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ALBIN PREPELUH: Why Are We Republicans?

Authors: Albin Prepeluh with Dragotin Lončar as Slovenski republikanci (Slovenian Republicans)

Title: Why Are We Republicans?

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About the author

Albin Prepeluh – Abditus (1880, Ljubljana–1937, Ljubljana) was a publicist and political theorist.² Before and during the First World War, Prepeluh was

¹ First advertised in *Avtonomist* 4, no. 14, April 5, 1924, 2.

² This biographic sketch was derived from the following sources: Dragotin Lončar, “Abditus (Albin Prepeluh),” *Sodobnost* 5, no. 11–12 (1937), 481–87. Dušan Kermavner, “Albin Prepeluh – Abditus. Njegov idejni razvoj in delo,” in Albin Prepeluh, *Pripombe k naši prevratni dobi* (Ljubljana: J. Blaznik, 1938), 293–362. “Politični ideolog Albin Prepeluh – Abditus,” *Kronika slovenskih mest* 6, no. 4 (1939), 256. Dušan Kermavner, “Prepeluh, Albin (1880–1937),” in *Slovenski biografski leksikon*, vol. 8, *Pregelj Ivan–Qualle*, ed. Franc Ksaver Lukman (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 1952), online at <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi460965/>, last accessed December 12, 2024. Jasna Fischer, *Idejni razvoj Albina Prepeluha v letih 1899–1918* (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, Oddelek za zgodovino, 1968). Nada Gspan, “Prepeluh, Albin,” in *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815–1950*, vol. 8 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), 264. See also Albin Prepeluh’s personal collection at the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia in Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, SI AS 2077 Zbirka Albina Prepeluha.

a leading Slovenian socialist intellectual, representing the ‘revisionist’ Marxist stream within the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party (*Jugoslovanska social-demokratska stranka*, JSDS), and one of the key theorists of the agrarian question among Marxists in the Habsburg Empire. During the interwar period, he underwent an intellectual transformation and developed a republican peasantist political language with strong socialist and Slovenian autonomist intonations.

Born into an impoverished working-class family in Ljubljana, Prepeluh first studied to be a carpenter as a teenager. As a young adult in 1898, he changed careers and entered public service, first as a clerk in the court system in Carniola and then as an expert in land registries. On November 14, 1918, almost immediately after the end of the First World War, Prepeluh was appointed temporary commissar for “war casualties and bereft relatives” at the Commission for Social Welfare (*Poverjeništvo za socialno skrbstvo*) of the provisional Regional Government for Slovenia (*Deželna vlada za Slovenijo*).³ The Commission was initially led by his comrade from the social democratic movement, Anton Kristan (1881–1930). Prepeluh was promoted to a permanent commissarial position and made Kristan’s deputy a month later, on December 23, 1918.⁴ (In the same announcement, Alojzija Štebi (1883–1956) was appointed superintendent of the Department of Youth Welfare within the Commission.) From March 1919, Prepeluh led the Commission,⁵ and soon after was appointed as member of the Slovenian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. He left the state administration in 1920, when he was 40 years old, and in the years following became the majority shareholder of the Jožef Blaznik Printing House (*Blaznikova tiskarna*) and assumed the company’s directorship until his death in 1937.

Originally, Prepeluh entered the social democratic movement in his youth through the Workers’ Educational Society (*Delavsko izobraževalno društvo*) in Ljubljana alongside his circle of friends, particularly Karel Linhart (1882–1918) and Ivan Kocmur (1881–1942). He began to publish political articles in the social democratic press starting in 1899, when he was 19 years old,⁶ using the pen name ‘Abditus’ (Latin for ‘hidden’, ‘withdrawn’, or ‘concealed’). The pseudonym would remain with him for the rest of his life. From 1899 until 1920, he was a member of the JSDS. In 1902, he came into conflict with the party’s orthodox leadership over the agrarian question. Prepeluh argued that it was necessary to entice peasants in the countryside to join the social democratic movement as

3 *Uradni list deželne vlade za Slovenijo* 1, no. 9, November 18, 1918, 17. See also entry on Andrej Gosar in this volume.

4 *Uradni list deželne vlade za Slovenijo* 1, no. 27, December 23, 1918, 58.

5 *Uradni list deželne vlade za Slovenijo* 1, no. 62, March 13, 1919, 189.

6 Abditus, “Socijalizem in Jugoslovani,” *Delavec–Rdeči prapor* 2, no. 30, November 1, 1899; no. 33, December 1, 1899.

a means of guaranteeing parliamentary successes and maintaining extra-parliamentary pressure.⁷ The orthodox leadership of the JSDS rather viewed the party as exclusively proletarian, siding in large part with Karl Kautsky's analysis in *Die Agrarfrage* (1899; see Context below for more details). Searching for an independent line, Prepeluh co-founded the journal *Naši zapiski* (Our Notes, 1902–1914; 1920–1922), aiming to create a broad progressive platform. During the 1900s and early 1910s, *Naši zapiski* drew into its orbit heterodox socialists like Anton Kristan and Alojzija Štebi, as well as Slovenian Masarykians (*masarykovci*) like Dragotin Lončar (1876–1954).⁸ Within the JSDS, Prepeluh was part of the “Socialist Youth” (*socialistična omladina*) who represented reformism against the leadership's (*inter alia* **Etbin Kristan's**, 1867–1953) orthodoxy.⁹ By the end of the First World War, Prepeluh had created a language of socialist reformism and a commitment to democratic norms, and so became an opponent of the left wing of JSDS from which the Slovenian communists emerged. Prepeluh was voted out of the party leadership in 1919 and voluntarily exited in 1920.

After the First World War, Prepeluh turned his attention to addressing the intertwined problems of authoritarian governance in Yugoslavia, oppressive capitalism in the city and countryside, and the negotiation of an autonomous Slovenian identity within a broader Yugoslav identity. This would guide his political orientation throughout the interwar period. His postwar work was first published in Štebi's *Demokracija* (1918–19) as well as the revival of *Naši zapiski* (1920–22), and the short-lived *Novi zapiski* (New Notes, 1922), all of which were continuations of the Socialist Youth orientation in the new, independent Yugoslav context.

In 1921, Prepeluh and Lončar launched the weekly newspaper *Avtonomist* (1921–24), representing an eclectic mix of democratic, peasantist, republican, socialist, federalist, and Slovenian autonomist political languages. (There were far-reaching consequences: as a child, Edvard Kardelj (1910–1979) was a delivery boy for the paper, and credited it with instilling left-wing republican and federalist ideas in him from an early age.¹⁰) While the Slovenian Republican Party (*Slovenska republikanska stranka*), founded by Anton Novačan (1887–1951), had

7 See the entry on Jože Srebrnič in this volume.

8 See Irena Gantar Godina, *T. G. Masaryk in masarykovstvo na Slovenskem (1895–1914)* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1987). On Lončar, see Avgust Pirjevec, “Lončar, Dragotin (1876–1954),” in *Slovenski biografski leksikon*, vol. 4, *Kocen–Lužar*, eds. Franc Ksaver Lukam et al. (Ljubljana: Zadrúžna gospodarska banka, 1932). Branko Marušič, “Lončar, Dragotin (1876–1954),” in *Primorski slovenski leksikon*, vol. 2/9, *Križnič–Martelanc*, ed. Martin Jevnikar (Gorizia: Goriška Mohorjeva družba, 1983), both online at <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi333776/>, last accessed December 12, 2024. Fran Zwitter, “Dragotin Lončar,” *Zgodovinski časopis* 8 (1954): 181–91.

9 See the entry on Etbin Kristan in this volume.

10 “Dosledni put revolucionara,” *Mladost: List Narodne omladine Jugoslavije* 4, no. 131, April 16, 1959, 2.

existed during the early 1920s, it collapsed after its failure at the 1923 elections. Many of its left-wing members then regrouped around Prepeluh, Lončar, and *Avtonomist*.¹¹ The source text below, “Why Are We Republicans?” (*Zakaj smo republikanci?*), was composed in this intellectual context—more on this in the next section—where the political language which had been developed by Prepeluh and Lončar since the turn of the twentieth century began to be met with a growing (but still meagre) popular interest in the republican state form.

Out of this more informal group, Prepeluh and Lončar founded the Slovenian Republican Party of Peasants and Workers (*Slovenska republikanska stranka kmetov in delavcev*, SRS) in October 1924. *Avtonomist* was retitled as *Slovenski republikanec* (The Slovenian Republican) and became the party’s organ.¹² At the same time, the party entered into an agreement with the Croatian Republican Peasant Party (*Hrvatska republikanska seljačka stranka*, HRSS), headed by Stjepan Radić (1871–1928). SRS became a federal branch of HRSS in the Ljubljana and Maribor *oblasti*.¹³ On New Year’s Eve 1924, Tomasz Dąbal (1890–1937) and Nikolai Meshcheryakov (pseud. Orlov, 1865–1942) wrote directly to Prepeluh to have SRS join the Krestintern, likely because HRSS was at that time a member party.¹⁴ However, Prepeluh never responded to the invitation.¹⁵

For the February 1925 parliamentary elections, Prepeluh stood as the leader of the HRSS–SRS list in the Ljubljana and Maribor *oblasti*. (He was not elected.) The same year, however, the ‘Republican’ label was dropped from Radić’s party’s name, allowing the Croatian peasantists to enter a national coalition government with Nikola Pašić’s People’s Radical Party (*Narodna radikalna stranka*) in Belgrade. Around this time, SRS became an independent party once more. However, in 1926, Prepeluh and Lončar led the SRS into a new political formation composed of other Slovenian peasantist groups, including Ivan Pucelj’s (1877–1945) Independent Agrarian Party (*Samostojna kmetijska stranka*). The Slovenian Peasant Party (*Slovenska kmetska stranka*, SKS) was founded as a result. The following year, the Radić–Pašić coalition fell apart, and SKS realigned

11 See Igor Grdina, “Kratka zgodovina Slovenske zemljoradniške in Slovenske republikanske stranke Antona Novačana,” *Zgodovinski časopis* 43, no. 1 (1989): 77–95.

12 See “Temeljni nauk Slovenske republikanske stranke kmetov in delavcev,” document no. 36 in *Programi slovenskih političnih strank, organizacij in združenj v letih 1918–1929: Pregled k slovenski politični zgodovini*, ed. Jurij Perovšek (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2018), electronic resource, <https://www.sistory.si/cdn/publikacije/38001-39000/38399/doc036.html>.

13 “Naša SRS je edino prava!,” *Slovenski republikanec* 4, no. 47, November 21, 1924, 2–3. *Oblast* was the highest-level regional administrative unit in Yugoslavia between 1922 and 1929.

14 SI AS 2077, Box 1/9, Letter from Dąbal and Orlov (N. Meshcheryakov) to Prepeluh, March 8, 1925. See George D. Jackson, *Comintern and Peasant in East Europe, 1919–1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 103–12. Luiza Revjakina, *Коминтернът и селските партии на Балканите 1923–1931* (Sofia: Академично издателство “Проф. Марин Дринов,” 2003), 77–111, on Radić and the HRSS in the Krestintern.

15 Revjakina, *Коминтернът и селските партии*, 106.

with the Peasant-Democratic Coalition (*Seljačko-demokratska koalicija*) for the 1927 elections. Prepeluh once more stood as a candidate, this time for SKS, but was not elected this time either.

As 1927 passed into 1928, Prepeluh turned his attention away from party politics and toward the question of land reform. Through his studies, he concluded that the seizure and parcellation of large agricultural estates and forest holdings was the only way out of peasant misery and poverty in the countryside. This problem primarily held his attention from 1928 to 1933, resulting in the foundation of the Union of Agrarian Interests (*Zveza agrarnih interesov*) and the 1933 publication of his capstone text on the question of land reform, *Agrarna reforma: naš veliki socialni problem* (Agrarian Reform: Our Big Social Problem).

In the meantime, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes had collapsed, and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was erected in its place. Puniša Račić had shot Stjepan Radić, Ivan Pernar, Ivan Granda, Đuro Basariček, and Pavle Radić in parliament on June 20, 1928. Basariček and Pavle Radić were killed on the spot, while Stjepan Radić died some weeks later, on August 8, 1928. In response, King Aleksandar Karađorđević declared a royal dictatorship (January 6, 1929), sanctified the ideology of integral Yugoslavism and the infallibility of the monarch, and dissolved all 'partisan' political parties and organizations. However, Prepeluh maintained his international political contacts through the late 1920s and early 1930s, among others with Karel Mečír (1876–1947) and the International Agrarian Bureau ("Green International") in Prague, still representing himself officially as one of the leaders of the Slovenian Peasant Party.¹⁶ From 1934 to 1937, Prepeluh wrote his autobiographic memoirs on the period around the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. "Remarks on Our Revolutionary Age," in a Masarykian nod, was first published serially in the progressive journal *Sodobnost* (Contemporaneity) in Ljubljana.

However, the series remained unfinished, and the monographic version of the articles appeared posthumously in 1938, edited by Dušan Kermavner with an extensive intellectual biography of Prepeluh.¹⁷ Prepeluh passed on November 20, 1937. He was 57 years old.

MOST IMPORTANT WORKS: "Socijalizem in Jugoslovani," *Delavec-Rdeči prapor* 2, no. 30 (November 1, 1899)–no. 33 (December 1, 1899); "O ženi in njeni ravnopravnosti," *Slovenka* 5, no. 4 (1901): 82–85; "Kautsky o agrarnem vprašanju pri nas," *Naši zapiski* 1, no. 2 (August 1902): 17–20; *Občina in socializem* (Ljubljana, 1903); *Reformacija in socialni boji slovenskih kmetov* (Ljubljana, 1908);

¹⁶ See correspondence in SI AS 2077, Box 2/17.

¹⁷ Albin Prepeluh, *Pripombe k naši prevratni dobi*, ed. Dušan Kermavner (Ljubljana: J. Blaznik, 1938).

Socialni problemi (Ljubljana, 1912); *Problemi malega naroda* (Ljubljana, 1918); trans., Niccolò Machiavelli, *Vladar* (Ljubljana, 1920); with Dragotin Lončar as Slovenski republikanci (Slovenian Republicans), *Mala politična šola za slovenske kmete in delavce*, vol. 1, *Zakaj smo republikanci?* (Ljubljana, 1924); *Idejni predhodniki današnjega socijalizma in komunizma* (Ljubljana, 1925); *V boju za zemljo in državo* (Ljubljana, 1928); *Kmetijski pokret med Slovenci po prvi svetovni vojni* (Ljubljana, 1928); *Agrarna reforma: naš veliki socialni problem* (Ljubljana, 1933); *Pripombe k naši prevratni dobi*, ed. Dušan Kermavner (Ljubljana, 1938).

Context

In 1928, the writer and historian Fran Erjavec (1893–1960) estimated that roughly 63% of the 1.06 million people living in the Ljubljana and Maribor *oblasti* labored in agriculture by 1925 (671,000).¹⁸ Erjavec observed that, compared with the Austrian statistics from 1910, this percentage had not significantly changed, neither in absolute nor in comparative terms, after fifteen years and dramatic political changes in Central and Southeastern Europe. Certainly, compared with the numbers from over four decades before, some of the population had moved from agriculture to industry and other professions. In Carniola alone, roughly 70% of the crownland's population in 1880 was engaged in agricultural work in some form, either as smallholding farmers or as day laborers (336,700); about 30% worked among all other professions, including in industry (144,300).¹⁹ However, the transition was not fundamental, and in no way could the Slovenian lands be labelled industrialized before the second half of the twentieth century.

Yet, already at the turn of the twentieth century, Prepeluh recognized clearly that the overwhelmingly agrarian economic structure of the Slovenian lands meant that the orthodox Marxist strategy of building mass socialist parties only on the basis of industrial workers would not be enough. In a letter to Ivan Kocmur from 1901, Prepeluh wrote with only a hint of hyperbole that “our nation is three quarters agrarian.”²⁰ In preparation for the 1902 JSDS congress in Celje, where he was slated to give the report on the agrarian question, Prepeluh approached none other than Karl Kautsky (1854–1938), asking for some clarity on the issue. Prepeluh informed Kautsky that the economic conditions in Austria-Hungary did not favor industrialization in territories inhabited by South Slavs; the peasantry continued to predominate numerically in the economy and would

18 Fran Erjavec, *Kmetiško vprašanje v Sloveniji: Gospodarska in socialna slika* (Ljubljana: Jugoslovanska kmetiška zveza, 1928), 12.

19 *Österreichische Statistik*, vol. 1/3 (Vienna: K.k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1882), 87.

20 Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, NUK Ms 1962, IV. 1. Članki in razprave, Folder 9, Prepeluh Albin, f. 1., Albin Prepeluh to Ivan Kocmur, March 6, 1901.

do so well into the future. Shouldn't socialists then go to the countryside and attempt to bring the impoverished rural population into the ranks of the party? To that end, Prepeluh asked whether Kautsky had written *On the Agrarian Question* (*Die Agrarfrage*, 1899) "especially for Germany, or also for Austria [meaning Cisleithania—CJI], or in general?"²¹

Kautsky's reply was less than cordial: "Said precisely, you have misunderstood my book."²² He argued that while the "rural proletariat" and even smallholders may be won over by a socialist program, it was an "illusion" to think that "rich peasants" may be. "Our party is a proletarian party, the party of class struggle, [and] this must be maintained in Carniola and Istria just as in Northern Bohemia and in Belgium. Our agrarian propaganda must never go so far as to obscure the proletarian content."²³ Kautsky ended with the critical observation that "the Slovenian socialists ... have set for themselves the impossible task to win over a part of the propertied classes for socialism," meaning the landed peasantry.²⁴ Soon enough, Kautsky thought, the Slovenian socialists would have to turn back exclusively to the proletariat as its base.

There is no doubt that Prepeluh chafed at this reply. He republished Kautsky's letter in *Naši zapiski* in August 1902, along with his own commentary: "In Russia, India, and among the South Slavs," Prepeluh wrote, "the conditions are the same. The inhabitants of these lands are on the way to industrial society. ... [However,] the idea of socialism develops much quicker than the economic conditions, which—there's no denying it—are the foundations of the socialist outlook."²⁵ He then republished key parts of Kautsky's letter in Slovenian translation, followed by another brief commentary. In sum, Prepeluh, argued, "[p]ractical life will finally decide the agrarian question, and the relevant theories will certainly bow to this verdict."²⁶

Across the period of large-scale geopolitical transformations in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe from 1917 to 1923—the end of the First World War, the collapse of empires and postimperial transitions, the construction of new international institutions and transnational governance—it appeared that the agrarian question was still largely rooted in its old conditions. The creation of a new Yugoslav state seems to have rather entrenched the inert agrarian economic

21 Prepeluh to Kautsky, March 14, 1902, letter no. 86 in *Karl Kautsky und die Sozialdemokratie Südosteuropas: Korrespondenz 1883–1938*, eds. Georges Haupt, János Jemnitz, and Leo van Rossum (Frankfurt–New York: Campus, 1986), 222.

22 Kautsky to Prepeluh, April 9, 1902, letter no. 87 in *ibid.*, 223.

23 *Ibid.*, 224.

24 *Ibid.*

25 Abditus (Albin Prepeluh), "Kautsky o agrarnem vprašanju pri nas," *Naši zapiski* 1, no. 2, August 1902, 17.

26 *Ibid.*, 20.

conditions in that part of Central and Southeastern Europe. Industrialization, and so socialism, had its development arrested, its pathway closed off by a variety of factors, among others the maintenance of large, low-yield estates owned by the high bourgeoisie and nobility, foreign and domestic alike. At a personal level, there is no doubt that Prepeluh's gradual turn from orthodox Marxism in the early twentieth century was completed with his exit from the JSDS in autumn 1920. And yet, Prepeluh never gave up on socialism—or, at least, his own socialist outlook.

From early 1921, Prepeluh attempted—with the energetic and constant help of his friend and intellectual collaborator, Dragotin Lončar—to clearly define a progressive pathway into the future for the Slovenian nation. (Yet, this was myopic, as they failed to address the political condition of the German-speaking minority in the Slovenian lands.) At first, they had attempted to reframe their reformist socialist and Masarykian realist viewpoints into a common political language in the short-lived *Demokracija*, briefly in the second series of *Naši zapiski*, and the likewise short-lived *Novi zapiski*. More sustained was their paper *Avtonomist*, which began publication in spring 1921. Through this outlet, Prepeluh and Lončar developed a new and innovative mixture of Slovenian national autonomism from the Left, arguing that the Slovenian nation must maintain its own cultural identity, but could only exist, survive, and thrive within a larger state structure. From this, they argued for a quasi-federal reformatting of the Yugoslav state and the development of autonomous administrative units. (However, this became increasingly unlikely after the passage of the centralist 1921 *Vidovdan* Constitution.) Interestingly, Prepeluh and Lončar identified the people (*ljudstvo*) in part with the nation, but under certain class reservations. For them, it was the peasantry, the majority of the population, who was the primary bearer of sovereignty, a role which was shared with laborers in non-agricultural sectors. And yet, this did not mean exclusive class rule for them. This would have been anathema to Prepeluh's and especially Lončar's view that democracy and democratic norms needed to be preserved above all else. However, they did not see democracy only within a liberal or bourgeois frame, and not at all in an illiberal, authoritarian sense. Rather, they argued for—and openly used the labels—a *republican*, agrarian socialist democracy.

There is no doubt that Prepeluh was familiar with the early modern European civic humanist tradition: he translated one of the key texts of that movement—Machiavelli's *Il principe*—into Slovenian in 1920.²⁷ Likewise, Lončar and Prepeluh

27 Niccolò Machiavelli, *Vladar*, trans. Albin Prepeluh (Ljubljana: Zvezna tiskarna, 1920). On the early modern republican intellectual tradition—albeit generally to the exclusion of East Central European variations—see in particular Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University

were both deeply inspired by the French revolutionary and American republican traditions, as demonstrated in the full text of *Why Are We Republicans?* translated below. The text grew out of local Slovenian intellectual conditions around the mid-1920s, written by political theorists looking for a political language to express their radical vision without giving up their intellectual flexibility or creativity. The text was also composed within a broader republican debate which had been raging from the final phases of the First World War and the collapse and transitions out of empire, under the twin republican models of the United States and Soviet Russia. Within Yugoslavia, republicanism of all kinds were being articulated actively in the early 1920s: in Belgrade, by the intellectuals around the Yugoslav Republican Party of Jaša Prodanović (1867–1948) and Ljubomir Stojanović (1860–1930); in Croatia-Slavonia and Dalmatia, by Radić's HRSS—of which Prepeluh and Lončar's SRS had been a branch party in 1924–25—as well as by the radical socialist and communist literary Left in Zagreb around Miroslav Krleža (1893–1981) and August Cesarec (1893–1941). However, the republican language lost its purchase in the second half of the 1920s, and certainly following the royal dictatorship and through the authoritarian 1930s, former Yugoslav partisans of the concept 'republic' rather began to use the more general concept 'democracy'.²⁸

Why Are We Republicans? is an extremely interesting document of Yugoslav (and so Central and Southeastern European) republican political languages in the first half of the twentieth century. In the text, ideas of radical popular sovereignty ("government ... is only the *executor* of the popular will") mix with references to an agrarian, classless society ("the people rule their homeland just as farmers manage and 'rule' their land"), as well as a semantic preference for the people (*ljudstvo*) as a wider political community over the narrower cultural community expressed in nation (*narod*). Likewise, at the end of the text, Prepeluh and Lončar summarize their ideas, stating that any "modern democracy" among the Slovenians cannot be based only on a narrow idea of "Slovenianness" (*slovenstvo*) but rather had to be open to the wider idea of 'the people', located firmly within and inseparable from "humanity" as a higher-order level of social, cultural, and ultimately political organization. To that end, only particular political forms would allow for the autonomous political, moral, and spiritual development of

Press, 1955). J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

28 As detailed in Cody James Inglis, "Between Freedom and Constraint: The Republican Left in Hungary and Yugoslavia, 1918–1948," doctoral dissertation to be defended at Central European University, Vienna, Austria, in 2026.

the people: the civic equality of a republic, the economic democracy of (agrarian) socialism, and the decentralized self-governance of a federation. *Why Are We Republicans*, then, is not merely a marginal or obscure political pamphlet, but a representative text of European republicanism in a new key and in a new setting: a modern republicanism mixed with agrarianism, socialism, and Masarykian democratic and realist ideals, adjusted to the particular conditions of East Central Europe—and within it, of Yugoslavia—during the postimperial transition and, in tragic retrospect, the interwar period.

Slovenian Republicans (ALBIN PREPELUH with DRAGOTIN LONČAR)

“Why Are We Republicans?”

Introduction

We, the united Slovenian republicans and federalists, have decided to present the Slovenian republican farmers and workers with various booklets containing some explanations about the most crucial political matters that should be known by everyone who does not want to be misled by racial political agitators or fooled by various political leaders. We adhere to the principle that the Slovenian people (especially farmers and workers, who do not have and have not had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with various political matters in detail) should learn the truth and acquire—in an approachable and easily understandable way—enough general knowledge about different political issues that they will be able to judge for themselves everything they read in the newspapers or hear at rallies or elsewhere.

The purpose and aim of these lines is, therefore, to inform people about various political issues to such an extent **that they can think independently** and no longer have to believe blindly everything that is shouted in their ears by those who care about nothing else but political power, which they then exploit and use for their own ends while paying no heed to the welfare of the people. Until the Slovenian people, or at least the majority of them, acquire a sufficient political education to be able to judge for themselves the importance or unimportance of all possible events at home and abroad, they will forever remain but a toy in the hands of those who always only focus on themselves alone and pay attention to the people only during elections.

That is why we will write our lines, aimed at Slovenian farmers and workers, in a completely calm and factual manner, without any personal attacks or insults, and let the people judge for themselves whether we are right or wrong.

...

What does the word “democracy” mean?

The most important question currently preoccupying all of Central Europe is the issue of **democracy** or people’s government. We hear this word day after day, we read it in all the papers, entire parties call themselves “democratic,” and yet few people know what it actually means.

The word “democracy” is derived from ancient Greek. It consists of two ancient Greek words: “demos” and “kratéo.” The word “demos” means “**people**,” and the word “kratéo” means “**to rule**.” “Democracy” therefore means “**the rule of the people**”; a “democratic” state is one in which “the people govern,” either in their entirety or through their elected representatives, while “democratic” parties are those that strive to ensure that **all the people** assume power.

...

Democracy and the Slovenes

For many centuries, we Slovenes lived under foreign rule. However, in the old days, this had not been the case. History tells us how independent Slovenian princes were enthroned in the *Gospodsvetsko* plain in Carinthia. **Slovenian peasants** played an essential role in these ceremonies, and it was from **their** hands that the prince accepted his authority. This is ample proof that, in the old days, Slovenes already had some idea that **the people**—then mostly peasants, of course—**were the origin and holder of all state power**.

However, **bellicose German noblemen** gradually established their dominion over us, **and the Slovenian lands became the private property or “fiefs” of the German princes**. Slovenians remained under German or Austro-German rule for almost seven hundred years. This is a very long time, and it is no wonder that Slovenes have completely forgotten that they were once the masters of their land... **The idea that the Slovenian people could also independently fight for their rights never managed to take hold among Slovenes as much as among Slovenian leaders and “bigwigs.”** ... We were still brought up in such a shameful servile spirit even when Austria started to appear at least somewhat democratic, and we were convinced of this by **all Slovenian “leaders and bigwigs” without exception!** Every last

one of them kept repeating the motto “everything for faith, homeland, and **Emperor**”—and so they spoke and taught us in the sweet hope that a ray of “imperial **grace**” would shine on at least one of them! **In the last century, the history of the Slovenes has been nothing but the history of Slovenian “leaders and bigwigs” begging for “imperial” grace in Vienna! ...**

With such an upbringing, it is no wonder that so little of the true **democratic** spirit—that is, the spirit demanding that **the people rule their homeland** just as farmers manage and “rule” their land—has emerged among Slovenians.

Daybreak

It is well known to all of us who followed the course and development of the World War that it was won by—**America!** ...

The **teachings of US President Wilson** represented the greatest force that intervened in the World War.

President Wilson was not only a president but also a great **scholar** and, most importantly, a **man with a noble heart**. ... He said: “Just as every free **citizen** in a country ruled by **the people** has a full right to live freely as a human being under the protection of **laws and regulations**, so every nation has its full right **to decide its destiny and be the ruler of its homeland**. The government should not be something “**above**” **the people but is and must only be the agent of the people’s will**. And just as **courts** that separate right from wrong have been set up to ensure that **people** have **peace** and safeguard them from hoodlums and troublemakers, so must **nations** unite to protect and secure their **peace** through an **international court**.”

Understandably, such lessons caused a **fierce change** in the hearts of peace-seeking European nations. **The rule of the people – peace – courts – each the ruler of their homeland**: these words shook all of Europe, and, thank God, some seeds of these teachings have also spread among **the Slovenes**.

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Conclusions

From all that we have written so far, it is clear that modern democracy rests on the following foundations:

1. We are **all** human beings. Every **human has the right to live as a free person** whom no one can oppress, while everyone is entitled to their **rights** according to the **law**.

2. Every human being wants to have **peace** to **develop freely**. The free development of human beings is limited only insofar as the **common interest of human society** requires it.

3. Just as everyone wants to live as a **human being** and has the **right** to do so, **nations** have the right to live freely and **peacefully** and **govern their homeland**. Thus, the best way for several nations to live together is as a **federal state or federation**.

4. In every country, **the people**, i.e. **all** people **equally**, should rule and decide on all their affairs. The government is not **above** the people; it is only **the executor of the people's will**. And because all people are **equal**, modern democracy recognizes no family lineage and no person who can stand **above** the people. Instead, it requires that the people also elect even their highest representative. For Slovenes, the principles of modern democracy can thus be expressed in four words:

Humanity – Slovenianness – Federation – Republic

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