



Anatomy of the “deathly silence”: Slovenian newspapers in Carniola and the pre-March censorship

Marijan Dović¹

Published online: 25 September 2023
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Abstract

The media landscape of the Habsburg Monarchy in the pre-March period was relatively meagre. In Carniola and other Austrian crownlands with a Slovenian population, the opportunities for literary development were limited: this is well evidenced by the ban on the publication of *Slavinja* in mid-1820 as well as by the many conflicts *Krajnska čbelica* (‘The Carniolan Bee’) had with censorship in the early 1830s. The modesty of literary activity in Slovenia at this time is often related to the low level of education and literacy among the population, discontinuity in the development of literary culture, and the general underdevelopment of the emerging Slovenian literary and media systems. However, imperial censorship also decisively contributed to this state of affairs. This article therefore outlines the functioning of the pre-March censorship apparatus at the state and local levels, showing how the censorship office in Vienna (headed by the count Josef Sedlnitzky) systematically blocked attempts to establish Slovenian-language periodicals (*Slavinja*, *Slovenske novice* ‘Slovenian News’ with its supplement *Zora* ‘The Dawn’, and *Ilirske novice* ‘Illyrian News’ with its supplement *Ilirski Merkur* ‘The Illyrian Mercury’) and how local factors were involved in these processes. It is argued that the power to ban a newspaper had a much stronger impact on the Slovenian press than the activities of local or state censorship. In particular, the long struggle to establish *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* (‘Agricultural and Handicraft News’) between 1838 and 1843 testifies to the early tendency of the imperial censorship apparatus to block the respective national(ist) agendas.

Keywords Slovenian literature · Habsburg Monarchy · Censorship · Joseph Sedlnitzky · Pre-March period · *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice*

✉ Marijan Dović
marijan.dovic@zrc-sazu.si

¹ ZRC SAZU Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies, Novi trg 2,
SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

On July 5th, 1863, at the ceremony celebrating the twentieth anniversary of *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* (Agricultural and Handicraft News), its long-time editor Janez Bleiweis summarized the history of the development of the Slovenian newspapers as follows:

When [Valentin] Vodnik's *Novice* already died in 1800, after four years of existence, because there were neither writers nor readers, the Slovenian people no longer had a Slovenian newspaper—deathly silence reigned over our dear homeland until our *Novice* rose again from the grave on July 5th, 1843. Its birth was very difficult—it took more than three years. That was under Sedlnitzky. Mr. Blaznik wanted to be their mother in 1841, but things did not go according to his will. He tried different ways, and called upon several midwives to make the difficult birth come through: an industrial society, an agricultural society—and finally he had to ask the noble Archduke John [of Austria] for help. Then, on February 10th, 1843, permission finally came from Vienna. (“Iz Ljubljane,” p. 223)

Bleiweis's assessment is largely correct. In the pre-March (*Vormärz*) period, the entire Habsburg monarchy was characterized by a relatively sparse and uniform media landscape: bureaucratically and centrally organized censorship severely restricted freedom of expression. In Carniola, but also in other Austrian crownlands with Slovenian populations, the opportunities for the development of literary life were therefore limited. The revolutionary spring of 1848—which, among other things, swept away the pre-censorship and the hated figures of Metternich and Sedlnitzky—brought a relaxation in this respect, even if the authorities soon took control again. This article demonstrates how the “deathly silence” mentioned by Bleiweis was decisively shaped by imperial censorship—especially by its highest authority, the Police and Censorship Court (*Polizei- und Zensur-Hofstelle*) in Vienna.

Censorship in Carniola before *Novice*

After the grueling years of the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna and the establishment of the Holy Alliance (1815) restored imperial power in the Habsburg Monarchy. After a few years of French rule in the Illyrian provinces (1809–1813), the Slovenian territories returned fully to the framework of the monarchy, and Ljubljana even hosted the Second Congress of the Alliance in 1821. The key figure of the Restoration period was Prince Klemens von Metternich, an important architect of post-Napoleonic conservative Europe, who, as imperial chancellor (1821–1848) and de facto the most important figure in the empire, tried to hinder the rise of liberalism and nationalism. To enforce his policies, he developed an extensive apparatus of precensorship and a tightly knit police network to identify and monitor potentially dangerous individuals. Between 1817 and 1848, he had a firm ally at the head of the police and censorship court in his aristocratic counterpart count Josef Sedlnitzky, another emblematic and unpopular figure of the period. The increasingly strict censorship regulations that decisively influenced literary and newspaper life in the

Habsburg Monarchy were curbed by the infamous Karlbud Resolutions (1819) and other decrees. Thus, one of the most restrictive censorship regimes in Europe at the time came into effect during the “Metternich era,” in which it was not even possible to post a notice over a store without the permission of the censor.¹

Looking at the Slovenian-language literary and newspaper production in Carniola at this time, one cannot help but feel that it was unusually meagre. Especially in journalism, Bleiweis’s remark about the reign of “deathly silence” seems utterly justified: from the modest *Ljubljanske Novice* (Ljubljana News, 1797–1800) of Valentin Vodnik until Bleiweis’s *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* (Agricultural and Handicraft News, 1843–1902)—that is, for more than four decades—there were no Slovenian-language periodicals worth mentioning. This state of affairs was undoubtedly the result of numerous factors, including low levels of education and literacy, discontinuities in the development of literary culture, and the general underdevelopment of the nascent Slovenian literary and media system. As shall be seen, however, imperial censorship contributed importantly, even decisively, to this situation.²

Let us take a closer look at the anatomy of this silence. Was there really no determination and knowledge in Carniola in the first half of the nineteenth century to establish a periodical publication in Slovenian? Such an assessment is not tenable. Already in the first half of the 1820s the first generation was maturing, ready for their own periodical: they were young literati associated with the Ljubljana lyceum professor Fran Metelko, who envisaged a newspaper with the daring Slavophile name *Slavinja*. The story of how this project was silenced is extremely revealing. On September 9th, 1824, three priests from Ljubljana—Janez Cigler, Ignac Holzapfel, and Franc Ksaver Andrioli—asked the local governorate for permission to print the “Illyrian-Carniolan newspaper *Slavinja*,” which was to appear weekly as a supplement to the German *Laibacher Zeitung* (Ljubljana News, 1778–1918). At the local government level, the matter went smoothly at first. At the meeting on September 16th, council member Jurij Mayr supported the initiative and proposed Jurij Pavšek, the head of the Book Revision Office in Ljubljana, as censor; the councilors agreed to the proposal.

On October 21st, the request traveled to Vienna because Sedlnitzky also had to approve the publication of the new newspaper. On November 13, the chief imperial censor wrote to the governor of Ljubljana, Joseph Camillo Schmidburg, requesting the Ljubljana ordinariate’s report on the three priests and a detailed plan for the newspaper. On the same day, he also addressed the Ljubljana police director, Joseph Schmidhammer, requesting information about “the personal characteristics of the priests that requested the right to publish, their scientific training, their behavior, their religiosity, and above all their political thoughts and actions” (Slodnjak, 1949, p. 13). The proponents of *Slavinja* soon put together and submitted a publication program, but the two reports that came to Vienna from Ljubljana were disastrous for the project. The report that Ljubljana’s principal policeman Schmidhammer wrote for Sedlnitzky

¹ On Habsburg censorship, see especially Bachleitner (2017, 2021); compare also Ruud (2009, pp. 5–8) and Goldstein (1989). The extreme poles are England, where previous censorship was abolished at the end of the seventeenth century, and Russia, where control was even stricter.

² For an English-language set of eleven articles dealing with censorship in the Slovenian crownlands under Habsburg rule, compare Dovič and Vidmar (2021).

was decidedly negative. In his assessment—and this is perhaps the most surprising thing—there is no moral or political disqualification of the publishers, only “technical” arguments: the publishing project was not thought through enough, it seemed to him too rushed, so that the project would probably be stopped soon, and the proposed censor Pavšek seemed trustworthy (pious enough) but intellectually immature for the task. Paradoxically, the core of the spy report is a qualitative judgement—the newspaper simply would not meet sufficient quality standards.³ *Slavinja* fared no better with the characterization of Bishop Anton Wolf that was appended to Schmidburg’s report in addition to the prescribed publication schedule. The provincial governor sought an opinion on the three priests from their newly appointed supervisor, who described the initiators as intellectually immature for such a project and expressed the suspicion that someone else was hiding behind them. Like Schmidhammer, Wolf also relied on qualitative arguments: he doubted the professional, linguistic, and organizational competence of the three initiators to publish a high-quality newspaper. Finally, Slodnjak says, Wolf also demonstrated “a good measure of chauvinistic uneasiness toward the Slovenian newspaper” (Slodnjak, 1949, p. 14): what is the point of a Slovenian newspaper, he wondered, if everyone that can read in Carniola can read German anyway (and can thus use the existing German newspapers)?⁴

On this basis, Sedlnitzky could calmly reject the request in a letter to Schmidburg on New Year’s Day 1825; in doing so, he explicitly referred to Wolf’s negative opinion, but did not mention Schmidhammer. Of course, one may suspect that less noble inclinations were the reason for the negative response than paternalistic concern for the quality of publications appearing in Carniola—for example, the tendency to inhibit the development of national languages. However, such tendencies, if present at all, remain carefully hidden. Regardless of how one may interpret this administrative rejection, one thing is certain: *Slavinja* remained a mute idea, a non-existent epoch in Slovenian literary and cultural history.⁵

After the blockade of *Slavinja* in the 1820s, the publication of *Kranjska čbelica* (The Carniolan Bee, 1830–1833) in the early 1830s seems to be the first successful attempt to publish a Slovenian periodical. Of course, a poetry almanac published only once a year is not really comparable to a weekly newspaper, but the initiators of *Kranjska čbelica*, thanks mainly to the poet France Prešeren (1800–1849), really made the most of the modest opportunity. The tactical maturity with which they sought permission to publish (a flattering dedication and a panegyric poem to Joseph Camillo von Schmidburg, which secured them the local governor’s support) later proved useful because the difficulties with censorship were far from over: The stormy history of conflicts that the editor Miha Kastelic, the critic Matija Čop, and the poet France Prešeren had in these years both with the censorship in Ljubljana and with the Viennese censor for Slavic publications, Jernej Kopitar (1780–1844),

³ That Habsburg censorship discourse borrowed methodologically from criticism is quite a general observation. Compare also Juvan (2021) and Syrový (this issue).

⁴ “aber daß man es so schwerer einsieht, wozu ein durchaus in der krainischen Sprache geschriebenes Wochenblatt als Bestandtheil einer deutschen Zeitung für Leser, welche, weil sie teutsche [sic!] Zeitung lesen, wohl alle das Deutsch, aber nicht alle das Krainisch verstehen, dienen soll” (Slodnjak, 1949, p. 25).

⁵ Compare also Slodnjak (1949, pp. 13–14), Dović (2020, pp. 254–258), and Žejn (2023).

testifies to this. In contrast to the almost forgotten history of *Slavinja*, these conflicts have been thoroughly studied, with Prešeren in particular making a name for himself as the Slovenian protagonist of the struggle against censorship (above all, with his witty poetic interventions). However, despite several victories in the course of this struggle, repression had the last word in this case as well: it cannot be overlooked that the premature end of the publication of *Kranjska čbelica* was due to exhaustion caused by the battles with censorship.⁶

Thus, the local censorship apparatus that dutifully controlled the German periodicals—*Laibacher Zeitung*, its supplement *Illyrisches Blatt* (1819–1849), and later *Carniola* (1838–1844)—before their publication had no contact with the Slovenian-language press even in the late 1830s. Nevertheless, by the end of the decade, pressure was mounting to finally establish a Slovenian newspaper in Carniola. The story that led, after five long years, to the founding and publication of *Novice* (the common short designation for *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice*) actually began in 1838—and it is examined in greater detail below. Before that, at least brief mention should be made of the ambitious plan of Andrej Smole (1800–1840) from 1840—which, like *Slavinja*, was nipped in the bud. Smole (in fact, with France Prešeren’s support) planned to publish *Ilirske novice* (Illyrian News), a twice-weekly political newspaper, with a weekly literary supplement *Ilirski Merkur* (The Illyrian Mercury), both of which were already to use the new Czech-based Gaj alphabet (Sln. *gajica*), which was gradually replacing the old Bohorič alphabet (Sln. *bohoričica*) in the mid-nineteenth century.

Smole set the local bureaucratic machinery in motion by applying for a publication permit on April 27th, 1840. With the exception of Jurij Šporer, who backed both political and literary newspapers, the other councilors at the Ljubljana governorate at least supported the idea of a non-political literary supplement. Here too, however, Sedlnitzky had the final say. As he had done a decade and a half earlier with *Slavinja*, he rejected the proposal on the basis of a negative police report. This time the intelligence work was performed by two officials (Eduard Schadek and chief inspector Joseph Suchanek) who, in a detailed biography, listed an entire series of negative characteristics of the applicant: how he spent a lot of money on travel, lived lavishly and dissolutely in Ljubljana without having a real job, lived only on interest, and showed signs of tiredness of life (Mal, 1930, pp. 300–301). Schadek’s remark that Smole was addicted to alcohol was omitted from the report for the governorate and did not reach Sedlnitzky. Nevertheless, in his rejection of June 25th, 1840, the chief censor denied Smole’s suitability as an editor of a literary newspaper—due to his lack of education, morally questionable lifestyle, and declining vitality. Smole did not give up after this first blow and continued to fight. As early as the fall of 1840, he filed a complaint and even planned an audience with the emperor—but death caught up with him.⁷

⁶ Compare also Žigon (1926), Gspan (1966), Dović (2020), and Juvan (2021, and this issue).

⁷ On Smole and his newspaper project, compare Prijatelj (1902) and Mal (1930).

The long birth and its many “midwives”: From *Zora* to *Novice* (1838–1843)

Much more complicated is the story of the censorship entanglements in the birth of *Novice*, which became known mainly thanks to the extensive research of Ivan Prijatelj.⁸ It began in 1838, when a new German newspaper, *Carniolia*, printed by Jožef Blaznik (1800–1872) and edited by Leopold Kordesch (1808–1879), appeared in Ljubljana alongside the existing *Laibacher Zeitung*. The local governor granted permission to publish the newspaper on March 6th, 1838, and on May 1st of the same year *Carniolia* began to appear. Encouraged by its success, as early as July 2nd, 1838, the editor Leopold Kordesch asked the governorate for permission to publish the “Slovenian national newspaper” *Slovenske novice* (Slovenian News) twice a week starting the next year, along with the weekly literary supplement *Zora* (The Dawn). The governorate’s councilors considered the request on July 14th and supported the petitioners’ arguments, stressing the need to educate the vernacular language. However, they did not dare decide on the new Slovenian newspaper themselves, and they passed on the application files to the Viennese censorship authority for evaluation (Prijatelj, 1912, p. 70).

However, the matter immediately became complicated. When Sedlnitzky’s office was dealing with the request, the “Carniola affair” broke out. Until then, Sedlnitzky was not aware that a new German newspaper had appeared in Ljubljana that had escaped central control and had received permission to publish directly from the local governorate. The suspicious minister of police, dissatisfied because “the subject of the present request is not fully known” to him and therefore he “cannot resolve it calmly,” immediately asked for appropriate reports. On October 18th, he wrote to Schmidburg requiring “more precise explanations of the content, aim, and purpose of the aforementioned newspaper” (Prijatelj, 1912, p. 71), and, with regard to Kordesch, he had already contacted his Ljubljana confidants, councilor Joseph Wagner, and local police chief Leopold Sicard, a few days earlier.

The investigations concerning *Carniolia* and *Zora* took place in parallel, and it is impossible to separate them. Their common denominator was the editor Kordesch, who was a mystery to Vienna because Sedlnitzky had not yet “investigated him in every respect and searched the last corners of his private life” (Prijatelj, 1912, p. 71). When Sedlnitzky received from the governorate the earlier editions of *Carniolia*, which were subsequently examined by two Viennese censors, as well as a sufficient amount of intelligence data on Kordesch, he finally allowed the publication to continue after a year—with a sharp rebuke to Governor Schmidburg, stating that “the governorate exceeded the limits of its authority by allowing the publication of *Carniolia* without asking permission here” (Prijatelj, 1912, p. 299). At the same time, he also called for stricter (pre) censorship because the second of his (post)censors identified inappropriate material already on the opening page of the first printed edition of *Carniolia*.⁹

⁸ Prijatelj’s publications were a major source because the original (German) documents from Vienna, quoted by him in Slovenian, can no longer be found. It is possible to assume they were destroyed in the 1927 fire at the Vienna Palace of Justice (also see Syrový in this issue).

⁹ On complications with *Carniolia*, compare Miladinović (2001, 2008, 2009) and Pastar (2023).

Let us see how the vigilant guardian of the monarchical press received “accurate and satisfactory explanations” about Kordesch, the editor of *Carniola* and potential editor of the Slovenian political newspaper, before making his decision. In a letter dated October 14th, 1838, Sedlnitzky asked Sicard to provide him with all the information he had

about the applicant’s origin and previous life, about his family, financial and other circumstances, about his moral and religious principles, about the quality of his political attitude, about his profession and way of life, his social relations and circumstances, furthermore about the level and extent of his education, finally about his possible literary and other works and merits. (Priatelj, 1912, p. 72)

Sedlnitzky’s zeal in examining the candidate in such detail seems impressive at first glance, but in fact it was routine: the thorough police chief made almost identical demands on other informants in his letters. However, one rarely comes across formulations like the following:

At the same time, I ask Your Grace to give me a thorough opinion on the possible necessity, usefulness, and benefit of the aforementioned enterprise in itself and, moreover, in relation to the province there [Carniola] as well as other provinces with which the intended newspaper seems to be reckoned because of the common language, its temporary influence on the education of the Slavic dialect in question, and also on the education and spread of the German language among the Slavic population, which is also intended by the government. (Priatelj, 1912, pp. 72–73)

The quote reveals the censor’s very specific concern regarding the Slovenian newspaper. Sedlnitzky clearly feared that the enterprise would not be conducive to the Germanization of the Slavic population as envisioned by the imperial authorities. Moreover, he correctly predicted that a Slovenian newspaper in Ljubljana might have a cohesive effect outside Carniola—which indeed was the case soon after *Novice* appeared in 1843. In any case, the above passage contains one of the rare indications that censorship (already) in the pre-March period deliberately hindered the cultivation of Slovenian.

Sedlnitzky also sent a letter with the same content to Councilor Wagner, who had previously co-signed the positive recommendation of the Ljubljana governorate—emphasizing that he wanted to hear his “individual opinion.” Wagner’s detailed report, sent to Vienna on November 23rd, 1838, was not so favorable to Kordesch. He mentioned that the applicant lacked the necessary education, that he frequented questionable inns mingling with lower-class people, that his knowledge was superficial, but that, on the other hand, he had so far cooperated well with the censorship, which Wagner determined when he was replacing Anton Stelzich as a pre-censor of Kordesch’s German *Carniola* the previous summer: “There was, however, no trace of negative tendencies, and he was always ready at once when I asked him to change something in his own or other people’s works, or when I sent whole articles and

poems back to him on the grounds that they were without content, coarse, and not suitable for publication” (Prijetelj, 1912, p. 75). From this observation one can at least see how precisely and conscientiously the local censors did their work.

Wagner goes on to report how the majority of the council members, led by Stelzich, initially opposed the idea of a Slovenian newspaper because they saw no need for it. However, in the end “they leaned to the side of the petitioner, not out of the conviction that Carniola and the local Slavic dialect would benefit, but because the voters—especially the non-Carniolans—wanted to avoid criticism, saying they wanted to harm the Carniolan nationality” (Prijetelj, 1912, p. 76). There follows a brief digression on the linguistic and cultural situation in Carniola, which Wagner concludes by noting that the educated practically do not use Slovenian (except for communication with servants and the lower classes), that there are only about twenty people that have a complete command of the language, mostly priests, and that it is precisely this class that “advocates most vociferously that the Carniolan dialect be more appreciated. There are also too many priests that obviously do not like to see German spreading in the country” (Prijetelj, 1912, p. 76). Wagner’s opinion, for which he had meticulously gathered information “in silence,” as he confided to the supreme chief at the end of the letter, thus differed significantly from the official opinion of the governorate (Prijetelj, 1912, p. 77).

In the meantime, Kordesch had not received a response for several months—which was not typical because Sedlnitzky usually made his decisions relatively quickly—and he may have concluded that the problem lay in the announced political nature of the newspaper. Therefore, on December 1st, 1838, when new information was still being gathered about him because of the affair, he and Blaznik submitted a new application to the local governorate, in which the idea underwent its first mutation—from a political to a literary newspaper. In the application, the publishers gave up the idea of a “political popular newspaper” and wanted only to publish *Zarja* “in the regional language as a literary newspaper only once a week” (Prijetelj, 1912, p. 296). Three and a half months later, Blaznik, this time without Kordesch, submitted a new application to the governorate requesting “permission for this purely literary newspaper” to appear as a weekly supplement to *Carniolia*. Governor Schmidburg supported the idea and, in an encouraging letter to Vienna, emphasized that the newspaper would be purely literary in character. However, the modest requests from the province met with little understanding: Sedlnitzky remained stubbornly silent without making a decision. Blaznik submitted his last application for a purely literary newspaper to the governorate on March 2nd, 1840; the governorate sent it to Vienna a week later with warm recommendations and assurances of the strictest censorship, but Sedlnitzky again gave no answer—remaining silent on this point for almost two years.

Blaznik, firmly determined to launch a Slovenian newspaper, nevertheless did not give up. He abandoned the idea of a literary weekly, and the original idea underwent another mutation in 1840—from a literary to a technical newspaper. In this groundbreaking change of concept, the industrious printer relied on the intention of the Carniolan delegation of the Association for the Promotion and Support of Industry and Trade in Inner Austria (Germ. *Verein zur Beförderung und Unterstützung der Industrie und der Gewerbe in Innerösterreich*) to publish a technical popular newspaper in the local language in Ljubljana. On July 16th, 1840, Blaznik sent a new request

directly to Sedlnitzky. This request also remained unanswered, but the initiative now received the support of the Graz-based society, whose founder and patron was the influential Archduke Johann of Austria (Mihelič, 1948, pp. 34–40). Thus, on January 12th, 1841, a request was sent from Graz to the Ljubljana governorate to launch a Slovenian-language supplement to *Carniolia*, which was now to have “a largely technical content and serve as a low-priced magazine for the artisan class” (Prijetelj, 1913, p. 63). The Ljubljana governorate, which had supported Blaznik’s efforts from the beginning, was now even more committed to the new newspaper, which in this form can already be understood as the nucleus of the later *Novice*.

Thus a coalition was formed that put increasing pressure on the taciturn Sedlnitzky: it consisted of the printer Blaznik, the industrial society in Graz and its branch in Ljubljana, and the Ljubljana governorate, where Schmidburg was succeeded as governor in 1840 by Joseph von Weingarten, who also sympathized with the Slovenian press. In 1841, pressure from petitioners increased until Sedlnitzky finally decided to write a letter on the matter. On January 4th, 1842, three and a half years after Kordesch’s initial request, he first complained that from the request:

neither the true tendency nor the form of writing and publishing this intended enterprise is clearly evident. The application also lacks any specification as to who is actually to be the publisher and editor-in-chief [...]. The tone of the application otherwise seems to be that the said association [...] wants to put itself at the head of the enterprise in question and [...] to appoint Jožef Blaznik only for the material implementation of this enterprise. At the same time, an agreement seems to have been reached that merely modifies the edition of the supplement of *Carniolia* requested by the printer Blaznik, which was to have literary content and appear under the title *Sarja*, so that it appears that the above-mentioned steps are aimed only at the realization of the enterprise originally planned by Blaznik and now intended for technical purposes. (Prijetelj, 1913, p. 65)

Obviously, the suspicious Sedlnitzky immediately identified the publisher’s maneuver. Unsurprisingly, to be able to make a final decision on the matter “in all tranquility,” he demanded from the new governor Weingarten “detailed and accurate information about the true aim and purpose” of the newspaper, a detailed report on the publisher, the newspaper’s program, printed sample editions, and finally a proposal for a credible local censor (Prijetelj, 1913, p. 65).

Sedlnitzky’s unyielding demands were the catalyst for drafting the newspaper’s program, which Blaznik compiled with the help of the lawyer and agronomist Jožef Orel (1787–1874) and sent to the Carniolan delegation of the industrial society on February 19th, 1842. The aim of the newspaper was “to disseminate, in the most common and accessible way possible, generally useful knowledge, especially that which could promote and stimulate industry, agricultural interest, and the improvement of craftsmanship.” The content, which otherwise strictly avoided political and religious topics, was also to include “stories, travelogues, poetic effusions, and short historical accounts,” with the caveat that the popular content “should also educate readers morally and intellectually” (Prijetelj, 1913, p. 162). Jožef Orel was to be the

editor and Blaznik the publisher. Blaznik initially refused to produce printed trial editions because this was too expensive and too demanding.

Almost simultaneously, Blaznik also approached the Carniolan Agricultural Society, to which he sent a copy of the program on February 21st, asking it to support the project with contributions and, in particular, to recommend that the society's members subscribe to the new newspaper. The agricultural society, a state-sponsored institution that had been concerned with the progress and welfare of the predominantly peasant population in Carniola since 1767, was thus the last actor to join the coalition for the new newspaper. On March 4th, 1842, the society forwarded Blaznik's program to Governor Weingarten and warmly recommended it to Sedlnitzky's office, emphasizing the publication's positive impact on agriculture in a country where the peasants did not understand German. He also recommended Orel, who was active in the industrial society at the same time, as the most suitable editor. On April 4th, the Graz office of the industrial society also sent Blaznik's program to the Ljubljana governorate, warmly recommending the project and the editor. In the meantime, Weingarten had also obtained a favorable opinion on Blaznik and Orel from the new police chief, Franz Johann Uhrer. On May 2nd, 1842, he wrote to Sedlnitzky, asking him to treat the request favorably, and he recommended the retired provincial councilor Janez Vesel as censor.

However, this was still not enough for Sedlnitzky to decide "with complete calm" about the existence of the new newspaper, which at that time was still intended as a supplement to *Carniola*. Therefore, on June 12th, he wrote to Weingarten that he insisted "on asking for a complete program and some sample issues with all the envisioned sections" (Prijatelj, 1913, p. 272). At the same time, he urged Uhrer to send him more detailed information about Orel and Vesel because he was not satisfied with the meager report Weingarten had enclosed. The police commissioner, Suchanek, replied to him, pointing out some minor shortcomings regarding Orel in his detailed communique—but in general his verdict on both, especially Vesel, was decidedly positive.

In the meantime, the final change of plans took place in Ljubljana, which definitively determined the character of the newspaper. The Carniolan Agricultural Society, which had already flirted with the idea of publishing a Slovenian newspaper in the past for practical reasons,¹⁰ decided to take the new newspaper under its wing (which also suited Blaznik, who thus took a much smaller financial risk) and to look for a suitable editor-in-chief itself. Thus the new newspaper, which first mutated from a political newspaper to a literary one, and then from a literary newspaper to a technical one, finally mutated a third time—this time from a technical newspaper to a predominantly agricultural one.

Important changes took place within the agricultural society as well: the ambitious young veterinarian Janez Bleiweis (1808–1881) prevailed over his two competitors Jožef Orel and Albert Kapus in the May 1842 elections and became the new secretary of the society. The newspaper's renewed program was approved by the

¹⁰ Compare count Franz Scribani Rossi's idea for a trilingual (German–Carniolan–Italian) agricultural journal in 1835 (Mihelič, 1948, pp. 31–33). Scribani's ambitious proposal remained on the shelf due to the disapproval of the German council members and the president of the society, Bishop Wolf.

society at its meeting on August 16th, 1842; it focused on agriculture and industry and no longer explicitly mentioned literary texts—at most, it hid the possibility of such content under the heading “publicly useful trivia.” At this point, Orel was still slated to be the editor. Moreover, the board of the society was to review the content of each issue, which effectively meant that internal pre-censorship was introduced. This decision posed major practical problems because most of the board members did not speak Slovenian—and so the idea was extremely expensive and time-consuming. As Mihelič (1948) has shown, the internal struggles in the summer and fall of 1842, during which Orel deliberately boycotted the request to translate (test) articles into German, eventually enabled Bleiweis to take over his position. After a complicated chain of events, the new secretary in this way somehow appropriated the merits of his predecessors that had fought for the newspaper long before him.¹¹

After all this confusion, the situation was finally clarified at the end of 1842: the new newspaper was to be an independent Carniolan weekly (not a supplement) with the title *Kmetijske in rokodelske novize* and a vignette similar to that of the industrial society; Blaznik remained only a printer and handed over the publication to the agricultural society, which was also to provide the newspaper with a suitable editor; the program was prepared and proofs were printed. On December 17th, 1842, the governorate sent everything to Sedlnitzky, who nevertheless allowed himself one last check: he wanted to look through the contents of the two test editions. Not understanding the language in which the articles were written, of course, he entrusted the work to the Viennese censor for the Slavic books—in the absence of Jernej Kopitar, this task was taken over by another up-and-coming Slovenian linguist, Franz Miklosich (1813–1881), who presented his future supervisor with a concise summary of the articles’ content on January 23rd. In the end, Sedlnitzky achieved the desired calm. He did not even call for police investigation of Bleiweis—which seems quite unlikely in view of what has been said so far. Such “indifference” can only be explained by the assumption that the control of the Carniolan Agricultural Society over the editor and the newspaper offered him a perfect guarantee. Be that as it may, on February 10th, 1843, Sedlnitzky informed the authorities in Ljubljana that he no longer had any reservations about publishing the new newspaper (*nehme ich nunmehr keinem Anstand*)—provided, of course, that the company would appoint a reliable editor. Ivan Prijatelj, the most comprehensive analyst of this bureaucratic saga to date, commented excitedly that “the stone over the grave of the Slovenian nation” had finally been rolled away (Prijatelj, 1913, p. 278).

Novice until the March revolution

The birth of the *Novice* was indeed “very difficult,” as Bleiweis euphemistically stated in 1863, and in this light, June 5th, 1843, when the first issue finally appeared, was a turning point. Of course, imperial censorship continued to exert a strong influence on *Novice* thereafter: permission to publish was far from overcoming all censor-

¹¹ Long editorial service at *Novice* (from its establishment in 1843 to his death in 1881) was a crucial factor that enabled Bleiweis to become a major political figure of the Slovenian national movement—he was even dubbed “the father of the nation.”

ship obstacles. The first obstacle encountered by potential authors was the society's board. Unlike Orel, who indirectly protested the board's internal control, Bleiweis did not actively oppose it. The society hired Fran Malavašič to translate the texts into German—but practical problems caused the board to make exceptions, and eventually “all editorial work was left to Bleiweis for the first year” (Mihelič, 1948, p. 51). An even greater obstacle was, of course, official censorship. Like all other pre-March publications, each issue was inspected before publication by the local censorship, which operated within the Ljubljana governorate. Various censors were responsible for censoring *Novice*. The first of them was Janez Nepomuk Vesel (from the beginning of publication until the autumn of 1843); his successor was Jurij Matija Šporer (from the fall of 1843 until December 1845).¹²

Although the newspaper was published by the agricultural society and its title explicitly mentioned agriculture and handicrafts, it had a wider reach: it soon became the central printed publication of the nascent Slovenian national movement. Its tactful editor strove for broad content, and he was able to invoke official permission to silence critics that wanted *Novice* to remain a purely utilitarian newspaper. The content included not only agricultural and handicraft topics in the narrow sense, but also public decrees affecting both areas, various domestic events (*vaterländische Ereignisse*) and news, domestic trivia, and reports on new Slavic books. The list was loose enough to allow almost anything—except high politics. Even poetry, which was not part of the official program, could be smuggled in in the form of “other trifles” (*andere Kleinigkeiten*), which, of course, had to be instructive (*belehrenden*) or at least intellectually stimulating (*Geist anregenden*; “Persiljena opomba,” 1845, p. 32).

It soon turned out that it was indeed poetry that became one of the most important parts of *Novice*, often occupying a prominent place on the front pages, and poets became the most recognizable contributors to the new newspaper. Even more, poetry was able to put forward the most problematic ideas because thoughts clothed in verse bypassed censorship more easily. Bleiweis thus managed to smuggle some important national(ist) ideas into the newspaper in literary garb. The most important achievement in this regard was the publication of the poem “Slovenja [...] carju Ferdinandu” (Slovenia [...] to Emperor Ferdinand) by Janez Vesel (pen name Jovan Koseski) on September 4th, 1844. Bleiweis was aware that the introduction of the new name *Slovenja* was risky because the censors at that time even tended to ban allusions to Illyria in Slovenian publications. However, the maneuver succeeded: the censor Jurij Šporer did not prevent the publication of the panegyric to the emperor, into which Koseski cleverly inserted an allegorized new historical and geographical entity. The introduction of the new ethnonym—Slovenia and Slovenians—quickly caught on thanks to *Novice*, and Koseski with his inspiring patriotic poems became the first national poetic celebrity.¹³

¹² In contrast to the majority of pre-March censors in Ljubljana, who were clerics (e.g. Jurij Paušek, Anton Stelzich, Andrej Gollmayer, and Jurij Mayr), both of them were lay imperial bureaucrats.

¹³ In the mid-nineteenth century, the expressions *Slovenija* ‘Slovenia’ and *Slovenec* ‘Slovenian’ gradually began to denote a (modern) Slavic nation and its (imaginary) territory, referring mainly to the population of Carniola, southern Styria, and southern Carinthia. Koseski's poem was one of the first harbingers of the

“The unmuzzled mouth”: 1848 revolution and the abolition of censorship

The March Revolution of 1848 was also welcomed by *Novice*. On March 22, 1848, Bleiweis published a lengthy editorial “Slava slava našimu presvitlimu Cesarju Ferdinandu pervimu” (Glory be to our most enlightened Emperor Ferdinand the First), as flattery to the “merciful father” that had bestowed upon us “unspeakable benefits.” At the same time, however, he was enthusiastic about the freedoms that the constitution brought with it, made no secret of his satisfaction at the fall of Metternich, and was particularly pleased about the abolition of pre-censorship:

On that day the gracious Emperor Ferdinand also permitted that in the future any book, newspaper, or anything else could be printed without having to submit it to the censor and obtain from him express permission to print it, as he had intended. Now then, we shall be free to write what we like, so long as it is true and fair. Oh, it is an unspeakable happiness that our mouths are no longer tied! (Bleiweis, 1848, pp. 45–46)

How the new freedom of the press was reflected in the editorial policy of *Novice* can be demonstrated by the publication of the poem that was much later to become the national anthem of Slovenia—France Prešeren’s “Zdravljica” (A toast). The planned publication of the original version in *Novice* in 1844 was blocked by the censor Jurij Šporer, presumably because of excessively nationalist passages. Prešeren later revised the poem and intended to include it in his poetry collection *Poezije* in 1846, but he again experienced censorship intervention, this time by Kopitar’s successor at the post of censor for Slavic books in Vienna, Franz Miklosich. In particular, Miklosich’s demand to delete the stanza “Edinost, sreča, sprava” (“Unity, happiness, reconciliation,” calling for the reconciliation and unification of the Slavs—which would then lead to restoration of their former power and glory) so enraged Prešeren that he withdrew the poem altogether—for it was precisely because of (self-)censorship that the poet himself had already omitted the potentially most problematic stanza of the submitted manuscript “V sovražnike z oblakov” (“To enemies from the clouds,” calling for thunder against national enemies and for the restoration of former freedom). Thus, the future Slovenian anthem had to wait not only for the death of Jernej Kopitar in 1844, but also for the revolution and the temporary fall of the pre-censorship regime. When the mouth of the press was finally “unmuzzled,” Bleiweis was able to put the intact final version of “Zdravljica”—including the problematic stanzas—on the front page of the newspaper on April 26th, 1848. In parallel, he published another poem on the same page that offered a completely different interpretation of the revolution and its freedoms: the priest Jožef Hašnik, another *Novice* poet, in his “Svobodni Lenart” (Free Lenart) conservatively ironized the achievements of the revolution, especially the apparent freedom it brought to the peasants. Thus, even during the two months of revolutionary chaos, the editorial policy of *Novice* seems to have been cautious, or, to put it in more modern terms, balanced.

new idea, which reached the level of a political program in Matija Majar’s famous 1848 resolution “Kaj Slovenci terjamo?” (What do the Slovenians demand?).

The abolition of pre-censorship triggered a wave of enthusiasm throughout the monarchy, which was immediately followed by an explosion of new, uncensored media of varying profile and quality. As early as March, seven new political newspapers began to appear in Vienna, including the radical *Die Constitution*; something similar happened elsewhere. For a short period, the authorities completely lost control of the frenzied press. The press euphoria of 1848 spread to Ljubljana as well (see Svoljšak, 2023). The “official” German newspaper of Ljubljana, *Laibacher Zeitung*, and the Slovenian *Novice* (which by that time had reached a decent circulation of about 1,800 copies) were joined in the revolutionary year by a number of new newspapers, both German and Slovenian. Among them was *Slovenija*, edited by Matevž Cigale, which appeared twice a week as a newsletter of the Slovenian Society (*Slovensko društvo*). The new newspaper openly advocated the revolutionary program of United Slovenia (*Zedinjena Slovenija*) and clearly shifted its focus to the political sphere; however, like many other media projects, it did not last very long—barely two years. *Slovenija* also published poetry: on September 22nd, 1848, it printed perhaps the most aggressive product of early Slovenian poetic nationalism, Koseski’s poem “Nemškutar” (Germanophile), which was not reprinted by *Novice* until over twenty years later (on August 28th, 1869)—with the telling note that it was the only poem that Koseski did not publish in *Novice* and that the famous poet himself now no longer remembered this text.¹⁴

The tightening of censorship in the early 1850s clipped the wings of the newspapers; those that survived found themselves in a similar situation as before March 1848. Bleiweis’s *Novice* was unable to regain its former monopoly position, but it remained firmly committed to the nationalist agenda and was still the central mouthpiece of the Slovenian national movement in the 1850s. At the beginning of the constitutional era, it was identified by the Ljubljana police as a hotbed of extreme nationalism. On July 3rd, 1861, the Ljubljana police director, Leopold Bezdek, sent a complaint to the Ministry of the Interior in Vienna, stating that *Novice* had “long been pursuing subversive tendencies, holding excessive ultranationalist views against everything German, and openly calling the ‘national element’ to fight” (Stariha, 2002, p. 50). Bezdek accused Bleiweis of agitating in *Novice* and trying to make it the “Magna Carta” of the Slovenians; as proof, he enclosed six problematic issues of the newspaper to the ministry.¹⁵

Bezdek’s complaint was followed by a letter from the ministry instructing the regional chief Karl Ulepitsch to monitor the press in Ljubljana and “immediately initiate an investigation, bring charges, and prosecute any illegal writing” (Stariha, 2002, p. 50). Bezdek, who otherwise believed that it would be best to ban *Novice*, followed the instructions and marked controversial passages with a red pen: the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia contain documents from 1861 to 1865 that testify to the fact that the police carefully monitored *Novice* at the time (the materials also include

¹⁴ Such a poem could not have been published in the pre-March era, nor later, after the renewed tightening of censorship in the early 1850s. In the second stanza, the poet blatantly declares to the hated “Nemškutar”: “For you, idiot, the sword is sharpened!”

¹⁵ Compare the documents in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (ARS – AS 16 438/1861).

issues with problematic passages marked in red). The reason for the prosecution against Bleiweis was finally provided by the anonymous letter “Iz Savinske doline” (From the Savinja Valley), published on November 26th, 1862, criticizing the notaries’ use of the (German) language. An investigation followed in early 1863, which could have had dire consequences for Bleiweis—he was threatened with suspension from the office of veterinary surgeon, from which he was protected only by immunity as a member of the provincial parliament. The Graz regional court finally dismissed the charges from Ljubljana, and Bleiweis got off with a fine of 10 florins and the loss of the bail of 60 florins (Stariha, 2002, p. 50).

Novice, the only Slovenian newspaper to experience both pre-March censorship and later retroactive censorship, amply shows how state control over the press remained constant after the revolution: censors were replaced by prosecutors and judges, who retroactively prosecuted problematic writers and editors.¹⁶ The new situation could have been even more burdensome compared to earlier decades: authors, editors, and printers now also faced heavy fines and even prison sentences. Be that as it may, in the 1860s *Novice* was no longer the center of attention because new, even more problematic newspapers appeared—namely, Andrej Einspieler’s *Stimmen aus Innerösterreich* (Voices from Inner Austria) and *Slovenec* (Slovenian) in Klagenfurt, and Miroslav Vilhar’s and Fran Levstik’s *Naprej* in Ljubljana. Numerous examples from this period (from *Triglav* and *Slovenski narod* to the satirical *Brencelj*) prove that the “classic” era of post-censorship seizures, convictions, and prison sentences had dawned.¹⁷

Conclusion

As evidenced by the history of the blocking of newspapers and the troublesome establishment of *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice*, the impact of the censorship apparatus was far-reaching: it was one of the decisive factors in the pre-March literary and media system in Carniola. In many respects, censorship was constitutive: even more eloquently than the dedication to Schmidburg with which *Kranjska čbelica* had to begin in 1830, three astonishing mutations in the (pre)history of *Novice* bear witness to this: the newspaper had to change from a political to literary newspaper, from a literary to technical newspaper, and finally from a technical to agricultural newspaper. At the same time, censorship—which, to recall once again Bleiweis’s apt formulation, produced a “deathly silence”—also remained a hidden force. Here, its power is most evident in its ability to ban periodical publications and nip them in the bud. This is also why the history of censorship refusals remains invisible, hidden in the archives of the imperial bureaucracy. What is left behind is a void—a void in the media space, but also a void in literary life: texts that were never written but could (or should) have been, and poems that remained forever unpublished.

One can also note that the pre-March censorship apparatus was seemingly decentralized through the network of local book revision offices and provincial govern-

¹⁶ For certain parallels with post-revolutionary Hungary, compare Hajdu (this issue).

¹⁷ Compare Cvirm (2010), Domej (2023) and Žigon (2023).

ates, but that in reality decision-making power was strongly centralized in the Vienna police censorship office, especially in the person of its all-powerful chief Sedlnitzky. Power struggles between local and imperial censorship officials, in which local dignitaries occasionally intervened—in Ljubljana, for example, Governor Schmidburg or Bishop Wolf—usually ended in favor of Vienna. The archives show that, among the local actors, the police—who were closely associated with Sedlnitzky—had by far the most power. They operated largely in secret, but with great determination: in their detailed secret reports on potential editors, authors and publishers, police detectives looked not only under the pen, but also between bedroom sheets and among bookshelves, plates, and glasses.

Finally, one can at least partially answer the question of what motives led the censors in the pre-March period to block Slovenian journals so persistently. At least on the face of it, the quality of the press was their main concern. Based on the typical paternalism of the Enlightenment, even the police and the bishop appear in their reports as a kind of evaluator, expressing their concern about the scholarly competence of the publishers. However, did censorship as an imperial power also deliberately inhibit the development of Slovenian language, literature, and culture, as many earlier scholars have implicitly stated? Although recent views on the history of the monarchy object to the excessive emphasis on the Habsburg Empire as a “prison of nations” (e.g., Judson, 2016), there is some evidence that in Carniola the imperial authorities’ aversion to the agenda of (cultural) nationalism was expressed precisely through censorship practices already in the pre-March period.

Declarations

This work was supported by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) as part of the research project “Slovenian Writers and Imperial Censorship in the Long Nineteenth Century” (J6-2583) and the research program “Studies in Literary History, Literary Theory, and Methodology” (P6-0024 B).

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