

The Sorrow Continues

What Ethiopia needed most following the departure of former President Mengistu Haile Mariam in May 1991 was a stable government, new directions in economic and political policies and a leadership that inspired new confidence in the country. Instead, it got Meles Zenawi, a guerrilla leader with no previous government experience and whose policies are unknown. Zenawi, head of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), is unacceptable to many Ethiopians outside Tigray province and, before long, he might resort to force, as Mengistu did, to govern.

Under Mengistu's leadership, Ethiopia experienced enormous political and economic problems which included long-running civil wars, persistent droughts, incredible poverty, massive famine, economic mismanagement and severe environmental degradation. Most of these problems predated Mengistu's leadership, for even before Mengistu, Ethiopia was economically backward, had an authoritarian and centralised political structure, its various nationalities felt oppressed, and the war in Eritrea had been going on since the 1960s.

For generations, Ethiopia, the oldest state in Africa, had been ruled by centralised and repressive governments which have been completely oblivious to popular demands. The imperial government, which had lasted more than 2,500 years when it was overthrown in 1974, had ruled provinces through dynasties appointed centrally. By the 1970s, most Ethiopians wanted change, but when it came it was 'hijacked' by the military. The Dergue (military junta), which toppled Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974, also maintained central control over the regions and provinces.

The Dergue, of which Mengistu was an original member, initially co-operated closely with radical civilian intellectuals, who helped it espouse socialism and provided some policy guidance in the mid-70s. During this period, there were hopes that the then progressive government would find

solutions to Ethiopia's multifaceted problems. It turned out that the Dergue's alliance with the leftist intellectuals in the mid-70s was a tactical ploy designed to rally opponents of the imperial regime. The Dergue was also anxious to demonstrate that its intervention was prompted by the uneven distribution of wealth and the existing archaic and unrepresentative political order, which it sought to change. Its socialist program was concerned with self-reliance, the dignity of labour and the indivisibility of Ethiopian unity, hence the slogan Ethiopia Tikdem (Ethiopia First).

By 1976, Mengistu had emerged as one of the main forces behind the secretive Dergue and, in February 1977, he assumed absolute power following a bloody confrontation with, and the assassination of, the former head of state, General Teferi Benti. In the next 18 months, Mengistu turned against the radical civilian organisations, including the trotskyite Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON). The two organisations were banned and most of their leaders executed during the struggle of the Dergue-spearheaded 'revolutionary red terror' against what the Dergue termed 'counter-revolutionary terror' in 1977. In practice, Mengistu's policies combined some elements of the Ethiopian imperial tradition and marxist-leninist principles. It might appear a contradiction in terms, but Mengistu ruled, lived and acted like a 'Leninist Tsar'.

Mengistu also made a drastic shift in foreign policy in 1977. When President Carter terminated aid to Ethiopia in February 1977 because of its human rights record, Mengistu responded by ordering the immediate closure of the largely redundant American facilities in the country. The US had provided economic and military assistance to Ethiopia since the 1950s and had built a military communications base at Kagnaw, near Asmara, in Eritrea. Possibly anticipating the break with the US, Mengistu had already approached the Soviet Union in December 1976 for military assistance. From mid-1977 to 1990, the Soviet Union gave Ethiopia more than US\$14 billion worth of weapons. The Soviets and Cuban troops also played a crucial role in helping Ethiopia repulse a 1977 Somali invasion and stayed on after the war to buttress the Mengistu regime. The regime's collapse in May 1991 was partly due to the fact that the Cuban troops and East German advisers had been withdrawn by the late 1980s and Moscow had cut military aid following the expiry of the Ethiopian-Soviet agreement in January 1991.

If the Soviets and Cubans had provided the external support for Mengistu, internally, he had relied on the military to govern. He had often used them to suppress nationalist demands for autonomy throughout the country and to execute his rivals. His support in the military appeared, however, to decline following the May 1989 coup attempt. By most accounts, the failure of that coup and the subsequent execution of plotters, destroyed one of the best chances of a coherent successor regime.

Always wary of popular leaders, Mengistu ensured he had eliminated all his rivals, both civilian and military, before he agreed to establish the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE), the first ever political party in Ethiopia, which was launched in September 1984. The WPE, established as a means of political control rather than a channel for popular participation,



A guerrilla fighter carries a handmade symbol of the EPLF.

followed the standard procedures of a centralised Soviet-style communist party. Although theoretically the party operated on the principle of collective leadership, in practice, Mengistu's word was law. Other political institutions like the Cabinet, the National Assembly and the civil service were subordinate to the party.

In the few years preceding his departure from the political scene, Mengistu had come under considerable pressure from Western powers, especially the United States, to show more respect for human rights and to liberalise the political system. In March 1990, he had announced a package of measures designed to encourage political pluralism, including the proposal to change the name of the ruling party from the WPE to the Ethiopian Democratic Unity Party and to widen its membership to accommodate opposition groups but his critics dismissed them as a transparent attempt to buy more time. The 1987 Constitution, which turned Ethiopia into a 'People's Democratic Republic', still referred to a one-party state and the idea of turning the WPE into a wider, more pluralistic front merely succeeded in upsetting WPE members without satisfying the demands for democracy.

Mengistu also recommended a gradual switch from a centrally planned economy to a market one, but the bulk of his economic measures were greeted with cynicism, because Ethiopia had no proper investment codes to encourage foreign investment.

The main challenges to Mengistu since the 1970s came from the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Both movements achieved extensive military gains between 1989 and 1991, eventually forcing Mengistu to flee. Although the EPLF and the TPLF were united against Mengistu, their victory is likely to put them at odds with each other, because of their inherently conflicting goals.

The EPLF which broke away from the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1971, has always sought full independence for Eritrea, the former Italian colony that was federated with Ethiopia under UN auspices in 1952. Selassie unilaterally dissolved the federal arrangement in 1961 and reduced Eritrea to the status of a province. That move prompted the establishment of the Muslim-led ELF but, since the mid-70s, it is the EPLF

which has been the most effective resistance group in Eritrea. The EPLF secretary-general, Issaias Afewerki, has indicated that the movement would like to organise a referendum to determine the views of the Eritrean people on the independence issue, but that is only a tactical ploy because the EPLF will not accept anything short of full independence. Following the departure of Mengistu, the EPLF established an 'interim' administration independent of Addis Ababa, pending a referendum. That step has left Ethiopia without its own port, because both Assab and Massawa on the Red Sea are within Eritrea, and Zenawi will find it hard to convince Ethiopians that their country can do without Eritrea. Thus, Zenawi's first political test is whether he can safeguard Ethiopia's territorial integrity by re-establishing control over Eritrea.

Zenawi's TPLF was established in 1975 with the help of the EPLF, and is not, therefore in a strong position to challenge the EPLF's goal of achieving independence for Eritrea. It emerged on the wave of strong resentment in Tigray province against the Dergue's land reform policies. The TPLF which, until recently has been effectively controlled by the pro-Albanian Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray, initially demanded autonomy for Tigray province, but because Tigray has been part of Ethiopia for more than 2,500 years, the TPLF could not credibly stake a claim for secession. Moreover, Tigray province is also inhabited by other ethnic groups, including some Afars and Oromos, and these could not accept the TPLF as their legitimate representative. Nor could the TPLF claim to speak for all Tigrayans, because the EPLF is also led by Tigrinya-speakers.

The TPLF, therefore, sought to modify its image and goals in the early 1980s. In 1981 it played a leading role in the formation of the Amhara-dominated Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) and in 1989 merged with the EPDM to form the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). This manoeuvre was a transparent effort by the TPLF to change its image of a purely provincial ethnic organisation and to gain some support from the Amhara and other ethnic groups. By 1991, the EPRDF included several other groups,

but there has never been any doubt that the TPLF, by virtue of its superior military force, has been the senior partner in the coalition and has controlled the agenda of the EPRDF. It was not surprising, therefore, that when the PRDF captured Addis Ababa in May 1991, it was Zenawi, a TPLF leader, who emerged as Ethiopia's interim president.

That the EPRDF could switch from its admiration of the Albanian model and accept US guidance within months when the opportunity for leadership was dangled before it, is not remarkable. What is important is how quickly it can start the healing and reconciliation process. It needs not only to eschew its previous goals and policies, but it is expected to accept ideas and implement policies it has never thought out itself. Although it always preached against Mengistu's policies,

the EPRDF will find it imperative to accept the Dergue's land reform policies, especially as they were applied in the south.

The new leadership will also have to deal with the legacy of war. People at war for any extended period of time often find it difficult to adapt to peacetime normalcy, and there are many Ethiopians in this category. Most of these, including guerrilla forces and more than 300,000 undisciplined and armed Mengistu troops, might feel more comfortable with a Kalashnikov than a ploughshare. There are many other Ethiopians who have been uprooted or have lost the habit of working and know only how to fight. These people constitute a potentially destabilising force against any government in Addis Ababa.

Zenawi is expected to liberalise the Ethiopian political system, establish a

multi-party system and hold elections within one year as a demonstration of his commitment to democracy. There is no doubt about the efficacy of a multi-party system in a society that understands and accepts the Eastern notions of democracy. But democracy has never been practised in Ethiopia and Zenawi himself has never experienced it. Zenawi will find it convenient to mime the language of democracy which is expected of him, but there is little evidence that at the moment he fully understands the meaning and has the ability to translate these words into action. Consequently, he might create political structures that give the appearance of democracy, but the reality might be something else.

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After Keating

As the World's Greatest Treasurer and the World's Greatest Parliamentarian metamorphoses into the World's Most Obtrusive Backbencher, it is time to get a few things on the record before the hagiographers of the Labor Party succumb totally to post-Keating tristesse.

It is worth recalling, for instance, that the WGT accolade was bestowed upon Paul John Keating by *Euromoney* magazine, the bible of the hot money speculators, rather than by the kind of disinterested committee which awards Nobel prizes. (Next year the same magazine rated Keating the second worst finance minister among those surveyed, edging out only Egypt, but let that pass.) It is usually worth noting that the action of Keating that had the speculators licking their lips in the first place was the removal of most foreign investment controls, which exposed the soft underbelly of the Australian economy to their depredations.

At the time, the hot money boys were not alone in their lavish praise of the Great Deregulator. Most of the busi-

ness world and almost all the economic and political commentators were showering Keating with praise for his actions in floating the dollar, allowing foreign banks into the country, freeing up the market, and so on. The few doubters were ignored in the orgy of congratulation of what was seen as Keating's courageous decision to throw us into the same pool as the big boys.

And indeed it was courageous; some would say foolhardy. The Australian economy was not then, and still is not, in any shape to resist the kind of pressure the international financial community can exert if it sets its collective mind to it. Not only is our overall base fairly small by world standards; our heavy reliance on commodity exports makes it peculiarly vulnerable to the

vagaries of all sorts of factors outside our control, including the weather.

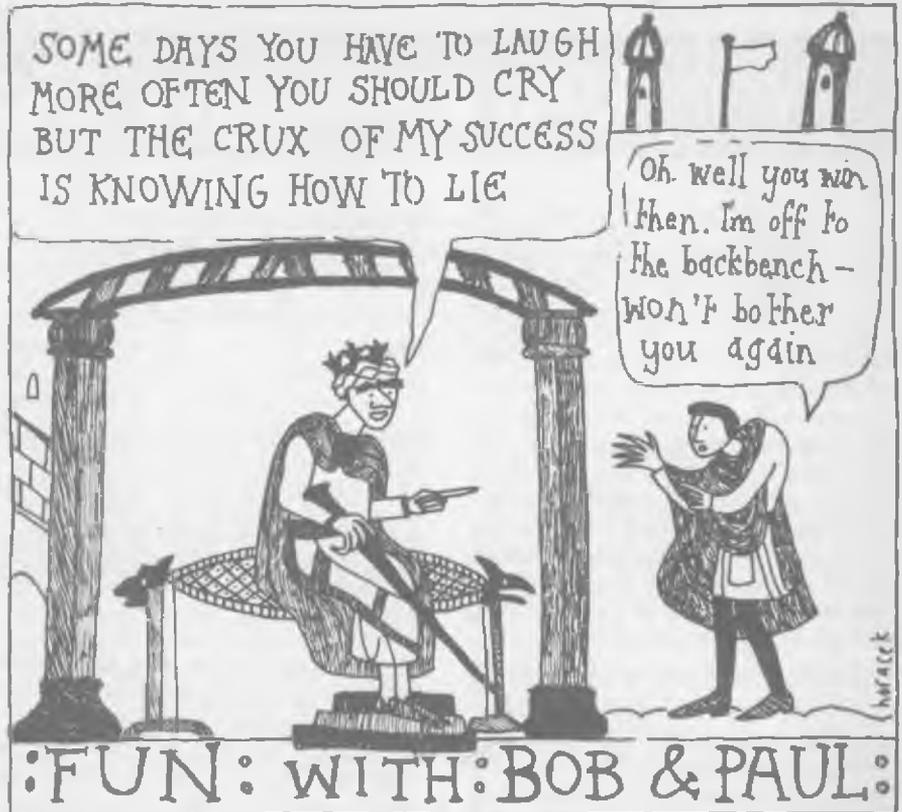
Regulation is not, of course, a final defence against either acts of God or acts of the market, but it can be both a deterrent and a cushion. When Keating took his hands off the steering wheel in the early days of the government he was showing an almost Panglossian faith in a benign future. By definition, deregulation is fine when things are going well. The test comes when things start to go badly, as they did in the mid 80s. Nowadays, even those who were most gung ho about Keating's free market ideas at the time (Max Walsh springs to mind) are cautiously acknowledging that there might be something to be said for some forms of regulation after all. Again, the pre-Keating regime would not necessarily have been able to avoid the present recession, although it would have been able to prevent the credit boom which led to the import boom which led to the balance of payments crisis when led to high interest rates which led to the economic downturn. But regulation would at least have given the government a few more levers to pull.

Despite a balance of payments crisis of mind-boggling proportions and the highest unemployment in 50 years, Keating leaves the Australian economy in better overall shape than he found it, and if the unintended consequences of many of his miscalculations—low inflation—can be made permanent, there will be numerous grounds for long-term optimism. But it can, and should, be argued that much of the underlying economic strength has a lot more to do with the work of John Button, John Dawkins and John Kerin in particular than with the Keating-Treasury model. Nor should the role of Ralph Willis, the now embittered Peter Walsh and Bob Hawke himself be understated. Keating was certainly the most flamboyant performer on the economic stage but, despite some of his more outrageous Placido Domingo-type remarks, he was far from the only one.

But Keating's fan club has seldom been too fussed about the rights and wrongs of his reputation as an economic whizz-kid—or at least a very fast learner. What really turned them on was Keating in Parliament. The importance of Parliament depends very much on where you stand—inside the colosseum or out of it. For political groupies, who include all the members of the House of Representatives, most of the Senators and all the press gallery, Parliament is where governments and their leaders are made and broken. The groupies will tell you that every successful prime minister achieved his position through his dominance on the floor of the chamber. The failures fell in the same arena.

This goes a long way to explaining why Keating commands such widespread adulation in the media because there is no doubt that Keating is the dominant parliamentarian of his time. There have been many who have been wittier, more plausible, more eloquent. It is unlikely that there has ever been one who attacked with greater ferocity. The torrents of insults Keating directs across the floor of the House simultaneously demolish his opponents and inspire his followers. Keating has made the Parliament theatre of cruelty his own.

The problem is that, while his performances are rapturously applauded by the people he likes to call the af-



ficionados, outsiders—which means the voting public—find them arrogant, bumptious, crude and generally distasteful. This did not matter quite so much when all but the spectators in the public galleries were shielded from the full impact of Keating in his natural habitat. In print, or even on radio, the screams of abuse could be tolerated, if not altogether accepted. But in living colour on the evening television news, Keating is definitely not suitable for children nor, indeed, for most adults. Much of Keating's unpopularity stems from the perception that he is a foul-mouthed bully. The World's Greatest Parliamentarian may be honoured in his own Caucus room, but in the wider electorate he is seen as something to be disposed of with surgical gloves and tongs.

And yet, despite his record, despite his public manner, Keating retains a certain credibility. Clearly, he is not the only one who believes his own publicity about his own omniscience. Despite the obvious fact that almost all of Keating's economic predictions have been absurdly optimistic, and many have been just plain wrong, people still tend to think that Keating knows what he is about—that what happens is a result of deliberate policy.

They also tend to believe Keating when he brags that he is the government's powerhouse, its dynamo, its brains and muscle.

As has already been noted, this is something of an exaggeration but, because Keating has marketed himself so aggressively, his wider audience is prepared to give him personally most of the credit and most of the blame for the state of the nation. At present, of course, it is almost all blame. Although mightily disillusioned with just about everyone even vaguely connected with mainstream politics, the voters are still prepared to admit grudgingly that perhaps it is not all Hawke's fault. It can't be, because it is all Keating's fault. Popularity is, of course, not everything. It may even be the last refuge of a political scoundrel. But Keating lacks even that last refuge.

His place in Labor history as the iconoclast who broke down a century of tradition is assured. Whether he ends up as the World's Greatest Leader (or Couldhavebeen Leader) or the World's Greatest Aberration is an altogether more intriguing question.

MUNGO MacCALLUM stood inside the colosseum for many years as a member of the parliamentary press gallery.

Slovenian Spring

In Ljubljana, in the north-west corner of Yugoslavia, the business day begins promptly at 8.30. In the crisp alpine air, the Slovenian republic's capital city feels more like Austria than the northern frontier of the south slavs.

For centuries the region that now has borders with Austria, Hungary, Italy and Croatia lived contentedly under Hapsburg rule. Today the diminutive republic of two million people has its sights set on 'joining Europe again', this time as a sovereign state divorced from the Yugoslav federation.

Along the tranquil waters of the Ljubljanica River the Slovenes, twice as affluent as most other Yugoslavs, browse nonchalantly through the city's tiny ski shops and Italian clothing stores. The business-as-usual tempo in Ljubljana betrays no sign of the turmoil that is ripping apart the Yugoslav federation. Yet the maverick republic's dash toward independence is an integral part of the country's crisis. On June 23 Slovenia formally seceded from Yugoslavia. In theory, Slovenia's declaration will establish it as the first new nation-state in the post-war European order.

Unlike Serbia or Croatia, Slovenia lacks even a brief period of national independence. Next to the open-air market, the original Roman city wall marks the settlement that was overrun by westward fleeing Slavs in the seventh century. Not until the 1918 Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were the Slovenes members of a modern state. Serbia's heavy-handed bid to dominate the kingdom led to its collapse, as well as a distrust of Serb ambitions that persists today.

Over the last decade, Slovenia's liberal policies pulled the Slovenes ever further away from Yugoslavia's deteriorating consensus. After a federal crackdown on communist party reformers in the 70s, the Slovenes responded from below. During the 'Slovenian Spring' of the late 80s, a thriving civil society here encompassed a plethora of social movements, from gay and feminist

groups to a punk scene that rivalled anything in West Berlin.

The initial goal of the 'new social movements' was not to wrest power from the regime. Along the lines of Solidarity in Poland, the groups first sought to expand the public space outside the political power structures. A fiercely critical press also flourished with the grudging tolerance of the republican government. Before long, Slovenia's wayward path brought it under heavy fire from the hardline federal powers. Civil society and the republic's leaders quickly realised that in Belgrade they faced an enemy much greater than one another.

In Slovenia's March 1990 elections, the first multiparty vote in post-war Yugoslavia, the Slovenes put the social movements into office and thanked the president of the by-then reformed socialist party, Milan Kucan, with the post of President of Slovenia. The movement coalition, called the Democratic-United Opposition of Slovenia (DEMOS), spanned nascent political ideologies from greens to Christian nationalists. The Movement for Religious Rights transformed itself into the Christian Democratic Party, and its leader became Prime Minister. Peace activist Janez Jansa took the post of Defence Minister and his friend Igor Bavcar, founder of the Protection of Human Rights Council, was named Interior Minister.

The elections put an abrupt end to the Slovenian Spring. Gradually at first, and then with abandon, the priority of independence subsumed the legacy of grassroots democracy. Jansa, the architect of a central European demilitarised zone during his dissident days, has presided over the republic's full-speed ahead militarisation, including plans for mandatory military duty in the future Slovenian forces. Bavcar now dutifully enforces

new laws that have tightened the borders and restricted immigration. The media has decried government tampering with the press as a throw-back to the 'ideological single-mindedness' of the party state.

Graffiti in the busy pedestrian lanes of Ljubljana's mediaeval old town points the way to the Centre for Peace and Non-Violence. A narrow stairway behind the Yves Saint-Laurent boutique leads to the office where Sasha Gazdik and his colleagues work. They and the handful of other veteran oppositionists not in parliament agree that political discourse today pales next to that of a few years ago.

"Since the movement leaders came to power, civil society has evaporated," says the 28-year old Gazdik, his cluttered desk surrounded by anti-nuclear and peace posters in a dozen languages. "The state is behaving like states everywhere else. It has even stooped to manipulating ethnocentrism for its own ends."

Jansa's defection was a particularly hard blow for his former co-workers. New taxes have been levied to pay for arming the military and conscientious objector status has been restricted. The logic: every other independent state has its own army.

Almost to a person, the Slovenes back some form of independence for the republic. Last year the newly-elected government first advocated a loose, reworked confederation of states in Yugoslavia. But as the federal powers dug in their heels against change and violence between Serbia and Croatia escalated, the Slovenes moved increasingly toward their own solution.

Critics argue that Slovenia, motivated above all by financial self-interest, only used the confederation idea to buy time for a full break with the other republics. The Slovenes have long griped about their funding of the impoverished south, despite huge export surpluses in trade with the other republics. Indeed Ljubljana's politicians took precious little effort to strike a deal with Belgrade before they announced plans for unilateral secession.

Still, even at top levels, the exact meaning of full independence for Slovenia is not at all clear. "We're not going to leave Yugoslavia like someone who has set the house on fire," says Kucan. "But the Yugoslavian state has already collapsed and our separation is definite. First, we'll become independent and then we'll talk about future structures for a new Yugoslavia."

Over the past year parliament has granted Slovenian laws precedence over federal statutes, cut payments to the federal budget and, most recently, empowered the republic to take full control over military affairs. In the six months since the referendum on independence, the government has built itself a nearly complete state apparatus, from foreign emissaries to plans for a Slovenian currency.

Though the Slovenes plough ahead undaunted, their simple declaration of sovereignty does not entitle them to the status of Europe's newest nation-state. Institutions and governments, from the European Community to the White House, insist that they will not recognise an independent Slovenia. The federal Yugoslav government charges that Slovenia's moves are illegal and, more than once, the army has flexed its muscles in the republic to show that its patience is at an end. As long as the Yugoslav army stands in Slovenia and Yugoslav customs officers at the borders, Slovenia's declaration remains largely symbolic.

The Slovenes have tactically hedged their bets of late, calling the process one of 'disassociation' rather than 'immediate succession'. Economically, the export-oriented economy desperately needs the internal Yugoslav markets to peddle its goods.

Slovenia hopes above all to remain part of the Yugoslav common market, explains Mitja Otorepec, Deputy Secretary of the Slovenia Chamber of Economy. "If we could strike a deal on trade and the division of the debt, then we wouldn't have any serious problems going it alone. But that won't be easy.

With less than a tenth of Yugoslavia's population, the Slovenian economy accounts for 20% of gross domestic product and a third of total exports. While Slovenia's economic strength is unparalleled among the former communist countries, many of its industries would certainly buckle under the full rigor of Western competition. Slovenian firms are already lining up to declare bankruptcy, fuelling unemployment which reached 5.5% this year from only 1.8% in 1990.

The republic's free market transition has only compounded the effects of Yugoslavia's economic nose-dive. Slovenia's industrial production plunged over 10% during the first three months of 1991, still considerably less than the 20-30% drop throughout Yugoslavia. But, argues Otorepec, even tougher free market measures are needed to facilitate Slovenia's integration into Western Europe. "If we want to be independent, we will pay a certain price," says the young economist. "That price is a lower living standard, at least for now."

The Slovenes are also in for a nasty fight over the country's foreign and external debt. Even by Slovenia's very modest estimates, its \$1.8 billion share of Yugoslavia's foreign debt and \$2 billion portion of internal debt is a staggering per capita average for the nation.

On every level, developments in Slovenia look tame compared to those throughout the rest of Yugoslavia. Yet here, too, the conservatism implicit in the search for an ambiguous national identity has made its mark. One of the state presidency's first acts was to declare an amnesty for all Slovenes who collaborated with the Axis powers in World War Two. Observers suspect that the republic's largely rural, Catholic population will eventually settle on a rightwing form of Christian Democracy for Slovenia.

Despite Slovenia's virtual ethnic homogeneity, 'guest workers' from the south constitute 15-20% of the workforce. The chauvinism that had de facto relegated Albanians, Macedonians and Muslims to second-class citizens in the past has intensified. Guest workers living in Slovenia, for example, were barred from the republic's referendum on independence last year.

In the 15-minute walk across Ljubljana, one senses that as a nation-state Slovenia's cosy charm would take the form of a claustrophobic provincialism. Although even oppositionists see no viable alternative to independence at this point, critics such as Ervin-Hladnik-Milharic, editor of the outspoken weekly Mladina, are sceptical. "The serious political problems that Slovenia is tackling are just too much for a region," he says.

Western European politicians are acutely aware of the magnitude of Slovenia's decision. Once Slovenia exits the Yugoslav federation there will be nothing to stop Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia from following suit. Nothing, that is, but the federal army and civil war. In central and eastern Europe, Slovenia's precedent could well spark a chain reaction in Slovakia, Silesia, Transylvania and beyond. Brussels eurocrats admit that their worry is not Yugoslavia or central Europe at all, but the hundreds of millions of refugees that nationalist wars in the Soviet Union would send west.

The international community's rebukes have not so much as turned the Slovenes' heads. Should worse come to worst, say some, Slovenia will simply join Austria.

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