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Art, science and politics

Зоран Аврамовић

**СРПСКИ
УМЕТНИЦИ
И НАУЧНИЦИ
У ПОЛИТИЦИ**



Photo: Zoran Avramović

Zoran Avramović: *Serbian Artists and Scientists in Politics*, IK Filip Višnjić, Belgrade, 2024, 250 pages

The latest book by our well-known intellectual and political activist Zoran Avramović brings various contributions divided into two segments: “Serbian artists in Politics” and “Serbian scientists and professors self-govern in politics” – with the “Final word” and the accompanying note about the author, completed with the list of his publications. The largest number of his works so far belongs to sociology of culture and literature, and sociology of education and politics. Some of his considerations can at the same time be seen as related to sociology of knowledge, as it is evident

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in this publication as well. Namely, the author emphasizes that the merit of one of the classical figures of sociology of knowledge, Karl Mannheim, is in “highlighting the element of irrationality that essentially exists in politics”, whereas “the direction of thought in politics is often and unconsciously determined by collective actions or desired perceptions hiding parts of reality”. Yet, this thesis, also accepted by the author, might be considered unilateral, because political opinion may also be rationally determined, primarily in terms of “objective-means rationality”, while the starting value premises can be problematized. Moreover, they frequently prove to be difficult to accept, which is also evident in Avramović’s specific observations throughout the book.

Speaking of the theses by eminent sociologists, this book takes into account the view of M. Weber, T. B. Bottomore, K. Mannheim, C. W. Mills, as well as of political scientists A. Tocqueville, J. Keane, and S. Woodworth. He is right in paying most attention to Max Weber’s classical views of the nature of science and “politics as a vocation”. The author’s starting question is “how politically engaged Serbian artists, scientists and professors, thing ad act collectively” in the period 1990-2024. It is “intellectualized politics” at work, the characteristics of which is that the artist, the scientist and the professor cover their public acting by the authority of the profession, “thus making the impression of authority in the society’s public sphere”.

As far as writers are concerned, the author establishes that they entered the public life in two ways – by the content of their artistic works and their own socio-political engagement, whereas

“Certain values, interests and needs motivate the artist to become involved in politics; of course, each artist in a specific manner”. In that context, the author mentions, first of all, Crnjanski, Ćosić, Andrić, and then Vidosav Stevanović, Bora Ćosić, Dragan Velikić, Ljubomir Simović, Svetislav Basara, Milisav Savić, Dušan Kovačević... In his further considerations, the author particularly focuses on our artists’ political engagement during the war breakup of the SFRY and the Serbian people’s suffering in the period 1990–2000 and later. As a matter of fact, deeper ideological-political differences proved to exist among Serbian writers. They were not guided by “practical wisdom, but by experience, impression, easy and hard words and a quick, exclusive attitude”. It was a way of learning about the reality which was marked by Oswald Spengler as “experiential knowledge” of society and man whose roots are in emotions, intuition and will. The author completes his observations by analysing the acting of Serbian musical and visual artists, film and theatre directors and actors, documenting his artistic and civic engagement. Just as in the case of writers, the presentation is also individualized here through listing the names of this type of artists, their statements and ways of acting.

The second part of the performed analyses refers to Serbian scientists and professors. He notices that the “participation of scientists in politics does not guarantee either better political solutions or practical success. He also asks the question as to “how to explain that a substantial number of Serbian scientists observers, when stepping into the reality, incorrectly observe facts, rely on the impression and not on the reasons and causes, understand



The author of the book "Serbian Artists and Scientists in Politics", Professor Zoran Avramović, PhD, and political philosopher Dragoljub Kojčić at the promotion of the book, House of King Peter the First, Belgrade, in November 2024.

Photo: private archive

social processes emotionally, use empty concepts, and draw wrong conclusions from right premises". He states the lack of responsibility for the public performance of "professors and scientists in their cabinets" who do not possess any knowledge of

practical life and political skills, or "unconsciously allow their personal intolerance and hatred to overmaster the mind". The author reminds that Scheler and Pareto established that urges, feelings, wishes and interests participated in knowledge of society and politics, which is also reflected in the acting of our scientists and professors. Among them, Avramović particularly draws attention to Vesna Pešić, Čedomir Čupić, Nikola Samardžić, Vladimir Goati, Božidar Jakšić etc. The author establishes the central deficit in their action by stating that there are few examples in European political culture "of political actors not respecting the rights of their own nations and of advocating more for the interests of others", which then leads to self-humiliation and disrespect of own nation and state.

In contrast, Avramović points out the following: "Involved in political struggles, the scientist, if he is truly a scientist, will not abandon the ideal of truthful knowledge in altered social circumstances". Moreover, the author notices that social sciences should "(1) analyse public events and processes, (2) observe structural tendencies of social life, and (3) point to the consequences of public decisions". This is a clear and sensible determination to which very little may be added.

Finally, the author also looks at the self-government understanding of the university and its autonomy. His central thesis is: "In Serbia, for 70 years already, there has been a self-government organization of the university, which means that the state as the founder has been excluded from the governing functions of the faculties and universities. This position of the university has no external control of legitimacy and professional ethics;

there are given to professors and students, while the state's duty is to provide financial funds", which can then lead to the "political instrumentalization" of the faculties and institutes. It is a relevant topic worthy of consideration, which has particular currency in the present socio-political circumstances.

Just as the author's previous works, this one also shows his clear critical-political opinion, specific observations and assessments with which the reader does not need to agree in every detail, but which are in many aspects inspirational and showing re-

spectable openness. Overall considerations in this attention-worthy edition are in compliance with the former emphasis by Milan Kangrga, a famous Yugoslav ethicist, that the intellectual who remains silent about society's important open issues is in fact not an intellectual. Apart from its theoretical value, this book also has a document value, due to the factual registration of the attitudes and engagement of Serbian artists and professors in the period from the 1990s to date. That is why it additionally deserves attention of the broader public.

References

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