An Everyday for Everyman (and Everywoman, Too):
Consumer Culture, the New "New Class," and the Making of the Yugoslav Dream, 1950-1965

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Reflecting on socialism in Yugoslavia at the close of its first decade, Milovan Djilas complained that his country's Communist Party and state officials had betrayed the promise of their own revolution by creating a new class -- an exclusive coterie of bureaucrats and apparatchiks seduced by the material trappings of the power they enjoyed, entrenched in their control of the nation's income and resources, and, as a result, utterly at odds with the time-honored communist ideal of a classless society. In *The New Class*, Djilas, once one of Tito's closest associates and later the Yugoslav dissident *par excellence*, delivered a blistering indictment of the bureaucracy that had emerged in the years following the communists' rise to power. He offered a thoroughgoing political critique of the Yugoslav regime and of communist regimes generally, asserting that Party leaders and apparatchiks had robbed the working class of what the writer, faithful Marxist that he was, continued to see as its rightful authority to govern. But while the scope of its arguments was extraordinarily broad, the book is perhaps better remembered for the way its author railed against the new bureaucracy's privilege and material comfort. Members of the new class, Djilas complained, had cheated ordinary citizens by assuming total control, tantamount to ownership, of Yugoslavia's wealth. The implications of the argument were damming: in a society that still faced severe deprivation in the aftermath of the Second World War, only these bureaucrats were able to ensure that they and their families would live comfortably. A high-level government job, in this view, amounted to not much more than a sinecure, a ticket to the easy life for those fortunate enough to have the party connections to arrange such a position. Small wonder, then, that ordinary citizens might see these bureaucrats as parasites. The governing élites had gone far beyond eviscerating the hated bourgeoisie (not that there had been all that much of a Yugoslav bourgeoisie to hate). They had, in effect, taken the place of their traditional enemies, reserving to themselves a privileged lifestyle that previously had been available only to the wealthy few, who, in a place as poor as Yugoslavia, had always been very few indeed. In their eagerness to consolidate their power over the country's productive resources and to amass and display the material markers of their élite status, they had corrupted themselves and discarded the Marxist principle of egalitarianism.¹

By the mid-to-late 1960s, the Yugoslav communists had seen the creation of yet another new class, this one likewise defined in large part by its control over material goods. Members of this new class busied themselves shopping for, buying, and enjoying all the tangible things and intangible experiences that their newfound positions of economic privilege afforded them. They outfitted their homes and apartments with sleek, modern furniture modeled on the hottest new ideas from Scandinavia. They planned new kitchens furnished with up-to-date appliances and laid out in popular styles that aspired to the latest European design standards. This "new" new class watched television in pleasant living rooms and listened to popular music on modern hi-fi systems. As if their comfortable apartments and homes were not enough, they busily set about building vikendice, weekend houses in the mountains and along the spectacular Adriatic seashore. They thumbed through magazines on automobiles and home improvement and entertainment and fashion, and they followed the trends that emanated from the style centers of Western Europe and the United States. They laundered their new clothes in new washing machines installed in their new and modern bathrooms.

They snapped up perfumes and skin creams and makeup and detergents and all manner of other cosmetics and household items. They ate well and drank freely and smoked a lot, and they did so with appetites shaped by their awareness of all the finer things European markets had to offer. They traveled, too. They saved a portion of their paychecks to buy automobiles, typically modest but serviceable, and in those cars they journeyed about energetically on holiday around their own country and across Europe, and not just to Eastern Europe, but to the West as well, largely without any restriction more serious than a budget. For this second "new class" of Yugoslavs, the good life was more than just a dream. It was real, tangible, and immediate—something that could be seen in advertisements and the popular press, purchased in the stores and supermarkets, and brought home to enjoy and display.2

Yet in stark contrast to the comparatively narrow circle of bureaucrats Djilas had described, the new class of the economically privileged that emerged in the 1960s was by no means a small, restricted group of the powerful, well-connected, and influential. Quite to the contrary, all this fervor and altogether conspicuous consumption was now, in fact, the domain of more or less ordinary Yugoslav citizens. To be sure, serious differences in earnings and disposable income remained, and the Yugoslav Dream remained unattainable for many people. But the new life of plentiful pleasures and comparative material comfort was within reach for enough of the population to sustain it as a realistic hope even for those who could not at the moment share in the dream fully. The new vision of consumer abundance was grounded firmly enough in Yugoslav social and economic realities to give it substantial legitimacy as a dominant cultural model for the country as a whole—and this was something quite rare in a society in which ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, and economic differences hampered the development of any notion of a pan-Yugoslav culture.

In the wake of the momentous changes that reshaped the lives of ordinary Yugoslavs during the first phase of worker self-management from 1950 to 1965, a heated new debate over consumer culture charged the country's political discourse, a debate rarely far removed from the traditional Marxist-Leninist concern for eliminating social stratification. The rush toward consumer society even became a stock element of the country's contemporary history, part of the standard account that Yugoslavs told themselves about the special path they were traveling as a result of their state's unique system. Many of the country's citizens were obviously well aware that Yugoslavia had come down with a serious case of consumption. That was not really at issue, notwithstanding the meeties of the debate over whether Yugoslavia had yet become a "consumer society." Instead, the more important question was whether this was a desirable, healthy course of events or, as the critics feared, a development that threatened the stability and unity of Yugoslav society.

The spectacular transformation was almost always described with a heavy dose of seemingly obligatory self-criticism, but often enough, the nostra culps betrayed some obvious satisfaction, too. Dušan Bilandžić's widely-circulated history text on postwar Yugoslav society offers a fine example of how the country's new emphasis on buying and owning was offered up as both a self-management success story and, at the same time, a darker intimation of some inherent failure to build socialism. "Toward the end of the 1960s," Bilandžić wrote, "the masses were caught up in a fever of consumption and money-making: in every part of the country, peasants and workers were building houses and buying durable consumer goods, while the richer people were getting vacation houses, ever more expensive cars, and so forth."3 Along with the impressive increase in living standards, Yugoslav society in this view had also "gradually acquired all

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the principal characteristics of so-called consumer society. In his typically measured style, Bilandžić acknowledged the ongoing polemic and even suggested its validity but did not himself engage in any open assault on consumerism. Yet even this account, which by the standards of "establishment" communist historiography is fairly balanced and moderate, was nevertheless shaped by the ideological imperatives of Yugoslav socialism. As a result, Bilandžić also read consumerism as, above all, part of a very suspect process of social differentiation. "Is Yugoslav society," he therefore asked, "increasingly being stratified into richer and poorer?" His history, like the interpretations put forward by many of the outright critics of consumer culture, faulted the economic expansion of the 1960s and the 1970s for reinforcing a dangerous tendency toward the creation of an unwelcome "middle class." The perceived threat to the class goals of Yugoslav socialism was practically palpable:

Because the Yugoslav economy toward the end of the 1960s was mainly transformed into a market economy system, the question thus arose: must this form of economy necessarily give rise to a new social class, one which in its fundamental characteristics is distinguished from the working class by its place in the system of productive relations, by its status, and by its economic situation — and one which will turn into a "counter-class"?  

Here, as in the writings of many other contemporary observers, the analysis of consumer society was thus fused (and, I believe, confused) with the party's ongoing battles against "enrichment," against private enterprise, and against the evil influence of "managers" and "technocrats," i.e., those directors and other leaders of business enterprises and financial institutions who were seen as the core of a rising "middle class" and who now seemed to eclipse the old statist "bureaucrats" as the bogeys of self-management.

Yet for all the valuable insights it provides into the very real changes that were taking place across the country, the wide-ranging argument that took place within Yugoslavia over the relationship between consumerism and social differentiation ultimately misses one critical and fundamental point. Driven as it was by the rhetorical imperatives of communism, with its antipathies to the bourgeoisie and its dedication to the struggle to create a classless society, the domestic critique of consumer society failed to fully appreciate the sweeping, inclusive quality of the Yugoslav version of consumer culture. Likewise, the critics were largely blind to its homogenizing and hence potentially unifying effects.

— En colère about the nouveaux riches and ready to see a petit bourgeois in every petite Peugeot, the domestic critics neglected some of the more subtle but just as important manifestations of their country's consumer culture. For Yugoslav consumerism's underlying vision of modernity, abundance, cosmopolitanism, and reward for hard work was present — indeed, pervasive — in all manner of lesser instances as well. In the workplace, in the schools, in the mass media, and elsewhere, public discourse continually reinforced the official message of Yugoslav exceptionalism: the notion that Yugoslavs, through self-management, enjoyed a system uniquely attuned to the interests of workers and protective of their rights. Beginning in the 1960s, through the complex workings of consumer culture, that message was blended with the idea that none of this need come at the cost of progress and prosperity. Critically, this sense of the uninterrupted flow of progress could be communicated through acts as common and simple as flipping through the ads in a women's magazine, watching television commercials for snack foods, and perusing the well-stocked shelves of the local market. Official ideology and the public discourse it

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4 Ibid., 378. The author noted that the structure the country's personal consumption had likewise "drawn ever nearer to the type associated with industrial consumer society." Expenditures for food had fallen from 53.9% of the total in 1952 to 39.5% in 1972, while outlays for furniture and equipment for the home had increased in the same twenty-year period from 4.8% to 10.2%, and the fraction spent on culture and recreation had risen from 0.7% to 3.8%. Energy consumption had increased astronomically, from 17.3 kWH to 369.4 kWH per capita. Ibid.

5 Ibid., 400.

6 Ibid. (emphasis added); see generally 399-402.
influenced thus intersected, albeit imperfectly and incompletely, with the private experience of ordinary Yugoslav citizens. What had begun as an official option for markets and consumer goods was appropriated and transformed by the country's advertising specialists, other businesspeople, and consumers, all acting with a notable freedom from explicit official control. Consumer-oriented production gave way to unadulterated consumerism, shoppers' choices superseeded and gave new meaning to the choices of the state and the party, and high politics yielded to the everyday.

This observation about the devolution of responsibility for consumerism from "high" to "low" levels of society raises another point that is too often missed: frequently, when we are dealing with consumer culture, it is the little things that matter most. In Yugoslavia, however, the assault on consumerism focused on the largest, easiest targets: automobiles, weekend houses, high-fashion clothes, televisions, and other big-ticket items which, though now available to more than just a privileged few, still smacked of luxury and ill-gotten gain. Conflated with domestic debates over corruption, technocracy, and unwarranted personal "enrichment," and grafted onto a dogged if mostly symbolic campaign against the country's tiny class of small-scale entrepreneurs, the controversy over consumerism failed to apprehend a rather different, and arguably deeper, transformation of Yugoslav society. Contrary to what much of the domestic criticism would suggest, Yugoslavia's consumer culture was not driven exclusively or even predominantly by the major milestone acquisitions, i.e., by rare and relatively expensive high-status purchases. The ideal that prevailed, the Yugoslav Dream, was instead one of abundance for the masses, and accordingly, much more frequently -- in fact, on a daily basis -- ordinary Yugoslavs reinforced their connection to consumer culture through equally ordinary shopping and spending.

Yugoslav consumerism surely was inspired by the grander aspirations and wealth of the West, but it was sustained, given life and legitimacy, by all sorts of much more minor consumer behaviors: shopping for cosmetics, buying a pair of stylish shoes, browsing through a rack of blouses in a gleamingly modern, self-service department store, or picking up cleansers and laundry powder in a supermarket styled along contemporary European lines. As seemingly inconsequential as they might be at first glance, all these activities worked to connect Yugoslav citizens with an image of pleasurable, rewarding, convenient, and modern living. Because they took place so frequently, their cumulative effects were likely equal to or even greater than those that came with milestone purchases. While little acts like these did not communicate high status in the sense that so troubled those critics who decried the appearance of consumption-driven "snobbism," they instead conveyed (and conferred) status in a different, less obvious, and yet perhaps more important way: all the many minor, quotidian indulgences in consumer culture offered Yugoslavia a means of constant reassurance that they, too, were full participants in modern life.

The most important manifestations of status associated with Yugoslav consumption were therefore not sneering or self-congratulatory displays of superior status directed at neighbors and co-workers, but instead hopeful assertions of a status equal to that enjoyed by citizen-consumers in the developed capitalist countries. Most assuredly, a quest for "high status" was involved here, but it was high status of a very different sort from that which motivated most of the Marxist critiques of Yugoslavia's consumerist appetites. In this respect, the symbolic communication was primarily reflexive, a reassuring message to oneself rather than a bold declaration to others (though many Yugoslavs were well aware that the outside world was watching their success with keen interest).

In addition, a distinctly communitarian quality marked Yugoslavia's mass culture of consumerism. There were certainly plenty of opportunities to use spending to create a sense of individual distinction, yet the official ideology of socialist Yugoslavia (and of Yugoslavism itself) continued to discipline and constrain, if subtly and indirectly, public discourse. For this reason, a central theme communicated through the country's advertising and mass media was the idea of high collective status: as a people, the message

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7 Here I am persuaded by the observation of Jukka Gronow and others that the study of consumption has been improperly geared toward analyses of high-value, infrequent purchases with unusual and perhaps unrepresentative symbolic value, at the expense of understanding more common, and arguably just as significant, everyday expenditures. See Jukka Gronow and Alan Warde, eds., Ordinary Consumption (London: Routledge, 2001).
went, “we” have succeeded. And importantly, because of the system's pronounced emphasis on building and serving a unified Yugoslav market, “we” in such cases often signified the broadest possible community of Yugoslav citizens, undifferentiated along ethnic lines. In this respect, consumer culture appears to have been one of the relatively rare factors which worked to reinforce a pan-Yugoslav identity: while there were obviously clear differences in living standards from republic to republic, people in the country did not participate in the new consumerist abundance on the basis of their ethnicity. Rather, the consumerist dream was presented as a genuinely Yugoslav dream, something that all the country's citizens were supposed to be able to share.

By drawing attention to the smaller, more common incidents of everyday consumerism, I do not mean to imply that the high-status items that drew most of the critics ire and fire were of little importance. Quite to the contrary, the perceived need to make acquisitions of this sort clearly did exert a strong pull over many people. But as acknowledged by even a number of the critics themselves, Tito among them, such items had themselves become, in short order, respectively “ordinary” luxuries. They were increasingly available to all sorts of Yugoslav citizens, many of them quite unexceptional: yes, the suspect bureaucrats, technocrats, and white-collar types all found these consumer pleasures more easily within their grasp, but such things were also accessible, albeit with more of a struggle, to villagers living in some of the most undeveloped and remote parts of the country and to workers in the smaller cities and in the little towns all across the state where Yugoslav factories had been situated as a result of the government's policy of distributing industrial development beyond the historical, pre-war manufacturing centers of the urban north and west.

Even its critics were forced to acknowledge that consumerism was not something that afflicted only the urbanized parts of the country. The danger was, in fact, far greater. Stipe Šuvar, an influential Croatian communist and one of the country's most prominent public intellectuals, thus offered an account of automobile fever in a village in the hilly Macedonian region of the Šar-Planina, one of the least developed areas of the country. In this little settlement, he said, about forty people already owned cars - this even though no road went to their village! Because a car was apparently something well worth having anyway, the resourceful villagers kept their vehicles under guard in a parking lot in the small city of Tetovo and used them whenever they went down to town. The peasant insistence on owning cars, in Šuvar's view, verged on the comical: “On rural radio stations people are requesting songs in order to inform their neighbors that a person has bought an automobile of this or that brand: Let it be heard! Let it be known! People in the villages are acquiring aspirations for ‘automobilization’ even in cases when they have not ensured other minimal civilizational possessions.” Moreover, Šuvar concluded, status in rural life was increasingly being divorced from its traditional ceremonial expressions and re-oriented toward modern consumption:

in some of our villages there now appears a competition which takes the form of acquiring televisions, installing plumbing, buying kitchen appliances, getting cars for one's offspring so that they won’t run off to the cities. All this speaks to the borders of the modern

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5 For a more detailed picture of both the impressive general level of consumption and the lingering differences attributable to socio-economic and educational status, see, e.g., Peter Kliner, "O življenskem stiku družbenih slojev na Slovenskem (II)." Teorija in praksa 16, no. 2 (1979): 196-215; Društveni slojevi i društvena svest: sociološko istraživanje interesa, stilova života, klasne svesti i vrednosno-ideoloških orientacija društvenih slojeva (Belgrade: Centar za sociološka istraživanja Instituta društvenih nauka, 1977).


10 Ibid., 174.
consumerist mentality and its infiltration into even the village. It is interesting that in some
villages in Serbia people have a television in the house and a water heater installed, even
though they don't have electricity yet. Just let them have these things on hand, and they
will be ready for the electricity whenever it comes!

Cases like this were no doubt extreme, but I believe they effectively dispose of any concern that Yugoslav
consumer culture affected only the comparatively rich. As the critique itself makes clear, the consumer
culture that had emerged in Yugoslavia by the mid-1960s was remarkably expansive, intimately involving
most of the country's citizens. The wealthiest snobs may have received much of the attention, but people
who were hardly "rich," even by a more inclusive, politicized definition of the term, were also participating
avidly in the country's new consumerist spirit. It is likewise quite clear that the desires and tastes at issue
here were not patterned directly upon the spending habits of those at the highest levels of society. Indeed,
they could not have been. Instead a simpler model prevailed: the modern but modest, rewarding but
reasonable Yugoslav Dream. Village dwellers (and urban workers) were not, as the critics of "enrichment"
suggested, pining away for a Mercedes and the chance to fritter away a million dinars in Fiji. They were,
instead, putting in extra hours, holding down second jobs, and leaving home for months to work as
Gastarbeiter in order to scrape together enough money to get a television set, some modern household
appliances, and perhaps a fairly pedestrian little Zastava. This was mass consumption, not massive
consumption.

Moreover, for many, their hopes of having at least some scaled-down version of the markers of
luxury and success were not, in fact, in vain. With patience, hard work (and extra work), and some
considerable sacrifice, they, too, had reasonable prospects of owning a car, a television, perhaps even a
modest vikendica to enjoy on holidays and to rent out to foreign tourists for hard currency. We might well
question, as did the avatars of consumer society, whether the sacrifices were sensible. But the fact
remains that many ordinary citizens did feel that they could share in the Yugoslav Dream, and their
conclusions were largely justified, largely because the goal was itself scaled-down, made more modest and
reasonable, in order to ensure that it remained available and attractive to the masses. Yugoslav workers
may have been laboring too hard in their quest to live the dream, but they were not laboring under an
illusion: the vision of abundance sold by the country's advertisers and by the "economic propagandists"
who promoted their wares was, when all is said and done, remarkable precisely for its accessibility.

One related aspect of the advent of consumer culture that went largely overlooked - probably
because of its disturbing implications about the propriety of the prevailing system - was the way in which
Yugoslav consumers, prodded on by advertising and marketing campaigns, could use their time spent
shopping and buying as a means of sharing in a broader, transnational culture of consumption, a lifestyle
that was frequently understood to be not only modern but also either explicitly or implicitly Western (and
often specifically Western European). In this, of course, they were prodded on by their country's own
marketing and advertising specialists, who were thoroughly immersed in the thrall of Western notions of what
successful advertising should look like, how it worked, and what was supposed to represent as part of a
larger, marketing-inspired concept of "business." As open as Yugoslavia was to outside influence,
Yugoslavs often did not feel themselves to be fully European. They were, in the minds of many at least,
doubly severed from the mainstream currents of life in Europe: first by a heritage of economic underdevelopment
and "backwardness," and then again by a cramped, inefficient system that left the country unable to
participate fully in the spectacular postwar affluence of Western Europe. It was sometimes uncertain just
exactly where Yugoslavia was -- the Balkans? Eastern Europe? the epicenter of the non-aligned world? --
but it was clear enough that often, "Europe" still seemed to be somewhere else.

Consumer culture helped dissipate those feelings of alienation and cultural distance. When
Yugoslavs snapped up jeans, maxi-skirts, "two-story shoes," and all sorts of other fashions that radiated
across the continent from Paris and Milan, when they purchased the very deodorants and lipsticks and skin
creams that made people all over Western Europe feel more elegant, modern, and attractive, and when they
saw in their own stores some of the same brands of soup and soap that they knew were on the shelves in

11 Ibid. (emphasis added).
Klagenfurt and Graz and Trieste, they were, in a subtle but important way, at one with a contemporary way of life which was grounded in consumption, cultivated by advertising, television, film, and the popular press, and perhaps as never before, genuinely pan-European. A set of fine new furniture in Danish Modern would, quite obviously, have the desired effect of making a Yugoslav living room considerably more "modern" itself. Perhaps not so obviously, though, it could render the room ever so slightly "Danish," too. (This thorough acquaintance with European styles, of course, was a two-edged sword: Yugoslavs also knew all too well what their system could not or would not deliver.) Again, it was not necessary that these experiences of shopping and buying be oriented toward real luxuries. The tokens of European citizenship that Yugoslavs sought and used most frequently were rather ordinary items, not BMWs and champagne and the other playthings of the wicked rich of the West.

In the "specific circumstances of Yugoslav self-management society" we thus encounter an interesting modification of the key process whereby the consumption practices of groups with lower social status come to mirror the habits and tastes of those placed more securely in the hierarchy. Thorstein Veblen, who produced one of the earliest and yet most durable critiques of consumerist behavior, called attention to the mechanisms through which, in a given society, upper-class, "nibrow" tastes become the model for others:

In modern civilized communities the lines of demarcation between social classes have grown vague and transient, and wherever this happens the norm of reputation imposed by the upper class extends its coercive influence with but slight hindrance down through the social structure to the lowest strata. The result is that the members of each stratum accept as their ideal of decency the scheme of life in vogue in the next higher stratum, and bend their energies to live up to that ideal.

The process Veblen identifies here was undoubtedly at work in Yugoslavia as well, at least to some extent. But importantly, the fairly radical social levelling of the first post-war years had largely eliminated real wealth in the country. Yugoslav communism had, in this respect, succeeded: there was no longer any "upper" or "leisure" class in the traditional senses of those terms. In this case, however, it appeared that hierarchy, like nature, abhorred a vacuum, and thus almost immediately a reconstituted system of differentiation began to appear along the lines that Milovan Djilas identified. But in contrast to the Yugoslav past and the capitalist present, this new "upper" class was not composed of the rich but of those in power.

The point bears further reflection: just as many democratic socialists in the West looked to Yugoslavia as a model, many Yugoslavs hoped just as sincerely that their version of socialism might over time evolve toward the Scandinavian model. Consumer purchases that evoked the progressive, modern, prosperous, and secure lifestyles of Scandinavia may thus have had a special cultural valence in Yugoslavia. This is, of course, simply a species of a more general phenomenon. When Yugoslavs bought perfumes with French-sounding names, Italian-style shoes, or American-label jeans, they were cloaking themselves just as certainly in French elegance, Italian flash, and the casual optimism of American youth. Of course, the fundamental premise of the Scandinavian design style was probably better matched than most to the economic realities that helped keep the Yugoslav Dream comparatively modest and measured: Danish Modern achieved its elegance through its simplicity. By adopting the style, Yugoslavs could purchase European modernity at a suitably low cost.


Consumerism and prosperity, however, worked as a great levelling force in this respect. As Yugoslav-American journalist Dusko Doder noted in his assessment of Yugoslav society in the late 1970s, "The introduction of the consumer society... has succeeded remarkably in one thing and that has been to eliminate or at least obscure economic and social differences between the elite and the great majority of the Yugoslav population. The New Class, as Milovan Djilas described the ruling elite in his book of the
With time, of course, some few Yugoslavs did manage to find ways to become genuinely rich, be it through private enterprise, celebrity, crafty speculation in real estate, or through corruption, which of all the options was probably the most mundane path to wealth. Still, truly rich Yugoslavs were rarities, and importantly, they were not necessarily deemed suitable for emulation, at least not in the official scheme of values. So, like its socialist cohorts, Yugoslav society remained noteworthy for the extent to which it lacked any substantial elite whose position was based on great wealth. Accordingly, in the absence of any firmly rooted, respectable "upper class," what Veblen called the "scheme of life in vogue in the next higher stratum" had to be, to a great extent, communicated to Yugoslavs from abroad. The processes of intra-societal stratification, distinction, and top-down modeling that analysts such as Veblen, Pierre Bourdieu, and others have identified appear to have been attenuated in Yugoslavia, clearing the way instead for comparatively greater horizontal modeling and the more generalized operation of a mass domestic "demonstration effect" of the sort identified by James Duesenberry. Moreover, communist egalitarianism may have had the curious consequence of intensifying the "international demonstration effect" that was also clearly at work in Yugoslav consumption, forcing up both absolute levels of consumption and the relative quality of the goods consumed (and, fatefully, slighting investment in the future productive capacity of the economy). Yugoslav critics of consumerism also recognized the importance of foreign tastes, of course. But in this respect as well, the Marxist tendency to focus on social differentiation and to identify the styles and values of consumer culture with "the rich" obscures rather more than it illuminates.

One other point that emerges from the passage just quoted from Veblen bears further consideration. This is the idea that, in modern conditions, consumption practices may render group identities less distinct and hence may serve to reduce social differentiation. Although the processes found in the Yugoslav case do not conform neatly to the intra-societal dynamics Veblen describes, it nevertheless does appear that in Yugoslavia "the lines of demarcation between social classes" did, through the sharing of tastes and attitudes, become ever more "vague and transient," to use Veblen's terms. Because of the country's characteristic political and economic circumstances, consumer culture encouraged precisely this sort of blurring of social distinctions. To begin with, Yugoslavia's fundamental economic policy clearly discouraged social differentiation, especially at the top end of the scale. Admittedly, throughout the history of the federation, the relatively poor remained relatively common, and at the extremes, as in Slovenia and Kosovo, the pay differentials among workers could be substantial. But a significant number of the country's poorer residents found ways to improve their financial situations, enabling them to participate more fully in the prevailing culture of consumption. Moreover, incomes policies depressed salaries at the top end, with the result that it was almost impossible to become wealthy just by holding down a single job in the social sector of the economy. Coupled with these very real economic restraints were similarly

same name, is still highly visible in Soviet bloc countries, with special stores, government limousines, villas and other privileges. Yet, except for a small circle around Tito -- and there are fewer than five hundred persons who actually run the country -- the system of economic privileges has largely disappeared in Yugoslavia." Doder, *The Yugoslavs* (New York: Random House, 1978), 59-60.


16 On the "demonstration effect" generally, see James S. Duesenberry, *Income, Saving and the Theory of Consumer Behavior* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949). Duesenberry argued that rising levels of consumption spark even greater increases in spending, as more people encounter more expensive, higher-quality goods more often, the social pressure to adjust consumption practices in order to buy those higher-quality goods is increased. As a result, even when incomes do not grow, consumption itself may rise, at the expense of savings and investment. That observation seems painfully applicable to the Yugoslav case.

powerful political pressures against social differentiation. As the concerted attack on "enrichment" during the early 1970s demonstrates, to appear conspicuously wealthy entailed some considerable risk. Yugoslavia's version of Marxist-Leninist governance was soft and tolerant, but it was definitely communist in its aspirations, and the goal of the classless society never disappeared from official public discourse. Both economic and political factors thus pushed consumption practices toward a very expansive middle.

Responding to these economic and political realities, the advertising and marketing specialists who helped build Yugoslavia's consumer culture starting in the early 1950s likewise tended, from the very beginning, to cultivate a satisfying, unexceptionable middle ground. They appealed to tastes for genuine luxury only infrequently, while at the same time they used the alluring imagery of modern, respectable, cosmopolitan consumption to pull those with lower incomes toward the secure center, the happy medium. People did not have to be "rich" in order to buy -- and buy into -- the elements of the Yugoslav Dream. Indeed, as Šuvar's vivid example suggests, they could sometimes be so far from "rich" that they lacked even the electricity needed to power the modern appliances they insisted on buying. Both during the initial period of market reforms from 1950 to 1965 and thereafter, advertising and marketing leaders spoke and wrote about their work with an inattention to its subversive qualities that can only be interpreted as either shrewdly duplicitous or astoundingly innocent (and this was not, it should be noted, a profession of natsis). But while the industry's work no doubt ended up undermining socialism, when it came to the construction of a target audience, advertising and marketing specialists were rather more faithful to the palatable, socialist-sounding line they espoused in their textbooks and journals and at industry conferences.

The creators of the country's advertising often said they were tailoring messages for "our Yugoslav man" [nas čovek], and on this particular count there was not much deception, either of themselves or of others. For Yugoslav commercial promotion was actually much more noteworthy for its efforts to reach an expansive middle ground of potential consumers than for any attempt to slice the audience into desirable, wealthy "haves" and less favored, poorer "have-nots." Thus we find, for example, abundant advertisements for Zastavas and simple little Yugoslav-built Renaults, but not much promotion of German luxury cars. The way in which items were advertised was increasingly inclined toward Western models, but what was advertised remained true to the modest, moderate Yugoslav Dream. Much of Yugoslav advertising was, as one industry specialist suggested, apparently designed to make almost everyone feel securely average and, furthermore, to make the Yugoslav average seem respectable enough -- and "average" enough -- to satisfy both the egalitarian, anti-bourgeois ideology of the party and the standards of prosperity and modernity projected by the internationalized culture of the developed capitalist world. In this way, the new class of Yugoslav consumers ended up occupying a safe, respectable middle ground, even though it could not, as some critics suggested, be equated with any "middle class." As a consequence of all these pressures toward the middle, Yugoslav consumer culture did not promote social differentiation through consumption nearly as much, or nearly as openly, as did Western practice, which embraced the notion of precise market.

18 See Marjan Pintarič, "Komu služi EP?" Buletin DEPS, no. 11 (1971): 25-26, at 26. Pintarič defends his craft with an appeal to the industry's concern for Everyman: "advertising is intended for the majority, and the majority represents the average. The advertising specialist operates with averages and knows that the average person is proud to be average. Therefore to the extent our consumer is able to achieve the average, we may assert that we have contributed to a better life for him, and we accomplish the same thing even if we just convince him that he has achieved the average." This observation speaks, I believe, to the compelling need for advertising to sell a vision of life that comes across to the target audience as something real and attainable. Actual conformity to economic and social realities is not necessarily at issue. As Robert Goldman notes, "advertisements can tell us nothing directly about how social relations are actually lived .... Although no claim can be made that ads depict real life 'one can probably make a significant statement about them, namely, that as pictures they are not perceived as peculiar and unnatural." Reading Ads Socially, 35, quoting Erving Goffman, Gender Advertisements (New York: Harper, 1976), 25.
segmentation and sought to exploit it for commercial advantage, tailoring advertisements and marketing campaigns to target audiences identified with all the scientific precision the discipline could muster. 

As the changing experience of modern consumer abundance reshaped the daily lives of ordinary Yugoslavs, it also had profound effects on the fortunes of the Yugoslav government and the League of Communists. The country's communists, as leaders of a broadly-based resistance movement during World War II, had begun their administration with substantially more legitimacy than their counterparts in most other socialist states. But their authoritarianism and cruel treatment of enemies, real and imagined, quickly dissipated a considerable share of that initial goodwill, leaving the party continually on the lookout for ways to repair its image and restore the popular support it had lost. In the 1950s and 1960s (and through most of the 1970s), Yugoslavia's dramatic economic growth and the vast new opportunities for consumerist satisfaction gave the government and the party a means of repairing some of the damage. For all their complaints about the socially corrosive effects of consumer culture, the Yugoslav authorities plainly enjoyed a much more secure position because of it — at least, that is, while the good times lasted.

The connections between the government's consumption policy and its support among the Yugoslav public are thus fairly obvious, and they were frequently noted by commentators both sympathetic to and hostile toward Yugoslavia's socialist experiment. Yugoslav-American journalist Dusko Doder, for example, saw the government's promotion of high living standards as one of its most spectacular achievements. Like some of the critics of Yugoslav consumerism, he read the country's experience as an exercise in "bourgeois socialism," though for Doder, this was clearly meant as a compliment, not the slur that the phrase was originally intended to be. In any case, Doder was certainly correct when he interpreted the consumerist expansion as a prime source of popular support for the government. Moreover, he quite rightly pointed to the possibility that consumer culture could, in the long run, yield even greater stabilizing and unifying effects. As Doder recognized, for socialist Yugoslavia,

[the trend toward middle-class existence carries with it both a promise and a threat. The promise is that a large body of citizenry will develop a vested interest in the system, which will help weld together the Yugoslav nations into a socialist commonwealth and gradually blunt the edge of nationalist animosities. The threat lies in the long-term prospect of pluralistic evolution which is something that the party is not prepared to accept.]

Doder published these observations in 1978, just as the Yugoslav economy was about to slide toward a near-total collapse. At that point, the government had reaped the benefits of a consumerist policy for years, but given the sad course of events, it would never be given the opportunity to enjoy the deeper transformation of the sort that Doder envisioned, in which consumers who were happy enough for the moment would be converted into committed supporters with a genuine stake in the system. Instead, it appears that for the government, the benefits of consumerism were shallow and impermanent. They were, 

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19 It may be possible, however, to find instructive parallels in Western experience, despite the presence of more extreme examples of wealth and poverty. The creation of a "cultural" middle-class defined largely via consumption has been seen perhaps most conspicuously in the United States, where even persons earning many times the median income, members of a group that by any rational objective standards can only be defined as an economic elite, live in the unshakable conviction that they are still "middle-class" (and where, conversely, workers earning much less than the average cling to the salvific notion that they, too, are part of the great American middle).

20 Doder, *The Yugoslavs*, 60. In linking prosperity and the growth of consumer society with the "threat" of uncontrollable pluralistic change, Doder here recapitulates the once-fashionable Western belief that the market and democracy necessarily go hand-in-hand. Market reforms were once the standard prescription for the political ills of the socialist world. China, of course, stands as the most glaring contradiction of the thesis; Yugoslavia, I believe, never had a genuine opportunity to put the principle to the test.
nevertheless, quite substantial while they lasted. We must remember that when times were good, in the 1960s and 1970s, Yugoslavs were pleased with what they had and proud of their country.21

Given that the state and party did indeed stand to profit from the blossoming of consumer culture, we might well wonder about the communists’ responsibility for setting in motion and guiding the remarkable course of events. How, in fact, was this expansive, “new” new class of Yugoslav consumers created? In the simplest, most immediate sense, the rise of a new consumerist orientation was a consequence of the Yugoslav state’s reorientation of economic policy from 1950 to 1965, with its move away from heavy industry and toward the satisfaction of consumer needs. But while this may have been a necessary condition, it was surely not sufficient. Other socialist governments, to varying degrees, also attempted to accommodate consumer demand, and a consideration of comparable cases suggests that those regimes did so without spawning the kind of thoroughgoing social transformation of attitudes and behaviors that left Yugoslav social critics worrying about the vices of consumer society.22 Other aspects of government policy also clearly had a role in the change. The introduction of self-management as the governing practical and ideological premise of Yugoslav society also catalyzed the reorientation toward consumerism. The new system’s flexibility permitted (but did not compel) a shift toward the market, which

21 One survey of four thousand Yugoslavs published in 1976 reported overwhelming levels of popular satisfaction with living standards. Asked whether they were pleased with their home, for example, only 15% answered that they were dissatisfied; 39% reported that they were mostly satisfied, while fully 46% said they were totally satisfied. Satisfaction with other chief elements of consumption was higher still: with regard to their clothing, 36% expressed total satisfaction, and 36% said they were mostly satisfied; only 8% reported that they were dissatisfied. For the quality of Yugoslav’s diets, the corresponding figures were 53%, 43%, and 4%, respectively. “Stavovi jugoslovenskih potrošača prema EP,” Ideja, no. 8 (July 1976): 8.

in turn allowed interested firms to cater to customers' tastes and wishes, gave advertising and marketing specialists the latitude to argue that their approaches were fully consonant with the values of Yugoslav socialism, and, more generally, helped provide an important ideological justification for theories and practices which treated consumption as equal in importance to production, if not, in fact, of even greater weight.

Government policies thus clearly played a significant part in the genesis of the new consumerist orientation. Just as important, however, were the concrete economic results of those policies. The Yugoslav communist leadership sought, and obtained, dramatic changes in living standards: in just over fifteen years, from 1956 to 1972, the country's living standard increased by a factor of 3.5.22 (The Yugoslav case thus raises the important question of whether other countries which likewise managed to achieve relatively high living standards, and which did so at a similarly rapid pace, also experienced such changes in culture.) In turn, this new wealth created the demand for more new wealth, opening the door to profound changes in attitudes and expectations about what the country's economy could and should deliver to ordinary citizens. It is critical to recognize, however, that the raw statistics on economic improvement conceal an inherently fraudulent element of the transformation: the government's policies on credit and incomes helped push incomes and spending to unrealistic and unsustainable levels. Much of Yugoslav consumerism, then, was undertaken with the indulgence of a government that operated on the basis of what might best be described as a "charge-card mentality." And by the end of the 1970s, the country had, both literally and figuratively, exceeded its credit limit.

Another indisputable factor in the creation of consumer culture was Yugoslavia's comparatively easy communication with the consumerist market economies of the West. Direct contact with the creators of Western advertising and marketing, and contact with the ideas that they disseminated, indelibly stamped the theory and practice of Yugoslav commercial promotion. For Yugoslavs not connected with the industry, a familiarity with the ways and wares of the West was similarly important. Through travel abroad, millions of ordinary Yugoslavs brought back new ideas and expectations along with their bags and basic loads of much-prized Western consumer goods. Finally, we cannot overlook the tremendous importance of the hundreds of thousands of Yugoslav citizens who worked abroad. The money and the changed attitudes about spending that they brought back to their home country were almost certainly one of the great engines of the new Yugoslav consumerism. One fierce critic of the Yugoslav approach to consumption, Svetislav Taboroši, argued that both the economic and the cultural consequences of the guest-worker phenomenon were immense. Largely because of the enormous financial contributions of the guest workers, he asserted, aggregate demand continually remained above the level of domestic production. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the experiences of the "Gastarbeiter" had wrought a fundamental change in the quality of Yugoslav consumption as well:

Because of the cultural unpreparedness of [migrant] workers for their new living conditions, they prove to be especially unable to resist the constant production of new needs. Guest workers tend to eliminate their increased psychic instability using the only sort of identification that is possible for them: the defense of their own personal dignity in the realm of consumption, where formally, they have equal rights. And so, at a disproportionately high rate, they purchase various technical innovations and engage in those forms of consumption-for-prestige that are available to them (large automobiles, for example).24

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24 Svetislav Taboroši, Odnos potrošnje u socijalizmu: potrošač u sistemju udrženog roda (Belgrade: NIO Poslovna Politika, 1986), 169. The author further argued that, while in Western Europe, the migrant workers constituted a specially-targeted market segment and were, as a result, subjected to "the most aggressive form of advertising." Ibid.
As a result of the constant contact with Western commercial promotion and consumerist attitudes, Taboroši concluded, "the lowest segments of the consumer culture of the West" were being "transplanted" -- first to the Gastarbeiter, then to Yugoslavia itself. As a result, the foreign workforce had become something that was likely unexpected and most certainly unwelcome, "a carrier of the idea of the sovereignty of the consumer into self-management society."

All these factors worked together to encourage the shift of many Yugoslavs toward a consumerist orientation and to promote the development of a new sense of social belonging derived from participation in modern modes of consumption. They helped create a great reservoir of consumerist demand -- the "genuine, avid hunger among all strata of the population" that Bogdan Denitch has described. But the most important force for stimulating and channeling those desires was not the state itself, but rather the country's aggressive and surprisingly autonomous advertising and marketing industry. When we look for those elements that generated and defined the new "new class," the messages constantly communicated by the creators of Yugoslav advertising, and the implicit ideology of consumer sovereignty carried with those appeals, stand out as the most significant. Yugoslavia's economy never really became a market economy, but the country's business culture did become, to a significant extent, a marketing culture. Advertising set the tone; marketing provided the "science" and the ideology, and a new conception of retailing delivered it all to consumers as attractively and persuasively as possible. Through it all, it was the industry's cautious but unmistakably Western orientation toward commercial promotion that made Yugoslavia look so different from every other socialist society and made life there reflect so clearly the classic capitalist manifestations of consumer culture.

Some observers of the country's embrace of consumerism have interpreted the developments of the 1950s, 1960s, and later as plain evidence of an instrumentalist grasping for legitimacy, i.e., for public support of continued communist control. Among the most prominent representatives of this view were Mihailo Marković and his colleagues associated with the celebrated critical journal Praxis, who incorporated this line into their broader critique of the country's drift toward consumer society. From this perspective, Yugoslavia's surrender to consumerism had achieved precisely the result the governing communists had desired: the authorities' standing in the eyes of the public was buoyed, at least for a time, by constantly rising living standards. In this respect, Marković saw the Yugoslav strategy as one common to all socialist regimes, many of which were, in fact, able to increase living standards dramatically in the immediate postwar decades and thereby ensure that their citizens would be less restive, if not exactly contented. But while the Praxis critique in this case was couched in general terms, it is clear that the Yugoslav government was being singled out for the most intense criticism. For, obviously, no country fit the description Marković offered as well as Yugoslavia: "Once the followers of Marx established themselves safely in power," he wrote, "the means became an end in itself. A cult of material production gradually lost its earlier function of overcoming poverty, and of generating a basis for self-development of all individuals. The good life was reduced to a comfortable life, a wealth of needs to a need for material wealth -- like any bourgeois society."

In the interpretation Marković advanced, consumer society was, in fact, practically the only real source for communist legitimacy in Yugoslavia. Having betrayed its original commitments to worker control and a radical devolution of power to ordinary people, Marković suggested, the Yugoslav

25 Ibid., 170.


government was now in most respects just a self-serving, power-loving, "real socialist" regime like any other. An instrumentalist approach to consumption therefore was, if not the only strategy available, certainly the least threatening. "This new Statist society," he argued, "was not able to legitimate itself by meeting either the socialist demand for more social equality, nor even the customary bourgeois demand for more political liberty. Its main virtue was its ability to produce goods and increase consumption." Ultimately, he concluded, consumerism only served to paper over the deeper failings of the Yugoslav system, which "stayed half way between Statism and self-government, oligarchy and democracy, political centralism and decentralization, the plan and the market."

As uncomplimentary as this assessment is, critics could sometimes voice their disagreements with the government's approaches, and their suspicions of its motivations, in even harsher terms. Dusko Doder recounts being told by a "left-wing sociologist" from Yugoslavia (another Praxist?) that Yugoslavia's profound consumerist orientation had been undertaken deliberately in the interest of social pacification and, perhaps not so obviously, for social discipline as well. The government, in this view, had encouraged the wholehearted adoption of a consumerist mindset, and then, in the most Machiavellian manner, had used consumption policy as both carrot and stick to keep the populace in line and on course:

What is so diabolical about this regime . . . is that they have figured out how to use consumerism for their own ends. You have the entire country wrapped up in a pseudo-bourgeois culture with everybody trying to move up. You give the majority of people what they want and their attention is diverted from politics and other such things. But eventually the regime wants to remind us that whatever we have is ours only because we have been allowed it. It is like a privilege we were granted by the regime, a privilege that can be taken away. They don't want to do that, they just want to remind us of these facts. It was quite possible, then, to interpret the reorientation of Yugoslav society toward consumerism as a project of the state: a deliberate, "top-down" phenomenon. From this perspective, consumer society appears to have been imposed on the country much like self-management was; there was precious little that was democratic about it. And if consumer culture was not, in fact, deliberately created as a tool of social control, it was, in this view, at least consciously managed to that end.

But is it fair to conclude that the Yugoslav government relied on consumerism to rally its citizens into a happy stupor that distracted them from the country's pressing problems and their own lack of any substantial control of the political system? Had Yugoslav communists swindled the people into blissfully trading away democracy for dish soap, worker control for washing machines, a little freedom for a little Fiat? Had the authorities deliberately used consumerism, as domestic critics of various stripes suggested, as a new opiate of the masses? Having studied in detail the rise of the advertising and marketing industry and the genuinely hostile response to consumerism that came from party circles, I think the record points to a contrary conclusion. This is not to suggest, of course, that the Titoist approach was blind to how widespread consumer satisfaction could bolster the popular support and acceptance of the regime. It was not. Clearly, the government was sensitive to the many benefits of consumer abundance. But the complaints that issued from government and party leaders were frequent enough, and earnest enough, to void any claim that Yugoslav society had been remade along consumerist, crypto-capitalist lines as part of some conscious, diabolical scheme.

It would, of course, be a mistake to ignore the effects of the government's actions in creating and nurturing consumer culture in Yugoslavia. The country's communist leadership did indeed permit, and

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29 Ibid., 179 (emphasis added). The author went on to observe that, after 1977, the growth rate declined rapidly, and so this most critical source of legitimacy quickly evaporated.

30 Ibid., 186.

31 Doder, The Yugoslavs, 55.
even sponsor, the new consumerist orientation. Ultimately, however, I think it would be even more misleading to disregard the popular roots of the new culture of consumption. Consumerism was not simply imposed from the top down as a matter of state policy; in many important ways, it also developed from the ground up— and here the country's consumerism may depart most radically from the patterns seen in other socialist states, where consumer policy was much more carefully planned, monitored, and controlled. If Yugoslavia managed to arrive at something very much like Western consumer society, it did so primarily as the result of the wishes, wants, needs, and hopes of ordinary consumers, i.e., through the everyday actions of millions of citizens who opted for this new way of living over and over again as they shopped and made their purchases and then enjoyed (and enjoyed displaying) their wealth. Some or even many of these yearnings for the good life quite possibly were, as the critics suggested, "false"—i.e., called forth and scripted through the black(ened) arts of consumer persuasion. False as they may have been, they were nonetheless felt to be genuine by many Yugoslav consumers, and in that sense, they had a very real quality that should not be slighted. Even if the government actually was, as the harshest critics suggested, happy to see consumerism turn citizens into docile sheep, this strategy could only work successfully if consumerist freedoms were deeply held and greatly valued by a large part of the population. Yugoslavia was not a democratic society, but in the end, there was in Yugoslav consumer culture something much more democratic than its critics were able to recognize or admit.

If consumer culture was the product of anyone's conscious plans, it was constructed not by the authorities of party and state but largely through the work of a dedicated cohort of advertising and marketing specialists. In this respect, of course, it was not purely a "bottom-up" phenomenon, for these industry workers were themselves part of an economic and political elite, positioned at neither the highest nor the lowest levels but rather somewhere in between. Some of the heightened attention to consumption was no doubt generated naturally through the give-and-take of competitive relationships between Yugoslav firms (which were themselves led by members of another important economic and political elite). But we must remember that the Yugoslav business environment, at least in terms of decision-making at the enterprise level, was really not all that competitive. A number for firms adopted a genuinely competitive orientation toward the marketplace; many did not. Thus, I conclude that consumer culture was built and sustained more by the creators of advertising—who had a strong and genuine conviction in the value of competition and the market—than by the wishes of the advertisers themselves. On this count, it bears noting that for a long time, the advertising and marketing industry struggled to convince many enterprise leaders that commercial promotion was truly necessary and effective in the Yugoslav context. Clearly, Yugoslav business had a considerable stake in the rise of a consumerist orientation, but the most interested parties were the advertising and marketing specialists and ordinary consumers themselves. Moreover, given the looseness of the Yugoslav system, none of these economic actors can readily be equated with "the state," as would likely be the case in more orthodox socialist regimes.

Complicating the ambitions of both communist authorities and more ordinary citizens was the persistence of a keen sense of relative deprivation: despite the remarkable achievements since the end of the war, the performance of the Yugoslav economy still lagged behind that of most Western European countries. Ordinary Yugoslavs were well aware of this unpleasant fact, and that recognition almost certainly dampened their support for the government. By the 1960s many of them were living quite comfortably, yet there was always the feeling that Yugoslavia could not quite keep up with its neighbors. Yugoslav policy had provided citizens with a great deal, but it had been either unable or unwilling to deliver all that was desired, and that is why, even during the best of times, Yugoslavs were packing onto trains and buses and getting into their cars to head across the borders for shopping excursions to Thessaloniki, Graz, Klagenfurt, and Trieste. The hunger for things that could be obtained only in the West surfaced almost immediately in socialist Yugoslavia, and it was never fully sated, not even during the

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72 See Božo Repe, "Tihozapjvo vse, razen pitjega mleka: vpliv nakupovalnega turizma na kulturne spremembe in način življenja v Sloveniji po drugi svetovni vojni," Zgodovina za vsa 5, no. 2 (1998): 90-96. Repe reports the results of oral history research concerning shopping trips across the Slovenian borders. Over time, a hunger for fashion, technology, and even kitsch replaced more basic necessities such
most prosperous years. Here again, the country turned out to be something betwixt-and-between, but in this particular respect, the intermediate stature often seemed to be not quite good enough. Perhaps even more important than the dissatisfaction with this lingering gap between Yugoslavia and the West, however, was the sharper resentment toward the government that sprung up once the economy began slipping backward, resulting in a serious decline in living standards and round after round of unpleasant belt-tightening.

Given how obvious the consumerist orientation of Yugoslav society was to both insiders and outsiders at the time, it is perhaps a bit curious that the importance of consumer culture in Yugoslav history has not drawn more sustained scholarly attention. Yet like so much else about Yugoslav society, the good life of the 1960s and 1970s has been eclipsed by the desperation and death of more recent times. I believe, however, that the connections between the culture of abundance and the disintegration that followed it may be stronger than is immediately apparent, making it all the more important that we understand precisely how Yugoslav consumer culture was built and nurtured during the critical formative period from 1950 to 1965. As it happened, the great problem that consumerism caused for the Yugoslav government was not that rising living standards would create a widespread demand for real political democratization, as some believed, but rather that the great increases in prosperity simply could not be sustained and were, in fact, forfeited in the 1980s. The apparent success of government policy in the 1950s, 1960s, and most of the 1970s built up huge popular expectations that the good times would continue and that the future would be, in fact, even brighter. Much of the Yugoslav Dream was wrapped up in the idea of progress, and without the real prospect of further progress it was bound to falter. Given the structural inefficiencies and inflexibility of the Yugoslav economy, and given the fact that a good part of country's consumer abundance had been purchased on credit, the consumerist orientation ultimately set Yugoslavia on a course for disaster. It is important to remember that the "borrowing binge" which John Lampe identifies as a central failing of economic policy in the 1970s was undertaken in part to prolong the consumerist spending binge that had begun much earlier.

Thus it becomes apparent that although consumerism long served as a stabilizing force in Yugoslav society, keeping ordinary Yugoslavs happy and enhancing the popular acceptance of the regime, it ultimately played some significant role in causing the collapse of the system. This view is supported, for example, in the analysis of the Yugoslav break-up offered recently by Svetozar Stojanović. Although with time Stojanović has modified considerably the anti-market sentiments of his Praxis days, he has as certain hard-to-find food items. From the beginning, however, the cross-border trade was noteworthy for its variety and its intensity, as is suggested in the quotation used in the title of the piece itself: commenting on the almost frenzied efforts to bring home a little of the West, one contemporary observer noted: "they are smuggling everything except bird's milk."

32 Mihailo Marković, for example, argued that Yugoslav economic conditions had created, in effect, a constant upward push for more and higher-quality consumption. Developing his argument in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he was willing to acknowledge at least some positive aspects of consumerism: "Given the constantly rising income (it is now $650 per capita, and some Yugoslavs are confident that by 1985, it will reach $2000), the impossibility of investing money and becoming a capitalist, and a constant sharp inflationary tendency, a Yugoslav is naturally oriented toward immediate consumption. Having overcome material misery he has become rather selective: he travels a lot and has an opportunity to see and buy foreign products, both abroad and at home. Consequently, he exerts constant pressure on the Yugoslav economy to modernize and to introduce novelties." Marković, *From Affluence to Praxis: Philosophy and Social Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), 104. The writer noted, however, that in most respects, Yugoslav consumerism was "deplorable." Ibid.

34 Much of the growth of the Yugoslav economy through the 1970s was the result of an over-reliance on credit. The country's foreign debt rose from about $2 billion in 1968 to $20 billion by 1982. John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 315
nevertheless continued to see the consumerism that became characteristic of Yugoslav life in the 1960s as a tremendous drag on the country's capacities and the spirit of its people. Analyzing the failure of Yugoslav communism and the disintegration of the federation, Stojanovic suggests that the embrace of consumerism was "one of the props of the regime," an important element of a larger strategy of "statist paternalism" endemic to communist governance. As a result of this tactic of popular appeasement, the Yugoslav economy was pushed beyond its limits: "Huge consumerist attitudes" were released, fed and whetted yet again by the too-easy availability of foreign and domestic credit. The Titoist bargain, Stojanovic argues, "corrupted the people," coaxing them to trade away any real power for relative prosperity and leading them into a reckless wastefulness which was "based in good part on the illusion that we had unlimited resources and supported by abundant financial remittances sent by Yugoslavs employed abroad."

Stojanovic overstates the extent to which consumerism was deliberately encouraged by the government in order to keep the Yugoslav population contented and manageable. A careful review of the record suggests that, in the end, the idea that the government consciously and instrumentally fostered a consumerist orientation among the public is grounded more on suspicion than fact. Yet Stojanovic is correct in one important sense: when it comes to consumption, Yugoslavia does appear to have been a victim of its own apparent successes. The prosperous times of the 1960s and much of the 1970s nurtured a set of consumerist attitudes and behaviors that simply could not be sustained once the country's economy ran out of steam beginning in the late 1970s. Rapidly expanding consumption unleashed expectations which could not be satisfied indefinitely. Consumer culture never disappeared in socialist Yugoslavia, but to a large extent, ordinary Yugoslavs' happiness about their ability to consume did begin to disappear. That sense of satisfaction had provided one of the strongest supports for the Yugoslav system, predicated as it was on communist party leadership, socialist economic policy, and a multinational federation. Without such support, each of those fundamental elements of the Yugoslav system proved vulnerable. For years, the Yugoslav Dream had been so appealing and so satisfying because it seemed reassuringly close to reality: if the good life was not available to everyone right away, then at least the future -- the near future -- held great promise. In the eyes of many citizens, at least, the reversal of fortunes that came in the country's last years proved fatal: Once prosperity became only a fondly-remembered thing of the past, the consumerist dream no longer seemed to have any real chance of coming true, and support for the system began to slip away.

33 Stojanovic, The Fall of Yugoslavia: Why Communism Failed (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1997), 66; on the evolution of the writer's views toward the market, see ibid., 315. Stojanovic's Praxis colleague Rudi Supek likewise interpreted the government's support of consumerist habits as a substantial drain on the economy, alleging that the habitual negative trade balances were due in large part to the importation of unnecessary consumer goods which benefited only a small fraction of the population. Rudi Supek, "Some Contradictions and Insufficiencies of Yugoslav Self-Managing Socialism," in Markovic and Petrovic, eds., Praxis: Yugoslav Essays in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences (Dordrecht/Boston/London: D. Reidel, 1979), 249-271, at 258.