

BETWEEN THE HOUSE OF HABSBURG AND TITO

A LOOK AT THE SLOVENIAN PAST 1861-1980



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Ljubljana 2016

ZALOŽBA INZ

Managing editor Aleš Gabrič
ZBIRKA VPOGLEDI 14

Jurij Perovšek in Bojan Godeša (eds.)
BETWEEN THE HOUSE OF HABSBURG
AND TITO
A LOOK AT THE SLOVENIAN PAST 1861–1980

Technical editor Mojca Šorn
Reviewers Božo Repe
Žarko Lazarevič
English translation: Translat d.o.o. and Studio S.U.R.
Design Barbara Bogataj Kokalj
Published by Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino/Institute of Contemporary History
Printed by Medium d.o.o.
Print run 300 copies
The publication of this book was supported by Slovenian Research Agency

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana
94(497.4)"1861/1980"(082)

BETWEEN the House of Habsburg and Tito : a look at the Slovenian past 1861-1980 / editors Jurij Perovšek and Bojan Godeša ; [English translation Translat and Studio S. U. R.]. - Ljubljana : Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino = Institute of Contemporary History, 2016. - (Zbirka Vpogledi, ISSN 2350-5656 ; 14)

ISBN 978-961-6386-72-2

1. Perovšek, Jurij
287630080

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Preface

The Second half of the 19th and the entire 20th century was a momentous period of European history and an era which wrought fundamental changes to the social, political, economic and cultural life of what was ultimately to become the Republic of Slovenia, together with the adjacent territories inhabited by ethnic Slovenes. New borders also cut swathes through the lands these people populated. In the aftermath of its 1866 defeat in the War against Italy, Austria ceded Venetia to Italy, thus causing ethnic Slovenes in Slavia Veneta (Beneška Slovenija) to become Italian citizens. A year later, as a consequence of constitutional changes, the Habsburg Empire was transformed into Austria-Hungary Monarchy. In the new dualist state, Slovenes living in Prekmurje and the Porabje were now governed by Hungary, while the majority of the nation remained Austrian subjects. Austria, Hungary and Italy thus came to provide the historical framework for the disparate social, political, economic and cultural development of contemporary ethnic Slovenes living in Central Europe. This period was characterized by the instigation of parliamentary democracy, entrepreneurial incentive, cultural exchange and ethnic friction between Slovenes and the neighbouring nations.

Rising national consciousness and tendencies towards Slovenian emancipation within the Empire (expressed through the United Slovenia political program formulated during the 1848 Spring of Nations) were frustrated by the seemingly unsurmountable obstacle of the nation's administrative division into disparate historical lands. It was only in Carniola that ethnic Slovenes formed a majority, but even there the fundamental demand of the establishment of a university which would introduce Slovene as a language of instruction across all levels of education was denied.

The Great War, during which Slovenian soldiers fought on all the major fronts (and on the Soča/Isonzo Front, ethnic Slovenes had fought on both the Austrian and Italian sides), brought to the "change of the World". Nearly six centuries of Habsburg rule were at an end. Slovenes first united with Croats and Serbs from the erstwhile empire in the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (State of SHS). Constituted on 29 October 1918, this entity encompassed nearly all those

territories* of the former Austria-Hungary, which were inhabited by south Slavs. On 1 December 1918, the SHS united with the Kingdom of Serbia to form the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of SHS). Those Slovenes who remained outside this new state (which in 1929 was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), embarked on different paths and, consequently, developed dissimilarly.

As a consequence of the 1915 Memorandum of London between the Entente and Italy, thence the 1920 Treaty of Rapallo, some one-third of Slovene ethnic territory, in the west and Littoral areas, came under Italian rule; many Slovenes living in Carinthia also found themselves living in the new Republic of Austria. These minorities were briskly exposed to cultural assimilation, followed by Fascism in Italy (from 1922) and Nazism in Austria (after the 1938 Anschluss); likewise, Hungary displayed but little understanding the culture of their ethnic Slovene population. Slovenes living in the centralised state that became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were essentially in a much better position, despite constant unitarian pressure, this with the aim of creating a unified “Yugoslav” nation.

Compared to the preceding Habsburg era, Slovenes in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia enjoyed considerable progress in the context of a burgeoning capitalist economy; culture and science also progressed. The University of Ljubljana (established in 1919) together with the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (established in 1938) played an important role. Slovenes, furthermore, at times contributed importantly to the shaping of Yugoslav politics. The classical multi-party parliamentary system which had developed during the 1920s, came to an end in 1929 with the suspension of the constitution and the introduction of dictatorship, nominally headed by the Yugoslav King. During the second half of the 1930s two pan-Yugoslav political organizations were active in the country; the domestic political environment, however, flourished, as did the economy. Indeed, industry and manufacturing developed most extensively across Slovenian territory, and manufactures found ready markets across the rest of Yugoslavia. All of this was instrumental in strengthening national self-confidence amongst the Slovenes.

But the World had been shaken once again by the war. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 immediately sucked in ethnic Slovenes living in Italy and Anschluss Austria, and the Yugoslav Slovenes in 1941. The Axis invasion of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941 marked the onset of a crucial struggle for the very survival and emancipation of the Slovene nation; its whole territory was rapidly occupied – namely by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Horthy’s Hungary – and thence annexed and dismembered.** Within the totalitarian and racist new

* With the exception of Prekmurje, Medjimurje, Bačka, Baranja and the Banat.

** In Europe, only Greece had a similar fate.

order created by the Axis powers there was obviously no room for Slovenes as either a national or political subject. Through the expansion of their borders, all three Axis occupiers intended the long-term eradication of Slovenian nation as an ethnic entity, and although their timeframe, methods and strategies in achieving this goal differed, Slovenian historiography applies the term *ethnocide* to describe the fate intended for ethnic Slovenes.

The reaction of the part of the Slovenes, who did not accept the existing conditions, resulted in the organised armed resistance against the occupation, which was led by the Liberation Front, the main anti-fascist Slovenian resistance political organization, and its military arm Slovenian Partisans. Established at the encouragement of the communists and eventually dominated by them, the armed resistance was opposed by the other part of Slovenes and their political parties and organizations who opted to tie their fate to that of the Axis powers; and who found justification for their military and political collaboration in their fight against godless communism and thus marked the fratricidal struggle during the occupation of Slovenia between 1941 and 1945. By means of the victorious resistance movement, which was part of the Yugoslav resistance and renowned by the antifascist coalition, the Slovenes became part of those nations that chased away the fascist dark in 1945.

In its plans for post-war period, Yugoslavia's victorious communists abolished the pre-war monarchy with its centralist system of government and instead established a federal socialist state, the constituent national republics of which enjoyed a degree of autonomy and self-determination. The ordinance declaring the Federation of Yugoslavia was adopted by the Anti-fascist council in the Bosnian town of Jajce in November 1943. This manifesto gave Slovenes, as well as all the other Yugoslav nations, some important attributes of statehood; indeed, within this emergent entity and its latter incarnations*** Slovenes had their own federal nation within Yugoslavia. Consequent to the Axis defeat, and thence under the terms of the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, the Slovenian Littoral – annexed to Italy from 1920 – was ceded to Yugoslavia. The new Socialist Federal Republic was henceforth home to more than ninety per cent of Europe's ethnic Slovenes, and its importance increased as a consequence. The Second World War, and the struggle against Axis occupation, laid the political foundations and precipitated a series of events that led the Slovene people along a path towards national emancipation, which ultimately culminated in Slovenia's independence in 1991.

Within the more liberal post-WWII order, ethnic Slovene minorities living in Italy and Austria received the official status of a national minority, but such was

*** Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (in 1945); the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (in 1946); and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1963–1992).

met with disparate levels of understanding as to the actual recognition of their needs and rights. Indeed, the Slovene minority in western Hungary were unable to develop their national aspirations to an significant extent.

Post-WWII Yugoslavia was characterized by a one-party communist political system and a socialist economy, within which Slovenes were notable political players in the state's economic and social development; they also became active in the further definition of their national and cultural identity. Following 1980 death of Josip Broz Tito, the leader of the post-war Yugoslav state, Yugoslavia began to sink into a deepening internal crisis. Insurmountable differences in the political and economic outlook of its constituent republics, as well as nationalistic antagonism thwarted headway. The 1980s saw the development of independence ambitions amongst Slovenes culminating in the decade's end decision to split with Yugoslavia and, with that, build an ideologically different society with a pluralist parliamentary democracy and market economy. In 1991 the Republic of Slovenia became a sovereign national state, which in 2004 joined both the European Union and NATO, and is today a member of numerous other international organizations.

This work addresses a number of the issues and developments that defined the lives of Slovenes in the Habsburg Empire, the inter-war Kingdom of SHS/ Yugoslavia and the post-war Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It makes especial reference to the Second World War, a period marked by invasion and occupation, collaboration and resistance, revolution and civil war, which was the most challenging period in the history of the nation and has fatefully marked both ideological and political relations among Slovenes.

Between the Habsburgs and Tito: A Look at the Slovenian Past 1861–1980 was written by researchers at the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana within the context of two research programs: *Ideological-political and cultural pluralism and monism in Slovenia in the 20th century* and *Images of economic and social modernization in Slovenia in the 19th and 20th centuries* both funded, since 2004, by the Slovenian Research Agency. The findings have been presented in a number of volumes, articles and conferences in Slovenia and abroad. We believe the selection included in this e-book best presents to the lay reader specific periods in the historical development of Slovenes during the second half of the 19th and 20th centuries. Our fervent hope is that this endeavour shall contribute to the greater international recognition of Slovenian history.

Jurij Perovšek

Bojan Godeša

Ljubljana, Slovenia, 21 November 2016