

## Book Review

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**DRAGAN SIMEUNOVIĆ, “POLITICS AS THE ART OF ILLUSION”,  
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Here is a book discovering the curtain behind which a wizard is hiding, but also more than that. It provides an insight into the man's rule over man technology. It clarifies the platform that carries the content of the illusionist, explains the ways of communicating that content, as well as the effects of the successful deception and illusion. And to make the subject of the research more complex, we assert that the scientific contribution of this capital work lays, firstly, in the paradigm of realism. The secret of the highest level of mastery of how dreams turn into reality. The work before us is not a normative-ontological debate, but a tangible model of the state-political machinery and its managers, being close to material realism. The book “Politics as the Art of Illusion” is an indicator of the measurement standard of post-Marxist realism in Serbian political science. The name of this absolute measurement of success in perceiving reality in the political sphere is the author of the book - Prof. Dragan Simeunović.

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The book is introduced by the Preface authored by Prof. Dragan Stanić (Ivan Negrišorac). We highlight the lessons in the text that make us aware of the importance of the concept of illusion in postmodernity. The lessons instruct not only the readers, but also members of the social elite in Serbia to create an organizational infrastructure that could absorb and apply the political thought of the author of the book. According to Stanić, such an application would be "safeguarding". We agree with this assessment.

The book consists of four chapters and almost 500 pages. The first part is introductory and explains the concept of politics. The second part relates to the means of politics, and the third, most extensive part to a very fundamental explanation of the entire political sphere. This part offers a basic presentation of the theory of politics as a discipline to the reader. The fourth part is entitled "The Big Scene" and presents an analysis of the Serbian national question in an international context. This analysis focuses on the Yugoslav idea, Serbia's relations with Russia, the phenomenon of collective guilt, globalization, and territorial borders.

In the first part, the author introduces the concept of politics starting from pre-politics and the origin of politics. Even before man appeared, in the world of nature, hierarchy and leadership existed in the animal world. Following the conscious activity of man on the historical scene, the politics appeared. It was in the form of the first communities of interest such as the polis, urbs or parish. The ability of a community to close within itself gives politics a security dimension. What's more, this dimension determines politics through the construction of the first rampart of the polis, as the first public property and the first public affair (*res publica*). The paradigmatic transition from a normative concept of politics to a modern one is illuminated by the accounts of the historical role of such scholars as Aristotle and Machiavelli. Reflections on these topics function as an indispensable theoretical basis to explain the concept of illusion in politics. The state as an institution is the first stage for an illusionist in politics. The state is the first institutional framework for mass communication of political illusion. The

foundations of such communication can be found in the oldest civilizations such as ancient Egypt. Political illusion as a manifestation and deception is the main instrument of manipulation to gain power and maintain power. Hence, it might be perceived as a tool with the same level of efficiency as the force. Those two phenomena, being of the same level, have mutual connections. When the illusion starts losing its power, the force takes its place as an instrument of maintaining the power. Although it is the end of the illusion, it is not the end of the fantasy. The deception of illusion returns in the form that Simeunović calls "counter-illusion".

In the second part of the book, Dragan Simeunović adds respect, dream and lie to the instruments of politics in addition to political illusion and force. Respectfully towards the respect, the author points to the security dimension of this phenomenon, arguing with Alfred Adler's concepts. Thus, Simeunović asks a research question: "Does the human desire to be respected stem predominantly from narcissism or perhaps from the need to protect ourselves and thus, from the survival instinct? Adler even believes that there is a special drive for respect."<sup>1</sup> Answering to the question, he proves the hypothetical position that man's need to be respected is equally caused by innate narcissism and the need to be safe.

The historical, but also contemporary, need of man to interpret the dream implies human need to see their future. Fearing an uncertain future, man needs to predict upcoming events. By interpreting Adler, Simeunović indicates man's need to act in daily life as if he knows what the future brings, so that he can be as prepared as possible. Accordingly, the significance of dreams remains important for politics, too, because the irrational always interferes in making the decisions that should be rational.

Further explaining political illusion in this part, Simeunović looks back at Socrates, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, Jovan Dučić, to clarify

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<sup>1</sup> Simeunović, 2022, p. 79

man's innate need for illusion. Explaining the need, he also describes the conditional relation that man has towards the truth, and above all towards the truth about himself. This book shows the reader that illusion is necessary to make one's life easier and happier. The principle of this necessity exists both at the individual and general level.

Simeunović, further, detailly maps the relation to truth, which is the foundation of man's relation to illusion, arguing with the thoughts of Radimir Lukić, Heidegger, Oskar Wilde, Goethe, Nietzsche, Jaspers, St. Augustine, Immanuel Kant, Hannah Arendt, Aristotle, Plato, Dostoevsky, Karl Marx, Mihailo Marković, Boško Telebaković, Berdyaev, Tolstoy, Helmut Plesner, Napoleon, Jung, Francis Fukuyama, Giovanni Tomasi, Ljubomir Tadić. The reader will be taken aback by his illusions about the general, assumed acceptance of the importance of truth in human society. Due to a discrepancy between what people really want from the truth and what they really get from it, there is a wide space in the political sphere for the creation of political illusion through lies.

In the third part, the author offers an extensive analysis of the entire political sphere, particularly through the lens of political illusion. The chapter on the state takes us through the dichotomy of legitimizing and non-legitimizing concepts of the state. The state in its normative-ontological and philosophical understanding is a means to achieve the common good. Through the concept of the common good, set in such a principle, one enters the field of political illusions and manipulations. The legal determination of the state is viewed primarily through the paradigm of theories about the social contract and theories about the state of nature.

The state of law developed in the German legal tradition in parallel with the English rule of law. The state of law ushered Europe and North America into the era of bourgeoisie and industrialization. The American and French revolutions dealt a blow to absolutist feudalism, followed by the demise of feudal relations and the beginning of class societies. Opposite the state of law, there is its antipode - the political or party state. The European experience has

been developing on the axis between the German state of law and the French revolutionary republic.

The national state comes as a product of civil emancipation of nations from empires, through the unification of national markets, the introduction of equality before the law. Nations are formed according to two basic principles: 1) the French concept of the nation, 2) the German concept of the nation. They emerge in different historical circumstances and can be based on Otto Bauer's concept of "community of destiny". In addition to the old European nations and nation-states, there are also new nation-states that emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the process of replacing one collectivist ideology - communism, with another collectivist ideology - nationalism.

The justification of the democratic state as the ideal of the modern world is linked to the fulfillment of certain institutional conditions that separate real democratic states from proclaimed democratic states. The difference between what is proclaimed as an ideal and what citizens get in the distribution of power leaves room for politics as an art of illusion. Democratization as a process was accompanied by the process of introducing elements of economic equality among citizens through solving the accumulated social problems of the liberal, bourgeois state. That process led to the creation of the social state and the welfare state.

At the end of the chapter on the state, the author explains the origin and existence of non-legitimizing concepts of the state through a description of the characteristics of an authoritarian and totalitarian state.

In the next two chapters, the author focuses on political violence and legal and illegal forms of gaining and retaining power. The reader gets a quality insight into the intertwined concepts of power, force, violence, authority, and rule; causes and foundations of violence in politics, as well as types and basic and complex forms of political violence. Reduction of political power can be legal or illegal. When talking about illegal forms of reduction of political pow-

er, the author introduces us to the realm of coups and conspiracies. Political conspiracy is always at the basis of political overthrow, *coup d'état*, putsch, uprising, political and social revolution.

The chapter on ideologies is another chapter where politics and illusion are perhaps most obviously intertwined. If we assume that fantasy lies at the base of every illusion and compare that to the fact that every ideology is a result of failed attempts by political theory to abandon fantasy, we come again to the sphere of manipulation of beliefs and emotions. Ideologies can be general or specific.

The chapters on political parties and political leadership provide not only the historical genesis of political parties from original political groups such as the Whigs and Tories, but also a substantive explanation of the necessity of the parties' roles in a democratic society. The author classifies political leaders, from antiquity to the present, into three types of political leadership that we see as historical. These are charismatic leadership, traditional leadership, and rational leadership. A charismatic leader is continually demanded. The demand just shifts from the person to the family, and then to the function. The sphere of politics, where charisma is still an indispensable element of influence on people, is at the same time a sphere of illusion.

In the chapter related to the illusion on the elite, the author shows an alternative way of observing the phenomenon of elitism. In addition to presenting the standard theories of the elite conceived in conservative reflections on social stratification, further leading to anarcho-syndicalism, but also to fascism, the author presents the fate of the elites in SFRY, FRY and in contemporary Serbia.

The fourth part of the book entitled "The Great Scene" tackles the issues of the Yugoslav idea between reality and political illusion. In the next chapter, Simeunović enters a realistic analysis of the relations between Serbs and Russians and interprets that relations through various historical periods

aiming to determine where the border between reality and myth is. The relations between Serbs and Russians are observed in the period of the Nemanjić dynasty's rule, after the fall of Byzantium, in the period when the Russian Empire reached the shores of the Black Sea, during the Serbian Revolution from the beginning of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. A separate chapter refers to the illusion of collective guilt as a pre-Christian tradition of European clans and tribes that was useful in the fight against the enemy. It was the idea of inheritance of the father's sin. A particularly impressive chapter of the book's fourth part is dedicated to the relationship between the nation and globalization and all the current challenges of the globalized society such as migrations and the process of re-sovereignty.

The book "Politics as the Art of Illusion" by Prof. Dragan Simeunović is a major scholarly piece, a new crown of the magnificent academic career of the great Serbian political scientist. Our strongest impression is the author's ability to combine scholarly and social contributions in one book through a study that addresses equally the academic and general public. Therefore, we would rate this book as enlightening because it has the potential to edify every reader, regardless of their education. It has been written in a language clear to everyone, communicating new insights into old knowledge. We would return to the wise message of Ivan Negrišorč that the political elite in Serbia is obliged to create adequate social infrastructures that would enable dissemination of the author's political ideas to the benefit of the national security and Serbian national identity.