

Milovan Djilas The New Class

Milovan Djilas the New Class is a provocative concept that has intrigued political theorists, historians, and social commentators for decades. It stems from the influential ideas of Milovan Djilas, a Yugoslav communist politician, theorist, and writer, who critically analyzed the structure of power and class in socialist societies. Djilas's work, particularly his notion of the "new class," challenges traditional Marxist views and offers a unique perspective on the evolution of social stratification in the modern era. This article explores the core ideas behind Djilas's concept of the new class, its implications, and its relevance in contemporary society.

Understanding Milovan Djilas and His Theories

Who Was Milovan Djilas?

Milovan Djilas (1911–1995) was a prominent Yugoslav communist leader, a close associate of Josip Broz Tito, and later a vocal critic of the Soviet-style communist regime. His political career began within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, where he held various high-ranking positions, including Vice President of Yugoslavia. However, his disillusionment with the authoritarian aspects of socialist governance led him to become one of its most critical intellectuals. Djilas's writings focused on the nature of power, leadership, and social hierarchy within socialist states. His groundbreaking book, *The New Class* (1957), introduced the concept that a new ruling elite was emerging in socialist societies—one that was distinct from the traditional bourgeoisie but held similar privileges and authority.

The Core Idea of the New Class

Djilas argued that in socialist states, power was not solely held by the political leadership or the working class but had shifted to a new elite—the "new class." This class consisted of bureaucrats, party officials, intellectuals, and technocrats who controlled the means of administration and decision-making, creating a new form of social hierarchy. Key characteristics of Djilas's new class include:

- **Elite Control:** Members of the new class possess significant privileges, access to luxury, and control over economic and political resources.
- **Lack of Accountability:** Unlike traditional ruling classes, the new class often operates without genuine accountability to the populace.
- **Institutional Power:** The new class maintains its dominance through institutional structures, such as party bureaus, government agencies, and economic planning bodies.
- **Corruption and Privilege:** Over time, members of the new class tend to develop a culture of privilege, diverging from the ideals of equality and collective ownership.

Djilas's Critique of Socialist Society

The Illusion of Equality

One of Djilas's primary critiques was that socialist societies, which claimed to promote equality and eliminate class distinctions, had instead created a new, hidden hierarchy. He argued that the promise of a classless society was undermined by the emergence of a ruling elite that enjoyed privileges, access to resources, and influence unavailable to ordinary workers.

The Power of the Bureaucracy

Djilas emphasized that the bureaucratic apparatus in socialist states became an end in itself. These bureaucrats, motivated by self-interest and power, often prioritized their own privileges over the collective good. This led to a disconnect between the ideals of socialism and the realities of governance.

The Corruption and Moral Decay

As the new class gained power, corruption and moral decay became prevalent. Djilas observed that the leadership, once committed to revolutionary ideals, became increasingly self-serving, thus betraying the foundational principles of socialism.

The Impact of Djilas's Theories on Political Thought

Challenging Marxist Orthodoxy

Djilas's concept of the new class was a significant departure from orthodox Marxist theory, which viewed the proletariat as the revolutionary class destined to overthrow bourgeois dominance and establish a classless society. Instead, Djilas argued that new elites could emerge within socialist states, complicating the Marxist narrative.

Influence on Political Discourse

His ideas prompted debates about power, corruption, and social justice within socialist and post-socialist countries. Critics and reformers used Djilas's insights to critique authoritarian regimes and advocate for greater transparency and democratization.

Relevance in Contemporary Society

While Djilas's work was rooted in the context of Yugoslavia and socialist states, its themes resonate today:

1. **Elite Power Structures:** Modern political systems often reveal the persistence of entrenched elites within democracies and oligarchies.
2. **Corruption and Privilege:** Issues of elite corruption and inequality remain central to discussions on governance and social justice.
3. **Institutional Entrenchment:** The concentration of power within bureaucratic and corporate institutions echoes Djilas's observations about the new class.

The Legacy and Criticisms of Djilas's Concept

Strengths of the New Class Theory

- It provided a realistic critique of socialist regimes, exposing the divergence between revolutionary ideals and actual governance. - It highlighted the importance of accountability, transparency, and anti-corruption measures. - It offered a framework to understand the persistence of inequality and privilege even in purportedly egalitarian societies.

Criticisms and Limitations

- Some argue that Djilas's analysis is overly pessimistic and dismissive of the potential for reform within socialist states. - Others contend that his focus on bureaucratic elites overlooks the role of broader societal forces. - The theory may oversimplify complex political dynamics by emphasizing elite control as the primary factor.

Modern Interpretations and Applications

The "New Class" in Post-Communist Societies

After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, scholars revisited Djilas's ideas to analyze the rise of new economic and political elites in post-communist countries. These elites often comprise former party officials, entrepreneurs, and technocrats who have maintained or gained influence, exemplifying the persistence of the "new class" phenomenon.

Global Elite and Oligarchy

In contemporary political discourse, the concept of the new class has been extended to describe global elites—wealthy individuals, corporate leaders, and political insiders—who exert disproportionate influence over economic and political decisions worldwide.

Implications for Democracy and Social Justice

Understanding the dynamics of the new class can inform efforts to promote democratic accountability, reduce inequality, and combat corruption. Recognizing how elite groups maintain their privileges is essential for developing effective policy responses.

Conclusion

Milovan Djilas's concept of the "new class" remains a vital lens through which to examine social and political power structures. His critique of elite dominance within socialist societies reveals enduring truths about how power can concentrate, regardless of ideological intentions. While his ideas originated within a specific historical context, their relevance persists today, reminding us to scrutinize the distribution of power, privilege, and accountability in all forms of governance. Understanding Djilas's "new class" helps us navigate ongoing debates about inequality, corruption, and the pursuit of genuine democracy in the 21st century.

Milovan Djilas and The New Class: An In-Depth Analysis

In the landscape of political philosophy and Marxist theory, Milovan Djilas and *The New Class* stand out as a profound critique of communist governance and the nature of power within socialist states. Djilas, a prominent Yugoslav politician and intellectual, introduced the concept of the "New Class" as a way to understand the emerging ruling elite that replaced traditional bourgeois dominance with a new form of power rooted in the state and party bureaucracy. This idea not only challenged the orthodox Marxist view of class conflict but also provided a nuanced perspective on the dynamics of power, privilege, and inequality in socialist societies.

Who Was Milovan Djilas?

Before delving into the concept of The New Class, it's essential to understand who Milovan Djilas was and his role in Yugoslav history and political thought.

Background and Political Career

1. Born in 1911 in Montenegro, Djilas was an early supporter of communism and a close associate of Josip Broz Tito.
2. He played a significant role in the Yugoslav Partisan resistance during World War II and later became a high-ranking official in the Yugoslav government.
3. As Deputy Prime Minister and member of the Communist Party's Central Committee, Djilas was part of the ruling elite that governed Yugoslavia after the war.

Shift in Perspective

1. In the late 1950s, Djilas became increasingly disillusioned with the authoritarian tendencies and inequalities within the socialist system.
2. His critiques led to a falling out with the party leadership, which culminated in his imprisonment in 1956.
3. During his imprisonment, Djilas reflected on the nature of power and the structure of socialist societies, culminating in his seminal work, *The New Class* (published in 1957).

The Core of The New Class

Milovan Djilas' *The New Class* offers a groundbreaking analysis of the evolution of power in socialist states. He argued that the political and economic elite in these societies formed a new ruling class, distinct from the traditional bourgeoisie, yet similar in its pursuit of privilege and control.

Key Concepts of The New Class

1. **The Emergence of a Ruling Elite:** Unlike classical capitalism, where class distinctions are primarily based on ownership of production, Djilas identified a state-based ruling class that derives its power from control over the state apparatus and party machinery.
2. **The Privileges of the Elite:** Members of the New Class enjoy privileges—luxury, influence, and immunity—that set them apart from the general populace.
3. **The Loss of Class Consciousness:** Unlike traditional classes, members of the New Class are often unaware or indifferent to their privileged position, viewing themselves as the natural leaders of society.
4. **The Corruption of Power:** The concentration of authority leads to corruption, authoritarianism, and the suppression of dissent.
5. **The Illusion of Equality:** Despite claims of socialism and equality, the New Class perpetuates inequality through its privileges and control.

The Formation and Characteristics of The New Class

Djilas' analysis provides a detailed account of how the New Class forms and operates within socialist regimes.

How Does the New Class Form?

1. **Revolution and Power Consolidation:** After a revolution, a vanguard party seizes control over state institutions.
2. **Bureaucratic Elitism:** Over time, a bureaucratic layer develops, comprising party officials, military leaders, and technocrats.
3. **Institutionalization of Privilege:** This bureaucratic elite begins to enjoy privileges, luxury, and immunity from the laws they impose on others.

4. Self-perpetuation: The New Class maintains its position through control over political, economic, and social institutions, often resisting reforms that threaten their authority.

Characteristics of the New Class

1. Political Power: They control the state apparatus and policymaking.
2. Economic Privilege: They have access to scarce resources, luxury goods, and sometimes private businesses.
3. Ideological Authority: They often manipulate Marxist ideology to justify their dominance.
4. Social Distance: They tend to separate themselves from the masses they govern, fostering a sense of entitlement.
5. Lack of Ideological Commitment: Their motivations shift from revolutionary ideals to personal gain.

The Impact of The New Class on Society

Djilas' critique highlights the profound implications of the New Class on socialist societies and their ideological foundations.

Erosion of Revolutionary Goals

1. The emergence of the New Class shifts the focus from serving the people to maintaining power.
2. The original revolutionary enthusiasm is replaced by bureaucratic self-interest.

Inequality and Social Stratification

1. Despite official teachings of equality, the New Class creates a new form of inequality based on privilege and access.
2. This stratification undermines the legitimacy of socialist ideology.

Political Repression and Control

1. The New Class often employs censorship, surveillance, and repression to suppress dissent.
2. This creates a culture of fear and conformity.

Moral and Ethical Decay

1. The concentration of power leads to corruption, nepotism, and moral decay within the ruling elite.
2. The ideals of justice, equality, and fraternity are often betrayed.

The Relevance of Djilas' Ideas Today

While The New Class was written in the context of Yugoslavia's socialist regime, its insights remain relevant across different contexts and eras.

Modern State Bureaucracies

1. Many contemporary authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes exhibit similar traits, with ruling elites controlling key institutions.
2. The concept of a "new class" can be applied to analyze corruption, privilege, and inequality in various political systems.

Post-Communist Societies

1. After the fall of communism, many former socialist states experienced the rise of oligarchic classes resembling Djilas' New Class.
2. These groups often maintain privileges and influence comparable to those described by Djilas.

Corporate and Global Elites

- 1. Some scholars extend Djilas’ concept to analyze global elites—business leaders, politicians, and technocrats—that dominate economic and political life.

Critical Perspectives and Legacy

Djilas’ The New Class has been both influential and controversial.

Support and Praise

- 1. Recognized for exposing the contradictions and failures of socialist regimes.
- 2. Lauded for its insightful analysis of power dynamics and corruption.

Criticisms

- 1. Some argue that Djilas’ critique oversimplifies complex social and political structures.
- 2. Others contend that his focus on elite privilege neglects broader structural issues.

Legacy

- 1. Djilas’ work remains a foundational text in political sociology and the critique of totalitarian regimes.
- 2. It continues to inspire debates on power, privilege, and social justice.

Conclusion: The Enduring Significance of The New Class

Milovan Djilas’ The New Class remains a vital critique of power and inequality within socialist societies, offering a lens through which to understand the persistence of elitism and privilege in various political systems. His insights challenge us to recognize the subtle ways in which revolutionary ideals can be undermined by the very structures meant to uphold them. Whether in historical contexts or in contemporary governance, the concept of The New Class invites ongoing reflection on how power is maintained, who benefits from it, and how societies can strive for genuine equality and transparency.

In summary, understanding Milovan Djilas and The New Class provides crucial insights into the nature of political power and social stratification, making it a must-know for students of political science, history, and sociology. As societies continue to grapple with issues of inequality and corruption, Djilas’ analysis remains a powerful tool for critique and awareness.

Questions & Answers About milovan djilas the new class

No	Question	Answer
1	Who was Milovan Djilas and what is 'The New Class' about?	Milovan Djilas was a Yugoslav politician and intellectual who authored 'The New Class', a critique of communist regimes, arguing that a new ruling elite had emerged in socialist societies, replacing the traditional bourgeoisie with a self-perpetuating communist elite.
2	Why is 'The New Class' considered a significant work in political theory?	'The New Class' is significant because it exposes the emergence of a bureaucratic elite within socialist states, challenging the idea that communism would lead to a classless society and highlighting issues of corruption, power, and inequality within such regimes.

3	How did Milovan Djilas's ideas in 'The New Class' influence political thought?	Djilas's critique influenced debates on socialism and authoritarianism, inspiring dissidents and reformists by revealing the corrupting influence of power within communist parties and questioning the legitimacy of the ruling elite.
4	What was the reaction of the Yugoslav government to Djilas's 'The New Class'?	The Yugoslav government condemned Djilas's book, viewing it as a betrayal and a threat to the socialist system, leading to his imprisonment and suppression of his ideas during the communist era.
5	In what ways does 'The New Class' remain relevant today?	'The New Class' remains relevant as it offers insights into how power structures can evolve within supposedly egalitarian societies, and it is often referenced in discussions about corruption, elitism, and governance in modern political contexts.
6	What are the main criticisms of Djilas's concept of the 'New Class'?	Critics argue that Djilas's concept oversimplifies complex political systems, and some believe it underestimates the potential for reform within socialist states or overemphasizes the role of a ruling elite as a permanent class.
7	How did Djilas's personal experiences influence his critique in 'The New Class'?	Djilas's firsthand experience as a high-ranking communist official who became disillusioned with the regime allowed him to identify and articulate the mechanisms through which the ruling elite maintained power and privileges.
8	What impact did 'The New Class' have on the dissident movements in Eastern Europe?	The book provided intellectual support and validation for dissident movements by exposing the internal contradictions and corruption of communist regimes, inspiring calls for reform and greater transparency.

Milovan Djilas, The New Class, Yugoslav socialism, Marxist theory, political elites, class struggle, communism critique, Titoism, political hierarchy, revolutionary theory