

Workers of the Port of Koper and the Economic Reform Period in 1960s Slovenia

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Introduction

The Luka Koper firm (Port of Koper) was officially founded in May 1957 (Terčon 2015, 293–4). It was a time of deep social, political, and economic dislocations in socialist Yugoslavia in general, and in the coastal region of the People's Republic of Slovenia in particular. The District of Koper was the administrative unit which took control of this part of the northern Adriatic region, which was incorporated into Slovenia (Yugoslavia) only with the London Memorandum of 1954. Virtually the entire Italian ethnic community, but also many Slovenes and Croats, abandoned their settlements and moved to Italy (Troha 2000; Gombač 2005; Centrih 2019a). The District of Koper, once part of the 'B Zone' of the Free Territory of Trieste, had been previously administrated by the Yugoslav Army, and was now fully integrated into the Slovenian economy. New residents from the interior of Slovenia and the other Yugoslav republics eventually moved in. Since thousands had left, in the late 1950s and early 1960s the region would seem to be a land of opportunity. The substantial fluctuations of the labour force at that time, however, show this was not exactly the case. In 1963, for example, 2,900 workers came to Koper, followed by an additional 2,700 the following year, but the same number of workers left town as well (Centrih 2019a, 159). The Slovenian socialist economy, and the state in general, was going through serious changes during this period. The development of socialist workers' self-management since the early 1950s in practice meant the gradual development of independent companies, and later also a market economy, while the decentralization of the Yugoslav state meant that state investments were slowly evaporat-

ing, while republic-based banks providing commercial credit grew in importance. These political and economic processes reached a peak in 1965, when economic reforms encouraged the introduction of even more radical market elements into socialist society (Prinčič 1999, 169–74).

The aim of the following article is to investigate these turbulent processes in the 1965–1970 period, using the example of the Port of Koper and its labour force. For the Port, these were crucial years in many respects. The main challenge was the construction of a railway from Koper to Prešnica which would connect the port with the Slovene interior and with customers in western and eastern Europe. The Port had to acquire financial resources, win over Slovenian public and political support, and face uneasy competition with other Adriatic ports. Working conditions were harsh. As a consequence, workers often responded with strikes or ‘work stoppages’, as strikes were officially known in socialist Yugoslavia.

In the first part of the article, I will present the historical sources and research efforts already conducted on the topic. The second part discusses the meaning of the 1965 economic reform for the Slovenian coastal region and the Port of Koper, and the third part investigates the strike at the Port of Koper in 1970. Key points and takeaways are presented in the conclusion.

Historical sources and research of the Port of Koper

The main primary source about the topic in my investigation is the archive fond of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia (AS 1589/III, 1589/IV). The League of Communists of Slovenia (LCS), known until 1952 as the Communist Party of Slovenia – but afterwards still often referred to simply as the Party, being a part of the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia, was the ruling and leading political force in post-war Slovenia. Virtually all relevant social, cultural, political, and economic issues took place under its auspices. The Port of Koper, as the only relevant Slovenian port, received considerable attention from the LCS. The archive fond in question contains reports, minutes from local Party assemblies and conventions, analyses of crisis events such as the ‘work stoppage of 1970’ at the Port of Koper, and also information about local public opinion. Daily newspapers, such as *Delo* (*Labour*), represent another important historical source. The 1960s in Slovenia were a period of liberalisation in all levels of society. The press was not an exception. By the end of decade, the press was openly reporting on ‘work stoppag-

es', including events at the Port of Koper. The use of the press and journalists for lobbying and to generate public pressure for various economic or political goals, often against the official political line of the Party, even became a best practice among company directors. Danilo Petrinja, the founder and charismatic director of the Port of Koper, later testified that 'journalists from all the Slovenian papers became involved in efforts to enforce the decision and the provision of appropriate funds for railway construction. Positive public opinion was generated' (Petrinja 1997, 82, 85).

Scholarship on the topic is extensive. Only the most relevant elaborations are mentioned here. The 1970 strike at the Port of Koper has been already studied by Sabine Rutar (2015). Using Danilo Petrinja's personal archive, preserved in the Koper Regional Archive, Rutar reconstructed the event in detail. Her 1970 strike assessment is two layered: a) conflict between workers and management; and b) rivalry within management, i.e. Petrinja and his competitors. By analysing the Yugoslav socialist self-management systems' strategies to contain social unrests, Rutar's study further provides a valuable comparison between Koper events and industrial conflicts in the late 1960s in the San Marco shipyard in Trieste. While my study does not significantly change the image of the 1970 Koper events already described by Rutar – with a possible exception in the assessment of the violent character of the strike – it puts more attention on the atmosphere of economic reforms in 1960s Koper.

The problem of 'work stoppages' (strikes) under socialism has been the subject of extensive research in Slovenia since the 1980s. The most exhaustive account of the topic – the anxiousness of the regime in dealing with strikes and other labour-related conflicts – is provided by Bogdan Kavčič and his associates (1991) and more recently by Jurij Hadalin (2018).

The most important scientific work about the Port of Koper was conducted by Nadja Terčon (2015). Her book is an in-depth study of the first period of development of the Slovenian maritime industry from 1945 to 1958. Political contexts and the serious difficulties facing the founders of the Port of Koper are described in detail. Terčon's findings are essential for the critical reception of the testimonies which form the key secondary historical sources (Petrinja 1993¹; 1997; 1999; Ugrin 2000). For the

1 Danilo Petrinja, in the 1990s, produced lots of material regarding the history of Port of Koper. The material of 1993 was published by his person in the form of an elaboration, later not entirely used in his article (1997) and a book (1999). I would

economic reforms in the 1965-1970 period in Slovenia, the works of Jože Prinčič are essential. This author examines the historical roots of the process and the reasons for the failure of the reforms. In his studies, he explains the role of directors in socialist enterprises and by doing so brings to light the triangular power relations between management, workers, and the Party (Prinčič 1999; 2005; 2008a; 2008b).

The reform of 1965: Stane Kavčič in Koper

In December 1965, Koper hosted a special meeting. Between July and September, the Yugoslav Federal Assembly passed 29 legal regulations on economic reform (Prinčič 2005, 1046). This was certainly not the first reform in the history of socialist Slovenia and Yugoslavia and by no means would it be the last, but this particular round had a unique character. In essence, the reform marked an attempt to approach a market economy to the greatest possible degree while at the same time maintaining the fundamentals of socialism: social ownership of the means of production, continued development of workers' self-management of companies, and the leading role of the LCS. It was a risky business in every respect. It was easy enough to criticize the classical (Stalinist) Soviet planned economy model in Yugoslavia at the time, but creating something new and better was another story. It was the Soviet model that the Slovene/Yugoslav communists had at least partly applied immediately after the war, and it had brought relative economic recovery to the devastated country and secured political power for the Party.

Many meetings and consultations were held in Koper beginning in the spring of 1965, with the aim of implementing the necessary steps in economic and political terms. By the end of the year many questions still remained unanswered, and reluctance in the face of the reforms appeared to be persistent. At the meetings of sociopolitical organizations such as the League of Communists, trade unions, the Youth Organization, workers' councils, etc., virtually everyone came out in favour of the reform. However, in June the Central Committee (CC) of the LCS was informed of public opinion in Koper regarding the coming changes. Certain 'individuals' were apparently spreading negative attitudes and concerns about the future. Layoffs were foreseen at companies, but unlike in the capitalist West, the local trade union would not stand up for its workers. On the

like to thank Dr. Jurij Hadalin for providing me the copy of the elaboration in question.

contrary, residents feared that 'the union will comply with layoffs'. Others felt that the reforms would hit those with the lowest personal income and standard of living the hardest: 'Those who own cars, flats, etc. should assume the burden instead.' Koper was also said to be in the throes of 'consumer fever'. It seemed that people were buying everything they could in anticipation of speculative profits when prices went up. Some were afraid Koper would pay a high price because it shared a border with Italy. The people of Trieste were presumably already buying everything up, in particular carpets, in order to resell at a profit. Others were anticipating a grim future because people were thought to already be living beyond their means. Building two weekend houses, one at the seaside and another in the mountains, was considered unsustainable, but so were mass purchases of washing machines imported from Italy: 'There is one merchant from Trieste who claims he made no less than 70 million Italian liras with washing machines here. Apparently, we now have more washing machines here than in Trieste. Was that rational?' Local communists and other activists discussed the anonymous gossip and opinions. 'The objectives of the reform must be properly interpreted,' they claimed (AS 1589/IV, t. e. 1664, Informacija, 18 June 1965).

In fact, it would take more than just a proper interpretation. Nothing short of a mental leap was needed. Late in June the municipal committee of the LCS of Koper hosted Svetko (Cveto) Kobal, a secretary of economy ('minister of economy') of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (SRS) and one of the key reform planners. 'In terms of arousing private initiative, individual interest, we need to make a big psychological leap just in how we raise our children,' Kobal told his comrades. Further, he claimed that substantial differentiation in personal incomes was necessary. Industry relies on highly skilled cadres, so these should benefit the most (AS 1589/IV, t. e. 1664, Zapisnik, 25 June 1965, p. 19).

For Kobal, the push for income differentiation was nothing short of a 'battle'. At the same time, the companies, their managers, and the workers' councils were adamant in their view that a rise in wages should come only with a rise in productivity. But in July, the productivity issue caused a scandal at the Port of Koper. According to a local Party report to the CC LCS, the director (Danilo Petrinja) had publicly claimed that the Port employed as many as 300 unproductive and 600 productive workers. Administrators, security guards, mechanics, electricians, etc. were thought to be particularly redundant. Petrinja was criticized by the mu-

municipal committee of the Party for his 'subjectivity'. Presented without any serious economic analysis, such views only caused dissatisfaction in the collective, or so the local Party claimed.

And with good reason. At the time there were 'minor work stoppages' at the Port of Koper. The longshoremen took advantage of the situation to demand better pay for their work. It was blackmail, or at least that is how the Party described it. The Port, on the other hand, promised to consider rewards for actual work performance. The local Party organization reported to the CC LCS that it would take more than that. The Port management apparently lacked a real connection to its workers. There were many meetings at the company, but only at the top. In other words, the report hinted that the management of the Port of Koper was autocratic. Challenging that view, Petrinja later recalled that the management bodies 'always eagerly solved particular problems concerning development together with all the workers'. Petrinja did not deny that discipline was a problem, and testified that some recently arrived workers were cooling enthusiasm for work by saying they 'came here to make money and not to work' (Petrinja 1999, 7, 9). It is worth noting that in his memoirs, Petrinja kept this cynical statement in Serbo-Croatian: '*Došao sam da zaradim, a ne da radim*'. In this form, the statement was commonly used in Slovenia in those days to express a prejudice against workers from the other Yugoslav republics, that they lacked a work ethic. On the other hand, Petrinja highly praised workers from Istria, Kras, and Brkini who apparently did not mind working long hours (Petrinja 1999, 6). The same Party report mentioned Petrinja's criticism of special federal benefits enjoyed by the Port of Bar in Montenegro. For the Port of Koper, the reforms had in many respects started even earlier. Already in May 1965, the Workers' council of the company liquidated as many as 33 'unnecessary jobs'. The council further said it would cut 60 jobs in administration and maintenance (*režijski delavci*) and curb future employment (AS 1589/IV, t. e. 1664, Informacija, 17 July 1965).

The kick off of the reform in the summer of 1965 posed many challenges and dilemmas. The municipal committee of the LCS of Koper, under the leadership of first secretary Branko Gabršček, invited Stane Kavčič for a Q&A in December. At the time, Kavčič was a secretary of the CC LCS, and he held the position of president of its Ideological Commission. He was still relatively young (46), had a working class background, and had been a Party member since 1941. He was ambitious, and strongly advocat-

ed reforms; he would go on to become President of the Executive Council (EC, 'prime minister') of the SRS (1967–1972). His reputation in Slovene historiography is that of the key figure of the 1960s 'liberalism' movement (Repe 1990, 47; 1992; 2003, 272–83). In an unpublished 1971 interview, Milovan Djilas, the renowned revolutionary and Tito's close associate before falling out of favour with him and ending up in prison, praised Kavčič as 'the first modern statesman in Yugoslavia: smart, rational in spirit and not an ideological mystic' (Košir 2016).

Kavčič's mission to Koper was essentially all about explaining the new 'rational spirit' of socialism and demonstrating resentment towards any remaining traces of 'ideological mysticism'. Kavčič received no fewer than 27 questions in advance from 'the leading communists' responsible for the local economy. One question was a little provocative, since it addressed the issue of the 'depoliticization' of the economy, namely, how should communists conduct their activities in the new situation? In other words: should the Party be kicked out of the companies? Kavčič was careful enough not to answer directly. In his opinion, the Party was to be the bearer of and fighter for the new way of thinking. But the core of his argument was an affirmation of the law of value – supply and demand in the socialist economy. In other words: the market and competition with as little state intervention as possible. No federal investment funds, but banks looking to finance profitable projects. Companies should deposit as much of their resources as they could with the banks and receive interest as income, which they could even divide among the workers: 'Banks should simply evolve into companies that collect incomes.' As simple as that. Kavčič even summed up the most up-to-date thinking of reformers regarding foreign investments in the Yugoslav economy, not only in the form of loans, but also through direct investment. Lastly, he said that prices should be fixed for a very small number of commodities (such as bread and grain), with all others regulated by the market itself. Since the Slovenian coastal region had recently experienced a considerable influx of western tourists, the locals were very interested in keeping the foreign currency for themselves instead of depositing it with the federal bank. No problem, said Kavčič: the dinar will eventually become a convertible currency, so hoarding liras, marks, and dollars will become irrelevant. And of course, Kavčič was staunchly against any equalization of personal incomes: 'Those who are more competent, with higher intellectual potential and possessing creativity, must be entitled to a pay raise in a reason-

able timeframe.' He attacked the belief that the essence of socialism lies in the distribution of goods and not in production, and further resented a stubborn adherence to the virtues of solidarity and unity at the price of poverty and shortages.

In the discussion, Kavčič briefly addressed the construction of a railway to connect Koper with the interior. It was a top priority for the Port of Koper. Kavčič was in favour of the project, claiming the construction was of national (economic) interest to Slovenia. But above all, Kavčič outlined how, in the realm of ideas, a part of society, even some communists, were confused and suffering from stagnation. 'The struggle between the old and the new' is how Kavčič described the process, and by doing so probably unintentionally repeated the 'formula' infamously used by Stalin to explain away every phenomenon. When asked whether conflicts over income distribution between those who have more and those who have less were about to emerge, he replied in the affirmative. Kavčič more or less openly admitted there would be winners and losers. He anticipated all sorts of conflicts, including between low income workers and those who were better off thanks to their work performance. But in his view, these conflicts were not something to be afraid of (AS 1589/IV, t. e. 1664, a. e. 137, fasc. 455, Zapisnik, 17 December 1965).

The strike at the Port of Koper in 1970

Born in 1922, Danilo Petrinja was a typical first generation socialist director. He started life as a carpenter, participated in the national liberation struggle from 1943 to 1945, was a Party member from 1944, and performed various political tasks until he was finally appointed director of the Water Community of Koper (Vodna skupnost Koper) in 1956, the company which would shortly undertake construction of the Port of Koper (Marušič 2010, 190–4). After 1945, in Slovenia as in all Yugoslavia, factory directors bore a closer resemblance to army commanders (which many in fact had been) than to normal managers. In fact, many had been partisan fighters or other notable participants of the national liberation struggle and revolution. Their powers (but also their duties) at the time were nearly absolute and they only paid lip service to the workers' councils (established since the early 1950s) and mostly continued to do so long into the 1960s when their powers were formally limited. Unlike young directors of the second generation, who as a rule were more (formally) educated and sought cooperation with workers' councils, these 'partisan'

or 'mighty' directors were known as authoritarians (Prinčič 2008a, 104–8). Formally, workers' self-management in the 1965–1970 period meant that on the level of the company, the director was no longer an employee of the state, accountable directly to the republic/communal authorities. He was now beholden to the elected workers' council (which also officially appointed him to this position on the basis of a tender commission consisting of workers' representatives and local community/republic delegates), and was supposed to manage the company in line with its directives (Prinčič 2008b, 66–7). Each company also had an LCS organization.

Theoretically speaking, the director was little more than first among equals at the company, but the reality of mighty managers like Petrinja was drastically different. They were bosses in the most imposing sense of the word. Petrinja won this status predominately through his deep commitment to the construction of the Port of Koper. The actual views of the highest authorities in Slovenia and Yugoslavia regarding port construction in Koper are still the subject of debate. Terčon is probably right in arguing that even though many testimonies and documents suggest that top politicians did not support the project, that was not really the case. Silent support existed in Slovenia; had it been otherwise, Petrinja's efforts would have been in vain (Terčon 2015, 294, 314). The fact remains that unlike other ports in Yugoslavia (and as Bruno Korelič, Petrinja's successor, outlined, literally anywhere else), the Port of Koper was not built by the federal state or republic, i.e. through investment funds (the latter represented only a tiny share of total funding), but largely with loans. For the purpose of this article, this crucial fact is seen as having negative consequences for workers' wages and living standards in general (Petrinja 1997, 74; Terčon 2015, 296). Obtaining loans, looking for investors and partners, required lobbying top politicians and Party functionaries, but also bullying and dangerous confrontations. Petrinja's published account of the construction of the Port of Koper gives the reader the impression that it required trials and strain worthy of Marvel heroes. In his career as Port director, Petrinja was brought before the courts four times and investigated by the Party commission five times, although he did get off the hook each time (Petrinja 1999, 10). In Belgrade in 1961, Petrinja unsuccessfully tried to persuade the federal secretary (minister) for transport, representatives of the Yugoslav railways and the Port of Rijeka, and the Croatian secretary for transport to bring tariffs for cargo transport from Koper to Kozina up to the same levels enjoyed by the Port

of Rijeka. He virtually lost his mind, cynically asking whether ‘the attitude of Yugoslavia regarding Primorska [the coastal region of Slovenia] is to be the same as that of the Italian invaders?’ (Petrinja 1997, 78). At the end of the day, Petrinja’s opponents threw in the towel, and he was promised tariffs on more favourable terms.

An even bigger challenge for him was the construction of a railway line between Luka Koper and Prešnica. It was built between 1964 and 1967, at a time when the economic reforms were reaching their peak. Obtaining finances from any federal or republic fund was completely out of the question, since the latter had been abolished by the reform. Petrinja was now fighting for commercial loans on far less favourable terms than before, and he begged interested partners to form a consortium of investors. This time he ran afoul of President of the EC of the SRS and Party big shot Viktor Avbelj. At a meeting in February 1964, Avbelj was furious at Petrinja for lobbying in the press for the railway. After the meeting Petrinja resigned from his post as director, but the workers’ council of the Port of Koper did not accept the resignation. Petrinja survived, and financial resources were secured for the railway. Slovenian Railways took out loans for the 31-kilometre Koper-Prešnica railway in 1971; by then the economic reform was already dead (Petrinja 1997, 84–7). But in the late 1960s these loans were a considerable burden on the Port of Koper, particularly on its workforce. The same could probably be said for the loans taken out for the construction of the port itself years earlier. This burden undoubtedly contributed to the strike of 1970, the event to which we will now turn.

I have already briefly discussed the ‘minor work stoppages’ at the Port of Koper in 1965. This should not be taken to mean there were no other port strikes in the period following the events of 1965, leading up to 1970. It does mean, however, that something really important happened in 1970, since it resulted, *inter alia*, in the founding of a special commission at the Koper Party branch. The commission’s report is preserved in the archive of the CC LCS. I should also mention that I was unable to obtain any other Party reports on strikes in the period. Moreover, Party documents reveal that in the heat of reforms, the Port of Koper was not considered the most pressing problem in the coastal region of Slovenia. Tomos, a motorbike factory in Koper, appeared to be far more problematic. It suffered from the typical problems of a young market economy. Suddenly it became extremely hard to obtain certain parts for motor-

bikes because Tomos' suppliers cancelled production of certain lines due to low profitability. In 1966, as many as 500 motorbikes remained unfinished for that reason. The Party report further claimed that Tomos was hoarding large stocks of production materials for the same reasons as many other companies at the time – they were afraid these commodities might soon be unobtainable on the market (AS 1589/III, t. e. 184, fasc. 487, Zabeležka, 14 June 1966, 2–3).

So, what happened at the Port of Koper in early spring 1970? Regarding the events in question, I was able to obtain a report ('Information') and political assessment of the work stoppage from the local Party branch dated April 1970. Other sources are some press articles published in the central Slovenian daily *Delo* in March and April, and a letter the President of the workers' council of the Port of Koper, Milan Končarevič, submitted in June to the Secretary of the Secretariat of the CC LCS Andrej Marinc, who would become Stane Kavčič's successor as President of the EC of the SRS in 1972. In order to reconstruct the events, Petrinja's highly detailed accounts (1993; 1999) proved to be of enormous value as well. In addition, Rutar's archival findings – especially Petrinja's reports, Proceedings of the Directors' Meetings and documentation of Workers' council meetings through 1969–1970 – provide valuable insight into the conflict (2015).

The accounts published in *Delo* clearly summarize the position of the Party almost to the letter, although they avoid taking a harsh tone with director Petrinja. On the other hand, the letter to Marinc addresses the strike only indirectly, the main substance being a defence of the former and current director (Petrinja had stepped down in April, and that fact alone speaks volumes). The letter could easily have included the views of the workers' council of the company and its president. But there are none. Its tone is cold, and it is limited to a 'response regarding criticism of business policies of the Port of Koper, which includes incorrect references to data and facts' (AS 1589/IV, t. e. 226, a. e. 506, Stališča, 16 June 1970). It could pass as a routine report submitted by any Western manager to a board of trustees. The local LCS report and assessment targeted Petrinja with the clear aim of discrediting him. That was hardly a surprise, as his boldness and arrogance had earned him plenty of enemies in high places over the years. Yet this document at least illustrates the living conditions of Port of Koper workers, and by doing so, if only indirectly, gives them a voice.

But without precluding further research, the historical data briefly described here can be considered representative, even if they lack information about the number of participants. Nor were the dates on which the strike took place and working units properly specified in the Party commission report. Petrinja, on the other hand, called the 'work stoppage' a 'general strike', and said it was started at 7:00 AM on March 27 by the machine operators and longshoremen. The immediate cause of the workers' unrest was unpopular decisions taken by the workers' council and adopted on February 24, which were based (falsely, according to Petrinja) on data suggesting operating losses and included draconian disciplinary measures and less favourable terms for billing hours worked, but according to Rutar also dismissals. Petrinja was apparently sick when the first signs of worker dissatisfaction appeared in the form of 'forced meetings'. But on that morning in March something really dramatic happened. Workers at the Port of Koper who stopped their work, marched by the Tomos factory and held a rally in Tito Square, the central public space of Koper. Egon Prinčič, who was filling in while Petrinja was on sick leave, was apparently even at the head of the procession waving a Yugoslav flag. At Tito Square, Radio Koper provided workers with loudspeakers. The workers were loud, and they demanded Petrinja be allowed to speak, which he did at the behest of the local Party, even though he deeply disagreed with these kinds of demonstrations. At the meeting of the workers' council at the Port of Koper, the yelling continued, and the council did suspend several of the unpopular measures adopted in February. *Delo* also reported that the longshoremen stopped their work and went on a 'peaceful procession' through Koper, passing the Tomos factory and ending up at the main square, where they demanded the presence of the president of the municipal assembly and the management of the Port. They were reportedly carrying banners and shouting slogans referring to 'disorder in the distribution of personal incomes'. Contrary to Petrinja, *Delo* recalled they were clearly dissatisfied, but were not yelling. Prinčič's strange performance with the flag was also omitted (Petrinja 1993, 214–5; Guzej 1970a, 2; Rutar 2015, 281). According to Rutar, a strike itself was not only a typical industrial conflict between workers and management for higher wages, it was also a moment of fierce conflict between Petrinja and the management whose aim was presumably his dismissal. Studying company files, Rutar suggests that some members of the Port's management 'helped to incite the strike or at least skilfully fomented it'.

A key persona in this ‘conspiracy’ was presumably Egon Prinčič, who soon became Petrinja’s successor (Rutar 2015, 282–3).

In contrast to my research findings, Rutar’s reconstruction of events suggests that workers of the Port of Koper ‘rioted at their workplace’, while the demonstration itself was apparently ‘aggressive’. In concluding remarks, Rutar goes as far as characterizing the Koper event of 1970 as a ‘significant violent public labour conflict’ (2015, 278–9, 288). Concrete forms and results of this aggressiveness/riot remain unclear. Mine and Rutar’s research does not provide numbers of those injured, equipment or building damage, or of any detained/arrested. In any case it is safe to assume that the Koper events of 1970 were nothing like the late 1960s conflicts at the San Marco shipyard in Trieste. In August of 1966, workers of Trieste’s shipyard called for a general strike in order to stop the closure of the shipyard. In October of 1966 conflict escalated; workers were fighting with the police and more than 500 of them were arrested, about 80 injured, and some public buildings in Trieste were damaged. Similar fights also broke out in Trieste in June 1968, resulting in 135 arrests and about 50 policemen and 16 civilians injured. In 1969, San Marco shipyard workers occupied the docks again (Rutar 2015, 285). As far as the Koper strike of 1970 is concerned, it is very strange that the Party commission left these juicy details out of the report. It inquired into the identities of the warehouse workers and longshoremen, but (unlike in other cases) left their names out. Since strikes were a sensitive topic in the period of socialism, the caution – *Delo* reported no photos or data regarding the number of strike and rally participants – is understandable. After all, no article on ‘work stoppages’ was published at all until the middle of the 1960s (Kavčič et al. 1990, 88; Hadalin-Milharčič 2018, 149). But this degree of caution is notably less understandable for an exclusive Party report (‘Information’). *Delo* actually did publish a number of articles about the event, and they provide some valuable details. It is also worth noting that the strike at the Port of Koper nearly coincided with the 50th anniversary of the famous railway workers strike which had led to a communist-supported demonstration of solidarity in Ljubljana and ultimately ended up being lethally repressed by the regime at the time. The press called the events of 1920 a ‘strike’, that is a genuine and logical manifestation of class struggle, while industrial conflicts under the socialist regime were only ‘work stoppages’ – they were an anomaly, something barely comprehensible (Jerman 1970, 2). Under Yugoslav self-managed socialism, com-

panies were nominally run by the workers themselves, while management performed executive tasks on their behalf. A strike was absurd for, in theory, the workers were striking against themselves.

But why did this “anomaly” occur at the Port of Koper? As Rutar suggests, the conflicts in the port’s management most probably played an important part in the strike. But without poor living and working conditions and problems with workers’ wages, the management could not take the advantage and manipulate the event in the first place. Besides, the Party was very good in settling brawls between bureaucrats and the managerial elite in its own ranks. However, settling class conflicts proved to be a much more difficult task. The Party’s claim of its leading role in society was based on the promise to direct the project of modernization in line with the interests of the working class. Workers’ dissatisfactions put the Party to the test. As explained by Rutar, that was the reason why the authorities in Yugoslavia at that time dealt quickly with the workers’ demands, largely by satisfying them. Even though strike organizers were often targeted, more often than not, managers were those to be accused (Rutar 2015, 286).

Diverging from Petrinja’s much later account, the Party claimed, in general terms, that the ‘unsettled and insufficiently stable system of income distribution and insufficient involvement of workers in self-managing decision making, of necessity maintained the wage mentality which was clearly manifested in the work stoppage.’ This assessment was also published in *Delo* (Guzej 1970b, 2). For the Party, the situation at the company was severe. So severe, in fact, that Stane Kavčič, ‘the liberal’, reportedly demanded that the Port workers immediately receive a raise, even if it put the company in the red (Petrinja 1993, 216). In 1970, the Port of Koper had 1,200 employees; in the previous year, 500 workers left the company to find better jobs elsewhere. Many specialists quit their jobs as well (6 specialists with a higher education over the previous two years: warehouse managers, shift foremen, etc.) These figures more or less match Petrinja’s latter day account: 490 left the Port in 1969, and 703 were newly hired (Petrinja 1993, 212). The Party recognized that the port was paying the price for economic reform. As suggested above, federal funds were no longer available to finance its investments, while commercial banks offered credits on unfavourable terms. To make matters worse, the Port of Koper was the main investor in the railway from Koper to Prešnica.

The Party commission also harshly criticised Port management for its treatment of the workers. For example, some workers were fired merely for taking unauthorized leave from work. The working process was poorly organized, sometimes with two shifts in a single day, lasting as long as 14 hours or even more. (Petrinja later testified that it was even worse. In the period of railway construction, some workers even did up to three back-to-back shifts, usually with no paid overtime.) Bruno Korelič, familiar with the late 1960s and 1970s Koper economy, much later even more dramatically described the living conditions of the workers in Tomos and the Port of Koper: 'The workers felt like slaves and had nothing to lose. They came to Koper to work to earn money and send money back home to Bosnia. If their expectations were not met, they had no trouble turning their backs and going home or rattling.'

The Party report further claimed that the company had invested only in industrial capacity, but spent less on the wellbeing of its workers. They started to build showers, toilets, and locker rooms only recently, in the past year. And housing conditions were intolerable (they were later described at length by Petrinja). The voices of the workers consulted by the Party commission can be clearly heard through these critiques: 'The Commission cannot escape the observation that the worker at the Port of Koper has to date been neglected.' But the party went much further in criticizing the management: not only did the company lack proper standards for evaluating work, but decisions taken by the worker-led self-management bodies were curtailed by the director himself. Some conclusions are particularly scathing: 'The head of the company had no interest in social organizations' [the Party, trade union] active performance, and often treated them as transmitters of decisions already taken by the senior management (collegium of professionals) and the director' (AS 1589/IV, t. e. 226, a. e. 506, Informacija o vzrokih prekinitve dela; Petrinja 1993, 212; Petrinja 1999, 6; Hladnik-Milharčič 2015, 11). It is also worth noting that the cited Party document had been edited post factum by an unknown reader, maybe even by some functionary from the CC. The harshest criticism regarding the management of the Port had been outlined in pencil and given quotation marks. For example: the commission's assessment on the director's negligence had been crossed out. A handwritten remark on the edge of the page reads: 'Out?'

Končarevič's letter to Marinc starts with a warning about the potential disintegration of the Port of Koper. It seems ideas were being floated

about spinning off the construction works and maintenance shops from the Port of Koper company. But he continues by addressing the general conditions at the Port of Koper, even mentioning the strike implicitly. In order to support his cause and refute criticism of poor management, he outlines the same hardships mentioned in the Party report. But he also refutes comments (not mentioned in the Party report) about how the Port of Koper had put more resources into wages than into the company's development. He included numbers to prove his case. Regarding the debt load, Končarevič stated that the Port had to repay as much as 25 million dinars alone each year for the credit, which amounted to a third of its total income. He bitterly recalled that the Port of Koper was the only port in Yugoslavia built by the working collective itself. And wages were stagnating: until 1967, employee earnings were about 30% above the average in the SRS, but this figure had fallen to 10% by 1969. Petrinja later explained that workers also worked really hard for their above-average wages. For example, workers had to carry 120 kg sacks of Cuban sugar, and two men were assigned to carry 300 kg bales of cotton. Such details go a long way towards explaining the high workforce turnover rate. Lastly, Končarevič notes that prices for port services had not changed since the beginning of 1970, while prices for materials and other necessary commodities had gone up (AS 1589/IV, t. e. 226, a. e. 506, Stališča, 16 June 1970; Ugrin 2000, 13).

Petrinja left the Port of Koper in April 1970, immediately after the strike. The event and burnout were the reason, as he claimed later. Even though he was awarded the prestigious Boris Kraigher prize for his achievements in January, and the workers' council initially did not accept his resignation (again!), and despite receiving the support of Stane Kavčič, this time, he left for good (Petrinja 1999, 10).

Conclusion

At the end of his life, Danilo Petrinja recalled that until 1967, the ratio between the minimum and maximum wage in the Port of Koper was 1:3.5, and that his personal salary was somewhere in the middle. At that time 'more than half of the employees earned more than me. And I was happy about that. They contributed more value to the company' (Ugrin 2000, 13). He further regretted that the company's management was not entirely successful in doing everything they could to ensure the workers would treat the Port of Koper as their own, as a company that would also provide

attractive opportunities for their children (Petrinja 1993, 212). But he was also proud to remember that he and his closest associates in those days 'took the path of the market economy. By doing so, the Port was liberating itself from the state-bureaucratic management methods' (Petrinja 1999, 9). Petrinja also recalled the following experiment: a group of workers received a certain amount of money per tonne of goods transshipped and it was entirely up to them how to divide the sum. According to Petrinja it was 'the highest peak of development of self-management', while others labelled it as a 'capitalist system' and so it was abolished (Ugrin 2000, 13).

To be sure, these assessments came not only long after the reforms of 1965, but also at a time when socialism itself was dead and the (fully capitalist) market economy was perceived as the only imaginable option. It is still safe to assume that Petrinja did firmly advocate for reforms in the 1960s. There is also little reason to question his attitude about his low salary and the contribution of workers to the production of value, even if it is an attitude that is even less comprehensible today than the idea of strikes was under socialism. After all, Petrinja started his life as a carpenter and later joined the partisans and became a communist, a person committed to national and social liberation at a time when the outcome of the war was far from certain (1943, 1944). Nevertheless, these two arguments, taken together, appear to contradict each other.

In the present Slovenian historiography, the economic reforms that began in 1965 and their aura of 'liberalism' are mostly perceived as positive yet highly inconsistent, 'burdened with the ideology and politics from which it arose' (Repe 1992, 931). Explaining the goals of reforms in Koper in 1965, Kavčič candidly addressed this 'burden'. But doubts and reservations persisted. In 1967, the Commission for socio-political relations and ideopolitical problems of the CC LCS addressed the fact that most Party members still did not have a clear impression of what the reforms were about. Even worse, a part of the membership was reportedly afraid that, with the reforms, the Party was deviating from some basic principles of socialism: 'the issue of equality, increasing social inequality ...'. Other members had serious doubts about the goal of making the dinar a convertible currency: 'the dinar was convertible in pre-war Yugoslavia, a low standard, unemployed workers and intellectuals, searching for work abroad were the consequences' (AS 1589/III, t. e. 218, Povzetek z razprave o reformi, 26 July 1967).

Did the Port of Koper workers manifest their position regarding the reform by foot? It would be wrong to infer that the workers of the Port of Koper went on strike against the reforms as such. The strike was clearly limited to the immediate problems of wages and working conditions. And after all, the first major recorded strike in socialist Slovenia/Yugoslavia took place in Trbovlje, in 1958 (Hadalín 2018, 144–8), years before the serious market turn of the reforms. It was not exclusively the introduction of a market economy that sparked unrest among the workers. It would be more correct to conclude that the gradual ‘liberalization’ and relaxation of the regime since the late 1950s, which was by no means the outcome of market principles, allowed the resistance of workers to be manifested in such a form, and to reach the point where articles on ‘work stoppages’ appeared in the press. But if this was the case, what forms did earlier resistance take? The same liberties noted in the case of the workers also apply to Party members, who enjoyed far greater freedom to express their dissent and concerns than at any previous point.

Yet it is clear that the reforms of 1965 made life much more precarious for the workers: they were easier to fire, prices went up, and wages became tied solely to the performance of the company, like in any capitalist country. All the while, many hardships experienced in the first decade of the socialist project persisted.

It may seem strange, but Petrinja correctly illustrated the ‘wage mentality’ of some workers: ‘I came here to make money and not to work.’ Nationalist prejudice aside, this statement was grounded in the banal fact that workers wanted to earn as much as possible for as little work as possible. What appears as idleness is in fact the diametrical opposite of the logic of capitalist exploitation in its most basic form: to extract as much living labour for as little reward as possible. In the concrete historical situation, it was a response to the conditions of hyperexploitation experienced by the Port of Koper workers in the second half of the 1960s. As such it made sense, regardless of the best intentions (the development of the Port of Koper) of managers, including Petrinja. Going three shifts with no breaks might have been a heroic accomplishment in the history of any socialist construction, but, at the end of the day, it was still hyperexploitation. ‘Non-work habit’ rather than ‘work habit’, that is, refusal of work, is by no means confined to premodern/preindustrial cultures, it is also a basic resistance against discipline and subsumption to capital, as Gisela Bock put it in order to explain the resistance of immigrant

workers from Southern/Eastern Europe in USA in the late nineteenth century (1987, 49–50). An alternative response was workforce flight (officially called fluctuation), which took place on a massive scale in the late 1960s. It is a spontaneous resistance strategy used by the working class from the beginning of capitalism to our own times (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989, 29).

Tito and his conservative associates may have put party ‘liberals’ like Stane Kavčič in their place in 1972 for threatening the LCY monopoly on power (Repe 2003, 89), but the stakes and issues were much more substantial than the mere prestige of aging revolutionaries and autocrats. From 1968 to 1971, students rose up in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana, and not only around issues of democracy and freedom. Their demands and concerns also contained elements of social justice (Repe 2003, 278–9). Reluctance over the reforms of 1965 may have been conservative at its core, but it also contained a sincere and legitimate concern that socialism may have already reached the point of no return. After all, Petrinja’s generation knew first-hand the price that had to be paid to develop a new society. But where/when does socialism end and capitalism begin (and vice versa)? Lenin may have been wrong about many things, but not in his assumption that revolution is essentially about the conquest of state power; it does not generate a new society automatically (Centrih 2019b, 324–5). The latter takes time and countless struggles, and lots of mistakes, tragedies, setbacks, illusions, coincidences, reforms etc. To put it simply: socialist revolution as the Event is not the same as socialism as the Process. So, the first multiparty elections in Slovenia (since the 1930s) in the spring of 1990 only officially ended the Party’s monopoly over state power, but neither destroyed socialism nor delivered capitalism. The crucial events that would eventually determine the shape of capitalism in Slovenia took place long before and long after 1990.²

Was the (failed) reform of 1965 one such event? Had the victory over leaders like Kavčič only been a temporal break, a desperate attempt to stop the inevitable – the introduction of a fully capitalist market econo-

- 2 Similarly, J. Piškurić, in her recent in-depth study on everyday life in socialist Slovenia, challenges perception of transition as a linear process, a sharp break between socialism and capitalism. According to her, important political and economic changes happened already in 1980s. And further, many widespread everyday life practices – which actually predated socialism – based on networking, reciprocity, solidarity, mutual help, etc, survived up to the present day also because they were solidified in socialism (Piškurić 2019, 332–9).

my? The fact remains that many Party members believed that their life's work was in jeopardy and were probably happy when the reforms lost steam by the late 1960s and were eventually aborted. If that was the case, then 'work stoppages' like the one at the Port of Koper probably proved that their fears were grounded. The turbulent 1965-1970 reform period in Slovenia and the rest of Yugoslavia thus raises the question of the nature of socialism and its relation to capitalism. Leaving manifestos, programmes, and ideals aside, what was the fundamental difference?

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AS, CK, ZKS: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, Centralni komite, Zveza komunistov Slovenije.

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