

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DR-30 Carinthia:
How Many Slovenes?

Schloss Albrechtsberg an der grossen
Krems,
Niederösterreich, Austria.

27 September, 1960.

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Who is a Carinthian Slovene? It's all a matter of definition. The Yugoslavs count 90-100,000 of them (out of a total provincial population of 475,000). Dr. Franz Zwitter told me: "60 to 70,000 Slovene-speaking Carinthians, of whom about 30,000 are nationally conscious." German estimates are around 13,000.

And official statistics? Here are the Austrian census figures for Slovenes in the area of present Carinthia (that is, the pre-1918 figures are corrected to exclude the Miess Valley granted to Yugoslavia after the first war:

1880	91,927
1890	92,068
1900	85,311
1910	74,210
1923	ca. 37,000
1934	31,703
1951	23,839

This is a surprising revolution, even by Central European standards, in a land with a positive birthrate and an increasing population.

It all depends, one soon discovers, on the Wends. And the Wends are probably a non-existent nationality!

But in the years since 1920, thanks primarily to assiduous propaganda work by German nationalist organizations, "Slovene" has been increasingly equated with "pro-Yugoslav" and "anti-Austrian", and to be anti-Austrian is of course to be a traitor. Now most of the non-German-speaking Carinthians are not and never have been strongly pro-Yugoslav (they are what the Slovene nationalists call "not nationally conscious"), and undoubtedly the Yugoslav occupations of 1918-20 and 1945 and the Communist nature of the present Yugoslav regime have made them less so (Austrian prosperity since 1952 and continued Yugoslav poverty presumably play an additional role). Since the dialect of the non-German Carinthians, the "Windisch", is a mixed language quite different from the literary Slovene of Ljubljana, and since these people believe themselves to be of mixed blood, it was easy for them to say that they are not Slovene, when "Slovene" is equated with being a bad Austrian, and they sincerely want to be good Austrians.

Therefore they are "Wends". And if, under Slovene nationalist pressure, the census is taken without a third category "Windisch", they will prefer to deny their Slav birthright and declare themselves "German" rather than "Slovene".

It is curious how much both Slovene and German nationalist propaganda has tried to obscure this simple fact, until the innocent foreigner requires weeks to discover it for himself. It is, incidentally, a fine tribute to the success of the "soft sell" side of the German campaign, and in the tradition of 1984 "doublespeak", that instead of denying that to be Slovene is to be Yugoslav and Titoist, non-German Carinthians have preferred to be non-Slovene. But I am not sure that the Germans themselves are fully conscious of what they have accomplished, that they have created a Wend nation and enlisted it on the side of German nationalism.

When this process is understood, the central dispute between Slovene nationalist leaders and the Austrian authorities becomes comprehensible. The latter, in full reasonableness according to contemporary liberal theory, believe in the "Bekennntnis-prinzip" (Confession principle) of nationality: a man is what he declares himself to be. But the former prefer to determine nationality according to "objektive Merkmale" (objective criteria): the first language learned (assuming, please, that Windisch is a Slovene dialect), the songs sung, and ancestry. Race.

So Dr. Zwitter is right when he speaks of 60-70,000 Slovenes (objektive Merkmale), and the Austrian census bureau is right when it speaks of 23,839 Slovenes in 1951 and estimates fewer today (Bekennntnis-prinzip).

All of this is vitally important, since both sides agree that application of paragraphs 2 (elementary instruction in Slovene and Slovene secondary schools) and 3 (Slovene as an official language and the use of Slovene topographical terminology and place names) of the minorities articles of the State Treaty are dependent on defining the numbers and location of the minority.

Therefore the Slovenes have been able to complain bitterly - and internationally - that paragraph 3 has never been applied, except to the extent of providing interpreters in law courts and administrative offices of the mixed zone. But official notices and publications are issued only in German, and there are no Slovene inscriptions or place names on the highways of Carinthia.

The Austrian authorities have replied that the legislation is on hand, but has been made dependent on the carrying out of a Minderheitenfeststellung (identification of the minority), long urged by the provincial government as well as by the German nationalist organizations. When I was in Klagenfurt early this month, Governor Wedenig and Dr. Walter Weissmann, the People's Party member of the federal Parliament best informed in Slovene matters, both told me that the Feststellung would take place this year, in the form of a secret ballot (to avoid the charge of economic pressures or fear of resurgent Nazism) asking the question: "Are you Slovene?" But when I called on Secretary Gschnitzer in Vienna a week later, I learned that the Cabinet had met in the meanwhile and decided to postpone the question again, out of deference to the Slovene nationalist leader

The practical consequences would also be serious. Out of 82 school districts for which I have figures (about 90 were affected), in only 19 - all of them small and confined to the two counties of Klagenfurt and Wölkermarkt - did over 50% of the children stay in bi-lingual classes after Wedenig's proclamation of September, 1958. In an additional four schools more than 20% (15-20% is normally allowed, in international usage, to constitute a minority large enough to require special treatment,) remained registered for Slovene instruction. The Heimatdienst has already served notice that it will campaign, after the Feststellung, for a limitation of the option for bi-lingual schools to those communities having this minimum of 20% Slovenes. Presumably only these approximately 23 villages would also qualify for town markings in Slovene as well as in German, and for the recognition of Slovene as a second administrative language.

On the other hand, if Windisch is accepted as a Slovene dialect, and the first language learned (mother-tongue) is accepted as the prime criterion of nationality, then a number approaching much closer to Zwitter's 60,000 and an area comprising most (but not all) the district of the bi-lingual schools will be entitled to the special protections guaranteed the minority.

The Slovene leaders are on weak ground, open to the charge that they are demanding minority rights for people who, of their own free will, refuse to be counted as members of the minority - an obvious absurdity. Insofar as one can be sure of anything after a very short time in the area (and assuming that pub-crawling is a valid way to conduct a public opinion poll), I am convinced that this charge is valid.

On the other hand, the Slovene leaders are right when they say that their ranks have been decimated by the process of **Germanisation**. However inaccurate the census figures are - because of differences in the counting criteria and in the prejudices of the counters - they do demonstrate that. Most blatantly in the policies of the Nazi regime from 1941-45, and only a little more subtly in the programs of the Deutsche Schulverein Südmark before 1914 and of the Heimatdienst before and after the Second World War, this Germanisation has been a deliberate effort. It is excused on the ground that it is a defensive effort, and the spectre of militant pan-Slavism, carried originally on the shoulders of the Society of Sts. Cyril and Methodus, more recently on those of international Communism, is invoked with appropriate shudders of civilized German, Christian horror.

Prof. Viktor Miltschinsky, the most literate of the German faction, devotes much of his writing - in his book Kärnten - ein Jahrhundert Grenzlandschicksal and in the press releases of the Oesterreichische Landsmannschaft in Vienna - to catalogs of the progress of the Pan-Slav invasion. (Verbally, in fact, he was even more immoderate.) There are lists of hotels and sawmills bought by the Slovene cooperative associations (with the implication that they are all nests of Titoist intrigue), and lists of Slovene cultural associations and of cultural exchanges with the (Yugoslav) People's Republic of Slovenia.

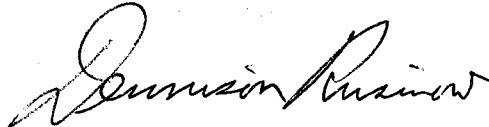
None of this is very convincing. Dr. Franz Zwitter told me: "The Slovene question was practically decided in 1949, when the Allied Foreign Ministers decreed that Carinthia should remain undivided. Now it is only a question of protection for the minority." This is true, although I am not convinced that Dr. Zwitter is convinced of it. Of the anxieties of the Heimatdienst and its associates, Secretary Gschnitzer - an interested but intelligent and relatively detached observer - said: "They are not justified by the facts. There is no danger of Carinthia being 'Slovenised' and the correct policy is therefore to give the minority more than is strictly required by law. But the existence of these nationalist organizations (like the Heimatdienst) for reasons of domestic politics cannot - and perhaps really should not - be forbidden."

It is such a policy of moderation and common sense that the federal government would like to pursue, apparently sincerely. Whether the well-organized and vocal German nationalist organizations whose effective pressure on federal organs Dr. Gschnitzer was admitting, will allow the effective and consistent pursuit of this policy remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, because the underlying reasons for Germanisation lie deeper than the frenetic campaign of the German nationalist groups, the Slovene minority will continue to disappear. A linguistic minority can survive in a primitive peasant community; in a modern society basing its economy on industry-cum-tourism, like Carinthia in the 1960's, this minority will be absorbed. The once-sizable German minority in Upper Carniola (the "Assling triangle" around industrial Jesenice) has already vanished, un mourned by any except the Carinthian Heimatdienst. Vienna is different from other German cities not least because of its large Czech minority, but all Viennese speak German in the present generation, even at home. Is it really a tragedy if Carinthia follows this course?

Only if it does so for the wrong reasons - Alois Maier-Kaibitsch's and Noribert Jordan's reasons.

Sincerely,



Dennison Rusinow

Received New York October 21, 1960