

AMNESTY PROPOSAL FOR “THE FOUR”

"I see the solution to this problem in the context of solving the common Yugoslav problem, as the start of a lessening of the political tension in the country."

(From my introduction to the debate at a meeting of the Yugoslav Presidency on 31 May 1989.)

One of the more important issues that had attracted the attention of the Slovene public in the past year was the trial by military tribunal in Ljubljana of three journalists and a soldier suspected of leaking a military document to the media. Collectively, they were known as “the Four”. It was clear that I needed to take some action in this matter. I tried several times to speak to General Kadijević, to convince him that even for the military it would be better to abandon the trial; that the JNA would gain credibility if it were to do so. But Kadijević was inflexible, continually raising the excuse of the independence of the military's judicial system. I tried to convince the members of the Presidency individually in informal talks to grant an amnesty for the Four. But the Serbian representatives in particular refused categorically. Later, I was often to have similar

conversations and confrontations with the JNA. I tried to make them understand that they, too, had to adapt to the process of democratisation. Why could they not make some movement in this direction? But they remained steadfast, completely inflexible. And this fuelled a growing aversion to the JNA within the Yugoslav republics, particularly Slovenia. The gap was widening and becoming less manageable. The trial of the Four by a military tribunal in Ljubljana caused a great stir. It was generally considered to be a political trial directed against Slovenia. This was the aspect that generated ill-feeling towards the federation and particularly towards the JNA. When I took over as President of the Presidency this, along with Kosovo, was probably the main issue of contention. I tried to make the members of the Presidency and the generals understand that resolving this question – releasing the Four – could greatly reduce the tension between Slovenia and the federation. They could put it into the context of easing the tensions between Yugoslavia's nationalities and, by simultaneously establishing a democratic dialogue in Kosovo, could take a great step towards achieving the desired consolidation of the situation. But they didn't want to. The Serbs didn't want to. The generals didn't want to. When the causes are being sought for the tragic events that were to follow, they should be sought in these decisions and in the consequences of such decisions. The consequences were a deterioration of relations, increasing mistrust and a continuing decline in the credibility of the federation and the JNA. I warned them then where it was leading. I called a special meeting of the Presidency on 31 May 1989 to discuss an amnesty for the Four. I also invited Janez Stanovnik, the President of the Slovene Presidency, and two of the members, Majda Gaspari and Andrej Marinc. I made clear why an amnesty for the Four would ease tensions between Slovenia and the federation, so too did Stanovnik and the other members. Stanovnik implored the Presidency and the generals: "If you do not listen to us now, next time you will be talking to separatists." But to no avail. General Kadijević was resolutely opposed; so were Jović, Bučin and Zelenović. And the others fell into line. I put the whole thing once again to a formal session of the Presidency on 21 June 1989, but when it came to the vote I was on my own. All the warnings that this decision would push Slovenia away from the federation fell on deaf ears. But by then this was perhaps already what some wanted to achieve. With

these manoeuvres they were forcing the Slovenes to take the separatist plunge. And this furnished them with the alibi they needed to enact their ideas.

I did not give in then, though. I continued to carry out my programme of measures. Many struggles lay ahead and we could not allow one lost battle to signal capitulation in our fight for a democratic and peaceful transition of Yugoslavia.