

**Emil Vlajki.** *The New Totalitarian Society and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* Preface: Osvaldo Croci and Brian K. MacLean. Ottawa: Legas, 1999. 195 pp., \$22.00 (paper). ISBN: 0921252943.

You may well ask yourself what an amateur is doing reviewing a book by a political scientist. A moment of patience will reveal that I or anyone is quite qualified. This is one of those books—not the only one to have come out of the Yugoslav wars—whose author is so convinced of the truth of his truth, that he does not feel the need to pay attention to the basic conventions of scholarship.

I disagree with Emil Vlajki's every word, but I will defend to my last breath his right to have an editor to help him say it. The best books on these wars—Aleš Debeljak's *Twilight of the Idols*<sup>1</sup> Tomaž Lavrič's *Fables de Bosnie*<sup>2</sup> for instance—have come from small or exotic presses, but Legas, the Ottawa academic publisher of this book, has failed Vlajki badly.

Here is a typical sentence from his first page: "At the international level, seventeen millions (sic) infant (sic) and children ... die each year in underdeveloped nations" (15). And one from the middle: "In the media were only representing Albanian point of view." Sic. And now, the last sentence of the book: "On 24 March the NATO-led force begun (sic) the aggression against Yugoslavia" (195). My relatives speak this way, but they do not publish books in English. 195 pages of this is too much. I understand that Professor Vlajki's French is exquisite.

Now the quotations. The epigraph has "Chaplin, Charles" saying, "Now, let us fight the world of reason" (22). No, Charlie said, "Now, ... let us fight *for* a world of reason."<sup>3</sup> Here is a supposed quotation from C. Wright Mills: "It is the professional politician that decisions, one is tempted to speak of a political vacuum in has lost the most, so much that in examining the events and which the corporate rich and high warlord, in their coinciding interests, rule" (36). Sic! On page 172, Vlajki quotes a certain L. H. Rockwell, Jr. thus: "NATO is the accuser,

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<sup>1</sup> Aleš Debeljak, *Twilight of the Idols* (Fredonia: White Pine, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Tomaž Lavrič, *Fables de Bosnie* (Grenoble: Glenat, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Charlie Chaplin, "Speech from *The Great Dictator*" (available at [www.graceland.edu/~filip/quotes/chaplin.htm](http://www.graceland.edu/~filip/quotes/chaplin.htm)).

prosecutor, judge [no comma] jury, and executioner because NATO pays the bills.” His footnote does not tell us where to look. I found the source nevertheless, in the far-right *WorldNet Daily* and it turns out Rockwell said, “NATO is the judge and jury because NATO pays the bills.”<sup>4</sup> Vljaki improved the quotation.

Here my students say, “But what about my points?” and get the sermon about the medium being the message. Still, here are some points: “The fact is that the United States along with Germany and the Vatican are (sic) responsible for the dissolution of the second Yugoslavia...” (159). And Milošević? “Unfortunately, because of the lack of vision of one single man, America won this battle” (179). While NATO was attacking, “Yugoslavia was an immense concentration camp and death camp and the extent of this potential genocide is matched only by the extermination of the Jewish people during the (sic) World War II” (173). This “bloody dying of Serbia [is] the real beginning of evil on earth” (173). Vljaki even feels justified in rewriting Genesis: “The Lord said to the Albanian from Kosovo. ‘Go into the boat with your whole family; I have found that you are the only one in all the world who does what is right ... Seven days from now I am going to send a missile rain that will ... destroy all the living beings that I have made in Yugoslavia’” (158). A clarification: “the Lord” is the U.S.

Professors Croci and MacLean of Laurentian are right in their preface. This is “at odds with conventional wisdom.” But it will take more than Vljaki’s rant to convince us that, as Croci says, “It is the best analysis I have read to date.” More shocking, indeed, than Vljaki’s book—after all, an axe in need of grinding must not be denied—is the fact that it was accepted by an academic publisher and praised by apparent outside readers. Peer review?

Vljaki cannot leave well enough alone. He correctly tells us that the anti-Serb side hires PR agencies. However, he says it is a “lie” to think “everybody having enough money can hire them” (147). For “there could not be any agency in the entire world .... which would accept and propagate pro-Serb messages systematically and intensively” (148).

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<sup>4</sup> Llewellyn H. Rockwell, “Looking at war crimes” (available at [www.worldnetdaily.com/bluesky\\_rockwell/1990528\\_xclro\\_looking\\_at.shtml](http://www.worldnetdaily.com/bluesky_rockwell/1990528_xclro_looking_at.shtml)).

How about, among others (as Roy Gutman reports in *Witness to Genocide*,<sup>5</sup> McDermott/O'Neill & Associates and David A. Keene & Associates? Officials of both agencies confirm,<sup>6</sup> for instance, that they assisted in setting up Lewis MacKenzie's 1993 tour, the one paid for by SerbNet, "a Serbian-American advocacy group." Of course the Serbs buy PR. Besides, how can a Canadian think the Serbs have lost the propaganda war when so often the sharp MacKenzie is the networks' unbiased expert, cleverly questioning the NATO version?

Most often Vljaki's sources are the cliché Left. It is fun to follow Vljaki—tortuously of course—to Chomsky or *In These Times* or *LM*, which was *Living Marxism* before it gussied itself up, like *Women's Wear Daily* morphing into *W*. For Diane Johnstone of *In These Times*, Milošević's Serbia is "the last bastion of old-fashioned independence in the Balkans" (131). It's all inspired by that sentiment Mavis Gallant already heard in 1968 among Parisians: "If we don't eat as well as we used to ... and if we don't make love as often as we used to, it is because of the Americans" (63).<sup>7</sup>

But there is worse than garden-variety anti-Americanism. Following Vljaki's claims to their sources, with little or no help from the author, will bring you to some strange history indeed. Thus T. W. Carr, quoted by Vljaki on page 92, even says that in the first independent Slovene government there were "no less than six ministers ... of German descent."<sup>8</sup> That is apparently a "nuff-said" argument.

Even simple anti-Americanism makes for strange bedfellows. Thus when we try to discover, despite Vljaki's faulty footnote (168), what the Spanish pilots that objected to NATO policy in Kosovo actually said, we travel on the Internet to an article apparently posted by the "Carlos Balino Institute" of "Cubans abroad defending the homeland and the revolution."<sup>9</sup> This does not surprise us, as who can be better anti-Americans than Cubans defending the revolution? What is initially

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<sup>5</sup> Roy Gutman, *Witness to Genocide* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Gutman, *Witness*, 168–171.

<sup>7</sup> Mavis Gallant, *Paris Notebooks* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> T. W. Carr, "A Careful Coincidence of National Policies" (available at <http://www.emperors-clothes.com/articles/carr/carr.html>).

<sup>9</sup> "Spanish pilot says US ordered targeting of civilians." From the Spanish weekly *Artículo 20* (available at <http://www.codoh.com/newsdesk/990618.html>).

surprising is that the home of this posting is a Holocaust revisionist site run by Bradley Smith. Cuban revolutionaries and Holocaust revisionists rubbing shoulders over Yugoslavia? Why, of course! What matters is that America be wrong. If Professor Vljaki does not want me to read this article at the site of the “Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust,”<sup>10</sup> then he’d better give me more precise footnotes and steer me elsewhere.

Professor Vljaki’s book is a swath of chaos: a fascinating, unreadable artifact. The scholar is unconvincing—but, were he to tell us, as the Irish say, who he is when he’s at home, that book I would devour.

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<sup>10</sup> Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust Home Page (available at [www.codoh.com](http://www.codoh.com)).