

THE POLEMIC BETWEEN THE *SLOVENIJA* SOCIETY IN VIENNA AND COUNT AUERSPERG IN THE SPRING OF 1848

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The public exchange of letters between the first Slovene political society, which was formed in Vienna in April 1848, and Count A. von Auersperg (a German-speaking poet known by the pseudonym Anastasius Grün, a native of Carniola) originated in a discussion of the question of the participation by Austrian representatives in the work of the Frankfurt parliament. This was one of the key questions about which Slovene public figures had to formulate their standpoints in the period of the revolutionary uprising of the spring of 1848. It was in their polemic with Auersperg that the Slovene liberals, who had only recently opted for political struggle, first expressed their views about several aspects of the future development of the Austrian Empire and its nationalities.

The basic aim of the German middle-class, democratic revolution of 1848 was the unification of Germany. During its very first days a movement developed for the convocation of parliament in order to decide Germany's fate. The German liberals proposed two options for the unification of Germany: the first under Prussia and the second under Austria. The democrats favored the creation of a German republic. It was proposed that a United Germany should comprise all the Austrian crown lands, including the Slavic (Czech and Slovene) lands—i.e., all the territories of the German union. The Frankfurt parliament was convoked on 31 March to determine the regulations for elections to the All-German legislative parliament.

The prospect of the creation of a United Germany was alarming for the Slavs who constituted parts of the Austrian crown lands. If the Austrian monarchy would be maintained within its existing framework, the Slavs hoped that, given favorable circumstances, they would be able to assume a preponderant position. (Incidentally, fears of this happening prompted many Austrian Germans to support the Frankfurt parliament.) If Austria entered the German Union, the situation would be different. The Czechs and Slovenes would find themselves in a minority in the German state, and their nationalities would be threatened by Germanization. The formation of a United Germany which

included a number of Slavic territories would thus constitute the failure of national liberation aspirations among the Slavic peoples of Austria.

The struggle with Frankfurt was initiated by the Czech liberals, who refused to take part in the elections to the German parliament. On 11 April their leader, František Palacký, wrote a strongly-worded letter against Austria's participation in the work of the Frankfurt parliament, and as a counterbalance to the idea of a United Germany proposed the creation of a federation of Austrian nationalities.

This letter also stirred up Slovene public opinion. The Slovene liberals developed in the same month a campaign for boycotting the elections. The *Slovenija* Society in Vienna was extremely active. On 20 April it issued the pamphlet "Appeal to the Slovene Nation," written by K. Dežman. Germany wished to strike a mortal blow against the newly-awoken Austria and its Slavic peoples, said the *Appeal*, and all the peoples of Austria should rise to its defense. The society called upon Slovenes to refuse to take part in the election of deputies to the Frankfurt parliament, to protest against the government election decree (of 15 April), and to demand an official recording of this protest.¹

Auersperg, as a supporter of the unification of Germany, then initiated a polemic against the *Slovenija* Society. He traveled to Ljubljana from Vienna during the last week in April in order to urge his fellow-countrymen to participate in the elections.

Auersperg shared the progressive views of the German liberal middle class and, as is noted by the Slovene scholar Breda Požar, "he held a correct position with respect to the nationality question." At that time the Austrian Germans still saw no threat to their position from the Slovene national movement, considering this latter to be purely cultural.² Auersperg was sympathetic toward the national development of the Slovene people, was interested in Slovene culture, and collected Slovene folksongs and translated them into German.³

¹ Meta Sluga, ed., *Zgodovina Slovencev* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1979) 451.

² Breda Požar, *Anastasijs Grün in Slovenci* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1970) 38.

³ These translations were published in 1850. Vasilij Melik, "A. A. Auersperg in

In early April Auersperg had been elected Viennese deputy to the Frankfurt parliament. His ideas about the form of the future German Union were as follows. He thought it would be necessary to renounce Austrian sovereignty and make the Austrian emperor subordinate to the central government in Frankfurt; he argued, however, that each nation in the Union should have the right to object to laws instituted by the All-German Assembly.⁴ The Austrian deputies in Frankfurt demanded that in a United Germany there should be guaranteed protection for nationalities and equal rights for the Slavs of Austria. Auersperg came out, additionally, in favor of these conditions being extended to “the Slavs in Styria, Carinthia and Carniola.”⁵ He clearly thought it essential that the national rights of his Slovene compatriots should be guaranteed in the future German Union. To his credit one must say that subsequently, when he was Ljubljana Deputy to the Frankfurt Parliament, he was one of the first to renounce his commission and return home, convinced that the German program was unacceptable to the peoples of Austria. He fulfilled the promise he gave in the spring to those who elected him: that he would return if a majority of them expressed their opposition to a union with Germany.⁶

In Ljubljana on 26 April Auersperg's letter entitled “To my Slovene brothers” (with reference to the appeal made by the *Slovenija* Society of Vienna) was published. In it, as in the next letter dated 6 May, Auersperg tried to convince the Slovenes that union with Germany was inevitable, and that it was the only salvation for Austria.⁷ Germany was not preparing to “strike a mortal blow against Austria”; on the contrary: association with the German Union would guarantee freedom and equality of rights for the Austrian Slavs.⁸ On the German side, this argument was at the time widely used; for example, Baron Andrian gave similar assurances on the pages of the *Laibacher* on 22

slovenski narod,” *Zgodovinski časopis* (Ljubljana) 4.1/2 (1987): 285–86.

⁴ Anastasius Grün, *Anastasius Grüns Werke in sechs Teilen*, ed. Eduard Castle, vol. 6 (Berlin: Bong, 1909) 132.

⁵ Melik, 286.

⁶ Još Apih, *Slovenci in 1848. leto* (Ljubljana: Matica slovenska, 1888) 105.

⁷ *Werke*, 131, 136.

⁸ *Werke*, 132.

April, when he declared that “. . . Slovenia will flourish only under the trusteeship of Germany.”⁹

Auersperg called upon the Slovenes to participate in the elections to the Frankfurt Parliament and defend their viewpoints in it. If, however, they should feel in the activities of the parliament a threat to their nationality, let them then express their protest publicly before the whole of Europe by walking out of the parliament.¹⁰ In protesting against the elections to Frankfurt the Slovenes were acting “under the influence of the hateful old system” of Metternich, which was contrary to the aspirations of the new Austria.¹¹ For this reason, their alienation from Germany would also be an alienation from Austria.

In a confrontation between Slavic and German interests, Auersperg saw a threat to the integrity of Austria, which could split into two (German and non-German) parts. This in turn would be succeeded by the Slovene provinces breaking apart into fragments, since they were held together only by their anti-German inclinations.¹² And would the Slovenes be able to exist without Austria? Were they sufficiently “prepared to provide for their Slovene compatriots an independent Slovene-national government and to maintain it?” For the Slovenes, in Auersperg’s opinion, the only choice was between one of the powerful states: either (together with Austria) joining Germany, or joining Russia. “Every step that you take away from Germany brings you immediately closer to Russia.”¹³ Auersperg expressed himself even more clearly further on when he explained that he was afraid of the Russians, not as enemies of Germany, but as “friends of Austria and the Austrian Slavs.” He would consider assistance from the Russians as “the greatest misfortune” for Austria.¹⁴ The suspicion that the Slavs of Austria were inclined to Pan Slavism, a suspicion which was typical of Austrian (and not only Austrian) Germans in 1848, was groundless: no

⁹ Apih, 95.

¹⁰ *Werke*, 133, 141.

¹¹ *Werke*, 131.

¹² *Werke*, 141.

¹³ *Werke*, 132.

¹⁴ *Werke*, 143.

aspirations to rely on Russian help in the struggle for their national rights were at that time expressed by the Austrian Slavs.

At the end of his second letter Auersperg emphasized that he believed in a great future for the Slavs, and expressed the hope that the Slovene people would for the time being remain under the trusteeship of Austria, "their elder sister," and would not express views contrary to her interests. And when Slovenia were to attain full maturity, separation would occur naturally and would not be so painful.¹⁵

In a reply to Auersperg's first letter, written by M. Dolenc and published in Vienna on 30 April,¹⁶ the Viennese Slovene liberals again voiced their opposition to a union with Germany and their support for a free and undivided Austria. A political union with Germany, in their opinion, would be a threat to the political, economic and national development of the Austrian peoples. The Austrian Empire would then "sink to the level of a German region," significant damage would be done to its industry and trade, and the Germans would "break the staff of our [Slovene, LAK] nationality with their preponderant majority." Not without foundation were the Slovene liberals wary of a German *diktat*, insofar as the representatives of Austrian Slavs, as indeed those of the Austrians as a whole, would be in a clear minority in the Frankfurt parliament.

It was in this polemic that the economic rationale for the struggle of the Slovene liberals against union of Austria with Germany was first heard. The Slovene national activists had as yet no sense of an economic need for the unification of the Slovene lands; they did not conceive of a Slovene economy that would be separate from that of Austria. For them, the trade and industrial interests of the Austrian Empire coincided with those of Slovenia. In this way the fear of German economic competition strengthened the national feelings of the Slovene liberals. Later, with the further development of the Slo-

¹⁵ *Werke*, 143.

¹⁶ "Offenes Sendschreiben des Vereines 'Slovenija' in Wien an herrn A. Grafen v. Auersperg (Anastasius Grün), Wien, 30. April 1848," in *Auersperg: Iz zapuščine. Mapa 3, 1848*. Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica v Ljubljani, rokopisna zbirka st.f. 310/3.

vene nation, some Slovenes came to fear Austro-German competition also; but in 1848 there was yet no mention of this.

In response to Auersperg's criticism that they were acting against Austria's volition, the members of the *Slovenija* Society in Vienna wrote that, should Austria take a step that would bring damage to the whole empire, and if it were not to heed the warning call by the Slovenes, then it would be left to the latter "at least not to tread together with it on that fatal path." In this could be heard an idea which was, in general, uncharacteristic of the Slovene national concept in 1848: the idea of a possible separation from Austria. Later, in the summer and fall of 1848, during the most heated period of Slovene-German relations, this idea would again occur to the Slovene liberal ideologues; but no special significance should in our opinion be attached to it. In the spring of 1848 separation from Austria was understood by the Viennese Slovenes merely as a gesture of despair, an extreme measure against the catastrophe that was threatening the empire. Moreover, this idea was expressed in the heat of argument. It was premature and superficial, and did not become firmly established in the Slovene national consciousness. Further, such a sharp denial of obedience to the government was an act of political courage that was evidence of the complete involvement of the Slovenes in the political struggle in the Empire.

When they spoke of the future existence of the Slovene people within a reformed empire, the members of the *Slovenija* Society in Vienna did not, essentially, dispute the thought expressed by Auersperg of the impossibility of immediately creating a national government for Slovenia; for they considered that the hitherto existing policy, which was inimical to their own nationality, would not allow the Slovene people to attain this level of progress. Only the further development of the Slovene people would prepare the ground for the creation of a Slovene state system. In addition, the Slovenes in 1848 shared the general European opinion that only a large state could be a viable one. Writing in the spring of 1848 of a future free empire, the Slovene liberals presupposed its being maintained in an unchanged form, and insisted on its indivisibility. In their first national program, the program for a United Slovenia, which they formulated during this period, they envisioned a union of the Slovenes of Carniola, Carinthia, Styria and the Littoral into one province of the Austrian Empire, and the introduction of the Slovene language into schools and public institutions.

When they, like other Austrian Slavs in 1848, came out in favor of the maintenance of the integrity of the empire and the reinforcement of the Slavic element within it, the Slovene liberals interpreted any attempt to separate from the empire as a betrayal of its peoples' interests. They set the same limits to the national liberation movements of other Austrian peoples as they set to their own, regardless of the different levels of their national political and cultural development. The zenith of any aspirations had to be national autonomy within the framework of a federal Austrian monarchy.

This particular feature of the philosophy of the Slovene liberals was demonstrated clearly for the first time in the correspondence between the *Slovenija* Society in Vienna and Count Auersperg; the subjects addressed were, however, the national liberation and unifying movements of the Italians and the Poles. Thus the Viennese Slovenes accused the Frankfurt Parliament of striving to "satisfy all the discontented of Europe at Austria's expense,"—to create independent Italian and Polish states and to tear away Galicia, Lombardy and Venetia from the empire, against the interests (as the Slovene liberals assumed) of the majority of these peoples. They were also opposed to the reunification of Poland and of Italy because they feared the establishment, on the borders of the Austrian Empire, of two strong and possibly inimical states alongside Russia.

Later, in the summer and fall of 1848, several articles from the *Slawisches Zentralblatt* and the *Gazeta Povšechná* containing critical assessments of the Polish national liberation movement were reprinted in the liberal newspaper *Slovenija*. Specifically, they wrote that the Poles did not wish to make use of the advantages of the national freedom that was promised to them in Austria;¹⁷ that they aspired to create their own state to the detriment of the unity of all the Austrian Slavs;¹⁸ and that they were attracted to a republican form of government.¹⁹ It is probable that the thoughts expressed in these publications made an impression on many Slovene activists and assisted the growth in Slovene society of a negative attitude toward the struggle for unity of the

¹⁷ *Slovenija* (Ljubljana: J. Blaznik) 1848, 5: 17-18.

¹⁸ *Slovenija* 1848, 28:110.

¹⁹ *Slovenija* 1848, 37:145.

Polish people. The development of an opinion of this kind was influenced also by the fact that the Polish middle-class democrats and several liberals from Galicia who in 1848 voiced their opinion in support of Polish independence saw the Hungarians and Germans as their allies.

The impatience shown by the Viennese Slovenes toward the national movements of the Poles and Italians drove Auersperg to a sharp rejoinder: "You, gentlemen, see in the rise of Lombardy only the vanity of a small group within a nation; but I see therein a great universal historical importance, namely the rebirth of that struggle for unity and independence for which Germany arose in its freedom struggle against Napoleon, and which must now find a peaceful solution on a parliamentary basis."²⁰ As was correctly remarked by the Slovene scholar Vasilij Melik, Auersperg's words sound "significantly broader and more progressive" than the views expressed in this connection by his Slovene compatriots.²¹ The representatives of the German liberal left wing recognized the national rights of the Polish and Italian peoples (in distinction to the rights of small "unhistorical" peoples). The struggles for and against the unification of Germany, Italy and Poland were one of the many points of disagreement between the German and the Slovene liberals, points which contributed to the strengthening of their mutual antagonism.

In the correspondence between the *Slovenija* Society in Vienna and Count A. von Auersperg were vividly reflected some of the typical features of the political views of the leading Slovene liberals in 1848; the progressive philosophy with which, in rejecting the idea of a centralized German state, they supported the right of the Slavic peoples of the Austrian Empire to free national development and the transformation of the empire into a federation; and the narrow-mindedness with which they attempted to contain, within the rigid framework of the empire, all the national liberation movements of its peoples.

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²⁰ *Werke*, 140.

²¹ *Zgodovina Slovencev*, 451.

POVZETEK**POLEMIKA MED DRUŠTVOM SLOVENIJA NA DUNAJU IN
GRAFOM AUERSPERGOM SPOMLADI 1848**

Članek opisuje zgodovinsko ozadje in politične nazore, kakor sta jih izrazila društvo Slovenija na Dunaju in grof Auersperg (Anastasius Grün) aprila in maja 1848. Potem ko so bili zavrnjeni na zboru frankfurtskega parlamenta, so slovenski liberalci prvič v zgodovini izrazili svoje poglede na vlogo slovanskih narodov v okviru Avstrijskega cesarstva. Grof Auersperg je v odgovorih pokazal, da so bili v mnogih pogledih njegovi nazori naprednejši od onih slovenskih liberalcev.