

# EVERY WAR INVENTS ITS HEROES

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*The question of the First World War's purpose and justification was asked by many after the war was over. It was of particular relevance for the citizens of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, whose (self)questioning and search for historical statements were additionally burdened by the fact that citizens of the new Nation of Three Names had been enemies on the frontlines, fighting on opposite sides of the battle-lines. This uncomfortable truth represented a tremendous obstacle for the formulation of a unified "common" wartime memory.*

Key Words: Commemorations, the Great War, Heroes, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, Memory, Public Monuments

*Vprašanje o smislu in upravičenosti Prve svetovne vojne so si po koncu zastavljali mnogi. Vprašanje je bilo posebnega pomena za državljane Kraljevine Srbob, Hrvatov in Slovencev, katerih (samo)spraševanje in odkrivanje sporočil zgodovine je bilo še dodatno obremenjevalo dejstvo, da so državljani nove države troimenega naroda med vojno pripadniki na sovražnih vojska in so se borili na nasprotnih straneh. Ta neprijetna resnica je predstavljala velikansko oviro za oblikovanje skupnega spomina na vojno, njene vzroke in posledice.*

Ključne besede: heroji, javni spomeniki, Kraljevina Srbob, prva svetovna vojna, Hrvatov in Slovencev, spominske slovesnosti

When the Great War was finally over, a large part of Europe was questioning its sense. The issue likewise arose during numerous commemorations dedicated to the memory of the fallen soldiers, which in the early post-war years took place day after day on different parts of the Continent. Like everyone else, the people of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians were faced with contemplating the purpose of the terrible war and the harrowing loss of human life. Their self-reflection and their quest for answers, though, were additionally burdened by the fact that many citizens of the Nation of three names had during the war been fighting for armies on the opposing sides of the front. This circumstance alone was a sizeable obstacle for reaching an "official," unanimous war memory, further compounded by the fact that the issue was never truly addressed with sober deliberation, but was instead left to an unbridled mixture of triumphant self-satisfaction on one side, and the fumbling search for an embellished image on the other.

## GOING TO WAR

In various cities of the Dual Monarchy, the declaration of war on Serbia was greeted with massive public manifestations organised by civil and military authorities. Austro-Hungarian newspapers welcomed the war with bombastic editorials (Romsics 2006; 27; Bobič 2012; 29). Slovenian newspapers portrayed it as "a war for justice against injustice," "a battle of integrity over wickedness," "a battle of civilisation over barbarism," "a battle of chivalry

over insolence” (Anon. 1914f: 1). In the days when Austria was “forced to write its history in blood, forced to fortify its foundations with gunpowder on behalf of all of its nations,” the leading Slovenian political parties, opinion leaders and journalists were all chiming in with belligerent rhetoric. The daily *Slovenec* reported in its tell-tale article titled *Long live Austria! Down with Serbia!* on the great war enthusiasm displayed by the Slovenian people. Purportedly, the reservists were eagerly reporting for duty, travelling to Ljubljana in merry excitement, shouting and singing: “Blood is boiling in our heroic hearts! All creation yearns for the cynical unlawful Serbia, that bandit state, that black spot on the face of Europe, that shame of the culture of our time, to be punished!” (Anon. 1914c: 1). *Slovenec* wore the sentiment on its sleeve, publishing fiery verses on the front page:

|                                  |                            |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| We shall greet you, Serbs,       | / S kanoni vas pozdravimo  |
| with cannon fire;                | / vi Srbi;                 |
| To the gallows we shall send you | / dom hladen vam postavimo |
| with our ire ...                 | / ob vrbi ...              |

(Anon. 1914d: 1)

On the occasion of a “solemn, magnificent manifestation” in memory of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, held by the Slovenian People’s Party on 15 July 1914 in Ljubljana, Governor of Carniola Ivan Šušteršič claimed that Slovenian loyalty had never been in question and they had never cowered before the enemy, and vowed that “the steadfast Slovenian soldier’s iron fist will crush the head of that Serb whose insolence festers with gluttony, never content with what God had allotted him, always craving to steal and devour ever more, like a greedy child with no shred of decency.” His audience loudly supported his claims: “Away with Serbia!” (Anon. 1914b: 2)

Although they had previously clashed words on countless occasions, disagreeing on a range of topics, Ljubljana’s mayor and leader of the so-called liberal party Ivan Tavčar and the Prince-Bishop of Ljubljana Anton Jeglič found common ground in resolute anti-Serbian rhetoric. The Sarajevo assassination markedly drew the former opponents’ conflicting opinions together. At a patriotic march on 28 July 1914, Mayor Tavčar gave a public speech from the Town Hall. According to him, every building block of that ancient house bore testimony to the fact that the Slovenian nation would long have “vanished into thin air” had it not been put under the protection of the “great Habsburg dynasty.” Cannon thunder, explained Tavčar to the assembled soldiers, was letting the whole world know that Slovenians want to stay true to the Austrian Empire until “the end of their days,” and, putting his views in plain words, exclaimed that “Slovenian fist had never stopped before the enemy had been trampled into dust and the black-yellow flag was proudly flying over the beaten troops of the disabled foe! It will be just the same now, as you are the worthy sons of your fathers!” (Anon. 1914d: 2). In early August 1914, Bishop Jeglič addressed the militiamen gathered in the courtyard of the home guard barracks during his Sunday

mass, before the men took their oath. In his speech he reassured them that the war about to erupt was a “just cause,” that their task was righteous retaliation for the “grossly unfair, conniving, perpetual ambitions to dismember and destroy our wonderful Austria blessed by the reign of the ancient Habsburg lineage” (Jeglič 1914b: 1; see also Jeglič 1914a: 84).

The press also bolstered the warmongering spirit by publishing newspaper reports on the heroism and selfless loyalty of the Slovenian soldiers in this grave moment of history. One of *Slovenec*'s reports informed how Governor Šušteršič and his wife had received a postcard from a group of wounded soldiers, bearing their greetings and the postscript: “An oak may sway and a mountain may move, but the Slovenian soldier's loyalty does not falter! Hurrah!” (Anon. 1914h: 1).

### REMEMBERING THE HEROES OF THE GREAT WAR

Slovenian newspapers followed suit in the way the Austro-Hungarian press saluted the mobilisation of soldiers—painting it as a happy occasion, the young soldiers' responses as enthusiastic and determined, “with God's and the entire nation's blessing” (Anon. 1914e: 1; Flerè 1916: 28). There was no mention of despondency, on the contrary, they emphasised that even the soldiers' loved ones experienced their departure to the battlefronts heroically. In 1917, the weekly *Slovenski Gospodar* even published a congratulatory note to Janez Slaček and his wife from Lower Styria who had given their seven sons to the Emperor's service “in the noble protection of their homeland.” Two of them had fallen “in the fields of glory,” said the note, while the remaining five were proudly serving the Emperor under the rallying slogan “An oak may sway and a mountain may move, but a Slovenian soldier stands strong or dies for his homeland and the Emperor” (Anon. 1917c: 4).

At the height of public enthusiasm, most people expected for Austro-Hungary's war with little Serbia to remain contained, believing everything should be over in a couple months' time. “Before the leaves start falling, we'll be home,” sang the Slovenian soldiers (Simčič 2014: 40). Alas, the months grew into four terrible years, during which the delusions about heroic feats, like the ones military painters from the times of “Father” Radetzky portrayed, died many times over and then finally buried the nation's hero in “anachronistic school readers” (F. G. 1924: 1; Jezernik 2014: 42–5). Indeed, technological advances lent death an enormous scythe which it could swing ever faster and more viciously: the death toll was numbered in the millions.

The Great War substantially expanded the graveyards of Slovenian cities, towns and villages. The number of graves grew daily. In the official language and the language of the press, the fallen soldiers were heroes who fell for the holy cause and whose “sacrifice must be honoured, but never pitied” (Flerè 1916: 43).

During the Great War, more than 35,000 Slovenian soldiers perished on the battlefields, with 11,000 left disabled. In other words, at the end of the war, there was “not a village,

not a single Slovenian settlement where the loss of a loved one was not mourned, now resting in foreign soil” (Dobida 1929: 430). The tremendous number of casualties influenced the understanding of the war as the seasons progressed. After four harrowing years, the shocking piles of fallen soldiers changed its image in the eyes of the majority of Slovenian contemporaries into one of a “four-year mindless slaughter,” in which the Slovenian soldiers fought and died on countless battlefields “in the service of their oppressors, against their own benefit and the benefit of their own nation” (Anon. 1918: 2)

According to Jay Winter, the Great War released “the avalanches of images and words surrounding the dead” and turned the cult of memory into “a worldwide phenomenon” (Winter 2006: 25–6). When the war was over, following years of mortal hatred, the winners and losers were brought back together in their mourning, their honouring of the casualties, paying respect to the fallen soldiers of all battles, of all battlefields, of all nationalities. As decreed by international agreements, the countries involved in the Great War were responsible for the upkeep of soldiers’ burial grounds regardless of nationality or citizenship “as befits a feeling of gratitude for their own men, and any cultured person’s feeling of piety for the foreign soldiers, also, all of whom sacrificed, in order to fulfil the hardest of duties for their homeland, the dearest of all things—their life.” For this purpose the participating countries established a special international fund to which they donated “sizeable sums of money” (F. B. 1923: 3; J. H. 1923: 2). Some years after the war, numerous burial grounds for fallen soldiers of all nationalities were set up in most parts of Europe “with a commendable reverence worthy of imitation” (J. H. 1923: 2; Anon. 1927: 3). Monuments to fallen soldiers were being erected in towns and villages all across the European continent. Their ubiquitous message was to remember the self-sacrifice, suffering and memory of all the casualties of war. A notable exception in this ubiquitous process was the *nation of three names*, which in time prompted some to begin calling the issue “our national shame” (F. B. 1923: 3; J. H. 1923: 2).

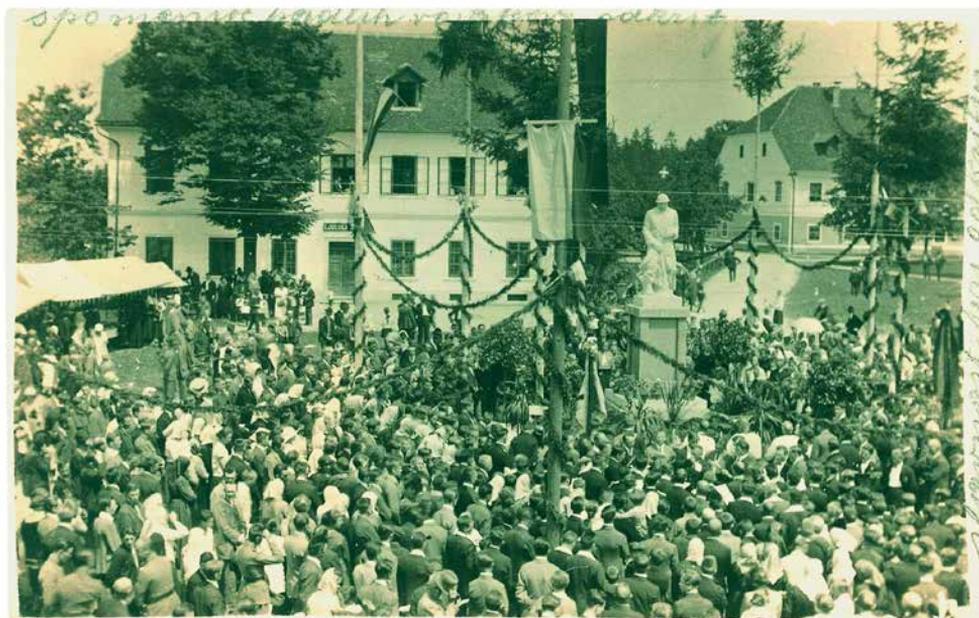
To the people exhausted by years of attrition, the conclusion of the war unavoidably brought new realities, with new heroes and new forgetfulness. The post-war restoration demanded enormous construction efforts, with even the bare foundations having to be built anew in many places. In that respect, the collective memory also changed profoundly, regarding not only the causes and the consequences of the war, but also its objectives and goals. The post-war narrative on the war was, actually, as different from the one presented during the war as if these were two completely different wars with completely different motives, objectives and consequences. At the Great War’s conclusion, with the founding of the new nation-state of the *nation of three names*, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, the new community required its own heroes and symbols to serve as a social adhesive (see e.g. Fikfak 2014: 8). Gavrilo Princip, who was from Austrian viewpoint the assassin, thus became the symbol of a heroic Serb and Yugoslavian patriot who had sacrificed his life for the freedom of all South Slavs and the restoration of the fallen Serbian Kingdom (Gerolymatos 2002: 14).

## AN ABYSS WITH NO BRIDGES

An abyss appeared between the periods before the war and after it, “an abyss with no bridges in between, where one end reaches the other only in distant memories” (Anon. 1939: 1). The Great War, accordingly, caused a fundamental break in the Slovenian public memory. In the first years of the war, between 16 and 17 August 1915 for example, several thousand members of “St. Mary’s people” still ventured on a “national pilgrimage” to the Basilica of St. Mary Help of Christians at Brezje, to celebrate the Emperor’s 85th birthday and pray for “our heroic soldiers on the lines of battle and the future of our nation” (Anon. 1915e: 1; 1915f: 1, 1915h: 4; 1915i: 484). In its appeal *Why travel to Brezje?*, published in mid-August 1915, the newspaper *Domoljub* wrote that those gathered on the Emperor’s Day will cherish the Emperor and pray “for their loved ones on the bloody fields of battle, for the Queen of Heaven to protect them from the enemy and to lead them from victory to victory,” as well as for “those brave men and boys already sleeping on foreign soil” (Anon. 1915g: 462).

Under one common state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians suddenly unified the “winners” (the former citizens of the Kingdom of Serbia) and the “losers” (the former citizens of the Dual Monarchy) of the Great War (see Dimić 1998: 33). The Austro-Hungarian Empire’s military campaign against Serbia, which included a major number of mobilised Croats on the side of the aggressor, but also Bosniaks, Slovenians and Serbs, resulted in enormous sacrifices and heavy economic damage. In its wake, chroniclers would portray Serbia as a “skeleton,” a demolished and desolate “military camp.” The Serbian collective memory of the bloody fratricidal and religious war remained a source of mistrust which extensively influenced the post-war politics (Dimić 1998: 30-2), but which was not given the much needed attention in public dialogue.

As argued by Ashplant, Dawson and Roper (2000: 16), the politics of war memory and commemoration is precisely the struggle of different groups to give public articulation to, and hence gain recognition for, certain memories and the narratives within which they are structured. After the nation-state of the Nation of three names had been established, Serbian and voluntary military tradition were preserved as a nation-building memory, while the memory of Austro-Hungarian military tradition was repressed, along with the memory of the Austro-Hungarian war casualties who had died fighting for a foreign army on the losing side of the war (see e.g. Bokovoy 2001: 251). Although the death toll was higher on the Serbian side, unlike the Austro-Hungarian war veterans, Serbian veterans at least had the satisfaction of knowing that their suffering and sacrifice were not in vain, that as a result, they achieved the liberation and unification of all the South Slavs. Memorial ceremonies held on the anniversaries of important battles served the purpose of alleviating the traumas left behind by the war. The Austro-Hungarian army’s invasion, the Serbian defeat, retreat, occupation and final victory against overwhelming odds became elements of the Serbian post-war narrative which in return gave meaning to the war experiences.



Unveiling of the monument to fallen soldiers in Polje, near Ljubljana



Unveiling of the monument to fallen soldiers in Črnuče, near Ljubljana

Austro-Hungarian war veterans did not play an equal role in this narrative at all. John Paul Newmann, for instance, tells about a Croat war veteran who asked for his due financial support. The official asked him if he had been a fighter on the Salonica Front, then rudely sent him off to beg for money from Emperor Karl instead (Newmann 2011: 56–7). The new nation-state was “more of a stepmother than a mother” to the former fighters of the Austro-Hungarian army, since up until 1925 the Austro-Hungarian war veterans, war widows and disabled were granted war and disability pensions that were even 75% lower than those of Serbian war veterans, widows, disabled and war volunteers (Svoljšak 2006: 285; 2010: 94; 2011: 33). In time, this situation became the sour apple of (repressed) national discord. *Slovenec* warned, in its 1 November 1924 editorial, of the highly destructive power of emotions stirring within the “losers’ side”:

Considering the current delicate political and social conditions in our country, these festive days should serve as an especially grave warning to us, and the price of ignoring it will be high. Let these days of reverence towards all those who worked and suffered before us and for us remind us of our duty to continue that work on solid and eternally true foundations, the same ones our fathers had built upon: a deep Christian faith and integrity. If future progress is not built upon these foundations, the freedom, the unification, the external force, the sword and the blood were all in vain. The only true unity, namely, is inner unity, and that cannot exist if we fail to observe society’s cardinal moral virtues: veracity, incorruptibility, loyalty, mutual respect, sincerity, honesty, etc. In these days, thus, let our lost loved ones remind us of that. (Anon. 1924: 1)

## COMMEMORATING FALLEN SOLDIERS

In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, Serbian military conquests were celebrated with magnificent state-funded public monuments, and Serbian soldiers and volunteers honoured on days of national commemoration. Naturally, there were fewer of these celebrations in the Slovenian part of the country, though it remains unclear why the monument to the Victory and Unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians “in memory to the brothers who fell whilst fighting for our freedom” was never built in Ljubljana, considering the fundraising campaign had already been started (Anon. 1920a: 6). The patriots made sure that several Judenburg rebels were exhumed and sent home to be buried with honours, but the soldiers who had fallen as members of the Austro-Hungarian army were removed from official memory and excluded from all memorials during the first post-war years. Slovenian newspapers even began wondering if the nation ever had any heroes of its own, claiming that “we are the people of Črtomir, he who got christened so meekly on the lake island. We are the people of Primož Trubar, he who fled and died in exile, and who was no hero ...” (Oblak 1920: 1).

After several years of silence on the topic of the fallen soldiers, calls arose from the anguish of family members who were denied a place to remember and mourn. They found it “disgraceful” that the majority of the soldiers had not even been given a modest name plate on a church wall or in some graveyard, that not even a simplest monument had been put up in public space, that not a single commemoration had been held in their honour (J. H. 1923: 2)

Those standing up for the building of monuments to the fallen Slovenian soldiers argued that honouring comrades by placing appropriate memory markers was the sign of a civilised nation’s piety (Bonač 1931: 1–2; K. M. H. 1935: 1). Monuments provide a physical site for the family members and the community to reflect on and remember the martyrdom of their loved ones, and as such inevitably carry political consequences. The commemoration ceremonies accompanying soldier memorials perhaps did not eliminate the political differences among their attendees altogether, but they did create an appearance of unison at least. Speakers would regularly stress the importance of unity and internal concordance. The preservation of war memory and the remembrance ceremonies organised in honour of the fallen thus became an expression of the efforts of particular groups to publicly articulate their views on history and struggle for their wider social recognition. “Monuments,” explained a writer for the newspaper *Gorenjec*, embody historic value because in them “the idea of what the monument stands for is immortalised materially, and that idea is the people’s signpost,” they “bring the idea to concrete life and thus reinforce it.”

Certain times arise when a nation is in dire need of ideational energy, when it must be roused, awoken, called to, invigorated so it does not waver. Through its monuments, a nation manifests its struggles. Through its monuments, a nation also protests, building courage. And that is why monuments are necessary. Not just Slovenians, all nations find themselves in a time when idea-fostering monuments are valuable more than ever, as signs of enduring peace and of protest to those who would endanger the truce and friendship between nations. (K. M. H. 1935: 1)

Eventually, the Association of Slovenian Soldiers (which later became the Association of Combatants) began organising commemorative ceremonies, revealing memorial plaques and other particular gestures, especially during the November 1st holidays. Mourning ceremonies in memory of fallen soldiers were proclaimed to be non-political in character, but their common goal was evident: the mobilisation of masses for particular political purposes. As suggested by Dagnosław Demski (2014: 27), commemorative rituals comprise an element that supports (political) community. Slovenian Commemorative ceremonies for the fallen soldiers in the Great War, too, served the purpose. Assemblies organised around the revealing of memorial plaques or at commemorative ceremonies regularly included the expression of political opinions, especially formal ones, though always regarding the present

rather than the past. In the state of the *nation of three names*, whose current citizens had not long ago been fighting on opposite sides of the frontline, the memory of the war had become one of the central ideological battlefields. This battle grew ever more openly political as the years passed by. As documented by the Central Committee of the Association of Combatants, the assemblies changed into “proper national manifestations” during the first half of the 1930s (Osrednji odbor Zveze bojevnikov 1933: 3). Speakers at the veteran combatants’ assemblies systematically emphasised their determination and the necessity of preserving the Slovenian language, Slovenian national characteristics and the Catholic faith (Anon. 1934b: 1; 1934g: 4; 1935f: 1; A. L. 1934.: 3), that is to say the main signs of Slovenian national individuality.

### THE POLITICS OF REMEMBERING WAR HEROES

The building of monuments to the fallen combatants of the Austro-Hungarian army depended on the efforts of individuals or smaller groups who knew how to mobilise the people and make decisions on the monument’s form and location (see e. g. Anon. 1928b: 4). The most common was the memorial plaque, usually embedded into a church or a graveyard wall, or chiselled into artistically more developed monuments. The names, generally arranged in alphabetic order, maintained the equality established on the battlefields, proclaiming all fallen soldiers as heroes in kind (Van Ypersele 2010: 580). Names set into stone, into objective reality so to speak, a honour that had once been reserved exclusively for magnates, now commemorated and cherished the everyman soldier. Catherine Moriarty establishes that the inscriptions, which invoked a profound private feeling of grief, were thus transformed into a source of national pride (Moriarty 1997: 138). The involvement of parishioners and/or villagers in mass public commemorative ceremonies, furthermore, reinforced the role of the peasantry as key members of the nation.

The memory of Slovenian soldiers who fell fighting for the Austrian army was kept alive in organised manner by the “non-partisan and apolitical” Association of Combatants (the former Association of Slovenian Soldiers), which held its first general assembly in 1924 “gathered around the throne of the Queen of Heaven” in Brezje. The association undertook the task of uniting old war comrades to honour the memory of their fallen friends, to provide for the war disabled and to rekindle the spirit of camaraderie and love that had once been harboured in the battle trenches (Anon. 1934c: 2). On the association’s energetic initiative, memorial plaques were uncovered each Sunday in parishes all across the Drava Banate (Stelè 1931: 412) and up until 1926, nearly 150 of these dedicated to fallen Slovenian heroes had already been put up (Anon. 1926a: 6; 1933a: 1–2; 1934c: 2; Dobida 1929: 430, Bonač 1931: 1–2). They were to serve as “lasting testimony to our descendants, showing our reverence towards our fallen comrades, and also our nation’s culture, as embodied by the saying ‘a nation that honours and respects the dead forges a bright future ahead’” (Anon. 1934c: 2).

In addition to smaller monuments in parishes and villages, secretary Bonač in 1926 already announced the intention building of a dignified, extensive, neutral great monument in the Ljubljana park Tivoli, dedicated to all the victims of the war (Anon. 1926a: 6).

Funds for the monuments were collected by the villages and parishes themselves, in the form of voluntary contributions. Since amounts sufficient to cover all the expenses of putting up the monument were seldom collected, the unveiling days often featured organised celebrations with dances, raffles, prize games, auctions and the like (Anon. 1920b: 2; Odbor 1921: 4). The Association of Combatants criticised this practice for being disrespectful towards the dead, encouraging veterans “to disallow frolicking on the graves and bones of our fallen comrades,” implying that if a municipality cannot produce its monument in a “dignified manner,” it best not set one up at all (Glavni odbor Z. S.V. 1925: 2). Those and other similar calls, though, mostly fell on deaf ears: for years, merrymaking remained a popular means to harvest the coin of the fallen soldiers’ relatives (see e. g. Anon. 1928c: 2; 1930a: 11; 1930b: 5; 1931: 11).

The solemn unveilings of fallen soldiers’ monuments across the Banate were reinforcing “the old war camaraderie, uplifting the spirit of unity and concordance” (Anon. 1934c: 2). The majority of the population greeted the activities with sympathy, though accusations of siding with the Austrians or “Austrianism” as they called it were levelled at them quite frequently, too (Anon. 1926a: 6; 1934c: 2; 1934d: 3; 1934h: 1). In 1924, Fran Bonač opined, defiantly, that between the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians there lied a lake of blood, which radically reshaped the hearts and minds of all the nations of Europe:

That is exactly why we shall set up monuments and honour the blessed memory of those who swam in that gruesome lake and who, in their effort to contain the waves from swallowing us all, were themselves drowned and lost. Their pitiful, scattered burial grounds serve as milestones of our lives. Every soldier of the Great War was a martyr, regardless of nationality. (Bonač 1924: 2)

Just as the early beginnings of Slovenian nationalism, the Slovenian combatants also masked the political nature of their movement under the guise of devotion and loyalty to the Royal House. A loyalty telegram emphasising the non-partisan and apolitical nature of their movement was sent to King Alexander from every rally, general assembly and similar event or meeting of the Association of Combatants (see e. g. Anon. 1926c: 6; 1934a: 1; 1934d: 3; 1934f: 8). Occasionally, they would also associate the king’s name with those of the fallen soldiers, constructing in this way a radically embellished interpretation of their historical role and meaning. Thus, the local organisation Battles of Vodice restored a monument to their municipality’s fallen soldiers whose names had been washed out by rain. In 1935, the names of the casualties were gilded, and King Alexander I the Unifier’s name was additionally engraved into a prominent spot on the monument (Anon. 1935b: 3).

The Association of Combatants encouraged the placement of monuments to the fallen comrades in different strategic ways and organised commemorations and rallies. World War Veteran outdoor assemblies in Brezje were of particular significance. They were usually held around mid-August, concurrent with the old wartime pilgrimages in honour of the Emperor's birthday, now instead dedicated to the holiday of the Assumption of Mary. Perhaps the biggest combatant meeting was held on the Nativity of our Lady in 1925. It was estimated that it was attended by around 12,000 participants from all the Slovenian regions, and also from outside of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. Missing, however, were any representatives of the political authorities, who did not respond to the invitation. On that occasion, a memorial plaque to the fallen Slovenian soldier was also revealed, made of Carrara marble and Swedish granite, embedded in the midst between St. Mary's chapel and the rest of the shrine so it could be seen from all parts of the church. The plaque depicts the head of Christ with a dying lion underneath, and a gilded inscription reading:

SAVED FROM THE HORRORS OF WAR  
WE PLEAD WITH THE QUEEN OF PEACE:  
MAY GOD REPAY THE FALLEN!  
SLOVENIAN SOLDIERS OF THE GREAT WAR  
GATHERED IN THIS HOLY PLACE

VOJNIH GROZOT OTETI,  
KLIČEMO KRALJICO MIRU:  
PADLIM PRI BOGU PLAČILO!  
SLOVENSKI VOJAKI IZ SVETOVNE VOJNE  
ZBRANI NA TEM SVETEM KRAJU  
31. VIII. 1924

The personal memories of contemporaries weren't of importance only to them and their loved ones. Through playing a part in the public ceremonies where war veterans gathered on important dates and at the unveiling of memorials to fallen soldiers, they became a component of the collective memory. They therefore helped shape the commemorative practices, and thereby acquired a political meaning. The Association of Slovenian Soldiers was, as its founders would frequently stress, established as an apolitical organisation with the essential goal of preserving the war memory of former and deceased soldiers. Nevertheless, it systematically and actively strived to revive the people's memory of certain topics aimed to provoke a favourable response not only with the war veterans, but with the wider political body as well.

#### PRIEST FRAN BONAČ

Former Austrian army Curate and Catechist Fran Bonač was especially persistent in agitating for and preaching about the establishment of memorials. Bonač was the honourable speaker of many commemoration and memorial revealing ceremonies across the Drava Banate. In his speeches, he stood up for the right to "a dignified grave and a dignified

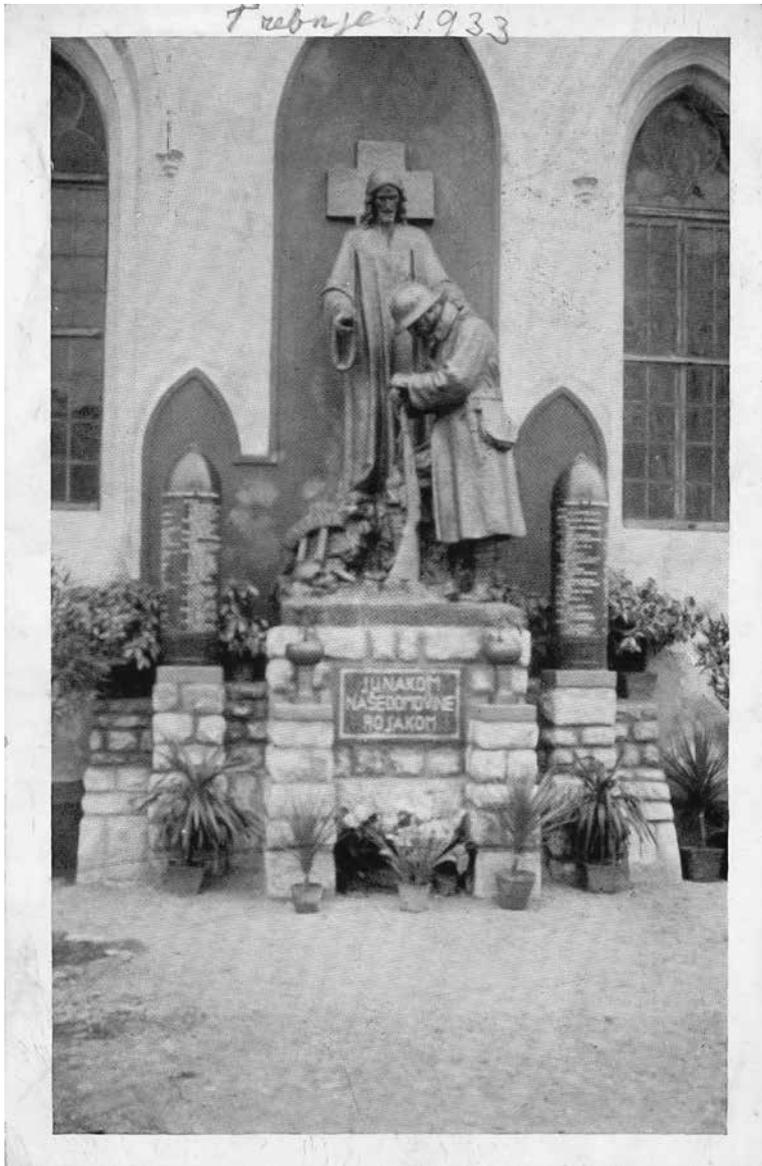
memory” of the fallen soldiers buried “on Slovenian soil” regardless of their nationality (Bonač 1929: 407–8). In this, he would often refer to Biblical examples, such as the story of Saul’s concubine Respha:

We read in the Second Book of Kings how King Saul provoked mighty resentment with the Gabaonites for breaking his word, in his attempt to destroy them with fire and sword. Famine struck the land of Israel and lasted for three consecutive years until it was revealed to David, Saul’s successor, that the blight shall end only when the deeply offended Gabaonites have had their retribution. For this they demanded the blood of Saul’s descendants, and so the king gave them seven among the sons of Saul to be crucified on the mountain before the Lord. Their mother Respha, in her merciful duty, spread upon the rock a horsehair cloth and lay upon it for long days and nights, preventing the birds and the beasts from devouring their flesh, until they were finally buried with dignity next to the remains of Saul and of Jonathan. So says the Bible.

Just as Respha watched over the wretched corpses of her crucified children, so shall we in this association protect the graves of our fallen comrades and remind our people not to forget their sons, but for each hamlet to put up at least one modest plaque in their memory, to pray for them, and to pay tribute to their sacrifice, their love and their loyalty—to us. (Bonač 1929: 407)

Though Bonač consistently emphasised the apolitical character of the Association of Combatants, he yet kept explicitly addressing the burning political questions of the time in his speeches (Anon. 1926a: 6). He said, on several occasions, that the Slovenian people dearly loved their country, and demanded that the country’s leadership show equal affection by relieving their “heavy tax burden and providing pension to all the people equally” and by not neglecting “their disabled, who sacrificed their bodies for the homeland.” Those were, of course, issues with a clear political charge. Such was also his rejection of those who voiced their doubt in the combatants’ patriotism. Bonač returned the sceptics’ accusations of “Austrianism” by accusing them in turn of “Byzantinism.” His prayer for the “fallen heroes” in the Brezje outdoor assembly dedicated to the Great War’s casualties in 1925, then, was already an entirely unambiguous step on the path of revising history (Anon. 1925e: 377).

The Association of Combatants incited a lively movement across the Slovenian parishes, striving for the open honouring of fallen soldiers. Such sites were to serve as their loved one’s substitute for the faraway grave, a place where they could utter their prayers and foster remembrance, a silent, living testimony to the horrors war (Anon. 1925d: 1; 1927: 3). The number of memorial plaques with soldier lists placed next to churches or graveyards grew quickly, along with the number of monuments, and in ten years’ time there was hardly a parish left without one (Anon. 1935e: 1). Though all of this took place far from the centres of power and concealed by an incomprehensible language, the goings-on eventually caught



Trebnje, monument to fallen soldiers in the Great War. The inscription reads: To the heroes of our homeland, compatriots.

the attention of Belgrade, the kingdom's capital. In late 1925, the Belgrade newspaper *Politika* published a scathing commentary frowning upon the events:

“The Illustrated Slovenec,” an outlet of Mr Korošec, keeps publishing images of monuments raised in Slovenia in memory of “fallen soldiers” from the former Italian Front. It is known that these monuments are being unveiled with honours and in the presence of the local authorities and fire brigade.

We have nothing against the families of those whose misguided heads were lost in the war—by accident, bad fortune or lack of awareness—preserving their graves out of reverence, but we have our rightful doubts about any conspicuous formal ceremonies that praise and glorify those who fought against the common allied and Yugoslavian cause on behalf of Karl Habsburg. For it is clear and undeniable that these “fallen soldiers” fought, tooth and nail, against the liberation of this country—even if unwittingly or against their will.

May our Slovenian brothers believe that every last Serbian would cry out in protest if someone should dare—in the same spirit—to raise a monument to that Serbian renegade Field Marshal Borojević, the commander of the Austrian Isonzo troops. (Z. 1925: 5)

*Politika's* concerns were dismissed in *Slovenec* by the Central Committee of the Association of Slovenian Soldiers as an “unfounded attack.” They appealed to the fact that soldiers killed in different countries have all had their graves maintained, even those belonging to the enemy's army, this including Germans slain in the invasion of Belgrade. That was why Slovenians also could not stay silent and thus “spit on the bones of their brothers and sons” who fell in Gorizia and in the Primorska region where they were “defending their own soil” (Glavni odbor Z. S. V. 1925: 2).

Ten years after the end of the war, in turn, the Catholic conservative newspaper for the Styrian countryside *Slovenski Gospodar* declared anew that the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne Franz Ferdinand, carried out by Gavrilo Principe on 28 June 1914, was a crime like any other, expressing outrage at the fact that a statue had been erected in Sarajevo in his honour (Anon. 1928a: 2).

## DEMOCRATISATION OF MEMORY

Before the Great War, heroes whose heroic deeds were set in stone for future generations to remember were invariably military commanders and leaders; the rank-and-file soldiers were left to oblivion (Mosse 1975: 37, 47; 1990: 99; Borg 1991: 104; Gillis 1994: 9; Winter 2006: 281). But the shattering turmoil of war in the years 1914–1918 resulted in a shift in the collective memory's perception of the essential war protagonist, replacing the notion

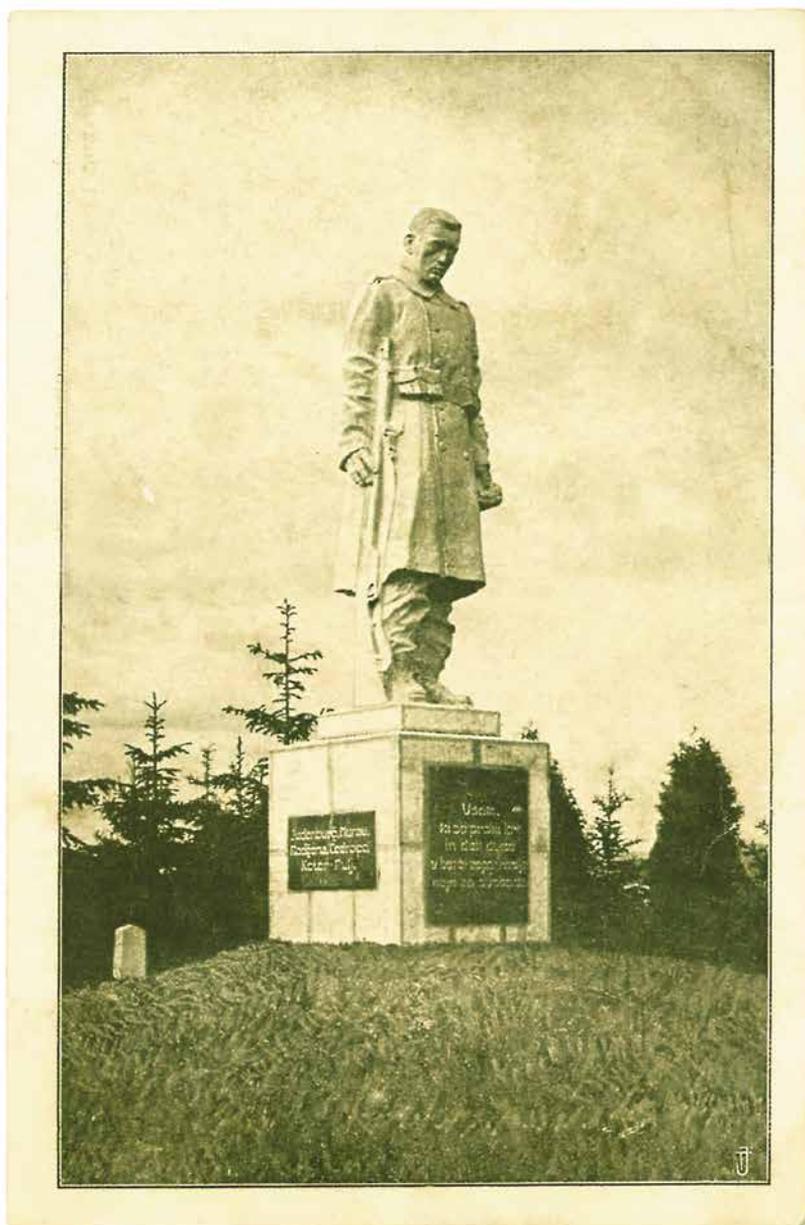
of the champion with that of the “unknown soldier,” the regular infantryman who carried the brunt of the suffering and faced the full onslaught of “the most dreadful war the world has ever seen” (Strobl 1915: 1). The monstrous death tally of the Great War, without compare in the experience of the contemporaries or even the chronicles of history, caused a paradigm shift, in no small way also paving the way for democratic thought:

The fate of the nation, its fortune or misfortune, should not be decided by a mere handful of men who ascended to power through birth, luck or favouritism. The nation itself should be forging its own path, making its own luck, be it good or bad, and carrying its own burden! Whomsoever owns the right to suffer and to sacrifice, owns as well, indubitably, the right to decide on the cause of his own sacrifice and suffering. (Anon. 1919: 91)

The shift in the collective memory is best illustrated by the monument in Metz, originally dedicated to Emperor Wilhelm II, which was demolished after the war and replaced by the monument to the *poilu* (French infantryman). Monuments would often portray soldiers dressed in uniform. In the nation-state of the *nation of three names*, this custom presented a significant problem owing to the fact that the Austro-Hungarian army had been the one to invade Serbia and leave behind massive destruction. Accordingly, “uniformed” monuments were scarce in the Drava Banate, but some were put up nonetheless. The first was the so-called Janez of Carniola statue placed in the Holy Cross graveyard in Ljubljana, though it was officially attributed not with the memory of just any fallen soldier but that of Slovenians of the 17th Imperial-Royal regiment who were executed for rebelling against Austria-Hungary during the Judenburg mutiny on 12 May 1918. This monument was already planned during the war as a token to Austro-Hungarian soldiers (Anon. 1916a: 4), was subsequently scrapped, then finally erected with a different connotation.

Painter Ivan Vaupotič designed the monument showing a common infantryman on a stone pedestal with a rifle by his leg, cap in hand, therefore bare, without a knapsack but with cartridge bags on his front side, his trousers fastened with a belt. The head is bowed, pensive as if in prayer and bald, showing that men used to be conscripted regardless of age. Voluntary contributions for the monument were being collected among soldiers during the war (Anon. 1916b: 5). The blueprint for the monument was designed by one-year volunteer, sculptor Svitoslav Peruzzi, who portrayed a soldier of the Carniolan 17th infantry regiment dressed in the regiment uniform. Peruzzi created a clay model of the monument but never finished it since he was relieved of army duty. The monument was instead carved in marble by one-year volunteer, sculptor Lojze Dolinar (Anon. 1916a: 4; Čopič 1987: 168-690). Originally, the statue of Janez of Carniola was to stand in Ljubljana as a monument to Slovenian heroism and loyalty to Austria (Anon. 1916b: 5).

In early spring of 1917, the command of the Imperial-Royal 17th infantry battalion “Crown Prince” sent a memorandum to the mayor of Ljubljana saying they were planning on



Kranjski Janez (Janez of Carniola), made by Svetislav Peruzzi, then an Austrian soldier in Judenburg, 1917.

setting up a fallen heroes' monument in Ljubljana, in agreement with the regiment's superiors. In writing, they asked the Ljubljana City Council to appoint a location for the monument's placement and begin laying the groundwork. Mayor Tavčar welcomed the proposal, and advised two potential locations for the monument in the city centre (Anon. 1917b: 1–2).

In the end, Janez of Carniola was finally put up in 1923, when the remains of the victims of the Judenburg mutiny were brought to Ljubljana. The monument, praising the valour of the “Carniolan soldier,” was unveiled on that day in memory of the Slovenians who rebelled against the Empire on May 12, 1918. It was set on a square pedestal of white stone, with black memorial plaques set between the graves of the five rebel leaders of Judenburg surrounded by the graves of other soldiers (Čopič 1987: 168–69).

Some years after Ljubljana, the village Dovje put up its own statue of the Janez of Carniola, “as a warm reminder and a silent warning to the future generations” (Anon. 1938b: 3). Church councillor Jakob Aljaž blessed the monument alongside the assembled clergymen, while secretary Bonač gave a speech of honour (Anon. 1925a: 7; 1925b: 3; 1925c: 4). A plaque with the names of the fallen soldiers was set into a pillar bearing the inscription “in memory of the fallen soldiers of the Dovje-Mojstrana Municipality. 1914 + 1918.” The memorial plaque was underlined with the verses:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| The battles are done, the suffering ends,        | Minuli so boji, minulo trpljenje,        |
| For home, our beloved, our lives have been spent | Za dom svoj preljubi smo dali življenje. |
| All over the earth our bodies now lie            | Zdaj širom sveta naša trupla trohne,     |
| Once more we'll unite, up there, in the sky      | A gor nad oblaki spet združimo se.       |

The monument was built on the initiative of a preparatory committee whose members held diverse worldviews and political convictions. The committee organised a fundraising campaign that netted some 25,000 dinars. Contemplating on the statue's representation, it was ultimately decided it should depict a regular of the 17th Slovenian infantry division in his typical Austro-Hungarian uniform. The committee's stance was that “history simply cannot be rewritten,” and that the statue was thus to serve as “a document of the times, a sad reminder of an even sadder past when Slovenian boys and men were forced, against their will, to take part in a worldwide massacre” (Anon. 1938b: 3). Not everyone shared their opinion, though. The monument in Dovje was in time vandalised on the grounds of allegedly “representing a soldier in a uniform that was all too Austrian as people would often point out—and have continued to object” (Anon. 1938a: 8). The statue and its pedestal were knocked down with a lath pulled from a nearby hayrack, and the head removed from the site. The marble plaque with the engraved names of some 60 fallen and missing soldiers, though, escaped the perpetrators' wrath. “Pitiful is now the sight of the demolished statue—that silent testimony of the suffering of our Slovenian boys and men forced to fight on behalf of rapacious foreigners and our nation's oppressors,” reported *Slovenec* (Anon. 1938b: 3).

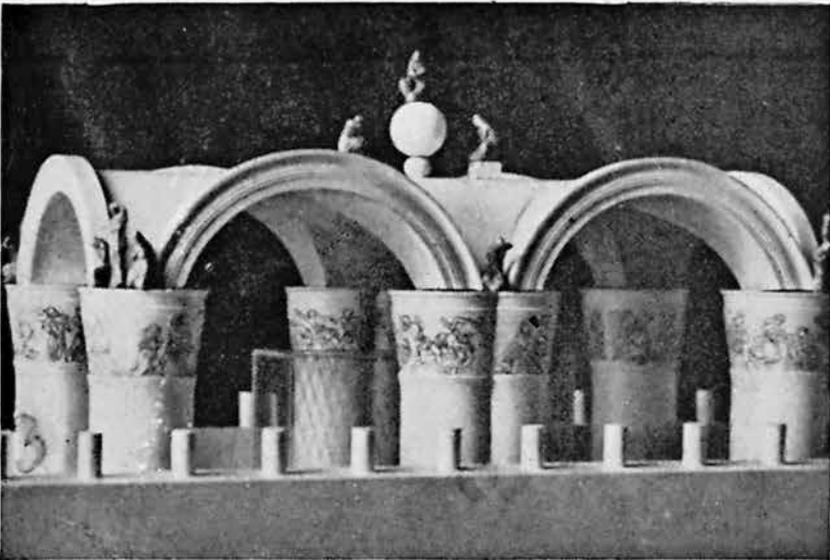
## INTERPRETING THE PAST AT THE EXPENSE OF THE FUTURE

During events organised by the Association of Combatants, and later after its forceful restructuring (the result of attracting Belgrade's attention) into the Association of Yugoslavian Fighters "Boj," the language of speakers was becoming increasingly political, having a direct and transparent agenda of struggling against centralism and for the autonomy of the Slovenian nation. Not everyone could simply take the podium during these commemorations, all the speakers were authorised by the association (Anon. 1933c: 1; 1933d: 3; 1934e: 1; Spindler 1934: 2). The speakers' language was growing increasingly radical, eventually including even direct insults aimed at the central authorities and their agents (Anon. 1933b: 1; 1936: 1).

Monuments and memorials dedicated to fallen soldiers were multiplying year after year, just like the number of the corresponding commemoration ceremonies. Eventually plates with names of fallen and missed soldiers were embellished with stone figures representing soldiers, in the Drava Banate they were dressed in the uniforms of the former Austrian army, to the monument in the town of Trebnje, in 1933, an astonishing inscription was attached explaining that it was dedicated to the "heroes of our homeland" (Junakom domovine).

The political motivation behind the commemorative ceremonies began most obviously revealing itself in the mid-thirties, when the Association started organising the so-called *tabors* (meetings) of the Slovenian people. The first one was held on Sunday, August 11, 1935, in Komenda. A crowd of several thousand attended the *tabor*, including school children, firemen, folklore groups in national garb, and the brass band of the Domžale district. The speaker of honour on this occasion was Ban Marko Natlačen. He did not speak about the past but rather focused on the present, especially on the relationship between the Slovenian and Yugoslavian national awareness, on the way "we perceive the Yugoslavian nation and the Yugoslavian national unity." In his views, it was essential to distinguish between the idea of the Yugoslavian nation in a state-political sense from that of Yugoslavian nation in an ethical, cultural sense. All the citizens of Yugoslavia, explained Natlačen, including Germans and Hungarians, constitute the Yugoslavian nation as an entity in a political sense. In the ethical, cultural sense, though, according to Ban Natlačen, the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians were "three distinct national units." That is why, he argued, any kind of hegemony of one nation over the other was to be considered intolerable. Slovenians united with Croats and Serbs in a common state in 1918, in order to grow stronger together, not to get rid of their national individuality. (Anon. 1935c: 1–2).

After the bloody Great War, the nation-state of the Nation with three names tried to interpret both the people's heroism and their sacrifice through the images and symbols of the Kosovo myth. Alexander Karađorđević (heir to the throne and regent 1918–1921, and king 1921–1934) himself was actively involved in the formation of the post-war memory of the Serbian role in the Great War. He personally attended numerous St. Vitus' Day celebrations and similar commemorations, often appearing as the main speaker. In his addresses,

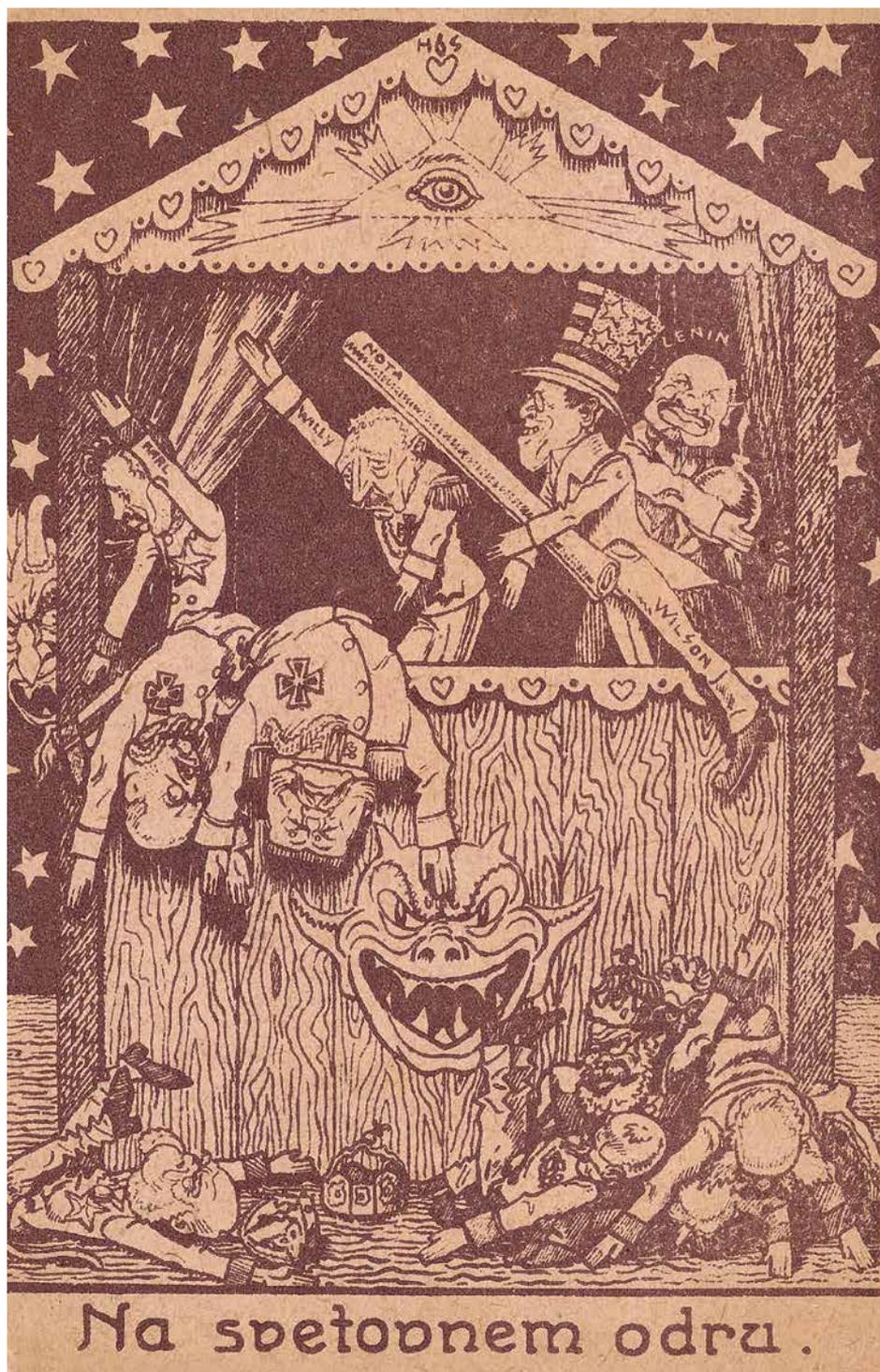


**Osnutek za grob  
neznane slovenskega vojaka na Brezjah**

Draft version of monument to the Unknown Slovenian soldier in Brezje.



Škofja Loka, monument to fallen soldiers.



On the world stage. Slovene caricature

Alexander predominantly spoke of the history of Serbian sacrifice for the establishment of the Yugoslav state (Bokovoy 2001: 248, 251).

From the mid-1920s on, monuments to fallen soldiers were being installed in most villages and towns across the Drava Banate. At a time when Belgrade and other Serbian parts of the country were taking state loans to construct monuments to their own, the state made no effort to honour the soldiers of the other side (see e. g. Anon. 1928d: 3), villagers, relatives and veterans had to cover the costs themselves. This, too, constructed the context in which the spiral spun, the pre-war enmity ostensibly bitter and intense, divides were opening up, and eventually became so wide that the *nation of three names* struggled to remember that after the war was over they united as *one* nation. Mindful of the horrid past, they lost the focus on the brighter future.

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## VSAKA VOJNA IZNAJDEVA HEROJE

*Ko je bilo Velike vojne dokončno konec, se je večina Evrope spraševala o njenem smislu in pomenu. Razmišljanja so podkrepili številni spominski dogodki, posvečeni spomin padlim vojakom, ki so se odvijali skoraj vsak dan. Še posebej je bilo vprašanje smisla in opravičevanja vojne pomembno za državljane novonastale države Kraljevine Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev, v kateri so se skupaj znašli nekdanji nasprotniki oz. sovražniki in po vojni zmagovalci in poraženci. Za člane nove troimene države je pomenilo to neprijetno dejstvo zelo veliko oviro za oblikovanje enotnega oz. "skupnega" vojnega spomina in na tej podlagi tudi nove države. Še večji problem je bilo dejstvo, da se teh zelo različnih izhodiščih ni nikoli resno tematiziralo, temveč so bila prepuščena mešanico zmagovalnega (samo)zadovoljstva na eni, in spotikajočemu se iskanju opravičljive zgodovinske podobe na drugi strani. Ko se je v nekaj tihih letih začela gradnja spomenikov vojnih žrtev v Srbiji in v Sloveniji - le malo jih je bilo postavljenih v drugih delih Kraljevine – so se komemorativne prakse intenzivno prepletlez nacionalistično ideologijo.*

*Predusem od leta 1925 dalje so v številnih srbskih krajih in vaseh ter v številnih slovenskih vasicah in v nekaterih mestih postavili spomenike padlim vojakom. V Srbiji so bili vsi oblečeni v vojaške uniforme zmagoslavne srbske vojske; v Sloveniji pa so bili vojaki navadno oblečeni v avstro-madžarske uniforme. Tako je ohranjanje živega spomina na padle vojake služilo tudi kot orodje za ohranjanje vojnih nasprotij in zamer med člani troimene Nacije.*

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