

**D. Rusinow, *Yugoslavia: Oblique Insights and Observations. Dennison Rusinow's essays selected and edited by Gale Stokes. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008. ISBN 13-978-0-8229-6010-2.***

Dennison Rusinow lived in Yugoslavia through most of the three decades of the 1960s–80s and was highly respected at the time for his objective reports. In this volume he planned to bring together some of his contemporary journal articles, presenting a detailed commentary on events as they unfolded throughout his period of reporting as a member of the American Universities Field Staff (later to become Universities Field Staff International). Rusinow's interest in Yugoslavia dated from his first visit in 1953, and became life-long.

Rusinow was working on this volume when he was killed in a road accident. The work was completed by his wife, Mary, who wrote a Foreword, and by Gale Stokes who selected and edited the articles dated between 1963–91 which were to be republished. She has also supplied notes for each article, clarifying and updating specific points. A simple clear map of Yugoslavia and its seven surrounding countries, marks all the places mentioned in the texts.

The book is arranged in three sections; in the first he sets the scene in a way in which Yugoslavia might not have been generally viewed. It is these first few chapters that give the book its anthropological flavour. His arrival, in the 1960s, by car in a village only twenty miles from Belgrade (and three from the main highway through to Greece), created 'a minor sensation'. This precedes scenes of 'A Serbian Feast'. In these earlier articles, Rusinow focuses on aspects of the adaptation of life in Yugoslavia to its own form of Communism which allowed for relationships with Western Europe. He observes new uses for the famous Lipizaner white horses, (descendants from those which were once bred in the region by a Hapsburg archduke in the sixteenth century), and indecision over whether to promote them as farm workhorses, for tourism—or for horsemeat. During the 1960s, sales of these horses were made to Denmark, Chicago and even in considerable numbers to Emperor Hailie Selassie of Ethiopia. A chapter on supermarkets shows the development from the late 1950s to have been very gradual, with a much slower acceptance of such modernisation in Serbia than in Slovenia. Rusinow describes the development of New

## *Central and Eastern European Review*

Belgrade, planned shortly after the Second World War, but already shabby within a few years.

The second section of the book: 'Crisis Moments', provides profound analyses of the intricate political developments and tensions of those decades in which his very participatory observation of this non-aligned country occurred. This section covers 'a new phase' of the Titoist Revolution, starting with his report in July 1966 of the Yugoslav 'liberals' versus the 'conservatives', grappling with such major issues as Yugoslavia's maintenance of independence while moulding many nations into a unified state and at the same time containing rapid economic development within a framework that could be reasonably called 'Marxist'. This was the time when Aleksandar Ranković, vice-president of the Republic of Serbia, resigned, easing the situation for many who had suffered his racist influence. Issues then arose from an apparent turn towards capitalism and a multiparty system as seen in reforms of 1965–66. Rusinow's analysis of the student revolt starting in August 1968 shows how it followed student movements around the world at the time, but also how it deviated, especially in its changing appeal both to workers and to authority figures, and that compromises at the outcome were reached with greater moderation and genuine commitment than in most other countries. Yugoslav students had grievances concerning overcrowding, and especially since all resources were hard to obtain they were forced to take longer to earn their degrees. They had considerable control of their own movement, and were even able to isolate both the provocateurs and the extremists. Tito addressed the students directly, first giving them praise, but also directing future expectations.

The author's portrayal of the crisis in Croatia four years later shows it to have evolved over a longer period and to have led to much greater and longer term divisions than the student revolt of 1968. There followed political purges of those seen to have become undemocratic and even Stalinist. Croatian nationalism was threatening the existence of Yugoslavia (as it later would succeed in doing in the 1990s). Long before those violent times, Rusinow identified the Serb town Knin and the neighbouring Croatian town Drniš, just fifteen miles apart, as places of potential enmity, especially concerned with real ethnic differences in those involved in railroad employment.

As early as 1967, Croatian intellectuals called for a complete official distinction between Croatian and Serbian languages. A new era of socialist democracy

in the early 1970s which might have inspired new hope as younger, more dynamic and better educated people came into positions of power, in fact led to a powerless centre ‘without the consent of the regions’ (p.140). Rusinow identifies several reasons for the failure to follow Ranković’s resignation with positive reforms. Two of the reasons he gives were the lack of ability and poor planning of economic issues and a possible Serbian nationalist backlash. Rusinow notes that Croatia’s émigrés became aggressive and even dangerous through ostensibly innocent cultural contacts. By 1971, Tito allowed for twenty-one draft amendments of the constitution favouring Croatian demands (a path towards sovereignty). In April of that year, émigré Croatians became violent—in Stockholm they shot the Montenegrin Yugoslav Ambassador, in Berlin they held provocative meetings. There was a move to bar Serbs from government employment in Croatia; inevitably this led to ethnic tensions. Later that year, Tito visited Zagreb in an attempt to slow down nationalist activity. He warned the Croatians that there was international observation of their deviations.

A chapter titled ‘Croatian Nationalism in Retreat’ discusses Tito’s visit to Zagreb late in 1972 and his apparent congratulations to the leadership on following a policy of greater unity with the whole country. One reason Rosinow suggests this unlikely approval of Tito’s after the recently past tense years, is simply ‘a good and alcoholic dinner at the end of a visit carefully orchestrated to flatter an old man’s sensibilities’ (200). It certainly did not prevent continued calls for nationalistic changes in Croatia, especially concerning tax revenues and the separation of Croatia’s armed forces. Further nationalist action, seen as a resistance conspiracy, was taken at a meeting in the significant town of Karadjordjevo (site of a similarly significant meeting in 1918). Despite continued discord in Croatia, nationalist activity was suppressed.

The third section of the book, ‘The National Question’, includes chapters on Kosovo from November 1965 onwards. Rusinow draws attention to Kosovo’s clearly defined borders surrounding a single tectonic basin of about fifty-five miles in diameter surrounded by high plains and towering mountains, with three rivers flowing out to three different seas. Once again the author gives an anthropological account of a changing society, particularly concerning family structure. In the 1960s there were eight-year schools teaching in the Albanian language. This was a time of better relations with Albania, with cultural and literary exchanges. This chapter is a prelude to the next one describing the difficulties Kosovo Albanians faced from the time of

Tito's death, bearing in mind its specific history within the Ottoman Empire. Rusinow comments on the expansion of one of the large households he had visited earlier, which by the 1980s had reached sixty, including thirty two children (249). He observes an interesting gender dialogue when visiting a family with an official from Priština, who asked Imer Kadri: how many children. Kadri replied 'eleven'. "Is that males only, or are you counting girl children?", 'Eleven' replied Kadri. 'This is a modern man' the official explained to us with a satisfied nod'."

Irredentism is referred to as only 'fleetingly glimpsed intimations of sentiments whose full extent can only be inferred...' (252). With such a high population of school-age children, schools were operating in three shifts, using the facilities from 6am to 10pm, with classes as big as 50. This was a period of massive male emigration of Albanian Kosovars to Western Europe, especially Germany, for well paid work. Most of these workers brought their savings back to Kosovo to invest in improving their homes. Rusinow was informed that most of the Slav Kosovars were post-1912 immigrants into Kosovo. He also explains the formal system of protection of the monasteries by Albanians. Traditionally, Muslim Albanian *voyvode* (chieftains), were chosen by decree of the Ottoman Vizier of Shkoder around 1880, as the senior member of the senior family of twelve villages of the Kelmendi clan, for the honour of this position. However, by 1978 this was seen as superfluous under state re-organization, and thus the tradition died.

The last of the articles analyses 'The Unsolved National Question', which resurfaced after Tito's death, and was surprising only in how long this took. Rusinow considers the demise of the Communist Party and the rise of Milošević's power in both Serbia and the whole of Yugoslavia, in spite of the success of Franjo Tuđman as leader of the Croatian Democratic Union (who had been imprisoned in the 1970s for his nationalist activity). The last pages of the book chronicle in detail, dated events from August 1990 (trouble in Krajina) through to 19th May 1991, after which the author seems resigned to the likelihood of considerable violence and civil war.

Tom Gallagher, in his review of this book for *Balkan Academic News*, points out how invaluable Rusinow should have been in the 1990s, with his exceptional expertise, experience and understanding of the complex situations of Yugoslavia. The US academic body employing Rusinow in Yugoslavia, went bankrupt in 1988, so that he moved back to the US as research professor in East European Studies and adjunct

*Central and Eastern European Review*

professor of History at the University of Pittsburgh, at the most crucial moment of Yugoslavia's last years, until his retirement in 2000.

**Antonia Young**

**University of Bradford**