

spectives. As Serbian historians began to express more independent views on the first Yugoslavia, they were met with strong criticism by historians in Zagreb, Skopje, and Sarajevo who adhered to earlier interpretations. The historiographical dispute reflected the Yugoslav peoples' disagreements over economic, national, and other problems.

The edited volume *Trends in Contemporary Serbian Historiography* makes an important contribution to the field by assessing the historiographical treatment of various current topics and providing an overview of foreign historians' perspec-

tives on Serbian and Yugoslav history and historiography. The variety of themes covered enriches the book, serving as an indicator of recent development in Serbian historiography while also emphasizing its current challenges. This publication has a twofold significance: it not only reflects the achievements of domestic historiography to date, but it also serves as a roadmap for the future, offering essential guidance that will definitely assist the next generation of historians in navigating the obstacles they are likely to face.

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*COVID-19 and the Left. The Tyranny of Fear*, eds. Elena Louisa Lange, Geoff Shullenberger. Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2024, 192.

Since March 2020, the global phenomenon known as COVID-19 was bound to become a legitimate subject of scholarly study as independent judiciaries still hesitate to react in many instances. Its potential involvement in the controlled demolition of the existing social, economic, and political order, as well as orchestrated "emergencies" and crises such as health, climate, food, migrants, energy, and regional wars, guarantees that it will remain a central focus in both natural and social sciences across various disciplines. As skilled interpreters of the past and contemporaries, historians, along with social scientists and other humanities researchers, are in charge of responding promptly to current events and, at the very least, providing valuable records to assist future generations in understanding recent developments.

However, beyond professional duty and ethical responsibility, personal courage is still essential. Elena Louisa Lange resigned from her comfortable po-

sition at the University of Zurich due to moral concerns and chose to pursue the uncertain path of a free intellectual, opposing the passive observation of the decline of educational programs shaped by unelected, obscure entities. Something similar happened to David A. Hughes of the University of Lincoln, who is a fierce opponent of the expansion of "techno-feudalism" and "biodigital totalitarianism", both of which opened the door for unconventional class conflict that he termed "omniwar". Meanwhile, Fabio Vighi continues to resist at Cardiff University despite his heresy regarding the convulsions of "senile capitalism", sustained only through a permanent state of emergency.

The book's editors, Elena Louisa Lange and Geoff Shullenberger, argue that authoritarian measures like lockdowns, mandated vaccinations, and enforced mask-wearing have led to the biopolitical disenfranchisement of human rights and allowed state-corporate institutions to en-

croach on private life and individual freedom. Paradoxically, by supporting these forceful techniques, the left has veered away from its traditional role as a critic of capital and state power, eventually reinforcing existing hierarchies and exacerbating suffering for “vulnerable groups” it aimed to protect. Thus, the major focus of this book is to unpack the paradox of the left embracing authoritarian methods, unfettered capital growth, digital transformation, biopolitics, and social discrimination while conforming to a distorted neoliberal consensus. The significance of panic and psychological blackmail as tools of dominance in late capitalist society is only one aspect of the debate over whether the left was a passive victim or an active player in the creation and execution of the “tyranny of fear”. With insights from several fields and perspectives, the authors explore the pandemic’s ideological, sociocultural, and economic impacts, advocating resistance to biopolitical technocracy, intimidation, and tyranny that restrict individual freedoms.

As global COVID propaganda grew stronger, it took on a farcical character akin to telenovelas and low-budget horror aesthetics. Media images showed grimacing patients, blurry vaccine vials, exhausted healthcare workers, and thermometers pointing like guns, while bizarre TV moments, such as masked authorities elbowing and medics dancing, faded the boundary between serious messaging and burlesque. In Serbia, the aggressive pandemic campaigning revealed an unexpected alliance between the liberal left and conservative elites in power, exposing the fictitious political discord that nourishes the country’s “hybrid democracy.” With the barrier between the regime and opposition media vanished, synergic marketing has become more effective, un-

covering the government’s puppet character with no intention of concealing it anymore. Due to ineffective pro-government media, Serbia’s pandemic advertising had to mobilize “opposition” outlets and NGOs in July 2020, prompting the president to award opposition journalists for their outstanding hospital coverage. Being sick with COVID-19 has become a status symbol among Serbia’s ruling party and liberal lefties, including a playwright with ultra-nationalist roots and her former party president, who gave a pathetic motivational speech from his hospital bed. The vaccination of a popular singer, the wife of a war criminal, resembled both a fashion event and the ultimate act of patriotism, with her clergyman campaigning from a billboard. To make the madness complete, *turbo-folk* stars and smiling city authorities inaugurated vaccination points in Belgrade shopping malls. Evidently, both the Serbian left and right converged in their supra-ideological efforts to disseminate fear-based propaganda (more on this enthusiastic promotional partnership in my chapter: „Fear Factories: Serbian Media and the ‘Invisible Enemy’“ in: K. Buchenau & M. Fechner / Hrsg./, *Die verlorene Wissenschaft. Versuch einer Katharsis nach Corona*, Bd. 2, Hannover-Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2024, 363–404).

Although the publisher and authors’ biographies indicate that *COVID-19 and the Left. The Tyranny of Fear* is an inherently scientific book, it is not solely intended for the academic community, as it also aims to rally and engage the “non-academic public” while critiquing the scholarly establishment. Amid the rise of “biopolitical totalitarianism” in Western universities, the authors question the strength of “Western values” and advocate for dialogue, individual freedom, democ-

racy, and emancipation from technocratic interests. They critique the tyranny of fear enabling minority control through manipulation, exclusion, and censorship, demanding resistance against this resurgent form of societal cruelty.

Since the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, unprecedented events have unfolded, leading to the rapid erosion of civil liberties following brief but intense propaganda on both the mainstream and social media. Western countries suspended constitutional rights, extended emergency measures, and enforced mask mandates, extensive testing, and vaccination campaigns, resulting in direct threats to personal freedoms. Considering measures like “social distancing,” lockdowns, and restrictions on assembly and privacy, such as Serbia’s absurd rule permitting retirees to shop in supermarkets only between 4 and 7 a.m., the phrase “war against the population” may sound like a euphemism. As noted by the editors, under the name of public health and the “greater good,” individual freedoms were violated, using historically proven propaganda strategies of intimidation and suppression to ensure unquestioning obedience to government authority. In Serbia, the pseudo-liberal left, independent medical associations, and a regime with strong chauvinistic origins used public appeals and academic publications to push for restrictions on individual liberties “in the name of national health,” which defied fundamental leftist ideals. The pervasive coalition of conflicting ideologies in hysterically but harmoniously suppressing any critical voices or scientific probing on mainstream and social media was intriguing enough.

Authors observed that governments worldwide enforced quarantines and strict controls reminiscent of totali-

tarian regimes, regulating social interactions through controversial PCR testing and vaccination status, while resistance to these policies led to social isolation, replicating previous discriminatory laws. Disproportionate measures, prompted by exaggerated worries of a virus with a fatality rate of less than 0.3% among the elderly, have called into doubt the true objectives driving such restrictive government activities.

Now we get to the major point of this edited volume: a surreal quiet and indifference of most of the Western leftist academic community towards an authoritarian reaction to the alleged health crisis. Influential philosophers like Slavoj Žižek, Noam Chomsky, and Judith Butler supported radical restrictions on personal freedoms, reducing individuals to mere statistics while ignoring social, ethical, and psychological considerations. This book critiques the “moral bankruptcy” of the current left and the inversion of the leftist perspective, which stems from the blurring of class consciousness, superficial critiques of capitalism, and the neglect of class dynamics in favor of an imposed technocratic approach. The authors identified four epistemic inversions in the leftist paradigm during the crisis, focusing on huge dread and awe of the virus, similar to religious fetishism, with the “invisible enemy” exalted to near-sacred status in a perverted reality.

The book editors attempt to reconstruct the virus’s social dynamics by comparing it to a natural disaster but are still surprised by the left’s response. Instead of pragmatism, the left preached fetishization, panic, and hysteria, which governments effectively exploited for control. Despite recognizing how viruses interact with social structures, the left’s reification and anthropomorphization of the virus result-

ed in a “fatal interpretation of the pandemic”, which saw its “desires” as needs to be met. Under the veil of “public health enforcement,” the pandemic led to severe police violence in Australia and Canada, enabling authoritarian measures largely ignored by mainstream media. The humanization of the virus coincided with the dehumanization of individuals, particularly unvaccinated citizens, whom French and German leaders treated with contempt. The left’s tacit acceptance of authoritarianism revealed its power ambitions and craving for lucrative projects, collaborating with state and corporate interests and contributing to the erosion of basic human rights under public health claims. By fetishizing the virus, the left justified brutal rights violations and caused widespread economic and mental harm, especially to children, despite their minimal health risk. In terms of fearmongering, the Serbian liberal left remained mute when Serbia’s president made disturbing remarks about insufficient cemetery capacities, inciting public fear and hinting at oppressive tendencies. Meanwhile, the Crisis Headquarters, which was still unofficial at the moment, intensified panic by urging Serbian citizens to stay home via awkward SMS alerts.

This book also focuses on how the pandemic promoted expert panels while inhibiting individual perspectives through false models and kitschy computer simulations instead of real research. The political left adopted this “hyper-realistic approach”, encouraging scientific authoritarianism and using slogans like “Trust science, not morons” to defend unlawful government actions. That is why the book editors found no justification for the left’s response to the pandemic, perceiving it as a hegemonic shift aligned with state and corporate interests. Under the pretext of

moral duty, the left reinforced political elites’ power, strengthened state authority, and formed alliances with controversial philanthropic organizations, puppet governments, and extremist movements.

Despite minority skepticism of institutions, contributing to vaccine hesitancy, the left paradoxically supported measures that violated physical autonomy while condemning those who opposed the government. Aligning with a pharma-media coalition, the new leftist agenda shifted from critiquing state and capital to labeling pandemic measure opponents as “right-wingers” or “conspiracy theorists”. The abandonment of conventional leftist principles resulted in social segregation, demonized dissent, and contradicted Marx’s ideal of individual liberty, with moving from personal rights to collective solutions in the name of solidarity, as evidenced by the WHO’s support for coercive programs. Political elites from the left to the center have been employing language to rationalize authoritarian policies that violate human dignity and consolidate their power.

Both editors believe that the emergence of collectivist cults stimulates ahistorical thinking, erodes traditional structures, and blends political power with disinherited beings who are detached from history and algorithmically predictable. The authors contend that internet censorship restores disconnection, legitimizes policies that erase previous struggles for freedom of speech, and strengthens the biopolitical-technocratic health regime, eventually promoting a collectivist approach that weakens personal autonomy. In other words, the decrease of historical consciousness and the normalization of repressive health practices indicate an alarming tendency of sacrificing

individual dignity for a homogenized collective identity.

This edited volume is divided into three parts that explore various dimensions of authoritarianism during the “pandemic era”. The first part addresses the ideology of fear, exploring the left’s support for pandemic authoritarianism and its totalitarian aspects. It presents the crisis as a hyper-realistic simulation and an Orwellian dystopia, where pandemic ideology distracts from an unprecedented transfer of power. In his chapter, Lee Jones investigates how the neoliberal system has weakened democracy, alienating the left from its historic base and causing it to eagerly endorse authoritarian policies in the name of protecting the most disadvantaged populations. On the other hand, Geoff Shullenberger uses Jean Baudrillard’s concept of “hyperreality” to analyze how the left has maintained a politics of panic and crisis during the pandemic, boosting exclusivity and silencing alternative voices. Shullenberger highlights the distorted leftist perception of reality, based on simulated graphic abstractions (viruses), and continuous monitoring as a key issue. He insists that this “hyperreal” understanding of crisis politics, emerging from climate change discourse, foreshadows a further entrenchment of authoritarianism and the manipulation of public perception in response to perceived threats. In her chapter inspired by Orwell’s concept, Elena Louisa Lange examines pandemic propaganda and argues that contradictory information regarding masks and vaccines was not due to incompetence but rather a deliberate strategy to suppress independent judgment and autonomy. She claims that by creating an environment where nothing can be trusted or questioned, those in power maintain control, producing a climate of uncertain-

ty that stifles critical thinking and dissent, much like the tactics in Orwell’s fiction.

The following section delves into the material processes and reasons driving the pandemic in a capitalist environment, including the expansion of the industrial complex, the bureaucratization of the pandemic narrative, and how the state of emergency hastens the demise of financial capitalism. Thomas Fazi analyzes how the pandemic accelerated the concentration of power and wealth, harming small businesses while benefiting tech monopolies and pharmaceutical giants. He describes the formation of a state-corporate symbiosis aimed at constructing a “biosecurity state” for profit and control through digital surveillance. In her chapter, Leila Mechoui discusses the institutional incentives behind state responses during the declared pandemic. Drawing on Marxist and Weberian theories, she argues that state bureaucracies, with weak working-class representation and formal left dominance, used rational means for irrational goals to achieve “bureaucratic self-preservation”.

Finally, Fabio Vighi’s analysis examines the dynamics of “implosive capitalism,” exacerbated by the aftermath of the 2007/8 financial crash. He asserts that the controlled shutdown of the economy and the rise of biodigital surveillance were motivated by capitalism’s need to sustain growth through artificial liquidity injections. The “lockdowns” not only aimed to inject liquidity and temporarily shield the real economy from inflation but also provided a pretext for enforcing authoritarian control. Vighi concludes that capitalism, confronted with a fragile and unsustainable debt-based system, seeks to migrate from a liberal to an authoritarian model through a series of emergencies to maintain its power structure.

The third section of the book evaluates national case studies, focusing on Commonwealth countries and Germany, and delves into the absurdities of Canada's political establishment, the British managerial elite's pandemic response, Germany's shifting anti-fascist paradigm during the state of emergency, and Australia's middle class's relationship with pandemic policies. Gord Magill discusses the 2021 Canadian truckers' protest against forced pandemic measures, concentrating on aggressive state propaganda and the left's withdrawal of support for this worker-led rebellion, which reveals deeper social and political dynamics in Canada during the state of emergency. George Hoare identifies the professional-managerial class as the main political force in Britain's pandemic response, rising from the working class's defeat under neoliberalism. This class, including bureaucrats with questionable degrees (as seen in Serbia), made use of crises like Brexit and the pandemic to consolidate technocratic control and suppress dissent. Michael Burkhardt's chapter looks into the German left's support for pandemic authoritarianism as part of the "anti-fascist struggle", outlining the manner in which its opposition to neoliberal austerity distanced itself from the working class and steered it toward a populist base.

This transformation resulted in a cosmopolitan "lifestyle leftism" that stigmatized skeptics and critics of official pandemic narratives using similar rhetoric that simulated class struggle themes. In the final chapter, Nicolas Hausdorf investigates Australia's severe pandemic measures, which amounted to state terror, focusing on the role of the new middle "laptop" class, whose status anxiety and detachment from production made them compliant, uncritical supporters of state policies and scientism.

Most contributors to this remarkable book are deeply disillusioned, genuine lefties who recognize the clear triumph of profit-driven interests over ideology, a reality that became abundantly apparent during this hastily staged health crisis, reflecting a broader failure of the neoliberal system. While harsh criticisms of pandemic policy have surfaced recently, simply exposing falsehoods does not appear to be enough. A deeper investigation would be more effective, concentrating on the ideological and material factors behind the phenomenon, such as pseudo-scientific dogmatism, mass corruption, a compromised technocratic left, and democratic collapse around the world.

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