

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DR-29

Carinthia:

Minority Politics and
German Nationalism

Schloss Albrechtsberg an der grossen
Krems,
Niederösterreich, Austria.

20, September, 1960.

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

I drove down to Eisenkappel (Slovene: Zelezná Kaplja), seven miles from the Yugoslav border, to talk to Burgermeister Lubas, who is also a Socialist delegate to the Carinthian provincial legislature. The village, southernmost market in Austria, predominantly German in a Slovene-Windisch valley, is booming, full of new shopfronts, sporting a modern, surrealistic espresso bar still smelling of fresh paint. I found the mayor, whose mother-tongue is Windisch and who calls himself German, in his office nervously awaiting me (I had had to telephone four times to make the appointment). The community files on nationality, elections results since 1953, and school enrollments were laid out for examination, and I felt uncomfortably like a revizor (government inspector) descending imperiously on a frightened town hall. With the mayor, who is a big, jovial countryman, a peasant leader of peasants, was a little, quiet man with bureaucrat's eyes. This is the Gemeindesekretär (township secretary, the local senior civil servant); would I mind if he sat in on the interview? The

Gemeindesekretär, it turned out, is a Slovene, that is, he speaks the literary language of Ljubljana as well as the local Windisch. Little Brother watching?

When I left the office and returned to the car, a fat man with a red face hurried out of the bakery shop in front of which I had parked. Was I the American journalist interested in the Slovene minority, who had been talking to the mayor? Please, what had the mayor told me about the school problem? Would I step in for a beer and a chat? I should be sure, after all, to hear all sides. So I met the town miller, Herr Reinwald, president of the Eisenkappel PTA and organizer of school strikes against bi-lingual classes, self-



VILLAGE INTRIGUE: THE BAKERY, THE
PTA AND GERMAN NATIONALISM.

confessed German-Austrian patriot.

The incident is typical of what happens to a foreigner who pokes his nose into the Nationalities Question. It would be a bold foreigner indeed who, after a week of interviewing and another week of pouring over pamphlets, brochures, newspaper cuttings, press releases, and collections of documents, would presume to have the facts and be qualified to make judgments. Even if he has done his basic homework ahead of time, as I believe I had.

So much for the disclaimer. With the warning that this is at best a provisional report, here is how the factions and issues seem to sort themselves out in the Austrian/Slovene problem.

First, the dramatis personae. There is the provincial government, headed by a Socialist, Governor Ferdinand Wedenig (Carinthia is the only Austrian province, except Vienna, in which the Socialists are the largest party, more as a result of the anti-clericalism of the local peasantry, I am told, than of their economic views). Wedenig is of Wend origin but, raised in the German area of Upper Carinthia, did not learn Wendisch until he was fourteen, does not speak proper Slovene, considers himself a German, but has a Ljubljana-born Slovene wife. He was a member of the first provisional government, which took over from Gauleiter Rainer as the British and Yugoslavs poured into the country on 7 May 1945. He moved up to the governorship after his colleague, Socialist Hans Piesch, was forced by Yugoslav diplomatic pressure to resign in 1947. Piesch's crime, as the Yugoslav protest to a meeting of the Council of Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs meeting in London in January, 1947, pointed out, was that he and his provisional government had accepted authority in 1945 direct from the retiring Nazi officials, a move apparently designed at the time to avoid chaos in the province and present a united front to Yugoslav territorial demands. I found Governor Wedenig disliked equally by the Slovene nationalist leadership and the German Heimatdienst, which seems to speak well for him. His role in the school strikes and new school law of 1959, as we shall see later, was pivotal - and unconstitutional.

Then there is the federal government in Vienna, playing the uncomfortable role of umpire, eager to present a clean copybook to the world at a time when it is taking the South Tyrol question before the United Nations, but apparently under effective pressure at home from German nationalist organizations. For their point of view I had a talk with Assistant Foreign Minister Franz Gschnitzer, spokesman for Slovene as well as for South Tyrol questions, the day before he left for New York to join the Austrian and South Tyrol delegations at the UN. Of that, too, more later.

Thirdly, there is the provincial legislature in Klagenfurt, composed of representatives of the Socialist Party, the People's Party (Austria's Christian Democrats), the Freedom Party (liberal and nationalist), and one Communist. Significantly, the Slovene parties are unrepresented, despite repeated efforts at the polls, and of the delegates only the Communist, Landtagsabgeordneter Kazianka, claims to be a Slovene.

In the center of the fight are the nationalist organizations. For the Germans, these have been gathered together since January, 1957,

in the "Heimatsdienst" (literally, the Homeland Service). This is a roof organization covering, among others, the Kärntner Landsmannschaft (whose favorite speaker, Capt. Karl Fritz was tried as Maier-Kaibitsch's henchman in the wartime atrocities, but acquitted), the Kärntner Sängerbund (choir league), the Abwehrkämpferbund (Defense League, an organization of those who fought on the German side in the civil war of 1919, and their children; its leader Hofrat Dipl.Ing. Brabek, a veteran of 1919, is a well-meaning gentleman and senior provincial civil servant, described to me as "a Carinthian patriot, for neither Yugoslavia nor Austria"); and the "League of the Carinthian Wends", whose chief, Dr. Valentin Einspieler, a People's Party representative in the provincial legislature, is a favorite target of the Slovene nationalists. One of the leaders of the Heimatsdienst is Dr. Ing. Vincenz Schumy, who represented Carinthia at the Versailles peace conference and was later provincial governor and a member of the federal government; a moderate and grand old man of the movement, he is a useful stalking horse.

The Heimatsdienst is a revival of the organization that led German resistance in Carinthia in 1919-20, and whose longtime pre-war director was the notorious Maier-Kaibitsch. It is significant that repeated attempts were made to reorganize it during the occupation years 1945-55, but were disallowed by the occupying powers. The present director, Dr. Noribert Jordan, who sports a Hitler moustache, told me that this was at Soviet insistence, and that there is nothing Nazi about his organization. But he was happy to put me in touch with several survivors of the National Socialist regime, including the widows of Gauleiter Rainer and Maier-Kaibitsch, both of whom he defended. Only Partisan terrorism was to be condemned. The emphasis of the Heimatsdienst today, at least for American consumption, is the Communist threat inherent in the Slovene challenge.

In Vienna I questioned Secretary Gschnitzer about the Heimatsdienst. With some embarrassment, he protested that such organizations could not very well be banned, despite paragraph 5 of article seven of the State Treaty (see below), "because of domestic political reasons." I should add that I had thought the Carinthian Slovenes had a very poor case until I met the Heimatsdienst. It would be interesting to know how much support the group receives from the Freedom Party (FPÖ - see DR-6); FPÖ provincial Deputy Dr. Hubert Knaus of St. Veit a/d Glan, who happens to be chairman of the Minorities Committee of the provincial legislature(!), protested the objective "middle" position of his party, but I find his name frequently listed as speaker at Heimatsdienst functions.

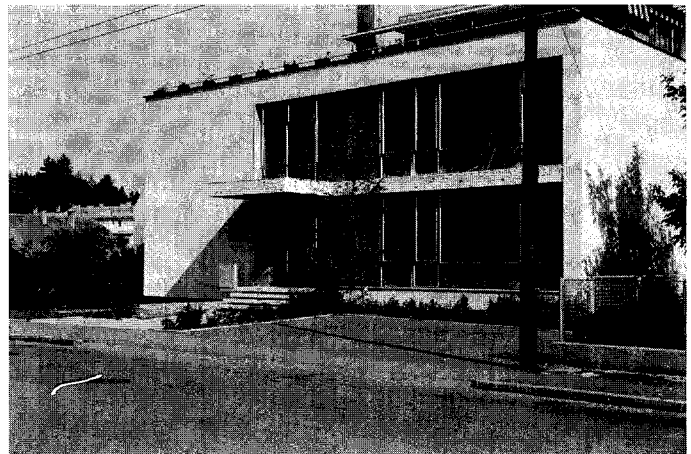
The Slovene nationalist group emerged from the war in 1945 with a fine record of underground resistance against the Nazi regime and organized themselves as the Osvobodilna Fronta za Slovensko Koroško (Liberation Front for Slovene Carinthia), whose chairman, Dr. Josef Tischler, was given a place on the Provisional Government recognized by the British occupation authorities. As a unified party, the OF did not last out the year. As a pre-condition for its participation in the first post-war provincial and federal elections in November, 1945, the British required Dr. Tischler to sign a pledge that "we will not at any time claim, demand, or make any suggestion or reference in public meetings or propaganda concerning any revision or change or modification of the existing Austria-Yugoslavia frontier,

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or any other frontier, until the Peace Conference or such earlier time as the British Commander in Chief may determine." Dr. Tischler signed, was promptly repudiated by the provincial plenum of the party, and resigned as party chairman and as a member of the Carinthian government. The OF did not participate in the elections that followed, and since then has been unrepresented in legislature and in government. The Slovenes have remained permanently split.

Today Dr. Tischler, who is now the head of the Slovene gymnasium (secondary school) in Klagenfurt, heads the "Christian" three-fifths of the Slovene movement. The descendants of the OF, avowedly Titoist in sympathy, are headed by Dr. Franz Zwitter and two of his friends and relations, also named Zwitter. (Please note again how the leaders of a minority do not have the right sort of last names - The Slovene leaders consistently have German names, and several of the leaders of German nationalist groups in Carinthia have Slav names.)

Both Slovene groups have seen hard times, and changed their names several times. In 1949, after the Paris Foreign Ministers' conference had decided in favor of the 1937 boundaries of Austria, the OF became the Demokratična fronta delavnega ljudstva (Democratic front of the working people) and campaigned as such in the 1949 elections. It won just over 2000 votes. In the same election, the Tischler group, by then called the Christian People's Party, obtained 4600 votes. (From 1920-33 the then-unified Slovene party, the Koroska Slovenska Stranka, had traditionally claimed 9000 votes and two delegates to the provincial legislature. All these figures are important to German claims about the real size of the minority.) In 1953 only the Tischler group presented candidates, winning 3900 votes. Since then neither party has campaigned in federal or provincial elections. In March, 1955, the Zwitter organization was again rechristened, this time under the carefully harmless title "League of Slovene organizations in Carinthia". This was no longer a political party, but "a union of socialist, that is, Titoist Slovenes", as Dr. Zwitter described it to me. It advised its supporters to vote for the Socialist Party of Austria - until last year's election, when it recommended a vote "for 'progressive parties' so as not to exclude the Communists" (Dr. Zwitter again). Financial support, Dr. Zwitter admitted freely to me, comes from Yugoslavia. Funds are reportedly distributed from the Yugoslav consulate in Klagenfurt but when I talked to officials there I ran into a blank wall - needless to say. It would be interesting to know more about this budding unholy alliance between the Carinthian Titoist group and the Moscow-true Austrian communists.



YUGOSLAV CONSULATE, KLAGENFURT -
CENTER FOR SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES?

The Tischler group now calls itself the Council of the

Carinthian Slovenes (Narodni svet Koroških Slovencev). It is closely connected with the "St. Hermagoras Brotherhood", a quasi-religious cultural organization that also runs an important Slovene publishing house in Klagenfurt and has a distinguished history of support for the Slovene cultural cause. Money comes from emigre Slovenes, including many in America, and also apparently - and somewhat obscurely - from the Church. The group is professedly anti-Titoist and therefore, in the face of Titoist Yugoslavia, somewhat confused as to where its loyalties should lead it. "Tischler would have no problem about his loyalty," Governor Wedenig told me; "if King Peter were still in Belgrade". Meanwhile, German leaders like to point out that the memoranda issued in the name of the Carinthian Slovenes are normally signed by both Tischler and Zwitter, and that they appear at official negotiations like a Jeckyll and Hyde pair, with Zwitter tactfully letting Tischler do most of the talking.

In the 1958 communal elections, the group made a half-hearted attempt at a political come-back in some townships, and polled 3800 votes, sometimes with the support of the Zwitter group, sometimes standing alone.

A final, behind-the-scenes actor in the drama is the Yugoslav government. It, too, speaks with two voices: a moderate one in Belgrade and a more violent one in Ljubljana, where an "Institute for Border Problems" is popularly believed to plan the campaign and issue orders, both to the Zwitter group in Klagenfurt and to the Slovene party in Trieste. My impression - without having visited Yugoslavia - is that the Belgrade government is often embarrassed by extremist demands in Ljubljana in the same way that the Vienna government sometimes finds South Tyrol passions in Innsbruck awkward.

The real issue behind all this complicated political intrigue is not Austria or Yugoslavia, but whether or not the minority is receiving the protection due it under the Austrian State Treaty and the principles of the United Nations, or whether it is being Germanized.

Article seven of the State Treaty, "Rights of the Slovene and Croat Minorities", provides:

"1. Austrian nationals of the Slovene and Croat minorities in Carinthia, Burgenland and Styria shall enjoy the same rights on equal terms as all other Austrian nationals, including the right to their own organizations, meetings and press in their own language.

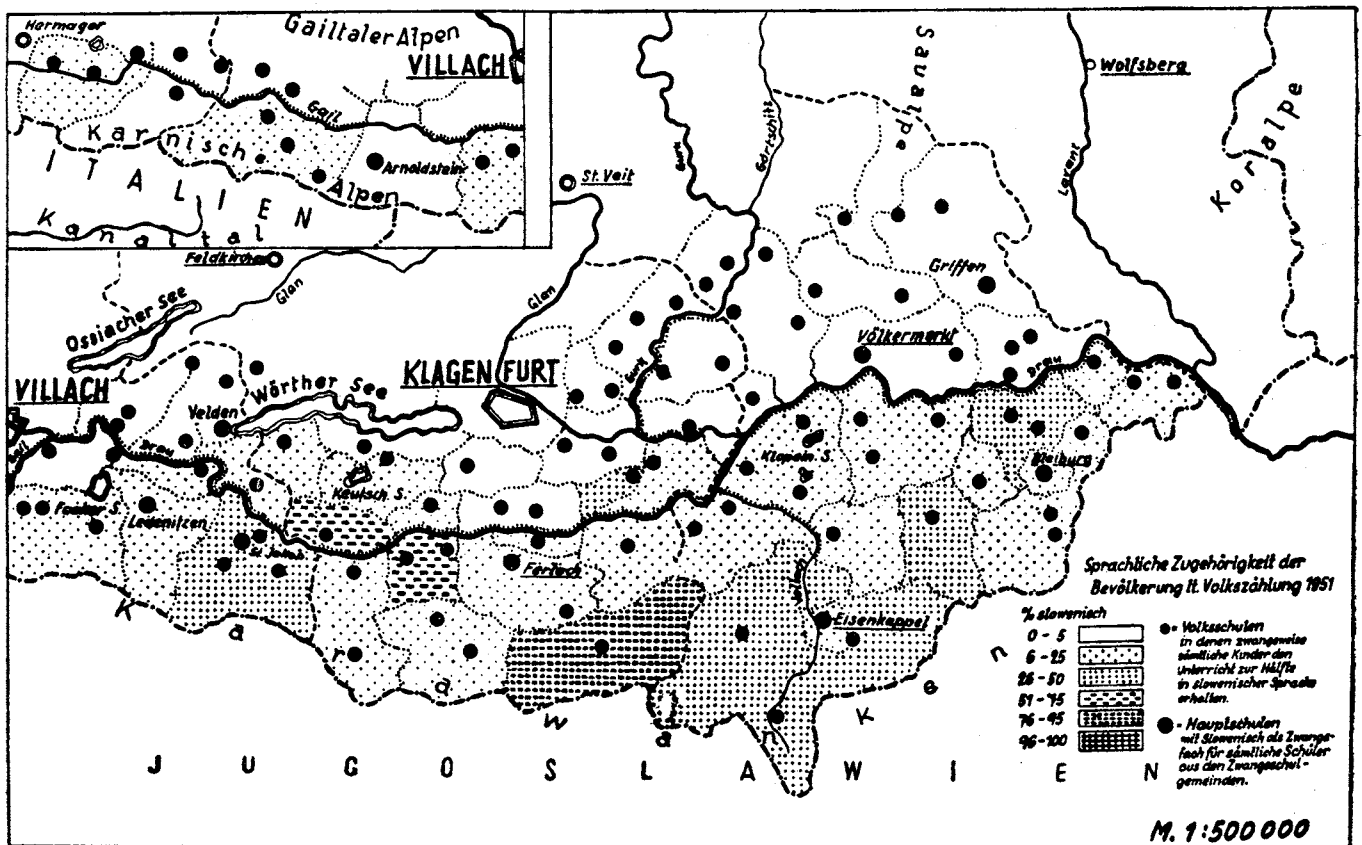
"2. They are entitled to elementary instruction in the Slovene or Croat language and to a proportional number of their own secondary schools....

"3. In the administrative and judicial districts of Carinthia, Burgenland and Styria, where there are Slovene, Croat or mixed populations, the Slovene or Croat language shall be accepted as an official language in addition to German. In such districts topographical terminology and inscriptions shall be in the Slovene or Croat language as well as in German.

"4. Austrian nationals of the Slovene and Croat minorities in Carinthia, Burgenland and Styria shall participate in the cultural, administrative and judicial systems in these territories on equal terms with other Austrian nationals.

"5. The activity of organizations whose aim is to deprive the Croat or Slovene population of their minority character or rights shall be prohibited."

The dispute centers around paragraphs 2 and 5, and to a lesser degree around paragraph 3. As usual, the history of the schools issue has been the most complicated. In 1945, apparently under the influence of the British occupiers, the provisional government adopted a school law, sponsored and largely written by Dr. Tischler (then Slovene representative in the government), establishing bi-lingual schools in the bi-lingual area - roughly the Zone 'A' of the 1920 plebiscite. In these districts, the proclamation ordered, "the instruction in the first three school years will be given primarily in the mother-tongue of the children, but the second provincial language will also be taught then from the first school year at least six hours per week. In the fourth school year will occur the transfer to German as the language of instruction, which will remain so to the end of legally required schooling (eight years in Austria). In addition, the fourth school



"Carinthian Slovenes - not including Wends - in 1951 census, and the bi-lingual schools before October, 1958".

year four hours and in subsequent years three hours of instruction in the Slovene language will be given. Religious instruction will be given exclusively in the mother-tongue of the children." In secondary schools in the area children coming from the bi-lingual elementary schools were required to study Slovene three hours a week as an obligatory course.

In the years that followed, this arrangement was the show-piece of Austrian authorities, whenever the question of the minorities was raised. The Zwitter-Slovenes complained from the beginning that the ordinance was never carried through in several townships at the northern edge of the zone, and that elsewhere it was always treated as provisional, rather than permanent. Dr. Tischler, on the other hand, with a personal vested interest in the arrangement, assembled testimonials of the effectiveness of the bi-lingual instruction and made much of the value to Austria and the Western World of a province where all the children were growing up with a good training in a Slavic language.

The regulation ran into strong resistance from the beginning and the revived Heimatdienst took its primary inspiration from the struggle against the bi-lingual schools, which the German nationalists termed "the rape of the majority by the minority". It would lead to the Slovenisation of Lower Carinthia, they cried, and they made much of the fact that the textbooks for Slovene instruction were printed in Ljubljana (it was uneconomic to produce them in Austria), and often contained thinly-disguised Communist or irredentist propaganda. More realistically, they complained that bi-lingual instruction meant that the children learned neither language well. Moreover, if children are to be forced to learn a second language, in principle not a bad idea, why in heaven's name Slovene, a language spoken by less than two million people in the world and having a limited literature? If a second language, better English, French, Italian, or even Russian. (An interesting parallel exists in Wales, where Welsh nationalists want Welsh taught as an obligatory second language, and where English parents have raised this same objection.) Moreover, they argued, Carinthian Windisch is as different from literary Slovene as High German is, so that the Wend children in effect had to master two foreign languages when they came to school. Let the "nationally-conscious" Slovenes send their children to Slovene schools, freely and in accordance with the State Treaty, but do not oblige German and Wend children to learn Slovene.

The campaign gained strength after the State Treaty was signed in 1955 and Austria became master in her own house - and after the Heimatdienst was allowed to reorganize that same year. In the school year 1957-58 it led to school strikes in a number of communities. The Heimatdienst claimed that it did not organize the first of these, but was itself taken by surprise by their spontaneity. Eisenkappel was a typical example. Here Herr Reinwald the miller, president of the local PTA, called a strike meeting. Mayor Lubas was opposed to such radical measures and came to the meeting with the local school board of which he was ex-officio chairman - only to be turned out because he was not the father of schoolchildren! The strikes took place and Klagenfurt was alarmed. Then the Heimatdienst - whatever its role in the early

strikes may have been - took over and during the summer recess announced a strike throughout the bi-lingual area for the end of September.

At this point Governor Wedenig acted in panic and suspended the bi-lingual schools by executive decree. Parents who desired to do so should have two weeks in which to "de-register" their children from Slovene instruction, and the schools would be re-opened on the basis of their decisions. When the week was over, 83% of the children in the bi-lingual schools had been de-registered, written down for instruction in German only. The Slovene leaders cried foul, the Heimatdienst was delighted.

That was in the autumn of 1958. In January, 1959, a select committee from the federal Parliament in Vienna was sent down to investigate, and in the spring a new school law was passed, legalizing the governor's decree (which even Heimatdienst leaders admitted afterward was unconstitutional): parents in the bi-lingual area who desired Slovene instruction for their children should register for it before the beginning of the 1959-60 school year. In Ljubljana, where I happened to be that Easter, I watched a massive student demonstration against the new Austrian law. But in the autumn the result was exactly the same as before: 17% of the affected children were registered for bi-lingual instruction, not a single child was registered for Slovene instruction alone. The Heimatdienst called it a "second plebescite", and triumphantly pointed out that the "Austrian" majority had increased from 58% in 1920 to 83% in 1959.

At first glance, nothing could be more fair than the new law, coupled with a guarantee that bi-lingual instruction will be provided for every child registered for it. (There are of course provisions that instruction in Wendisch-speaking districts will be in Wendisch in the first years, until the children have mastered sufficient German - a revival, in fact, of the "ultraquist schools" of the Habsburg Monarchy and the First Republic.) But aside from objecting that it would in practice prove impossible to provide bi-lingual instruction for two or three children in a township, the Slovene leaders (in a "Memorandum on the School Question" signed by Tischler and Zwitter, and in a conversation with me by Zwitter) complained bitterly that the free option of the parents was not really free. They pointed to some instances of economic pressure brought by German employers, but the weight of their argument was more subtle.

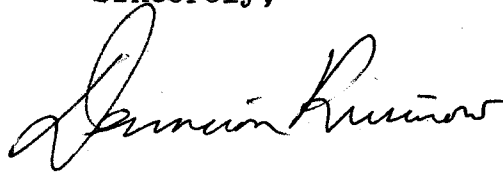
First, the Slovene minority had an inferiority complex about its language, has heard for many years that one must know German well to get ahead in Austria (this is undoubtedly true, but unavoidable), and therefore tends to be ashamed of its Slovene characteristics and to desire assimilation - except for the "nationally conscious" minority of the minority. Secondly, the Slovene parents of today are still the generation that lived through the Nazi terror, and when they hear today's Heimatdienst leaders making the same speeches that Maier-Kaibitsch and his friends made before the war - indeed, when they note that the speeches are being made by many of the same people - they are frightened of the future, and will not declare themselves pro-Slovene in anything.

An extreme example of this last point is provided by the wife

of a Slovene doctor in St. Jakob im Rosental. During the de-registration period she was telephoned and asked if she did not want a de-registration form. She said she did not need one. The anonymous speaker answered: "Thank you very much, I just wanted to draw your attention to it, so that when the right time comes, you will have no excuse!" When memory reaches back to 1941, such an incident is hard to take as a joke.

Both these arguments of the Slovene leaders bring us at last to the central problem in the Carinthian minority issue. This is the answer to the misleadingly simple question: How large is the Slovene community?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Dennison Rusinow".

Dennison Rusinow

Received New York October 21, 1960