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Original scientific paper

Voices of Crisis: Radio Študent and the Political Events in Yugoslavia in the Late 1980s and Early 1990s

In the late 1980s, a small, independent, alternative radio station in Ljubljana unexpectedly became one of the principal actors in a sequence of political events, which catalysed mass protests and contributed to an ongoing political crisis. These events aided the formation of social movements and strong political figures who remained influential within local politics for the next thirty years. Slovenian media promptly reported the news in the wake of the ongoing political transformations and liberal-democratic reforms, but while mainstream media continued to report on foreign affairs, local issues, workers' strikes, inflation, and protests of doctors and students, it was Radio Študent that undisputedly overshadowed the conventional news with its reporting on the JBTZ affair, through which the radio became an under-recognised agent of change. Through archival records, this paper investigates the actual substance behind the radio voices and archival content that produced “chaos” in the Slovenian and Yugoslav political ether. By analysing radio broadcasts, meeting summaries, letters, and other related content, we investigate the deeper extent and report insight into the key political event at the time. Additionally, we follow one of the stages in the development and construction of the autonomous and progressive orientation of the radio itself, which remains topical to this day.

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KEYWORDS:

Radio Študent, 1980s, alternative media, political crisis, JBTZ, Slovenia, Yugoslavia

Media triggers and radio signals of political transformation

This article based on archival research, historiographically investigates an in-so-far marginally treated political and cultural actor in times of pivotal political transformation. Its key intention is to expand and deepen the understanding of the development and role of the always-mentioned but rarely analysed Radio Študent, framed within political events “from below” at the end of the 1980s. Ljubljana’s Radio Študent is usually briefly noted in historiographic works, sectioned under “alternative culture” and thus positioned within the bounds of cultural history, predominantly as youth media. Thus, its role has been mostly observed through its contribution to the alternative student and protest scenes in the late 1960s and 1970s, whilst the subsequent decades have been subjected to compressed historiographical analysis, with some relevant accounts regarding the 1980s in times of the JBTZ (Janša, Borštner, Tasić, Zavrl) affair, when it achieved its peak popularity.¹

This article extends existing research and gives fresh insight into this specific case within contemporary political history. It does so by detailing the content and character of the radio not only as an alternative to mainstream media but also as a political actor “from below” – on par with some other, historiographically more represented media outlets of that era (usually printed in form, i.e. Mladina magazine).² As Mladina magazine is well-researched, this article focuses on Radio Študent only, intending to achieve two objectives. Firstly, to outline a trajectory in media and political history that has largely remained underexplored and underrepresented beyond Slovenian historiography. Second, it seeks to more clearly situate Radio Študent within the broader context of contemporary intellectual, cultural, and political history “from below.” The article further reframes and interrogates the dominant narrative of alternative/independent media as a counter-actor only, and seeks to clarify nuances of the meaning that writers and editors gave to a specific political development (the JBTZ affair).

It explores how the radio authors and desks balanced styles of reporting, programmatic and political decisions, irony, daring provocation, and playfulness, and how this balance evolved. Indeed, since 1969 the radio had “promoted the youth subculture scene, rock’n’roll and, since the late seventies – in times of “structural, socioeconomic and demographic changes,”³ “the

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¹ Marko Doles and Ali Žerdin, Radio Študent – Stopinje v prahu, 16. 10. 2023, <https://radiostudent.si/druzba/stopinje-v-prahu/ali-zerdin>.

² Mladina magazine was at the time an official magazine of the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia (ZSMS), but was well-read in other Yugoslav geographies as well, especially in Croatia. By opening the door to new social movements, ZSMS had a significant impact on the further political development of Slovenia. In the late 1980s, criticism targeted long-standing political and military leaders unaccustomed to media scrutiny. Mladina pioneered provocative journalism; each confiscation or ban on its content at the time only boosted its circulation. ZSMS, with Mladina as its newsletter, thus could not be considered a supporter of the governing regime. More in: Aleš Gabrič, “Slovenska kulturnopolitična razhajanja med kulturno ustvarjalnostjo in politično akcijo 1980–1987,” *Zgodovinski časopis* 56, no. 1/2, (2002): 199–221.

³ Rory Archer and Goran Musić, “The Belgrade Working Class from Tito to Milošević. New geographies of poverty and evolving expressions of grievances in an era of crisis, 1979–1986,” *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest* 50, no. 1 (2019): 2.

punk movement,⁴ and in the 1980s, it was a “body of civil society.”⁵ Through an exploration of the diversity and depth of critical frameworks nurtured within the station’s reporting on the JBTZ affair, this study reveals how amidst the turbulence of the 1980s, Radio Študent manufactured and coached an independent and progressive identity.

By solidifying its role as a critical media outlet and cultivating an autonomous narrative, it also avoided being a mere mouthpiece for the nascent opposition – not always successfully, especially amidst so-called watershed events that signified upcoming societal transformations or were even themselves considered ignitors of profound sociopolitical changes. These events can range from protests up to a total upheaval, but even a march can change the course of historic trajectories and destinies.⁶ But what about the role of a radio show in such big and small *cause célèbre* events? A careful dissection of lesser-known political events or efforts is always welcome to unveil intricacies and subtler alchemies of political agency, mobilizing from below, and the effects of collective political consciousness and action.⁷ The 1980s came the mainstreaming of economic and political crises,⁸ a series of reforms,⁹ as well as seismic paradigm shifts in societal consciousness. Yugoslavia by all means was not an exception: it too has seen its share¹⁰ of “pivotal” and “prophetic”¹¹ harbingers of transformative change,¹² dissolution, and rupture.¹³ However, beyond the “flux of relatively frequent political, economic and constitutional changes,”¹⁴ more is left to explore the real impacts and side-effects of key political processes within the fabric of society at the time.¹⁵

⁴ Gabrič. “Slovenska kulturnopolitična razhajanja,” 201.

⁵ “Igor Vidmar in Ali Žerdin o izročilu Radia Študent,” *Delo*, 24. 10. 2013, YouTube, 00:12:26, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNmexDqVxDk>.

⁶ Irfan Habib, “Civil Disobedience 1930–31,” *Social Scientist* 25, no. 9/10 (1997): 43–66.

⁷ Thomas Weber, *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Gandhi’s March to Dandi* (India: Harper Collins, 1998).

⁸ As Slovene historian Božo Repe asserts, the word crisis was not used until the mid-1980s. In his book *Yugoslav society in crisis*, published in 1985, Croatian economist Branko Horvat stated unequivocally that “the political system has become the main obstacle to economic and social development” (at the same time that some Slovenian and other economists also called the situation a crisis and simultaneously advocated the introduction of a market economy). This statement sparked strong reactions at the time. More in Božo Repe, “Slovenci v osemdesetih letih,” *Zgodovinski časopis* 54, 2 (2000): 237. Igor Duda completes this picture, asserting that Yugoslav politicians preferred to phrase the crisis as “a complex situation” at least until 1982. More in Igor Duda, *Pronađeno blagostanje Svakodnevní život i potrošačka kultura u Hrvatskoj 1970-ih i 1980-ih* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2010), 30.

⁹ Dejan Jović, *Uvod u Jugoslaviju*, (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2023), 278.

¹⁰ Archer and Musić, “The Belgrade Working Class from Tito to Milošević,” 53–79.

¹¹ The death of Josip Broz Tito is considered such an event.

¹² For example “Hrvatsko proljeće” from the 1970s.

¹³ Such are the SANU Memorandum (Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts) from 1986, the poster scandal of 1987, the speech of Slobodan Milošević from the same year, the alternative constitution proposals, Slovenian May Declaration, etc.

¹⁴ Rory Archer, Igor Duda, and Paul Stubbs. *Social inequalities and discontent in Yugoslav socialism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), 4.

¹⁵ As political scientist Dejan Jović suggests, such are the localization, autarky and disintegration processes. More in: Jović, *Uvod u Jugoslaviju*, 272. Concretized events of the kind are the change of political generations in 1984, the splits within the LCY, the Litostroj strikes, the formation of the Slovenian peasant union, the Vojvodina parliament

A few quintessential examples of these intricate political processes occurred in the late 1980s in Slovenia. For example, when, for one reason or another, both the State Security Service and the Slovenian political elite assessed that *social movements* were incomparably more relevant¹⁶ than the fervent calls for independence and democratization in the Articles for the Slovenian National Program, published in the 57th number of *Nova revija*.¹⁷ True, everyday life in the late 1980s was loaded with calls for democratization, accompanied and intensified by various forms of political opposition,¹⁸ opposition to centralism, the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA),¹⁹ and the like. Among the precipitants of these demonstrations were prominent political detentions. In Slovenia, these arrests were nicknamed "the JBTZ affair," often cited as a key catalyst for the Slovenian Spring.²⁰ Even in the case of any uncertainty or contestation of this status, the JBTZ affair undeniably provoked a substantial societal response. In the framework of historicizing the present,²¹ the historical "impact, novelty, memory, relevance."²² and intricacies surrounding the affair have already been exhaustively explored through numerous articles, books, memoirs, and televised documentaries. Many of these narratives were crafted and endorsed by the key protagonists themselves, significantly contributing to the enduring resonance of these events within the annals of Slovenian history. This article thus abstains from any further dissection of the affair and uses a selection of literature and archival documents that identify the content (through articles, announcements, and reports) transmitted on-air during the initial summer months of the JBTZ affair. It is nevertheless imperative to sketch a concise outline of the pivotal circumstances of the case.

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replacement, spiking inflation, debt, continuation of the Kosovo protests against inequality, complications of the delegation and self-management system, centralization efforts, etc.

¹⁶ "Nova revija defined itself as an elite intellectual group, while the youth subculture was understood as part of a mass culture." Grega Repovž, "Ali H. Žerdin o družbenih gibanjih v osemdesetih. Kaj hočemo, nismo vedeli. Česa nočemo, pa," interview, *Sobotna priloga, Delo*, April 22, 2000, <http://www.gape.org/gapes/prispevki/ali.htm>.

¹⁷ Značilnosti novih družbenih gibanj v Sloveniji, Republiški sekretariat za notranje zadeve, oddelek za analitično raziskovanje, Ljubljana, junij 1986, Arhiv Sove in Repe, "Slovenci v osemdesetih letih," 259.

¹⁸ STA, Pregled dogodkov v Sloveniji in mednarodne dejavnosti Slovenije v ponedeljek, 20. 11. 1995.

¹⁹ At the beginning of the 1980s, the Army decided that high school graduates would join the Army, but not college graduates, which wasn't well-received among many.

²⁰ One of the four arrested in the JBTZ affair was Franci Zavrl, ex editor of the politics desk at Radio Študent and chief editor until his departure from Radio Študent for Mladina newspaper in 1986. In an interview later on he stated, that "for two springs, in 1988 and 1989, we supported each other quite well, admittedly due to "higher interests", and together we brought down the previous regime. For Mladina it was more about democracy, for Nova revija about the Slovenian state, we put both together into a realizable story." More in "Noč dolgih nožev," *Mladina* 19, 16. 5. 2008, <https://www.mladina.si/43471/noc-dolgih-nozev/>.

²¹ Dafna Goor, Anat Keinan, and Nailya Ordabayeva, "Historizing the present: Research agenda and implications for consumer behavior," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 00 (2024), 1-23.

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

Turning points: the arrests that sparked the affair

In the early morning hours on May 31, 1988, members of the State Security Service and the Ljubljana criminal police, in agreement with the military security service, arrested Janez Janša and Ivan Borštner. They handed over the arrestees to the investigating authorities of the JNA. This act came to pass as the initial incident of the JBTZ affair that unfolded during the spring of 1988 and was followed by legal actions in front of a military tribunal. It all began with a house investigation at the computer company Mikro Ada offices, sometime between 7:15 and 11:45 AM,²³ when the politically ambitious employee Janez Janša, was apprehended. Along with three other men from varied backgrounds – military, journalistic, and civilian – he was accused of possessing and disseminating Document no. 5044/3,²⁴ deemed a military secret.²⁵ The discovery of the classified document in Mikro Ada was thus the official reason for the arrests. In detail, it was non-commissioned officer Ivan Borštner, who was accused of having forwarded the document to the editorial office of Mladina magazine, which is why military investigative authorities apprehended him too,²⁶ merely within an hour of Janša's arrest. Four days later, on June 4, 1988, David Tasić – having been accused of receiving the document from Borštner – was arrested for divulging military secrets. The last letter in the JBTZ acronym (coined from the last name initials of the arrested) was added with the accusations against one Franci Zavrl, of revealing a military secret.

Zavrl, editor of Mladina magazine at the time, contradicted the accusations against him in a letter to the court,²⁷ and avoided arrest by timely signing himself up in a psychiatric facility. This sequence of events made it appear to the Slovenian public, that the military elite had not only begun to shut down its political critics but intervened in civilian life. The arrests also had long-term effects. The drama helped the rise of political "cults" of certain figures central to the affair. More importantly, some of them remained active, influential, and prominent within the highest echelons of state power for the next 30 years, up until today.²⁸ These highly publicized arrests between May

²³ SI AS 1289, Izjava urednikov Časopisa za kritiko znanosti – signed Bojan Korsika, chief editor and Igor Bavčar managing editor. Radio Študent, 1. 6. 1988.

²⁴ There were allegations at the time that the document was proof of the Yugoslav People's Army's planned coup d'état, planned arrests and subsequent takeover of power. The document in question was said to have been related to Milan Kučan's speech transcript from the Federal Presidency discussions from March 29, and the "focus had been on the situation in Slovenia, with demands for action, including arrests, which Kučan strongly opposed." More in Repe, "Slovenci v osemdesetih letih," 417-18.

²⁵ SI AS 1931, 1147, Obrazložitev postopkov proti Janezi Janši, Ivanu Borštnerju in Davidu Tasiću, Ljubljana, Radio Študent, 6. 6. 1988.

²⁶ Ali Žerdin, Konec Ertlove partije: Ali je bila afera JBTZ posledica policijskega komplota proti Tomažu Ertlu?, *Mladina* no. 18/11. May 1990, 30.

²⁷ SI AS 1159, Franci Zavrl, Center za mentalno zdravje, Poljanski nasip 58, Letter to the Military court in Ljubljana: objection against the indictment of the military prosecutor's office dated 6/29/1988, Ljubljana, 7. 7. 1988.

²⁸ The "Committee for the Defense of Human Rights," which organized protests regarding the JBTZ trial, was led by Igor Bavčar. Subsequently, as the first Slovenian Interior Minister, Bavčar oversaw the process known as the erasure, affecting 25,671 former Yugoslav citizens. This process involved ensuring that as few people as possible retained their permanent residence, thereby stripping them of various civil and human rights. In 2023, Bavčar was convicted of

31st and June 5th ignited widespread protests, accompanied by other heated demonstrations, i.e. "against the repression in Kosovo, [as well as] against the police and the Yugoslav Army, to show solidarity with the workers."²⁹ These events were unfolding at a tumultuous time, concurrently with social movements' calls for peace, environment, gender and human rights.³⁰ Prominent figures of those movements perceived the late 1980s as a time when "writers, media, artists and citizens in general, protested against the centralised and militarised regime directed from Belgrade."³¹ Belgrade and the JNA perceived the nascent Slovenian opposition and Slovenian political leadership as "one and the same" as ex-Slovenian president Milan Kučan later reflected the tumultuous times.³²

He added to this perception that "the Yugoslav Army perceived any demand toward the Slovenian political leadership to liquidate the opposition as tantamount to the self-liquidation of the political leadership itself, and such actions would thus halt the democratic processes in Slovenia, whose tendencies were considered separatist at the time."³³ In any case, both Belgrade and Ljubljana were raising difficult questions about the nature of the Yugoslav federation,³⁴ and the type of developmental models for the future.³⁵ The arrests that came at that time also had a significant secondary effect: the prompt establishment of the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights (in continuation: Committee) – proclaimed the "strongest institution of civil society in the eighties."³⁶ It served as a conduit for myriad grassroots movements and initiatives, and gained resolute support in the

moneylaunderingrelatedtotheresaleofsharesfromtheSlovenianholdingcompanyIstrabenz. Another notable figure is Janez Janša, who was an occasional publicist for the weekly publication *Mladina* at the time. Since his rise to prominence during the affair remains an active political figure as of 2024 and has been involved in several political controversies since Slovenia's independence. Franci Zavrl, another influential individual and the editor of *Mladina* during the affair, is suspected of being Janša's accomplice in some post-independence business deals through his Luxembourg-registered company. Zavrl also led one of Slovenia's largest lobbying and public relations firms. More in Lenart J. Kučić, "Lastništvo tednika *Mladina*," *Pod Črto* - research conducted within the project "Hidden interests of media owners," (Principal investigator: Taja Topolovec), https://podcrto.si/app/uploads/2019/07/Mladina_lastnis%CC%8Ctvo_predogled_FINAL_V3.pdf.

²⁹ Gal Kirn, "Slovene independence never happened, or how to reconstruct the historical mode of politics?," *Monitor ISH* 9, No. 2 (2007): 91-108.

³⁰ ARS-1931, 2313, UA-1986, Značilnosti novih družbenih gibanj v SR Sloveniji, Ljubljana, 1986.

³¹ Marko Hren, *Antologija Metelkova, zvezek I, Kako nam ni uspelo preprečiti vojne in ...kako lahko preprečimo...?!* (self-published October 2003), 234.

³² Chairman of the Presidency of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia at the time.

³³ Božo Repe, *Milan Kučan - Prvi predsednik Slovenije* (Sarajevo: Udruženje za modernu istoriju, 2019), 152.

³⁴ Whereas guest authors at Radio Študent was raising questions of Slovenian and Serbian nationalism, for example in a broadcast from 1. 8. 1988 titled plainly "Slovenian and Serbian nationals" authored by Tomaž Mastnak, at the time involved in the Committee. SI AS 1159, Tomaž Mastnak, Slovenski in srbski nacionalizem, Radio Študent, 1. 8. 1988.

³⁵ In 1987 and 1988, the question of political organization and the question of Slovenia's position in Yugoslavia converged on the problem of constitutional organization. The Constitution became the main field of competition between the socialist authorities and a section of the critical professional public. More in Repe, "Slovinci v osemdesetih letih," 242-43, 420.

³⁶ Repe, *Milan Kučan*, 150.

League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia (ZSMS).³⁷ Some historians³⁸ (including state institutions) attributed it with a crucial role in Slovenian independence processes:

“The event that decided the modern history of Slovenia. If there wasn’t a large Human Rights Committee and a protest crowd in front of the military court in Roška, Slovenia wouldn’t have had free elections in 1990 [...] The mass mobilization of like-minded people in the summer of 1988 promoted the democratization of Slovenian society and heralded the beginning of the imminent end of both the system and the Yugoslav state, which, due to numerous never-solved problems, was rapidly coming to its end.”³⁹

On a lesser scale, the JBTZ affair indeed triggered the Slovenian public into protests as early as June 21st of the same year. Protesters, organized by the Committee vehemently decried the arrests and trials as an overreach of federal power and a violation of human rights. The Socialist Alliance of the Working People (SAWP),⁴⁰ as the voluntary democratic front of working people and bearer of the activities of the most widely united socialist-oriented citizens, responded with calls for tolerant and civilized behaviour on all sides. Subsequent historiographic interpretations mostly underscored the crux for public discontent – the suppression of political dissent and the infringement on press liberties, swiftly evolving into public statements for democratization and sovereignty. The detainees were indeed subjected to a military trial,⁴¹ held in Serbian as the customary language in the Army, contravening Article 212, paragraph 3 of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, according to which everyone had the right to use their language and script in legal proceedings.⁴²

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Nonetheless, the trial continued and culminated in corresponding prison sentences. At the end of July, the military court passed its verdict (as Radio Študent would later ironically claim “In the name of the People”) Ivan Borštner, an ensign at the JNA, received a four-year sentence for the accession, removal, and transmission of the document. Janša, at the time the publicist of Mladina magazine, received 18 months in prison, whereas Tasić and Zavrl, who acted as Mladina’s internal affairs editor and chief editor

³⁷ Marko Zajc, “Pragmatični, skeptični, drobnjakarski: ideološka in programska izhodišča ZSMS/ZSMS v letih 1989–90,” in *Narod – politika – država: Idejnopolični značaj strank na Slovenskem od konca 19. do začetka 21. Stoletja*, Vpogledi 23, eds. Jurij Perovšek and Mojca Šorn (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2020), 244.

³⁸ Historian Peter Vodopivec, who himself was politically active during the 1980s, considered that in the midst of civil society grievances at the time, the Committee united diverse actors into a political opposition, “the likes of which had not been seen in Slovenia since the Second World War.” In Jasna Fischer et. al. *Slovenska novejša zgodovina 1848–1992* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga – Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2006).

³⁹ Accompanying text for the photographic exhibition “Argumentirano in civilizirano/1988,” on the 30th anniversary of the JBTZ affair, *National museum of contemporary history*, 22. 05. 2018, <https://www.muzej-nz.si/si/razstave/arhiv-razstav/967-argumentirano-in-civilizirano-1988>.

⁴⁰ Katarina Spehnjak, “Narodni front Jugoslavije (SSRNJ – razvoj, programsko-teorijske osnove i procesi u društvenoj praksi 1945–1983),” *Povijesni prilozi* 3 (1984): 9–82.

⁴¹ ARS-1931, 1147, Ukrepi ONZ zoper Janeza Janšo, 31. 5. 1988, 1.

⁴² Constitution of Socialist Republic of Slovenia, Official Gazette of SRS, no. 6–44. 74, 28. 2. 1974, [https://sl.wikisource.org/wiki/Ustava_Socialisti%C4%8Dne_republike_Slovenije_\(1974\)](https://sl.wikisource.org/wiki/Ustava_Socialisti%C4%8Dne_republike_Slovenije_(1974)).

at the time, received five and six months respectively.⁴³ In mid-October 1988, the Supreme Court in Belgrade confirmed the verdict of the Ljubljana military court, and Tasić's sentence was increased to ten months in prison. As the case returned to Slovenian courts, the four were released sooner than expected.⁴⁴ At the beginning of August 1989, Janša was released on parole, followed by Tasić and Zavrl, while Borštner did not return to serve his sentence in April 1990.

Information mavericks: Mladina and Radio Študent's contributions to the affair

Weekly magazine *Mladina*, founded in 1920,⁴⁵ had garnered significant acclaim for its critical reporting at the time. The witty publication had consistently addressed taboo subjects and championed issues such as freedom of the press, freedom of speech, youth subcultures, environmental concerns, strikes, post-war atrocities, privileges and issues of the political nomenclature, the persecution of conscientious objectors, and the political role of the JNA. Even if it may have had a more benign status in the past, due to its provocative form and content in the 1980s, it had also been confiscated,⁴⁶ pushing further its popularity in the second half of the 1980s with around 50,000 printed copies. It gained additional notoriety at the time of the JBTZ events due to its critical, pacifist, and anti-militarist stances regarding Federal Secretary of Defence Admiral Branko Mamula's involvement in the use of military personnel for personal benefit. The violation of the public's trust via the misuse of authority and corrupt practice that undermined the principles of peace, fairness, and accountability were however even more dominant issues through Mamula's involvement in the (at the time ongoing) Ethiopian-Eritrean war. His arms sales deals, during a time of famine affecting the two nations, lead to his infamous moniker as the "merchant of death."⁴⁷

This traumatic content added to the critical publishing on the JNA, especially in Slovenian media. Contemporaneous analyses conducted by the JNA itself had claimed that there were 50% more articles written about the Army in 1988, as compared to the previous year.⁴⁸ *Mladina*, at the time the official magazine of the youth organisation ZSMS, was running the print media show. The same magazine released the JBTZ affair, thus accelerating the change in the attitude of the Slovenian public toward the federation.⁴⁹

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⁴³ The sentences have primarily altered in length after the the Supreme Military Court in Belgrade confirmed the verdict of the Ljubljana Military Court in October the same year. For Tasić, the sentence was initially extended, for some it was taken into account how much time they had already served in prison.

⁴⁴ Repe, *Milan Kučan*, 151.

⁴⁵ David H. Weaver and Lars Willnat, *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 284.

⁴⁶ Ana Šela and Darko Friš, "Nova revija v primežu Službe državne varnosti. *Annales. Series historia et sociologia*," 27, No. 4 (2017): 825.

⁴⁷ Ilija Tomanić-Trivundža, "Eritreja, moja dežela: Photoreportage and Positive Representation of a Distant Other," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 62, No. 1 (2022): 146-65, here: 148.

⁴⁸ Repe, *Milan Kučan*, 150.

⁴⁹ Patrick Hyder Patterson, "The East is Red: the End of Communism, Slovenian Exceptionalism, and the Independent Journalism of *Mladina*," *East European Politics & Societies* 14, No. 2 (2000): 411-59.

The fact that some of the involved arrestees were contributors or editors to *Mladina* was of some help to the rising popularity of the affair and the magazine. The next step was taken when *Mladina* opened additional space for civil initiatives: it was on June 3, 1988, when the Committee for the Protection of Rights of *Janez Janša* was established precisely within the premises of *Mladina*.⁵⁰

Three days later, when all four letters fell together into the acronym JBTZ, critical groups and individuals formed the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights. Its Charter was signed by members of editorial offices, publishing houses, movements, individuals, societies, and organizations both from Slovenia and abroad.⁵¹ The Committee lobbied for release through a wide range of political, informative, and cultural activities. Later that very same month, it organized a cultural rally in support of the imprisoned in Ljubljana's Congress Square, attended by approximately 25,000 people,⁵² whereas on the first day of the trial, a few dozen people gathered in front of the military court building on Roška street in Ljubljana. Nine days later, at the end of the trial, more than 10,000 people had gathered in front of the court. How was that possible? In an era devoid of mobile phones and online social networks, traditional informative outlets like newspapers and magazines surely held sway.

In a footnote within a biographical volume, historian Božo Repe presents the findings of the analysis, asserting that in the initial months of the affair, Slovenian informative outlets published 1,354 texts concerning the JNA, with over half of these publications comprising commentaries. Printed newspapers such as *Mladina*, however, weren't the sole news disseminators during the affair. A significant number of careful listeners tuned in to the humbly ranged frequency of Radio Študent, a local radio station in Ljubljana, emitting from the student dormitories in the southwest of town. Radio Študent had the media reins of the affair for a while and steered its narrative uniquely. Assertions have been made regarding Radio Študent's pioneering role in expanding the media landscape and fostering an autonomous public sphere (while *Mladina* "later aligned itself with this trajectory during the mid-1980s")⁵³ during the affair. But what kind of radio was it exactly?

⁵⁰ Some authors and actors set the foundation of the Committee at the Mikro Ada offices on Cankarjeva 10B. For example Simon Ošlak, "Totalna revolucija? Boj slovenskega punka pod komunističnim režimom Jugoslavije." <https://unipub.uni-graz.at/obvuqrhs/download/pdf/2340333?originalFilename=true>, 50.

⁵¹ SI AS 1159, PRISTUPAMO Odboru za zaščito ljudskih prava koji je ovih dana osnovan u Ljubljani, Radio Študent, June, 1988.

⁵² Branko Soban, "Križa vpliva tudi na obrambo moč države," *Delo*, 22. 6. 1988, 1-2.

⁵³ The specificity of Slovenia in the Yugoslav and Eastern European area was that alternative youth culture and new social movements played a key role in the democratization process, and that this "alternative" – not "opposition" – included critical theoretical production as an integral part. Asta Vrečko, Tina Malešič, Moderna galerija. More https://www.academia.edu/33375751/THE_EIGHTIES_OSEMDESETA, 14

Chronicling the foundational years of Radio Študent

"Friends of Radio Študent: listen, listen! Radio Študent is broadcasting at 188 meter wavelength."

Radio Študent, May 9, 1969⁵⁴

With these words, Radio Študent commenced its first broadcast. The commencement itself was, however, the result of a longer process of establishing the radio, and of an overall initiative, with somewhat contested origins. One of the Radio Študent websites hosts archived content before 2012. In some of the sites, the radio editorial had publicly disclosed that the initiative to establish the radio in the 1960s originated as a pacifying strategy, approved by official political structures: "The Party believed that creating a radio medium that 'quickly and objectively' informed the student body about current events and issues would quell student unrest at the University of Ljubljana."⁵⁵ Some claims suggest that the idea of a student radio was brought to materialization by the Association of Students of the University of Ljubljana.

Some records attribute a grassroots factor to the radio's creation, through the turbulent events of 1968 in Slovenia.⁵⁶ In any case, the radio transmitted its opening remark in 1969. The differing claims of its origin and establishment have been recently challenged by former chief editor and radio director Tomaž Zaniuk,⁵⁷ in a comprehensive book, exceeding 370 pages. The book serves as an example of public history from below, with contributions from members of a community, establishing a communal memory and helping to ensure the community's survival as well as its revival.⁵⁸

The book, just like the radio itself could be considered an attempt of "community history" to overrun "the slow social processes of official history"⁵⁹ or even erasure from history. From that point on, the Radio Študent community members act(ed) both as community co-creators and guardians of its memory, outlining "the influence Radio Študent had on past cultural, media and political processes in Slovenia,"⁶⁰ but most importantly – the

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⁵⁴ Kulturno uredništvo, "Misliti Radio Študent 1969," *Radio Študent*, 10. 3. 2019, <https://radiostudent.si/kultura/repeticio/misliti-radio-student-1969#>.

⁵⁵ "Splošne informacije/General Information," *Radio Študent*, archived page. <https://old.radiostudent.si/sections.php>.

⁵⁶ Kulturno uredništvo, "Misliti Radio Študent 1969," *Radio Študent*, 10. 3. 2019, <https://radiostudent.si/kultura/repeticio/misliti-radio-student-1969#>

⁵⁷ Tomaž Zaniuk, "Self-managed student radio station," in *Brez nagobčnika: Radio Študent: že od 1969.*, 1st edition, eds. Igor Bašin, Marko Doles, and Tomaž Zaniuk (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2023) 189-91.

⁵⁸ Barbara Franco, "Decentralizing Culture: Public History and Communities," in *Oxford Handbook of Public History*, eds. James B. Gardner and Paula Hamilton (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2022), 13.

⁵⁹ Jožef Muhovič, "Univerza v Ljubljani, Akademija za likovno umetnost in oblikovanje Zgodba o 'velikih' in 'malih' zgodbah in njene etične implikacije v kulturi," in *Zborovanje Slovenskega muzejskega društva Kočevje*, ed. Ida Gnilšak (Ljubljana: Slovensko muzejsko društvo, 2014), 38-39.

⁶⁰ A. P., "Po dolgem zbiranju gradiva izšel zbornik o fenomenu Radia Študent," *RTV Slovenija*. 20. 12. 2023, <https://www.rtvsllo.si/kultura/knjige/po-dolgem-zbiranju-gradiva-izsel-zbornik-o-fenomenu-radia-student/692350>.

meaning of very the radio itself. Interestingly, Zaniuk debunked the myth that the radio was a product of student protests: "... rather the other way around, the preparations for establishing a student radio station as a communication channel contributed to the first student demonstrations after World War II." Zaniuk thus traced the radio's origins to 1966, starting with a small radio club within the Forum organization for study and extracurricular activities and the Union of Student Organizations of People's Technology (ŠOLT). This initiative, he claims, matured and received official approval from the Republican Secretariat for Economy and Federal Administration in 1968. By the end of that year, a founding committee had established a three-hour radio program, culminating in the ceremonial opening on May 9, 1969. Zaniuk's account is corroborated by the statements of Jože Šlander, the Ljubljana Student Organization president at the time, who provided a short description of the process:

"At that time, there was a student radio amateur club under the leadership of Ljubo Dobrečević, who built a transmitter. Then we set up a studio in the basement of the eighth block in the student settlement in Rožna dolina, bought equipment, something was also donated to us by RTV, which finally measured the transmitter, and after receiving approval for broadcasting, we started preparing the program."⁶¹

The 1960s saw sporadic transmission of a three-hour daily program starting at noon.⁶² Immediately after its establishment, Radio Študent became a haven for young, non-conformist intellectuals with steadfast views on contemporary issues.⁶³ It was considered provocative in the seventies as well, mainly because of the musical scenery it offered (progressive rock, free jazz, punk, and later on postpunk & hardcore). The Community of Students of Ljubljana Higher Education Institutions (LVZ) featured as the radio station's official founder in the 1970s, when the radio broadcasted four hours per day and four hours of weekend evenings until midnight, straight from the basement of student dorm no. 8.⁶⁴ Even in its early years it practiced innovative practices, for example including the listeners in the program via phone during airtime, which wasn't the case with other radio stations.

This era of Yugoslavia was also in a way a time of "found prosperity,"⁶⁵ and Radio Študent enjoyed a relatively favourable position compared to print magazines. It formed a "tradition" that included "independence, criticism, innovation, non-conformism, irreverence." As confirmed by ex-editor and journalist at the radio, Igor Vidmar: "... someone would say that was old 'anti-regime journalism,' but it was a deconstruction of ideological assumptions,

⁶¹ Erik Valenčič, "Študent naj bo: 40 let Radia Študent, prvega evropskega neodvisnega radia, skozi oči nekdanjih in zdajšnjih sodelavk in sodelavcev," *Mladina*, 13. 5. 2009, <https://www.mladina.si/47015/student-naj-bo/>

⁶² <https://www.rtv slo.si/kultura/radio-student-ali-pol-stoletja-proaktivne-radioaktivnosti/487570>.

⁶³ Boris Mužević, "Radio Študent in študentsko gibanje," *RTV Slovenija*, 30. 9. 2018, <https://www.rtv slo.si/1968/spomini/radio-student-in-studentsko-gibanje/467043>

⁶⁴ The independent student organization existed until 1974, when it was abolished and merged with the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia to form the ZSMS University Conference. More in Zaniuk, "Self-managed student radio station," 199.

⁶⁵ Duda, *Pronađeno blagostanje*, 394.

context and background of seemingly ordinary information.⁶⁶ Its contributors typically included diverse groups of individuals, including students, activists, artists, scientists, and others who shared a commitment to sociopolitical issues and critical discourse. Often leaning toward progressive, leftist, and countercultural perspectives, the radio commented on topics of social justice, environmentalism, human rights, and political power structures. The station valued independence from commercial interests and tended to topics that were marginalized or overlooked by traditional media, and it helped that it "had such a small reach, like a marginal newsletter that, as such, did not experience any special control."⁶⁷

It may have not had control, but it had monitoring: the State Security Service had estimated that "there are noticeable elements of anarchism, neo-Trotskyism, Western New Left influences, and other ultra-radical ideas. Despite the rudimentary program, the radio's contributions could lead to greater deviations in a certain critical political situation, or influence the mood of wider social strata."⁶⁸ Unsurprisingly, a later Radio Študent jingle addressed this issue provocatively and playfully on air: "On Radio Študent, they are long-haired hippies, punks, metalheads, slackers, arafatkas, leeches, potheads, weirdos, drug addicts, drunks, junkies, zombies, communists, leftists, anarchists, leftist extremists... but the jingles are fine."

Adding to this character in the 1980s, Radio Študent approached political events by opening up more taboos, thus establishing "an immense influence upon the democratization of the Slovene press." This alone was extraordinary considering there were only seven regular employees, about 70 regular contributors, and about 100 occasional authors, speakers, tech crew, and radio DJs. At the time, 20 percent of its finances were covered by various state funds and the university, and 80 percent by broadcasting self-produced advertisements. All the while it maintained its outspoken, independent political image.⁶⁹

Throughout "the provocative 80s"⁷⁰ the radio tackled classical affairs such as education reform, but was also uncompromising toward bodies, procedures, and institutions within the republics and the federal union, especially the JNA. In the years 1988 and 1989, programmatic changes resulted in an extension of its weekly broadcast. Radio Študent also became more theoretical, which was key for the JBTZ affair in 1988, when it peaked in popularity. How did it use its potential of mass media, even if it was a relatively small station? It was the fact that the official info channels didn't report promptly⁷¹ on the JBTZ process at the time.⁷² Radio Študent sought

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⁶⁶ "Igor Vidmar in Ali Žerdin o izročilu Radia Študent," *Delo*, October 24, 2013. YouTube, 00:10:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNmexDqVxDk>.

⁶⁷ Maja Kač, "Radio, ki se je znal odzvati na družbene krize – Radio Študent – nekoč in danes," *RTV Slovenija*, April 21, 2009, <https://www.rtvsl.si/kultura/drugo/radio-ki-se-je-znal-odzvati-na-druzbene-krize/158864>.

⁶⁸ Zaniuk, "Self-managed student radio station," 203.

⁶⁹ SI AS 1159, Undated document. Radio Študent.

⁷⁰ "Nazi punk affair" and "Laibach-Tito-TV affair," among many others.

⁷¹ SI AS 11509, "Letter from Igor Watzak," *Radio Študent*, 24. 7. 1988.

⁷² "Splošne informacije/General Information," *Radio Študent*, archived page. <https://old.radiostudent.si/sections.php>.

to correct this reporting gap, thus arriving at the largest audience in the station's history during that time. Recalling the 1980s, JBTZ affair chronicler Ali Žerdin, stated:

"And with the police taking on the punks, for example, it became a real event...At the end of the seventies, it was Radio Student who started to make a story out of this event. When the 1980s began, however, serious repression by the authorities began to appear against this youth with colourful hairstyles. Repression, which - if we compare it with the JBTZ affair - was much more severe."⁷³

Ex-director of Radio Študent Tomaž Zaniuk had also confirmed that the regime media boycotted reporting on the trial⁷⁴ "and only Radio Študent and Mladina informed the public about what was happening...At that time, the whole of Ljubljana, which was within the reach and audibility of Radio Študent's radiowaves, listened to it because it was the only one offering up-to-date information."⁷⁵ According to Zaniuk and other authors, it reached around half a million listeners instead of the usual 40.000.⁷⁶ But other than reporting, through its participation as a co-founder of the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights of Janez Janša in 1988, it also played a role in groundbreaking political events.

Ali Žerdin was also radio editor-in-chief at the time, and a participant in civil society activities, including the Committee. He characterized the radio reporting at the time as "clever and innovative", praising real-time reporting. Prompt reporting was not the only reason why the radio reached its peak. According to Žerdin, the radio "violated many journalist and reporting dogmas of journalistic work" that exist nowadays: "*We were distinctly biased. We tried to get a statement from the military court prosecutor, but when he didn't give it, we published one-sided information without hesitation.*"⁷⁷ What kind of content and atmosphere did Radio Študent produce back then? How did the radio show authors and editors interpret information during the JBTZ affair, and how did they do it differently?

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Revisiting the archives: Radio Študent and the JBTZ affair

"The event that decided the modern history of Slovenia. If there wasn't a large Human Rights Committee and a protest crowd in front of the military court in Roška, Slovenia wouldn't have had free elections in 1990."⁷⁸

⁷³ Repovž, "Ali H. Žerdin."

⁷⁴ Some of the reporters' criticism broadcasted on Radio Študent aimed at mainstream journalism. Ali Žerdin, for example, protested against cuts of public TV statements in a way that "changed the meaning of the statements, especially regarding the legal system, legality and legitimacy." SI AS 1159, "To je istorijska činjenica, a ne manipulacija," Jocular, Radio Študent, 5. 7. 1988.

⁷⁵ Zaniuk, "Self-managed student radio station," 47.

⁷⁶ Tim Obreza, "Z alternativo čez oblast," *Radio Študent*, 14. 4. 2019, <https://radiostudent.si/kultura/repetitio/z-alternativo-cez-oblast>.

⁷⁷ Jela Krečič, "Medij z glasom, ki se je slišal in je še vedno glasen," *Delo*, 17. 4. 2009, <https://old.delo.si/kultura/medij-z-glasom-ki-se-je-slisal-in-je-se-vedno-glasen.html>.

⁷⁸ "Argumentirano in civilizirano/1988."

To briefly explain those processes at Radio Študent, it is relevant to note that the station, even if small, had a status of exceptional significance. It was a mass media that did not serve merely as a conduit for unreflective entertainment. As Ali Žerdin noted,

“... already in the times of the punk affairs Radio Student showed not only solidarity but also a significant theoretical reflection. Some questions also began to arise: what is wrong with this country; what about freedom of the press; what about freedom of expression. It was a spark that ignited a much wider debate than initially expected.”⁷⁹

At the time, a portion of Radio Študent's activities was financed through various marketing efforts that were nevertheless conventional. For instance, in 1988, the same year as the JBTZ affair, the radio station collaborated with the Republican Committee for Information and Health to design an educational propaganda campaign against AIDS. In addition to these campaigns, the radio's marketing department undertook various projects, ranging from regular prize competitions (such as the Bombola) to advertisements for diverse products and companies. Notably, there was the proposal for Radio Študent to produce the inaugural commercial for the first Slovenian McDonald's. Despite encountering such propositions and recurring financial crises, according to Zaniuk, the radio nevertheless maintained significantly elevated standards of reporting on civil society topics, especially during the 1980s, coinciding with the proliferation of new left paradigms of identity politics in Slovenia.⁸⁰ Authors also often disagreed with the claim that Radio Študent is merely a student radio, not only because of its diverse audience, but also due to the fact that informative and theoretical content was contributed by diverse authors, including common people and well-known publicists.

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The authors, and consequently the radio broadcasts, were original, witty, and insightful from the beginning, and were allowed to operate more freely compared to other media. They took good advantage of this opportunity. Thus, by the end of the 1980s, Radio Študent “followed the trial against Belgrade intellectuals, opposed Article 133 and the imprisonment of Jehovah's Witnesses. It advocated human rights and demilitarization.”⁸¹ When the JBTZ affair commenced on May 31, Radio Študent was the only radio station transmitting the sessions, demonstrations and mass gatherings. Some of the political actors in the affair colloquially confirm even two decades later that Radio Študent's audience at the time was “maybe more broad than the national radio.”⁸²

Such mobilization of critical thinking and expression became a staple of the times and journalists from Radio Študent had arrived to open doors elsewhere in the media world: many extended their careers in Mladina

⁷⁹ Repovž, “Ali H. Žerdin.”

⁸⁰ At the time the financial difficulties threatened to reduce its program by 40%. More in Zaniuk, “Self-managed student radio station,” 48.

⁸¹ Urška Savič, “Novejša mitologija Radia Študent,” *Radio Študent*, 12. 5. 2019, <https://radiostudent.si/kultura/repetitio/novejsa-mitologija-radia-student>.

⁸² “Janez Janša, Interview,” *RTV Slovenija*, broadcast by *Večerni gost*, 22 June 2008.

and other public information channels (television, journals, periodicals, newspapers).⁸³ It was the little risks that counted. For example, at the time before the start of the JBTZ affair, Radio Študent reporters questioned the JNA about the yet unpublished information regarding the abolition of the Ljubljana military area and its subsequent division into military bases, which would connote that the Ljubljana and Maribor sectors would retain the corps commands, while the headquarters of the command would be moved in Zagreb. Part of the affair were Kučan's transcripts from a political session, regarding the possibility of a counter-revolution in Slovenia⁸⁴ and the overall relations between Slovenia and the Army. In addition to questions raised about a possible coup d'état, the JBTZ landscape consisted of issues of political personnel rotations, elections for the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, economic issues and industrial production, financing projects of the JNA and the state, as well as the perceived militarization of society.

"A very suitable situation was at the end of the 1980s, when many people asked themselves the question - What is behind the JBTZ process, what is behind those arrests? We didn't get to the end, the officials didn't remember it, the politicians had nothing to do with it, the judges did their job and the prosecutors only did their job, etc. As if some divine providence is at work, some plan in which innocent politicians and officials are laid, the conspiracy is silent again."⁸⁵

The authorities, as well as Radio Študent itself, made frequent evaluations of the media sector, questioning what the terms truth, half-truth, meta-speech, enemy, democratic freedoms,⁸⁶ signify. Multiple initiatives, media, and organizations demanded release, seeing the arrests as an attempt to instil fear.⁸⁷ Archival documentation frequently highlights instances of criticism of the public information sector, for the delay, superficiality, obedience, and disobedience in reporting. In contrast, the marginal Radio Študent demonstrated its capacities well. Instead of broadcasting commercial content, it frequently broadcasted 25-minute theoretical programs that delve deeply into a single topic or dedicate entire weeks to exploring specific issues. Halfway through 1988, all this energy was focused on the various ongoing and underlying political processes behind the affair. During the editorial mandate of the late 1980s, records of Radio Študent's political info desk stated that "the radio must not opt for any positive political project, and must primarily point out the moments of failure of positivist orientations." Archival records of editorial meetings note that, as an independent media, Radio Študent must "send blows both

⁸³ Even though they were free to experiment and go beyond traditional reporting dogmas, Radio Študent reporters were continuously educating themselves. Early on in the process, on June 8, 1988, Radio Študent received a press release announcing the cancellation of a seminar on investigative journalism, originally scheduled for June 9 and 10 in - Bled, attributing the cancellation to the recent events, noting that most reputable Slovenian journalists involved in the seminar had been tasked with addressing the activities of the Committee.

⁸⁴ SI AS 1159, "O kontrarevoluciji v Sloveniji," *Radio Študent*, 22. 6. 1988.

⁸⁵ Speech of Jožef Školč, 25/11/2003, Slovenian parliamentary corpus (1990-2018) - Si Parl.

⁸⁶ SI AS 1159, "Zakaj oblast potrebuje ekscese, Jocular," *Radio Študent*, 28. 6. 1988.

⁸⁷ SI AS 1159, "Izjava zbora slovenskih kulturnih delavcev," *Radio Študent*, 2. 6. 1988.

to the political left and political right," not the least because "that's the only way it can be successful with students and other young people who are the target audience." Additionally, instead of the classic form of provocation, a performative approach was taken up, along with some programmatic changes. If in the 1980s Radio Študent typically commenced its programming at 1:00 PM, during the trial it began broadcasting at 9:00 AM – four hours earlier than usual.

The initial news of the arrests was made to the audiences with a dramatic program interruption, and an announcement that "Internal affairs authorities had conducted a home and office investigation to secure traces of a criminal act." Promptly, documents marked "urgent" kept pouring in from all sides.⁸⁸ Since the audiences were immediately hooked and letter-writing culture had still been around, Radio Študent announced the postal address where mail could be dropped for the JBTZ detainees. Live mass performances also became the norm. After the June 21st cultural meeting, the Committee and Radio Študent organized a follow-up concert on July 23 in Mostec Park, attracting a crowd of 15,000. It commenced with a poignant minute of silence.⁸⁹

Other than co-organizing such events, Radio Študent intensified radio "performances:" radio announcers effectively mobilized residents, urging drivers to sound their horns, particularly as they would pass Roška Street, the location of the trial. In return, approximately 300 demonstrators would express their support by applauding the drivers who honked the loudest. Announcers also broadcasted jingle countdowns (500, 499, 498...) signaling to the public, that the arrest list was longer than the four people of JBTZ. Apart from circulating ludic and performative radio scripts and ideas, the staff experimented with terrain broadcasting: reporters transmitted content via public phone booths to pass the news first. The spoken repertoire at the radio included more than speeches and interviews with important figures in the process – it also entailed dramatic performances by "common people."

Instances of omission were a part of the job – in an anecdote, a Radio Študent reporter discovered that her tape recorder accidentally didn't capture any audio and was devoid of recorded content. No other television or radio outlets present at the meeting had recorded any portion of the event as well. And just as it appeared that there would be no documentation or evidence of the meeting, an unknown woman appeared in the basement of student dormitory number 8, where Radio Študent was located at the time: she had recorded the meeting on a tape recorder and decided to donate the recording to the radio.

On June 11th, Radio Študent repeatedly announced an event titled "Autonomous Action of the Amazon women"⁹⁰ – a proposed walk of women

⁸⁸ SI AS 1159, "Izjave," 32122xLJB 35228 LTM, 29/26, "Ljutomer" 164/159 1, 1750.

⁸⁹ A decade later, in the same park, a commemorative event was held in collaboration with Mladina, marking the tenth anniversary of the trial against the four under the slogan *Dost nam je!* (We've had enough!)

⁹⁰ SI AS 1159, Odziv na članek "Pretnja poslanika" Zdravke Čičmirko Pokrajčič, Sprehajalke s cvetjem na Metelkovi ulici v Ljubljani nasproti kasarne 4. Julij, *Radio Študent*, 30. 6, 1988.

with children near the military prisons. The event was officially canceled, but a group of women who were aware of the radio announcement (but not the cancellation) gathered, admittedly without the presence of children. They were sent flowers by a certain Vera Vazzaz, the same person who had also provided Radio Študent, with a dramatic letter of apology to Janez Janša for her suspicions of him. That also went on air. The radio also aired letters from the newly-formed civil initiative Belgrade Consultative Board for the Protection of Human Rights, appealing against demagogic and tendentious Serbian media reporting on the events in Slovenia.⁹¹

Radio technicians also played a role in performances. At the cultural meeting on 21 June, one of the hits played was Free Nelson Mandela, edited later on into "Free Janez Janša, Free David Tasič, Free Ivan Borštner." On a warm Thursday night on 9 July, Borštner's daughter engaged Radio Študent listeners with an emotional performance. Sharing intimate descriptions of her father's experiences, her wishes and dreams, she made sure to provide the listeners with a detailed account of the prison authorities denying her father's simple requests such as access to a shaver and some fruit. To the question of a political agenda behind these and other actions, Ali Žerdin would comment:

"To say that we had a political program would be an exaggeration. Of course, we don't know what we want. We knew better what we didn't want. Above all, we knew how to do something. We knew that when we did it in public, there would be some effects, that there would be some response, that someone would be angry about it. And that we will have fun doing it, that it will be talked about and that, in the end, most people will find our work relevant and socially useful. Most importantly, it's fun. We were never dead serious in the eighties, there was a lot of fun involved. If I sum it all up now, I have to say that there was some unconscious political program behind it, never spelled out."⁹²

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On a slightly more serious note, even though radio announcers regularly reported on the daily communiqués of the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights, and the overall critical sentiment against state politics at the time was strong, the radio did not function merely as a mouthpiece for the Committee or any nascent political opposition. Whenever the Committee would attempt to act further, the idea could be (also publicly) rejected by Radio Študent: for example, prof. Vladimir Dedijer of the Russel Tribunal's announcement⁹³ regarding the case was accepted for broadcast, whereas the mid-July request for a day of mourning⁹⁴ proposed by the Committee was rejected. Any further escalation of the cathartic JBTZ drama was usually relieved by witty and sarcastic humoresques. Such was the

⁹¹ SI AS 1159, Predsedstvu SRS Srbije in Javnosti, Signatories: Dr. Kosta Čavoški, Biljana Jovanović, Srdja Popović, Dr. Svetlana Slapšak, Pavluško Imširovič. Radio Študent, 29. 6. 1988.

⁹² Repovž, "Ali H. Žerdin."

⁹³ SI AS 1159, Professor Vladimir Dedijer, Treće saopštenje Raselovog suda povodom hapšenja Janše i Tovariša, Radio Študent, 7. 7. 1988.

⁹⁴ The proposal entailed black flags and Slovenian flags at half-mast, and a suggestion for people to stay at home or go out as little as possible in order to empty out the streets.

article titled "Janša ate meatballs yesterday"⁹⁵ or "Janša (ustava) and Billy the Kid."⁹⁶ Amid all these roles, the radio maintained an intense relationship with the state authorities because some radio reporters were also Committee activists.

It is no wonder that radio stations are considered critical infrastructure in times of crisis.⁹⁷ In line with that, Ali Žerdin⁹⁸ attested that just in case, night shifts were introduced at Radio Študent, "for fear that some false document could end up in the radio offices." Internally, the organization of the League of Communists (ZKS) of Radio Študent (party cell) demanded from the very beginning that the Municipal Committee of the ZKS Ljubljana Vič-Rudnik, the University Party Organization and the Central Committee of the ZKS ought to immediately discuss the arrests.⁹⁹ Requirements for additional explanations and other demands for clarification also arrived from the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia's University Conference Ljubljana.¹⁰⁰ With the words "Woe to the state, and especially to the Communist Union, if it turns away from unpleasant questions of the youth and makes enemies out of them" the League of Communists of Radio Študent issued a warning, cautioning the state and the League of Communists against alienating them, additionally suggesting it would be easier and wiser to instead address the concerns of the youth. They made clear that any failure to engage with these issues would likely result in their collective departure from the organization. Žerdin had as well explained the horizontality of Radio Študent's relationships with other media, through the case of Mladina magazine:

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"I remember that there was a kind of 'central planning deliberation' behind who would open what topic - what topic Mladina would work on, what Radio Student would do (...) We knew each other because the way someone entered journalism was very predictable: you started at Tribuna or Radio Študent, then you went to Mladina, (...) So there was some active communication. We knew each other and who was going to do what."¹⁰¹

The programming strategy of Radio Študent throughout the 1980s and 1990s has been thus fixed to a deliberate deviation from conventional standards of commercial radio stations which tended to cater to broad audiences. Instead, Radio Študent had aimed to elevate the regular listening experience by introducing stimulating, critical, and challenging content, thus *cultivating* the audience instead of catering to it. On June 8, Radio Študent prepared a short program "Prior to the trial"¹⁰² inquiring "Military Secret - What is it?" and answering that question through a longer body of

⁹⁵ SI AS 1159, Janša je juče pojeo čufte. Radio Študent, undated.

⁹⁶ SI AS 1159, Janša (ustava) and Billy the Kid, Jocular, Radio Študent, 18. 7. 1988.

⁹⁷ Radio operations can possibly be subjected to monitoring and evaluation by the authorities. Just like other classic telecommunications infrastructure, radio infrastructure could be a potential target of various attacks. Radio staff had often had a vital role both in times of peace and war.

⁹⁸ A former editor at Radio Študent and chronicler of JBZ events.

⁹⁹ ZKS - Zveza komunistov Slovenije, in translation League of Communists of Slovenia (ZKS).

¹⁰⁰ SI AS 1159, Gorazd Drevnšek. Radio Študent, 1. 6. 1988.

¹⁰¹ Repovž, "Ali H. Žerdin."

¹⁰² SI AS 1159, Ali Žerdin, Pred sodbo - Kajje strogo zaupno, kajje vojaška skrivnost? Commentary. Radio Študent, 27. 7. 1988.

text, consisting of excerpts of the Military Encyclopedia (specifically page 566, column 2, paragraphs 3 and 5). A military secret was thus precisely defined on-air as information of military significance determined by law or other legal criteria, usually encompassing data on military and peacetime plans, locations of units and institutions, and other details. Another 12-page broadcast "Pred razsodbo" from 26 July 1988 dealt with the disagreements between the Committee and Jože Smole, the President of the Republic Conference of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People (SAWP), regarding issues of politization and pressures on the military courts.¹⁰³

In addition, the program analysed the consequences of betraying a military secret, differing between a punishable act, offense, or misdemeanour. For instance, the transmission of military-related information to a foreign country or the intended transmission of such information was severely punishable by law. Thus, a military court would be responsible for the trial, regardless of whether the perpetrator would fall into the category of military personnel or a civilian. Unauthorized transfer of information declared a military secret to another person was a punishable act of betraying a military or state secret, depending on the importance of the information. Such information also arrived at Radio Študent through letters of official state institution statements, which were reported on, and critically examined on behalf of the radio staff.

In the Jocular radio segment on 2 June 1988, at 5 PM, editor at the time Ali Žerdin assessed the situation as serious, emphasizing the need for "the democratic public to respond rationally" advising against hysterical reactions and encouraging alignment with politically progressive initiatives. Žerdin interpreted the arrests as provocations by repressive elements in society and as a litmus test for the current state of affairs, stating: "The fact that this was a provocation demands of us to remain mature," adding that the "provocateurs had intensified their tactics by opting for a military rather than a civilian court after realizing that the arrests had not elicited the desired hysterical reaction." The dramatic conclusion included a call for the public to take action by advocating for the release of the arrested and pushing for changes to the penal law.¹⁰⁴

On 8 June 1988, the radio aired the statement of the Association of Slovenian Journalists regarding public concerns over the JBTZ affair, but also regarding the "ideological and political assessment of the Republic Conference of the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia" which called on people to take measures for preservation and further democratization of socialist self-governance, supported by a powerful army in the service of the people. Throughout July 1988 the radio opened the question of constitutional debates,¹⁰⁵ deepening the analysis of this process through longer contributions on ideological historical and political issues, political estimations of attacks

¹⁰³ SI AS 1159, Draga Ahačič, Pred razsodbo, Radio Študent, 26. 7. 1988.

¹⁰⁴ SI AS 1159, No title. Jocular, Radio Študent, 2. 6. 1988.

¹⁰⁵ SI AS 1159, Komu zvoni? 24. 7. 1988 This broadcast made note of interpreting Slovenia not as a state of the Slovenian people but as a model of societal reforms, headed against extreme centralization of political decision making. The broadcast is without author signatory.

on the JNA¹⁰⁶ on behalf of military personnel, continuing the ongoing debate on the law,¹⁰⁷ the role of the JNA in the political system of Yugoslav self-management, arms sales, military courts, development of military industry, political character and even morality of military elders.¹⁰⁸ A sizeable portion of broadcasts were of a broader theoretical nature,¹⁰⁹ critically approaching issues of the exclusion of the public – even the most qualified expert public, or the issue of trust toward military courts.¹¹⁰ Another broadcast criticized the political statements of Raif Dizdarević which “could be interpreted as a threat of war instead of the threat of constitutional changes”¹¹¹ (due to sloppy translation into Slovenian language).

Through it all, it retained a humorous vibe, at least in the titles, i.e. “About elephants, rhinoceroses, and sacred cows, or – what Dizdarević had said.” Later that month the radio developed the same theme further, with a snappier contribution on the use of language,¹¹² followed by a critical broadcast on party conflicts at the plenum in Kosovo.¹¹³ More importantly, it transmitted an interpretation of the court process as a political process,¹¹⁴ criticizing adjustments and modifications of facts on behalf of the ruling ideology, considering this process as complementary to the rising nationalisms at the time, and to the ongoing crisis due to a globally weak economy. Another broadcast dealt with the crucial need for the mobilization of the whole Yugoslav public, claiming that the conflict is not between the citizens and republic authorities, and is not hierarchical, but entails a political struggle featuring, on one hand, a democratic public, and on the other, secret diplomacy. It also called for organizing beyond republic borders.¹¹⁵

More such questions were raised in the daytime slot around 2 PM in the broadcast titled “Dogajamo in odmevamo” particularly regarding the lacking demands for changes in the Penal Law.¹¹⁶ The radio featured interviews with activists, and politicians, including Pavuško Imširovič, from the (in)famous “Belgrade process” four years before the JBTZ affair. It aired contributions from the likes of Igor Bavčar and Slavoj Žižek¹¹⁷ questioning

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¹⁰⁶ The radio also broadcast an extended critical overview of the differences between malicious attacks and a critique of public enactment to which any self-managing socialist society shouldn't be immune. In SI AS 1159, Draga Ahačič, O neutemeljenih očitkih, Radio Študent, 15. 7. 1988.

¹⁰⁷ SI AS 1159, The position of the section for criminal law at the Bar Association of Slovenia, and a demand for inclusion in the Committee, Section for criminal law at the Slovenian Bar Association, Radio Študent. 13. 6. 1988.

¹⁰⁸ SI AS 1159, Ustavna pravica kot politični proces in obratno, Radi Študent, 30. 7. 1988.

¹⁰⁹ SI AS 1159, Kaj ti je, skupščina? (Nič mi ni; ...me boli), Radio Študent, 23. 7. 1988.

¹¹⁰ SI AS 1159, Zakaj vojaškemu sodišču ne moremo zaupati?, Radio Študent, undated.

¹¹¹ SI AS 1159, O slonih, nosorogih in svetih kravah ali Kaj je Dizdarević resnično rekel, Jocular, Radio Študent, 29. 7. 1988. The broadcast elaborated issues of legality and pressures on the work of the Committee in Slovenia.

¹¹² SI AS 1159, Saška Plavevska, M. Ničiforovič, Politics express, Radio Študent, 30. 7. 1988.

¹¹³ SI AS 1159, Partijski plenum o Kosovu, Saturday, Radio Študent, 30. 7. 1988.

¹¹⁴ SI AS 1159, Politični procesi, Radio Študent. 30. 7. 1988.

¹¹⁵ SI AS 1159, Rastko Močnik, Zakaj se mora mobilizirati jugoslovanska demokratična javnost?, Radio Študent, 19. 7. 1988.

¹¹⁶ Katra. SI AS 1159, No title. Dogajamo in odmevamo, Radio Študent, 14. 7. 1988.

¹¹⁷ SI AS 1159, Slavoj Žižek, Če ne bi bilo Beograda, bi si ga bilo treba izmisliti, Jocular, Radio Študent, 21. 6. 1988.

the role of the Committee for Human Rights, criticizing it for not having addressed the issues of human rights in Kosovo or the ongoing conflicts in Vevčani (Struga) in Macedonia.¹¹⁸ Radio Študent thus used its potential and favorable position well, as the only media that could afford independent and thus political and critical reporting, while keeping a high bar for the quality of the program offered. If from the middle of the 1980s onwards, the processes of democratization of society and national emancipation were closely intertwined,¹¹⁹ in the 1990s that momentum changed due to structural, political, and societal shifts and ruptures. Due to the new circumstances and shifted political stakes, political issues were more often framed through culture and subsequent cultural clashes between various societal actors, with an exception in the first half of the nineties in times of the distressing ex-Yugoslav wars.

A short overview of programmatic radio activities in the nineties

The initial basic program design of Radio Študent in the early 1990s continued to follow an independent stance toward content creation. This independence principle continued to signify a critical distance from all power sources (financial, political, ideological, and religious). In the late nineties, however, a liberal spirit could be observed in its approach to politics “from the point of view of the collision of political interests with the rights of individuals,” highlighting “solidarity, cultural diversity and tolerance.” After the first turning event in the decade, when the Gazelle helicopter was shot down near the radio premises on 27 June 1991¹²⁰ the broadcast was extended to 24 hours per day. The radio employed some new strategies, aiming to cover events in most of northern ex-Yugoslavia.¹²¹ Programmatically, the radio prepared and broadcast educational content, continuously articulating values of human rights, respect for diversity, and tolerance.

In the second half of the nineties, more specifically in February 1997, Radio Študent moved from its basement space to the sixth and seventh floor of the student dormitories’ building no. 14. Ever since May of the following year, it was also made available on the world-wide-web where its role was delineated clearly: “Radio Študent functions by combining community radio format, intended for specific target groups of educated people and students, and a public channel format, allocating part of its program time to civil society groups and initiatives.”¹²² Throughout the 1990s, it maintained its commitment

¹¹⁸ Nerina. SI AS 1159, Intervju s Pavuškom Imširovičem, Radio Študent 14. 7. 1988.

¹¹⁹ Repe, “Slovenci v osemdesetih letih,” 447.

¹²⁰ An unarmed JNA helicopter was shot down in a provocation on June 27th, 1991, both pilot and copilot died on spot. More info about the case of the shot helicopter: Anja Vladislavljivic, “Pilot’s Killing in Slovenia’s ‘ten-Day War’ Causes Enduring Controversy,” *BIRN*, 22. 6. 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/06/22/pilots-killing-in-slovenias-ten-day-war-causes-enduring-controversy/>.

¹²¹ Zaniuk, “Self-managed student radio station,” 230

¹²² “Splošne informacije/General Information,” *Radio Študent*, archived page. <https://old.radiostudent.si/sections.php>.

to social responsibility through a publicly declared “amplification of voices that might otherwise have been overlooked.”¹²³

This manifested in different ways. One example was the broadcast of regional programming and music, in post-Yugoslav conditions, during the ongoing war in the neighbourhood, thus diverging from the newly established “European-oriented” commercial radio norms in Slovenia’s other radio stations. This enactment of values included the “maintenance of a network of correspondents from the region, such as the Cross Radio project in the late 1990s, standing out as one of the first initiatives for a reestablishment of communication channels in the space of the former Yugoslav republics.”¹²⁴ Internally, it maintained a continuity of values, as can be drawn from the programmatic documentation from 1995:

“Radio Student is an independent, politically and party-neutral, educational and informative radio station, [...] based on several principles: impartiality, independence and autonomy, racial, religious, national and gender tolerance, freedom of expression and pluralism of thought, respect for the dignity, freedom and personal integrity of the individual, respect for the principles of artistic freedom, the principle of independence of program content creation from holders of financial resources, investors and advertisers, and non-profitability.”¹²⁵

Throughout the nineties, Radio Študent’s politics desk expressed a firm intention to continue developing content related to civil initiatives and various subcultures. Specifically, the reporters expressed interest in sociopolitical development and its effect on people’s lives, including events on the margins and within informal initiatives, organizations, and pressure groups, becoming more critical of civil society at the time. Program slots were however made readily available for civil society initiatives, and reports on (now plural) party politics were maintained. Coverage over ex-Yugoslav territories as well continued within radio series such as *Retrovizor*, *Joculator*, and other shows, later, however, categorized in what could be interpreted as an “identity/community slot,” i.e. *Balkan Express*.¹²⁶

During the armed collisions in Slovenia, the radio operated under the Emergency Action Plan, broadcasting an informative programme inclusive of the official reports of the Republican Secretariat for Information, and the public television station RTV Slovenija. Radio Študent however included additional sources of information, from various supporters, colleagues, and citizens, passing the information to other agencies in Yugoslavia and abroad. Radio staff noted and documented all information, eavesdropped on civilian and military frequencies and cooperated with radio amateurs to gain information and better insight. A backup telecommunication system was set up just in case, and a 15-member on-call team was established, with a precisely defined program and security duties.

¹²³ Urška Savič, “Novejša mitologija Radia Študent.” *Radio Študent*, 12. 5. 2019, <https://radiostudent.si/kultura/repetitio/novejsa-mitologija-radia-student>.

¹²⁴ Urška Savič, “Novejša mitologija Radia Študent.”

¹²⁵ SI AS 1159, Programmatic stances of Radio Študent. *Radio Študent*.

¹²⁶ SI AS 1159, Pavel Gantar, “Kosovizacija” - Nein danke!, *Radio Študent*. undated.

Radio staff secured the studios from air raids, to which a radio station could potentially be exposed.¹²⁷ The editorial team had sent multiple letters to the City Secretariat for People's Defence with requests to withhold military recruitment of Radio Študent staff. The proposed alternative to mobilization in territorial defense units was for the staff to at least be officially mobilized within Radio Študent,¹²⁸ so they could physically remain located at the radio. Similar requests were sent out to various Secretariates for People's defense, demanding the postponement of military exercises and training.¹²⁹ After the turbulent nineties and in times of transition, the radio experienced several subtler changes, strikes, clashes regarding possible privatization attempts, threats of closure, deepening financial difficulties, etc. However, in 2024, at the time of writing this article, it still broadcasts content for its listeners.

Conclusion: (radio)waves of calm

This microhistorical study primarily relied on the partially systematized and incomplete archives of Radio Študent, as well as available secondary literature. It incorporated publicly available interviews, documentary video material, and other pertinent sources. Effectively dislocated historical accounts, disorder in the official archived units, and lack of access to private archives were a significant methodological challenge. In conclusion, the late 1980s in Slovenia were a time when the entire public, including the youth, was highly politicized.

Questions revolved around questions of pluralization and democratization. In this climate of high politicization of the Slovenian public, Radio Študent played a role beyond what appealed to citizens in a broad range of activities: from frequent mobilizations, performative actions, and humoresques, but balanced or completely avoided scandalizing the JBTZ affair further, by maintaining a highly theoretical approach, and by enacting an educational role. On one hand, it mobilized people through drama, playfulness, and direct action, while on the other it contributed to the pacification of the prevailing general feeling of political uncertainty at the end of the twentieth century. Mass mobilizations in 1988, however, accelerated and heralded the beginning of the end of the system and the Yugoslav state. Not exclusively due to Radio Študent, but also because of it, the public had found itself in the middle of much bigger questions: ones of federal and republican hierarchies, legality, constitutionality, reform, crisis, human rights, democratization, structures of repression, and role of civil society at the time.

This was one of the reasons why during the celebration of the 30th anniversary of Slovenia's independence, Radio Študent received an official state award from the president, for its role in the democratization and independence of Slovenia.¹³⁰ A review of archival documentation revealed

¹²⁷ SI AS 1159, Miran Divjak in documentation no. 030791/01, dated 3. 7. 1991.

¹²⁸ SI AS 1159, Miran Divjak in documentation no. 030791/02, dated 3. 7. 1991.

¹²⁹ SI AS 1159, Miran Divjak in documentation no. 120691/03, dated. 12. 6. 1991; documentation dated 11. 6. 1991.

¹³⁰ A.J., "Predsednik Pahor se je Radiu Študent zahvalil za polstoletno poslanstvo," *RTV Slovenija*, 15. 1. 2012, <https://www.rtvsllo.si/kultura/drugo/predsednik-pahor-se-je-radiu-student-zahvalil-za-polstoletno-poslanstvo/549729>.

the exact ways in which the radio operated not only as a means of public information, a force of civil society, or an educational forum but also how it made decisions about the role of a political actor “from below.” The article clarified how Radio Študent transcended its “alternative cultural youth media” role in times of crisis.

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