

SLOVENE INTELLECTUALS' RESPONSE TO POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MODERNIZATION IN THE NINETEENTH AND AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURIES

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Historians have agreed for some time now that, as with other Central European countries, the Slovene intelligentsia has played a central role in the formation of the nation. The slow growth of towns, industry, and the middle-classes was characteristic of Slovene socio-political development, and already noticed and commented upon in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹ The Slovene middle-class elites, which became the most important actors in the Slovene national movement in the nineteenth century, arose primarily through education. In a little more than seven decades, approximately three and a half generations, from about 1840 to WW I, a sizeable enough segment of the educated middle classes was formed and grew into the most important dynamic factor in the Slovene national consciousness and politics, the Slovene farmers' majority notwithstanding.²

Slovene intellectuals were educated at Austrian universities in Vienna and Graz, and by the end of the nineteenth century also in Prague and Krakow. Students of theology and law at first predominated, while the number of philosophy and medical students gradually increased. From 1860 on, the number of students in technical and

¹ Among those who already in the second half of the nineteenth century concluded that the Slovene lands were falling behind economically more quickly developing Austrian lands was Janez Bleiweis: "Each one of us certainly desires, and I also hope, that the trades spread in our land," he said in the Carinthian parliament in 1864. "But we must still wait for, perhaps for a very long time, for men to appear who can build the trades and manufacture." See: Peter Vodopivec, "Gospodarski in socialni nazori Bleiweisovega kroga," *Zbornik za zgodovino naravoslovja in tehnike 7 (Bleiweisov zbornik)* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1983) 37.

² In this article I intentionally do not speak of national identity but instead use the term national consciousness. The term identity seems to be too strong, because individual identity is a complex of different relations and feelings. The sense of belonging to a people is just one of them.

biological studies also grew. About 1910, the optimists declared that the Slovene intelligentsia already had the professional structure needed for the most vital matters of national existence, as well as the experts for all areas that could influence further national formation and development.

The thesis of the leading Yugoslav and Slovene communist ideologist Edvard Kardelj and some other Slovene marxists—that the Slovene national movement was primarily the result of the endeavors of the bourgeoisie, which by standardizing the Slovene language sought to unify the Slovene economic space, has therefore no real basis.³ As the historian Vasilij Melik has pointed out,⁴ the Slovenes were a socially and culturally developed nation before WW I, with most of the cultural institutions, newspapers, societies, and a widely used literary language. Yet the business and merchant classes were poorly developed: Among the Slovene middle classes, the “economic bourgeoisie” (*Wirtschaftsbürgerthum*) was modestly represented. Descendants of prominent merchants and entrepreneurs, who were still standing in the Slovene national ranks at the beginning of the Slovene national and political movement, left the movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, and passed over to the German side, particularly the German liberal side.⁵ A new, at first still meagre class of Slovene bourgeoisie, started to form only in the last decades of the nineteenth century but was still little involved in Slovene national political life in the first decades of the twentieth century. Up to the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy, and for the most part also in the Kingdom of

³ “The national idea for Slovene bourgeois parties therefore remained only the means of economic strengthening of the Slovene bourgeoisie,” wrote Kardelj. See Edvard Kardelj-Sperans, *Razvoj slovenskega narodnega vprašanja* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1957) 262.

⁴ Vasilij Melik and Peter Vodopivec, “Slovenski izobraženci in avstrijske visoke šole 1848-1918,” *Zgodovinski časopis* 40.3 (1986): 271–74.

⁵ For example, Fidelis Terpinč (1799–1875) was a Slovene-minded businessman whose wealth passed into the hands of the German-oriented Zeschko and Lukman families after his death. Peter Kozler (1824–79) was a conscientious Slovene and author of the first map of Slovene lands (1853). He and his brother founded the Union brewery in Ljubljana in 1864; however, the brothers disagreed on the national question and the brewery became a German enterprise. Something similar happened with the Samassa family, bell casters who were originally Slovene-, but from the 1870s German-minded.

Yugoslavia, Slovene politics were embraced by people who had achieved their status and position by virtue of education, and by those who had occupied official posts or were members of various professions. This fact had an important impact on Slovene political development and had positive as well as negative consequences.

Slovene politics and the political views of Slovene national political elites of the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries were traditionally judged by Slovene historians writing primarily from the point of view of loyalty to the national program of 1848 and its sensitivity to social problems. The Slovene national program, with its demand for a United Slovenia (Združena Slovenija or Zedinjena Slovenija) was, however, only one of the results of the revolutionary turmoil of 1848. For most of the population at that time, which still had no modern national consciousness, the Slovene national program was not critical. The central events of the revolution in the Slovene lands were the fall of absolutism and the abolition of the remnants of feudalism. The majority of the otherwise narrow circle of authors of the Slovene national program and of its most zealous advocates was thus well aware that the future of Slovene politics and the Slovene national demands were closely linked to the prospective fate and development of the liberal revolution.

Along with the conservative majority, and the negative attitude towards tenant farmers' demands for land without compensation, there were also Slovenes who represented liberal, even democratic views, talked about the sovereignty of the people, referred to the declaration on human rights of 1789, advocated freedom of the press and political tolerance, and rejected anti-Semitism. The program of a United Slovenia, which in 1848 was the only one of the political programs of the Habsburg nations to appeal exclusively to natural law, was in itself a revolutionary act, written in the Enlightenment or early liberal spirit. Consequently, in 1848 in Slovenia, there was indeed a small, but noticeable circle of people, aware of the importance of both sides of the revolution, national and liberal-democratic, and of their close relationship. This very message of 1848, which linked the idea of a United Slovenia to the demand for the democratization of the monarchy and public life in it, receded in the Slovene national movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the idea of United Slovenia was resurrected.

In Slovenian politics and among the public of the second half of the nineteenth century, and even most of the twentieth century, the memory of the 1848 revolution was most closely associated with the program of United Slovenia. There was much less awareness of the fact that the revolution represented the beginning of modern parliamentarism and democracy in Central Europe and, consequently, also in Slovene history. The principal social basis of the Slovene national movement of the second half of the nineteenth century rested with the peasants. Its leaders and spokesmen were lay intellectuals and partly the clergy; wealthy entrepreneurs, merchants, land owners, and officials only gradually joined them from the 1880s on. The differences between the two groups of Slovenian politicians, conservatives and liberals, were mostly dogmatic and political, depending on the views of the potentials and prospects of the Slovene national movement, even the result of the generation gap, but certainly not expressions of conflicting interests due to their social background. The spokesmen and leaders of both were professional and educated people. The former appealed to the peasants and adjusted their political language to the peasants' thinking and wishes; the latter perceived the social basis of the future Slovene society in the rising "middle class" and tried to reflect that group's aspirations and ambitions.

The principal difference between the Slovene conservatives and liberals⁶ was the fact that the first were more prudent, and the second more radical in their attitude towards the national program and naturally towards the church and clergy. The two camps' national, political, and social perspectives and visions were nevertheless much more similar than might seem at first sight. The central figure of the Slovene national movement, the veterinary surgeon Janez Bleiweis, was a true conservative who believed in the evolutionary change of society and in the patriarchal, estate world order in which the father as the head of the family and the farmer as the core of the nation were central. On the other hand, he basically remained a *freigeist*⁷ all his life and never became a member of the clerical party, not even after he was persuaded, after 1867,

⁶ The question of how liberal Slovene "liberals" really were is naturally a problem in itself. I use the designation as generally used in historiography, although one may ask how justified it really is. The replacement of "liberals" with "free thinkers" or "progressives" seems even less persuasive.

⁷ Ivan Prijatelj, *Duševni profili slovenskih preporoditeljev, Izbrani Eseji I* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1952) 311.

that the clergy and the church were indispensable for a stronger Slovene consciousness. However, the social visions of the liberals (Fran Levstik, Josip Vošnjak, and Josip Stritar) were no more modern, since they did not seek the future of Slovene society in a capitalist or industrial-bourgeois transformation, but in the maintenance of tradition, preservation of the peasantry, and in a slow-down of the impending social and economic changes. Levstik was a notorious free thinker and democrat, owing to his national radicalism, his critical attitude towards the clergy, and his opposition to the opportunistic authoritarianism of the conservatives. However, he saw the Slovene future in the "brotherhood of Slavic nations," purified of any foreign element, in which there would be no room for the "example of the more developed and technologically more progressive (German) environment," and which would be based on the rural tradition and "a sort of primordial Slavic community," rooted in language and literature.⁸

A similar intermingling of the liberal-progressive and conservative beliefs can also be found in the views of other Slovene politicians and literary figures of the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus it is not surprising that in 1873 the liberal newspaper *Slovenski narod* published an article in honor of the recently deceased John Stuart Mill; meanwhile the Slovene liberals, in practice, were following Karl von Vogelsang (and not Mill). As the literary scholar Taras Kermauner pointed out more than two decades ago,⁹ the poet and writer Josip Stritar was indeed a determined opponent of Bleiweis, but in his social visions in many ways also his adherent: Stritar perceived the Slovene social ideal in a Slavic-Slovene rural-collectivist democracy, governed by solidarity founded on the common ethnic origin and national harmony. His unfinished story, "The Ninth Country,"¹⁰ which is the first Slovene social utopia, features the ideal Slovene society, a large, orderly landscape, in which farmers work during the day and sit to converse and read journals and books at night. They speak and write literary Slovene, adopt important decisions by a majority of adult (male) votes, and tolerantly and self-critically solve mutual disagreements.

⁸ Dimitrij Rupel, *Svobodne besede* (Koper: Lipa, 1976) 219.

⁹ Taras Kermauner, *Radikalna zavrtost – slovenski kulturni arhetip, Prispevek k teoriji slovenske dramatike in kulture – analiza igrokazov Josipa Stritarja* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1975) 217.

¹⁰ Josip Stritar, "Deveta dežela," *Zbrano delo* 4, ed. France Koblar (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1954) 305–38.

The Slovene national and political leaders, like the elites of other nations of the Habsburg Monarchy, formed their ideas and political culture mainly from the point of view of their national and narrow ideology and from their horizons and interests. For this reason, they very slowly assimilated ideas about “modernization” from Austrian and Western European socio-political modernism through the social and “modernization” ideas they represented. The central topics of Slovene politics of the second half of the nineteenth century were: the Slovene language, its use in schools and in public, Slovene literature, culture and its institutions, and the danger of Germanization. With the growing economic crisis in rural areas and with the numerical expansion of the working class, social issues and the problem of the undeveloped transportation infrastructure came to the fore. And the worsening Catholic-liberal relations in Austria aggravated the clerical-liberal conflict. Meanwhile, progress on all other issues, including democratization of the parliamentary and electoral systems, legal individual and social security, and democratic liberties—not to mention basic state and political affairs—lagged behind. When these issues had to be resolved, the decisions were explicitly compromising and pragmatic, adopted in fear of opponents becoming stronger and/or with a tendency to gain solidarity with allies. Such, for example, was the opposition of Slovene politicians to the abolition of one of the most undemocratic institutions in the Austrian electoral system, indirect elections to the State Assembly. In 1873, the Slovene deputies and leaders rejected direct elections only out of solidarity with the Czechs, even though the Slovenes were aware of the benefits of election reform.

In this light, the tight political union of the liberals and the conservatives from the second half of the 1870s to the beginning of the 1890s, which Slovene historians traditionally designate as a period of national Catholic-liberal compromise and common struggle against German oppression, was not only an expression of opportunism and lack of principled Slovene liberalism, but also of a low profile and differentiated middle-classes in general. The Catholic political elite was more aggressive and explicit in its social and political principles: Its spokesmen undoubtedly represented the social concepts of the conservative class and rejected liberal ideas, ideas associated with the French Revolution, Enlightenment social currents, and their aftermath. The end of the harmonious “herd condition” (as it was called by the literary historian, Ivan Prijatelj), was only brought about by a theology

professor from Gorica, Anton Mahnič, who summoned both Slovene “parties” openly to admit their differences and called for a “separation of spirits.” His determined words embarrassed the liberal camp most of all, since it revealed its numerous weak points: inconsistency of views and ideas, adherence to tradition and idealized peasant life, fear of too rapid expansion of the middle-classes, and other social changes in Slovene society.

The author and literary historian Fran Celestin, who from the liberal point of view stood for literary creativity in a “clear spirit of one’s view of the world,” even before Mahnič, could not have a major impact on the greater coherence of views and ideas of the liberal and free thinking movement, since he remained less than fully committed himself. On the one hand, he favored the enrichment of knowledge and openness to new ideas, a more lively orientation to the future than to the past, the social relevance of literature, and attention to material as well as spiritual development. On the other hand, like his fellow political thinkers, he opposed a more radical change in the prevailing agrarian social structure of Slovene society, vaguely rejected the “theory of unlimited property freedom,” and condemned as “usurious” liberal capitalism.¹¹

Historians have traditionally attributed the compromising nature of Slovene middle-class politics in the Habsburg Monarchy to its inability to define Slovene economic, social, and political goals in a more exact and modern way. However, this question can and should be reversed. Could the intellectuals, educated at Austrian high schools whose task it was to form loyal state officials, have been effective originators and agents of modernization and democratization? It is doubtful that the liberals’ social and political views, which were more than the expression of their or anybody’s social interests, could have surpassed the expression of their own visions and horizons.¹² The thesis of the German and Austrian *Sonderweg* may also apply to other Central European nations.

Recent German and Austrian research dealing with the history of the bourgeoisie reveals that the intelligentsia of Central Europe, Germany, but also of the Habsburg monarchy as a whole, was a

¹¹ Fran Celestin, “Naše obzorje,” *Ljubljanski zvon* (1883): 39–52, 113–19, 169–72, 236–43, 320–27, 394–98, 454–57.

¹² The other part of the middle-classes, which—involved in the economic activities—might have tended to more radical thinking out of economic needs, was simply not absent.

prominent herald of national emancipation endeavors, while it was less progressive and effective in advocating a modern, democratic transformation of society and politics. "Part of the educated bourgeoisie, which focused on a career in public service, was a unique bourgeois *Funktionselite* (functional elite) in Central Europe," notes German social historian Hans Ulrich Wehler. "Different from the union of the nobility, the city and Oxbridge (graduates of Oxford and Cambridge in Great Britain), different from the union of the great bourgeoisie, nobility and (the graduates of) Grands Écoles (in France)..."¹³ The two modern Slovene middle class political parties, which took their final form in the 1890s were, in terms of their leadership, primarily ideological-political formations, which nevertheless looked for constituents in different social groups of the Slovene population, and also tried to make them understand what was best for them.

However, the parties did not represent homogeneous social groups. From the end of the 1890s the gap between the political elites and their constituents was complete, in spite of occasional attempts at "reconciliation," because they were not even ready to reach a minimal consensus on fundamental national interests. Their vision of Slovene society and of the world was explicitly black and white, since their most faithful adherents judged social processes and political events in ideological terms. By the end of the nineteenth century, the belief had been strengthened in the Slovene liberal camp that the social foundation of the future Slovene society and of its development could not only be the peasant and the intellectual, but that its socio-economic stability could only be ensured by strong and solid "middle classes." However, the attitude of the two parties towards electoral reform, extension of voting rights, and, consequently, towards the democratization of political life still remained pragmatic and inconsistent. Under the influence of the conservative trend, the Catholic party, as it was known, was at first against electoral reforms. Later, however, when it turned out that an extension of voting rights benefited the party, it supported them. In the liberal camp, the process was the reverse, since they initially favored universal and even equal voting rights, but when they realized that

¹³ Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Wie »bürgerlich« war das Deutsche Kaiserreich? Aus der Geschichte lernen?* (München: C.H.Beck, 1988) 184.

democratization of the electoral system was taking away their votes, they opposed the changes.¹⁴

Janez Evangelist Krek's attempt to democratize the Catholic party was quickly taken over by the party leadership, while socially and more democratic-thinking liberal intellectuals mainly split with the liberal party before WWI. Some of the younger, critical, dissatisfied members clung to Masaryk's ideas and stood for "action among the people,"¹⁵ while some of them joined the movement with its new, collectivistic social vision. Some individuals, like Albin Prepeluh, saw the potential for "Slovene democracy" in the modernization of Slovene rural areas and in consolidation of the peasantry. However, in spite of all this, discussion of basic issues of democracy and political freedom was rare even in the last decade and a half of the Habsburg Monarchy's existence. Albin Prepeluh was one of the few individuals who considered these issues. "The freedom of a society or of any community is reflected in the freedom of the individual," he wrote in 1912. "The greatest freedom of an individual rests in the fact that he himself defines his individual needs. This is the basis of individual freedom. Take away the possibility of an individual to decide about himself, and freedom is buried. At such a moment, we can no longer talk about individualism—or socialism either."¹⁶

In the years before WWI, the idea of a "united and autonomous Slovenia" was replaced by the more abstract idea of Yugoslavia. However, there were no more concrete, state- and democratically-oriented political visions that would define the desired social and political model for the Slovene national unity in more detail. In the spring of 1918, on the very anniversary of the 1848 revolution, in the overcrowded

¹⁴ Dragotin Lončar, *Politično življenje Slovencev* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1921) 70–76.

¹⁵ The "patriotic radicals" were under the influence of Masaryk's slogan about the value of "little works among the people and for the people." Slovene students who had been at Prague University were the majority of radicals.

¹⁶ Abditus (Albin Prepeluh), *Socializem posameznika, Socialni problemi, Eseji* (Ljubljana: Schwentner, 1912) 89. "Svoboda družbe ali pa kake celote se zrcali v svobodi posameznika...Največja svoboda posameznika pa tiči v tem, da sam določuje svoje individualne potrebe. To je temelj individualistične svobode. Vzemite posamezniku možnost odločevati nad seboj samim in pokopana je svoboda. V tem trenutku ne moremo več govoriti o individualizmu—a tudi socializmu ne."

Union Hall in Ljubljana, when Anton Korošec was receiving signatures in support of the May Declaration from the hands of Slovene ladies and young girls, nobody remembered the democratic slogans of “the spring of nations.” The focus of attention was on the nation’s future; the future of democracy was supposed to be self-evident. The Slovenes left the Habsburg Monarchy and entered the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes as a mature and formed nation. There were undoubtedly generations of Slovene intellectuals that deserved credit for this. Yet the same generations, successful in their national-emancipation endeavours, failed to form a more solid democratic tradition. Consequently, in 1919 in *Ljubljanski Zvon*, Anton Loboda (Anton Melik) sadly stated that Slovene political conditions were still very primitive, since “the average individual here is still not politically independent enough, he draws his political decisions too little from himself and too much from the directives of leaders.” He highlighted in particular “inadequate political education” and the lack of “prolific political education, instruction on the basic rights of human existence.”

I will only confirm the statement that we are a politically mature nation, when individual political activity will encompass all questions, issues, rights and duties of man and of his relations to the social organizations of the nation and of the state, and when political and/or party authority will play a lesser role with us than so far. To this purpose, strong political education is needed.¹⁷

In the following two decades, Slovene parties did not substantially open, democratize, and modernize themselves. The book by the French author, Julien Benda, *La trahison des clercs*, which in 1927 summoned French intellectuals to stop thinking in collectivistic notions and to dedicate themselves to universal, human, and democratic values, did not attract major attention in Slovenia. Between the two world wars, the majority of Slovene intellectuals joined party organizations, while the number of

¹⁷ Anton Loboda [Anton Melik], “O našem notranjepolitičnem stanju,” *Ljubljanski zvon* (1919): 19–21. “Trditvi, da smo politično zrel narod, bom pritrdil šele, kadar bo individualno politično dejstvovanje obsegalo vsa vprašanja, probleme, pravice in dolžnosti človeka ter njegovega razmerja do socialnih organizacij naroda in države in kadar bo politična oziroma strankarska avtoriteta pri nas igrala manjšo vlogo, kakor pa sedaj. Zato pa je treba še močne politične vzgoje.”

groups and individuals leaving them in disappointment started to increase in the 1930s. There were still not many alternatives. The moderate center, which saw a potential solution of political conflicts, tensions, and mutual accusations in the perfection of the institutions of liberal parliamentary democracy, and in a gradual search for a balance between various political attitudes and interests, was surprisingly weak even among the intelligentsia. This is the only explanation of why a significant number of young intellectuals, who, in disappointment, left the traditional parties in the 1930s and approached the communist left with a desire to work for democracy. However, not a decade had passed before it became evident that this was not the correct alternative either.

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POVZETEK

SLOVENSKI INTELEKTUALCI IN POLITIČNA TER SOCIALNA MODERNIZACIJA V 19 IN V ZAČETKU 20. STOLETJA

Znanjo je, da je bilo oblikovanje modernega kapitalističnega podjetništva in trgovine na slovenskem ozemlju razmeroma počasen proces. Zato se je meščanstvo oblikovalo predvsem s pomočjo šole. To je imelo za slovenski narodni in politični razvoj pozitivne, pa tudi negativne posledice. Slovenske laične izobraženske elite s koreninami v kmetstvu so sicer sprejele nekatera programska gesla in načela evropskega svobodomiselnosti in liberalizma, toda zvečine so vstrajale pri konservativnih družbenopolitičnih predstavah in nasprotovale hitrejšemu pomeščanju in modernizaciji slovenske družbe. Politične stranke, ki so se oblikovale konec 19. stoletja, so bile predvsem ideološke in nazorsko-politične in ne socialno interesne grupacije. Njihova politika je v glavnem temeljila v nacionalnih predstavah in ambicijah njihovih voditeljev in ne v interesih njihovega socialnega ualedja. V takšnih razmerah so bila pred prvo svetovno vojno v slovenski politiki živa predvsem narodno emancipacijska sporočila revolucije leta 1848, mnogo manj pa njena liberalno-demokratska gesla. Z vprašanji politične in družbene demokratizacije, človekovih – posameznikovih svoboščin, moderne parlamentarne demokracije in držaljske pravne varnosti so se ukvarjali le redki posamezniki. To je imelo daljnosežne in usodne posledice tudi za slovenski politični razvoj v 20. stoletju.