and rebirth. (McAdam 1995: 222-223)
The revolutionary sweep of movement activity, it seems, gave the challengers the moral force of agents representing all of society rather than the appearance of representatives of a particular group within society. Oberschall (1996) also notes the “moral conviction” that drove the challengers in Eastern Europe. Presumably the strength and popularity of this conviction helped dissolve boundaries between movements and draw less politicized bystanders into the movements as well. However, Kenney (2005) takes issue with the notion that bystanders were “swayed by moral force” alone. He argues that the political opportunity structure of the 1980s by no means guaranteed anti-Communist movements a platform through which to recruit large segments of the non-politically organized majority population, especially given the memory of earlier, failed attempts to overthrow the system in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Rather, movement organizers in the late 1980s had to frame “unlikely situations as opportunities” for a skeptical population that had learned to be politically docile after years of repression by Soviets and their allies in the Polish regime (Kenney 2005: 146). The expectation of repression and movement failure could only be overcome by movements with limited objectives that were easily relatable to the average person’s plight yet not immediately threatening to the regime’s legitimacy and power. In Russia, as well, the climate of fear and the history of repression led to the development of narrow social movement organizations that relied heavily on symbolism and rarely openly threatened the regime (Zdravomyslova 1996). This stands in stark contrast to McAdam and Oberschall’s description of movements emerging from widespread discontent and seeking broadly to replace the regime through revolutionary change.
By broadening the sample of Eastern European countries in the late 1980s to include Yugoslavia, some resolution of the above disagreement is possible. In Yugoslavia, as will be shown, movements against the regime were broad-based and boldly threatened the Communist elite, perhaps more than anywhere else in the region. However, the movements were not revolutionary but very much involved with salvaging the status quo for workers and ordinary citizens as much as possible.³ McAdam’s conflation of revolutionary movements with broad based movements perhaps misses the large scale social movement, what will be defined as the “Polanyi-type struggle”⁴ below, that is not revolutionary but aimed to protect society from unwanted or too rapid change.

In this case, Yugoslavia was very much at the forefront of reforms affecting the entire region during the 1980s. Rather than an elite preserving the Communist line, politicians in Yugoslavia actively cooperated with and sometimes spearheaded the reform effort, creating widespread unrest that was not “anti-Communist” in orientation or style (see below). Oberschall and Kenney’s descriptions of movements elsewhere in the region, confirmed by the studies of Ost, were smaller, focused movements favoring reform that met against (sometimes token) opposition from conservative elites still agnostic towards the reform agenda. Stated another way, movements in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany relied on

³ In the terms of social movement analysis, they were similar to the “quotidian struggles” of Snow et al or the “reactive social movements” of Tilly (see below).
⁴ This is derived from the distinction between “Marx-type” and “Polanyi-type” struggles laid out in various works of Silver and Arrighi (see especially Silver 2003).
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anti-Communist ideology but chose patient strategy over bold tactics in their dealings with the regime and their efforts to recruit bystanders. They operated in an uncertain climate where it was difficult to ascertain who their likely allies would be – the “masses”, the elites themselves, the vanguard of workers – or whether they would be left alone altogether as sitting ducks for another round of Soviet-led repression.

For reasons that will be clear below, these movements can correctly be called social movements and largely explained by the theoretical frameworks of the resource mobilization and political opportunity schools, in the way that Oberschall explains them. Movements in Yugoslavia, and perhaps other “outlier” cases in the region, were movements of society – broad-based, chaotic, anti-reform, and bitterly and openly antagonistic towards the entire ruling elite. They had no Soviet machine to fear and little to fear from the Yugoslav party leaders, who found themselves caught between their reputations as darlings in the reform circles and their unmet obligations to workers throughout the federation. The very different ideological underpinnings and historical factors of the Yugoslav struggle in the 1980s necessitated a movement very different from what mainstream movement theory is so far equipped to explain. It is close the revolutionary type struggle of McAdam, but without the revolutionaries; similar to the mass rebellions of Arendt, but without the “mob” to organize them. To be sure, the “strain,” “threat,” “discontent,” and “breakdown” were there, but these brought out workers and the unemployed
merely seeking a restoration of the status quo rather than the zealous fascists, degenerates, and reactionaries who populate most of the classical literature.

One promising typology is Tilly’s categorization of movements as proactive, reactive, or competitive (1978). This is especially relevant in the Eastern European transition, where movements were engaged in a conversation about the role of competing ideologies in shaping social policy. As any potential reform could undo the political and economic advantages of some groups, whether at the expense of others or as a response to declines in dominant industries or modes of economic organization, it is expected that such groups would form “reactive” movements in response to the reforms. Some have attempted to more specifically account for this type of movement, which is neither revolutionary nor limited to narrow interest organizations. The most intriguing may be Snow et al’s concept of “quotidian disruptions”, where masses of people struggle against perceived threats to their ability to live their lives as they normally would (Snow et al 1998). While promising, this concept may not allow for a full explanation of the origins, causes, and consequences of mass-based, non-revolutionary movements, as it focuses mainly on the phase of movement activity where already present grievances translate into mass action.

For reasons that will hopefully be made very clear, Polanyi’s concepts of “the self protection of society” and “the double movement” are most directly relevant to the study of these so-called movements of society (Polanyi 1945). Polanyi has been
neglected almost completely as a theorist in the study of social movements, which is surprising for at least two reasons. First, he has achieved almost unparalleled importance as a theorist within the field of economic sociology, especially through his concept of “embeddedness” and its generalization by Granovetter and others (see e.g. Granovetter 1985). It would only be expected that Polanyi’s influence would have spread to other areas of sociological inquiry including social movements. Secondly, Polanyi’s celebrated concept of embeddedness is only a piece of a larger theory about how society organizes itself to protect against detrimental reforms, and hence more a theory of social movements than of market society per se.

While the argument of Polanyi describes the liberal attempt to institute a “self-regulating market” and the likely social response, it can, with little modification, explain most situations where large numbers in society spontaneously gather to impede some policy or process that threatens socially-embedded values or expectations. It is thus appropriate to the analysis of any situation in which ideological rigidity forces the development of movement strategies outside the bounds of everyday politics. What might under other circumstances be resolved through political channels is mired in the impasse where unpalatable concessions are the only alternative to open conflict. This will be the outcome wherever strong ideological commitments, rather than merely material interests, characterize movements and the primary opposition they face. Where movements can overpower such opposition, there is social reform; where they are forced into
submission, there is authoritarianism; and where there is an impasse between
movement and opposition the outcome is all too often chaos and war. When we
take into account that the struggle in Yugoslavia and elsewhere in the region was
strongly related to the question of the market’s role in society, the application of
Polanyi to the Eastern European context becomes almost irresistible. It improves
on the classical formulations by normalizing protest and protesters, and offers a
more long-term view than Snow and others who focus exclusively on the immediate
period of movement emergence and activity. The Polanyi-type struggles in
Yugoslavia will be compared to the neater social movements elsewhere in the
region, offering a more comprehensive description of the divergent paths out of
Communist rule taken in Eastern Europe. Specifically, the little-researched labor
movement in 1980s Yugoslavia, the dominant social movement until the nationalist
takeover and wars of the 1990s – its origins, organization, and impact on
subsequent political events – will be described in detail and then compared with the
recorded history in other transitioning countries.

Yugoslavia in the 1980s

In this section, the social movements that developed in 1980s Yugoslavia are
described in detail. Most analysts of Yugoslavia developed their interests in the
region after the wars and consequently neglect the years 1980-87 when nationalist
mobilization was negligible at best. Rather than a mere prelude to violent ethnic
wars, these were years of radical multi-ethnic labor mobilization set off by the
federal governments attempts to implement a neoliberal economic agenda in agreement with IMF economists.

The fact that Yugoslavia was an independent Communist entity, and thus not subject to the threat of Soviet repression against social movements, is often downplayed. The Party was certainly heavyhanded at times in its dealing with some political challengers, but the constraints facing potential challengers never resembled those that faced their corresponding numbers in Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary. In addition, Bockman and Eyal's (2002) point that neoliberal transition was being negotiated by Eastern European leaders long before the collapse of communism is especially relevant to Yugoslavia, where reform effectively began even before Tito’s death in 1980. The history of these reforms is inextricably linked with the social movement struggles that erupted in the 1980s.

The victory of the Partisan struggle against fascism in Yugoslavia, followed shortly after by the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Comintern, left the country as one of the world's true laboratories of socio-economic experimentation. Over a period of 30 years, Marshall Tito and his team of loyal socialist economists and political theorists devised and revised ‘market socialist self-management’ mostly unhindered by the ideological or political influence of either the Soviet Union or the United States. The Yugoslav system was subject to constant tinkering, mostly by the same group of experts around Tito, who devised various means of increasing the autonomy of constituent regions in Yugoslavia while preserving the character of
social ownership. It was also, until 1980, an impressive developmental engine, leaving Yugoslavia with rates of GDP growth and measures of economic equality (as measured by GINI coefficients; see Bicanic 1991: 23) that were the envy of the so-called second and third worlds. The success of this system pushed Tito’s Yugoslavia into a key role in the non-aligned movement of the 1960s and 70s and mostly preserved Yugoslavia’s cold war autonomy, allowing it to mediate successfully between American and Soviet strategic aims in East and Southeastern Europe.

Over the next decade, this privileged position was lost due to an interaction of external pressures and internal conflicts. First, Tito’s death caused the Yugoslav system to be prematurely weaned from its dependence on his highly specialized knowledge just as the country was becoming increasingly unable to meet its obligations to foreign creditors. This led to an overall shift towards dependence on outside economic expertise, particularly along the lines of the neo-liberal recommendations then being issued by international financial institutions. Second, worker unrest in Yugoslavia increased every year between 1980 and 1987, when it exploded in a wave of strikes from which the federation never recovered. This wave of unrest has received strangely little attention in the literature, despite the facts that strikes increased ten-fold in the 1980s, worker unrest was directly responsible for the downfall of at least one federal government, and workers were more responsible than any other social force of the decade for the failure of every attempted political and economic reform program (see Jovanov 1989 and below). As Kuzmanic notes, both right- and left-wing analyses of the Yugoslav “transition”
were unanimous in their omission “of class elements, of working people, working class, and, of course, of the trade unions” (Kuzmanic 1996: 159-162).

Between May 1979 and June 1988, the Yugoslav federal government entered into six “stand-by agreements” (SBAs) with the IMF (Avramov and Gnjatovic 2008). From the perspective of the federal government, these were needed to secure continuing inflows of foreign capital. Once the “debt crisis” of the late 1970s struck, and after the United States had begun to establish itself as a major competitor in the market for international capital, smaller economies like Yugoslavia were forced to prove their “creditworthiness” in order to continue to attract investment by agreeing to the IMF’s standard package of “conditionalities” and thus secure funds both from the IMF and from international banks.5

The first stand-by agreement, signed in May 1979 while Tito was still alive, contained relatively weak conditions and therefore left little impact on the Yugoslav economy. When Tito passed away in May 1980, the IMF wasted no time, signing a new SBA with the incoming government only a month later. This agreement represented the largest IMF loan anywhere in the world to date and that insisted on a set of much tougher conditions on the set of macroeconomic policies the government could now follow. After encouraging signs of cooperation by the Yugoslav Federal Government, the IMF followed quickly with a comprehensive three-year SBA in January 1981. This set the framework for the Economic

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Development Plan 1981-1985, a binding commitment by the federal government to restrict demand, reduce deficits, institute ‘realistic’ exchange rates, and redirect investment towards agriculture and the export sector (Avramov and Gnjatovic 2008: 23).

As a result of the attempts to introduce monetary austerity, Yugoslav workers struck 625 times in the period 1980-1982. These strikes were, ironically, both the result of the IMF policies themselves and of government activities that undermined those policies. Facing pressure from creditors and workers alike, the government was forced to pursue inflationary policies that went against the interests of both the IMF and ultimately, the workers themselves. According to media reports collected for this study, workers cited wage pressures as the primary cause of the decision to strike, whether caused by actual attempts to cut wages or by the inflation caused by the printing of money to resolve outstanding debts and maintain social services. The government was accepting IMF funds under the ruse that it could implement a monetary austerity package, while possessing no real power over the workers who demanded the restitution of their purchasing power or over regional politicians who depended on federal payouts in order to maintain control of their republics. This patently unsustainable approach met its final denouement at the end of 1982, when the government defaulted on its foreign loans and the IMF demanded a more serious commitment to the terms of the SBA in order to guarantee a desperately needed debt rescheduling. In April 1983, the IMF successfully negotiated a huge rescheduling deal with Yugoslavia involving 15
countries and 583 banks, and the era of monetary austerity was officially underway (Avramov and Gnjatovic 2008: 24).

This new period of economic reform began in earnest when the federal government of Milka Planinc commissioned a group of economists under Sergej Kraigher, who published their recommendations as the “Long Term Program of Economic Stabilization” in 1983. The program aimed “to achieve an external balance and deal with the other macro-economic variables: inflation (which was rising), living standards (which were falling), production (which was stagnant), investment (which was negative in real terms)” (Bicanic 1991: 27). By 1985, the country had recovered the capacity to pay off its debt through the imposition of ‘realistic’ exchange rates, dinar devaluation, import quotas, and restrictions on foreign travel. This led to a new agreement with the IMF despite the failure to control inflation and a decline in investments and in the standard of living, with incomes down 4.3 per cent. At the same time, the more extreme measures recommended by the commission were never implemented, mainly due to fear of labor unrest (Bicanic 1991: 28).

This fear was quickly justified, with 336 strikes breaking out in Yugoslavia in 1983, almost double the number of the previous year and more than any other year in the history of the federation. As the consequences of the partial implementation of the Kraigher recommendations deepened, strikes again doubled, to 696 for the year 1985 alone (Jovanov 1989: 35). The character of strikes between 1983 and
1985 was strongly defensive (Pavlovic 1988), with workers reacting to declining purchasing power (Jakovljevic 1983, Zagorac 1983, Zavnik 1983), rapid and unprecedented deterioration of standards of living (Loncar 1983b), and perceived threats to their control over workplace decisions (Jovanov 1989). Regional party bureaucrats mostly looked on passively, perhaps because during this period workers still tended to see them as allies and actually struck less frequently than expected (Loncar 1983a). Workers instead directed their strikes against workplace managers and their own syndical representatives, while party leaders most often responded by conceding to worker demands, replacing managers, and restoring lost wages. So the dynamics that would characterize the impasse of the 1980s were locked into place by 1985: the federal government implementing measures that placated financial institutions and postponed the balance of payments problems but harmed the interests of workers; regional political elites giving in to workers and restoring some of their lost privileges; and strikes becoming a more or less institutionalized means for workers to defend their interests while pitting their respective regional party leaders against the federal government and its reform packages. The strikes were not only nonthreatening to the regional elites, but a potential asset, turning workers against the federal government and transforming some into potential fodder for nascent secessionist movements a few years later.

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6 Zagorac estimates a 26% increase in prices and 29% increase in “life expenses” between August 1982 and May 1983 (Zagorac 1983: 15-16).
7 “Average personal income of the employed Yugoslav is about two thirds of the income he would make four years ago. This summer, standards of living have suffered probably the biggest hit of the last ten years….Workers are demanding protection….nothing happened to protect them after the prices went up. Nobody asked them anything” (Loncar 1983b: 9-10).
8 Workers’ erstwhile loyalty to the federal government was evidenced by the fact that throughout the 1980s, strikers frequently carried Tito’s photo and the communist party flag, both to indicate their Yugoslav
By 1985, 61% of households were reporting insufficient income and over half were reporting that their expenditures exceeded their income (Bicanic 1991: 20). At the same time, conflict between the federal government in Belgrade and the regional governments reached new proportions. As an example, a federal proposal for controlling foreign exchange and managing the transition was rejected by the governments of Slovenia and Croatia, who proposed a rival program that was nearly identical albeit less sensitive to the needs of the poorer republics (Jakovljevic 1985, Kovic 1985). Their intention was clear: promote a version of the transition package that rewarded wealthier republics and their more successful firms, preserve the relative privileges of workers in the wealthier republics, and eventually secede and leave Belgrade to deal with strikes and economic decline in whatever would be left of Yugoslavia.

In summary, the federal government in the first half of the 1980s chose to play both the role of spectator and that of provocateur. It would antagonize the regional politicians and frustrated workers with reform packages that were nearly impossible to implement, and then stand by as workers unleashed their grievances on their immediate management and while regional governments struggled to keep the peace. As Županov (1984) discusses, the reforms also disrupted the peace between regional party elites and workers in their respective republics. Despite patriotism and their nostalgia for a federal government that defended their economic interests. This served equally to demonstrate the workers’ ideological rejection of neoliberalism and the new federal government(s) that promoted it (interview with Miroslav Stanojevic, February 27, 2007; see also photos in Lowinger 2009).
purchasing power declines in the early 1980s, many workers survived by ‘borrowing’ machinery and supplies from the factory in order to produce and sell on the grey market while regional officials looked the other way. Workers reciprocated with their political loyalty and of course, with their willingness to look away as regional party leaders enjoyed benefits from their position inconsistent with the official Communist ideology of ‘brotherhood and unity’. The economic reforms of the federal government successfully dismantled this alliance between workers and the regional governing bodies, removing a buffer to worker standard of living without offering any comparable replacement.

This arrangement between workers and the regional governments is but one example of how social peace in Yugoslavia had been preserved through engineering and negotiating with ‘market’ principles, by keeping the market firmly embedded not only in society but also in ideology and politics. This functioned not only in maintaining ‘illegitimate’ economic activity and corruption, but was also responsible for the quite ‘legitimate’ success of Yugoslavia’s economy until 1980. Perhaps more than any other single fact, the embedded market is what kept the peace in Yugoslavia, and it was inevitable that attempts to pry the market out of its awkward, twisted, but completely vital position in society would be the Samsonian feat that brought the whole structure down. Or to paraphrase Polanyi, the operation conducted by the IMF and the Federal Government of Yugoslavia on the market was succeeding even as the prognosis for the patient continued to worsen (Polanyi 1944 [2001]: 25).
Strikes in Yugoslavia 1983-1985: A War on Two Fronts

The years 1983-85 were thus the key years in the early phase of direct IMF involvement in the Yugoslav economy, a phase that began in the late 1970s. These years were marked more by labor unrest over what might have happened as a result of IMF policies than over what actually did – as the government acted cautiously in implementing policies as a result of the threat of strikes. The 1,425 strikes that broke out in this period were nearly all in reaction to declining life standards, and many were directed against specific efforts at ‘stabilization’ of the economy.\(^9\) This is borne out by the fact that the 1983 stabilization plan and the SBAs of 1984 or 1985 were all followed by a spike in newspaper reports of labor unrest. After the announcement of the stabilization plan in April 1983, strike reports increased by 50%, and after the implementation of the two SBAs strike reports increased dramatically from near zero before implementation to an average of 27 reports per month following implementation.\(^10\)

Strikes in this period were notable for their character as “emotional explosions”\(^11\) by workers frustrated by their inability to make ends meet, supporting our view of the workers’ movement as a form of the ‘self protection of society’. Workers responded against their vulnerability in two spheres where they had once enjoyed relative power – the marketplace and the workplace itself. From

\(^9\) The quantitative strike data is from Jovanov (1989), while the qualitative data is from the media reports conducted for this study.

\(^10\) Author’s own data (see Lowinger 2009).

being the region’s only workforce that enjoyed both relatively high purchasing power on an open market and the only to possess any effective control over workplace decisions, they were faced with sudden reversals in position on both fronts. Inflation curbed their access to consumer goods and thus severely cut into their standard of living, while workplace decisions were increasingly made over their heads by management or politicians and often to their further detriment. Notably, IMF-backed reforms would only intensify both sets of complaints, by attempting to freeze wages and to restructure or even sell off worker-managed firms, as described below.

Both these sets of concerns converged in the longest conflict of the period, the strikes in Kratovo, Macedonia between June and September, 1984. The strikes generated significant news coverage both in Yugoslavia and worldwide, with over 40 reports in the local Yugoslav media and with several articles being picked up in foreign news services including the Associated Press. The conflict began when manufacturing workers at the work organization *Idnina*¹² learned of a plan between management and the local communist party to merge them with the much larger and more powerful *Sileks* organization (Naumovska et al 1987: 35). While *Sileks* was clearly a more sophisticated and efficient operation, it was also facing a credit crunch and was considering wage cuts to help meet its financial obligations. *Idnina*, on the other hand, while only using 20% of its capacity, was financially stable and had even managed to carve a market for itself exporting to Belgium, Romania,

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¹² An explanation of the role of work organizations (also known as BOALs) in the Yugoslav system of self-management is beyond the scope of the study, but for an introduction see Prout (1985).
Bulgaria, and Cuba. Workers were loath to merge with the larger company and lose their relative security, and thus rejected the merger plan in a formal vote by a huge margin. In response, the local communist party in Kratovo fired the management of *Idnina* as well as several members of the work council, citing a lack of work discipline, failure to develop according to industry standards, and the recalcitrance of the work council itself in rejecting the merger. As a result, *Idnina* workers initiated the longest strike in the history of Yugoslavia to date, which ended with workers solidifying their previous control over workplace organization. The fame of the Kratovo strike and the relative success of the workers gave strong legitimacy to the larger and more ambitious strikes that broke out later in the decade.  

While on the surface the Kratovo strike was a struggle between workers and local party leaders over workplace control, it contained all the elements of the ‘self-protection’ movement that characterized the period. *Sileks* represented all that was threatening about the new direction of the economy – efficiency over security, hierarchy over cooperation, and ‘development’ through credit dependence over modest self-reliance. All these trends represented a threat to workers’ ability to have a say in the determination of their own wages, which were already barely enough to cover their expenses. In the other major strikes of the era, the question of ‘self-protection’ more directly took the form of wage demands. At the Trepca mine in Kosovo, workers protested low wages, increasingly unequal wage distribution, a “lapse of self-management relations,” and the general economic and political

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13 Naumovska, Lidija; Todorovski, Ilija; Lazarevski, Pande. 1987. “Sta hoce radnici u strajku?” *Socioloski pregled*. 21:3; 7-78.
situation in the country. The strike in Trepca was also notable as an example of the absence of ethnic divisions among workers, as Albanian and Serb miners marched together for their common interest, belying the assumption of ancient ethnic hatred that has become the all-purpose explanation for Yugoslav conflicts. Finally, in another event that received significant international coverage, 2000 workers of the zmaj (“dragon”) company in Zemun, just outside Belgrade, protested the delay in their wage increases, and succeeded in securing 9 months worth of retroactive wages. The report of the Zemun strike was recorded in an influential local paper as part of a series entitled “Every day another strike.” The table below gives a sense of the level of the crisis facing workers through the first half of the 1980s and why they felt compelled to “explode” so often. For now, it suffices to conclude by pointing out that the strikes through 1985 were not directed against the political system, but only against perceived “abuses” of the self-management system by political leaders. In this sense, they were remarkably dissimilar to the Solidarity-led strike campaign in Poland and other social movements emerging in the region at the time.

The period between 1986 and 1988 was encompassed by a last-ditch refinancing effort covered by the IMF’s brand new ‘enhanced surveillance’ program (Avramov and Gnjatovic 2008: 24). All economic decisions of the federal government were now placed under the microscope in order to ensure that the anti-inflation measures of the 1985 SBA would be implemented unhindered by competing government priorities. Bicanic describes the period as follows:

After the government had reached an agreement with the IMF, politicians started fearing labour unrest and unpopularity caused by the welfare loss. The economic policy of the Planinc government was judged as over-restrictive, insufficiently selective, and inadequately anti-inflationary, while the introduction of real interest rates was too hasty....By the time the new government of Mr B. Mikulic came to power in May 1986 the new policy approach had a name: ‘programmed inflation’...The result was inflation rates that were rising monthly, falling exports, stagnant production, and a severe wage freeze which was eventually abandoned by fearful politicians in the face of labour unrest. The far worse track record of this approach was

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18 The SBA of May 1985.
achieved in spite of a more favourable economic environment than during the previous period....Even before these results...the programmed inflation approach was criticized by the profession. However the government stubbornly implemented it until May 1988... (Bicanic 1991: 28).

Between 1986 and 1988, Yugoslavia experienced a wave of strikes unlike any a communist country had seen. 1987 in particular would be remembered as the “year of strikes”, with nearly 1700 in the federation including the famous Labin coal miners strike in coastal Croatia, appropriately identified by Kuzmanic (1988) as the “beginning of the end”. The strike itself did not produce any unusual gains, but the effect of constant media coverage across Yugoslavia encouraged the workers’ movement in all republics and contributed to the shift from defensive to offensive demands and tactics. After Labin, it became common for workers to leave the factory and take their strike to Belgrade, to make aggressive if not unreasonable demands such as a doubling of wages, and to call for the government itself to step down (see below). Workers realized once and for all that the federal government was the appropriate target for their frustration as the most visible agent of the economic policy changes.

Increasingly, the economic policies themselves were cited as the incitement to strike. In September 1986, the German business newspaper Handelsblatt reported that Mikulic’s plan to lower wages as a means to fight inflation, a key point in the IMF agreement, was the cause of the upsurge in strikes that year.19 Virtually all the strikes that broke out in 1986 were reported in local media to have been caused by

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unresolved wage demands. In 1987, the situation only deteriorated. A huge strike wave broke out in the first few months of the year after the government introduced a wage freeze.20 873 strikes broke out altogether in the first eight months of 1987, with workers now demanding not only higher wages but also that the issues they faced should be solved on a wider political level. Over 100,000 workers went on strike in the first six months of the year, 164% more than the same period in 1986.21 Towards the end of the year, a news article reported that workers were increasingly directing their efforts against specific economic measures they believed were unjust, and that over 85% of strikes were successful. The title of the article, translated awkwardly and literally, was “Blade of the workers revolt goes more often towards the system measures.”22

Despite the IMF’s insistence on dealing only with the federal government, it was clear that the federal government’s control over politicians and workplace managers in the republics was weakening.23 The Agrokomerc scandal of 1987 demonstrated this most vividly. Company director Fikret Abdic, also a leading politician in his republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina, nearly bankrupted the province after it was discovered that he had issued hundreds of millions of dollars worth of phony bonds (Lydall 1989: 168). As a result, inflation once again skyrocketed, and all the austerity measures dutifully worked out between the federal government and

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23 See Lowinger 2009 for a comprehensive discussion of the impact of decentralization on political events in the 1980s.
the IMF amounted to naught.

In short, the strikes in 1986 constituted an aggressive attempt to protect workers from the effects of agreements signed with the IMF. The strikes in 1987 attacked not only the effects of the economic measures, but also the authority of the government itself to enter into agreements whose short term effects were so detrimental to workers. The Labin strike in the spring and summer of 1987 was the watershed moment of the entire movement. For the first time, journalists were invited to have unfettered access to the strikers, leading to a media blitz in which 213 news reports on Labin appeared in a period of just four months (Lowinger 2009). The longest, most famous strike in the history of Yugoslavia ended with no spectacular victory for the workers directly involved, but the movement as a whole had firmly entrenched itself in the consciousness of the entire federation, laying the foundation for the worker solidarity that was to characterize the year that followed.24

While 1987 saw workers strike for “more spoonfuls of potato on their plate”,25 by 1988 the movement had assumed the character of a worker solidarity movement against economic reform. The Labin strikers had become heroes across the federation, and workers began to view themselves as a group united across regional political boundaries. When a new SBA was signed with the IMF in June, workers did not wait to take action. Rather, they made the ‘pilgrimage’ to Belgrade to protest in

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24 See Magas 1993: 105.
Lowinger 2011

front of the federal parliament and at regional political headquarters, firmly identifying the government agreement as the main threat to their interests. In June, 327 miners walked 145 kilometers from Tuzla in northern Bosnia to Belgrade and protested in front of a federal building. This feat was repeated later in the month by workers from Zmaj in Zemun who, because of their close proximity to Belgrade, sent 4000 workers on the march. In addition, the workers enjoyed popular support from local citizens, who helped to turn the strike into a 10,000 strong popular demonstration for a recovery of lost economic security. In July, the work councils Borovo and Vartileks united in an odyssey around Yugoslavia, beginning by striking in front of their local party headquarters in Vukovar, Croatia and then travelling to Zagreb and eventually Belgrade. This was seen in the media as the first opportunity for a strike to morph into a larger solidarity demonstration against the direction of government policy, as workers from Croatia were gaining support for their action from the local population in Serbia. Party leaders lashed out at the syndicates, claiming they were doing a poor job of explaining the economic reforms to the workers, and that the solidarity movement emerging from the strikes were guaranteeing the failure of the reform effort. It was also reported that police were sealing off the area around the strike to head off solidarity demonstrations.

Overall, the main theme of media reporting in 1988 was the fear that the

momentum of labor unrest would spiral into a larger movement that would derail the reforms for good.\textsuperscript{33}

As a result of the strikes, the inability of the federal government to contain inflation, and a vote of no-confidence, Branko Mikulic resigned in early 1989 (Bicanic 1991: 29). He had never managed to implement key details of his inflation control policy, and what he did accomplish left the country in far worse crisis than before. Ante Markovic took over as prime minister, introducing ambitious plans to privatize self-managed enterprises and reverse inflationary trends. He enlisted the help of then Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs, who proposed a program of ‘shock therapy’. Bicanic describes the skepticism that accompanied the new, radical phase of reform: “It was implicitly assumed that the economy can and the population is willing to absorb any shock and change [despite that] all the previous attempts to reform radically the society and economy have failed” (Bicanic 1991: 26). There was, in other words, no reason to expect that the waves of social unrest and economic disorder that followed the prior, less radical, and only partially implemented reforms would not all the more so reverse the proposed benefits of deeper, more radical, and more fully implemented reforms. The reforms were pushed forward anyway, either out of ideological blindness or in the belief that the federation could finally be pushed out of its now decade-long political impasse.

The Sachs/Markovic plan was scheduled to unfold in two phases. The first phase would focus on controlling inflation and the second on firm-level restructuring and privatization, representing the first serious attempt to introduce reforms on the micro- as well as macro-economic level. Between late 1989 and 1990, the government introduced a wage freeze, liberalized trade, shrank the money supply, and fixed the exchange rate. The results were mixed: on the one hand, unemployment rose, production fell, firms went bankrupt, no longer able to count on the support of regional politicians, and labor unrest, manifest in strikes and demonstrations in front of the federal parliament, continued. On the other hand, the government briefly managed to reduce inflation to zero, and prices even dropped for a short period in April 1990. Real wages, which had dropped by 42% in the first phase of the Markovic/Sachs reforms, also briefly rose at this time (Bartlett 1991: 42-43). This result was hailed as a “miracle” (Vojnic 1993: 176), and Markovic became the darling of liberal circles, although he would turn out to be a martyr for the cause. The reforms might have gone even further, but Slobodan Milosevic had by then taken control in Serbia and used his power to veto the federal government's plan to ‘save' self-management and Yugoslavia with it (interview with Dragomir Vojnic, March 14, 2007).

The 1980s are often viewed as the stage of Eastern European history where Communism was gradually phased out due to the successive compromises of Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and the pressures from social movements in many of

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the Soviet bloc countries. Yet the actions of Solidarity and all the other actors in the resistance to Soviet Communism never reached the fever pitch of labor unrest in Yugoslavia. The development of a militant labor movement opposed to reform, followed by a process of nationalist fragmentation and war, bears little semblance to what was occurring in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia at the time. It is thus unsurprising that, as mentioned above, Yugoslavia has not been included in most comparative studies of regional transition in the 1980s despite that it too was a staunchly Communist society in the throes of liberalizing reform. Although what inspired the flourishing of movement activity in Yugoslavia was not at all unique, the Federation’s many distinct political features ensured a vastly different style of movement and outcome. The many features of Yugoslav society that differed from the regional norms included its relatively very robust freedoms of association, the press, and travel, as well as its independence from the Soviet Union. These features led to a social movement that was different ideologically and organizationally. Indeed very little organization existed or was necessary for Yugoslav society to throw its weight against the breakdown of the old social order, making 1980s Yugoslavia a case study par excellence of the “self protection of society” ultimately giving way to political chaos and war. The movements were not anti-Communist, but protective, reactive, and broad-based – what we have identified as a movement of society. They set the stage for a showdown with the newly influential nationalist politicians who were willing to break apart Yugoslavia

35 Even Poland’s Solidarity, often seen as the vanguard and model for workers’ unrest in the region, was dormant for much of the 1980s as it was unclear how events in the Soviet Union would play out (Kenney, Ost).
and, with it, the economic and political impasse caused by the cycle of reform and unrest.  

In identifying the patterns common to social movements in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, Oberschall cites “the systemic crisis of socialism and the persistent decline in living standards.” This caused a “loss or lack of legitimacy” that “opened a democracy frame for the opposition that prevailed over the ‘reformed communist’ alternative” (Oberschall 1996: 94). As noted above, these features did not characterize the Yugoslav experience at the time. Although the federal government was experiencing a threat to its legitimacy, the primary threat was not launched from the ideological milieu of either pro-democracy or anti-Communism but precisely from those who wished to bring Communist society back into line with its original ideals and goals. The lack of an alternative model of post-Communist transition leads Oberschall to mistakenly lump the Yugoslav experience of “civil war and strife” in with the others, just another consequence of “the weakening of the Soviet empire” (93). An alternative model summarizing the above characteristics of the Yugoslav experience will be presented below. It is necessary first to briefly outline the experience of other Eastern European countries in a bit more detail.

Unlike the 1980s experience of Yugoslavia, in which a broad base in society rose to prevent the transition to liberal capitalism, the major movements in Poland,
Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany began as or developed into narrow movements opposed to a particular aspect of Communist life. In Poland, the workers' movement whose most recognizable proponent was the Solidarity union took on an anti-establishment stance from its beginnings (Kenney 2005, Ost 1991, Oberschall 1996). Lacking confidence in its numbers and political influence, Solidarity withdrew from the public arena for most of the 1980s while the strikes in Yugoslavia were reaching their peak. Rather than a movement of society, the Polish anti-Communist movement was a more familiar type of social movement, in which a movement organization exploits a common grievance and attempts to build its base while preparing for an opportunity to effectively stage its protest. It was based in a “worker-intellectual alliance” that represented a vanguard of the anti-Communist forces in society and operated in a climate of great uncertainty, where the possibility of harsh repression proved to be clear and present (Oberschall 1996: 106). The very existence of such a movement was taken to be evidence of the failure of Communism, which should not have created the conditions where workers as a class would organize against the state (104).

In Yugoslavia, the picture was more complex. The Party line officially allowed worker protest and in some cases encouraged it, particularly if it led to the abolition of ill-gotten privileges. The press was free throughout the 1980s to report on worker unrest and even turned some champions of workers’ rights into icons (Lowinger 2009). Workers were seen as a threat to the reform effort, but no significant faction emerged that was opposed to Communist rule per se. In addition,
no single organization rose to prominence during the entire 1980s strike wave, as
worker organization appears to have been of the ‘wildcat’ type – opportunistic,
impromptu, mobile, and hard to control. In addition, Yugoslav workers never had a
Solidarity-style symbol to rally around, and could not be satisfied by being brought
into the political system as partners as Solidarity ultimately was. The nationalist
parties in Yugoslavia capitalized on this – they were able to present themselves as
alternative rulers of the people despite having a much smaller base than the
federation-wide labor movement. Finally, Yugoslavia had de facto freedom of the
press, which meant that groups of workers at a distance from one another across
the federation could signal that the climate was ripe for action and learn from each
other. This obviated the need for a social movement organization to perform the
difficult task of raising opposition and uniting its various strands. Thus rather than
organization from above, as in Solidarity, there was significant mobilization from
below. Not coincidentally, one of the first acts of the national parties attempting to
take over in the various Yugoslav republics was to drastically curtail this press
freedom and control the content of various influential media.3738

Of all the Soviet-bloc countries, perhaps none was prouder of its history of
anti-Communist dissent than Czechoslovakia. Cowed into submission after the
repression of the Prague Spring, the dissenters formed an influential subculture of
political opposition and artistic freedom. Networked and intellectual, this group

38 Poland is covered in a bit more detail than the other cases due to its more obvious
similarities with the Yugoslav case.
was able to capture the political opportunity of the late 1980s Soviet opening, employing the symbols of prior resistance movements to capitalize on widespread but dormant public opposition to Communist rule. In East Germany, by contrast, anti-Communism was weakly developed as an ideology and dissent sporadic and disorganized. Rather, freedom of movement and the possibility of reunification with the West was the faint hope that finally sparked a resistance movement to the Soviet Union, capitalizing on the liberalizations of Gorbachev. Focused on these goals, the movement gained widespread legitimacy on both sides of the Berlin Wall. Because reunification was its primary aim, the movement was spared the difficulty of working out the details of an agenda for transition. It could focus all its attention on organizing mass demonstrations and defections from the East and could afford to let the momentum of public support take over.39

In Hungary, the process of reform that took place in the 1980s in some ways resembled the Yugoslav experience. Whereas in Yugoslavia, which had no absolute ethnic majority, social protests united around the protection of status quo rights and privileges, in Hungary nationalist symbols proved a potent rallying point for a much more focused opposition movement. Reformers abandoned the notion of a “third way” between socialism and capitalism and were prepared to offer concessions to the anti-Communist movement in exchange for complicity with the painful short-term consequences of the liberal reforms (Oberschall1996: 106). In short, political liberalization was offered in exchange for economic liberalization. This is actually

39 All data in this paragraph is from Oberschall 1996.
similar to what took place in Croatia after the war of secession, an option not available as long as Croatians belonged to the Federation and before support for the multi-ethnic agenda of the labor movement was crushed by nationalist persecution (Lowinger 2009). A post-war, post-plural Croatian society shouldered the burden of reform in a way that it could not when it was part of the fabric of a Yugoslav society very much bound up in its own self-protection. When the nationalists took over, in Hungary and in Croatia, patriotism proved a sufficient device to promote difficult reforms as the best option for the future of the people.

In at least one key area, Yugoslavia was unlike every one of the four major Eastern European countries that successfully navigated the transition from Communism. Unlike Poland, strikes in Yugoslavia were legal and workers’ organizations were not suppressed. The labor movement thus operated “above ground” throughout the 1980s, gaining momentum against the economic reform effort and presenting a real obstacle to the legitimacy of the federal government both on the domestic and international political arena. It also lacked organization into one clear dominant group, such as Solidarity in Poland, that could intercede on behalf of the entire movement, reach a compromise with the government, and ultimately become part of the transition. Workers in Yugoslavia had no limited agenda to rally around, such as the right to organize or the legalization of an extant union. There was no effective organization behind the strikes to capture the support of the movement, and anyway opposition wasn’t “illegal” in the same way as in Poland. Merely legitimizing the movement would have no mitigating impact on
its social force. In a sense, the distinction between the Polish labor movement and its Yugoslav counterpart is similar to Arendt’s distinction between movements of “class” and “mass”. The former can be bought off and controlled, while the latter cannot.

In contrast to Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia lacked a well-developed network of anti-Communist dissidents who could build a government after transition. The most obvious reason for this was the lack of a Soviet threat to both nurture the movement and keep it at bay until the right opportunity arose. The Yugoslav opposition developed prematurely, before the opportunities for transition were effectively available, and without the coherent ideological focus that could mark it as an anti-Communist resistance and thus a part of the region’s collective future.

Unlike East Germans, Yugoslav citizens did not live in a climate where basic freedoms were severely restricted, especially the right to travel and freedom of the press. Bread and butter issues – a decent wage, affordable goods, and workplace rights – carried the day, and transition in itself offered no easy resolution of these issues. German reunification was in this sense a bit of magic that could shut down protest even if it left some basic questions of East German quality of life temporarily unresolved.

Unlike Hungary, Yugoslavia did not have a dominant ethnic group to take ownership of the transition process and the reform effort. Nor could the federal
government, in its bid for reform of the economy, offer political liberalization as a salve for the economic reforms. The political climate was already much more liberalized with a somewhat active civil society. As reforms took their inevitable and expected bite, leaders received the full brunt of pressure from a mass movement, without anything to offer as a concession beyond the reversal of the reforms themselves.

The vast strike movement in the 1980s demonstrates that political life in Yugoslavia was already substantially freer than it was anywhere else in the Communist world at the time, rendering the bargaining chip of liberalization ineffectual. Workers could freely march into the federal parliament building and deliver their demands directly to exasperated Party delegates. This much more real Communism proved more resistant to ideological opposition and reform. The labor movement was not in position, nor was it ideologically disposed, to oust the Communists and there was no anti-Communist vanguard to do the job either. Rather, the task was split into two – only after the nationalists effectively split the federation apart could Communism wither away in the various fragments of Yugoslav society.

When international circumstances are favorable, even relatively small movements can exert a huge impact. In Hungary and East Germany, although opposition was historically weak, the turning tide in the region ushered the anti-Communist forces into power despite their shortcomings in the organizational and
mobilizational arena (Oberschall 1996: 96). The larger forces of opposition in
Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as events unfolding in the Soviet Union, created
moral legitimacy for anti-Communism and allowed it to take hold across the region.
Ironically, it was the relative popularity of Communism in Yugoslavia that prevented
the exploitation of this opportunity and ultimately led to the violent dissolution of
the Federation. Elsewhere in the region, “communism was a mask for the extension
of the Soviet empire into their own country, ... an alien illegitimate authority”
(Oberschall 1996: 98). In stark contrast, Communism was the only ideology that
had ever been used successfully to justify the existence of an entity called
Yugoslavia. Communism was not only not an alien force, it was one of the proudest
indigenous inventions of Yugoslavs. Yugoslavia after Communism was as
incomprehensible as Communism after Yugoslavia, and both fell to the nationalist
battery in short order. It can be argued that Yugoslavism as a political project was
indeed a victim of its own success – it created a Communism that could not be
assailed by anti-Communist forces alone.40

Anti-communism as an ideology is what allowed widespread social unrest to
be filtered into the language of social movements in Eastern Europe. In Yugoslavia,
however, widespread unrest could not be contained under the “anti-communist”
label and was diffuse, mass-based, and threatened every regional government as

40 If a curious metaphor may be suggested, if the Communism of the Soviet bloc was
the disease, and 1980s movements the cure, the breakaway of Yugoslavia from the
Comintern in 1948 can be seen as the creation of a super-Communism immune to
whatever forces could destroy the old virus. It was constructed specifically against
the perceived Soviet abuses of the Communist ideal that would eventually lay the
groundwork for protest once the Soviet machine stopped killing dissenters.
well as the federal state. The narrow patriotic and nationalistic sentiment necessary to the definition of nationhood in the new Europe was not present in Yugoslavia even into the late 1980s. In Yugoslavia, communism was patriotic in a way that anti-communism could never be. In other words the “shared culture of national symbols” necessary to an effective anti-Communist resistance was still a culture of Federal Yugoslav symbols (Oberschall 107). Nationalism as an ideology came and accomplished, eventually, what anti-communism could not – the resolution of the political impasse and the way to integration into Europe. The symbols that long ago marked the differences among ethnic groups were not in any sense shared and were considered by many to be relics of the War era. In this light, the aggressive efforts of Milosevic, Tudjman and others to replace federal symbols with those of particular ethnic groups stand out clearly as the only successful resolution of the impasse that was preventing both the transition to capitalism and the resumption of normal political rule. The same process that led to peaceful transition in Hungary and the “Velvet Divorce” of the Czech Republic and Slovakia created confusion, chaos, and violence in the context of a de-nationalized Yugoslav Federation.

It is these many differences that point out the need for a concept of movement activity beyond what the formulations of current theory can offer. Distinctions such as progressive/reactive or reformist/revolutionary describe differences in the goals or organizational structures of movements but do not tell us much about the complex of history, politics, and ideology that turn these distinctions into relevant predictors of variation in movement outcomes.
Table 2: The relative effect of social factors on movement development and resulting movement orientation.

SM=social movements
MS=movement of society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Anti-Communist Ideology</th>
<th>Soviet repression/influence</th>
<th>Social Freedoms</th>
<th>Unified (Non-Communist) national ideal</th>
<th>Social Movement Organizations</th>
<th>Goals of movement</th>
<th>Orientation of movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Limited Reform</td>
<td>SM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>SM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Germany</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Unification</td>
<td>SM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>SM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak, not unified</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Protect society</td>
<td>MS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have shown that either a strong anti-Communist ideology or a strong nationalist ideal led to the development of traditional social movements with initially narrow focus and slow development of opposition. The political opportunity provided by the weakening of the Soviet influence allowed these movements to control the transition process and represent the future of their respective societies. In Yugoslavia, neither the nationalist or anti-Communist ideals were strong until very late in the decade. By then, the constant political opportunity provided by an open society independent of the Soviet Union had already given way to a broad labor opposition movement that could not be bought off by concessions nor defused by the fall of the Communist juggernaut.
Polanyi’s expectation of economic reform leading to societal unrest, political impasse, and chaotic war is met only in Yugoslavia. However, his concepts are equally useful for understanding the other cases. Indeed, a coalition for reform existed in every country in the region, but in each case the impasse was broken by the existence of a powerful concessionary option that would exchange some aspect of political control for social quiescence in the short term. In Poland and Czechoslovakia, legalization of the opposition did the trick, whereas in Hungary and East Germany national self-determination was paramount. An orderly transition was engineered in which many of the elite could cling to power, meet their obligations to foreign creditors, and forge partnerships with the opposition forces. Lacking any obvious means to pacify the opposition, the Yugoslav Party acted at cross purposes for an entire decade, attempting to buy off the opposition with minor monetary concessions that had little impact while pushing through package after package of economic austerity. As protests swelled and reached the breaking point, the nationalists were the only political forces who seemed capable of offering an alternative to the years of impasse. This they provided, and the consequences have been well-documented elsewhere. It suffices to point out here that they were eerily similar to the consequences predicted by Polanyi’s time-tested hypothesis of the link between reform and transformative movements of society.

41 An exhaustive review is provided in the author’s previous work (Lowinger 2009).