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RICHARD MILLS, *THE POLITICS OF FOOTBALL IN YUGOSLAVIA: SPORT, NATIONALISM AND THE STATE*, I. B. TAURIS, LONDON, 2018.

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In the region of former Yugoslavia, football has recently attracted widespread attention to itself again. The reasons are not exclusively sporty, such as Croatia winning the silver medal at the World Cup in Russia, but also political. We have witnessed many political tensions during the last World Cup. There were tensions between Croatia and Serbia, but also between Serbia and the Swiss National Team because of goal celebrations of Swiss players of Albanian origin.

Considering these recent events, Mills' book appeared with perfect timing. This book reviews the history of football in Yugoslavia from the very beginning in 1918 till the bloody break up in the 1990s. Naturally, football is just a means that Mills uses to explain key concepts such as nationalism, ideology and nation-building. The book is divided into three chronological parts. The first one includes the interwar and the World War II period. Three chapters of the second part cover the period from the foundation of the Second Yugoslavia in 1945, to Tito's death in 1980, while the last four chapters cover the last decade of the state and the war period in the former Yugoslav countries.

Intrinsic problems of the interwar monarchy could also be recognized in football, where tensions between the two administrative centers, Belgrade and Zagreb, culminated in 1929, parallel to widespread political tensions in the state. In the next decade, football portrayed political and national separatism, with the final formation of the Croatian Football Federation (HNS) on August 6th, 1939, even before the formation of the Banovina of Croatia.

Mills does not leave workers' sports clubs on the margins of this monograph but deeply analyzes their development in the context of the resistance they provide in the war period. And while some of the leading clubs took part in newly formed leagues in quisling states, (semi) illegal experiences of workers' clubs, proved to be a solid basis for the struggle against domestic and foreign enemies. The closer the final victory in the war was, using football in state-building rose. Hajduk Split changed from being a 'bourgeois' club to being the bastion of the revolution, contributing to international recognition of the new state (p. 71). But, the end of the War did not bring complete discontinuity with the prewar situation. Although there was a radical cut in institutional and

organizational terms, many problems that burdened the post-war football had roots in the practice of pre-war football life. But, even though the football was widely used as a means in the process of state-building after liberation, its role was twofold. However, the effects of politics were not only positive in this early period, because even though it was ideologically cleaned, the football field remained a space for showing political and nationalistic aspirations.

In the two decades after the Tito-Stalin split, football continued to reflect the achievements of the revolution, and at the same time it was being liberalised and decentralised as the rest of the society. Yet, throughout this ideological struggle, the Party was aware of football's potential to destroy the revolutionary attainments, but their efforts to control the game were ineffective, leaving the market and national interests to triumph (p. 134).

Mills points that football, in the last decade of Tito's life, was "entwined with political commemorations, socialist innovations and celebrations of the multi-ethnic state" (p. 165). While the evolution of the self-governing socialism continued along with liberalization and decentralization, the situation in the whole society, as well as in football, was much more difficult to control, so the Party was forced to intervene several times. Mills points to a symbolic moment from the Hajduk and Red Star's match in May 1980, but not because of

the tears after the news of Tito's death, but because of the lesser-known clash of domestic fans and soldiers who came to support the Belgrade club.

Just as the country experienced its own crises after Tito's death, football also experienced its own, which resulted in a loss of confidence in institutions and clubs in the 1980s. But far more important than that was the appearance of a fan culture that appeared in parallel with nationalism that threatened to ruin the multiethnic foundation of the state, so attention was shifted from events on the ground to the ones in the stands. Maksimir event was one of those, and Mills dedicates a whole chapter to what he calls "The Maksimir Myth". While many commentators represented this event as the beginning of the end of Yugoslavia, Mills sees it as an excessive myth, primarily because of other big incidents that occurred without ethnic tensions, but also the fact that the League, Cup and National team lasted for another whole year after this event.

There are objections to Mill's book, such as the missing theoretical framework or the fact that the book did not shine in the methodological sense. But in spite of all this, it is an excellently written monograph that will not be read exclusively in academic circles. *The Politics of Football in Yugoslavia* will be compulsory literature not only for those who are interested in Yugoslav studies but also for those who are interested in the wider history of sports.