yugoslavia in the cold war
JUGOSLAVIJA V HLADNI VOJNI
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THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERN COUNTRIES ON YUGOSLAVIA'S INTERNAL SITUATION

Conflict with the Cominform brought the internal differences in Yugoslav and Slovenian society to a head. Investments in military industry had reduced the standard of living and increased repression. It was not until the 1950s, with the transformation of the political system (the introduction of self-management, gradual decentralization), that the situation began to change for the better. Yugoslavia, which in 1950 had been on the verge of economic ruin, began to receive Western aid. Such aid, however, was provided on the condition that Yugoslavia gave greater consideration to a market economy and commodity production. The new economic system was based on social property rather than state-owned and remained halfway between the old dogmatic system and greater regard for the principles of market economy. Political control of the economy remained largely intact: federal authorities retained control over investments, money, most prices, and over the market in general; on the other hand, companies were given greater autonomy, domestic trade and foreign currency transactions were liberated, and banking was reorganized. Politics were directed towards gradually but constantly increasing the standard of living. Economic disparities had led to the first massive workers' strike (the strike in Trbovlje in 1958) but the more liberal economic policy ended the period of stagnation.

Industry in Slovenia expanded by 15%, and by the beginning of the 1960s it was growing at a rate of 10%. Once the practice of collectivization ceased, agriculture was revived. During the mid-1950s Slovenia experienced a leap from an agricultural to an industrial society; more than half the population was earning a living in non-agricultural activities. When the port in Koper was constructed, Slovenia also began to develop a maritime industry. Accelerated industrialization, however, also had a negative side: buildings and facilities were built on good farming land, housing for workers was built with inadequate infrastructure, insufficient housing was a constant problem, a specific class combining the attributes of farmers and workers emerged in the areas surrounding large industrial centers, economic migration to Slovenia began from less developed parts of Yugoslavia, the new urban class – occupying small city apartments while retaining the mentality of farmers – produced a specific culture and habits (such as the weekend mass exodus to the villages, the cultivation of vegetable gardens, etc.).
The departure from the Soviet model of society relaxed repression (as a result of the fact that the Communist Party had achieved its main revolutionary objectives). Court trials as a means of reprisal were now only used exceptionally, and most clergy and political prisoners were released from prison. The Opposition was confined to intellectual circles, and their activity depended on the tolerance of the authorities. These seemingly modest but significant changes made Yugoslavia different from other East European countries. This divergence began timidly in the early 1950s and subsequently gained momentum.

The difference was not only reflected in the political system but was particularly evident in the standard of living, tourism, travelling, shopping abroad, and imitation of the Western way of life. Within Yugoslavia, Slovenia was in a unique position; it was the most advanced and culturally pro-Western part of the federation. Slovenia borders on Italy and Austria, and has substantial minorities in both countries. These factors enabled Slovenia to maintain constant contacts with its two neighbors, except during the postwar period, and allowed direct comparisons of living standards. In the mid-1950s authorities in Slovenia tried to shift the standard of living in Slovenia closer to neighboring capitalist countries. Despite the presence of some capitalist elements, Slovenia's system remained essentially socialist. It was based on egalitarianism, full employment, extensive social security, and a specific socialist ideology and morality. The system placed the community, and not the individual, in the forefront, despite the fact that Slovenians are individualists by nature. The mixture of a socialist system and of imitating Western capitalist trends created an unusual cultural atmosphere in Slovenia. People believed in Tito, in self-management, and (later) in non-alignment, but they also believed in the washing machine, refrigerator, television, and other elements of consumer society. Since a market economy and competition existed only in part, production was inefficiently and slowly adjusted to the needs of the buyer and to modern trends. During the 1950s (but also in the 1960s and the 1970s) shopping abroad was the Slovenians' only contact with Western type consumer psychology, which they readily adopted.

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The first window into the Western world for the Slovenians (and the Yugoslavs) was Italy. The border with Italy was demarcated again in 1947 (in Yugoslavia's favor), a dividing line painfully etched on the memory of the inhabitants who had lived together for centuries, first under Austro-Hungary, and in the period between the two world wars, under Italy. In some areas the border passed between houses, or went across back yards, or else (as in the town of Miren), it cut through cemeteries (on occasion, undertakers, with a provisory demarcation and in the presence of armed border guards, literally moved the cross from one country to another, so relatives on both sides of the border could pay their last respects to the deceased). Before the border stones were put in place, people moved the wooden posts used to mark the border in order to preserve small pieces of land on either side. Relations with Italy were strained until 1954, when the so-called London Memorandum finally settled the question of Trieste (the division of the Free Territory of Trieste between Yugoslavia and Italy). Consequently, in the mid-1950s people rarely crossed the border and only the people living within 100 m of the border and those who had property on both sides of the borders were entitled to do so. They were required to take the shortest road to reach their farmland, and were not allowed to visit large towns. They did so, however, despite strict surveillance on both sides (on the Italian side they were most often recognized by their "socialist" shoes or the license plates on their bicycles). Among the familiar stories describing the escapades of smugglers is one about a man who made a small, hidden cable car and used it to smuggle goods until he was discovered and sentenced to two years in prison. The inhabitants of the border area were the first to buy Western goods, which they then smuggled into Slovenia. They usually hid the goods in car tires or under their clothes; the main articles to be smuggled were sugar, coffee, rice, lemon, medicines, soap, cameras, copper sulfate used in vine cultivation, broomcorn brushes, brooms, and anything else of which there was a shortage in Slovenia. This type of trade was mostly based on barter; meat, brandy, eggs, and butter were smuggled into Italy (there is a well-known story of a woman who arrived at the border just as the butter under her shirt began melting). Some of the smugglers acted with the knowledge of the police and helped the authorities purchase office material, typewriters, etc. In the first half of the 1950s smuggling fashion articles, especially popular plastic raincoats, became a lucrative business. Although risky, smuggling was in general profitable and, in many border areas in the first postwar period, people made so much money smuggling that they were able to build houses with their profits. 

On 6 August 1950 the inhabitants on both sides of the border met at the crossing in Režna Dolina. The meeting was intended to revive contacts between friends and relatives among the inhabitants on both sides of the border. It was to be repeated on Sunday, 13 August, but masses of people arriving from the Yugoslav side broke through the border and dispersed among the shops in Gorizia, where they bought mostly broomcorn brushes and brooms. Media response was mixed: the Yugoslav press remained silent, the press in the border area wrote of bringing down an unjust border, and the press of nationalist Italy described the event as the "march of the hungry."\(^5\)

In 1955, Yugoslavia and Italy signed an agreement on frontier trade. The so-called Udine Agreement was the first of its kind signed between a capitalist and a socialist country during the cold war period.\(^6\) The right to cross the border was extended to the entire population of the border area in a radius of ten kilometers, and people began to cross the border regularly. The border area population particularly liked visiting fairs on the other side of the border (for example, for St. Andrew's Day in Gorizia), where they could buy cheap goods from street stands. One of the most sought after items were the so-called "bambole," large dolls in colorful dresses, usually placed in the middle of king-size beds for decoration. Wedding confetti, chewing gum, and Italian candy were also favorite articles among the visitors.\(^7\) The goods sold on Italian street stands in the 1950s and later played an important part in forming the taste of Slovenian and Yugoslav buyers.

People who had property on both sides of the border were allowed to cross the Austrian/Yugoslav border beginning in 1953, when agreements were signed regulating frontier trade and the rights of Austrian citizens who had property in the Yugoslav border area. In addition to property owners, other members of the border area population were issued three-day passes in exceptional cases, while only doctors, veterinarians, and midwives had permanent permits to cross (in 1958 there were 6000 holders of permits in total on the Yugoslav side, and 5000 on the Austrian side). In 1960 a supplementary agreement was signed regulating frontier trade, which allowed crossing for permanent residents of the area within 10 km from the border. Inhabitants could get a permanent border pass, allowing them to cross the border four

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times a month and to remain abroad for a maximum of sixty hours. They
were often required to use the same crossing (there were 19 crossings on
the border with Austria), and they could take with them 3500 dinars (10 USD)
per month. Owing to poorer supply and higher prices until the mid-1960s,
Austria was not as popular a shopping destination as Italy. Among the rare
exceptions to this rule was the case of farmers, who could buy used agricul-
tural machines on credit in Austria.\(^8\)

Those who did not live in the border area could get a passport (personal,
family, or group passport) in order to cross the border. Passports were issued
by secretariats of internal affairs in certain districts, at their own discretion
and without any obligation to explain their decision to the applicant (for in-
stance, passports were not issued to men who had not completed compulsory
military service). The citizens of practically every socialist country needed
visas to travel abroad and a letter of recommendation from the country to
which the person wished to travel. Given administrative restrictions and the
modest standard of living, travel was rare until the beginning of the 1960s,
and was usually limited to business trips and visits to relatives. Illegal
crossing was frequent, however, especially for the purpose of emigrating
overseas. In the second half of the 1950s tourism began to develop and the
number of foreign visitors increased, especially those coming to various
craftsmen's fairs. The gradual opening towards Western culture was first
demonstrated in the beginning of the 1950s by the showing of American
movies ("Bathing Beauty", Gone with the Wind), light domestic movies (the
comedy "Vesna"), and by translations of Western literary works. Toward the
end of the 1950s and in the early 1960s the first fashion shows were organ-
ized, followed by jazz and popular music festivals (modeled after the festival
in San Remo), and beauty contests. In Slovenia jazz had a tradition that went
back to the prewar years. After the war it was brought back by the Slovenian
composer Bojan Adamič. Party dogmatists disapproved of this type of mu-
sic; jazz was undesirable, but it was not banned. In the 1950s it became
extremely popular among young people, and the first jazz festival was organ-
ized in 1959.\(^9\) Later, jazz festival became typical of Ljubljana, where it
formed a tradition, maintained by the participation of the best jazz musi-
cians, and recognized in the world. Festivals of popular music and beauty
contests also began in Yugoslavia toward the end of the 1950s; the first and
best-known festival in Slovenia began in 1962 under the name Slovenska
popevka. It was originally organized in Bled, and then in Ljubljana. The

\(^8\) Repe: "Tihotapijo vse, razen ptičega mleka."

lyrics were written by avant-garde poets and by famous Slovenian composers of popular music. In 1958 the regular transmission of television programs began in Slovenia. In the 1960s, television transmission expanded substantially and, with its programming (Western serials, movies, music programs, and even commercials), television greatly influenced the evolving consumer mentality and by its strong presence promoted an affinity towards Western values, and consequently, on the desire to go abroad. As a rule, Slovenians were able to watch some of the Austrian and Italian TV programs and to use the foreign commercials as guidelines when shopping abroad. Austrian and Italian tradesmen (especially those of Slovenian origin) began to advertise their business in Slovenian magazines and on the radio.

In the mid-1950s, following the end of the "hard line" period of the cold war, Western influence in Slovenia was still minor. In fact, Yugoslavia (and Slovenia with it) opened up to the world only in the 1960s, when the standard of living had risen considerably, as a result of the so-called "liberal" policy of the Slovenian leaders, who directed the economy towards transportation, tourism, trade, and various services. Most inhabitants could obtain a passport without any particular administrative difficulties (and the conditions for refusing an application were regulated by law), while the visa requirements for neighboring countries were gradually abolished. Increasing numbers of people began leaving to go and work in Austria and Germany. From 1964 to 1969, in the course of emigration organized by the employment bureau 62,347 Slovenians moved to the West, after which they returned home only for holidays, bringing with them various Western articles. Shopping abroad was no longer reduced to jeans, make-up, and washing detergent but now included washing machines, vacuum cleaners, kitchen appliances, and even cars. Crossing the border, shopping abroad, and travel in general were important factors in shaping the Slovenian way of life. Specific consumer rituals were formed, a type of shopping frenzy that many Slovenians (and especially Yugoslavs) could not resist. People would buy not only what they needed but anything and everything, driven by the idea that they must "make the most" of their trip abroad so the trip would have been "worth it." This way of thinking goes well with the conviction that saving and rational use of money are senseless, since in a socialist system it is the responsibility of the

11 Ibid., p. 237.
state to resolve its citizens' housing and other problems, and to make sure they get salaries.

Western influence, therefore, came to Slovenia through open borders, travel abroad, and tourism, and even more through movies, music, television, foreign tourists, and Slovenian emigrants. The result of these circumstances was that in the "liberal" 1960s, the Slovenians had already acquired Western standards and way of thinking in regard to residential culture, dressing, and how they spent their free time. People took from the socialist system what benefited them (free education, good health service, and full employment), and accepted the ideology propagated in the speeches of the politicians, in newspaper articles, and the TV journal as a necessary evil deriving from their "middle" position.