

## Liberalization of Slovene society in the late sixties<sup>1</sup>

After World War II Yugoslavia formally reinstated a multiparty system. This system was legalized by the Law on associations, committees and public assembly prior to the first elections of August 25, 1945.<sup>2</sup> Article 27 of the federal constitution of January 1946 included the right to political assembly. This regulation remained valid until the second constitution was ratified in 1963. The new constitution defined the leading role of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.<sup>3</sup> In 1965 also the legislation changed and indirectly introduced a one-party system.<sup>4</sup> The leading role of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was even more accentuated in the constitution of the year 1974.<sup>5</sup>

The classical multiparty system was replaced by the system of people's democracy. The central role in this system was played by the People's Front. While the Front did include political parties and mass organizations, the decisive role was in the hands of the Communist Party. The supposed purpose of such a system was to enable a peaceful transition into a socialist social order. The new government first did away with the opposition, which refused to join the People's Front, and later also with the individual parties in the Front itself. In 1949, the People's Front adopted the program of the Communist Party as its own program.<sup>6</sup> Its constituent parties effectively lost their power and dissolved. After 1949 any organized opposition ceased to exist. Institutionally, opposition to the communist government was represented primarily by the Church (especially the Catholic Church).

In Slovenia, the Liberation Front had already lost its coalition character during the war (the Dolomiti declaration of March 1, 1943). The only opposition movement worth mentioning 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 from it because of the conflict between its own liberal orientation and the dominant role of the Communist Party of Slovenia in the Front. During the election campaign after the war, its members tried to establish special organizational networks, but the authorities resorted to legal proceedings to frustrate the group's intention.

Despite the absence of an opposition, and despite the drastic stifling of individuals and groups with alternative ideas, a critical attitude towards politics persisted throughout the post war period. This was particularly strong in the 1950's, especially among intelligentsia and cultural circles, which was a consequence of the partially liberalized situation. The strongest opponent of the Communist Party politics in the Liberation Front itself was Edvard Kocbek, who in 1940's acted on behalf of Christians. After the 1950's the opposition's views were mostly manifested through cultural disputes in certain journals (among the Slovene ones were *Beseda* in the beginning of the 1950's, *Revija 57* at the end of 1950's and *Perspektive* in the first half of the 1960's).<sup>7</sup> When, after a shorter or

---

<sup>1</sup> Repe, Božo. The liberalization of Slovene society in the late 1960s. *Slov. stud.*, 1994, 16, št. 2, p. 49-58.

<sup>2</sup> Law on associations, committees and public assembly, Official Bulletin of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia no. 65 - 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).

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, basic principles, article VI (Ljubljana, September 1945).

<sup>4</sup> Basic Law on associations, Official Bulletin of the SFRY no. 16/65 The law speaks about associations and no longer about political parties but on the other hand, parties are not explicitly prohibited.

<sup>5</sup> Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, basic principles, article VIII (Ljubljana, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> Vojislav Simović, Branko Petranović: *Istorija narodne vlasti u Jugoslaviji* (Savremena administracija, Beograd 1979); Božo Repe: *Politična alternativa v Sloveniji n Jugoslaviji po 2. svetovni vojni, partijska in izvenpartijska opozicija* (Povojna zgodovina na Slovenskem, Koroški pokrajinski muzej Slovenj Gradec, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Aleš Gabrič: *Socialistična kulturna revolucija* (Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana 1995).

longer time periods, the authorities judged that these journals had overstepped the boundaries set by them, they banned them.

From the end of the 1940's until the mid - eighties there was thus no organized opposition in Yugoslavia. Despite that, the authorities - especially after the 1950's-quietly supported pluralism in culture, arts, and partially in journalism and philosophy (with various interpretations of Marxism and other philosophical schools). This so called "quiet pluralism" was of course limited by the prohibition of political assembly and the "tolerance boundary," which was set at various times as the Party saw fit, and was not to be crossed. For this reason, the attitude towards the authorities - especially among the intelligentsia - depended on the circumstances in various parts of the country at various time periods, and vacillated between being less and more critical. Criticism remained limited to publishing articles in certain journals, however, and was suppressed (by administrative and judicial measures) whenever it showed a tendency to escalate into a political movement. A group that met with a very wide response in the 1960's was the so called Praxis group. Its members supported various options, but did not deviate from the socialist vision.

Owing to specific circumstances, an opposition or an "alternative" with any real potential in terms of power struggle, thus existed within the only and dominant party. The first ideological differences showed soon after Stalin's death, when Tito used his influence to slow down the democratization process. This was the period when there were fears of major anti-Stalinist movements in East European countries, which could potentially endanger socialism as a system. It was also the period when it seemed possible that Yugoslavia, after Stalin's death, might move closer to the Soviet Union again. It therefore took the Party only a couple of months to deviate from the guidelines adopted at its 6th 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> Deviation from the mentioned guidelines were at the same time expressed in the conflict with Milovan Djilas, the main author of the congress resolutions, who at the end of 1953 wrote a series of articles supporting the idea that Yugoslavia was gradually moving toward polarization into a new "bureaucratic" class on the one hand, and a new socialist left on the other. According to him, the possibility of forming two socialist parties should not be excluded. Djilas' 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 7th congress, which took place in April 1958 in Ljubljana. This incurred severe criticism by the Communist Parties from the Soviet Union and other East European countries. The structural crisis in the economy, substantial differences within Yugoslavia which could be no longer controlled by the centralized system, and a more pronounced social differentiation, which was the consequence of the rising standard of living at the end of the 1950's and in the beginning of the 1960's, resulted in, among other things, worker's demonstrations, the first example of which was the strike in Trbovlje, Hrastnik and Zagorje in January 1958.<sup>10</sup>

The beginning of the 1960's saw the first public conflicts between the republics and the federation. These occurred first in the economy (in 1962 the Slovene delegation walked out of the session about the Yugoslav economic plan held in the Federal Assembly).<sup>11</sup> This was followed by cultural polemics with political implications (the polemics 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 political leadership weakened, which resulted

---

8 Zgodovina zveze komunistov Jugoslavije (Komunist, Državna založba Slovenije, Ljubljana 1986).

9 Božo Repe: Vpliv "djilasovščine" na Revijo 57 in Perspektive (Borec 535-537, Ljubljana 1995).

10 Martin Ivanič: Stavka v rudnikih Trbovlje, Hrastnik in Zagorje (Delavska enotnost, Ljubljana 1986).

11 Božo Repe: Utrinki iz bližnjega leta 1962 (Teorija in praksa 11 - 12 1989 and 1 - 2 1990, Ljubljana).

12 Božo Repe: Obračun s Perspektivami (Znanstveno in publicistično središče, Ljubljana 1990).

in two movements with different developmental visions: one, already tested, was centralized, with a strong party, and a controlling, repressive apparatus; the other was more democratic, with tendencies to introduce self-management, decentralization and to take into account the reality and the laws of economic development. The second option was supported by Slovene politicians, who were, for the most part, also its initiators. Both movements counted on Tito's support. Formally, however, he did not take sides with either, thus effectively supporting the centralized one. Yugoslavia moved closer to the Soviet Union again. The political crisis was not addressed until mid 1960's, 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 as a union of states and not as a federal state, yet with control mechanisms which guaranteed the power of the center: a united party controlling all leading positions, a strong centralized and politically influential army, and Tito as an institution with the highest authority, combining the three most powerful functions in the country - that of the party, of the state and of the army).<sup>13</sup> The new direction was first formulated at the 8th congress of the Communist Union of Yugoslavia in 1964, where it was admitted that the national problems had not been solved once and for all by socialism, then in the early stages of economic reform (1965), and also in the political conflict with Ranković (the Brioni plenary session in 1966). Normatively, these changes were enacted by constitutional amendments between 1968 and 1971, and finally by the 1974 constitution.<sup>14</sup>

The changes were accompanied by strong nationalist pressures and also by outbreaks of nationalism, such as that in 1968 in Kosovo and that in 1971 in Croatia.<sup>15</sup> They were also expressed through the protest meetings of the intelligentsia in the 1960's and the student demonstrations in 1968. The changes were partially the consequence of political events abroad as well (the "Prague Spring" and the occupation of Czechoslovakia).<sup>16</sup>

The above mentioned processes strengthened the liberal forces in some republics (especially in Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia, and partly also in Macedonia). As for the Slovene "liberalism" <sup>17</sup> of the late 1960's, this meant more political pluralism between and within the existing political organizations - the Socialist Union of the Working People, the youth organization, and the trade unions. This "liberalism" also appealed for the continuation of economic reforms and was in favor of a combination of market economy concepts and the state's social corrective. It insisted on more independence for Slovenia within the federation, which should include the possibility of establishing direct international contacts with other countries, obtaining international loans, and the principle of fees for the maintenance of the federation. It wanted more independence in the defence policy (republican territorial defence, a right to serve military service in one's own republic or, where this was not possible, in nationally homogenous units, and the right to use one's national language in the army). The economic concept of "liberalism" began to take its shape with the election of Stane Kavčič as the president of the Slovene government in 1967. He was the leading figure of Slovene "liberalism." Contrary to the previous policy of orientation toward heavy industry (influenced by ideological reasons), he foresaw the

---

13 Dušan Bilandžić: 1971 godina u Hrvatskoj, ljudi iz 1971. Prekinuta šutnja (Vjesnik, Zagreb, 1990).

14 Božo Repe: Slovenians and the federal Yugoslavia (Balkan Forum Vol 3 No 1, Skopje 1995).

15 Božo Repe: Das Besondere am "Titoismus" (Aufrisse No 2, Wien, 1992).

16 Božo Repe: Študentske demonstracije leta 1968 v zahodni in vzhodni Evropi in v Jugoslaviji (Zgodovina v šoli 3, Ljubljana 1995).

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

development of more dynamic branches (trade, banking, transport, tourism, services, consulting, engineering, and in the long run, also of information and computer sciences). Slovenia was to become a bridge between eastern and western countries and should follow primarily the example of the West (in its specific way by combining the socially - owned property and market laws). It should encourage the development of "natural" resources (petroleum, gas nuclear energy). In terms of administration it should be policentric, but should have a uniform system of education, health care, research and scientific activities, and fiscal policy, directed from the center. The more conservative part of the leadership, which supported Edvard Kardelj, and operative core which included France Popit, chair of the Central Committee of the Communist Union of Slovenia, and Sergej Kraigher, president of the Assembly, had already tried to get rid of Stane Kavčič and with the "liberals" in the time of the so - called "road affair" in the summer of 1969. That was the period of conflicts concerning the distribution of international loans for the construction of roads. The federal government (which was then headed by the Slovene Mitja Ribičič) left out two sections of Slovene roads, while considering the proposal for the distribution of the loans. The Slovene government's reaction was very sharp. Tito himself intervened in the "road 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 some others. Among the most important is the so - called "affair of 25 deputies." In the summer of 1971 a group of republican deputies proposed, in addition to the official candidates, their own candidate for a member of the federal presidency (dr. Ernest Petrič). This was done 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 on the Communist Party's monopoly in appointing high positions.<sup>18</sup> The reaction was harsh: some deputies were stripped of their term of office, while others felt the consequences for years to come.

The conservative group used its newly gained dominance to attack newspaper editors, intellectuals, liberal politicians at lower levels, pedagogues advocating an ideologically neutral school system, some university professors and others. In 1972 they attacked Stane Kavčič himself and his supporters in the Slovene political leadership. Kavčič was forced to resign and, until his death in 1987, never returned to politics.<sup>19</sup> This attack was part of the Yugoslav attack on "liberalism," initiated and led by Tito. On September 18, 1972 Tito sent a letter to the members of the Communist Union in which he spoke about the Communist Union's resumption of indirect control and management of the society. In some cases (Croatia, Serbia) Tito also interfered directly in the conflict with the liberal movements. The constitution of 1974 guaranteed a direct leading role to the Communist Union of Yugoslavia as the only political power. It introduced a delegate system as a specific form of the self - management socialist democracy. "Classical" deputies were replaced by delegations, which hindered the system and eliminated the direct responsibility of individuals. The economy became regulated by the Associated Labor Law (1976), and the so-called agreement economy became the dominant form (a closed, uncompetitive system in which only export companies, which faced Western market conditions, could do well). The gap between Slovenia and its western neighbors, which had begun to diminish during the liberalization period, thus began to widen again.<sup>20</sup>

The period of "liberalism" in the second half of the 1960's and in the beginning of the 1970's was complex and contradictory, with a violent interruption of new economic and political processes. From the national point of view, Slovene "liberalism" was completely limited by Yugoslavia. Even the most radical ideas of this time (with the exception of part of the political emigration) could not exceed the Yugoslav boundaries. Both the

---

18 Akcija 25 poslancev, Časopis za kritiko znanosti 101- 102 (Ljubljana 1987).

19 Stane Kavčič: Dnevnik in spomini (Časopis za kritiko znanosti, Ljubljana, 1988).

20 Božo Repe: "Liberalizem" v Sloveniji (Borec, Ljubljana 1992).

circumstances at home and abroad worked against it and there were no real chances of its development. The "liberalist" movement started and developed in a socialist country and within a single party, which is why it was very specific. From today's viewpoint this "liberalism" was necessarily incomplete, inconsistent, marked by the ideology from which it originated and by the politics defining its space. It nevertheless represented a significant beginning of pluralism in recent Slovene political history, which was marked by the rule of a single party. It was also an important experience which 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 of strategic economic directions, which Slovenia still largely wishes to implement today. Finally, the "liberalism" of the late 1960's significantly contributed to the strengthening of Slovene self-confidence and to its ambition to create an independent state.

### **SUMMARY**

The article discusses political life in Slovenia and in Yugoslavia in the 1960's and early 1970', i.e. in the period of so called "liberalism." The Slovene "liberals" assumed that persistent criticism could change the structure of the system. They thus remained within the socialist system and accepted the leading role of the Communist Union. However, simultaneously they strived for pluralism within existing political organizations, for various forms of property ownership (the prevailing form was social ownership of property), for acceptance of market laws and for greater autonomy for the individual republics in Yugoslavia. According to them Slovenia should establish closer economic ties with neighboring western countries, develop more dynamic economic branches (tourism, transport, trade, services) and become a bridge between the east and the West. The conservative group in the Communist Union first tried to do away with the "liberals" during various "affairs" (the so called "road affair" in 1969, the "affair of the deputies" in 1971). They finally succeeded in defeating the "liberals" in 1972, as part of the all - Yugoslav suppression of "liberalism". Slovene "liberalism" was incomplete and inconsistent, marked by the ideology from which it originated. It nevertheless represented a significant beginning of pluralism in recent Slovene political history. It was also an important experience which 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> Although "liberalism" was defeated, economists continued to believe that the market economy was inevitable, this opinion was shared also by a part of the political top. The part of industry which exported its products to the West was used to 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 some other countries; through its open borders it had steady contacts and a possibility of comparing with western systems. Aspirations for political pluralism arose from economic pluralism which was considered to be indispensable. Although rejected by the political top, such ideas were expressed by some political scientists and sociologists even in the "leaden" seventies. Their considerations were (regarding the circumstances) above all oriented towards a pluralist scheme of Socialistična zveza delovnega ljudstva (The Socialist Alliance of the Working People) which was to comprise political groups of different world views. Such alliance was meant to be a sort of political opponent to the League of Communists. Edvard Kardelj first agreed with the concept, but then refused it in the seventies, although he acknowledged the necessity of political pluralism - a very special one, of course - he named it "pluralism of the self-managed socialist interests." Study on West Universities was not expected with a pleasure by authorities, but mostly they tolerated it. Some intellectuals (Dimitrij Rupel, Peter Jambrek etc.) who studied in seventies in USA and in other countries became leaders of opposition in eighties. "Liberalism" was therefore - tough defeated - not without consequences. The conditions before the period of "liberalism" could not be completely restored. Different views were also preserved in The league of Communists. A part of "liberally" oriented politicians managed to keep their positions; some of them went to industry or business and tried to influence political circumstances from there. One of the politicians who stayed on this "march through institutions" was Milan Kučan. In the mid-eighties he became the president of the league of Communists of Slovenia. He reformed it, and included along with younger, unburdened politicians also a part of the "liberal" crew from the sixties to its executive bodies. Such political leadership was much more susceptible for political pluralism than the former one and it is well deserved for the evolutionary transition to the multiparty system.