

**Robert Knight**

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## The Carinthian Slovenes and the Continuities of post-Nazi Carinthia 1945–1958

The article, a revised version of a lecture given at the Institute for Ethnic Studies in Ljubljana, discusses the domestic and international dimensions of minority politics in post-Nazi Carinthia. Based on archival research in Britain, Austria and Slovenia (Yugoslavia) it argues that despite Austria's transition from National Socialist rule to post-war democracy there was evidence of a basic continuity in the stigmatisation (and self-stigmatisation) of the Slovene minority. This continuity largely explains why Carinthian politics moved in an increasingly anti-Slovene direction in the 1950s, leading in 1958 to the demolition of the bilingual school system which had been introduced in 1945. The international dimension, Yugoslavia's territorial claim, the policies of the West and the Cold War are also discussed but the article argues that they were secondary to the dynamics of provincial politics.

**Keywords:** Austria, Carinthian Slovenes, post-Nazi society, minority rights.

## Koroški Slovenci in kontinuiteta postnacistične Koroške med 1945–1958

*Članek oziroma prirejena verzija predavanja, ki sem ga imel na Inštitutu za narodnostna vprašanja, obravnava domače in mednarodne razsežnosti manjšinske politike v postnacistični Koroški. Na osnovi arhivskih raziskav v Veliki Britaniji, Avstriji in Sloveniji (Jugoslaviji) dokazuje, da je v Avstriji, kljub prehodu iz nacionalsocializma v poveljno demokracijo, obstajala neka temeljna kontinuiteta stigmatizacije (in samostigmatizacije) slovenske manjšine. S to kontinuiteto si lahko v veliki meri pojasnimo naraščajočo protislovensko usmeritev koroške politike v petdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja, ki je leta 1958 povzročila odpravo dvojezičnega šolskega sistema, uvedenega leta 1945. Članek omenja tudi mednarodne razsežnosti dogajanja, jugoslovanske ozemeljske zahteve, politiko zahodnih držav in hladno vojno, vendar so bile te po avtorjevem mnenju drugotnega pomena v primerjavi z dinamiko deželneprovincialne politike.*

**Ključne besede:** Avstrija, koroški Slovenci, postnacistična družba, manjšinske pravice.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 1957, the Carinthian Slovene leader Joško Tischler looked back twelve years to the start of the system of bilingual primary school education which he had initiated soon after the end of the war. The radical innovation had given Slovene and German equal status for the first three years of education and introduced bilingualism – irrespective of parental views – into over 100 southern Carinthian schools:

What was the basic principle of the bilingual school? Through our own experiences during the Second World War we all, I believe, came to the conviction that many horrors that occurred in our villages were not decided upon or decreed from Berlin, Vienna, and not really from Klagenfurt, but were instead born out of hatred in the village and the parish. Since the ethnic struggle erupted in south Carinthia, the land was divided into two hostile camps. This struggle inflicted serious wounds everywhere. We wanted to heal these old wounds, not only among the old, but also among the young people, that is why with the bilingual school we built a bridge that is meant to tie the countrymen into a fraternal relationship, to offer them the opportunity to get closer to one another, and to enrich each other spiritually in the encounter. We also want our children to be brought up as honest citizens, without them having to renounce their kin the process. We all have to contribute our share to the common good, which is also after all the precondition for the good of each individual. This common good can be reached only through peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and forgetting the bitter past. May our children be spared the suffering of our fathers! (Tischler 1957a, 1)<sup>2</sup>

Tischler's undertone of regret probably reflected his realisation that the days of his school were numbered. Certainly he was well aware that the pressure from its critics and enemies, which had steadily built up over the previous decade, was now dominating much of Carinthian political discussion.

Less than a year later, the bilingual school system was indeed effectively demolished. In September 1958 Ferdinand Wedenig, Carinthia's governor, issued a decree which allowed parents to withdraw their children from bilingual instruction. The decree spoke of the parents being able to apply for their children's liberation (Ger. *Befreiung*) from bilingual instruction. Yet the outcome triggered by the decree was highly coercive: a campaign of intimidation and pressure was directed at Slovene-speaking parents which resulted in the deregistration of thousands of their children from instruction in the language of their parents.

The following discussion sketches the trajectory of the bilingual school system from its establishment in October 1945. The basic narrative of decline and fall is placed here in two contexts: a primary one of the continuities in attitudes and values between national socialist rule and post-Nazi Austria and a secondary one, of the international and bilateral (Austrian-Yugoslav) politics of the Cold War.

Continuities in post-Nazi society across the hiatus of May 1945 can, at least in principle, be investigated in a variety of ways; for example much could be learnt from the statistical analysis of Nazi party membership, employment, dismissals and post-war career paths – if only reliable statistics were available; individual biographies can also shed important light on longer political and social continuities, as in the important work of Lisa Retzl and Werner Koroschitz (2006) and Lisa Retzl and Peter Pirker (2010) on Carinthia and for West Germany Ulrich Herbert's biography of Werner Best (1996); continuities can also be explored through particular economic or social institutions, in Carinthia, the timber and forestry industry would be one important example.

By contrast, this article focusses on the continuities in political culture. The term is of course notoriously contested but the assumption here is that it is the package of assumptions, values and norms which inform institutions and influence (not determine) political decision-making; in the case of post-war Carinthia that means in particular assumptions about the superiority of German (Ger. *Deutschtum*) over Slav, which may be understood either racially or culturally, or often as a rather fuzzy mixture of both. The underlying issue of continuity is the extent to which these assumptions remained salient after the collapse of National Socialism or became salient again.

Placing these aspects ahead of the international context – the early Cold War, Yugoslavia's territorial claims and, last not least, Austrian State Treaty negotiations and the provisions of its Article Seven – seeks to counteract the interpretation which sees Yugoslavia's territorial claims on Carinthia as the prime dimension of post-war minority politics. That does not mean that the Yugoslav claims – or their potentially disastrous implications for the populations concerned – should be ignored, but it does imply that their basic importance lay in the way they were overstated and dramatised. In particular, it will be argued here, they were instrumentalised by Carinthian (and other) political actors in order to gain political advantage. They allowed politics to centre on mobilising in defence of the supposedly threatened *Heimat*, an identity which was understood as exclusively German-speaking.

One result of this polarisation was that discussion of the continuity question itself was often a test of loyalty (or subversion). An early example can be seen in the rejection of the claim that Carinthia was particularly marked by its Nazi past. For example Paul Jobst, a leading Carinthian Social Democrat politician, responsible for oversight of denazification, wrote in the *Neue Zeit* on 10 March 1946, indignantly rejecting the defamation of Carinthia as a brown province. He went on to condemn those who used this label, above all the Slovene Liberation Front (Slov. *Osvobodilna fronta*) (Jobst 1946). But Jobst was setting up an Aunt Sally – caricaturing a position as manifestly unjust in order to demolish it and using the indignation thus generated to strengthen Carinthian defensiveness and foster collective identity. Precisely for this reason it seems more useful to

avoid this – and similar types of emotive labelling about a collective Carinthia – which usually hinder dispassionate historical enquiry.

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## 2. Anti-Slovene Continuity and the Transition of May 1945

The resilience of anti-Slovene attitudes in Carinthia is closely linked to the nature of the Carinthian transition of power in May 1945. The description of the transition by Hans Haas and Karl Stuhlpfarrer (1977, 88) as “uniquely legal” appears to be confirmed by other evidence, notably the account of the negotiations between *Gauleiter* Rainer and a group of Carinthian politicians written by the chief *Gau* administrator (Ger. *Gauamtsdirektor*) Meinrad Natmeßnig (Doc. 1). Natmeßnig’s account, clearly written soon after the negotiations took place, shows not only the relatively harmonious atmosphere but also the way perceptions of the 1918–1919 struggle (Ger. *Abwehrkampf*) provided shared ground for both departing Nazis and arriving politicians. On 6 May, for example, Rainer told the latter that he “assumed” (Doc. 1) that its principles would be included in the new post-Nazi order. The politicians reassured him that they had always stood by the principle of “a free and undivided Carinthia” (Doc. 1). Rainer then proposed that a “League of Defenders of the border” (Doc. 1) be mobilised in defense of the border. This should be organised in a way that would avoid the charge that it was “a camouflaged SA or something similar” (Doc. 1) but Nazi members would need to be swiftly integrated simply because they were “the best *Abwehrkämpfer*” (Doc. 1) and would be lost if they were spurned by the new power-holders. Hans Piesch, the Social Democrat leader, assured Rainer that only Nazi *Kreisleiter* were unacceptable as “fighters [for the border]” (Doc. 1); furthermore only Nazis who had violated the law would be punished and this would be publicly stated. No-one would be punished purely on the ground of party membership: “we will not prosecute Party members for their party membership but only implement personnel changes, and these won’t be done quickly” (Doc. 1). Rainer then promised that the fighting forces of the party would not oppose the new regime and announced that he himself wished to help to preserve the unity of the province. Carinthian unity and the moderate treatment of party members duly featured in the key public statements which followed. Rainer may appear to have lost touch with reality in some respects – according to one eyewitness he was afraid that the British might assign a Jewish adviser to him, with whom he would “of course” be unable to collaborate (Newole 1946). Yet he was surely correct in understanding that – despite the lost war and years of propaganda – the *Abwehrkampf* still retained much of its mobilizing potential.

Carinthian opinion as a whole was clearly diverse and fragmented. There was presumably, as elsewhere, great war weariness, and uncertainty about the future and there may well have been a similar collapse of expectations and

illusions among the younger generation of Hitler Youth. Yet overall it is difficult to see much evidence here of a society in the process of disintegrating (Ger. *Zusammenbruchsgesellschaft*). One British observer reported that as well those who felt sincere pleasure at the liberation “a large proportion of the people is now anti-Nazi, but not because Nazism was bad, only because it failed” (Knight 2017, 26).

Above all it is difficult to find evidence of a radical shift of attitudes towards the Slovene minority. After seven years of Nazi propaganda and many more preceding decades of ethnic conflict the assumption that Slovene language, culture or race was both inferior and threatening remained widespread. A generation of children – whether German and Slovene-speaking or both – had passed through an education system which was designed to make them “fully valued members of the German nation right from their childhood and from their parental houses” (Ferenc 1980, 563–565, 572–574). Propaganda as well as social pressure had led to a drastic decline in the use of Slovene, especially in public.

Even the utter defeat of Nazi Germany had only partly dented the message of German superiority. In July 1945 an American OSS report summed up the view of “many German-Carinthians” as being that the Slovene minority “deserved and continues to deserve no better fate than absorption into the superior German community” (Beer 1987, 426). The stigmatisation of Slovene had also been accepted and internalised by many “radical assimilants” (Larcher 1988, Ottomeyer, 1988). Some resistance to speaking Slovene came from children. These attitudes contrasted starkly with the self-confident exuberance of the victorious partisans and their supporters in the Liberation Front (Slov. *Osvobodilna fronta*), who during the Yugoslav occupation of southern Carinthia in May 1945 agitated for the secession of the area to Yugoslavia, and continued to support it after the troops were forced to withdraw.

The introduction of compulsory bilingual instruction for all children in over 100 primary (elementary) schools a few months later was a radical attempt to escape from the long continuity of ethnic polarisation (Domej 2003). As already suggested, Tischler’s basic assumption was that a common village school, where both languages were taught, could undermine ethnic divisiveness: like Switzerland, Carinthia was “a province inhabited by two nationalities. Its inhabitants therefore have the fundamental duty to master both languages of the province” (Tischler 1957b, 25–26). This Swiss analogy (whether or not it was genuine, idealised or instrumental) led Tischler (as reported by British intelligence) to hope that through the new school system the children of German-speaking Austrians “will be brought to understand their Slovene compatriots through a knowledge of their language, literature and culture” (Knight 2017, 35–36). Given the basic context outlined here it is not difficult to see that Tischler’s experiment would be hard to implement. The most obvious reason, as already



indicated, was the continued anti-Slovene stereotyping, which clearly had not been removed through an anti-Nazi educative process, as sometimes argued, and could hardly be ended overnight.

For similar reasons the denazification programme instigated – with some ambivalence – by the British occupation authorities was unlikely to achieve a more tolerant, pluralistic attitude towards Slovene culture or identity. Many of the flaws of denazification in Austria were similar to those in the Western zones of Germany and have now been well researched. One difference worth pointing out was that in Austria the revival of party politics began earlier and was less closely monitored. As a result Austrian politicians became active agents; and denazification – above all exemptions from it – soon became inextricably entangled with party recruitment and party patronage (Knight 2007). In Carinthia the Social Democrats (*SPÖ*) profited most from the early reestablishment of party politics, partly because they were able to attract members who before the *Anschluss* had left them for the illegal Nazi movement but also because they were able to attract those elites for whom the People's Party appeared too close to the Catholic church.

This party political manoeuvring was well under way well before the re-enfranchisement of former less implicated (Ger. *minderbelastete*) Nazis (in Carinthia about 40,000) in May 1948. But it clearly gained further momentum and meant that both main parties became, in the words of one British report, busily engaged in enlisting the “prodigal sons” (Knight 2017, 73). In the elections in the following year the party set up by former Nazis, the Electoral League of Independents (Ger. *Verband der Unabhängigen*, further *VdU*), gained 20 per cent of the vote and entered the Carinthian *Landtag* with 8 seats (out of 36).

Many of the prodigal sons (and some daughters) were not just demanding second helpings of fatted calf, they were laying down demands about how the next course should be cooked. From the start, the *VdU* made the abolition of the bilingual school – or coercive school (Ger. *Zwangschule*) as they called it, a key part of their programme and kept it at its centre over the following decade. Nevertheless it is important not to reduce minority politics to the rise, decline (and return) of the *VdU*. The party was only one element in a new triangular politics and what mattered most was the spill-over effect onto the two main parties. As it sought to recoup the ground lost in the 1949 election, the *SPÖ* steadily shifted away from the basically tolerant attitude of their leader Wedenig. And as they recruited or sponsored former Nazis their centre of gravity shifted in a more anti-Slovene direction. The shift can be seen *inter alia* in the reporting of *Neue Zeit*, which became more markedly anticlerical and anti-Slovene, especially after Hans Paller was appointed as editor in 1954.

In some ways the shift inside the Austrian People's Party (*ÖVP*) was more obvious. The tension between its Christian Social Catholic wing and the former supporters of the antisemitic and often anticlerical Agrarian League (Ger.

*Landbund*) were built in from the start. As the courting of former Nazi votes intensified, the latter gained ground. In the summer of 1948, Carinthian ÖVP leaders even wanted to shift to a more explicitly anti-Slovene line, ending all Slovene public signage and the use of Slovene in administration and schools: its leaders thought this would “greatly increase the chances of the provincial party” (Wildner 1948).<sup>3</sup> The veteran German nationalist activist (and former Nazi party member) Hans Steinacher was a pivotal figure in shifting the party in a more pronounced anti-Slovene direction.

The obverse of this process was the marginalisation of Slovene leaders. Admittedly they also contributed to this process themselves by deciding to boycott the elections of November 1945, although prime responsibility presumably lay with the communist leadership in Belgrade or Ljubljana (Knight 2017, 37–39). Tischler himself became *persona non grata* in Vienna after publicly criticizing Austrian policy at the height of the Moscow State Treaty conference in April 1947. Even after he broke with the Liberation Front later that year and formed a separate Catholic National Council (Slov. *Narodni svet*) his attempts to return to mainstream politics were rebuffed in Vienna. When he was briefly admitted to Chancellor Figl in June 1949 and allowed to submit proposals for a far-reaching minority statute, this was the exception which proved the rule. In the Austrian cabinet discussion Oskar Helmer, the SPÖ Minister of the Interior, declared that “Dr. Tischler is a traitor who ought to be locked up” (Doc. 2). The objection to Tischler from the ÖVP education minister Felix Hurdes (a Carinthian) were similar but in a sense more significant, since they showed how little sign of a rapprochement there was, even where there was shared ideological ground of Catholicism and anti-communism. In any case, despite Hurdes’ fears, the chances of either Tischler or the rival Titoist organisation Democratic Front of the Working People (*DFDL*, *Demokratična fronta delovnega ljudstva*) influencing the decision-making over minority protection (Article 7 of the Austrian State Treaty) were slight (Doc. 2).

This helps explain a striking disconnect, which has not been much commented on, between the diplomatic discussions about minority protection and the actual situation of the minority which was meant to be the subject of the protection. The final text was vague on some key points or – notably on the question of bilingual education – completely silent. As Tischler (or his supporters) put it, the final wording was “not sufficiently precise and leaves too much to the good will of the Austrians” (Knight 2017, 72). That lack of goodwill – or better, of the political will of Carinthian actors to incur the political costs of appearing sympathetic to minority aspirations – steadily diminished over the following decade.

### 3. The International Context: Minority Politics in the Cold War

This provincial politics took place in a highly charged national and international context, marked by polemics, agitation and counter-agitation over the future of Carinthia's southern border. The way this territorial dispute became a hotspot in the early Cold War, starting with the confrontation between Yugoslav and British forces in May 1945, has been told many times and need not be repeated here. The diplomatic discussions of the Foreign Ministers of the USA, Soviet Union, Britain and France which took place between 1947 and August 1949 in the context of Austrian Treaty negotiations have also been researched in great detail, in particular by Gerald Stourzh (1998).

The central point to be made here is that the Carinthian border dispute, and more broadly the Cold War, were not just threats, they also brought opportunities. For some German nationalist and former Nazi activists there was a chance to regroup, adjust to the catastrophe of 1945 and regain the initiative. This allowed Carinthian ethnic politics to be reframed in a way which allowed well-established anti-Slovene attitudes to be mobilised – with appropriate adaptations. This does not mean that the reality of Yugoslavia's territorial claim, the readiness of the Yugoslav leaders to assert it through a military *fait accompli* in May 1945, and the probably brutality which would have accompanied its implementation, should be ignored here. Yet it is also clear that some politicians and activists – of different political colours – had an interest in maintaining, prolonging and overdramatizing the conflict. Initially at least, that meant an odd convergence of the Liberation Front and their German national opponents. To adapt Pieter Judson's terms, both the “guardians of the border” and their enemies, sought to foster the belief (whether as hope or fear) that a border revision was possible (Judson 2006).

For Yugoslav policy the border issue might have had an advantage in the phase when it was seeking to broaden its appeal beyond the cadres who had fought in the Liberation Front, but the available evidence strongly suggests that once the window of opportunity was closed in May 1945 the interest of Yugoslav (or Slovene) communists in annexing southern Carinthia steadily diminished. That can be seen for example by the way the Yugoslav delegation to the Austrian Treaty talks in Moscow in March 1947 came equipped with a range of minority protections proposals. Both Edvard Kardelj in Moscow and later Aleš Bebler in Belgrade clearly signalled the Yugoslav readiness either to drastically reduce its territorial claim, or drop it altogether in return for an agreement over the exploitation of the two Drau hydro-electric power stations at Žvabek/Schwabegg and Labot/Lavamund (Knight 1985).

However, a compromise along these lines did not materialise. The main reason was probably the growing mistrust between East and West over the



terms of the Austrian Treaty, in particular the complex issue of German assets in Austria, which increasingly overshadowed discussions. But it should also be noted that, especially as tensions increased between Moscow and Belgrade in 1948, Yugoslav leaders became reluctant to pursue the compromise idea they themselves had earlier put forward. Presumably they feared exposing themselves to Soviet attacks for abandoning the Carinthian Slovenes.

Last not least, there were Austrian and western interests keeping the border question in play. Leaders of the SPÖ like Adolf Schärf used it as early as September 1945 for electioneering purposes. So did the ÖVP Foreign Minister in April 1947 Karl Gruber, when he flagged up international differences over the border in order to try to act as its defender and so deflect domestic criticism of the failure to get agreement at Moscow. A year later the border dispute was used by Western leaders in order to engineer a break-down of the Austrian Treaty talks in London. Soon afterwards the British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin adopted the idiom of the Carinthian *Heimat* when he assured visiting Austrian parliamentarians that he had felt he had been “acting in the spirit of the Austrian people” and “whatever the delay, whatever the trouble, we must not surrender an inch” (Knight 2017, 63). A similar dramatic rhetoric was used again by Gruber in 1949 as he continued to suggest that the future of the border hung in the balance even when agreement was imminent. Once agreement was reached Gruber headed to Carinthia to play again the part of doughty defender of the border for the sake of the People’s Party. In short, the international context helped the proverbial Carinthian primeval fear (Ger. *Urgangst*) to become (again) a central feature of Carinthian politics.

Yet it is hard to resist the conclusion that a more substantial *Angst* among Carinthian politicians than the fear of a Slav invasion or Slovene subversion was the fear of being outflanked by their political opponents over the national question. One example among several came in March 1949 when – to the irritation of the ÖVP – Wedenig returned from the latest round of Treaty negotiations in London and successfully portrayed himself as the prime defender of provincial interests. After attacks in the *Volkszeitung*, the *Neue Zeit* responded that

*/.../ the bourgeois circles in Carinthia have hitherto considered the struggle for the Heimat to be their political monopoly and sought to make political capital from it. They consider the fact that the Carinthian question is now no longer part of their party political brand as an incursion into their domain (Neue Zeit 1949).*

The overall outcome of this maneuvering was that a question which, at least in principle, could have been disposed of in April 1947, was perceived as hanging in the balance or – to use another favourite phrase of the Carinthian press – standing on a knife-edge. That helped those – in all political parties – who sought to return to an anti-Slovene agenda or, as they saw it, reverse the unwarranted concessions

made to the minority in 1945. Chief among these was Tischler's bilingual school system. From the start it had been attacked as the first step down the slippery slope to secession. Its supporters, including teachers and education officials, were attacked for activity verging on treason. The actual rationale of the school, the overcoming of Nazi germanisation and the stigmatisation accompanied it, faded into the background.

This provincial momentum had its own dynamic. Though it was certainly facilitated by the international context it was not dependent on it. For example, far from diminishing after the four Foreign ministers confirmed the 1937 territorial *status quo* in June 1949, it increased. On the other hand, appeals for restraint from Vienna now had a clear foreign policy basis: the continued dramatisation of the border stood in the way of an improvement of Austrian-Yugoslav relations.

The tension between provincial dynamics and foreign policy considerations emerged as the thirtieth anniversary of the 1920 plebiscite approached. Early in 1950 the Austrian envoy in Belgrade Karl Braunias warned against "smashing too much china" in the forthcoming celebrations (Knight 2017, 81). As often in ethnic politics, financial issues were also centrally involved, especially after the Carinthian government put in a request for a massive financial grant to mark the occasion. As the subsequent Cabinet discussion shows, ministerial reservations reflected their doubts about the Carinthian claim to an exceptional status within the Austrian republic. Even the comments of the most outspoken pro-Carinthian voice in the cabinet, Ferdinand Graf, (State Secretary for Internal affairs) that "we can't now suddenly downplay Carinthia" (Doc. 3) implicitly acknowledged that for the previous four years Austrian (and Western) policies had been engaged in precisely the opposite of downplaying. But the discussion also sheds light on the readiness – or lack of it – of federal actors to intervene against anti-Slovene trends in Carinthian politics (Doc. 3).

It is unclear what exactly followed from Gruber's intention to "pour cold water on the hot-heads" (Doc. 3) in Carinthia. At the anniversary celebrations themselves, the *VdU* could not be excluded altogether. However, Braunias was able to report from Belgrade – with evident relief – that despite some critical articles "the 10<sup>th</sup> October had been got through well: in the Yugoslav press the celebrations had received less prominence than the international football match played two days before" (Knight 2017, 82).

Seen from Ljubljana or Belgrade, the Carinthian Slovenes clearly mattered much less than securing the government's position against its internal critics and external pressures from the Soviet Union and its supporters. Both pointed to the need to improve diplomatic and economic relations with the West, including Austria. Yugoslav politicians apparently preferred to listen to reports which painted the situation in rosy colours, and placed their hopes in progressive forces (especially the *SPÖ* and their leader Wedenig). The 1954 local election results for example were seen as evidence that Carinthian soil was not suitable for

German nationalism. Less rose-tinted assessments like those of Lojze Ude, which were based on a deeper understanding of the internal dynamics of the Carinthian politics, were not welcome (Ude 1956). As a result of this wishful thinking, Yugoslav leaders found themselves repeatedly surprised and disappointed when the strength of the anti-Slovene lobby in Carinthia became clear. That was also true of the tumultuous events of autumn 1958.

#### 4. Conclusion

The bilingual school remained at the top of the provincial agenda throughout the 1950s and this helped move Carinthian politics in a more anti-Slovene direction. Gruber's label of "hotheads" (Doc. 3) probably applied to many of the activists who formed the core membership of organisations like the Kärntner Heimatdienst. Yet the label has two weaknesses: firstly, it understates the thoroughly rational calculations which lay behind much of the anti-Slovene lobbying; secondly, it wrongly implies a separation between an ideologically motivated core and Carinthia's political culture. Here it is worth stressing that the lobby against the bilingual school was not primarily about education or aimed at gaining the support of those whose children were actually attending bilingual instruction. Outside small towns like Bleiburg/Pliberk and Völkermarkt/Velikovec, the *VdU* was electorally weak throughout southern Carinthia. Even more widely in the province as a whole, the party failed to repeat its success of 1949. What it did succeed in doing was to push the two main parties in an increasingly anti-Slovene direction as they attempted to take the wind out of the sails of the anti-Slovene lobby. That success in turn owed much to its ability to portray itself as the voice of loyal Carinthians under threat from Yugoslavia.

To an extent this anti-Slovene lobbying can be seen, in line with recent warnings about "groupism" (Brubaker 2004), less as the representation of a clearly bounded national group engaged in a competition with an opposing one. It was the process of fighting the battle itself that helped construct ethnic group identity in the first place, define its borders, then monitor and patrol them. At the same time it should be stressed that Slovene and German activists were not involved in comparable entrepreneurial activity in a free identity market. Competition was never symmetrical, and the ethnic market was no freer than the economic market of neo-liberal hopes. The state – or large parts of it – was effectively owned by German elites and the non-dominant Slovenes were weaker, economically, politically and psychologically. Those parts of the state which were not, notably some federal authorities in Vienna, in the end lacked the self-confidence or stamina to assert themselves. Here the memories of pre-war federal weakness and the ebbing away of legitimacy before the *Anschluss*, also played a role.

This lack of federal assertiveness should be born in mind when the implementation of Article Seven of the Austrian State Treaty and its a commitment to protect Austria's Slovene and Croat minorities is considered. Internationally, there was little interest in its implementation. Before its signature both Austrian and Western negotiators would have preferred to drop the article altogether if not for the risk of reopening negotiations with Yugoslavia. After signature, there was little interest among Austrian diplomats in "making a big deal of the issue" (Ger. *"die Sache gross aufziehen"*) (Knight 2017, 96). In the resultant vacuum German national lobbyists pressed forward. There were admittedly also initiatives from the two main Slovene groups but they could hardly match the strength of their opponents.

Three years after the State Treaty was signed, and less than a year after Tischler's speech cited at the beginning, the pressure on the Carinthian Governor Wedenig became irresistible. In September 1958 he was forced by his own party to issue a decree (Ger. *Erlass*) which allowed parents to deregister from bilingual education. The intimidation, persuasion and application of economic muscle which this triggered resulted in fall of the numbers of registered children from over 12,000 to just over 2,000. In some village schools all Slovene-speaking children were now only allowed to be taught in German. Statistics for ethnic or linguistic competence are highly contested of course, but if we accept the estimate of Carinthia's civil servant Karl Newole (who had little reason to exaggerate) in 1955 80-85,000 people had "a Slav language of daily use" (Ger. *"slawischer Umgangssprache"*) (Knight 2017, 89). That was double the highest figure which could be deduced from the 1951 census. Whether those referred to are labelled Slovenes or Slovene-speakers it is clear that a massive assimilatory shift had taken place. That was confirmed two years later in the 1961 census (Pleterski 1966).

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Revised version of a lecture given at the Institute for Ethnic Studies on 24 April 2017. I would like to thank the Institute for their invitation, as well as colleagues and friends for help and support in my research on this topic, in particular Prof. Tone Ferenc, Prof. Janko Pleterski, Dr. Dušan Biber, Darinka Drnovšek, Ksenija Slabe and Metka Suk. References have been kept to a minimum.
- <sup>2</sup> "Kaj je temeljno vodilo dvojezične šole? Mislim, da smo vsi med drugo svetovno vojno z izkušnjami na lastni koži prišli do prepričanja, da mnogo strahot, ki so se dogodile po naših vaseh, ni bilo odločenih ali dekretiranih iz Berlina, Dunaja in niti ne iz Celovca, temveč da jih je izleglo sovraštvo na vasi in občini. Odkar se je v južni Koroški razplamtel narodnostni boj, je bila dežela razdeljena v dva bojna tabora. Ta boj je prizadel hude rane povsod. Te stare rane smo hoteli ozdraviti, ne pri starih, temveč pri mladini in zato smo ji z dvojezično šolo zgradili most, ki naj oba deželana – bratsko veže, jima nudi možnost, da se zblížata in se v srečanju medsebojno duhovno oplemenitujeta. Hočemo tudi, da bo naš otrok vzgojen v poštenega državljana, ne da bi se mu bilo treba pri tem odpovedati svojemu rodu. Vsi moramo po svojih močeh prispevati odgovarjajoči delež k skupnemu blagru, ki je končno tudi pogoj blagra vsakega posameznika. Ta skupni blagor pa je moč doseči le v miroljubnem sožitju, medsebojnem spoštovanju in pozabi bridke preteklosti. Naj bo našim otrokom prihranjeno trpljenje naših očetov!" (Tischler 1957a, 1).



- <sup>3</sup> “Figl erzählte mir voll Entrüstung, der Karisch aus Klagenfurt sei eben bei ihm gewesen und hätte ihm den Beschlussantrag der Kärntner Landesregierung der Partei notifiziert, dass man die slowenischen Aufschriften beseitigen und die Gebrauch der slovenischen Sprache in den Ämtern und Schulen einstellen solle. Das werde die Chancen der Landespartei sehr steigen lassen. Figl habe das mit den Worten abgelehnt, dass er verrückt geworden sei. Unter keiner Bedingung könne er darauf eingehen, worauf sich Karisch aber auf eine Rücksprache mit Hurdes berief. Graf ist nicht da. Das ganze sieht, wie Figl meinte, sehr stark nach einer Intrige gegen ihn und Gruber aus” (Heinrich Wildner Diary, 24 July 1948).