

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DR-28
The Slovenes of Carinthia

Schloss Albrechtsberg an der
grossen Krems,
Niederösterreich, Austria.

19 September, 1960.

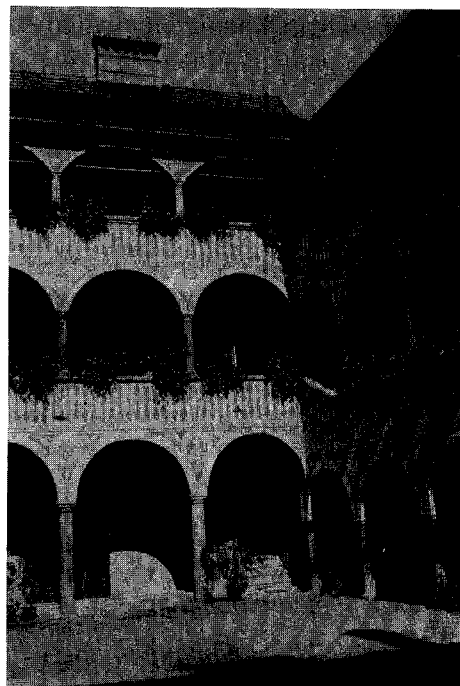
Mr. Richard H. Nolte,
Institute of Current World Affairs
366, Madison Avenue,
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Down in Carinthia on the tenth of October fires will be lit on all the mountaintops, and in Klagenfurt representatives of the federal and provincial governments will gather on the Neuen Platz (where a double-sized bronze Hercules bashes a triple-sized water-spouting bronze dragon over the head) to hear commemorative speeches. It will be the fortieth anniversary of the plebescite that kept Carinthia unified and Austrian. German organizations are planning mammoth celebrations. Slovene organizations are preparing protests and boycotts. The nationalities struggle on the borderlands of Germantum goes on.

Carinthia is one of those provinces - like Alsace, Posnania, Bohemia or West Hungary - where the German world comes gradually to an end and becomes something else. Here the other world is Slovene, and in the valleys of Carinthia the two cultures have been mixed for over eleven hundred years. Until the "national awakening" of the nineteenth century, nobody cared. Then came the Slovene Renaissance and Slovene claims, backed by the shadow of Russian-sponsored Pan-Slavism; the Germans, feeling themselves threatened in their thousand-year cultural and political dominance on the borderland, reacted with a sharpness that culminated in the madness of Nazism. When young scientists came down from Berlin during the last war to measure the skulls of the peasants, to determine who was German and who Slav, this was only the reductio ad absurdum of the claims and counter-claims of a century.

The passions aroused by nationalist sentiment in Central Europe are a fascinating riddle for an American, a riddle the solving of which is in many ways more essential to an understanding of the area than economics or geography. From the outside the issues involved seem so unreal that the observer is moved to impatience. When the choice is really between Tito-Communist Yugoslavia and



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democratic-bureaucratic Austria, why is a Slovene priest in southern Austria, so passionately concerned that the parish children should learn to read Slovene, the language of Communist propaganda published in Ljubljana?

But he is. And the reason, as David Binder once wrote from Giessen, is that Central Europe suffers from too much history, and historical memories that are too long.

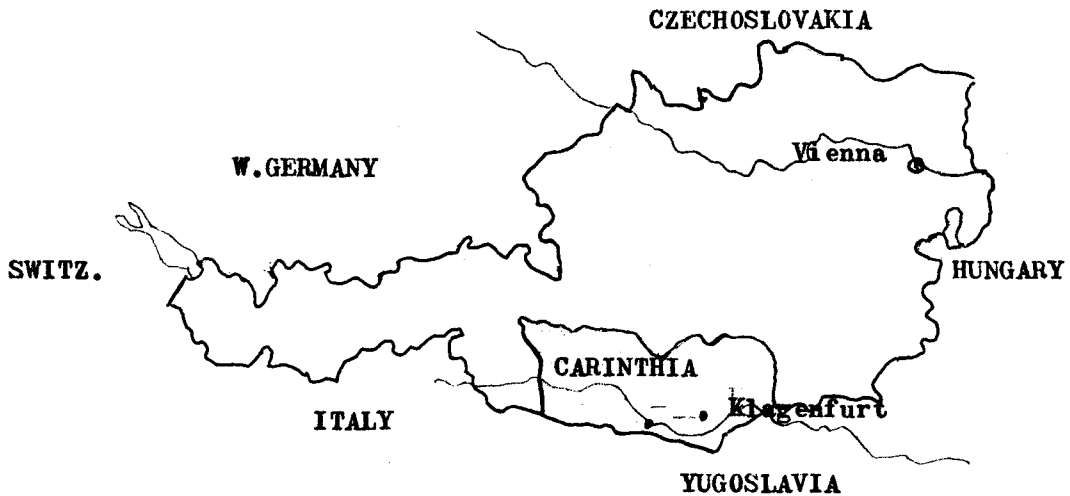
This Carinthia is a case in point. One begins with the current questions: Are the Austrians fulfilling their moral and treaty obligations to the minority? Is the Slovene minority "raping" the German-speaking majority? Is it significant that the governor's wife is a Ljubljana-born Slovene? Are the Slovene leaders the irridentist agents of Titoist Communism? Are the peasants afraid to declare themselves as Slovenes because they fear a revival of Nazism? But then one discovers that other, superficially esoteric questions are equally important: Is Carinthian "Windisch" a Slovene dialect or a mixed language, and what was its vocabulary in the eighteenth century? Was Slovene a literary language before 1800? Were the ninth century dukes who sat upon the stone throne preserved by the Zollfeld Slav or German? When did the Slovenes arrive? Finally the simplest and most basic of the questions remains unanswered and curiously unanswerable: How large is the minority?

The country itself is worth fighting over. For my taste, it is Austria's loveliest province, proud of possessing the warmest Alpine lakes, marred only by West Germany's massive discovery of its beauty and warm water - the West Germans swarm over its hotels and camping places in their tens of thousands in July and August and force Austrians and ICWA fellows to wait until September for their trips south. It is also, significantly, one of the most completely inclosed and self-contained of the Austrian Länder. In the northwest corner rises the Grossglockner (3798 meters), Austria's highest mountain, pride of the Tauern range that cuts off the southern lakes from Tyrol, Salzburg and Upper Austria. In the south the Karawanken Alps are a massive barricade between Carinthia and Carniola (gradients on the Loibl Pass road exceed 22%). Only to the northeast and east are the passes into Styria and toward Vienna lower and easier, and in the southwest, beyond Villach, another easy pass provides Austria's chief connection with Italy. Through the middle of the land flows the river Drau (Slav: Drava), among the lakes, and where it flows into Yugoslavia, the mountains give way to the Pannonian plain.

It is the Karawanken that have been most important to the history and development of Carinthia. When the Slovenes came from the east in the sixth century - driven by the Avars to a bloodless occupation of empty mountain valleys - they settled on both sides of the mountain barrier, in the Ljubljana Basin to the south and in the Klagenfurt basin to the north. By the time of Charlemagne the Germans had come, too - in response to a Slovene appeal for help against Avar pressure, the German historians say. In 1335 both Carinthia and Carniola passed to the Habsburgs, united after the 15th century with Styria as the "Inner Austrian" lands of the

Styrian branch of the Habsburg family. For more than a millennium German lords and German monasteries ruled a Slav peasantry who, almost alone among the peoples of Central Europe, cannot look back to a single moment in history when they were an independent and powerful state.

The Karawanken barrier decreed that the development of Carniola and of Carinthia should follow very different courses. The southern province remained a totally Slovene countryside, speckled with German market-towns, to which a scattering of Slovene intellectuals came - and became Germanized. The same was true of the northern slopes of the Karawanken, in southern Carinthia. But Upper Carinthia, north of the Drau valley, had never been properly



settled by the Slovenes, and its peasantry became (or perhaps always was) pure German. In the Drau valley, the heart of the country, the two peoples met and mingled, blissfully unaware of nationality. The result was the people who today call themselves "Windisch" (Wends).

About the Wends revolves the whole Carinthian minority problem of the mid-twentieth century. "Windisch" or "Wenden" is the old German name for all the Slavs, deriving from the Latin Veneti (which today commemorates Slav intrusions into the Po valley in the names "Venetia" and "Venice"). My Webster's dictionary allows the term now to denote only the non-Polish Slav peoples who live scattered around Berlin, in Brandenburg and Pomerania, but at least since the tenth century the south Germans too have used it to mean their immediate Slav neighbors, and in the Habsburg Empire it was the German name for the Slovenes. As such it acquired a derogatory connotation, like "Wop" or "Wog" in English, until in the nineteenth century educated Germans preferred to call the Slavs of Carniola and Carinthia "Slowenen" (Slovenes), and "Wenden" went quite out of fashion in polite language. Since 1920 it has been revived and used to denote the mixed people of the Drau valley in Carinthia, who speak the mixed language locally called "Windisch" (literally, therefore: Slavic). As such, it is a politically loaded term today,

and the pivot point of the whole Carinthian dispute. A curious evolution of a name!

The "nationalities problem" began in Carinthia in the early 19th century, as it did throughout the Habsburg Empire, with the coming of a new national consciousness to the Slovene people, encouraged by their intellectuals and their priests. The German nationalists claim that only then did Slovene become a literary language for the first time. This seems an exaggeration, since there was a Slovene Bible at the time of the Reformation and the "first" Slovene Renaissance; but it is true that the language was brought up to date and equipped with the vocabulary of the 19th century as part of the "national awakening". All this happened in Ljubljana, the capital of pure-Slovene Carniola, which was transformed in these years from a German into a Slav town (as were Prague, Bratislava, Zagreb and dozens of other towns, formerly German in a Slav landscape). North of the Karawanken, the Carinthian Slovenes produced more than their share of leaders to the awakening, but these were drawn south to the new Slovene cultural center, and in Carinthia the peasantry went on speaking their "Windisch", whose Germanisms indicate (I am told) that it was mixed as early as the seventeenth century: the refurbished Slovene written language was almost as foreign to them as High German.

Still, "Wenden" was the old German name for all Slavs, and the Wends of Carinthia, despite mixed language and presumably mixed blood (no one can tell me today whether they should be considered partly-germanized Slavs or partly-slavicized Germans), thought of themselves vaguely as Slavic. When the Slovenes of Ljubljana formulated their claims to a Slovene national-state, they included lower Carinthia, with the undoubtedly German towns of Klagenfurt and Villach, in their borders. The South Slav society of Sts. Cyril and Methodus founded Slovene schools on both sides of the mountain barrier. In Carinthia the "Deutsche Schulverein Südmark" subsidized the building of opposition schools - the 'ultrazinst' schools - in Wendisch districts, in which "Wendisch" was used only in the first years, until the children learned enough German to follow lessons in the official State language.

With the collapse of the Monarchy in 1918, the South Slav state was born. The Slovenes, supported by Serbian army units, hastened to bolster their claims to lower Carinthia by an armed occupation. German-speaking Carinthians, returning from the front, took up their arms again, defying go-slow warnings from the new republican government in Vienna, and civil war followed. The Peace Conference in Paris forced an armistice and ordered a plebescite to be held.

For administrative and voting purposes, the disputed area was divided into two zones. Along the border, in the districts known to contain most of the Slovenes and in fact under Yugoslav occupation, a Zone 'A' was created and left to the Yugoslavs until after the election. This zone included the market centers of Völkermarkt and Bleiburg and the pure Slovene valley around Zell. If the plebescite here were to result in a majority for Yugoslavia, a second plebescite would be held in Zone 'B' to the north, including the provincial capital Klagenfurt and its second town Villach (commanding the passes

to Italy). If the vote in Zone 'A' were favorable to Austria, no plebescite would be held in Zone 'B', which meanwhile remained under Austrian occupation.

The plebescite in Zone 'A' was held on October 10th, 1920, under Allied supervision. There seems no doubt that it was fairly conducted, although both sides had conducted a vigorous propaganda campaign and brought to bear such pressure as they could, fair and foul. It is significant that the area had been under Yugoslav occupation for over a year and a half, so that undue Austrian pressure could hardly be charged. 58% of the electorate turned in the green ballot for Austria, and the South Slavs reluctantly evacuated the zone, taking many of their most active partisans with them (including 32 teachers and 28 priests).

As the German nationalists point out today, this result was achieved only because many of the Wends preferred a unified Carinthia to union with the South Slav state, and it was a foregone conclusion that Zone 'B', if it had voted, would have produced an Austrian majority, partitioning the province. As the Slovene nationalists told me, these Wends were "not nationally conscious", and therefore preferred to keep the province intact (and their market towns of Klagenfurt and Villach in the same country as themselves). In short, economic considerations triumphed over nationalism. The Austrians add that the brutality of the Yugoslav occupation also cost the South Slav kingdom many Slovene votes.

Since 1920 the Slovene leaders have concentrated on arousing this dormant national consciousness of the Carinthian Wends, and the Yugoslav state, whether royal or Titoist, has never given up its claim, actively revived in 1945. (Although, as Austrian Foreign Minister Bruno Kreisky pointed out in a recent speech, Tito's Yugoslavia, by adhering to the Austrian State Treaty of 1955, which defines Austria's borders as those of 1937, has in fact given its recognition to the existing frontiers.)

In the aftermath of the plebescite triumph of 1920, Austrian federal and provincial authorities promised the Slovene minority full protection, in accordance with the clauses of the Treaty of St. Germain requiring such measures. What followed is a complex story of ten years of negotiations over legislation to establish "cultural autonomy" for the group, in which each side continuously accused the other of bad faith. On 27 May 1931 the provincial legislature's school committee declared further efforts to be in vain, blaming the intransigence of the Slovene leaders, and ended the debate. The Slovenes still use the decision as a stick with which to beat the Austrian authorities, but the evidence I have examined seems to indicate that the provincial and federal governments - in contrast with local private nationalist groups with considerable influence - had made a sincere effort. Slovene cultural societies, periodicals, and the powerful and efficient Slovene cooperative movement continued to exist, relatively unhampered, through the days of the Dolfuss-Schuschnigg dictatorship and even through the first years after the Anschluss, Nazi officialdom having promised the Slovenes "greater" autonomy than they had enjoyed under the Austrian Republic. German nationalist groups in the province today reprint with relish elaborate declarations of loyalty to the Hitler regime

from the Slovene leaders who are still the spokesmen of the minority in 1960. (One of the intriguing aspects of the controversy is the continuity of leadership on both Slovene and German sides, from 1920 to the present. It is not surprising, therefore, that the arguments and schemes for settlement offered in 1960 are virtually the same as those of the '20's.)

The German invasion of Yugoslavia in April, 1941, brought an abrupt end to the uneasy peace between Nazi and Slovene. All Slovene organizations were prohibited. Upper Carniola and the Miess Valley (a piece of Carinthia east of the Karawanken awarded to Yugoslavia without a plebescite in 1920, because its population was undisputedly Slovene) were annexed to Carinthia and placed under Gauleiter Friedrich Reiner in Klagenfurt (Goebbels in his diary commented ironically in 1943 that "our Austrian Gauleiters certainly excel at making territorial claims"). Almost all Slovene priests on both sides of the Karawanken were promptly arrested, some being released later under pressure from the Bishop's Ordinariat in Klagenfurt, but only with an episcopal promise to remove them to German-speaking areas and replace them with German priests who, it was specifically stated, were to know no Slovene. Some 272 Slovene families were forcibly removed to northern Germany, and their farms given to German immigrants (including numerous South Tyrolers who opted to leave the Alto Adige to become German citizens). In charge of these operations was SS-Standartenführer Alois Maier-Kaibitsch, for many years before the war the director of the German-nationalist "Heimatdienst", the leading anti-Slovene organization in Carinthia, founded during the "defense struggle" of 1919-20, and re-founded in 1955 to "continue the struggle". I spoke with the present leadership of the Heimatdienst in Klagenfurt this month, former friends and colleagues of Maier-Kaibitsch (who died a few years ago while serving a life sentence for his role in the wartime terrorism). Significantly they defended his record during the war as well as their own. Considering the strength of the Heimatdienst today, nothing did more to arouse my suspicions that the Slovene leaders may have a case after all.

It is therefore perhaps appropriate to quote from a lecture I have before me, delivered by Maier-Kaibitsch on July 10, 1942, in which he speaks of the tasks before the Carinthians, "now that we are part of the Reich": "...The events of the last years in the Balkans have given us the possibility of putting an end to the so-called Slovene minority in the area north of the Karawanken ... The carrying out of security measures required at that time, among other things, the imprisonment of some Slovene leaders in the former bilingual zone; others were banished from the Gau. We trust therefore that the small number of those who since the 1939



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census recognized their Slovene adherence will now realize the facts and understand our warnings and invitations ..." He went on to discuss the dangers inherent in the annexation of Upper Carniola, with its overwhelming Slovene character, in giving support to Slovene aspirations in Carinthia. Extreme measures must be taken to make Carinthia pure German. "The use of the Windisch colloquial language must cease once and for all even in private intercourse ... this must be achieved by all means. Only German inscriptions can be put in churches, on flags, crosses, on the grave-stones in cemeteries. It is everybody's task to report to the Gaubureau, Section for nationality questions, all inscriptions in Windisch ... Slovene literature must be confiscated and disappear from everyday use. All party and state institutions have to issue strict instructions to effect that only German may be spoken ..."

There is much more in the same vein. I wish I had read this before talking with Maier-Kaibitsch's friends at the Heimatdienst, who were trying hard to appear moderate men.

The other side of the coin is represented by the Partisan movement, which by 1942 was spreading from Slovenia to Lower Carinthia, enlisting extensive support among the Windisch-speaking population. It represented, as its veterans are proud to point out today, the first anti-Nazi Partisan movement on the soil of the Reich itself, and its support among the local inhabitants is proved by the extent and ineffectiveness of German repressive measures. Much has been made of this Partisan record by both sides. For the Slovenes, their staunch anti-Nazi record and the sacrifices of their struggle merit special consideration by the victorious allies. For the Germans, they are evidence of the continued and dangerous efforts of a Communist and Slav minority to seize Austrian territory. The Heimatdienst is eager to enumerate instances of Partisan terror at the end of the war, especially the abduction and disappearance into Yugoslavia of about 300 Wends and Germans in 1945, a number consisting largely of leaders of the pro-Austrian campaign of 1919-20 in Zone 'A'. The Heimatdienst would like to persuade one that Partisan terrorism cancels out Nazi repression.

Those responsible for the 1945 revenge in Carinthia were no longer local Partisan groups, but units from Yugoslavia, recognized as part of the new Yugoslav army of Marshall Tito. As these occupied much of old Zone 'A', the government in Belgrade presented a demand to the Allies that Yugoslavia be allowed to participate in the occupation of Austria by taking over Carinthia (assigned to the British Zone), pending a settlement of the frontier question. The British and American foreign offices replied that the frontier question was indeed open, but for this very reason they could not accede to the Yugoslav request. Nevertheless, it took from April 2 (the date of the Yugoslav note) until May 19 for the Anglo-American authorities, through a series of increasingly sharply worded diplomatic notes, to secure a Yugoslav evacuation of Austrian territory.

In 1949, at a Four-Power Foreign Ministers conference in Paris that drew up a draft of the Austrian State Treaty, it was decided that Austria should retain her 1937 boundaries unaltered. By then even the Soviet Union had lost interest in supporting the Yugoslav claim.

Since that time the Slovene leadership in Carinthia, split into Titoist and "Christian" factions, has maintained that it is no longer campaigning for a Yugoslav annexation, but only for protection of the minority within Austria and increased cultural relations with the Slovenes south of the Karawanken. German nationalists maintain that this is only disguised irridentism and the Titoist faction, at least, is not very convincing in its denials.

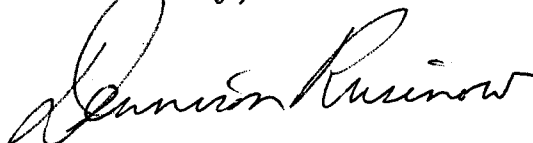
All of this is a most involved story. But it is necessary to review it to understand why the Slovene question in Carinthia is essentially different from the problem of the Croat minority in the Burgenland (DR-25), where no irridentism can be suspected, and also different from the South Tyrol problem (DR-14-20).

The latter connection is one that both the Yugoslavs and the Italians have been eager to establish. Rome and Belgrade have both suggested often that the Austrians should not concern themselves about the South Tyroleans until they have cast the mote out of their own eye in Carinthia (therefore Austria's surprise and embarrassment when Yugoslavia this month became the only European country to offer support to Vienna's South Tyrol complaint before the United Nations).

Yet the Austrians are surely right in denying the parallel. The South Tyrol was until 1918 (and, except for four towns, is still) a solidly German area, while the Klagenfurt basin has always been a mixed area; there is no language border in Carinthia like that obvious one at Salurn in the Adige valley. Perhaps more significant, the South Tyrol was awarded to Italy in 1919 without a plebescite and against the express wishes of its inhabitants (a wish confirmed again in 1946-47), while Carinthia remained undivided in 1920 after an undeniably free vote in favor of Austria. It is not without significance that the South Tyrol leadership today is in favor of a plebescite at any time, while the Slovene leaders in Carinthia have turned themselves inside out to avoid any sort of counting of Slovene noses in the territory they claim. There is more to the Slovene case than is indicated by this blunt fact, but it does do much to destroy the myth of an analogy between the problems of Bolzano and Carinthia.

But the problems as they are today, and the views of the men I talked to in Klagenfurt, are best reserved for a second letter.

Sincerely,



Dennison Rusinow

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