

~~SECRET~~Yugoslavia: Pro-Solidarity Activities in Slovenia

The republic of Slovenia has registered its disagreement with the low-key official Yugoslav position on the imposition of martial law in Poland by permitting public displays of support for the Polish Solidarity movement. Belgrade is cautious to avoid actions in which Yugoslavia would appear to choose sides in East-West tensions over Poland. In breaking ranks with the official Yugoslav stance, the Slovenes have served notice they will not meekly acquiesce if the other republics opt for hardline "solutions" to the country's economic and political problems at the Party Congress in June.

In mid-February, Die Welt and Neue Zurichher Zeitung reported public displays of support for Solidarity in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. Placards with the Polish national colors and the Solidarity emblem decorated a sold-out rock concert sponsored by student organizations and the main shopping streets. This support for Solidarity among the Catholic Slovenes reflects their desire that Yugoslavia clearly and publicly back the Polish reform movement. Without the approval of local officials, such controversial actions could not have taken place.

Although small groups of dissidents in other Yugoslav republics have signed petitions supporting Solidarity and the US Embassy in Belgrade reports similar sentiments among younger central committee members, Slovenia is the only region to allow pro-Solidarity activities. In contrast, Serbian police in December broke up a small demonstration outside the Polish Embassy in Belgrade after the Polish martial law declaration. Organizers of the demonstration and of a Serbian intellectuals' petition were reportedly harassed by police afterward. In Croatia, there is also strong latent support for Solidarity, but the authorities there brook no outward show of support for an independent trade union movement with strong ties to the Catholic church. The regime in Zagreb sees the Croatian Catholic Church as a potential political rival.

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The Slovenes have made several other decisions that demonstrate their more liberal attitudes. Last year, Ljubljana approved the publication of a literary journal aimed at challenging bureaucratic strictures on free artistic expression while Serb and Croat leaders flatly rejected similar proposals. More recently, a prominent Slovene and ex-Yugoslav Premier, Mitja Ribicic, criticized the harsh jail sentences handed out to Albanian nationalists in Kosovo despite Belgrade's clear support for such repressive measures.

The Slovenes fear the post-Tito leadership, beleaguered by unrest in Kosovo and by a variety of economic and social problems, may begin to listen to the hardliners, including the Serbian nationalists, who are pushing for greater centralization in Belgrade. In the Slovenes' eyes, a shift away from the system of power-sharing and the decentralized ground rules left by Tito would also end chances for the evolution to a more modern political and economic system.

There will be much political maneuvering before the Yugoslav Party Congress in June. The aggressive Slovenes could serve as a catalyst for forcing debates on the issues into the open where the strategies of the hardliners can be exposed and discredited. A primary factor in the Slovenes' favor is that the Yugoslav press has become more daring and is pressing for open "dialogues" on key policies. It is likely that some of this debate will focus on Yugoslavia's official policy toward the Polish crisis. A worsening of the situation in Warsaw could increase the pressure on Belgrade to take a more assertive stand in favor of the "renewal" process there.

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