

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

**The Efficient Cause: the trial of the "Ljubljana Four"
and the end of Yugoslavia
by Chandler Rosenberger**

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Dear Peter

History can explain a lot, but only so much. If you understand the historical grievances that Central European nations hold against one another, you grasp one of the factors in the appearance of new states here. Slovaks explaining their decision to leave a federation with the Czechs might, for example, complain that their culture had been submerged in an unsatisfying construct called "Czechoslovakism." The other factor in the nationalism, however, is distinct -- the reason such circumstances finally become unbearable. It's not enough to master the long-standing arguments between



Slovenes demonstrating for political freedoms, Ljubljana, Nov. 21, 1988

Czechs and Slovaks, or between Croats and Serbs, to understand why the states of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia fell apart in the early 1990s. It's necessary to track the ever-shifting sands of historical interpretation, but it's not sufficient.

Some Slovenes can produce a list of all their former rulers at the drop of a hat. That's not to say these complaints aren't legitimate. They often are.

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But the intricacies of, say, the Slovene anti-fascist resistance movement will not alone explain why Slovenes sought independence in 1991 as opposed to in 1945 or 1974. As the historian Branka Magas has written:

For a country to disintegrate in this particular manner, something must have gone very badly wrong. To seek the guilty party in the various nationalisms that legitimized themselves through the ballot box during 1990 is to beg the question of why politics should have taken this form. On the other hand, any temptation to seek deeper causes going back in time as far, for example, as Emperor Diocletian's division of the Roman Empire should be avoided, since it does not help us understand at all why *this* war should be waged at the present time.¹

It's especially important to understand the contemporary inspiration of Slovene nationalism for several reasons. First, the Slovenes had never, in modern times, had an independent state of their own before 1991. Like the Czechs, they had done reasonably well out of the Austro-Hungarian empire; before the Habsburg house collapsed in 1918, radical calls for independence from Vienna had traditionally lost out to moderate voices. Indeed, whatever their complaints with the Habsburgs, Slovenes felt more threatened by the ambitions of the newly-unified German and Italian states.

Second, today's independent Slovene state emerged from the multi-national federation in which Slovenes had placed their hopes of defense of their national identity. Take the experience of the Second World War. After defeating the pre-war Yugoslavia (which had governed Slovenia from 1918 to 1941) Germany, Italy and Hungary divided Slovenia among them. With a few exceptions on the far right, therefore, non-Communist Slovene nationalists fought a guerrilla war against the fascists alongside the Communist partisans. Even Slovene nationalists wanted to reassemble Yugoslavia, which had at least given them the status of a nation within a Slav state.

Compare that to the Slovak identity, which is divided between those committed to an independent Slovakia and those committed to Czechoslovakia. Hitler gave the Slovaks their first state. Crudely put, the popular mind (in part thanks to Communist propagandists) easily placed national and political ideas in the same baskets. To be a Communist was to be a "Czechoslovak." To be an anti-Communist was to be a Slovak (or, as the other side would put it, a fascist). In Slovenia, no such clear-cut distinction existed. What was it, then, about the 1980s that prompted Slovenes to abandon a state that both nationalists and

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"Yugoslavs" had fought for?

The Communist leader with whom even non-Communist Slovene nationalists had allied themselves during the war was Josip Broz, better known as Tito. His death in 1980 prompted a political reshuffle that was to have dramatic consequences across Yugoslavia. Most significant perhaps was the rise of Slobodan Milosevic through the ranks of the League of Communists of Serbia. Milosevic's rise and Serbia's bold bid for more power within Yugoslavia distressed the peoples of the federation throughout the 1980s. By then the Slovenes had nurtured a market and press within their borders that was considerably freer than those of the other republics. To be Slovene meant, to some extent, to support market and political reform. With the Yugoslav government slowly falling under Milosevic's control, Slovene identity was threatened not by Italy or Germany but by Belgrade.

Slovenia had had a well-established national identity for a thousand years before the "long, hot summer" of 1988. The market and political reforms of the 1980s wedded that identity a contemporary sense of being a bastion of democratization within a sclerotic socialist state. As tense as the Yugoslav federation was, it might have held together. But when the dreaded Yugoslav National Army put four Slovenes on trial in a military court, the well-established nation felt it had reason to go its own way.

WHO ARE THE SLOVENES?

Without Slovenes there would be no Slovenia. Contemporary Slovenes trace their roots back to a group of Slavs who settled east of the Alps around 630 A.D. There they intermingled with the Romans and founded the "state" of Carantania, independent until its absorption by the Franks in 745 A.D. Frankish government brought Christianity and an attachment to the emerging Holy Roman Empire. Until the rise of the Habsburgs within the empire at the beginning of the fifteenth century, Carinthian knights governed the region with some autonomy.²

As the Habsburg asserted control over the Austrian lands, Latin and German became the languages of the educated and governing classes. Slovene speakers, although common in the Austrian provinces of Carniola, Styria, Istria, and Gorizia, were mostly serfs excluded from politics. The Reformation, with its emphasis on citing verse in the vulgar tongues, gave Slovenes some of their first written texts but did not lead to a national uprising (as it did, for example, among the Hussites of the Czech Lands.) With the exception of a brief period (1809-1813) of autonomy under a Napoleonic vassal state, the Slovenes were

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governed from Vienna until the house of Habsburg fell in 1918.

Slovenes under the Habsburgs

Within the empire, however, the written Slovene language spread from religious texts to the realms of culture and science. Whether Slovene speakers should assert their language within the realm of politics was to divide the nation's leaders in the run-up to the nationalist revolutions of 1848. One stream of Slovene thought, exemplified by the radical nationalist writer Franc Preseren, advocated cooperation with other Slavs in the overthrow of the Habsburgs. The moderates, on the other hand, adhered to "Austro-Slavism," a belief that the Slavs governed directly from Vienna could expect the Habsburgs eventually to offer them more autonomy through a federalized household government. Implicit in "Austroslavism" was a fear of losing the protection of the Habsburgs should the empire fall. Better to seek rights within the Habsburg government, the argument went, than to leave oneself at the mercy of the centralizing nationalists in the German Confederation, Hungary and Italy

"Austroslavism" won out. Much of the Slovene resentment of the Habsburgs faded when Vienna abolished serfdom in 1848. Slovene



The southern provinces of those Habsburg lands governed directly from Vienna (1867-1918). Slovenes were present in Styria, Carinthia, Trieste, Istria, Carniola and Gorizia, but only formed a majority in the last two. Contemporary Slovenia is outlined.

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politicians refused to attend the Frankfurt Assembly, where liberals were plotting the democratization of a greater German confederation.³ The Slovene leaders also rejected an appeal from Hungarian-governed Croatia to join them in establishing a political movement, Illyrianism, that would embrace all the Southern Slavs. Better to negotiate with the Habsburgs for language rights and wait for the "inevitable federalization" than to throw in one's lot with a movement subject to the whims of the increasingly assertive Hungarians.⁴

It soon became clear that the Austrians would centralize, not federalize, the half of the empire governed directly from Vienna. The uprisings of 1848 shocked Emperor Franz Josef into adopting the Bach system, named after the Interior Minister who designed it. Far from give the Slavs political autonomy, the Bach system introduced governors directly appointed from Vienna. When the Hungarians rebelled and threatened to take their lands out of the empire, the Habsburgs adopted a dual monarchy, giving Hungarian nationalists such a Laszlo Kossuth a free hand in ethnically mixed regions such as Croatia and Transylvania. Determined not to let another national group form within the Austrian dominions, the Habsburg held all the tighter to what they had.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, Slovenes again divided on how to respond to the "Germanization" of their lands. While fearful of losing their cultural identity (Slovenes did not yet have, despite repeated requests, a Slovene-language university), many were nonetheless suspicious of joining up in a Southern Slav state. Conservatives made cautious overtures to their Catholic brethren in Croatia, while some liberals promoted a union with orthodox Bulgars and Serbs as well. But as late as World War One, the predominant "Yugoslav" idea in Ljubljana was the creation of a pan-Slav government within the Habsburg administration. Some Slovenes felt they had too little in common with the other southern Slavs. As Slovene writer Ivan Cankar put it:

To my mind the Yugoslav question in cultural or even linguistic terms does not exist at all . . . we are brethren in blood and at least cousins in language -- in culture, which is the fruit of several centuries-long upbringing, we are much more alien to each other than is a farmer from Gorenjsko to a Tyrolean, or a vine-dresser from Gorica to a Friulian.⁵

In August and September of 1918, national councils were established in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia and were charged to settle the fates of the three major nationalities of the collapsed Habsburg empire. For the Slovenes, it was again a question of the lesser of two evils. The Slovene delegation feared that Italy,

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victorious in the war, would build on their strong position at the Versailles negotiations and swallow an independent Slovenia. The forced assimilation of those Slovenes already under Italian rule did not bode well for the nation's fate should it fall under Rome. When the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established under the leadership of the Serb Karadjordjevich dynasty on Dec. 1, 1918, the Slovenes hoped for autonomy in a pan-Slav state.

Slovenia in the First Yugoslavia, 1918-1941

The Slovenes had mixed feelings about the new state from the beginning. On the one hand, Italy's aggressive pursuit of territory at Versailles proved to the satisfaction of many that Slovenes were in safer hands. Belgrade gave the Slovenes their first university in 1920. But the Yugoslav Constitution of 1921 gave Ljubljana no autonomy and did not even recognize the Slovene language. Slovene reaction was strong; the dominant Slovene political party throughout the short-lived kingdom's history was the People's Party, led by Anton Korosec, a Catholic priest eager to emphasize Slovenia's Central European, rather than Balkan, identity. Korosec, a former member of the Austrian parliament, played for Slovenian interests. His party boycotted the session of the Yugoslav Constituent Assembly when the centralist constitution passed. Since nationalist tensions still ran high throughout the new kingdom, especially between Serbs and Croats, the Slovenes played an opportunistic game, often voting with the Bosnians and Serbs against the Croats in exchange for more autonomy. ⁶ Indeed, Korosec was to earn such a reputation for being a moderate that he was appointed Prime Minister in 1928.

Slovenia was to lose its political rights, however, as the country careened towards civil war. King Alexander suspended the constitution and banned both parliament and national political parties six months after a Montenegrin member of parliament shot dead one of his Croat counterparts on June 28, 1928. Korosec, whom the king had kept on, resigned. When, in 1934, King Alexander was assassinated by the Croat nationalist *Ustache* movement, Korosec returned briefly to Belgrade as a member of the regent's government. But Slovene national leaders had long since retreated into the Catholic church. When the Axis attack of April 6, 1941 finished off the Yugoslav kingdom, Slovenes offered little resistance.

Wartime Slovenia and the birth of the Yugoslav Federation

After the defeat of the Yugoslav Kingdom, the Axis Powers divided Slovenia among them. Germany took the northernmost provinces (Gorenjsko and Stajersko), giving a small northeast corner to Hungary. Italy captured the south, including Ljubljana. Since the Slovene nationalist leaders had long since retreated

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into the Catholic church, the occupying powers had to devise schemes of dealing with it in order to govern. The Nazi reaction was to launch an assault on the church. The Italians, on the other hand, offered cooperation. Their conciliatory approach split the Catholic church in two. Some, such as Bishop Rozman, went so far as to bless the formation of a military unit allied to the Axis Powers, the Slovene Home Guard. Others formed the Christians Socialists or joined the Liberation Front. Both were friends of the partisans fighting to liberate and re-establish Yugoslavia.

As events slowly gave the partisans the upper hand, the anti-fascists began to plan a restored Yugoslavia. At a meeting of the Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia held in the Slovene city of Kocevje, Slovenes made their demands for autonomy and self-determination clear. Tito's Communist allies, however, were not eager to revive nationalism within the anti-fascist movement. Tito, for example, appointed a Montenegrin to lead the partisans in Slovenia.⁷

Slovenia in Tito's Yugoslavia, 1947-1980

As far as the Slovenes were concerned, the new Yugoslavia offered the same benefits and same problems as the old. Tito's government rescued Slovenia from its greatest fear, annihilation under Italian and German rule. It successfully won Slovenia a stretch of Adriatic coastline, despite a resident Italian majority. But it imposed a government as centralized in Belgrade as the Karadjordjević dynasty had been. And, being a Communist government, it subjected a wide range of previously "civil" institutions to authoritarian control.

The Catholic Church, for example, lost enormous amounts of land to nationalization. When it openly opposed the regime, it suffered the assassination of priests. In 1952, the Vatican finally broke off diplomatic relations with Tito's government. The regime was equally brutal towards Slovene intellectuals who celebrated the country's Central European identity. "The (Communist) Party has forgotten that it is in Europe," the Slovene writer Edvard Kocbek complained in his diaries in the 1950s:

that it must have more respect for the variety of life and spirit than in Russia; that our revolution is specific . . . that it is plunging into brutality and vulgarity of the most primitive kind; that it is creating demoralization and sterility among intellectuals; that it is planting abysmal passions (hatred, force, lies, personal excesses) in the countryside."⁸

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The League of Communists of Slovenia responded to such concerns by pushing again for more autonomy. In 1952 it liberalized intellectual life, allowing more contact with Central Europeans. In the late 1950s Slovene communist Evard Kardelj led a federal campaign to liberalize the economy. In 1969 each republic was allowed to form a territorial defense unit separate from the Yugoslav National Army, or JNA. (The JNA remained as equally represented within the League of Communists as any republic.)

Kardelj's efforts, however, were put down by the central administration in Belgrade, which insisted that it had the right to redistribute north-western wealth toward development projects elsewhere as it pleased. In 1968 Slovenia watched World Bank money intended for a road project to neighboring Austria and Italy be diverted to a project in the "the south" (i.e. Macedonia and Kosovo). The so-called "Road Affair" prompted the Slovene leader, Stane Kavcic, to take the side of students demonstrating in Ljubljana. Belgrade responded by orchestrating Kavcic's overthrow and by introducing stricter secret police monitoring of the "unreliable Slovenes."

Slovenia had its revenge, of sorts, in the 1974 constitution. Kardelj returned to power as an architect of a state set-up that was in theory based on subsidiarity. National administrations were to be sovereign, turning to the other constituent parties, such as the federal government, the League of Communists and the Yugoslav National Army, only secondarily. But republican sovereignty remained merely a theoretical source of power so long as the League of Communists was under Tito's sway. It wasn't until after his death in 1980 that republics could take advantage of their constitutional rights. By then, of course, the threats of German and Italian expansion that had always made Slovenes cautious in challenging a multi-national federation had faded. Slovene communists began a campaign for "bourgeois" rights at home and elsewhere in the federation, such as among the Albanian minority of Serbia's Kosovo province.

Milosevic's rise after Tito and Slovenia's response

Serbia, famously, would have its revenge as well. Complaining that it was being ham-strung by other republics while pursuing control over Kosovo, Serbia's Communists quickly sought their way within those federal institutions that still had a voice -- the federal presidency and the Yugoslav National Army.

The story of Milosevic's rise on the back of resurgent Serb nationalism, especially thanks to Serb resentment of the 1974 constitution, is too complicated to go into here. I would rather concentrate on how Slovene and Serb relations deteriorated according to perceived slights and grievances without attempting to judge their

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validity.

In April 1981 the Albanians of the Serbian province of Kosovo, comprising 90 percent of the autonomous republic's population, held mass demonstrations calling for a Kosovar Republic. The demonstrations were put down by force and the province was placed under martial law. The insurrection and its violent quelling had immediate consequences for the rest of the Yugoslav federation. Serb leaders complained that the 1974 constitution allowed other republics to escape the obligation of helping to secure Serbia's borders. The theory that other republics were conspiring with the Kosovar Albanians to exploit and strangle the Serbs was born. A movement within Serb political and intellectual life vowed to rewrite the constitution.

The communists in Serbia began to undermine the balance of the 1974 constitution by leading putsches in the party structures of the republic's two autonomous provinces, Kosovo and the Vojvodina. Since both had seats on the eight-man federal presidency, Serbia now held three votes. Another putsch of the Montenegrin leadership gave the Serbs half the presidency's votes. The Serbs then set out to re-write the constitution.

Meanwhile, democratization and economic liberalization proceeded apace in the Western republics. Ordinary Slovenes began to complain that too much of their "hard-won" money was being squandered on corrupt and inefficient socialist factories in southern Serbia and Macedonia. On May 25, 1986, a group of Slovene students offered alternatives to a post-war tradition, the "Clog Race," that had been introduced by Tito as a symbol of Yugoslav unity. In January 1987, the students took their protest one step further and destroyed a wooden clog with a chainsaw at a gathering in downtown Ljubljana.

Much to the frustration of the leaders in other republics, the Slovene League of Communists refused to crack down. Milan Kucan, a liberal, became head of the Slovene League in 1986. His government allowed extraordinary press freedoms. When the newly-founded Slovene journal *Nova Revija* ("New Review") published an issue dedicated entirely to the question of Slovene independence, the federal prosecutor filed charges that the Slovene communists refused to act on. *Mladina*, the weekly magazine of the Union of Slovene Socialist Youth, began publishing irreverent articles that found their way to other republics. One commentary in 1987, for example, condemned Milosevic's crushing of his one-time mentor, Ivan Stambolic, as a marriage of nationalism and neo-Stalinism. An investigative piece published that year accused former Federal Minister of Defense, Branko Mamula, of ordering conscript laborers to build him a villa on the Croatian coast.⁹

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Two journalists finally went too far. In March 1988, Frani Zavrl of *Mladina* and Andrej Novak of *Teleks* criticized Mamula for attempting to sell weapons to famine-ridden Ethiopia. The papers also implied that Mamula was beginning to resemble General Jaruzelski, the instigator of Polish martial law, a little too much for Yugoslavia's good. The federal prosecutor insisted that the Slovenes be tried for insulting the army and twisted Slovene arms until a court date was set. To the federal government's dismay, the trial sparked off mass demonstrations of Slovene outrage. To the army's dismay, the court acquitted the journalists. (Zavrl today says he had an informal understanding with Slovene justices that, although he might often be brought to court, he would never be sentenced.)

Today Frani Zavrl (now a prominent public relations executive) characterized the two types of censorship the magazine faced -- one from Slovene authorities, the other from Yugoslav forces -- as "maternal" and "paternal." In Slovenia, communist authorities rarely forbid publication of information but in informal meetings with *Mladina* editors pleaded that the magazine's investigations were undermining their own authority in the federation. Kucan, for example, would "make it a question of guilt," Zavrl said. "He would say he was fighting for Slovene interests in Belgrade and that we were making his life more difficult."

Federal authorities and their allies in the Slovene secret police, on the other hand, practiced old-fashioned "paternal" censorship when they could, insisting explicitly that journalists be prosecuted. Neither the Serb leadership nor communists dependent on strong federal structures for their power looked kindly upon Slovenia's self-confident accountants and journalists. While the army's counter-intelligence service, KOS, stepped up its intimidation of Slovene intellectuals, Milosevic condemned the Slovenes as traitors. In the words of the Slovene Academy of Sciences:

The old centralized League of Communists preserved in unreformed centres, from the "delegate" assembly and its executive council to the army -- which demanded a new communist party restructured on its own initiative as the protector of the state system -- received essential support from the mid-eighties on from the unexpected nationalist Bolshevism of the dominant political faction in Serbia.¹⁰

The battle lines were clearly drawn, then, by March 1988. On the one side, Milosevic stood with four of the federal presidency's votes in his pocket and the Yugoslav National Army turning to him as their savior. On the other side were the Slovene politicians (and their more cautious allies in the other republics) who,

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to the acclaim of their constituents, had pushed for economic reform and had allowed journalists to write openly about corruption in the federal state. All that was needed now for an open clash was a juicy news story implicating the army in a conspiracy against Slovenia -- one that would bring the "maternal" and "paternal" forces into conflict.

THE EFFICIENT CAUSE: THE TRIAL OF THE 'LJUBLJANA FOUR'

The facts of the case against the Ljubljana Four are undisputed. In February 1988, Ivan Borstner, a (Slovene) junior officer in the JNA, leaked a classified transcript of a high-level meeting of JNA officers to *Mladina* correspondents David Tasic and Janez Jansa and to the magazine's editor, Frani Zavrl. At the meeting, JNA officers had discussed plans for the pacification of Slovenia. The army planned to arrest around journalists and activists and, if necessary, put Slovenia under military rule. In May, *Mladina's* contacts among Slovene Communists leaked the magazine a second document, a transcript of a closed meeting of the central committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. At that meeting, held on March 29, Kucan protested against the army's paranoia with respect to Slovenia.

Mladina did not get the chance to publish either document. The Slovene secret police heard that Jansa had the latter in his apartment and, upon searching it, found the former as well. The May 13 issue of *Mladina*, which was to have contained the transcript of Kucan's speech, was censored. But by mid-May, Ljubljana was abuzz with rumors of impending occupation. In late May and early June the four were charged with possession of a classified military document.

This time the Slovene leadership was helpless. The JNA invoked its right to try citizens threatening the republic in its own military court. It ignored the Slovene League's request that the defendants be provided with civilian lawyers. All but Zavrl (who was still recovering from a nervous breakdown brought on by his previous arrest and interrogation) were incarcerated.

Zavrl wasn't the only of the four to have a record of tweaking the JNA's nose. Jansa, a young graduate in defense studies, had been a Socialist Youth functionary responsible for relations with the JNA. These he regularly soured on the pages of *Mladina*. He wrote columns supporting the right to conscientious objection, calling for the abolition of military parades on May Day and complaining that the JNA was dominated by Serb officers.

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Populist indignation

Had he known the impact his arrest was to have on Slovenia's national consciousness, he might well have welcomed it. The JNA appeared to do all it could to alienate the Slovenes. The trial was held in Ljubljana but conducted in secret and in Serbo-Croat. Seen in the light of how the Serb-dominated federation was rolling back civil rights in Kosovo, the arrest of writers investigating the JNA's plans for Slovenia was to antagonize public opinion more than any article ever could have. "This was the best thing they could have done for us," Zavrl said later. "Suddenly, it was we (Slovenes) versus them (the Yugoslav state.)"



Although the official media at first paid

Frani Zavrl washes windows at a prison outside of Ljubljana, June 1989

scant attention to the trial, Slovene student journalists made the case a *cause célèbre*. They could afford to. Student journalists in Slovenia had more financial independence than their colleagues in other republics. In the early 1970s, students at Ljubljana University established a student society for the university independent of the Union of Socialist Youth. In exchange for arranging part-time jobs for students the union would collect 10 percent of the wages earned. Although the Ljubljana association was forced in the mid-1970s to merge with the Socialist Youth, it remained autonomous. It also remained rich. "By the mid-1980s, the association had millions of Duetschmarks," according to Ali Zerdin, who at the time of the trial had been an editor at a *Radio Student*, a station that the association funded.

Egged on by the students, popular Slovene reaction was fierce. Editors at cultural magazines, the management of Radio Student and leaders of Ljubljana's flourishing "alternative" community founded the Committee to Defend Janez Jansa. The Committee collected 100,000 signatures, earned the support of more than 500 organizations nationwide, including the union of metal workers, who offered to go on strike in sympathy. "When," Magas writes, "on 28 July, Ivan Borstner was sentenced to four years in prison, Janez Jansa and David Tasic to five months, the conviction grew that not only democracy but also the Slovene nation had been put on trial."¹¹

"The army used very bad PR," Zavrl said with a laugh five years later. "They

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closed the trial, denied us lawyers and offended national feelings. It was as if we were still living under Stalinism." Which, of course, the Slovenes were not.

Some Slovenes criticized this nationalist reaction as no better than what was happening in Serbia. Miha Kovasc, writing in *Telex*, argued that the Slovene leadership had pushed for the wrong rights, e.g. the right that the trial be conducted in Slovene, when it should have pushed for human rights across the federation by condemning the JNA's use of military courts in peacetime. "This commitment to national sovereignty," Kovasc wrote, "draws a veil over the responsibility of individual national bureaucracies for the current social catastrophe." But Tomaz Mastnak, writing in the magazine's next issue, argued that there were good and bad forms of nationalism. "The platform for the homogenization of the Slovene nation," he wrote,

has been the struggle for political democracy, the defense of fundamental human rights, the battle for a legal state. The starting point of Serb mobilization has been *Blut und Boden*: Kosovo and the blood spilled on the piece of land in the 14th century battle of Kosovo. . . . Serb nationalism wishes to set itself up as a state-dominated community, whereas Slovene nationalism organizes as a society wishing to supervise the state."¹²

But the trial did more than merely highlight the difference between the developing national consciousness in Serbia and Slovenia. In the public mind, the trial pushed civil rights groups out ahead of the Slovene leadership in calls for democratization. Reforms were no longer something to be accepted gratefully from above. "For the first time," Zerdin said, "ordinary people began to discuss the idea of a rule of law. Before 1988, no one talked about 'the rule of law.' Before that, everyone had assumed that 'the rule of law' meant that the state ruled. Now civil society demanded a real 'rule of law.'"

The trial and investigations into its origins also shocked Slovenes by revealing how extensive the secret networks in Slovene society really were, Zerdin said. The Committee for the Support of Janez Jansa transformed itself into the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights and in 1989 insisted that the Slovene Assembly investigate under whose authority Jansa's rooms had been searched. The Assembly "discovered" (or at least made known) that behind the official administrative laws of the state lay a web of secret interlocking organizations, tying, for example, the Slovene prosecutor's office to the secret police. "We discovered," Zerdin said, "that the powers of the secret service were much greater than given by law. Suddenly we realized that a parallel legal order

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existed in Yugoslavia."

In light of the revelations, the Committee continued to organize popular rallies that put pressure on the Slovene authorities to stand up to Belgrade. On Nov. 21, 1988 a speaker at a large rally in Ljubljana spoke of Slovene sovereignty, the first time the demand had been raised publicly. Days after Jansa was arrested again on May 5, 1989 the Committee issued the May Declaration, which demanded Slovene sovereignty.

The press remained unrepentant and began to question the Slovene leadership's backbone in its dealings with Belgrade. Although he later led the Slovenes to independence, Kucan's failure to stand firmly against the trial from the beginning cost his leadership some of its authority, Zavrl said. Suddenly, Slovenia's communists had a full-fledged and strident civil society to deal with. They spent the next two years trying to catch up with it.

Slovene democracy and independence

The popular movement released by the trial refused to be put back in its bottle. Demonstrations continued unabated right up until the first shots of the Yugoslav civil war were fired.

The emboldened Slovene civil society, convinced that Serb centralization of the Yugoslav federation was turning them into a minority in "Greater Serbia," added Serbia's treatment of its minorities to their list of grievances. On



An injured Janez Jansa returning to prison, May, 1989

February 27, 1989, Slovenes demonstrated in favor of Albanian rights in the cultural center in Ljubljana named after the man who had first voiced skepticism with regard to the unification of Southern Slavs, Ivan Cankar. Serbia responded with a war of words and wealth. On March 1, Serbia began boycotting Slovene goods. On 22 May, Milosevic, the newly-elected president of Serbia, spoke of

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The November 21, 1988 demonstration organized by the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights. A speaker from the Slovene Farmer's Alliance spoke of Slovene sovereignty.

resurgent fascism in Slovenia. Two months later, a Serb-dominated federal presidency denied Kosovo and Vojvodina their sovereignty. Slovenia's hopes for survival looked bleak. On September 27, the Slovene Assembly passed an amendment to their own constitution that allowed theoretically for the republic's sovereignty. Milosevic responded by organizing a rally in Titograd where speakers called for war with Slovenia and planning to send Serbs to Slovenia for a "Rally of Truth." (It was blocked at the last minute by Slovene officials.)

Since Slovenia's communists could no longer count on being the unchallenged intermediary between a restive, well-organized opposition and Milosevic's puppets in the federal presidency, they threw their reputations behind the agenda of the civil society, hoping perhaps, in Tom Wolfe's memorable words, to "control the steam." On December 27, the Slovene Assembly passed an electoral law that allowed for political pluralism. On January 20, the Slovene delegation, including Kucan brought down the last meeting of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia by walking out. The Serbs had proposed a Milosevic flunky to represent Kosovo on the presidency; the Slovenes feared what the gesture might mean for Slovene independence within the constitution.

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Despite their best efforts, few of the Slovene communists escaped the wrath of the electorate. In Slovenia's first free election, the anti-Communist alliance, Demos, ("The Democratic Opposition of Slovenia,") won the majority of seats in parliament. Lojze Peterle, head of the Christian Democrats, became premier. Kucan did, perhaps deservedly, survive and was elected president of Slovenia. Through a series of steps the new parliament all but declared independence outright. In September, it declared the Slovene government fully sovereign and declared illegal any attempt to declare a state of emergency on Slovene territory without its approval.

Meanwhile the war of words had prompted all to prepare for the real thing, since, as a Slovene historian has written, "of the three most important cohesive elements in Yugoslavia, i.e., Tito, the Party and the Army, only the last one remained."¹³ The army tried to rescue Yugoslavia by both political and military means. On May 17, federal authorities tried (unsuccessfully) to seize the weapons of the Slovene Territorial Defense. Shortly after Slovenia and Croatia offered the Federal presidency their vision of a "confederation," Veljko Kadijevic, the Yugoslav Minister of Defense, threatened the two nations with force. In December, having despaired of the League of Communists, a group of retired and active army officers founded a political party, the "League of Communists -- Movement for Yugoslavia." According to its own internal statement of intent, the officers hoped to "make sure that in the next five to six months the LC-MY becomes the main political force in the Yugoslav space, and the bastion for all left-oriented parties, associations and organizations."¹⁴

It's hard to know how the army hoped to gain political ground in Slovenia, given that its center-right government gave them no purchase, its Communists had agreed to a plebiscite on independence and its public opinion was so intransigent. Between December 23 and 26, 88.2 percent of Slovenes voted in favor of outright independence. The last bastion of Yugoslavism could now only take up its arms to hope to have its way.

At 5 a.m. on June 27, 1991, Yugoslav air force jets began to bomb Ljubljana. The Yugoslav National Army seized the Slovenian border check-points. But the Slovene Territorial Defense, remodeled as the Slovenian army, began to score guerrilla victories under the direction of one Janez Jansa, now Slovene Minister of Defense. The war against Slovenia lasted only ten days. On July 7, the federal and Slovene governments signed a European Community accord, known as the Brioni Accord, which called for the withdrawal of JNA troops from Slovenia in exchange for a three-month hiatus on all claims to independence. The accord

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between the Slovenes and the government in Belgrade, unlike so many others signed between parties in Yugoslavia since, held. Although the Slovene government again declared sovereignty unilaterally in September, Slovene independence was secure. The Yugoslav conflict was now to be a war, in chimerical forms, between Serbs, Croats and Bosnians.

Although, as wars go, the fight for Slovene independence cost few lives, the case has been made that Slovenia can be held responsible for the end of Yugoslavia and the blood shed elsewhere. For example, the accomplished correspondent of the BBC, Misha Glenny, uses an interview with Mamula to raise the question in his book The Fall of Yugoslavia. Mamula, although retired, had been an *eminence grisee* behind General Kadijevic. "Kadijevic made one very big mistake with which I disagreed," Glenny quotes Mamula as saying. "He decided to let go of Slovenia. I protested but he insisted. After that happened, it was clear that we had lost Yugoslavia." Glenny then writes:

Aside from the exceptional organization and motivation displayed by the Slovene TO (Territorial Defense) and the government in Ljubljana, this is the central significance of the war in Slovenia. By forcing the independence issue, Slovenia bears some indirect responsibility for the war in Croatia.¹⁵

Whether one ought to hold the Slovenes responsible for the break-up of Yugoslavia is perhaps a topic for another newsletter. No doubt some do. But it's clear that the Slovenes didn't fight *in order* to unleash havoc on their neighbors. Slovenes fought for what had come to be their national identity -- that of a relatively open and ethnically coherent society threatened by a revanchist Yugoslav military.

It is notoriously difficult to separate cause and effect in analysing the nationalist movements that have reshaped Central Europe in the 1990s. One is always faced with dilemmæ. The Slovenes, one is told, had always had a separate identity. If so, one is inclined to reply, why hadn't it expressed itself before? The Slovene case seems especially difficult, since so few Slovenes had ever argued for an independent state and so many had fought in World War II to restore the multi-national state of Yugoslavia. Why should a nation that had never had a state before suddenly, in the late 1980s, begin campaigning for one?

The answer, it seems, lies in the nature of causation itself. Many things that might happen do not for the lack of what Aristotle called the "efficient cause."

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Aristotle divided natural and human causation into four categories. The first in the logical succession is the "material cause," the stuff from which something is made. In the case of a temple that has not yet been built, the "material cause" is the stone from which it will be constructed. Second is the "formal cause," the idea of the shape these materials will take. In the case of the temple, the "formal cause" is the design that the architect has in mind for the stone he sees in the quarry. The stone will not be formed into columns and friezes, however, without the third category, the "efficient cause," the work of cutting and lifting the stone into place. Without the "efficient cause," the last logical category, the "telos," or goal, will remain unfulfilled. In the case of the temple, the goal of having a place to worship will not be reached unless someone marks, cuts and moves the stone.¹⁶

The material cause of the newly-independent Slovene nation, the group of Alpine Slavs with their own language, has existed since the sixth century. The "formal cause," the awareness that the character of the Slovenes is different from their German, Italian and fellow Slavs, existed under the Habsburgs, as Slovene fears of domination by any of their neighbors shows. Until the late 1980s, the goal, a government in which Slovenes could express their "Central European" identity in their Slavic language, had always proved elusive. The threat of being extinguished by expanding German or Italian states prompted the Slovenes to stick by either Vienna or Belgrade.

But in the late 1980s and early 1990s Slovenes were prompted to build their state. With their western and northern borders stable, they no longer had to fear that their work would endanger what freedoms they had. Indeed, the threat to their identity no longer appeared to come from Rome or Berlin but from Belgrade. By the time of the trial of the Ljubljana Four, Slovenes already distinguished themselves from their fellow Yugoslavs by their commitment to economic and political liberalism. But the trial mobilized civil society to push for independence. It was the "efficient cause" in building an independent state, one in which Slovenes could read *Mladina* in peace.

Yours,



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PLEASE NOTE:

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Footnotes

1. Magas, Branka. The Destruction of Yugoslavia. London and New York (Verso), 1993. p. 337.

2. Slovenian Academy of Sciences, "Memorandum on the Origins of the Slovene Nation," Ljubljana, 1992.

3. Vodopivec, Peter. "The Slovenes in the Habsburg Empire or Monarchy," in "Voices from the Slovene Nation," Nationalities Papers, Vol. XXI, No. 1. New York, 1993. pp. 159-172.

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5. Pirjevic, Joze. "Slovenes and Yugoslavia," in "Voices from the Slovene Nation," Nationalities Papers, Vol. XXI, No. 1. New York, 1993. pp. 109.

6. *ibid.*

7. *ibid.*

8. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 114.

9. Magas, pp. 110 and 270.

10. Slovene Academy of Sciences, p. 6

11. Magas, p. 145.

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12. Both quoted in Magas, p. 148.

13. Necak, Dusan, "A Chronology of the Decay of Tito's Yugoslavia, 1980-91," in "Voices from the Slovene Nation," Nationalities Papers, Vol. XXI, No. 1. New York, 1993. p. 182.

14. Quoted in Magas, p. 272.

15. Glenny, Misha. The Fall of Yugoslavia. London, Penguin, 1992. p. 97.

16. Wheelwright, Philip, ed. Aristotle. New York, Odyssey Press, 1951. pp. xxxv-xxxvii.

All photos are from Stojko, Tone. Slovenska Pomlad, Ljubljana, Podrok, 1992.