

REMEMBERING AS REINTERPRETATION: TRANSITIONAL WINNERS AND LOSERS, THE CASE OF *NOVA REVIJA* INTELLECTUALS

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1. Introduction

History is not simply what happened in the past, a factual recapitulation of supposed past events, but their interpretation, the meaning of past events for the observer. Because our perspectives on events differ with change of social position in relation to others, we also tend correspondingly to interpret events in different ways. Our individual perception of events also changes as we go through the cycles of life because of our cognitive development (changes in our sensory and emotional dispositions and our way of thinking). Our brains or minds are not archives of unchanging past memories which we can activate at will at any given moment with a push of an imaginary “attention button.” Any given past event will be influenced by our succeeding new, relevant experience and revised continuously. When a psychoanalyst, for example, listens to descriptions of dreams by middle-aged people that they had as children, such narratives should be interpreted with caution, as more or less self-serving, personal revisions. The same is more or less also true of our memories of waking life: as our individual and social perspective changes, our perspective on past events is accordingly transformed. Our own personal reflections on the transition from authoritarian socialism to democratic capitalism in Slovenia are in this sense no exception. It is not an objective account of social facts but a subjective rendering influenced by numerous later events, relevant to the author’s perspective.

Collective histories of groups of individuals are embedded in histories of larger populations of individuals, involving continuous negotiations among its members concerning which interpretations of past events are relevant for the group as a whole. The current public debate in Slovenia over the interpretation of the Second World War (i.e., how to evaluate the role of the communist led guerrilla movement on the side of the Allies and of the home guards collaborating with Fascists and Nazis) is an illustration of these processes on the level of the community as a whole. This debate was being suppressed by the communist regime throughout the post-war period and has resurfaced in full only with the advent of democracy in the 1990s.

The subject of our interest will be differences in interpretation of the historical transition from socialism to democracy in Slovenia. Broadly speaking this is the period of the past quarter of a century, from the

appearance of the punk youth subculture in the late 1970s, which was followed by new social movements (peace movement, feminists, gays, Greens, etc.) and the intellectual dissident movement in the early 1980s (above all journalists and publicists in increasingly autonomous media such as the journal *Mladina*, Radio Študent, the journal *Nova revija*) during the time of authoritarian communist rule, to the self assertion of political parties, mass media, the Catholic Church, and other civil society organizations in the period of democratic political rule from the 1990s on.

We will focus on the group of intellectuals surrounding *Nova revija* and attempt to discern how they interpret the socialist past as well as the democratic present. This circle of intellectuals represented one of the most significant dissident intellectual groups under socialism (although not the only one, as they often like to claim). Once the old regime fell, internal differences arose among *Nova revija* intellectuals and it soon became apparent that most of them had affinities with conservative political parties. *Nova revija* soon became an important articulator of conservative ideology in Slovene political life. We are not implying that it was the only conservative ideological elite (the Catholic Church, for example, is also very important, although its role is not as transparent and direct), but merely that we will limit our analysis to *Nova revija* intellectuals. We will carry out this analysis by interpreting the pronouncements of some key dissident figures on subjects relevant to our discussion (e.g., Jože Pučnik, Dimitrij Rupel, and others), along with the writings of their secret admirers, closet dissidents, who became vocal anti-communists only in the 1990s with the institution of democracy (Peter Jambrek, Vasko Simoniti, and others). Furthermore, we will analyze their pronouncements in two distinct periods of post-communist rule: when they were in the political opposition and perceived themselves as transitional losers, and since 2004, when conservative political parties which they support came to power, implying a shift in their self-perception to that of transitional winners.

A transitional loser is defined as a person who believes that his or her status did not change in the transition period from socialism to democracy according to his or her sense of justice—for example, opinions expressed by *Nova revija* intellectuals were no longer perceived as significant by political elites when coalitions of left oriented parties were in power. We define a transitional winner as a person whose status in the transition period is changing according to his or her expectations of what is legitimate—for example, members of the *Nova revija* group gained privileged access to media when the present conservative coalition of parties came to power.

The basic hypothesis of our analysis will be that interpretations of the socialist past and democratic present are significantly influenced by political socialization in the socialist authoritarian regime. This holds true

for citizens in general as well as for intellectual and political elites in particular. It seems very probable that a generation or two will have to pass before the influence of the old regime on our perception of the nature of political life will wither away. This is true of adherents to both leftist and rightist political parties.

The crux of the question is the crucial effect of political socialization under communism on Slovenes' political perceptions, especially on the perceptions of politics on the part of the intellectuals who are the subject of our analysis. Possessing the authoritative word was crucial for the maintenance of the regime because the monopoly on power in communist countries was based on the exclusivity of ideological interpretation of events, which could certainly not be founded on the claim of greater efficiency, or on the belief that the avant-garde party possessed the means to achieve a communist future that could not be gambled away at democratic elections in the present. The regime was created and maintained by people who believed in the authoritative nature of the word when spoken by the right person and from the right position, and as a result the party elite as a rule felt threatened by the word of the uninitiated, by people not under party control. The word understood in this fashion, as the Word, was of strategic importance and the monopoly on its use had to be guarded at all costs. Dissident intellectuals' rival ideological interpretations of social development were, as a result, not perceived by communist party officials as mere empty verbiage, as just another symbolic threat to the symbolic order from a group of disenchanting intellectuals, as would be the case in democratic political systems, but rather as a real threat to the regime's existence.

This made the work of dissident intellectuals dangerous, but paradoxically it also made it very significant in their own eyes. Their intellectual activities were seen as of central importance not only to party officials but also to many other members of society. In such a political climate, dissident intellectuals generated a highly exaggerated view of their own significance as well as of their contributions to society. As a result, they came to perceive themselves as central figures of public life under socialism, as the beacon of light leading the "common" people to affluence and democracy. The implication of this is that a significant number of dissident intellectuals under socialism were seduced into authoritarian interpretations of political life. Their understanding of democracy was a combination of old regime traditions and new democratic aspirations. They are democrats in principle, but traditionalists in reality, with an inherent mistrust of the so-called "masses." They have little patience for democracy as a system in which all citizens are formally equal and participate in public decision-making procedures. The idea of a political system as an arena in which elites debate the relative merit of substantive claims has a much greater appeal to them. As a consequence, they were often disappointed

when their substantive claims were no longer perceived in the 1990s as central by anyone except their ideological adherents. In such situations they tended to perceive themselves as transitional losers. Insult was added to injury when their substantive claims to justice became minority, opposition opinions. The formal system of democracy as it was implemented was increasingly perceived as a betrayal of supposedly true, substantive democratic ideals. Throughout the 1990s, the conservative intellectual elite around *Nova revija* believed that it was given these ideals for safekeeping until true democracy would prevail in the country.

This implies that we can expect remnants of traditional political values, and what is even more important, of traditional methods of doing politics, to remain significant in present-day Slovene political party life in general and in the ideology of *Nova revija* intellectuals in particular. In what follows, we will analyse the position of *Nova revija* intellectuals in two post-socialist periods: when they were for the most part in opposition and perceived themselves as transitional losers and when they came to positions of power (since 2004).

2. *Nova revija* intellectuals in opposition

For a larger part of the 1990s, liberal democrats (led by Janez Drnovšek) and social democrats (reformed communists) formed left-of-center coalition governments. On the other hand, political parties of the conservative pole (Christian Democrats, Slovene Democrats, etc.) were by and large in opposition. The group of conservative intellectuals around *Nova revija* were increasingly baffled by this state of affairs and started interpreting this as an—in their opinion—unbearable and illegitimate political situation. In what follows, some of their basic observations will be presented.

2.1. Continuity with the old regime

In the opinion of *Nova revija* intellectuals, democracy in Slovenia is only apparent and old communists still have all real power in their hands. In the second half of the 1990s, eight prominent *Nova revija* intellectuals (Drago Jančar, Franc Bučar, Niko Grafenauer, Pučnik, Simoniti, Jože Snoj, Rudi Šeligo and Ivan Urbančič) issued a political pamphlet in which they claim, among other things:

We have a formal democracy, i.e. almost all the centers of power are occupied by people whose manner of thinking and methods of governing were shaped during the time of the one-party system which, whether during the completely totalitarian era or during the more liberal phase, was ultimately a non-democratic period. (...) What is contentious (...) is their

practice, which is the outcome of the old political philosophy. There still remains the authoritarian manner of governing, there still remains the unpreparedness for dialog: public authority, assisted by the media and the legislature, is de facto controlled by persons from the previous regime (1997: 36).

Numerous similar critiques were expressed in this period. In a debate of members of the editorial board of *Nova revija*, Pučnik explicitly stated that continuity exists between the liberal democratic government of Drnovšek and the old communist undemocratic regime: “In my opinion we have a government today which has methods of functioning—despite a different legitimacy—that in no way whatsoever substantially differ from the government in the second half of the 1980s. Maybe it is in many ways even worse” (1998: 36–37).

Democracy of the 1990s in Slovenia is only formal and this is, in their opinion, insufficient. On the substantive level, members of the old regime are still pulling all the strings, and because many people are not aware of this—naively thinking that the political system is democratic—the situation is even worse than under communism.

2.2. Totalitarianism

We see that they took it for granted that the new democratic governments of the 1990s were embedded in the old regime. But what precisely was the nature of the old regime? According to the *Nova revija* intellectuals, it was totalitarian.

In a collection of articles on communist Slovene history published by *Nova revija*, the historian Vasko Simoniti wrote an introduction in which he analyzed the phenomenon of totalitarianism (Jančar 1998: 24–36). He defines totalitarianism with the following indicators:

- violence of the ruling party against its own as well as against foreign citizens (several hundred thousand people were executed after the war, approximately 150,000 to 200,000 Germans as well as 26,000 Serb volunteers, Croatian Ustashi and Slovene home guards);
- political monopoly of the communist party to power (all autonomous political life was banned);
- secret police (Ozna) terror against its citizens (some 25,000 people were victims of political trials);
- control over all economic life (dispossession of peasants, nationalization of banks, factories, shops, etc.).

For Simoniti, totalitarian rule was in force in Slovenia until 1990. In his opinion, Slovene citizens were threatened to the last moment of communist rule by secret mass executions, total political control of social life, secret police terror, and total control of economic life:

In different periods of the forty-five year rule totalitarianism had both severe and milder forms but was at its demise still totalitarian. Right up to the end there was namely still the possibility of the use of repressive measures against ideological enemies (1998: 35).

In the opinion of *Nova revija* intellectuals, left-of-center governments of the 1990s led by Drnovšek were not only contiguous with the old regime but with a communist totalitarian regime.

2.3. Elites

If the 1990s were characterized by continuity with totalitarianism, then it should come as no surprise that *Nova revija* intellectuals were able to detect continuity on the level of social elites as well. Frane Adam, citing a study by Anton Kramberger, sums up three of its main conclusions:

- high level of reproduction of political, economic and cultural elites;
- high level of accommodation of these elites to new circumstances;
- centrality of the political elite (1999: 99–100).

Most respondents who had elite positions in 1988 retained these positions in 1995 (the rate of reproduction was 83%). The rate of reproduction was somewhat lower in the political elite (71%) than in the economic and cultural elites (89%). These data were interpreted by Adam and other conservative intellectuals as problematic, as evidence of an incomplete, only partial transition from socialism, while Kramberger disagreed. A heated sociological polemic ensued.

Jambrek gives a political interpretation of the supposedly high level of reproduction of old elites:

Because of its status, institutional and informal power as well as its gravitational ability (on the basis of financial and institutional power) to co-opt individuals from competitive groupings, the ruling group—which coincides with the informal nomenclature of the old regime—has a dominant and at least transitive monopoly to power (1999: 13).

In the opinion of conservative ideologues of *Nova revija*, left-of-center political elites, subordinated to ex-communist officials, function like social

“black holes,” sucking in all individuals approaching elite positions. It is as a result not surprising that in their opinion all elites are by and large elites controlled by communists.

2.4. The Media

According to these observers, the crucial resource that enables the old elites to maintain continuity with totalitarianism is control over the media. In a public statement of thirty-two authors closely associated with *Nova revija*, some of Slovenia’s basic problems are enumerated, including the fact that the “media, above all the daily press, are politically one-sided” (1999: 397).

For Jančar, the claim that the press functions as a fourth branch of democracy is only a bad joke in the case of Slovenia (2001: 5): “In this case post-communist rulers and their servile post-communist editors in reality strive with all their might to maintain the status quo: it is in short a way of ensuring the dependency of the media.”

Conservative intellectuals came up with the idea of media equilibrium as a desired state of affairs, as a precondition of a democratic society. And as the media in Slovenia were not equilibrated in the 1990s, the country was undemocratic. According to *Nova revija* intellectuals, practically all media were in the hands of leftists (the public television, all daily newspapers), while only two publications were pluralistic (the right-oriented *Mag* and *Demokracija*). In 2003, the leader of the political opposition, Janez Janša, demanded media reform which would, among other things, transform public television (giving one channel to position and the other to opposition parties) and inaugurate a special public fund for the pluralization of the daily press (one of its main functions would be to finance a conservative daily newspaper) (Tomc 2006: 137–38).

According to *Nova revija* intellectuals, control over media by the old communist elites significantly contributed to the rule of totalitarian continuity in Slovenia.

2.5. Cultural crisis

The authors of *Nova revija* were not simply calling attention to a number of differences in political attitudes between two political blocks. In their opinion, Slovenia was divided into two antagonistic camps—communist forces of continuity and conservative opposition advocating democratic reform. But this was not a mere conflict of political interests, of totalitarianism and democracy, but a clash of cultures.

In the aforementioned public statement, the group of thirty-two authors claims: “Ten years after the Majniška declaration, Slovenia is in a

global and cultural crisis that is already effecting the development of the Slovene nation and its historical interests, even our national identity is being threatened” (1999: 398).

Pučnik stated that the structural crisis of people’s values and of the political and economic systems is endangering basic human rights of Slovenes as well as their very material and existential interests: “Because we are dealing with a general cultural crisis, the only possible exit from this situation is a cultural renewal of Slovenian society and state” (1999: 46).

In short, national identity and individual well-being are threatened as a consequence of communist continuity. Simply winning the elections was thus no longer perceived as sufficient for these conservative intellectuals. It was a precondition that had to be followed by a cultural renewal carried out by the radicals of the conservative block.

2.6. Conclusion

In long years of opposition in the 1990s, intellectuals of the *Nova revija* group elaborated an ideology, a system of opinions, underlying and informing political action. We are dealing with an ideology because:

- it is a system in the sense that all opinions represent a meaningful homology, in our case a conservative outlook on life;
- it consists of opinions (value judgements about social facts) which are not true or false (as data of scientific research) but rather appear just or unjust to the interpreter (they are subject to moral evaluation);
- and its function is instrumental (it serves as the agenda of political parties or movements of the conservative political block).

With this in mind, what can be said of this conservative critique of the first decade of Slovenian independence? When analyzing the supposed continuity with the old regime, our conservative ideologues claim that the Slovene political system is merely a formal democracy. This indicates an influence of Marxist ideology on their thinking (where “real,” substantive, socialist democracy is also distinguished from the merely formal, bourgeois, capitalist democracy). But in reality, modern democracies ensure only formal equality of its citizens.

Second, our authors leave totalitarianism largely undefined. In political science it is usually defined as a combination of totalistic ideology, one-party rule, charismatic leader, and state control over civil society. According to this definition, Slovenia was certainly not a totalitarian society in the 1980s: Tito was dead, the ideology was so complex that it was being defined in numerous different and often mutually exclusive ways, civil

society was no longer under strict control as numerous social movements and dissident groups attest to, while the federal party was decomposing into eight national parties. Because the Second Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s did not fit their scheme of a totalitarian state, intellectuals of the right were forced to coin such oxymorons as “soft totalitarianism” for the political system of the period in Slovenia.

Third, what is high reproduction of elites is a matter of personal opinion and not of scientific knowledge. It is especially difficult to talk of high reproduction of elites in a society that experienced decades of self-management socialism that incorporated many non-communist or only nominally communist people to elite positions.

When intellectuals of the *Nova revija* group spoke of the high reproduction of elites, they were conveniently forgetting that they were also among members of elites in the old regime. Namely, we can find among them people who in the 1970s and 1980s were editors in state publishing houses, professors at state universities, renowned artists who received numerous state awards, sociologists who wrote tracts on the superiority of self-management, and others. And finally, the assertion that media equilibrium is the only possible arrangement in a democracy is compatible with functionalist social theory. In the reality of modern democratic states the market functions as the crucial regulator of media. The idea of media equilibrium is thus homological with a conservative ideological outlook and not inherent in a modern formal democratic arrangement as such.

3. *Nova revija* intellectuals in positions of power

Jambrek is one of the most articulate and ambitious ideologues of the conservative block. He amalgamated all the conservative ideological critiques of political reality in Slovenia in the 1990s into a program of political action in the year 2000, four years prior to the conservative block's accession to power. His analysis is very Gramscian—an explanation of how elites (in his case financial) dominate over politics (parties) and civil society (media) and consequently also over beliefs of citizens (voters at elections). It is familiar reading for anyone who knows his Marx—that is, Jambrek tells us how ruling ideas are translated into ideas of the ruled and how financial capital (the “material base”) functions as the source of all other power (of the “superstructure”). Jambrek expressed this theory quite explicitly:

According to political theory there are at least three sources of power. Firstly, there are ballots of voters, secondly, there are media, and thirdly, there is financial power. Financial power is transformed into media power and media power is transformed into the number of votes, and all of these are very

naturally interconnected. Does a financial corporate system exist which could, based on its own interests, help to maintain or to create a new option? (...) When twelve or fifteen names of companies are enumerated—Laško, Union, Gorenje, Mercator, Luka Koper, Krka, Lek, Ljubljanska banka, Telekom, Triglav, Petrol, Istrabenz... —it becomes obvious that we are dealing with a system with sufficient accumulation to establish any new option. This is an interesting system, rather well coordinated, and internally connected, compatible. We are not dealing with an organization but a network. Let us further presume: does this system have any common interests? It does. And if it does, than it would be normal to expect that it will strive to buy the government. It buys the government by buying parties and by buying the media (Žerdin 2005: 17).

According to this somewhat Machiavellian theory, money buys power (political parties) and persuasion (media), while voters (sheep) follow obediently. It is a very deterministic theory that—this was probably not the intention of the author—condemns the conservative block parties to the status of eternal opposition, as no social actor is envisaged which could restructure the existing networks of status quo. It is also implied—perhaps also unintentionally—that all government is inherently corrupt and, by extension, that all media merely express business interests. Be that as it may, Jambrek's theory was disproven empirically four years later when left-of-center parties were defeated in elections, despite the fact that such an event was, according to our author, a theoretical impossibility.

Jambrek might be a determinist in theory but he did not leave things to fate. Together with his friends from *Nova revija* he organized a civil society initiative called Assembly for the Republic, which actively supported right-wing political parties in the 2004 elections. They did not limit themselves to ideological support but also organized numerous public meetings and financed them as well. The financial support is seen by some as problematic, because while *Nova revija* is a private company it also receives substantial subsidies from the state (at the time governed by a Liberal Democratic government). Thus when *Nova revija* spent approximately ten million Slovene tolar for the political campaign (a part of this debt, the money spent for Rupel's private plane trip to a meeting of the Assembly for the Republic during one of his state visits as foreign minister of the previous regime, still remains unpaid), it was, according to some critics, hard to distinguish private donations from state subsidies. But no matter how problematic the operation was, in the view of some critics, after the elections no one took the trouble to investigate it thoroughly.

When the conservative political block of parties (Slovene Democrats, New Slovenia, and Slovene Peoples Party) came to power in

2004, they had two possible courses of action. They could exercise their new-found authority in keeping with the liberal ideology they professed during the election campaign and as a consequence distance politics from centers of wealth and social influence, or they could give in to temptation and, now that they finally had the opportunity—following Jambrek's plan—subordinate the economic elite and the media, thus ensuring permanent power to the conservative block of parties. It soon became obvious that liberal ideology had been put on indefinite stand-by. Political authority is being used to carry out the cultural mission, to break away from the purported communist continuity that has supposedly penetrated into all the pores of Slovene society. To achieve this goal, the Janša government had to delegitimize the past as continuous and totalitarian, to purge the old elites, and then to conquer the media. The voters, of course, would follow automatically.

3.1. Continuity

Today's Slovenia is in many ways still perceived by many as continuous with the communist regime. We are still in a sense living in the past. Let us illustrate this with the case of judiciary. In its counter-revolutionary zeal, the new conservative elite has little patience for such elementary principles of democracy as an independent judiciary. When a verdict is not according to their liking, it often becomes subject to bitter criticism by the authorities. The last illustration of this is the acquittal of suspects in the case of the beating of a journalist (who later became a member of Slovene Democrats and eventually also their member of parliament). After the verdict, Prime Minister Janša had this to say about the judiciary in Slovenia:

Those who had power in Slovenia more or less uninterruptedly for the last sixty years had in this period constructed a special kind of one-party, to authority subordinated judiciary system as well as agencies of prosecution and investigation. They controlled everything—from professorships on faculties to holidays in prisons. (...) The unravelling of the case which is disgraceful is thus a logical consequence of the state of affairs and of the approach at the very beginning. (...) The godfathers have punctually provided for a cover-up. I hope that after normalization of affairs which has in spite of everything begun—because of the effort of numerous honest and independent individuals in the judiciary, the prosecution and the police—it will in the future become possible to come to the bottom of the case. As a matter of fact, I am convinced that the truth will come to light and with it also a just trial (Brlec 2006: 13).

To recapitulate, Slovenia's prime minister believes that there still exists, in 2005, a communist regime, and that communists continue secretly to control the judiciary, but that under his leadership honest individuals (which in all likelihood should be understood as members of his party and other sympathizers of the regime) will eventually prevail.

After another acquittal, this time of onetime prominent communist party official suspected of crimes against civilians after the end of Second World War, a well-known conservative publicist had this to say about the trial:

His communist comrades had learned enough from him that they were able to maintain in Slovenia communist courts which do not judge according to law and truth but rather according to current needs of leading communists. This goes even so far that they managed to infiltrate his son into the ranks of constitutional judges, even though he was for a while a leading Slovenian communist (Sirc 2006).

To recapitulate, according to Ljubo Sirc, the judiciary under the Janša government is still communist, its decisions must still be to the liking of leading communists (i.e., members of the left opposition parties and their sympathizers), and the proof of all this is the fact that Mitja Ribičič's son Ciril managed to become a constitutional judge.

The conservative block government is not able to transform the judiciary elite as quickly and as efficiently as it was able to restructure the business elite. Reforms are being debated in parliament which would lead to a greater influence of the executive over the judiciary branch of government—for example, a five-year probation period for young judges and a changed structure of the judiciary council that appoints judges (a greater number of political parties and civil society members in it). The reforms are being introduced in the name of greater efficiency, but critics warn that it will lead to the erosion of judiciary autonomy. There were also disputes between the Minister of Justice Lovro Šturm and representatives of the judiciary because of his refusal to appoint their candidate to the district court in Ljubljana. Recently there was also a public polemic when five Supreme Court judges endorsed a right-wing candidate for mayor of Ljubljana. The first one to protest was the president of the Supreme Court himself but his opinion did not dissuade the five judges. Other critics soon followed and pointed out that such behavior was until then unheard of in democratic Slovenia. But most damaging is the fact that the judiciary code explicitly forbids it. The function of a judge is incompatible with support of political parties or candidates for political office. Not insignificantly, government officials did not comment on the controversial situation.

3.2 Totalitarianism

The problem with delegitimization of the past lies in the fact that for many Slovenes the role of communists in the Second World War is still an important source of legitimacy of the old regime. Opinions by voter preference indicate this:

- 66% of the people who voted for reformed communists (Social Democrats) and 61% of those who voted for Liberal Democrats perceive the role of home guards in the Second World War as collaboration with Fascism and Nazism;
- while the communist-led partisan movement is perceived as collaboration with Stalinism by only 10% of the people who voted for Slovenian Democrats, 30% of those who voted for New Slovenia and 39% of those who voted for the Slovene Peoples Party see it the opposite way (*Mladina* 2006: 20).

It is obvious that any radical revision of history would be perceived as unnecessary and undesirable by most standards in such a cultural context. Despite this, the conservative coalition is cautiously attempting to reinterpret history. Ideal opportunities for this are state holidays at which members of the government tend to equate all forms of armed resistance in the Second World War. A typical example of this is a speech on the day of resistance to Fascist and Nazi occupation forces by France Cukjati (head of parliament and member of Slovene democrats). In his speech he stated that many partisans and home guards realized at the end of the war that their ideals had been betrayed, but it was not their fault that this was so. It was the fault of Stalinists and Nazis. He then concluded:

It is time that our Slovene motherland becomes the mother of all its children. It is time that it becomes capable of recognizing and acknowledging genuine patriotism in all different resistances of the Slovene nation, regardless of the color of the worldview which they had. Only then will this day become the day of all Slovenes and only then will the value of resistance shine in its pure meaning for the future of the Slovene nation also (*Delo* 27 April 2006).

Cukjati equates all resistance movements in the Second World War, in our case resistance to Fascism and Nazism on the side of the Allies and resistance to communism on the side of the Axis forces, as morally identical. What enables Cukjati to make such an equation is his insistence on the hegemony of Slovene nationalism over all other considerations. All other ideologies pale in comparison with patriotism. Both resistance movements were in his opinion forms of collaboration, but they are redeemed by personal ideals of the people involved (above all adherence to Slovene nationalism, but also to Western European traditions). We are

dealing with a complete moral relativization and ethnicization of our history. Such a nationalistic reinterpretation of history has numerous undesirable and unintended consequences. One of them: if Slovene partisans can be accused of collaboration with the Soviet Union, then so can the American and British allies. This of course means that Cukjati's ideological discourse is for domestic political consumption only.

Another, similar attempt at relativization of history is legislation on war veterans. The problem with the legislation, proposed by Minister of Social Affairs Janez Drobnič, is that it does not explicitly state that those who collaborated with occupation forces in the Second World War are not entitled to benefits. Collaboration with occupation forces is not even mentioned. According to conservative block politicians it is not mentioned because this is supposedly an ideological category. But the minister went even further. In his opinion, those collaborators who were not punished in a court of law are not guilty and should be treated as fighters against communism. According to opposition parties (but suspicions are also being raised by the coalition Pensioners' Party), the conservative block parties are attempting to equate partisan and home guard veterans of war and in this fashion to reinterpret the Second World War and its consequences.

There are also attempts to revise Second World War history through revision of primary and secondary school textbooks, but the process is still being carried out by members of the historical profession. Basic changes were already carried out in the early 1990s (in the direction of less politics, more social, cultural and economic processes) but the present minister of education, Milan Zver, is far from satisfied. In 2005 he attempted to add two new members to the commission for history (both are closely affiliated with his Slovene Democrats). He also publicly supports a substantive revision of textbooks in which all subjects that divide Slovenes would be omitted. It comes as no surprise that one such subject is, in his opinion, the question of collaboration during the Second World War (Pirc 2006: 14).

It is in this context not surprising that attempts are also being made to revise the contemporary history of Slovenia. On the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of Slovene independence, Prime Minister Janša stated:

When the tanks of the Yugoslav Peoples Army started to shoot at the Slovene nation, numerous fervent advocates of socialism renounced it. Alas, not all: the editorial board of *Dnevnik*, some editors of *Mladina*, a segment of the Liberal Democrats of Slovenia, and a segment of the War Veterans, as well as some participants in the national liberation struggle, for example, greeted their intervention and criticized the Slovene government which led the resistance (Žerdin 2006a: 20).

It comes as no surprise that the prime minister enumerated the above “advocates of socialism” as collaborators with the Yugoslav Peoples Army. They are all his current political opponents—the two remaining left-oriented media outlets in the country (*Dnevnik*, *Mladina*), the main opposition party (Liberal Democrats), and veterans of the Second World War (ex-partisans collaborating with the Allies). The prime minister was manipulating contemporary history for contemporary political purposes—to belittle all opposition to his government. Accusations of collaboration are especially absurd in the case of *Mladina*, the most outspoken magazine during opposition to the socialist regime of the 1980s as well as during the struggle for independence. Paradoxically, Janša was an important contributor to the magazine at the time when it was supposedly advocating socialist ideology. It remains unclear why he chose to remain silent on the subject for two decades. When the Museum of Contemporary History prepared an exhibit on the anniversary of independence, they had to rely mostly on the photographic material of *Mladina*’s journalists (fifty-nine out of ninety-eight photographs). But since *Mladina* is disliked by the conservative coalition, the name of the magazine for which they were made was omitted in the exhibit catalog .

3.3 Elites

Transition from socialism to democracy was very gradual in the case of Slovenia and the high level of reproduction of elites (political, economic, and cultural) testifies to this. The Liberal Democrats who were in positions of power for a large part of the 1990s saw no need for a revolutionary change in elite composition. Reliance on old economic and cultural elites remained significant. World Bank and International Monetary Fund suggestions of more radical reform (privatization, market regulation, foreign capital) were to a large extent ignored and Slovenia opted for economic gradualism and significant state intervention. Because the expectations of most citizens are more social democratic (the welfare state must insure the basic needs of its citizens, such as social and health insurance, right to education, etc.) than liberal (every individual is responsible for his or her own welfare), such policies were perceived as desirable and legitimate by most citizens.

The political elite retained a central role in Slovene society. In the economy, for example, a substantial segment of corporations remain under state control (perhaps even as much as a half of the whole sector). The political elite achieves this above all with state funds (Kapitalska družba, KAD and Slovenska odškodninska družba, SOD), which have significant shares in the ownership of many businesses. How was this situation created? It all started in 1992 with the privatization of the economy. In those companies that were privatized, the state retained 20% of its shares.

These served at least three purposes: to control the inflow of foreign capital into the country (hostile takeovers were not in the presumed national interest), to finance pension funds, and to repay those citizens whose wealth was expropriated after the Second World War (in those cases in which it was impossible to return their property in kind). Unfortunately, the unintended consequence of this privatization scheme was that the state with its 20% stake became a key economic player in most of the privatized companies with a very dispersed ownership structure. This enabled the post-privatization governments to place its political allies in control and management positions of many companies. As Matija Rojec and Janez Šušteršič observed that “it seems that hardly an important company exists in which the state does not have an important share as an owner” (Tomc 2006: 20).

As was already pointed out, a liberal program of privatization was never seriously considered by the conservative government. From its accession to power, the government used state funds to create a new, conservative economic elite that is closely affiliated with the new government. In his 2004 study of economic elites, Žerdin shows that during the first year of conservative block rule, top management in big companies was as a rule installed by the new government. He concludes that “the logic of recruiting to the top of the hierarchy of influence is distinctly political” (2005: 22).

According to Žerdin, eighteen top managers of fifty of the largest Slovene companies were removed from their positions by the new government since 2004, when it came to power, which represent roughly one-third of all positions (2006: 22). In light of these purges, the polemic among Slovene sociologists in 1999 about the levels of reproduction of elites between 1988 and 1995 can be perceived in a new light. According to conservative sociologists (above all Adam), these reproduction rates were too high and indicated that the transition from communism was in effect not carried out by the Drnovšek governments. It was up to the new conservative government to remedy the situation. And the government needed no special encouragement to carry out the task.

Not only top management but numerous control and lower management positions were also being purged. According to Žerdin, the new economic elite is being recruited from three main sources: first of all those candidates of the new coalition who failed to be elected to the parliament in the 2004 elections, secondly from relatives of the ruling coalition members, and thirdly from a wider circle of sympathizers of the coalition. President Drnovšek had this to say on the subject:

The government ranks into top positions in economy as well as in other institutions people with inadequate experience. It seems that membership in a political option is all that counts.

They are replacing experienced and successful managers without any hesitation with beginners who have never proven themselves. The case of the head of one of our largest power supply companies who was replaced by a person who previously sold cars in a store is an outstanding example of this (2006).

As a consequence, the centrality of the political elite in society, typical of the old authoritarian socialist regime and something that was often criticized by *Nova revija* intellectuals when they were still in opposition, thus remains a significant structural characteristic of contemporary Slovene society. According to many critics, politization is becoming even more explicit.

3.4 The media

A more equilibrated media situation was high on the priority list of *Nova revija* intellectuals' ideological demands in the 1990s. Did the new government pursue it when in position of power or did it follow a more liberal policy of media autonomy in the market, a position more in keeping with its manifest liberal ideology?

It soon became obvious that the government was on a mission to restructure the media landscape. It all started with politicians from the winning political option making explicit threats against journalists in key media institutions. Rupel, foreign minister in the new government, stated that the media in Slovenia were at war with the conservative block and continued by observing that "in some places media owners would deliberate carefully whether it was worth going to war with the political side that won the elections" (Tomc 2006: 138).

This turned out to be a harbinger of things to come. First on the agenda was the public radio and television channel. Because it was supposedly controlled by leftists, the government proposed new legislation in parliament giving the ruling coalition a decisive role in radio and television policy by putting its people into all key management positions. The opposition contested this policy. In the ensuing referendum the opposition lost by a small margin and public television and radio came under closer governmental scrutiny.

Because daily newspapers are privately owned, the government had to use a different strategy, one involving state funds (KAD and SOD), to penetrate them. Its first victims were *Delo*, *Večer*, and *Primorske novice*. The example of *Delo*, the largest daily in the country, is indicative. It all started in the summer of 2005, when Premier Janša secretly met with top managers of two large companies (Laško and Istrabenz) and the head of the financial group Kmečka družba. At the meeting they agreed to sign two

secret contracts—Istrabenz with KAD and Pivovarna Laško with SOD—with the intention of buying approximately 29% of Mercator's shares owned by the state. Soon after that Mercator's top management was replaced. But this was only the first half of the deal by which the government got rid of undesirable "left-wing" management at Mercator. Then Infond Holding, a company related to Pivovarna Laško, sold approximately 20% of its shares in the media house Delo to KD group. Because KD Group represented the conservative coalition's interests in this deal, the government soon gained control over the newspaper *Delo*, too. Purges of ideologically incorrect management could begin in full force. They first changed top management in the company, which in turn proceeded to replace most of the newspaper's editors. It all began with warnings. Ervin Hladnik, who was at the time the editor of a weekend supplement, recalls how Foreign Minister Rupel, who obviously has plenty of time to deal with domestic policy as well, invited him to lunch:

He told me directly and bluntly that the government considers *Delo* to be a hostile newspaper and the supplement "Sobotna priloga" is particularly adverse to the government, that this is intolerable. He said something to the effect that I am not to worry because Janez Janša will really take care of it. That I should come to my senses because otherwise things will change in a different manner (Trampuš 2006: 37).

Indeed, things did change in a different manner. Once the government altered *Delo*'s top management, it was also able to replace its key editors, among them Hladnik. How were these purges justified? Danilo Slivnik, a right-wing journalist and now a top manager of *Delo*, claims that it was not a matter of ideology but of attitude towards the new government. When Liberal Democrats were in power, the newspaper supported them, but under new political circumstances things had to change. It is unacceptable that *Delo*'s journalists are anti-NATO, anti-American, and anti-globalistic under a conservative government (*Mladina On-line* 2006). It is apparent that Slivnik's conception of political democracy is compatible with that of Rupel and obviously of the coalition as a whole in contemporary Slovenia, the media must conform to political parties which are in positions of power, or else face the consequences.

A good illustration of how media function after they have been "equilibrated" is the coverage of candidates for mayor of Ljubljana in the 2006 local elections. The state-controlled national television has proven to be very biased. Data for the period 1 August–31 September show that Franc Arhar, the right-wing parties' candidate, had 7.51 minutes of coverage, the Liberal Democrats' Jožef Kunič 2.24 minutes, the Social Democrat and sitting mayor Danica Simčič 1.48 minutes, the popular independent candidate Zoran Jankovič 1.38 minutes, and all the other twelve candidates

put together 8.10 minutes (Štamcar and Petrovčič 2006: 8). Critics point out that Stane Granda, president of the civil initiative Assembly for Ljubljana, which supports Arhar's candidacy for mayor, is also head of the program council at the national radio and television channel. While top management of national television sees no conflict of interest in Granda's case, they immediately suspended Peter Vilfan as basketball commentator because he is a candidate on Zoran Jankovič's¹ list for city council.

But governmental control is not limited to the "equilibrated" media like the national television. The government is also able to exert pressure on the privately owned POP television station. When the prime minister found out that a piece that could, in his opinion, be unfavorable to the coalition government in the local elections would be aired, people from his office contacted top management at POP and let them know of the consequences this would bring—government controlled advertisers would shun the channel. As a consequence, the piece was temporarily retracted.

But despite all the purges, the media are still perceived as a major problem by the conservative government. Politicians frequently stress its negative role in the society. When Prime Minister Janša spoke of economic reforms, he pointed out three obstacles: "The media represent one of the most serious obstacles for a more rapid reform process, for a shift in thinking and a developmental breakthrough" (Grgič 2006: 2). The second problem, according to the prime minister, are citizens themselves, because they obstinately stick to the old socialist conviction that some rights have been given to them and have to be guaranteed by the state (social democratic values), while the third obstacle are the opposition parties themselves which are against the reforms proposed by the government (the prime minister expects unanimous support for his policies).

This type of discourse, which locates the government's political problems in civil society and autonomous individuals, in our case in the media, citizens, and the political opposition, is the result of the cultural mission of the conservative block, of its substantive goal, that of creating a new and better Slovenia, according to their standards, and is as such similar to the discourse of politicians of the old regime.

In a situation where most of the media have been intimidated directly by purges of top management and editors or indirectly with threats of withdrawal of advertising, where journalists have little experience and even less desire to uphold the dignity of their profession against governmental threats, and where opposition parties do not perceive the current democratic deficit as a serious problem, the statement of President Drnovšek was all the more significant. When the prime minister publicly

¹ Jankovič was elected with 63% of the vote in October 2006.

criticized him for not consulting the government concerning the visit of Serb Prince Karađorđević to Slovenia, the president retorted (N. R.: 2006):

The government will not subordinate the institution of the president. It is attempting to subordinate some others, the economy and the media, but it will not subordinate the institution of the president. Not while I am the president.

The clash of two leaders culminated when the prime minister refused to grant additional funds to the president and already announced visits abroad had to be cancelled as a result (for example, Drnovšek's visit to the king of Spain).

4. Conclusion

Slovene political elites, both left and right, have been socialized in the old regime and have, as a result, retained many of the old political traditions. We have tried to illustrate this by the example of the conservative block parties, specifically by the *Nova revija* group of intellectuals. They still perceive politics of the transition period as the arena in which conflicting substantive goals are competing for domination. Those who are in positions of power perceive themselves as transitional winners; those who are in opposition as transitional losers. We have illustrated what the substantive goals of these intellectuals while in opposition were:

- breaking away from continuity with the old regime,
- which is totalitarian,
- where old communist elites still exert control over public life,
- with hegemony maintained through domination over the media.

Once they achieved positions of power the goals of these groups of intellectuals soon became apparent:

- breaking away from the continuity with the old communist regime,
- by delegitimation of the totalitarian past (history of the Second World War) and of its propagators,
- by installing their own conservative elites,
- and by taking control of the media.

The new conservative elite perceives itself as a counter-revolutionary force. A journalist of the leading conservative daily *Delo* Ivan Puc, stated this very explicitly in the weekly supplement, "Sobotna priloga." He proclaimed the 2004 victory of the conservative coalition of parties as our October revolution. The comparison with Bolsheviks (it is not clear from Puc's

writing whether Janša in this analogy plays the role of Lenin or Stalin) is not accidental as can be discerned from the journalist's concluding remarks:

Some weeks ago the twenty-year old story of social democratic rule in Sweden came to an end. A lot of patience, ruthlessness, and egoistical cadre policy and changes which are implied in the shift of the October revolution will be needed before our current prime minister, Janez Janša, will be able to boast of such a story (Puc 2006: 1).

Somewhat paradoxically, the conservative block perceives itself as a counter-revolutionary ideological force fighting communism, which is still dominant in Slovene society. Because higher interests are at stake, in the last analysis the survival of Slovene society as such, the new elite can use undemocratic methods when striving for its substantive goals (ruthless and egoistical cadre policy) against its arch enemy, social democracy, which is just a euphemism for communist totalitarianism. The Slovene conservative block has pronounced undemocratic ideological characteristics. Its representatives often believe that they are on a mission of delivering Slovenia from the curse of communism. Democracy alone does not suffice for redemption. As is evident from the above quote from Puc, Swedes were delivered from the curse of social democracy in democratic elections, but Slovenes have been less fortunate. According to the author's conspiracy theory—and a consensus about its validity exists in the conservative block, as was illustrated—Slovenes are still being governed secretly by a communist lodge fifteen years after ousting communists from power and two years after winning elections against Liberal Democrats, who are just communists in disguise. As is always the case with revolutionaries, their belief in a conspiracy theory of their own making absolves them of responsibility for all possible wrongdoing—in our case, for example, of ruthless and egoistical cadre policy in the economy, the media, the judiciary, and the educational system.

We are witnessing what G.W. Hegel would probably call the "irony of history." The right-wing coalition came to power to disentangle Slovenia from its supposed continuity with the past socialist system. But they carried out their reforms in such a fashion that the political subsystem of society became even more traditionalistic than it was previously, thus in effect drawing Slovenia closer to its socialist past than it has ever been after independence. Slovenia, of course, still has a democratic political system, but significant elements of authoritarianism are nevertheless present.

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POVZETEK

SPOMINJANJE KOT REINTERPRETACIJA: TRANZICIJSKI ZMAGOVALCI IN PORAŽENCI, PRIMER INTELEKTUALCEV NOVE REVIJE

Avtor analizira razumevanje tranzicije iz socializma v demokracijo v Sloveniji na primeru intelektualcev Nove revije. V prvem obdobju tranzicije, ko so bile na oblasti levo-sredinske vlade, so doživljali tranzicijo kot izdajo, medtem ko skušajo sedanjo vladavino desno-sredinske vlade izkoristiti za kulturno predrugačenje slovenske družbe. Razlike v orientaciji v obeh obdobjih avtor opazuje na petih dimenzijah: kontinuiteta s starim režimom, totalitarizem, elite, mediji in kulturna kriza. Sklene z ugotovitvijo, da so bile slovenske politične elite socializirane v starem režimu in so zaradi tega ohranile številne tradicionalne metode političnega delovanja.