

THE SLOVENES FROM THE GERMAN PERSPECTIVE (1848-1918)

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Two objective factors constitute the defining aspects of Slovene-German relations between 1848 and 1918. The first is that from the very beginning, the Slovene lands belonged to the German Holy Roman Empire (that is, the German Federation until 1866) and were regarded as a matter of course by the Germans as a part of the German national territories, or at least, following the separation of Austria from Germany, as German cultural territory. The second factor, which had an even greater bearing than the first, was that during the lengthy process of national development a large part of the higher social strata in the Slovene lands (particularly the middle class) opted for German, rather than Slovene, national identity. It was the existence of these islands of the German language in the midst of a "Slovene sea" and the mounting sense among this population of a Slovene threat to German culture that introduced elements of irrationality into German-Slovene relations of the time. German-Slovene relations can therefore best be understood by analyzing the attitude of the German population in Slovenia toward its Slovene neighbors.

Notwithstanding the parliamentary debates in Frankfurt, in which even the foremost advocates of democracy counted decisively on German possession of the Slovene lands, the first factor was neatly summed up by the Carinthian poet and journalist Vincenc Rizzi (who had great respect for the Slovene poet France Prešeren), who in 1848 openly "wrote off" the Slovenes for reasons of political expediency, by stating: "if the Germans are to be mighty and renowned, they must have the Adriatic and Trieste."¹ Karl Dežman was of a similar opinion when he wrote the following unambiguous position in 1861: "Germany will not and cannot relinquish its claim to these lands, as it is inevitable that it should dominate Carniola in order to establish a link with the Adriatic. Germany is the owner of this sea and to allow any other

¹ Ivan Prijatelj, *Slovenska kulturnopolitična in slovstvena zgodovina* (Ljubljana: Državna založba, 1956) I, 44.

nation dominance over it would be a grave political error.”² This position did not become any less popular after Austria’s exclusion from the German Confederation in 1866 and the founding of the German Reich in 1871; it even became increasingly more assertive from the turn of the century onwards.

In general, the German population of the Slovene lands did not base its denial of the existence and development of the Slovene nation on purely practical reasons, although it admitted that its aspirations for possession of the lands to the south were those “most German of inclinations” (as the sentiment was neatly summed up by Rudolf Hans Bartsch).³ It also based its justification of its anti-Slovene position on the cultural and economic inferiority of the Slovene nation. The key-note of the German view of the Slovenes in the period 1848-1918 was that the Slovenes were a small nation, possessing neither higher social strata nor a higher level of culture, and for this reason incapable of leading an independent existence. This attitude grew primarily out of the ongoing nation-building process in the Slovene lands, which engendered the formation of the characteristic structure of the nation. In reference to this national structure, the Slovenes always replied to the question: “Where in God’s name did the Germans on Slovene soil come from?” with the explanation that the Germans in question were not genuine Germans, but turncoats, who had denied their Slovene heritage and wanted to pass as Germans; the justified reply of the Germans when accused of being renegades, on the other hand, was that national origin does not predetermine the nation one chooses to belong to. Yet when this argument failed to convince the other side, the German population bent its energies towards proving that Germans had been present on Slovene soil from the Early Middle Ages onwards, and that German culture had played an important part in the development of the Slovene nation. It was the Germans, they argued, who erected new towns and boroughs on the ruins of settlements from antiquity, the Germans who cultivated the land and its inhabitants. All the Slovenes could pride themselves on, (of which, they maintained, there was very little), evolved under the benevolent influence of the Germans and German culture. The Slovenes had

² Prijatelj, II, 53.

³ Ivan Pederin, “Slika Štajerske u austrijskom zavičajnom romanu (Heimatroman),” *Slavistična revija* 35/1 (1987) 51-63, p. 54.

succeeded merely in preserving their vernacular language and even this contained ample evidence of the immeasurable influence of the German tongue. The new Slovene language, which the leaders of the Slovene nation chose to promote as their nation's literary language, was in their opinion an artificial construct in its entirety, incoherent to the Slovene people.

By denying the indigenous nature of Slovene culture, the Germans attempted to deny the existence of the Slovene nation, in which they built their arguments on the same stereotype as the Slovenes did: the stereotypical image of the "Slovenes as a proletarian nation" (as Ivan Cankar formulated it, once it was firmly anchored in the nation's consciousness), which offered a ready basis for the national arguments advanced by Slovene and German nationalists. For, while the Slovenes saw in it proof of the rapid and comprehensive development of their nation, the Germans used it in their attempts to prove that the Slovenes were an ahistorical nation and that Slovene culture was inferior to that of the most highly developed nation of the Monarchy.⁴

The speech given by Count Anton Auersperg before the Carniolan Diet in January 1863 was illustrative of the typical way in which the German population viewed the Slovenes in the second half of the 19th century. In his first extensive anti-Slovene speech, he emphasized that Carniola, together with the entire ethnographic community of Slovenes, was situated on German cultural soil and went on to argue this view as follows: "Its charms live and thrive under the influence of the German spirit, German cultural accomplishments. That is how it always was and how it is and, God willing, how it should also remain. Whatever Carniola has of prosperity, spiritual wealth, legal institutions and other advantages, it owes to the influence of the German spirit... A fact our farmers value only too well, for they know that it is thanks to these very cultural accomplishments that they have an advantage over all other Slavic tribes, and that they therefore need not fear comparison with any of them. In this land, the German language is the dowry of every educated person. It has become a general item of wealth and lives a lively life in parallel to the provincial tongue, giving our people the key to a wealth of sciences, the key to ties

⁴ Igor Grdina, "Doživljanje Nemcev in nemške kulture pri slovenskih razumniki od prosvetljenstva do moderne," *Zgodovinski časopis* 47/1 (1993) 57.

with the world. May the mellifluous, beautiful provincial tongue be cultivated; may it develop, be enriched and shape itself; may it be granted acceptance in the schools, the Church and administrative offices and may it find its wings for higher flights into the ideal world, but by all means, leave German with it — with the meaning it holds, for the fulfilment of its great task, and the purpose it also serves in this country.”⁵ The same viewpoints were advocated by the most famous Slovene renegade of all time, Karl Dežman, who before the National Assembly on 27 June 1861 publicly announced his break with the Slovene nation and became the leader of the German Constitutional Party in Carniola. He also believed that Slovene resistance to all that was German was completely ridiculous. Instead of looking to the uncultivated Southern Slavs (especially the barbaric Croats, whom he accused of having drunk all the methylated spirits from Hyrtl’s anatomical samples in Vienna in 1848),⁶ he advised the Slovenes to cultivate close ties with the accomplished Germans, who would never even dream of “persecuting our language and our nation.”

In a letter to Valentin Zarnik written in January 1861 (i.e., a few months before his public break with the Slovenes), Dežman clearly stated that the German language was not the main reason for the Slovene people’s lack of progress, and that the cause was to be sought in “...our laziness, our parochial slyness and submissiveness, our disregard of all healthy and justified criticism, our love of leather pants, Carniolan inns and drinking, our apathy towards all matters of public concern, our cold-heartedness, our empty boasting, our lust for fighting and copulating and the crudeness of our nature.”⁷ In his article “Germanophil” in the *Laibacher Tagblatt* (1869), he stressed that the so-called Germanophiles did not renounce their Slovene origins and language, but simply saw Slovene-German relations in a different light from the Slovene party. The Germanophile himself loved his mother tongue, he stated, “but is convinced that a knowledge of German will be of great advantage to him.” The Germanophile was convinced that his children would have a better future if they learned German and sought economic ties primarily with German-

⁵ Vasilij Melik, “A.A. Auersperg in slovenski narod,” *Zgodovinski časopis* 41/2 (1987) 290.

⁶ Prijatelj, II, 72

⁷ Prijatelj, II, 72

speaking nations rather than the uncivilized countries in the Slavic south, where blood feuds were still waged and men carried rifles over their shoulders. The Germanophile despised no nation, especially not the German one which had taught the Slovenes so much. Because he was aware of the fact that Slovene literature stemmed originally from German literature (for the Reformation had brought culture to this land), he particularly valued German culture. For this reason he naturally wished that his children learn German in addition to Slovene, and advocated freedom in all areas of public life. Of course, he had nothing against the national fantasies of a united Slovenia, which at best could only be an ideal.⁸

Slovene-German relations saw little change in this respect between 1848 and 1918. In German-Slovene relations of the time, however, fine nuances can be detected in the German assessments of the Slovenes. The Germans did not directly oppose the Slovene wish for progress in all areas, either in the revolutionary year, or in the 1860s and 1870s. They merely pointed out more frequently to the Slovenes that they were not yet sufficiently developed for complete independence. In his second letter to Habsburg Slovenia in 1848, Count Auersperg expressed strong sympathy with the Slovenes' struggle for cultural growth and predicted a radiant future for them: "Slovenia should walk a while longer with the aid of its elder sister, Austria, and should not be ashamed of accepting such guidance, as it [Slovenia] is no less talented, but merely younger. Once it achieves full maturity, the separation will also be natural — and therefore less painful."⁹

In a letter to Janez Bleiweis in 1850, Auersperg even stated his belief that the Slovenes had only to undergo a short learning period, during which the achievements of German culture would be indispensable to them, but that this beneficent "Germanic mission" would soon end on Slovene territory, as soon as it had achieved its aim.¹⁰ A similar viewpoint was expressed before the National Assembly in 1873 by a German deputy from Celje, Dr. Richard Foregger, when he stated that the Slovene voters had not elected him because of his liberal beliefs, but because of "culture,

⁸ Peter Vodopivec, "O socialnih in gospodarskih nazorih nemškega meščanstva na Kranjskem od konca 60. do začetka 80. let 19. stoletja," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 27 (1987) 13.

⁹ Melik, 288.

¹⁰ Melik, 289.

German culture," which would lead them in a more advanced manner than the Slovene, as they realized that "they must still be suckled by the maternal breasts of German culture, until their nation is developed to the point that it will be justified in demanding autonomy."¹¹

Yet the Germans had no intention of abandoning their mission and weaning the infant Slovene nation. Even the most favorable judgments in which the Slovenes were categorized as a "noble fragment of humanity" frankly conclude that the Slovene nation, simply because of its smallness, had no future. "The Slovenes are a crumb of humanity," wrote the *Marburger Zeitung* in 1870, "and as such are worth as much as fragments of a diamond. When the material is of equal worth, size is decisive. The reasons are plain. Several million people are needed to provide the amount of talent required for progress in human thought and actions, and a number of geniuses besides. A nation of one million, however, does not even have the intellectual resources necessary for founding a good quality secondary school."¹²

Because of the smallness of the Slovene nation, the Germans initially attempted to convince the Slovenes that development was unattainable to them without their assistance and German culture. Failing this, they began denying Slovene autochthonicity and attempted to prove that the Slovene political demands were unjustified. The genealogy of the German nations as created by the Germans in the Slovene lands did not place the Slovene nation at the very bottom of the list. The place it allotted them, however, was not much higher than that of the Galician Jews or the Ruthenians. For this reason, the Slovene emulation of the Czechs seemed more than unfounded to many. According to Celje deputy Foregger, the Slovene issue was in no way to be confused with the Czech one, as matters were entirely different in the case of the Czechs: "The Czechs are a nation which has every right to claim such a title... Whichever people wish to be recognized as a nation in its own right must put forth evidence of independent national striving, national achievements, contributions towards the development of culture. The Czechs are capable of this, whereas all the Slovenes have to show is a language of their own. Yet a language

¹¹ Janez Cvirn, *Boj za Celje. Politična orientacija celjskega nemštva 1861-1907* (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 1988) 95.

¹² *Marburger Zeitung*, 18 Feb.1870.

is only an indication of (a nation) and not a national achievement or the fruit of a nation's labor...a nation boasting no original contributions to the development of culture has no right to recognition of its national independence."¹³ When the Slovenes were granted several national concessions under the Taaffe government, the increasingly determined German reply to the question "Where then, is the Slovene 'nation'?" was: "Nowhere. It simply does not exist!"¹⁴ A people without its own culture simply could not be a nation. Nor was the popular vernacular (*Volks-sprache*), which was an attribute of all peoples, proof of the existence of an indigenous culture; particularly not in the case of the Slovenes, whose popular vernacular was "so permeated with German terms, that it is far closer to the German than to the new Slovene (literary) language." The Slovene language was influenced to such a great extent by the German that "one could classify the common language of the people as an independent idiom." Moreover, this influence over several centuries had even led to a state in which Slovenes were "no longer pure Slovenes" but the "product of various kinds of cross-breeding," which was particularly obvious in the language.¹⁵

From this time on, the Germans apparently set about persuading the whole world, and especially themselves, that the Slovenes, in the course of their historical development, had already become semi-German. Naturally, the latter did not find such arguments convincing. On the contrary, they became more and more convinced that it would be better to adopt "be it the Serbian written language, or the Russian, or any Slavonic language, but not German."¹⁶ The cry of Josip Jurčič, who exclaimed: "No, we will not be German! Anything but German (it being understood, that we do not wish to be Hungarians or Gypsies)! We shall fight Germanization to the death!"¹⁷ echoed louder each time it was uttered. For this reason, the German population decided to step up the unfinished process of Germanization. However, it did not wish to finish its task by brute force ("today, one can no longer

¹³ Cvirn, 24-26.

¹⁴ *Cillier Zeitung*, 10 Nov. 1881.

¹⁵ *Deutsche Wacht*, 12 May 1889; statements made by Richard Foregger, before the National Assembly in Vienna, 7 May 1889.

¹⁶ Josip Jurčič, *Zbrano delo* (Ljubljana: Državna založba, 1984) XI: 154.

¹⁷ Jurčič, 154.

assimilate by means of brutality,")¹⁸ but through the influence of German culture, which was believed to be the best weapon in the fight against the German population's national enemies: "Our strongest weapon, the superiority of the German race, German culture ... and with this weapon, we must win."¹⁹

In German eyes, the obvious and comprehensive development of the Slovene nation from the 1880s onwards was artificial, even a "process of Slavicizing the Germans who have settled in this region,"²⁰ supported by the state and the Austrian governments to the detriment of the German population. In this process of "Slavicizing" the ancient German culture, the Slovene political leaders (the "champions" or "Cossacks")²¹ were accused of using the most brutal methods available, a brutality which allegedly arose out of the fact that the Slovenes were a nation "without past or future," which is why Slovene nationalism was directed towards negative aims.²²

Yet ostensibly only the Slovene political leadership availed itself of such brutal methods, in particular the clergy, who put up signs on rectory doors saying: "No dogs or Germans," while the simple Slovene country folk were still friendly towards the Germans, being well aware of the importance of German culture, as they themselves were half German. For this reason, the German population did not wage its battle against the "poor" Slovene people, but against the fanatical Slovene politicians, who were only pursuing their own interests: "We will be able to make peace with the nation as soon as it has freed itself of its current false prophets. Thousands of points in common speak in favor of unity."²³

Just as the leading German politicians such as Auersperg and Dežman were prepared to tolerate Slovene nationality only within the bounds of "folk life," and certainly not in the dimensions which the Slovene political leaders wished to secure, Slovenes were portrayed positively in German patriotic novels (Bartsch, von Gagern) only in the role of farmers, people connected closely to

¹⁸ Richard Foregger, *Zur Cillier Gymnasialfrage* (Vienna: Privately publ. 1894) 17.

¹⁹ *Cillier Zeitung*, 18 Aug. 1881.

²⁰ *Cillier Zeitung*, 13 Nov. 1881.

²¹ The provincial deputy from Celje, Dr. Foregger, in his speech before the Diet on 7 May 1889, translated the word "prvaki" also as "magnates."

²² Richard Foregger, *Zur Cillier Gymnasialfrage*, 14.

²³ *Cillier Zeitung*, 29 Aug. 1880.

nature and mythology. Seeking to prove the cultural inferiority of the Slovene nation, Rudolf Hans Bartsch went as far as to write: "And the Slovene nation? It has no past and no monuments. Only a bit of Glagolitic script. No heroism, no divine thoughts; nothing but the idol of Triglav. And if it were not for the hilltop churches, one would despair... Otherwise there is nothing, simply nothing..."²⁴ Nevertheless, he was convinced that only the isolated Slovene farmers had respect for the German name, as they alone "understood the German soul, having souls themselves."²⁵ Bienenstein in his *Verlorene Heimat* also wrote that the Slovene country folk were tame and susceptible to all that was German, as they harbored the surmise that their predecessors had German blood and that they had grown distant from the German language over the centuries.²⁶ The simple Slovene farming folk is simple and good. In contrast, the Slovene nobility (city folk) are arrogant and impudent. "Yet hold up a firm German fist under their noses and they are instantly tamed."²⁷

In the course of development, however, this view of the Slovenes came increasingly into conflict with reality. While Count Auersperg, in reaction to the first Slovene speeches to the Styrian Provincial Assembly in 1863, was justified in describing the Slovene language as an argot (*Kauderwälsch*) which could never take the place of German,²⁸ the assessment given in 1915 by Baron Friedrich von Gagern that Slovene speech was like the screeching of hawks was entirely out of place.²⁹ And if Auersperg rightly pointed out, in 1848, that the Slovenes were not yet sufficiently developed from the cultural aspect to lead a wholly independent existence,³⁰ the assessment of Slovene cultural development given by Bartsch in his novel *Zwölf aus der Steiermark* that Slovene culture's only frail distinction was a tradition of melancholy and monotonous singing, — this "melancholy monotony being in

²⁴ Rudolf Hans Bartsch, *Zwölf aus der Steiermark* (Leipzig: L. Staackmann, 1912) 171.

²⁵ Franc Zadavec, *Umetniški "črni piruh"* (Ljubljana: Državna založba, 1981) 182.

²⁶ Zadavec, 184.

²⁷ Zadavec, 184.

²⁸ Melik, 290.

²⁹ Ivan Pederin, "Djelo Friedricha von Gagerna kao ideološki predložak nacizma," *Slavistična revija* 35/4 (1987) 381-401, page 388.

³⁰ Melik, 287.

effect the last psychological sign of their originality; an extremely problematic sign from the existential aspect of a little nation which subsists without a heroic past and above all, is not gifted with divine geniuses,"³¹ was flatly at odds with the existing situation. Bartsch, like all the others, overlooked the fact that the Slovenes had made a decisive breakthrough in their development in the past few decades and evolved from a people that had never featured as such in history into a nation in the true sense of the word. Bartsch overlooked this fact because he subconsciously wanted to.

In an article, the famous sociologist and professor at Graz University, Ludwik Gumplowicz, described the nation-forming process of the so-called ahistorical nations in the Monarchy as follows: "The older cultural nations have a tendency to look down at younger ones, which have not yet come so far in their cultural development, convinced that 'culture is not achieved overnight and that they had to endure much suffering before reaching such a high level of culture'. Nowadays, in this age of steam power and the rotary printing press, smaller cultural nations really do gain culture overnight; they need not take pains to achieve it, as all of this has already been done for them by others. It is almost unbelievable how rapidly nations with young cultures are ascending to the same position as old nations."³² Gumplowicz cited Slovenia as an example of particularly rapid cultural development. The cultural development of a small, historically irrelevant farming people fascinated the scholar to such an extent that it prompted him to revise his theory of nations. In his early works, the professor had treated the nation as a phenomenon arising from the independent life of a state, whereas from 1897 onwards, he treated the nation exclusively as a cultural phenomenon. To a great extent, Gumplowicz arrived at this new categorization of the nation by analyzing the phenomenon of Slovene national integration, which he presented to the European public in 1896 in an article in the *Paris Revue Internationale de Sociologie* entitled "La question Slovène."

Yet Gumplowicz seems to have been one of the few Austrian intellectuals who was more than fascinated by Slovene cultural development during the latter part of the 19th century. The fact that he altered his theory of nations shows that he also understood

³¹ Zadavec, 181.

³² Ludwik Gumplowicz, "Sociološki problemi v avstrijski politiki," *Slovan* 1906: 311.

the cultural development of the Slovene nation correctly. Many others, on the other hand, were merely intrigued by the development of the Slovene nation, but were unable to comprehend it. It was understood least of all by precisely those who witnessed it directly and who lived with, and among, the Slovenes. And because they could not, or would not, understand it — which was of course first and foremost the defensive reaction of a threatened minority — their image of the Slovenes came increasingly into conflict with reality. In the decade before the First World War, the German mission on Slovene soil was rapidly nearing an end. The words uttered in 1850 by Count Auersperg (albeit probably with little sincerity) were coming true, and the story ended as predicted by Gumplowicz in 1906: “The Slovenes too shall develop, although they are struggling on their own territory against two nations with old cultures which may well threaten their development, namely the Italians and the Germans. These, however, will meet the fate of all nations with ancient cultures on Slovene soil. They may be glad if they are not engulfed and swept away by a flood of foreign ‘barbarians’ in their lands; for wherever they sow the seeds of culture beyond the borders of their homesteads, they sow the teeth of the Cadmean dragon, from which will spring armed hosts who will march against them.”³³

And so it came to be.

Univerza v Ljubljani

POVZETEK

NEMŠKO GLEDANJE NA SLOVENCE (1848-1918)

Nemško-slovenski odnošaji postanejo najlažje razumljivi, če jih skušamo presoјati in ocenjevati po držī, razpoloženju in odnošajih nemškega prebivalstva v Sloveniji nasproti Slovencem. V članku so opisani ti kriteriji omenjenega obdobja, med njimi pa še posebno naslednji: predpostavka, da so bili Nemci po svoji kulturni in ekonomski vlogi v zgodovini naradni gospodarji slovenskih dežel; dejstvo, da so Slovenci vse, kar so kdaj koli dosegli v svoji zgodovini, prejeli od Nemcev; zapreke razvoja slovenske nacionalnosti, vključno njih maloštevilnost in njih ponemčeni in malovrednji jezik; dejstvo, da je bilo vsakdo stremeljenje po slovenski nacionalnosti neorgansko in po sebičnih in neodkritih politikih vsiljeno preprostemu narodu. Že Auersperg je gledal na slovensko odvisnost od nemškega

³³ Gumplowicz, 226.

kulturnega in političnega pokroviteljstva - le kot nekaj začasnega, provizoričnega, nekaj kar naj bi nekoč vendarle pripeljalo do "ločitve". Čisto drugačno pa je gledanje Gumpłowicza, profesorja na graški univerzi, ki je sodil, da so Slovenci kulturni zrel narod.