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The Journalist's Action in Socialist Yugoslavia: Understanding the Formulation "Journalist as a Socio-political Worker"**

IZVLEČEK

NOVINARJEVO DELOVANJE V SOCIALISTIČNI JUGOSLAVIJI: RAZUMEVANJE FORMULACIJE "NOVINAR KOT DRUŽBENO-POLITIČNI DELAVEC"

V prispevku analiziramo jezikovno igro 'novinar kot družbeno-politični delavec', ki je bila profesionalna oznaka za novinarjevo delovanje v nekdanji socialistični Jugoslaviji. Besedilo je razdeljeno na dva osrednja dela. V prvem razdelku se z uporabo zgodovinsko-pojmovne metode lotevamo analize izraza v normativnih tekstih, kar zaobjema program-ska in angažirana besedila, ki so nastajala v takratnem času. S takim pristopom skušamo v pomen izraza vstopiti notranje, v utrip in duh časa, predvsem pa razumeti, kaj so z oznako njeni ustvarjalci želeli doseči in tudi sporočiti. Ugotavljamo, da sta bila novinarstvo in novinarjevo delovanje kot družbeno-političnega delavca razumljena kot pomemben politični dejavnik, kot sila, ki po eni strani prispeva k razvoju in izvedbi novega družbeno-političnega reda, tj. samoupravne socialistične skupnosti, po drugi strani pa novinar z lastnimi izdelki vpliva na širšo zavest množice, kar se izkazuje skozi idejo izobrazbe in vzgoje novega človeka: samoupravljalca. Drugi del prispevka je komplement prvemu, saj s kvalitativno

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metodo poglobljenega polstrukturiranega intervjuja z nekdanjimi novinarji, ki so profesionalno delovali v Socialistični federativni republiki Jugoslaviji, in skozi njihovo spominjanje nadaljujemo notranjo rekonstrukcijo pomena, razumevanja in rabe izraza v takratnem času.

Še posebej smo opazovali odnos s politiko, ki ga koncept esencialno vsebuje. Z empirično analizo smo tako prišli do različnih zaključkov: nekateri intervjuvanci so izraz orisovali afirmativno, da ima novinar posebno poslanstvo, večina od njih pa je do rabe in pomena izraza pristopila s kritično distanco, da je novinar vprežen v potrebe dnevne politike in tako v svojem delovanju viden kot neavtonomen.

Ključne besede: novinar, družbeno-politični delavec, socializem, samoupravljanje, Jugoslavija

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we analyse the language game "the journalist as a socio-political worker", which was the professional label for journalists' action in the former socialist Yugoslavia. The text is divided into two main parts. The first part uses a historical-conceptual method to analyse the mentioned formulation in normative texts, covering programmatic and engaged texts produced at the time. This approach seeks to enter into the meaning of the term from the inside, into the pulse and spirit of the time, and above all to understand what its creators wished to achieve and communicate with this expression. We find that journalism and the journalist's action as a socio-political worker were understood as an important political factor, as a political force on one hand contributing to the development and implementation of a new socio-political order, i.e., a socialist community based on self-management and, on the other hand, the journalist who through their own products tried to influence the broader consciousness of the masses, as manifested through the idea of the education for the new man: the self-manager. The second part of the paper complements the first since through the qualitative method of in-depth semi-structured interviews with former journalists who had been professionally active in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and via their recollections, we continue to internally reconstruct the meaning, understanding and use of the formulation at that time. In particular, we observe the relationship with politics that the concept essentially contains. Empirical analysis thus led us to different conclusions: some interviewees (the minority) described the term affirmatively, that the journalist as a socio-political worker had a special mission, while most approached the use and meaning of the expression with a critical distance, namely, that the journalist as a socio-political worker was harnessed to the needs of daily politics and thereby seen as non-autonomous in their labour and actions.

Keyword: journalist, socio-political worker, socialism, self-management, Yugoslavia

Introduction

The aim of the article is to analyse the formulation “*the journalist as a socio-political worker*” from the *inside*, by entering the particular historical and social moment in which it was present. This formulation, also treated here as a language game, was used during the time of socialist Yugoslavia. The concept undergoes a holistic historical-conceptual analysis and also receives empirical attention. The second part of the expression – ‘a socio-political worker’ – is understood as a way of *normatively* marking the journalist’s *work* as the creation of journalistic products, the journalist’s *labour* as producing daily news/products for audiences, and *action* as the journalist enters into the common world/society.¹

In the field of journalism studies, research explicitly addressing the term is rare. However, the concept is often mentioned in texts that address journalism and the journalist’s actions in socialist Yugoslavia, especially the journalistic normativity of time and space. The wording “the journalist as a socio-political worker” is frequently opened up and interpreted in academic texts by referring to the Yugoslav Journalists’ Code that indeed included² it up until 1988, although it is no longer found in the Code.³ The phrase is typically explained as meaning that the journalist, as “a socio-political worker”, is someone who actively contributes to developing and also implementing the self-managed socialism (such as in the article by Sonja Merljak Zdovc and Melita Poler Kovačič,⁴ and in the latest book by Zrinjka Peruško, Dina Vozab and Antonija Čuvalo⁵). The Code also states that the journalist, “as a socio-political worker”, ideologically pursues Marxism and Leninism, realises the importance of the working class and its role in socialist society based on self-management. Melita Poler⁶ clearly distinguishes these words from “the journalist as a watchdog” who normatively controls and does not cooperate with political authorities. There is also a consensus in these texts that the formulation is closely linked to political power, placing it among political terms, and this is also considered in this discussion.

Igor Vobič⁷ shows that the normativity also captured in the expression “the journalist as a socio-political worker” reveals the unique *objectivity* of historical time and space (also see Dina Vozab and Dunja Majstorović⁸). This suggests that phrases which

1 The triad *labour – work – action* follows the tripartite division set out in the work of Hannah Arendt. The division is used throughout her work *Vita Activa* [*The Human Condition*] (Ljubljana: Krtina, 1996) in a classical-traditional meaning. This article, however, attempts to unveil the concepts through the meaning and relevance of (*associated*) labour in the socialist political community.

2 The phrase is written in the Codes [*Kodeks novinara Jugoslavije*] from 1965, 1973, 1982.

3 *Kodeks novinara Jugoslavije*, 1988.

4 Sonja Merljak Zdovc and Melita Poler Kovačič, “The Paradox of Slovenia: Investigative Journalism during Socialism and Democracy,” *Journalism* 8, No. 5 (2007): 522.

5 Zrinjka Peruško, Dina Vozab and Antonija Čuvalo, *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems: The Case of Southeast Europe* (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2021), 101.

6 Melita Poler, “Ethics and Professionalisation of Slovene Journalism,” *Javnost (The Public)* 3, No. 4 (1996): 109.

7 Igor Vobič, “Three paradigms of journalistic objectivity in Slovenian press history,” *Central European Journal of Communication* 7, No. 1 (2014): 9–11.

8 Dina Vozab and Dunja Majstorović, “The Transformation of Normative Approaches to Journalism in Croatian Academic Literature from Socialism to Post-Socialism,” *Croatian Political Science Review* 58, No. 2 (2021): 18.

emerged in the chosen historical epoch should be understood according to the political and societal idea of the time – seen in speech/language as an objective disguising of time – which is under research.

In the paper, we present analysis complementing previous research based on the use of two methods: the historical-conceptual method and the qualitative method of in-depth semi-structured interviews. Both methods are intertwined in the text. Rather than attempt to judge the term from the *outside*, by elaborating and comparing it with contemporary journalistic norms and standards, the article aims to develop an epistemological perspective from the *inside*, which was especially possible by using these two methods.

The discussion is divided into two parts. In part one, we analyse the mentioned expression with the historical-conceptual method, which includes a brief presentation of the journalist's actions in engaged and programmatic texts written during socialist Yugoslavia, for the purpose of developing the socialist and self-managed community. The second part is dedicated to reconstructing the use and understanding of the formulation "the journalist as a socio-political worker" by interviewing former journalists who were professionally active in socialist Yugoslavia. Most of them were active in the time of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), mainly in the former socialist republic of Slovenia.

Interpreting the Language Game Through the Heritage of the Phrase "a Journalist as a Politician"

The expression "the journalist as a socio-political worker" after the comparative *as* combines two adjectives – *social* and *political* – that pertain to the noun – *worker*.⁹ This means the worker is somehow socially and politically engaged/active and therefore the journalist is a socio-political worker. The journalist's professional identity is thus marked by the socio-political imperatives of the Yugoslav socialist system based on self-management.

The wording is treated as a language game, a concept that reconciles the use of language with forms of human actions; in our case, the use of the term "the journalist as a socio-political worker" with the journalist's actions in the common socialist and self-managed world. For Ludwig Wittgenstein, the concept "is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life".¹⁰ As such, it can also be part of a specific historical epoch, idea or use. This discussion attempts to unfold the historical meaning of the wording rather than give it a single

9 The phrase is not written in a unified way across the texts. Sometimes it is written as one word – *sociopolitical worker* – and other times it is hyphenated – *socio-political worker*. Even though the Slovenian language discerns between the meanings of hyphenated and non-hyphenated words, the texts and their subsequent analysis reveals that in this case the phrases *sociopolitical worker*/*socio-political workers* are identical in meaning. In this article, we use the hyphenated version since the hyphen replaces the word *and*. Therefore, the meanings of both 'social' and 'political' are retained.

10 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 9.

black-and-white/universal definition that reduces the journalist as a socio-political worker to an expressive instrument of the political authorities and their ideology. This attempt is based on the understanding that human affairs, and with them the use of language in a chosen form of action, are contingent on and subject to spontaneity,¹¹ as well as impossible to capture in a universal definition.

With the concept of language game we place analysis of the mentioned wording in the historical-conceptual method. Reinhart Koselleck¹² (see also the text by Gunter Scholtz¹³) explains this method as a main and fundamental complement to social history, which analytically enters into the study of socio-political structures and formations, and therefore as a conceptual discussion of the pulse, the spirit of historical time, and its political and ideological purposes. In our case, this means that by interpreting the formulation we observe the structure of the relationship between the political authorities/politics and the journalist's labour, actions and work in socialist Yugoslavia. The historical-conceptual analysis approach also continues in the second part of the paper through interviews with former journalists and their historical understanding of those words.

The politician and former editor of *Ljudska pravica* [*The People's Right*] Vida Tomšič, at the first press conference held in the liberated territory in 1944, outlined the role and identity of the journalist in the future Yugoslav socio-political system in this manner:¹⁴ "We are journalists because we are politicians, or we are politicians because we are journalists". This declaration was aimed at the struggle to construct a new order, which marked the Yugoslav post-war period, but it also regarded the journalist's identity and actions as an active engagement in the realisation of this new order. Together as a political and socialist community, they were to change the common reality. The previous interpretation of "the journalist as a socio-political worker" (e.g., in the Yugoslav Journalists' Codes of 1965, 1973 and 1982) also sees the journalist making an active and engaged contribution to the development of self-managed socialism and self-management (level of social and economic relations), which more obviously began to be introduced into the Yugoslav space after 1950.

Engaged contribution through the identity of journalists as politicians and, later, journalists as socio-political workers may be explained in that journalists, with their products and active recognition of socio-political relevance, actively enter the political community, which is a common space of the people. After revolutions, including after the Yugoslav revolution,¹⁵ a need had arisen to constitute a new socio-political order¹⁶,

11 Arendt, *Vita activa*, 11, 183, 184, 199–202.

12 Reinhart Koselleck, *Pretekla prihodnost: prispevek k semantiki zgodovinskih časov* [*Future Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*] (Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis, 1999), 110, 111.

13 Gunter Scholtz, "Kaj je pojmovna zgodovina in čemu se z njo ukvarjamo? [What Is Begriffsgeschichte and Why It Deserves Our Attention]," *Phainomena* 11, No. 41/42 (2002).

14 Bernard Nežmah, *Časopisna zgodovina novinarstva* [*The Newspaper History of Journalism*] (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2012), 282.

15 Gal Kirn, "Jugoslovanska revolucija skozi tri partizanske prelome [The Yugoslav Revolution Through Three Partisan Ruptures]," *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* 45, No. 269 (2017).

16 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: suverena oblast in golo življenje* [*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*] (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2004), 52–55. See also: Hannah Arendt, *O revoluciji* [*On Revolution*] (Ljubljana: Krtina, 2017), 19.

which required the participation of all people – in the case of socialist Yugoslavia – all working people who were the central identity of the system at that time.

In re-constituting the socio-political order, following revolutionary practice, thought is transformed into practical and active thought (practical reason, *phrónesis*¹⁷) that can simply be named action, or in modern vocabulary, activism. The foundations of action are based on human knowledge of speech and its use. It is speech that enables humans, as by nature *politikòn zôon*¹⁸ or just a social animal,¹⁹ to communicate and collaborate with other humans who can together form and even change a political community and together contribute to its future development. Such journalists, who are part of the creation of a new, socialist, self-management political community and society, may be seen as political animals, agents, who actively enter the public space through their own work, labour and action, which are in turn marked by broader socio-political practice.

However, the legacy of the previous statement that “a journalist is a politician, and a politician is a journalist” observed in the formulation “the journalist as a socio-political worker”, which is largely focused on the development of self-management²⁰, allows two conclusions. First, a manifestation of power that is framed through the one-party system and one main ideology. Yet this also means that while the Party as the political authority is leading, at the same time it also shows that the Party is or should only be partly a leader. Second, as a founder of socialist self-management Edvard Kardelj wrote in one of the fundamental works at the time, *Smeri razvoja političnega sistema socialističnega samoupravljanja* [*The Developmental Directions of the Political Systems of Socialist Self-Management*] (1977), that a crucial political forces, in addition to other main political forces (e.g., the League of Communists, the Socialist Alliance of Working People, trade unions and other socio-political organisations), of the system *is the system of public communication*, in which he listed the press, radio, television and other “media of social life”.²¹ These forces are fundamental contributions to developing the socialist political idea and self-management. Kardelj added, “the media of social life” are not “merely media, but a political force that can influence social consciousness in a very progressive or a very reactionary manner”.²²

The introduction of Kardelj's conception of the public media – and thus journalistic activity – as a political (co)force of the socialist system also raises the question of their relationship with other, more central political forces, and the possibility of autonomously implementing the self-management idea and action; in particular, by framing and characterising journalists' activity as a socio-political worker. We address this relationship empirically with in-depth semi-structured interviews in the second part of the paper below.

17 Aristotel, *Nikomahova etika* [*Nicomachean Ethics*] (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2002), 190, 191, 194, 195.

18 Aristotel, *Politika* [*Politics*] (Ljubljana: GV, 2010), 112.

19 Hannah Arendt, *Predavanja o Kantovi politični filozofiji* [*Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*] (Ljubljana: KUD Apokalipsa, 2018), 74.

20 Mitja Gorjup, *Samoupravno novinarstvo* [*Journalism in Self-Management*] (Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1978), 62.

21 Edvard Kardelj, *Smeri razvoja političnega sistema socialističnega samoupravljanja* (Ljubljana: ČZP Komunist, 1977), 220.

22 Ibidem.

Methodology

Using the historical-conceptual method, the concept of research has so far been elaborated and discussed together with programmatic and engaged texts embedded in philosophical/scientific debates. It may be concluded that “the journalist as a socio-political worker” has a close relationship with politics and is connected to political action. This close relationship with politics does however not mean that the journalist is necessarily subordinate to narrow politics, i.e., the Party, or even that they are an instrumental extension of it. Instead, it means the journalist’s action is directed to the construction of an alternative. The building of an alternative modernity is reflected on one hand by an appeal to the socialist political idea and the individual’s committed contribution to a shared political community and, on the other, it is demonstrated that the journalist as “a socio-political worker” is part of the authorities, especially of the power of united workers, which precisely in socialist Yugoslavia acquires a central role and the role of an engaged member of and contributor to the self-management society.²³

The overall exploration of the formulation and understanding of the relationship between politics and journalism whose meaning this language game offers is complemented by the use of in-depth-semi-structured interviews conducted with former journalists who were professionally active and worked in the SFRY. The interviews saw the following research question emerge: *What kind of relationship with political power and the authorities was expressed by use of the wording “the journalist as a socio-political worker” and how did this relationship affect the journalist’s autonomy?*

As part of the project *Vloga komunikacijskih neenakosti v dezintegraciji večnacionalne družbe* [*The Role of Communication Inequalities in Disintegration of a Multinational Society*], 37 in-depth semi-structured and non-anonymised qualitative interviews, conducted by Jernej Amon Prodnik and the author of this paper, were held between June and August 2021. A table containing data on the interviews is found in Appendix A. The interviews were designed in several thematic strands; in one of these, we specifically addressed the meaning and use of the researched formulation in the past self-managed socialist society. The sample selected for the analysis includes 34 interviews, where three interviews were excluded because they contained no mention of this wording.

The choice of a qualitative method of this type was dictated by the tendency to look at the formulation’s use from the *inside*, by those journalists who had been professionally active in the SFRY and generally in socialist Yugoslavia. This approach ultimately serves to complement the historical-conceptual method and reveals the ‘facticity’ of use of the wording, as well as the journalists’ point of view: how they

23 Kardelj, *Smeri razvoja socialističnega samoupravljanja*, 93. Also in formal acts: e.g., in Article 2 of *Zakon o združenem delu* [*The Associated Labour Act*] (Ljubljana: Gospodarska založba, 1976), 23. And in fundamental principles (part II) in *Integralno besedilo ustave Socialistične federativne republike Jugoslavije in amandmajev I do XLVIII k ustavi Socialistične federativne republike Jugoslavije* [*SFRY Constitution, 1974*] (Ljubljana: Uradni list SR Slovenije, 1989), 20.

used, understood and saw the formulation, especially at the time. Here we may add that both methods are approaches that open up intersecting perspectives and entail different ways of internal thinking about the expression according to the then socio-political system.

By interviewing former journalists, we entered into their recollection and interpretation of the time, and – in a historically interpretative and reconstructive manner²⁴ (oral history) – we also grasped the use of the researched language game. The latter shows the forms of action in the SFRY and the journalist's relationship with the political authorities and specifically what they wanted to glue onto the journalist's identity in the socialist socio-political system precisely in the wording of the formulation. Namely, through dialogue with the former journalists, and therefore by using the method of in-depth semi-structured interviewing, we also clarified²⁵ some of the judgements, dilemmas, even prejudices about the formulation, which have arisen following the SFRY's dissolution, and instead adopted an analytical, internal view of the expression.

The main limitation of this method is that the interviewees' personal and professional histories are memories, and hence we cannot exclude the possibility that their description of the past – and thus use of the phrase “journalist as a socio-political worker” – is imbued with the language of the present and with (professional) normative ideals adapted to the contemporary time and place. It is 30 years since the collapse of the SFRY, although tendencies to move away from the Yugoslav socialist political system were already evident in the 1980s. We are also aware of the fact that the interviewees are remembering and reconstructing the time, place and the formulation on the phenomenological level of experience and thus on the level of plural particularity, i.e., their insight is just one element of views on the language game in the larger puzzle of time and space. This also explains why their words are not taken as the ‘main’ or ‘only’ truth, but as a complement to other relevant and possible perspectives.

Empirical Analysis: The Embedding of “the Journalist as a Socio-political Worker” in Their Relationship with Politics and Reflecting on their Autonomy

The data obtained offer several possible perspectives on the understanding and meaning of the mentioned wording.²⁶ Some interviews approached the term affirmatively, in line with the interpretation presented in the first part of the paper. Yet, most approached the expression in a highly critical way, understanding it as a way the

24 Charles C. Ragin, *Družboslovno raziskovanje: enotnost in raznolikost metode* [Constructing Social Research: The Unity and Diversity of Method] (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2007), 99.

25 Ragin, *Družboslovno raziskovanje*, 98. Steinar Kvale, *Doing Interviews* (London: Sage, 2007), 13, 14.

26 The interviewers presented preliminary results of the interviews in the paper *The Journalist as a Socio-political Worker: Ideology and Practice of Slovenian Journalists in Socialist Yugoslavia* at the Central and Eastern European Communication and Media Conference (CEECOM), which took place between 22 and 23 October 2021.

political authorities tried to limit and restrict the journalist's autonomy and their mission to their own political purposes and interests.

The revealed polarisation once again gives the impression that the formulation and its meaning cannot be seen in any univocal way, or even be packaged into a single semantic definition. The interviewees' divergences also suggest that the life forms of social and political action, including that of the journalist (as a socio-political worker), in socialist Yugoslavia were complex and not unambiguous, and ultimately call for further research to explain the alternative on which the socialist Yugoslav revolution and system were built. The findings presented here also – at least in part – bridge interpretations of the formulation that are products of the conflicts emerging in contemporary political discussions.

Affirmative interpretations and identifying with the expression

Whether the interviewees identify with the formulation is not entirely clear. An affirmative and positive understanding of the wording does not mean these ex-journalists associated their own professional action at the time with broader socio-political activity and saw it as contributing to the creation of the socialist self-management community and society. They tried to see and explain these words consistently for the special historical context and time in which it was used, which shows at least the partial self-identification and association of one's own journalistic identity with socio-political action at that time.

We estimate that seven of the interviewees held such an attitude to the language game: they understood their own action through use of it as being equal to higher political decision-makers, as socio-political workers they actively contributed to the (re)construction of self-managed socialism – seeing their journalistic labour and work as one of the main forces of the system. Two of them understood the second part of the term – 'socio-political workers' – as a manifestation of the opinion leaders and engaged agents in their own right, through their journalistic pieces and products their readers showing listeners and viewers different perspectives on social problems. Being an opinion leader and an engaged agent also meant being like a sort of a teacher of the audience. Many, however, saw the formulation as a generic label for their role and status as a journalist in the SFRY.

Socio-political workers were politicians, that is the equation. It was used, but not in a pejorative sense. / ... / We journalists wanted to change social relations. It was conscious. That is why we are journalists. (Branko Maksimovič)

We informed people. We broadened their knowledge, their horizons, and directed them with our ideas. That is why it used to be said then – and I agreed with it – that a journalist is a socio-political worker. / ... / Today, the phrase is taken out of context. (Miloš Ivančič)

If someone told me "you are a socio-political worker", I naturally told them that I was a journalist, but our status at the time was such that there was no need to pretend otherwise. (Stane Grah)

For these interviewees, as we can also see in the above quote from Miloš Ivančič, there was a strong emphasis on the fact that today the formulation is seen outside of the context in which it was coined and used. Today, it is generally used as a way of expressing how journalists' action and journalism at that time could be discredited in the sense that it was an extension of propaganda and merely an instrument of the one-party rule. And that journalists did not have the possibility of autonomous thinking, reflection and action. It is precisely by using the historical-conceptual method in the first part that we have sought to unpack the formulation contextually and to look at it through the interpretations of texts written and produced during socialist Yugoslavia. Interviewee Bernarda Jeklin contextualised the wording as follows:

Today, the phrase sounds terrible, but it sounded completely different back then. At the time, it was self-evident [that journalists were socio-political workers]. The fact that we were building socialism was entirely fine. To provide a better life for everyone, what was wrong with that? Nothing.

Interviewee Stane Grah also viewed the general status of "journalists as socio-political workers" in the way that the narrower political power, by using this term – purely on a linguistic level – gave journalists some kind of trust, leaving them close to narrow political circles and also to the information that was circulating in these closed spheres. Here we recall Kardelj's assumption that *the system of public communication* is one of the political forces adding to the development of the socialist system and influencing the social and political consciousness of the masses.

That was our status and they [politicians] treated us in this way when we were talking to the League, the Socialist Alliance or those like them. /.../ In essence, we were an integral component of politics for politicians. /.../ There was mutual trust that was very dear to us, I was grateful and so were others; we appreciated being better-informed, this was very useful for us. (Stane Grah)

This statement can be interpreted in two ways. First, more generally, the political authorities that coined and used the term probably wanted to show and give recognition that journalism is the (co)power of the system and the developer of those political ideas that have yet to see their day of full realisation. Further, they also tried to symbolically represent the unification of working people, who are political agents too. By using the formulation, they wished to establish relations between various fundamental political forces of the system, and journalists as "socio-political workers" are therefore one of them. Second, by establishing a closer relationship by using the formulation with journalists, the political authorities also sought to ensure the easier and more direct promotion of the ideas, positions and reforms they had developed in spaces removed from the general public. They tried to eliminate journalists from *the watch dog role*, which was also not a plan of the system at the time.

The affirmative attitude to the concept did not mean they did not feel autonomous in their work and action. They characterised their action as largely autonomous, although their autonomous – i.e., independent setting of the rules of governing their own action (*autós*, self, – *nómos*, law) – action was dictated and made meaningful by

the self-management and socialist socio-political system in which they were existentially and professionally situated. Thus, certain topics like self-management, socialism as a broader political idea, the leading political functionaries (e.g., Tito and Kardelj) and the Non-Aligned Movement were sacrosanct and could not be openly or publicly questioned and challenged.

Distancing from and non-identification with the formulation

Two interviewees stated they had never thought about the formulation and engaged with it in any meaningful way. Although they had heard of it, it did not preoccupy them. One of them explained this was because he had been a foreign correspondent and mainly professionally active abroad.

I personally think that we did not pay too much attention to it. I only know that we used to say we would not make for great socio-political workers. /.../ [When asked whether she understood the phrase as a pejorative, she responds:] Not really a pejorative, no, but that we are not socio-political workers because we are journalists. (Nadja Pengov)

Some interviewees who were critical of the phrase, even back then, also expressed that they did not put more emphasis on the expression as a way of distancing themselves from it. However, we estimate that 25 interviewees were extremely and clearly critical of the expression and did not associate their own professional action with it in any way. They saw the coining and use of the wording primarily as a political manner, how political authorities tried to direct them in line with their goals, interests and positions. By appointing journalists as “socio-political workers”, they were attempting to intervene in journalists’ autonomous action and mission. For these interviewees, it is not very clear whether they entered into the interpretation of the formulation through contemporary journalistic norms and ideals. Despite this, it is clear that they see the professional identity of the journalist and the professional field of journalism as matters that should be independent of narrow political power, regarding which they as journalists must be critical and attentive to the problems it causes.

Distancing from the term, or being critical of it, was shown in narrow association with political power, with the Party and other socio-political organisations. This notion was applied by interviewees mainly to those journalists who saw their professional mission and their professional identity in line with ‘socio-political working’ and to journalists who gave the impression of being socio-political workers because they had visibly close relationships with the political authorities and collaborated with them in various ways (serving politics and its interests). The large majority of interviewees stated that otherwise a minority of journalists in editorial offices and journalistic organisations equated their professional action/work with the essence of the formulation. Those who identified with it were principally those who had a stronger intention to climb up the political ladder or had other political interests and thought it would make it easier for them to obtain information from the inside, from the closed circles.

Many of us stayed kilometres away from this phrase. From the very beginning. It only meant a close relationship to and dependence on politics. Some were even proud of this phrase, proclaiming themselves to be socio-political workers, but we often thought it was a slur. That, in this way, you are selling your independence. (Gojko Bervar)

Deliberate non-identification with the formulation “the journalist as a socio-political worker” also meant that they did not want their labour to be associated with political power in any way and thus showed a distance from it. They hence emphasised the fact that they were primarily *journalists* and not socio-political workers, which is also seen in some of quotations provided above. With this attitude, our journalists created for themselves the possibility of independent and especially autonomous journalistic action and decision-making within the socio-political system.

That is how we were treated. Even though I never approved of us being called socio-political workers. I always let them know: I am a journalist! I am not a socio-political worker because I would act differently. Even in my opinion pieces, I never ‘religiously’ reported on the decisions that were being made. I always had an independent, critical relationship to things. (Aleks Štakul)

The interviewees also felt that the expression was imposed on them by politics in order to gain a *formal ally*, namely, through the use of language and the explicit designation of their professional identity, with which they demonstrated an expectation of who a journalist should be in the SFRY.

They [politicians] knew that the press is very important, that it is a factor that can either make politics or break it if it is too critical. With this concept, they wanted to say that we are in this together, we will stay together, you will not stab us in the back with critical writing. (Janez Čuček)

[The expression] was present because politics made it present. It said: ‘Journalists are socio-political workers because they are fighting for the ideals of this country’. (Ivan Praprotnik)

I understood it as a yoke. As a way to use journalists for the purposes of daily politics. (Marjan Sedmak)

A few interviewed journalists felt that anyone who was a member of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, i.e., the Party, or other socio-political organisations was automatically seen as a socio-political worker who was implementing the self-managed socialist society. A contradiction arising here is that although the vast majority of former journalists were by their own accounts mostly passive members of the League of Communists, they felt no special affinity with the expression.

Those [socio-political workers] were mainly functionaries and members of five socio-political organisations: the Socialist Alliance of the Working People, the League of Communists, trade unions, youth, and fighters. And those who were involved in these organisations were socio-political workers. They were not merely functionaries, they also sat in county communities, municipalities, and so on. (Ivan Praprotnik)

This interpretation can be expanded by some interviewees' observations who stressed that 'the journalist as a socio-political worker' was simply someone who uncritically and faithfully transmitted the conclusions, opinions and positions of the Central Committee, which they saw as propaganda, and was thus completely subordinated to politics in thought. Such journalists were not seen as autonomous in socio-political action.

The closest definition of this concept would be that a socio-political worker is someone aware of the responsibilities expected of him by the League, in line with their politics, the current politics. (Alenka Puhar)

[Journalists as socio-political workers] obtained their opinions at the Central Committee. (Tone Hočevar)

Interviewee Ervin Hladnik Milharčič interestingly noted that the emergence and inflation of this kind of engaged and programmatic expression meant that the alienated political power was trying to build a closer relationship with the working people. According to the interviewees' statements, the inflation of this kind of expressions had the opposite effect: they distanced themselves from the expressions and hence from the ideas that such an expression represented. The formulation "the journalist as a socio-political worker" was also seen by most journalists as a programmatic and bureaucratic platitude found in a variety of formal documents. Accordingly, they did not attribute deeper meanings to it.

If you were to go back and search for these resolutions, documents, you would find them in abundance. But everyday people did not know what this is. / ... / These platitudes were flying around. Why did they even think of a journalist being a socio-political worker apart from it being a propagandistic platitude. (Jože Poglajen)

[The Code of Yugoslav Journalists] existed, yet it was useless. Full of platitudes. They used to say the journalist is a socio-political worker and similar stupidities. (Mojca Drčar Murko)

A few interviewees who were critical and distanced themselves from the expression sometimes took a pragmatic approach to identifying with it: they identified with the wording only when the status built around it brought them existential and professional benefits, e.g., the possibility of a higher salary, promotion and also the kind of symbolic possibility of transforming socio-political organisations, especially the Party, from the inside. Interviewee Ivan Praprotnik very ironically described this claim:

We liked this idea of a journalist as a socio-political worker, but for one reason only, not politics. It was because the salaries of socio-political workers at the time were twice the level of journalists. And so, we said, well then, we, too, shall be [socio-political workers] and have better salaries.

Statements like this again link socio-political workers in particular with those who were active in the Party or in the narrower political power and organs, and hence obtained some existential benefits. This also leads to the conclusion that the designation of journalists as "socio-political workers" was chiefly on a symbolic level of the socialist system.

The expression discredits journalism

Some interviewees perceived the formulation as an obvious humiliation of journalistic labour and its mission. They mentioned that the authorities used the term to discredit the journalist, as they should embody the role of a *watch dog* and be perceived as such, and tried to humiliate their labour precisely by reducing the noun *worker* to the level of merely labour. One interviewee even felt that use of the word *worker* was partly inappropriate because journalists in those days already held advanced degrees and diplomas.

Again, this attitude contradicts a system supposed to be built on the power of all workers and the associated labour through which workers could realise their own political potential.

I even stated publicly at a meeting then that we [journalists] were not socio-political workers. /.../ Because the label socio-political worker degrades the journalistic profession. The term implied that a journalist, as a socio-political worker, was serving the socio-political system. Not that he is a watchdog. /.../ This label was made to imply that journalists [as socio-political workers] were supposed to make a constructive, positive contribution to the development of society as such. But this label was at the same time degrading to the journalistic profession. (Mitja Meršol)

[With this term] politics was trying to put us on the same level as workers. To humiliate [journalists] in a way. (Lada Zei)

Discussion and Conclusion

The paper and previous empirical analysis allow the conclusion that the formulation, treated here as a language game, which reveals the journalistic professional form of action in the SFRY, is closely related to politics and broader political action, which in turn leads to three possible sub-interpretative concise meanings:

A) The affirmative conception of the formulation showed that the journalist, as a socio-political worker, was one of the forces of a system that was actively, committedly and perhaps even activistically contributing to the development and emergence of the new socio-political order, namely, the socialist community based on self-management. With such an interpretation, the journalist is not seen as subordinated in thought and action to politics, but their autonomy is intersected with the higher goals of contributing to the community, society, suggesting an Aristotelian *use of practical reason* together with the *political action* of equal agents in the public sphere and in the broader political community. Especially through associated labour and the importance of a worker – which includes a socio-political worker – as an engaged agent of the community, there is a significant political potential, inspired by the idea of creating a socialist society that would be the starting point for a *good* and fair life for all people.²⁷

²⁷ Franck Fischbach, *Kaj je socialistična vlada? Kar je živo in kar je mrtvo v socializmu* [What is a Socialist Government? What is Alive and What is Dead in Socialism] (Ljubljana: Krtina, 2019), 12, 14, 24, 38, 40, 69.

This kind of understanding the formulation is consistent with the interpretation presented in the first part of the paper, and it is precisely with this explanation that we bridge the prejudices and judgements attached to journalism and the journalist's action in this historical timeframe. With this interpretation, we also recognise the huge possibilities for further research since it offers us a more complex reflection and understanding of a form of journalistic action, especially in line with the alternatives on which the Yugoslav revolution and system were built.

B₁) The second, frequent interpretation that emerges from the analysis is that, through the use and conception of the expression, the Party and the other main socio-political organisations sought to mark the journalist's action with their own goals and purposes, also including the simulated pretension of the common struggle in the construction and development of, on one hand the self-management society and on the other the socialist political community. Use of the formulation was also an attempt to control journalists in their actions. The interviewees thus noted that the designation "socio-political workers" denoted their autonomous action and thought, and above all their professional identity, which they already then understood as meaning that the journalist's labour had to be independent of political power and its intentions.

The interpretation of this strand is linked to a statement by Rastko Močnik, who in 1984 wrote that the journalist as "a socio-political worker" was "an agent of bureaucratic class struggle",²⁸ which sheds light on the following: although the authorities wished to construct the active and engaged power of all working people, including by declaring journalists as socio-political workers, in a way they failed to do so. Thus, for most interviewees this kind of designation was either a mere programmatic and bureaucratic phrase purposely invented by the authorities to 'simulate' or 'fake' a common struggle for a new order, or was simply intended to show that the journalist's identity in this system must only be somehow linked to narrow political power, even if in terms of the *common good*.²⁹

B₂) This explanation is related to the previous one. Some interviewees saw a minority of journalists as socio-political workers completely subordinated to the authorities, implying that those journalists were direct transmitters of opinions and positions that were formed in closed, internal political circles. Namely, they were in a sense propagandists for the Party and its interests.

However, through the paper we wanted to show the complexity of use of the language game "the journalist as a socio-political worker". We addressed the formulation in the first part with the historical-conceptual method and in the second part with the qualitative method of in-depth semi-structured interviews with former journalists. With both methods, we tried to approach the Yugoslav time and space in a distanced

See also: Franck Fischbach, "Delo in možnost demokratičnega javnega prostora [*Labour and the Possibility of a Democratic Public Space*]," *Filozofski vestnik* XXXIV, No. 3 (2013): 30–32.

28 Rastko Močnik, "V boju za svobodo javne besede – danes [In the Fight for Freedom of Public Expression – Today]," [foreword] in *Cenzura in svoboda tiska* [*Censorship and Press Freedom*], Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Ljubljana: Univerzitetna konferenca ZSMS: Republiška konferenca ZSMS, 1984), 18.

29 Aristotel, *Nikomahova etika*, 47–51.

way, by entering into the understanding of the expression internally and adapting to the normative ideas of the time: who the journalist "as a socio-political worker" should be. The two methods led us to several possible perspectives for explaining the term, which confirms the basic point that the formulation cannot be explained by a single universal definition. What is 'universal' in the expression is precisely its concrete connection to politics.

The multiple possible perspectives of understanding show that language and its usage are components of human affairs, of the intersubjective world, which in essence is spontaneous, contingent, plural and unpredictable. Through their own particular perspectives, use of language and the outline of their professional and personal histories/(auto)biographies, the interviewees interpreted and explained one of the most important concepts in Yugoslav journalism and presented the different possibilities of journalistic actions and practice which, alongside possible interpretations of the formulation, also give an incentive to research and explore the complexities of the Yugoslav socio-political system, possible alternative forms of journalistic activity and an alternative liveness in a manner of Catherine Samary,³⁰ who sees, e.g., in the Yugoslav self-management socialism subversive potential to transform society and political communities and generally in the area of human affairs.

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Appendix A

Table 1: Interview data, including full name of interviewee, their birth year, interview length, date and the type of media interviewee worked at.

Last name, name	Interview length [minute]	Interview date [year- month-date]	Interviewee birth year	Media type		
				Newspaper	Television	Radio
Ambrožič, Lado	127	2021-07-22	1948	X	X	X
Bergant, Boris	183	2021-06-18	1948		X	
Bervar, Gojko	130	2021-06-11	1946			X
Čuček, Janez	124	2021-07-15	1937	X	X	
De Corti, Borko	139	2021-06-17	1948	X		
Dobljekar, Nevenka	109	2021-07-13	1952	X	X	X
Drčar Murko, Mojca	252	2021-06-22	1942	X		X
Golob, Milan	112	2021-08-11	1937	X		
Gorjup, Ada	48	2021-08-13	1943			
Grah, Stane	192	2021-07-19	1946		X	
Grizila, Sonja	125	2021-07-20	1951	X		
Grobovšek, Bojan	91	2021-07-22	1949	X		
Hladnik Milharčič, Ervin	101	2021-08-12	1954	X		X
Hočevan, Tone	128	2021-07-19	1946	X	X	
Ivančič, Miloš	171	2021-07-21	1948	X		X
Jeklin, Bernarda	110	2021-07-12	1936	X		
Kajzer, Janez	135	2021-08-19	1938	X		
Kodrič, Zdenko	155	2021-07-13	1949	X		X
Komparič, Nina	129	2021-08-13	1945	X	X	X
Kovač, Božo	160	2021-06-23	1935	X	X	
Kozinc, Željko	137	2021-07-14	1939	X	X	
Kremžar, Leo	171	2021-08-17	1949			X

Last name, name	Interview length [minute]	Interview date [year- month-date]	Interviewee birth year	Media type		
				Newspaper	Television	Radio
Maksimovič, Branko	151	2021-06-16	1945	X	X	
Meršol, Mitja	100	2021-08-09	1945	X		
Pečko, Otmar	116	2021-06-21	1948		X	
Pengov, Nadja	82	2021-08-16	1944			X
Poglajen, Jože	84	2021-06-14	1950	X		
Praprotnik, Ivan	90	2021-08-10	1947	X		
Puhar, Alenka	142	2021-07-14	1945	X		
Rupnik, Anton	158	2021-07-20	1937	X		
Sedmak, Marjan	129	2021-08-09	1938	X		X
Štakul, Aleks	156	2021-08-16	1944	X	X	X
Šuligoj, Boris	115	2021-06-16	1953	X		
Vizovišek, Slavko	158	2021-06-17	1949	X		
Založnik Rustja, Zora	78	2021-07-16	1939	X		X
Zei, Lada	159	2021-06-21	1941	X		X

Nina Žnidaršič

NOVINARJEVO DELOVANJE V SOCIALISTIČNI JUGOSLAVIJI: RAZUMEVANJE FORMULACIJE »NOVINAR KOT DRUŽBENOPOLITIČNI DELAVEC«

POVZETEK

Prispevek se ukvarja z analizo jezikovne igre ,novinar kot družbenopolitični delavec', ki je bila sicer profesionalna oznaka za novinarjevo delovanje v nekdanji socialistični Jugoslaviji in zapisana v Kodeksu novinarjev Jugoslavije do leta 1988. Analiza izraza je zasnovana z dvema metodama: zgodovinsko-pojmovno metodo in

družboslovno kvalitativno metodo poglobljenega polstrukturiranega intervjuja, ki ga lahko imenujemo tudi pristop k oralni zgodovini. Z obema metodama se skuša z analizo vstopiti v čas in prostor notranje, prilagajoče se tedanjosti. Prvi del prispevka je namenjen analizi formulacije skozi programska in angažirana besedila, ki so nastajala prav v socialistični Jugoslaviji. Avtorica prispevka poskuša z metodo zgodovinsko-pojmovne analize zajeti idejo formulacije, hkrati pa predstaviti utrip in duh, ne samo časa, ki ga proučuje, temveč tudi duh, ki veje iz rabe same jezikovne igre. Drugi razdelek prispevka je namenjen empirični analizi 34 poglobljenih polstrukturiranih intervjujev z nekdanjimi novinarji, ki jih je avtorica prispevka skupaj z dr. Jernejem Amonom Prodnikom izvedla med junijem in avgustom 2021. Intervjuvani novinarji se profesionalno-demografsko umeščajo predvsem v obdobje od začetka šestdesetih let, zato je empirična analiza umeščena v analizo rabe fraze v času Socialistične federativne republike Jugoslavije in v prostor nekdanje socialistične republike Slovenije.

Že zgodovinsko-pojmovna analiza je pokazala, da je proučevana formulacija v tesnem odnosu s politiko in političnostjo, vendar ne na način, da bi bil novinar kot družbenopolitični delavec propagandno gonilo ozke politične oblasti, ampak da naj bi prav prek lastne prakse in političnega delovanja prispeval k izgradnji in razvoju po eni strani samoupravljanja, kar predstavlja družbeno in ekonomsko raven ter idejo podružabljanja, po drugi strani pa socialistične skupnosti, kar predstavlja raven politike, pa tudi političnega delovanja. Sam izraz družbenopolitični (delavec) združuje prav obe ravni delovanja. Tako se identiteta novinarja v tem času normativno izkazuje skozi postavko, da novinar naj ne bi bil »zgolj«¹ poročevalec in opazovalec družbenega dogajanja, temveč naj bi z lastno prakso in izdelki utelešal angažiranega akterja družbe in politike. Branje vizij in idej Edvarda Kardelja razkriva pojmovanje, da je sistem javnega obveščanja, kamor se uvršča komuniciranje po tisku, radiu in televiziji, razumljen kot ena izmed temeljnih političnih sil sistema, kot del širše *skupne* oblasti, ki zasleduje vzpostavljanje tistih socialističnih in samoupravnih idej, ki še niso v polni meri ali sploh niso uresničene/izvedene. Prav branje takih besedil daje vtis, da je mogoče na proučevan koncept pogledati tudi skozi drugačne in predvsem kontekstualne perspektive, obenem pa ustvarja kompleksnost novinarske dejavnosti v času in prostoru.

S poglobljenimi polstrukturiranimi intervjuji z nekdanjimi novinarji je analiza, komplementarno prejšnji metodi, zasledovala notranjost pomena in rabe jezikovne igre 'novinar kot družbenopolitični delavec', kajti vsi intervjuvani novinarji so izkusili prostor in čas, ki ga prispevek naslavlja. Skupaj z njimi se je rekonstruiralo prostor in čas in iskalo morebitne drugačne pomene proučevane formulacije. Pridobljeni podatki intervjujev so podčrtali politično esenco termina, in sicer se je raba termina v odnosu do politike in politične skupnosti izkazovala na različne načine. Manjšinski del intervjuvancev je imel afirmativen odnos do termina oziroma je nanj skušal pogledati skozi kontekst, v katerem je nastal in bil rabljen. Ta pogled se sklada z zgodovinsko-pojmovno analizo. Ti novinarji so novinarja kot družbenopolitičnega delavca videli povsem na isti ravni kot (višje) politične odločevalce, predvsem pa mu pripisali aktivno in angažirano vlogo (mnenjski voditelj), ki vpliva na zavest bralcev, poslušalcev, gledalcev

in z lastnim angažmajem prispeva k razvoju in nastajanju samoupravne socialistične skupnosti. Po drugi strani pa je izrazito velik del intervjuvanih novinarjev do pomena in rabe izraza pristopil kritično in distancirano, kar je impliciralo tudi njihovo videnje profesionalnega delovanja novinarja, ki mora biti neodvisen in popolnoma avtonomen v razmerju do politike in politične oblasti. Pojem so videli predvsem kot izrazni način, kako skuša politična oblast novinarje utiriti v lastne cilje, interese in potrebe dnevne politike.

Prispevek pa ne nazadnje skuša odpreti premislek o alternativni formi novinarskega delovanja, ki jo ponuja prav razumevanje jezikovne igre ‚novinar kot družbenopolitični delavec‘; takšen novinar naj bi bil primarno aktivist in angažiran akter v družbi in širši politični skupnosti, v aristotelovskem pomenu besede skupnega dobrega.