

## THE LIBERALIZATION OF SLOVENE SOCIETY IN THE LATE 1960s

Božo Repe

After World War II Yugoslavia formally reinstated a multiparty political system which was legalized by the Law on Associations, Committees and Public Assembly prior to the first elections of 25 August 1945.<sup>1</sup> Article 27 of the Yugoslav federal constitution of January 1946 included the right of assembly. This regulation remained in effect until the constitution of 1963, which defined the leading role of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup> In 1965, further legislative changes indirectly led to a one-party system.<sup>3</sup> The leading role of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was made even more explicit in the 1974 constitution.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the multiparty system was replaced by "people's democracy," in which the People's Front played the central role. The Front nominally included political parties and mass organizations; decision-making power was in the hands of the communists. The purported purpose of this system was to smooth the transition to a socialist social order. The new government first dispensed with the opposition which refused to join the People's Front and later with the individual parties in the Front itself. In 1949, the People's Front adopted the program of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Law on Associations, Committees and Public Assembly, in the *Official Bulletin of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia*, no. 65: 636. This was a special supplement to the *Official Bulletin*, no. 36, issued by the Slovene National Liberation Council and the National Government of Slovenia (Ljubljana, September 1945): 301-302. At this time Slovene laws were published together with translated federal laws as special supplements.

<sup>2</sup> Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Basic Principles, Article 6 (Ljubljana, September 1945).

<sup>3</sup> Basic Law on Associations, in the *Official Bulletin of the SFRY*, 16.65 (1965): 723. The law no longer speaks about political parties but about associations; on the other hand, parties are not explicitly prohibited.

<sup>4</sup> Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Article 8 (Ljubljana, 1974).

Communist Party as its own program.<sup>5</sup> Its constituent parties effectively lost their power and disbanded. After 1949 organized opposition ceased to exist. An institutional opposition to the communist government was posed primarily by the Catholic Church

The Liberation Front had already ceased to be a coalition during the war, after the Dolomite Declaration of 1 March 1943.<sup>7</sup> The only opposition of note was the so-called Nagode group, which was active immediately after the war. It joined the Liberation Front at the beginning of the war but later withdrew because of the conflict between its own liberal orientation and the dominant role of the Communist Party of Slovenia in the Front. During the postwar election campaign, its members tried to establish special organizational networks, but the authorities frustrated the group's intention by instituting legal proceedings against it.

Despite the absence of an opposition and suppression of individuals and groups with alternative ideas, a critical attitude towards the government's politics persisted throughout the postwar period. It was particularly strong in the 1950s, especially among the intelligentsia and in cultural circles during a partial liberalization. The strongest opponent of the Communist Party politics in the Liberation Front itself was Edvard Kocbek, who in the 1940s spoke on behalf of Christians. After the 1950s opposition views were manifested chiefly in cultural disputes, in particular in certain journals (e.g., *Beseda* in the early 1950s, *Revija 57* at the end of the decade and *Perspektive* in the first half of the 1960s).<sup>6</sup> When, after varying time periods, the authorities judged that these journals had overstepped political bounds, they banned them.

From the end of the 1940s until the mid-1980s there was thus no organized opposition in Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, the authorities—especially after the 1950s—quietly supported pluralism in culture, arts,

---

<sup>5</sup> Vojislav Simović and Branko Petranović, *Istorija narodne vlasti u Jugoslaviji* (Beograd: Savremena administracija, 1979); Božo Repe, "Politična alternativa v Sloveniji in Jugoslaviji po 2. svetovni vojni: partijska in izvenpartijska opozicija," in *Povojna zgodovina na Slovenskem* (Slovenj Gradec: Koroški pokrajinski muzej, 1992): 11-19.

<sup>6</sup> Aleš Gabrič, *Socialistična kulturna revolucija* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1995).

and to some extent in journalism and philosophy, which offered various interpretations of Marxism and other philosophies. This so-called "quiet pluralism" was, of course, limited by the prohibition of political assembly and the Party's "tolerance level." For this reason persons generally critical of the regime, especially among the intelligentsia, vacillated as circumstances changed in various parts of the country at various times. Criticism was, however, limited to publishing articles in certain journals and was suppressed (by administrative and judicial measures) whenever it showed a tendency to escalate into a political movement. A group that did earn recognition in the 1960s was named Praxis, after a review of the same name. Its members, primarily Zagreb and Belgrade philosophers professing views that ranged from orthodox Marxism to existentialism and neomarxism, thought that intellectuals should constitute an informal but loyally socialist opposition.<sup>7</sup> An opposition or an "alternative" with any real power could exist only within the single, governing party.

The first ideological differences in the party arose soon after Stalin's death, when Tito used his influence to slow down the democratization process. At this time Eastern European leaders feared an anti-Stalinist movements, which could potentially endanger the socialist system. During this period, it also seemed possible that Yugoslavia might move closer to the Soviet Union once again. It was therefore only a matter of months before the party policy diverged from guidelines adopted at its Sixth Congress in November 1952 in Zagreb. At the congress, the party explicitly renounced its direct operative ruling status in state organs, the economy and society in general, and changed its name to the Union of Communists of Yugoslavia.<sup>8</sup> This change of course found expression in the conflict with Milovan Djilas, the main author of the congress resolutions, who at the end of 1953 wrote a series of articles describing how, in his view, Yugoslavia was gradually moving toward polarization, with a new "bureaucratic" class on the one hand, and a new socialist left on the other. According to Djilas, two socialist

---

<sup>7</sup> In the 1980s the Belgrade members of the group for the most part became adherents to nationalist philosophies and supported Milošević.

<sup>8</sup> *Zgodovina zveze komunistov Jugoslavije* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1986). Trans. of Janko Pleterski et al., eds., *Istorija Saveza komunista Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Komunist, 1985).

parties were a possible end result. Djilas's influence was felt in Slovenia a few years later, especially in *Revija 57*.<sup>9</sup>

A partial liberalization of the Communist Union of Yugoslavia occurred at the Seventh Congress, which took place in April 1958 in Ljubljana. The congress drew severe criticism from the communist parties of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries. The economic crisis, substantial differences within Yugoslavia which the centralized system could no longer manage, and more pronounced social differentiation resulting from the rising standard of living at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s led to unrest, including workers' demonstrations, the first example of which was the strike in Trbovlje, Hrastnik and Zagorje in January 1958.<sup>10</sup>

The beginning of the 1960s saw the first public conflicts between the republics and the federation. Initially they had to do with the economy. (In 1962 the Slovene delegation walked out of a federal assembly session on the Yugoslav economic plan).<sup>11</sup> Cultural polemics with political implications came next; for example, the dispute between the Slovene writer Dušan Pirjevec and the Serb writer Dobrica Ćosić on the nature of Yugoslavness.<sup>12</sup> The unity of the Yugoslav leadership became weaker, and two movements with different political visions arose: one, already tested, was centralized, posited a strong party, and a controlling, repressive apparatus; the other was more democratic, favored self-management, decentralization and reckoning with laws of economic development. Slovene politicians supported the second vision; they were, for the most part, also its initiators. Both movements counted on Tito's support. Formally, however, he did not side with either, and thus effectively promoted the centralizing one. Yugoslavia again moved closer to the Soviet Union.

---

<sup>9</sup> Božo Repe, "Vpliv 'djilasovščine' na *Revijo 57*, *Perspektive*," *Borec* 46.535-537 (1994): 948-940.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Ivanič, *Stavka v rudnikih Trbovlje, Hrastnik in Zagorje* (Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Božo Repe, "Utrinki iz bližnjega leta 1962," *Teorija in praksa* 26.11-12 (1989): 1498-1511; and 27, 1-2 (1990).

<sup>12</sup> Božo Repe, *Obračun s Perspektivami* (Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1990).

The political crisis was not addressed until mid 1960s, when Tito, for as yet unexplained reasons, allowed the federalization of the country and the formation of the Communist Union as proposed by the Slovene politician Edvard Kardelj. Yugoslavia became a union of states instead of a federal state, yet with control mechanisms guaranteeing the dominance of the center. These included a united party controlling all key governmental positions; a strong, centralized and politically influential military; and Tito as an institution with the highest authority, combining the country's three power loci—the party, the state and the military.<sup>13</sup> This redirection was first formulated in 1964 at the Eighth Congress of the Communist Union of Yugoslavia, which acknowledged that socialism had not dispensed with nationalities problems.

Socialism was then in the early stages of economic reform that commenced in 1965, and was also hampered by political conflict involving Ranković (i.e., the Brioni plenary session in 1966). Economic and political changes were formalized as constitutional amendments between 1968 and 1971, and became part of the 1974 constitution.<sup>14</sup> These legal changes were accompanied by strong nationalist pressures and also by nationalistic demonstrations, such as took place in Kosovo in 1968 and in Croatia in 1971.<sup>15</sup> Related to these were the intelligentsia's protest meetings in the 1960s and the 1968 student demonstrations. Political events abroad (e.g., the "Prague Spring" and the occupation of Czechoslovakia) likewise had an influence on Yugoslav political shifts.<sup>16</sup>

The political realignment at this time strengthened the liberal forces in some republics, in particular in Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia, and to some extent in Macedonia. Slovene "liberalism" of the late 1960s in fact meant greater political pluralism within existing political

---

<sup>13</sup> Dušan Bilandžić, *1971 godina u Hrvatskoj, ljudi iz 1971. Prekinuta šutnja* (Zagreb: Vjesnik, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> Božo Repe, "Slovenians and the Federal Yugoslavia," *Balkan Forum* 3.1 (March 1995): 139-154.

<sup>15</sup> Božo Repe, "Das Besondere am 'Titoismus,'" *Aufrisse* 13.2 (1992): 27-32.

<sup>16</sup> Božo Repe. "Študentske demonstracije leta 1968 v zahodni in vzhodni Evropi in v Jugoslaviji," *Zgodovina v šoli* 4.3 (1995): 13-20.

organizations—the Socialist Union of the Working People, the youth organization, and trade unions.<sup>17</sup> Its proponents appealed for continued economic reforms and favored a combination of a market economy and state intervention in social matters. They insisted on increased independence for Slovenia within the federation, ideally including the possibility of direct international contacts with other countries, foreign loans, and levies for the maintenance of the federation. The liberals advocated more discretion for the republics in defense policy (e.g., territorial defense units, the right to perform one's military in the home republic or in nationally homogenous units, and the right to use one's native language in the military).

The Slovene liberals' economic views began to form with the election of Stane Kavčič to the presidency in 1967. Kavčič was, indeed, the leading figure of Slovene "liberalism." Disagreeing with the ideologically driven favoritism towards heavy industry, he foresaw the development of more dynamic sectors; for instance, commerce, banking, transportation, tourism, engineering and, in the long run, also information and computer sciences. Slovenia, in Kavčič's view, would become a bridge between Eastern and Western countries but should primarily follow the Western examples, specifically those that combined social ownership of property and a free market. He favored development of natural resources—petroleum, gas, and nuclear energy. Administratively, Slovenia would be policentric, but with a uniform system of education, health care, research and science, and one, central fiscal policy. The more conservative wing of the leadership, which supported Edvard Kardelj and included France Popit, chair of the Central Committee of the Communist Union of Slovenia and assembly president Sergej Kraigher, had already attempted to remove Stane Kavčič and the "liberals" from power in the summer of 1969, at the time of the so-called "road affair." The phrase refers to the federal conflict

---

<sup>17</sup>

In post-war Slovene and Yugoslav history the term "liberalism" is used to denote the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. It was the time when important democratic changes occurred within the only and leading party, the CPY, which were also reflected in society. Party "liberalism" is in no way related to classic liberalism, except by a few fundamental democratic principles. The term is historical, it was used in 1960s and 1970s. Historiography accepted it, but usually it is used in quotation marks in order to differentiate it from classic liberalism.

over distribution of international loans for road construction. The federal government, then headed by the Slovene Mitja Ribičič, left out two sections of Slovene roads when considering the proposal for the distribution of the loans. The Slovene government reacted very sharply. Tito himself intervened in the affair and Kavčič's adversaries managed to limit his influence considerably. (He nevertheless remained the most popular Slovene politician.)

The "road affair" was followed by other disputes. Among the most important was the so-called "affair of the twenty-five deputies." In the summer of 1971 a group of republic deputies proposed, in addition to the official candidates, their own candidate, Ernest Petrič, for membership in the federal presidency. The move was in accordance with assembly regulations but without the consent of the Socialist Union of the Working People and the Communist Union. The deputies thus infringed upon the Communist Party's monopoly on appointments to high positions.<sup>18</sup> The reaction was harsh: some deputies' terms were shortened, while others experienced censure for years to come.

The conservative group used its newly gained dominance to attack newspaper editors, intellectuals, lower-level liberal politicians, teachers advocating an ideologically neutral school system, some university professors and other outspoken liberals. In 1972 they attacked Stane Kavčič himself and his supporters in the Slovene political leadership. Kavčič was forced to resign and never returned to politics before his death in 1987.<sup>19</sup> This attack was part of the general Yugoslav offensive against "liberalism," initiated and led by Tito. On 18 September 1972 Tito sent a letter to the members of the Communist Union in which he spoke of the union's resumption of indirect control and management of the society.

In Croatia and Serbia Tito inserted himself directly into the movement against the liberals. The constitution of 1974 held the leading role of the Communist Union of Yugoslavia as the sole source of political power in the country. It introduced a delegate system as a specific form of the self-management socialist democracy. Individual

---

<sup>18</sup> "Akcija 25 poslancev," *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* (1987): 101-102.

<sup>19</sup> Stane Kavčič, *Dnevnik in spomini* (Ljubljana: Časopis za kritiko znanosti, 1988).

deputies were replaced by delegations, which hindered the system and eliminated personal political responsibility. The economy became regulated by the Associated Labor Law (1976), and the so-called "agreement" economy—a closed, noncompetitive system in which only exporting companies, which faced Western market conditions, could prosper—came into force. The gap between Slovenia and its western neighbors, which had begun to diminish during the period of liberalization, again widened.<sup>20</sup>

The period of liberalism in the second half of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s was complex and contradictory, marked by jolting interruptions of new economic and political processes. From the national point of view Yugoslavia severely limited Slovene "liberalism." With the exception of proposals of political thinkers in emigration and emigre organizations, there were no political programs that included an independent Slovenia—at least as a member of a confederation—between 1945 and 1987. Circumstances at home and abroad militated against liberalism and there were no real prospects for its furtherance after the Prague Spring, after which Yugoslavia would continue to enjoy its reputation as the most democratic socialist country, with the support of both the USSR and U.S., who were desirous of a stable state. The liberal movement started and developed in a socialist country and within a single party, which accounts for its specificity. From today's standpoint, this liberalism was incomplete, inconsistent, colored by the ideology from which it originated and by the overall political context. It nonetheless represented a significant step towards pluralism in recent Slovene political history. Liberalism was an important experience that contributed to Slovenia's peaceful transition from a one-party system into a multiparty system at the end of the 1980's.<sup>21</sup> It contained concepts

---

<sup>20</sup>

Božo Repe, *'Liberalizem' v Sloveniji*, *Borec* 49.9-10 (1992).

<sup>21</sup>

Although liberalism was defeated, many economists continued to believe that a market economy was inevitable. This opinion was shared by part of the political leadership. Industries that exported to the West were used to further competition, and a great deal of the Slovene managerial staff was spared in spite of political purges. Slovenia continued to develop economic contacts with Austria, Italy, Germany and other countries, maintained open borders and compared its economy with Western systems. Aspirations for political pluralism grew out of economic pluralism, which was considered indispensable. Although



of strategic economic policy that Slovene politicians still wish to implement today. Finally, the liberalism of the late 1960s contributed significantly to the strengthening of Slovene political self-confidence and to the ambition to create an independent state.

Univerza v Ljubljani

---

rejected by the political leadership, some political scientists and sociologists espoused such ideas even in the stagnant 1970s. Uppermost on their agenda was pluralism in the Socialist Alliance of the Working People (Socialistična zveza delovnega ljudstva), which was to comprise political groups with different views. Such an alliance was meant to be a sort of political opposition to the League of Communists. Edvard Kardelj first agreed with the concept but then rejected it in the 1970s, though he acknowledged the necessity of political pluralism, terming it "pluralism of self-managed socialist interests."

The authorities viewed study at Western universities with displeasure but they tolerated it. Some intellectuals (e.g., Dimitrij Rupel and Peter Jambrek) who in the 1970s studied in the U.S. and other countries became leaders of the opposition in 1980s. Liberalism was, therefore, not without consequences. The conditions before the period of liberalism could not be completely reestablished. Different views were also preserved in the League of Communists of Slovenia.

Some liberal politicians kept their positions; others went into industry or business and tried to influence politicals from there. One of the politicians who stayed on this "march through institutions" was Milan Kučan. In the mid-1980s he became the president of the League of Communists, reformed it, recruited younger politicians and brought into the executive organs some of the 1960s liberals. Such leadership was far more inclined to political pluralism than its predecessors and it deserves credit for the transition to a multiparty system.

## POVZETEK

LIBERALIZACIJA SLOVENSKE DRUŽBE  
V POZNIH ŠESTDESETIH LETIH

*V prispevku je obravnavano politično dogajanje v Sloveniji in Jugoslaviji v šestdesetih letih in v začetku sedemdesetih let, to je obdobju t.i. "liberalizma." Slovenski "liberalci" so izhajali iz predpostavke, da je mogoče v vztrajno notranjo kritiko sistem strukturno spremeniti. Ostajali so znotraj socialističnega sistema in priznavali vodilno vlogo Zveze komunistov, toda obenem so se zavzemali za pluralizem znotraj tedaj obstoječih političnih organizacij, za različne oblike lastnine (ob prevladujoči družbeni), za upoštevanju tržnih zakonitosti in za čim večjo samostojnost posameznih republik v Jugoslaviji. Slovenija naj bi se gospodarsko čim bolj povezovala s sosednjimi zahodnimi državami, razvijala naj bi zanjo propulzivne panoge (turizem, transport, trgovino, storitvene dejavnosti) in postala naj bi most med vzhodom in zahodom. "Konservativna" struja v Zvezi komunistov Slovenije je z "liberalno" skušala najprej obračunati ob raznih aferah (t.i. "cestna afera" leta 1969, "afera 25 poslancev" leta 1971). Dokončno ji je obračun uspel leta 1972, v kontekstu vsejugoslovanskega obračuna z "liberalno" usmerjenimi strujami. Slovenski "liberalizem" je bil sicer nedorečen in nokonsisten ter obremenjen z ideologijo, iz katere je izšel. Kljub temu pa je bil pomemben zametek pluralizem v novejši slovenski politični zgodovini in pomembna izkušnja, ki je pomagala, da je Slovenija konec osemdesetih let mirno prešla iz enostrankarskega v večstrankarski sistem.*