Continuity, Pragmatism, and Ethnolinguistic Nationalism

Public Administration in Slovenia during the Early Years of Yugoslavia

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A new state

On October 29, 1918, the people of Ljubljana/Laibach, the capital of the Austrian crownland of Carniola, were excited¹. Most shops and offices were closed, and crowds were moving through the streets carrying not only Slovene and Yugoslav but also British, US, and Czech flags². They were eagerly awaiting the mass gathering supposed to take place that afternoon, where the independence of the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs – popularly called Yugoslavia – was to be proclaimed. After the National Councils in Ljubljana and Zagreb, the self-proclaimed representatives of the Habsburg South Slavs, had rejected Emperor Charles' manifesto of October 17, the National Council for Slovenia and Istria had – even if somewhat reluctantly – approved a public gathering to mark the final step on the road to independence³.

The National Council was reluctant for two main reasons: its members feared public unrest and an intervention by the Habsburg authorities, who still controlled the armed forces. Yet, as it turned out, their fears were exaggerated. The government in Vienna and its local representatives did not intervene, and the manifestation proceeded in a rather orderly fashion. It did, however, take an unexpected turn, as one of the reserve officers drew his sword and called upon all the soldiers and officers present to renounce their

¹ I would like to thank the participants of the 2018 workshop “The Great Transformation: Administrative Personnel in the Successor States of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1918–1920” and the editors of this volume for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Jernej Kosi and Jernej Komac for kindly sharing several archival documents and a forthcoming chapter with me. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Slovenian Research Agency (research core funding No. P6-0235 and research grant Nr. J6-180 [A]).

² *Slovenski narod* (30. 10. 1918) 1s.

³ Walter LUKAN, Die Habsburgermonarchie und die Slowenen im Ersten Weltkrieg. Aus dem „schwarzgelben Völkerkäfig“ in die „goldene Freiheit“? (Austriaca, Wien 2017) 199–202; Jurij PEROVŠEK, Slovenski prevrat 1918. Položaj Slovencev v Državi Slovencev, Hrvatov in Srbov [The Slovenian Revolution of 1918. The Position of the Slovenes in the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs] (Razpoznavanja 35, Ljubljana 2018) 67–92; Janko PLETERSKI, Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo. Politika na domačih tleh med vojno 1914–1918 [The First Decision of the Slovenes for Yugoslavia. Domestic Politics during the War of 1914–1918] (Ljubljana 1971) 259–267.

oaths to the emperor and swear allegiance to the new Yugoslavia. The bishop of Ljubljana, Anton Bonaventura Jeglič, was shocked. He exclaimed, "But this is a revolution", and the officer – the future professor of psychology in Brno and Ljubljana, Mihajlo Rostohar – replied, "Indeed, your excellency, it would seem so!"⁴

The spontaneous swearing of allegiance was certainly the highlight of the gathering; it was also a moment that symbolically marked the end of a process that had started in May 1917, when Slovene, Serb, and Croat members in the Vienna *Reichsrat* presented their plan for the transformation of Austria-Hungary into a federation of nation-states. In the following months, this goal was slowly replaced by full independence as internal and external developments increasingly made Austria-Hungary unviable. Whereas most politicians had sincerely desired a Habsburg Yugoslavia in the spring of 1917, from the late autumn of the same year, they increasingly just wanted a Yugoslavia – with or without the Habsburgs. After it became clear that Austria-Hungary was about to lose the war and that the Entente states were not interested in its survival, independence seemed inevitable⁵.

Yet the proclamation of independence and the grandiose gestures that accompanied it were not enough to truly establish an independent state. On the contrary, the simultaneous demonstrations in Zagreb and Ljubljana were followed by a period of uncertainty, in which the new State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs desperately tried to gain international recognition, establish its organs of power, control the territory it claimed for itself, and quell internal unrest. Not even unification with Serbia on December 1 solved all these challenges, although it did bring a modicum of stability.

Both the short-lived State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes were at first de facto federal states. Unifying territories which had previously been parts of the Habsburg Empire and the independent kingdoms of Montenegro and Serbia took years, so parts of the state had a significant degree of autonomy. And in this situation, Slovenia, previously just a goal of Slovene nationalists, came into existence as an administrative unit with its own government for the first time. Its borders were only determined in the early 1920s, and the status of Slovenia within Yugoslavia kept evolving throughout this time. Yet it existed: it had its organs of power, its administration, and so forth, until it was finally dissolved in late 1923 and early 1924 during the process of Yugoslav provincial reform⁶.

The dissolution of Austria-Hungary and the establishment of Yugoslavia became the topic of historical analysis soon after 1918. Already in 1928, an edited volume with the title "Slovenci v desetletju 1918–1928" ("The Slovenes in the Decade from 1918 to 1928") was published; it included several chapters that looked at the events of late 1918 and their immediate aftermath. They were mostly written by historical actors and

⁴ PLETESKI, Prva odločitev (cit. n. 3) 266: "To je pa revolucija!" – "Da, Prevzvišeni, tako nekako."

⁵ LUKAN, Habsburgermonarchie (cit. n. 3); PEROVŠEK, Slovenski prevrat (cit. n. 3); PLETESKI, Prva odločitev (cit. n. 3); Andrej RAHTEN, Od Majniške deklaracije do habsburške detronizacije. Slovenska politika v času zadnjega habsburškega vladarja Karla [From the May Declaration to the Dethronement of the Habsburgs. Slovene Politics during the Reign of the Last Habsburg Ruler Charles] (Celje 2016); Momčilo ZEČEVIĆ, Slovenska ljudska stranka in jugoslovansko zedinjenje 1917–1921. Od majniške deklaracije do vidovdanske ustave [The Slovene People's Party and the Yugoslav Unification. From the May Declaration to the St. Vitus Day Constitution] (Maribor 1977).

⁶ Miroslav STIPLOVŠEK, Prizadevanja skupščin ljubljanske in mariborske oblasti za izvajanje in razširitev samoupravnih pristojnosti (1927–1929) [Efforts of the Ljubljana and Maribor Administrative Regions' Assemblies to Exercise and Expand Autonomous Jurisdiction (1927–1929)]. *Lex localis. Revija na lokalno samoupravo* 2 (2004) 1–19, at 8.

straddled the border between historiography and memoirs⁷. In the same year, the first monograph, Silvo Kranjec's "Kako smo se zedinili" ("How We United") also appeared⁸. Additionally, several prominent actors of the events published their memoirs during the interwar period, and Anton Korošec, perhaps the most important of them, spoke about the events at some length in a public lecture⁹.

After 1945 and the reestablishment of the Yugoslav state, historians somewhat neglected the so-called first Yugoslavia. Yet, Janko Pleterški's 1971 book "Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo" ("The First Decision of the Slovenes for Yugoslavia") was a major milestone, as it made important strides in the investigation of war-time politics and the establishment of Yugoslavia¹⁰. However, for the topic of this article, the book is less important as it ends shortly after the proclamation of independence. In the 1990s, several historians started focusing on the establishment of Yugoslavia and especially the short-lived State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs. Jurij Perovšek's 1998 book "Slovenska osamosvojitve v letu 1918" ("Slovene Independence in 1918") – and its recent extended edition, published under a new title – can be considered a standard, even if the "patriotic" tenor is hard to overlook¹¹. Bojan Balkovec's volume on the Slovene National Government is also worth mentioning, if only because this rather pedestrian monograph is the first and the only book on the topic¹².

The 1990s also saw the scholarly edition of the minutes of the National Government's Sessions, an important source, and several memoirs and diaries were published. Among them, those of Vladimir Ravnihar, who was the Minister of Justice in the Slovene National Government from 1918 to 1921, and the diary of Fran Milčinski, a senior judge, are the most important for the topic of this article¹³.

Despite all this, the topic of transition from Austria-Hungary to Yugoslavia has not been exhausted. Some sources have been neglected, were unknown or unavailable, and several aspects of this transition have not been studied systematically. More importantly, the topic needs to be revisited, because existing interpretations are all decisively shaped by

⁷ Slovinci v desetletju 1918–1928. Zbornik razprav iz kulturne, gospodarske in politične zgodovine [The Slovenes in the Decade from 1918 to 1928. Collection of Papers on Cultural, Economic, and Political History] ed. Josip MAL (Ljubljana 1928).

⁸ Silvo KRANJEC, Kako smo se zedinili [How We United] (Celje 1928).

⁹ Ivan ŠUŠTERŠIČ, Moj odgovor [My Reply] (Volders 1922); Ivan HRIBAR, Moji spomini [My Memoirs], 4 vol. (Ljubljana 1929); Fran ŠUKLJE, Iz mojih spominov [From my Memoirs], 3 vol. (Ljubljana 1926–1929). Korošec's lecture was published decades later: Silvo KRANJEC, Koroščevo predavanje o postanku Jugoslavije [Korošec's Lecture on the Emergence of Yugoslavia]. *Zgodovinski časopis* 16 (1962) 218–229.

¹⁰ PLETERŠKI, Prva odločitev (cit. n. 3).

¹¹ Jurij PEROVŠEK, Slovenska osamosvojitve v letu 1918. Študija o slovenski državnosti v Državi Slovencev, Hrvatov in Srbov [Slovene Independence in 1918. A Study of Slovene Statehood in the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs] (Ljubljana 1998); PEROVŠEK, Slovenski prevrat (cit. n. 3). See also Jurij PEROVŠEK, Die Slovenen in der Umbruchszeit und im neuen jugoslawischen Staat (1918–1929), in: Region und Umbruch 1918. Zur Geschichte alternativer Ordnungsversuche, ed. Harald HEPPNER–Eduard STAUDINGER (Bern 2001) 69–85.

¹² Bojan BALKOVEC, Prva slovenska vlada 1918–1921 [The First Slovene Government 1918–1921] (Družboslovje 9, Ljubljana 1992).

¹³ Sejni zapisniki Narodne vlade Slovencev, Hrvatov in Srbov v Ljubljani in Deželnih vlad za Slovenijo 1918–1921 [Minutes of the Sessions of the National Government of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs in Ljubljana and the Provincial Governments for Slovenia 1918–1921], ed. Peter RIBNIKAR, 3 vol. (Ljubljana 1998–2002); Vladimir RAVNIHAR, Mojega življenja pot. Spomini dr. Vladimira Ravniharja [The Path of My Life. Memoirs of Dr. Vladimir Ravnihar], ed. Janez CVIRN–Vasilij MELIK–Dušan NEČAK (Historia 2, Ljubljana 1997); Fran MILČINSKI, Dnevnik 1914–1920 [Diary 1914–1920], ed. Goran SCHMIDT (Ljubljana 2000).

nationalism. To a lesser or greater degree, historians have seen these events as a chapter in Slovene national history, a liberation, a redemption, a necessary step on the long march towards the nation-state, and have failed to understand and explain them on their own terms.

In this article, I will analyze the administration of Slovenia in the immediate aftermath of Austria-Hungary's disintegration, trying to establish whether the transition to a new state also caused its transformation. In other words, I am interested in substantial changes that occurred after October 29, 1918, and their underlying causes¹⁴.

A new administration

The first few days after October 29 were a period of uncertainty. The provincial governor (*Landespräsident*) was still at his post, the Austro-Hungarian army still existed, although it was rapidly disintegrating, and the emperor and his government in Vienna had not yet resigned. The new State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs was also not internationally recognized, its borders were disputed, and large parts of the population refused to acknowledge it. Therefore, it was no surprise that the new Slovene National Government, established on October 31, decided to leave most laws, administrative structures, and procedures intact as it tried to gain control over the territories it claimed to rule. Only legal and administrative continuity could guarantee a degree of stability sorely needed in these tumultuous times. Consequently, the National Government passed a decree subordinating all provincial and local administrative structures to itself on November 4. It thus basically replaced provincial governments and the government in Vienna as the supreme authority but did not change the underlying administrative hierarchy or its functioning¹⁵.

Subsequent decrees introduced some changes, as the National Government appointed a special commission for administrative reform, headed by former Austrian minister Ivan Žolger¹⁶. It quickly prepared a document that defined relations between the National Council in Zagreb and the National Government in Ljubljana, specified its departments and their subdivisions, established some new administrative and judicial bodies, and regulated the jurisdiction and hierarchies of the existing ones. The National Government approved this document and the relevant decree was published in the official gazette on November 21¹⁷. Because the National Government "inherited" the largely intact Carniolan provincial administration – Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, had previously been the capital of Carniola – the jurisdiction of former Carniolan authorities was slowly extended to parts of Styria and Carinthia controlled by the Slovene authorities. As far as administration was concerned, Slovenia was little more than an enlarged Carniola during the first few years of Yugoslavia's existence; even after the unification with Serbia, continuity prevailed.

¹⁴ For an informative discussion of the distinction between transition and transformation, see Florian KÜHRER-WIELACH–Sarah LEMMEN, Transformation in East Central Europe: 1918 and 1989. A Comparative Approach. *European Review of History* 23 (2016) 573–579.

¹⁵ Sejni zapisniki (cit. n. 13) 1: Od 1. nov. 1918 do 26. feb. 1919 (Ljubljana 1998) 68s. On the National Government, see BALKOVEC, Prva slovenska vlada (cit. n. 12); Peter RIBNIKAR, Narodna vlada SHS v Ljubljani in Deželne vlade za Slovenijo 1918–1921 [The National Government of SCS in Ljubljana and the Provincial Governments for Slovenia 1918–1921], in: Sejni zapisniki (cit. n. 13) 1 9–45.

¹⁶ Sejni zapisniki (cit. n. 13) 1 83.

¹⁷ *Uradni list Narodne vlade SHS v Ljubljani* [Official Gazette of the National Government of SCS in Ljubljana] (21. 11. 1918) 1, 2; PEROVŠEK, Slovenski prevrat (cit. n. 3) 180–187.

Yet there were some areas where change did happen. After all, the new state claimed to be a nation-state, supposedly an embodiment of nationalist aspirations. Unsurprisingly, then, the National Government decreed that Slovene should be the language of administration on all levels in its very first session, on November 1¹⁸. Thus, it retroactively legalized changes that had started in many areas of the administration after October 29. By the same day, the mayor of Ljubljana had already decided that the last remains of German must go and ordered that even correspondence with the (still existing) imperial army must be in Slovene. Similarly, the executive committee (*Landesausschuss*) of the Carniolan Diet instructed provincial institutions, including the Provincial Museum, to cease all use of German in official correspondence on October 30, just days before the National Government abolished it¹⁹. Some did not wait for instructions and acted on their own. Slovene magistrates at the Provincial Court in Ljubljana decided on October 29 that they would officiate in Slovene only; the next day, they informed their superior and put their decision into practice²⁰.

The establishment of Slovene as the sole administrative language was a symbolically important move, a signal that the new state was a Slovene/South Slav nation-state. However, its impact on day-to-day bureaucratic practice was limited, as Slovene had been used in administration even before the break. In all the provinces where Slovene speakers lived, they could use it in their communication with the authorities, at least according to the law. Additionally, Slovene was used as the so-called internal language of administration, the language in which business was conducted within and between administrative offices, wherever Slovene nationalists had control; it was the internal administrative language in the Carniolan provincial administration, as well as in most municipalities in Carniola, some in Styria, and several in the Austrian Littoral²¹.

Furthermore, the decree of November 1 allowed the use of German in communication with the administration. As in Austria-Hungary, members of the public could petition the authorities in their language – Slovene or German – which they often did. In December 1918, for instance, the Carniolan Industrial Company (*Krainische Industrie-Gesellschaft*), one of the biggest enterprises in the Slovene part of Yugoslavia, used German in its communication with the district prefecture in Radovljica²². Yet contrary to Habsburg practice, the authorities replied not in the same language but in Slovene. When twenty municipalities from the region of Kočevje/Gottschee, an area with a German-speaking majority, petitioned the National Government to allow the continued use of German by the administration in correspondence with self-identified Germans, the Government remained adamant: Slovene was the only official language in the territory under its jurisdiction and no exceptions could and would be allowed²³. Here, the break with the past was obvious. The administration was no longer understood as a neutral instrument of state power which treated all the citizens equally. On the contrary, it was

¹⁸ Sejni zapisniki (cit. n. 13) 1 54.

¹⁹ Marija LAH, Borba ljubljanske občine za slovensko uradovanje [The Struggle of the Ljubljana Municipality for Slovene Administration]. *Kronika. Časopis za slovensko krajevno zgodovino* 5 (1957) 135–146, at 146; Mateja KOS, Deželni muzej in prva svetovna vojna [The Provincial Museum and the First World War]. *Argo. Časopis slovenskih muzejev* 57/1 (2014) 34–47, at 41.

²⁰ MILČINSKI, *Dnevnik* (cit. n. 13) 386–389.

²¹ On language use in the Austrian administration, see Gerald STOURZH, *Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in der Verfassung und Verwaltung Österreichs 1848–1918* (Wien 1985).

²² Ljubljana, AS, AS 137: Papers of the District Prefecture in Radovljica, t.e. 637, p.e. 3482, no. 9019, *Krainische Industrie-Gesellschaft* to district prefecture, Jesenice, 17. 12. 1918.

²³ Sejni zapisniki (cit. n. 13) 1 158.

supposed to serve the interests of the ethnolinguistically defined nation and minorities were to be at best tolerated. As we will see, language use was not the only, or even the most radical, change of this kind.

Let us, however, first look at another area where discontinuity was apparent from the very beginning. Even before the National Government had been established, the National Council, spurred on by an informal committee of impatient Slovene reserve officers, relieved several Carniolan top officials – the chief of police, head of the school board, vice-president of the provincial court, and some others – of their duties²⁴. After October 31, the National Government continued this purge of Habsburg loyalists, especially those suspected of involvement in the political persecution of Slovene nationalists during the war. The newly established official gazette published a series of decrees in the first days of November. The purge targeted not only the most prominent officials but also extended to several lower-level bureaucrats, magistrates, mayors, and even school principals. On November 6, for instance, the official gazette published a decree removing the principal of the Ljubljana *Realschule*, Henrik Svoboda, from his post²⁵.

While this change of personnel had an air of improvisation about it, it had in fact been planned in advance. Already in August, when the National Council for Slovenia and Istria was established, it included a section tasked with preparing a takeover of the administration. In a communiqué published on August 17, the National Council stated that the *Austrian administration is [...] totally unfit for a modern state, and even the Austrian government has repeatedly acknowledged this. [...] Consequently, we have to reform the administration ourselves and adapt it to the democratic principles of the Yugoslav constitution*. It also announced that one of its sections would make sure *that native officials are appointed in our territory, and it is to manage a register of all the [reliable] officials in all professions*²⁶. According to Fran Milčinski, a judge at the provincial court who was reasonably well informed about the activities of the National Council, such a register was ready by mid-October²⁷.

Nationalizing the bureaucracy

By the late summer of 1918, change was definitely in the air, even if it was not entirely clear how the story would end. The collapse of Austria-Hungary still did not appear unavoidable to contemporaries, but a radical transformation seemed imminent. In Ljubljana, local German speakers sensed a coming change; some started to sell their property and prepared to leave, others adapted. A German-speaking shopkeeper announced to his clients at the beginning of October, *From now on, you will all speak Slovene to me!* Another proclaimed that he had always felt Slovene *in his heart*²⁸.

²⁴ PLETERSKI, Prva odločitev (cit. n. 3) 267.

²⁵ *Uradni list Narodne vlade SHS v Ljubljani* (6. 11. 1918) 3.

²⁶ AS, AS 58: Papers of the National Council for Slovenia and Istria, Box 2, Communiqué of the National Council, 17. 8. 1918: *Dalje [sic] je avstrijska uprava popolnoma nesposobna za moderno državo je priznala avstrijska vlada že opetovano. [...] Za to moramo tudi upravo sami reformirati ter jo prilagoditi demokratičnim načelom jugoslovanske ustave. [...] Ta odsek se ima baviti [...] za nastavljenje domačih uradnikov na našem teritoriju in ima voditi evidenco o vseh za posamezne stroke sposobnih uradnikov*. – On the establishment of the National Council see LUKAN, Habsburgermonarchie (cit. n. 3) 175–178; PEROVŠEK, Slovenski prevrat (cit. n. 3) 31–33; PLETERSKI, Prva odločitev (cit. n. 3) 244–250.

²⁷ MILČINSKI, Dnevnik (cit. n. 13) 377.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 376.

Officials all over the empire also sensed a change and began preparing for the eventuality of it breaking up. Milan Škerlj, a Slovene official in the Ministry of Justice in Vienna, was offered a decoration, the Order of Leopold, for his service sometime in October, but told his superior he would prefer a promotion to the rank of ministerial councilor (*Ministerialrat*). He explained his reasoning in his memoirs: *I thought to myself: Austria is falling apart. You will not stay in Vienna, and such a medal can do more harm than good in extremis*. A higher rank and a correspondingly higher salary, on the other hand, would be transferable to the new state, Škerlj hoped²⁹.

As the so-called national revolution approached, and especially after it became clear that the break really was final, officials started leaving Vienna and other towns and cities across Austria-Hungary and offering their services to the newly established Yugoslav state. Ivan Žolger, a former minister without portfolio in the government of Ernst Seidler, was one of these. Even before his return, he was a candidate for the presidency of the National Government; later, he led the special commission for administrative reform and was sent to the Paris Peace Conference³⁰. Milan Škerlj also returned and took an important post in the newly established Slovene Ministry of Justice, where he served until it was dissolved in 1924; he was appointed Professor of Law at the University of Ljubljana immediately thereafter³¹.

Other returnees were also appointed to different positions in the administration, judiciary, diplomatic corps, or elsewhere. On November 18, the National Government decided that all returning officials should get a post, *even if foreigners have to be dismissed because of that*³². This was an ominous sign for all non-South-Slav officials, and a fairly accurate declaration of intent. Soon thereafter came the first wave of removals, based on the real or imagined role of the deposed officials in wartime "oppression". Then the National Government dismissed those officials from disputed territories who had sworn allegiance to German Austria, or those who refused to swear an oath to the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs³³. Officials who were not able to use the new administrative language, Slovene, were also dismissed³⁴. While the majority of those fired for any of the above reasons self-identified as German or were perceived as such by the Yugoslav authorities, they did not get their discharge papers for that reason, at least not officially. However, this was about to change.

Already in August 1918, the first communiqué of the National Council had spoken of the need to appoint *native officials*³⁵. As the preparations for independence proceeded in the following months, some Slovene nationalists advocated a radical purge. While Fran Milčinski was working on the new court statute days before the break, another magistrate told him, *I am a radical; all the Germans have to be purged from the administration!*³⁶ Yet

²⁹ Milan ŠKERLJ, *Spomini in vojni dnevnik* [Memoirs and War Diary], ed. Dagmar SLEKOVEC (Izola 2011) 228s: *Mislil sem si: Avstrija je v razsuhu, na Dunaju ne ostaneš, tako odklikovanje in ekstremis ti prej škoduje kot koristi*.

³⁰ PEROVŠEK, *Slovenski prevrat* (cit. n. 3) 121; RAHTEN, *Od Majniške deklaracije* (cit. n. 5) 183; Miloš RYBÁŘ, *Žolger, Ivan, vitez* (1867–1925), in: *Slovenska biografija*, <http://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi909172/#slovenski-biografski-leksikon> [31. 5. 2019].

³¹ Vladimir MURKO, *Škerlj, Milan* (1875–1947), in: *Slovenska biografija*, <http://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi654536/#slovenski-biografski-leksikon> [31. 5. 2019].

³² *Sejni zapisniki* 1 (cit. n. 13) 1 118. For the appointments of returning officials, see *ibid.* 91, 130.

³³ *Ibid.* 123, 157.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 172, 197.

³⁵ AS 58, Box 2, *Communiqué of the National Council*, 17. 8. 1918.

³⁶ MILČINSKI, *Dnevnik* (cit. n. 13) 378: *Jaz sem radikalen; vse Nemce iz uradov stran!*

as we have seen, this did not immediately happen. The need to maintain stability and a functioning administration prevailed, as the Minister of Justice in the National Government, Vladimir Ravnihar, later acknowledged in his memoirs: *We hesitated with the purge of non-native judges and officials [...]. We did not have enough people to fill all the posts that would be vacated by the removal of foreign personnel. There was a danger that we would have to close some courts if we moved too quickly*³⁷.

However, there were indications that the new authorities would not restrain themselves for too long, and that loyalty and competence would not be enough to keep a post in the administration or the judiciary. There were indications that a “national purification” of the administration was in the making. These included not only the announcement on November 18, clearly saying that “foreigners” might be dismissed, but also the frequently employed distinction between citizenship and nationality. On November 14, the National Government announced that it was not counting on the military service of *citizens of German nationality*, and two days later, it decided that it would not be mobilizing those same *citizens of German nationality*³⁸. On December 2, the Government debated whether *Germans* (that is, Yugoslav citizens categorized as Germans) could receive jobs in the judiciary, *in principle*³⁹.

On that day, the ministers did not reach a final decision – among other things, they wanted to know what German Austria was doing in comparable situations – but in two weeks’ time, they would. In its 25th session, the National Government passed a brief decree, published in the official gazette on December 19, that basically fired all officials *of German nationality* in the territory it controlled⁴⁰. Less than a month later, it made clear that the decree also applied to *road maintenance workers and lower-level officials in the Ministry of Public Works*⁴¹. In February 1919, the Government also forced public notaries to reapply for their posts and rejected eight of the ten German applicants; three did not even bother to apply⁴².

How many people lost their jobs in the purge is not entirely clear; there are no exact data in the Yugoslav documents. Yet, Austrian statistics from 1921 showing 581 officials who were employed by German Austria because they had been fired in Yugoslavia allow for some approximation of the scale of the purge⁴³. While not all of these came from Slovenia – most probably did –, some of the fired found jobs in the private sector or retired. So, it is safe to assume that at least 500 officials were permanently dismissed.

This had an impact on the livelihood of many more, especially as the situation was exacerbated by further measures. Namely, the National Government also emphasized that the fired officials needed to vacate their apartments. In December 1918, for instance, the ministers twice debated the need for railway officials who had just lost their jobs to move

³⁷ RAVNIHAR, Mojega življenja pot (cit. n. 13) 135s.: *S takojšnjo odstranitvijo vseh tujerodnih sodnikov in uradnikov smo oklevali. [...] Zategadelj nam je manjkalo ljudi, da bi mogli zasesti vsa mesta, ki bi postala prazna z odstranitvijo tujerodnega osebja. Obstajala bi nevarnost, da bi morali nekatera sodišča kar zapreti, če hitimo s čiščenjem.*

³⁸ Sejni zapisniki (cit. n. 13) 1 109, 115.

³⁹ Ibid. 157.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 193; *Uradni list Narodne vlade SHS v Ljubljani* (19. 12. 1918) 53s.

⁴¹ Sejni zapisniki (cit. n. 13) 1 254.

⁴² Milan ŠKERLJ, Pravosodje v Sloveniji v prvih desetih letih po zedinjenju [The Judiciary in Slovenia in the First Decade after Unification], in: *Slovenci* (cit. n. 7) 388–423, at 414.

⁴³ Herta HAFNER, Der sozio-ökonomische Wandel der österreichischen Staatsangestellten 1914–1924 (Diss. Univ. Wien 1991) 316s.

out in three days or be evicted *via facti*⁴⁴. One minister even suggested that all foreigners should be evicted from their houses and apartments to alleviate the housing crisis. The government, however, decided to wait and gather more information, especially about the policies of German Austria on this matter⁴⁵.

Some Slovene nationalists were certainly eager for a wider purge, not only of officials but of all Germans – or more precisely, of all those they categorized as Germans. On January 1, 1919, Fran Milčinski wrote in his diary that *the radicals* were promising to *help Germans move*. Apparently, they were planning to emulate the Czechs, who were supposedly *sending furniture wagons to [German] houses and buying them [one-way] train tickets*⁴⁶. In fact, some saw the break as an opportunity for a comprehensive “purification” that would remove all those they perceived as foreign from the new Yugoslav state. An anonymous official in the municipal administration of Ljubljana, for instance, took it upon himself to prepare a list of all the Jews in town – even the assimilated ones – and sent it to the National Government, asking “if something could be done about this”⁴⁷.

The nationalization of the administration was certainly a crucial break with the Austrian past. While the pre-war Austrian bureaucracy had been staffed by individuals who could apply for a post regardless of national or any other identification – at least in principle –, the new administration only had room for “proper Yugoslavs”, defined ethnolinguistically and not by citizenship⁴⁸. This nationalization ran parallel to similar processes in other successor states, especially German Austria. In fact, the decree of December 16 was a direct reaction to a similar measure enacted on the other side of the northern Yugoslav border some days before, as the decree explicitly stated in its preamble⁴⁹. However, the Slovene government was more radical in its approach. The Austrian government emphasized that those non-Germans who had been living in the territory of the new state for a long time, were married to German women, were raising their children as Germans, and were nationally indifferent need not be fired; especially if they were lower-level officials⁵⁰. The National Government in Ljubljana, on the other hand, did not allow for any exceptions, at least not in principle.

The nationalization of the administration formed part of a wider process by which the nationalists wanted to make sure the state borders exactly matched the boundaries of their imagined community, of their nation, which is after all a central tenet of nationalism as

⁴⁴ Sejni zapisniki (cit. n. 13) I 204, 231.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 260.

⁴⁶ MILČINSKI, Dnevnik (cit. n. 13) 415: *Naši radikalci obetajo, da bomo pomagali Nemcem se seliti. Češ, na Češkem so jim pošiljali kar pobištvene vozove pred hišo in jim kupili vozovnice za železnico.*

⁴⁷ Marko ŠTEPEC, Vpliv vojne na življenje civilnega prebivalstva v slovenskih deželah 1914–1918 [The Impact of the War on the Lives of Civilians in the Slovene Lands 1914–1918] (Diss. University of Ljubljana 2018) 160.

⁴⁸ For the Habsburg administration and its officials, see John DEAK, Forging a Multinational State. State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War (Stanford Studies on Central and Eastern Europe, Stanford 2015); Waltraud HEINDL, Josephinische Mandarine. Bürokratie und Beamte in Österreich, vol. 2: 1848–1914 (Studien zu Politik und Verwaltung 107, Wien–Köln–Graz 2013); Karl MEGNER, Beamte. Wirtschafts- und sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte des k. k. Beamtentums (Studien zur Geschichte der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie 21, Wien 21986).

⁴⁹ *Uradni list Narodne vlade SHS v Ljubljani* (19. 12. 1918) 53. For the developments in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania, see the contributions by Martin Klečáček, Julia Bavouzet, and Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici in this volume.

⁵⁰ HAFNER, Wandel (cit. n. 43) 229s. See also the contribution by Karl Megner and Guenther Steiner in this volume.

a political principle⁵¹. And because the situation on the ground was different, they were trying to change it by limiting the rights of citizens who in their minds did not belong to the nation. This was not limited to the Slovene part of the new state; on the contrary, it was happening in other parts of Yugoslavia too. For example, the National Council of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs in Zagreb, the supreme authority of the short-lived State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, instructed regional and local national councils that Germans and Hungarians could not become members⁵².

In short, while “foreigners” became citizens of Yugoslavia after the break, because they had their domicile in its territory, they were not allowed to become full members of the political community, the nation, because it was defined not in a civic but in an ethnolinguistic sense; the state, the nation, and the linguistic community had to be exactly the same⁵³. Consequently, “foreigners” were denied certain rights and opportunities, a job in the administration among them. Such a distinction between legal citizenship and full membership in the political community could already be observed in the Habsburg Empire. For one, it applied to women, who were nominal citizens but were not enfranchised and were thus deprived of participatory citizenship⁵⁴. And in the eyes of many native Viennese, at least, full membership in the community of Austrians was also denied to all those who – despite their Austrian citizenship – were perceived as foreign. This category very much included Empress Zita, whose accent disqualified her even if she identified as an Austrian and even if she was not only a citizen but a member of the ruling family⁵⁵.

The situation of non-South-Slav officials in the new Yugoslavia was comparable. As we have already seen, they were denied full rights even if they were nominal citizens. They had citizenship but they could not keep their jobs because they were categorized as “foreigners”. Additionally, their full membership in the national community was not dependent on their legal status or their actions but on the judgment of somebody else.

Let us look at the latter dimension of the situation in more detail. While there was room for officials’ personal declarations of nationality in the process of establishing who was German and who was not, in the last instance it was the government’s decision, based on the belief that nationality is an objective trait and can be objectively determined. After all, this was the dominant understanding of the time; there was even some legal precedent from the pre-war Austrian legal system⁵⁶. From the documents, it is not entirely clear how the Slovene authorities went about determining ethnicity during the purge. Yet Milan Škerlj’s account of the purge in the judiciary illustrates the process and the prevailing

⁵¹ Ernest GELLNER, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca 2006) 1.

⁵² Ivan KOSNICA, *Odnos državljanstva i nacionalne pripadnosti u Kraljevini SHS/Jugoslaviji* [The Relation between Citizenship and Nationality in the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia]. *Zbornik Pravnog fakulteta u Zagrebu* 68 (2018) 61–83, at 68.

⁵³ Tomasz KAMUSELLA, *The Normative Isomorphism of Language, Nation and State*, in: *Understanding Central Europe*, ed. Marcin MOSKALEWICZ–Wojciech PRZYBYLSKI (BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 115, Abingdon–New York 2017) 144–150. For a wider context, see also Tomasz KAMUSELLA, *The Politics of Language and Nationalism in Modern Central Europe* (Basingstoke–New York 2009).

⁵⁴ Maureen HEALY, *Becoming Austrian: Women, the State, and Citizenship in World War I*. *Central European History* 35 (2002) 1–35, at 1s.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 13–15.

⁵⁶ Gerald STOURZH, *Ethnic Attribution in Late Imperial Austria: Good Intentions, Evil Consequences*, in: *Gerald STOURZH, From Vienna to Chicago and Back. Essays on Intellectual History and Political Thought in Europe and America* (Chicago 2007) 157–176; Tara ZAHRA, *Kidnapped Souls. National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca–London 2008) 13–47.

mindset rather well. According to him, the Ministry of Justice was afraid it would lose too many magistrates and other court officials in the wave of firings. Therefore, it allowed them to freely declare their nationality. It also reemployed some officials who declared themselves Germans, especially if they were *born Slovenes*⁵⁷. Similarly, the decree of December 16, which also allowed the rehiring of previously fired officials, gave preference to those who came from a *native family*⁵⁸.

A similar logic could be observed after 1919, when the Yugoslav army occupied parts of West Hungary, which were then annexed and administered by the Slovene authorities. Here too, a purge of non-South-Slav, in this case Hungarian, public officials, magistrates, and teachers followed⁵⁹. And in the case of teachers, we again come across a biological understanding of nationality. Unsurprisingly, the person the authorities from Ljubljana sent to the region to get a sense of the situation suggested that “foreign” Hungarian teachers should be immediately laid off, because they were not able to teach in Slovene. Local Slavophone teachers, however, could keep their jobs, even if they were also not able to teach in standard Slovene because they only spoke the local Slav vernacular. They were still “our people”, the inspector argued, and should be given an opportunity to reeducate themselves. They were “our people” despite the fact that most of them did not identify with the Slovene nation⁶⁰.

In the final instance, then, nationality was understood in biological terms and could be reduced to descent: you were either a born Slovene/Yugoslav or not, and your self-identification was unimportant. This was an insidious idea, even if it sometimes benefited those affected. It took agency away from individuals and gave the government a powerful tool. Some Slovene nationalists wanted to use it on other occasions, not only during the purge of the administration. Once they took over the town council of Ptuj/Pettau, a Styrian town with a sizable German-speaking community, for instance, they decided that Germanness could only be determined by “authentic” German descent and that the council should have the final say in the matter⁶¹. The aim of this exercise was to deny parents the right to choose a German-language education for their children and to reduce the statistical presence of Germans.

Conclusion

Yet the needs of the state and its administration only allowed a limited amount of nationalist dogmatism. Simply put, the state needed officials; it needed judges, police of-

⁵⁷ ŠKERLJ, Pravosodje (cit. n. 42) 406.

⁵⁸ *Uradni list Narodne vlade SHS v Ljubljani* (19. 12. 1918) 54.

⁵⁹ Attila KOVÁCS, Številčni razvoj prekmurskih Madžarov v 20. stoletju [The Numerical Development of Prekmurje Hungarians in the 20th Century]. *Razprave in gradivo* 48/49 (2006) 6–36, at 11s.

⁶⁰ Jernej KOST, Slovene Ethnolinguistic Nationalism as Rhetoric and Practice in Post-Imperial School Administration in Prekmurje (forthcoming). On the identifications of Slavophones in the so-called Prekmurje, see IDEM, The Imagined Slovene Nation and Local Categories of Identification. “Slovenes” in the Kingdom of Hungary and Postwar Prekmurje. *AHY* 49 (2018) 87–102.

⁶¹ Ljubica ŠULIGOJ, Narodnostne razmere na prusjem območju med obema vojnama [The National Situation in the Ptuj Area between the Wars]. *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 61/2 (1990) 231–239, at 235. The cited article is very biased – more a nationalist tract than a scholarly analysis – but based on sources, and the data is useful. For a brief overview of comparable developments in other successor states, see Pieter M. JUDSON, *The Habsburg Empire. A New History* (Cambridge, MA–London 2016) 444–446.

ficers, and prison wardens in order to function properly. This was why it did not immediately fire all the officials who refused an oath to the new state. Instead, it decided on November 16 that a promise to follow instructions from superiors would suffice for the time being, because these officials were simply *irreplaceable*⁶². This is also why, according to Ravnihar, the National Government in Ljubljana did not start the purge sooner. Finally, this is also why the decree of December 16 already included a provision that allowed the rehiring of German officials, as we have seen.

And this is exactly what happened. It soon became obvious that in some regions, the normal functioning of the administration, the schools, and the judiciary simply would not be possible without at least some of the fired officials. During the first session of the National Government in 1919, one of the ministers had already remarked that the government might be forced to rehire all of them in a year's time. Indeed, the ministers immediately let it be known that all those who had been dismissed could apply for their posts again⁶³. In the next sessions, the government already approved several rehires⁶⁴. Pragmatism made the purge less radical than originally planned.

Nevertheless, the dismissal of German officials represented a crucial moment in the transformation of Slovene administration in Yugoslavia. Along with the introduction of Slovene as the only official language – Serbo-Croat only slowly gained a role – it was a decisive step in the public administration's nationalization. While it remained essentially Habsburg in its organization and its procedures – continuities far outweighed change in this respect – the layoffs of Germans were an important break with the imperial past. Yugoslavia defined itself as a nation-state, a state of the triune Slovene-Croat-Serb nation, and it wanted a public administration which included only members of this nation. At the same time, membership criteria were defined according to a biological understanding of nationality.

The purge of supposed foreigners was supported by a narrative of liberation: the imperial administration was presented as an oppressive tool, an essential element of the imagined German domination over the so-called Slovene lands. Hence, the removal of Germans could be framed as a necessary and long overdue correction of a "historical injustice". Vladimir Ravnihar, then Minister of Justice, claimed that the National Government was simply trying to create a situation in which the nationality of officials would correspond to that of the people. *We were trying to give the people judges of their own nationality*, he wrote in his memoirs⁶⁵.

This mindset, which certainly was not exceptional at the time, was also apparent in other areas, not just the administration or the judiciary. After the war, Slovene nationalists were also busy nationalizing the educational system, cultural institutions, local government, and the economy. And while some of the approximately 30,000 people who left Slovenia between 1918 and 1921 did so voluntarily, the majority emigrated because they lost their jobs or other sources of income⁶⁶. The promises the Zagreb National Coun-

⁶² Sejni zapisniki (cit. n. 13) I 115.

⁶³ Ibid. 237–239.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 288, 293, 301.

⁶⁵ RAVNIHAR, Mojega življenja pot (cit. n. 13) 137: [...] *da vzpostavimo pri naših sodiščih v personalnem stanju razmere, ki ustrezajo resničnemu narodnostnemu položaju v okoliških [sic] vseh sodišč na našem ozemlju in da damo ljudstvu sodnike njegove narodnosti*.

⁶⁶ Janez CVIRN, Meščanstvo v Celju po razpadu Avstro-Ogrske [The Bourgeoisie in Celje after the Dissolution of Austria-Hungary], in: *Iz zgodovine Celja*, 3: 1918–1941, ed. Marija POČIVAVŠEK et al. (Odsevi

cil made days before the declaration of independence, when it guaranteed all “foreign” minorities a free and democratic future in the South Slav state, turned out to be largely empty⁶⁷. The nationalists simply could not find room for equal treatment of those they categorized as “foreign” in their vision of the nation-state.

preteklosti 3, Celje 2001) 191–216; Janez CVIRN, Nemška manjšina na Spodnjem Štajerskem v času med obema vojnama (1918–1941) [The German Minority in Lower Styria in the Interwar Period (1918–1941)], in: Migracije in slovenski prostor od antike do danes, ed. Peter ŠTIH–Bojan BALKOVEC (Zbirka Zgodovinskega časopisa 39, Ljubljana 2010) 568–575; Ervin DOLENC, Deavstrizacija v politiki, upravi in kulturi v Sloveniji [Deaustrification of Politics, Administration and Culture in Slovenia], in: Slovensko-avstrijski odnosi v 20. stoletju, ed. Dušan NEČAK et al. (Historia 8, Ljubljana 2004) 81–94.

⁶⁷ PEROVŠEK, Slovenski prevrat (cit. n. 3) 71. Yugoslavia was not exceptional in this regard. Minorities were disadvantaged in all the successor states; see JUDSON, Habsburg Empire (cit. n. 61) 445–451.