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NEWSPAPER COVERAGE AND SOME ASPECTS OF POLICY IN BORDER TRADE UNION STRUGGLES: COMPARING THE 1968 GENERAL STRIKE IN TRIESTE AND THE 1970 WORK STOPPAGE IN PORT OF KOPER

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ABSTRACT

The article details the press coverage of the general strike that took place in Trieste in June 1968 and the work stoppage at Port of Koper in March 1970. It shows the ways in which the workers' protests were covered by the local press on both sides of the border and the social impact of the workers' demands. It also highlights the cross-border alliances in place for the duration of the strikes in question, both in the media and in politics.

Keywords: dock workers, strike, North-Eastern Adriatic, press coverage, trade union struggles

COPERTURA GIORNALISTICA ED ALCUNI ASPETTI POLITICI NELLE LOTTE SINDACALI DI CONFINE: CONFRONTO TRA LO SCIOPERO GENERALE DEL 1968 A TRIESTE E L'INTERRUZIONE DEI LAVORI NEL PORTO DI CAPODISTRIA NEL 1970

SINTESI

L'articolo presenta la copertura giornalistica dello sciopero generale di Trieste del giugno 1968 e dell'interruzione dei lavori nel porto di Capodistria del marzo 1970. L'articolo mostra il modo in cui le manifestazioni di protesta dei lavoratori sono state riportate dai giornali locali da entrambe le parti del confine e l'impatto delle richieste dei lavoratori nella società. Inoltre, evidenzia le collaborazioni transfrontaliere che si sono sviluppate durante il periodo degli scontri, sia a livello mediatico che politico.

Parole chiave: lavoratori portuali, scioperi, Adriatico nord-orientale, copertura mediatica, lotte sindacali

INTRODUCTION¹

In the second half of the 1960s, an intense strike wave spread throughout the ports of the Northern Adriatic. It began in Trieste, where struggles based on a long tradition of workers' organising, focused on fierce opposition to the CIPE plan,² the full implementation of which would have brought about the closure of St Mark's shipyard in Trieste. Social unrest, however, also crossed the Yugoslav border during the major protests in Trieste in 1966, 1968 and 1969, with work stoppages in the Port of Rijeka in 1969 and 1971 and the first work stoppage in Port of Koper in March 1970 (Rutar, 2020, 390).

In Yugoslavia, strikes were frequently referred to as work stoppages. While the socialist state recognised the possibility of social conflict even under socialism, it did not take a clear position on strikes in the 1960s. In the 1970s, even within the Law of Associated Labour framework of the 1976, they are not discussed directly. Within the section on work related dispute resolution, however, strikes are addressed in such terms as work stoppages and forced meetings, or more generally as workers' discontent (Hadalín, 2020, 302–303; Kavčič et al., 1991, 75–85).

The region's position along the most open border between the West and the East (Repe, 1998, 262) aided both technological and cultural transfer. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the liberalisation of the border was accelerated by agreements that facilitated border crossings. Those became more frequent from the mid-1960s onwards (Čepič, 2018, 664) when the agreements started to materialize. As a result, goods, ideas, worldviews and mindsets were exchanged. In terms of the economy, one can see this in the technological transfers that (more or less successfully) modernised the Yugoslav industry, while the cultural transfer was manifested above all through encounters with western thought currents. These transfers can also be seen as a recontextualization of cultural elements in the broadest sense from one environment to another, and through this we can observe a cross-cultural influence that results in a certain degree of cultural hybridity (Štuhec, 2020, 194). Contemporary research in the field of New Labour History (Rutar, 2014) sheds light on how this approach can be useful. For example, in the late 1960s, directors of Yugoslav companies kept modern management and marketing manuals from the West in their offices alongside Marxist classics (Archer & Musić, 2020, 399). The middle

classes, on the other hand, saw their mentalities change as they came into contact with consumerism and the standards of the West (Repe, 2017, 590). The port workers in the border area of the North Adriatic, the central subject of the present discussion, were introduced to strike culture (also) through the activism of their comrades on the western side of the border (Rutar, 2020, 389). Cooperation between Italian and Slovene Communist Parties was active, and there was also talk of social struggles in Italy, for example when representatives of Partito Comunista Italiano (hereafter PCI) reported to the Club of Deputies in Ljubljana in 1970 on the so-called *autunno caldo* (the hot autumn of protests) of 1969,³ which had sparked protests in industrial centres throughout Italy, the most high-profile of which were in Turin (Giachetti & Scavino, 1999, 7–11).

It is also important to point out the contrasting number of strikes by dockworkers in Trieste and in Koper. In Trieste, dockworkers went on strike nine times in the 1960s and as many as twenty-seven times in the 1970s. It should be added, however, that in the 1970s many of the strikes were symbolic in nature and involved international political events, including strikes against the war in Vietnam and the military *coup d'état* in Chile. The 1968 strike is thus chosen here because it stood out in terms of its attachment to local development and because it transcended the port sector to become a general city-wide strike. In the case of Port of Koper, the work stoppage in 1970 was the first and remained the only large stoppage at the port until the independence of Slovenia. During the 1970s, it was followed only by a smaller work stoppage in 1976 (Dato, 2006, 216–217; 219–220).

The main purpose of the analysis is to present how both Italian and Slovenian local newspapers covered the two selected workers' protests. We will be interested in how the local press characterised the (il)legitimacy of the protests, described the demands of the workers and gave the reasons for the difficult economic situation of the dockworkers.

The coverage of both strikes will be presented through the reporting of the newspapers *Il Piccolo: giornale di Trieste* (a conservative newspaper from Trieste), *Primorski dnevnik* (a pro-Yugoslav, Slovene newspaper from Trieste) and *Primorske novice: glasilo socialistične zveze delovnih ljudi* (the main newspaper from Koper and the Slovene Littoral). These newspapers were chosen because they are closely connected to the border area, which they regularly report on,

1 I would like to thank Urška Lampe and Egon Pelikan for their comments on earlier versions of this article, which were very helpful in the process of writing and editing the final version.

2 CIPE is the official abbreviation of the *Comitato Interministeriale per la Programmazione Economica*, the Interministerial Committee for Economic Planning, which was adopted by law on February 27, 1967, and regulated the strategic planning of economic development on local, state and interstate levels. For a detailed description of the activities of CIPE in the 1960s and 1970s, see Mobilio (2013, 138–162).

3 *Primorski dnevnik*, 14. 3. 1970: Tajniki treh deželnih komitejev KPI o lanskih socialnih bojih v Italiji, 1.

taking into account matters both domestic and cross-border. They were considered as the most important newspapers in the region. Ten articles from *Il Piccolo*, four from *Primorski dnevnik* and one from *Primorske novice* covering the Trieste strike were analysed. It should be noted here that the articles in *Primorski dnevnik* were longer and concentrated on a smaller number of reports, whereas in *Il Piccolo* the articles were shorter and larger in number. As per coverage of the work stoppage at the Port of Koper, the analysis consisted of four articles from *Il Piccolo* and three articles each from *Primorski dnevnik* and *Primorske novice*. The sample of articles presented includes all relevant articles on both events that appeared in the selected newspapers up to one month after each strike/work stoppage.

GENERAL STRIKE IN TRIESTE, JUNE 21–25 1968

The CIPE plan and technological transformation: the struggle for survival of Trieste port workers

Before taking a closer look at the general strike of June 1968 in Trieste, it is necessary to present the necessary context of Trieste port sector development under the Italian state. In the inter-war period, when Trieste first came under Italian rule, the port sector began to downsize and, at the same time, the part of the city's economy unrelated to the port sector grew. This was triggered above all by the increasingly transit-oriented nature of the port. This resulted in a reduced need for post-arrival cargo-handling services. The situation for those working in the port sector deteriorated after the end of World War II. From 1949 onwards, workers' trade union struggles had focused on the right to work in the port. This was a struggle against private companies being able to bring their own workforce into the port to handle cargo (Persoglia, 1986, 85, 104).

The creation of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia autonomous region also expediated the shift away from the dominance of the port sector in the city. This change had increasingly turned the city of Trieste, which still claimed to be a shipbuilding and port centre, into an administrative and political centre, at the expense of the city's distance from industrial sectors (Bednarz, 1986, 318–319).

In the 1960s, there was a marked decline of the port of Trieste as the cargo was increasingly diverting to both competing Italian as well as foreign ports. In addition to cargo volume reduction, the port increasingly turned to bulk cargo, which does not require additional treatments. This in turn generated an increase in trade union activity of port workers (Persoglia, 1986, 106–107). The outbreak of discontent that had been spreading among the workers for several years was caused by the news of the approval of the CIPE

plan, which reached Trieste on the eve of October 7, 1966. Implementing the plan in its original form would have meant, among other things, the liquidation of St Mark's shipyard. The very next day, there was a mass protest by workers in the shipyard, the port, and some other sectors, accompanied by groups of students. The protest was directed against the "tertiarization" of the city (Sema & Bibalo, 1981, 402) and aimed at preserving Trieste as an industrial city, as there was a fairly broad consensus that the city's success could only be ensured through further development of industry and the port sector (Fragiacomo, 2012, 186).

The outcome of these struggles, and the adoption of a modified CIPE plan, was a compromise solution that mitigated the original intentions but satisfied neither side. The shipyard was preserved, but despite the successful retention of the majority of jobs, the number of employees in the industrial sector as a whole declined noticeably. From December 1963 to August 1968, the Trieste industrial sector recorded a loss of 8276 jobs, 4509 of them in the 1966–1968 period alone (Sema & Bibalo, 1981, 404, 414). The still-unresolved compromise solution thus brought a new momentum to trade union struggles in 1968, and the spirit of the student movements of '68 also appealed to Trieste's hitherto more conservative student population, which was becoming more and more progressive and joined the general strike that spread across Trieste in large numbers on 21 June 1968 (Sema & Bibalo, 1981, 410–412).

The general strike in Trieste lasted from June 21 to June 25, 1965. It started as a protest rally at the opening of the Trieste Fair, but the strike, which had been planned to last only a few hours, turned into a multi-day protest. The protest was a general city-wide strike organised by the dockworkers, who were joined by many other citizens to save the jobs at St Mark's shipyard. During the protests, there were several clashes between protesters and police. Protesters formed several barricades for protection, mainly on the Largo Barriera Street. Sixteen civilians and around fifty police were injured.

Il Piccolo

Il Piccolo is a daily newspaper published in Trieste since 1881. It has had a pro-Italian nationalist orientation from its initial support for Italian irredentism at the end of the 19th century to its conservative nationalist orientation after World War II. Let us examine how it reported on the 1968 general strike in Trieste.

The June 21 edition, which outlined the planned course of the strike and briefly summarised the positions of the unions, the city authorities, and the communist opposition in the city council, presented the event as a three-hour strike, after which the workers would return to work. The news of the announced strike itself is only

found on page four of the paper, and above it there was the news of a productive meeting with the regional authorities on the implementation of the CIPE plan.⁴

Although the account of the protests is rather restrained, and the protest itself is positioned as one of the many that have been taking place in the city over the years, the seriousness of the problems facing Trieste is nevertheless highlighted. It is stated that “The economic problem, which has now become a moral and psychological problem in Trieste, must be seriously addressed and immediate solutions found to decisively improve the livelihood of our people.”⁵ Journalists of *Il Piccolo* pinned their hopes for a revival of the city’s job prospects on the International Trade Fair, which also opened on June 21, and the strike was not coincidentally aligned to this. They made their demands to the fair guests, among them Giulio Andreotti, the then Italian Minister of Economic Affairs, who was the inaugural speaker at the fair’s opening.⁶

They took the coverage much more seriously on Saturday, the day after the general strike. The front page of the newspaper was clearly headlined by the fact that Trieste had been paralysed for twelve hours, together with a photograph of the crowd attending the protest rally following the strike. Andreotti, after the workers’ intervention at the fair, received their representatives at the end of the day and assured them that he would take their message to the government in Rome. Some individual incidents at the rally are mentioned, with praise for the police response and the protest leaders’ self-restraint. There are reports of some twenty-five injured police and dozens of injuries among the protesters.⁷

Throughout the coverage, including in subsequent issues, the police side of the situation was at the forefront, followed (to a lesser extent) by the protesters’ point of view. In a more extensive report in Saturday’s issue (page 4) we find a picture of a smoke-filled tram route blocked by protesters. The afternoon’s violence was attributed solely to protesters, with the police merely protecting the participants in the rally, which caused “hours of intense drama and unrest”⁸ from the afternoon until late in the evening. The afternoon part of the protests, however, was represented as the work of a small group of students who were said to have continued to cause disturbances in the city until the evening. There is a contradictory element in play here since the

police were present in large numbers and were unable to disperse those present without the threats of physical force. The protesters then improvised barricades as they fled, throwing stones in the direction of the police. The article also draws a parallel with the 1966 strike, as the rioters had come into conflict with the police then too, and *Il Piccolo* described the afternoon scenes as very similar. The situation is said to have calmed down only after the police physically pressured the protesters at around 7:30 PM. The persistent younger protesters were labelled as extremists, from who the trade union leaders had distanced themselves.⁹

In Monday’s edition, reflecting on the situation, it was noted that solutions should be sought first and foremost with those responsible for modifying the CIPE plan, so that dialogue could be established at least at regional level. Hope was expressed that Andreotti would pass on the protesters’ requests to the government. The archbishop of Trieste, Antonio Santin, also reacted to the clashes that had engulfed the city and appealed for non-violence.¹⁰ The article also clearly delineates who the victims and aggressors were in the event. The photo section shows several young activists defending themselves behind a barricade and a single police officer on the other side, throwing smoke bombs at them.¹¹ The hectic events of Friday and Saturday are then described in a separate article as “the longest days”, from which the people of Trieste were only able to take a break on Sunday. Eight protesters were detained, and two Molotov cocktails were seized. In addition to praising the police response, the role of the municipal security is highlighted, who took an active role in the escalation to restore order. However, when some of the more prominent representatives criticised the excessive violence of the repressive authorities, it was explicitly stated that each of them was a communist (either of PCI or of other parties/movements of a communist and socialist orientation).¹²

Thus *Il Piccolo* (rather predictably) established a dichotomy between the official representatives, who addressed the desire for change at the institutional level, and the extremists, who are also equated with communist institutional representatives representing through PCI the local and national opposition.

The conservative *Il Piccolo* also stressed the need for reforms and the establishment of a clear economic

4 *Il Piccolo*, 21. 6. 1968: Proficuo «vertice» alla Regione sullo stato del piano C.I.P.E., 4; *Il Piccolo*, 21. 6. 1968: Stamane nuove sciopero di tutti i metalmeccanici, 4.

5 *Il Piccolo*, 21. 6. 1968: Stamane nuove sciopero di tutti i metalmeccanici, 4.

6 *Il Piccolo*, 21. 6. 1968: Andreotti inaugura stamane la 20.a edizione della Fiera, 4; *Il Piccolo*, 21. 6. 1968: Trieste affida alla Fiera il suo messaggio di operosità, 8.

7 *Il Piccolo*, 22. 6. 1968: Trieste paralizzata per 12 ore, 1.

8 *Il Piccolo*, 22. 6. 1968: Giornata di grande tensione in città, 4.

9 *Il Piccolo*, 22. 6. 1968: Giornata di grande tensione in città, 4.

10 *Il Piccolo*, 24. 6. 1968: Si apre una settimana di speranze, 4.

11 *Il Piccolo*, 24. 6. 1968: Due volti di una stessa realtà, 4.

12 *Il Piccolo*, 24. 6. 1968: Bilancio dei “due giorni più lunghi”: in carcere otto dei trentacinque fermati, 4.

policy for future development of Trieste. They expected, above all, for Trieste to be integrated into the national economy, but with a special purpose. On Monday June 24, a second coordinated general strike took place, this time joined by the CISL trade union, which did not support the first strike. *Il Piccolo* praises the unitary stance (they also did not publish their newspaper on the 24th) and the more orderly and organised rally. They conclude by reflecting that for Trieste, it is necessary to “[d]efend a past of traditions and positive results in the field of labour.”¹³

Primorski dnevnik

Primorski dnevnik has been published in Trieste since 1945, first as *Partizanski dnevnik*. It received financial support from socialist Yugoslavia and remained pro-Yugoslav until its dissolution.

The reporting of *Primorski dnevnik* starts on June 21, the first day of the protest, just as *Il Piccolo*’s did, as they too did not expect the strike to last longer than the announced three hours’ absence off work, and the news of the strike is somewhat overshadowed by the opening of the International Trade Fair as well. The subtitle of the *Primorski dnevnik* article points out that the procession will draw public attention at the opening of the Fair. This was only mentioned indirectly in the text of various articles and was not specifically highlighted in the reports by *Il Piccolo*. The headline also emphasized the repetitive nature of the strikes, which better articulated the long-standing discontent of the workers.¹⁴

The difference in reporting becomes apparent after the strike unfolded on a much larger and more hectic scale than expected. *Primorski dnevnik* focused on the demonstration in front of the Fair, which was also the main focus of the trade unions that organised the strike. The front-page headline on June 22, the day after the had protests begun, clearly states that the message of the protest is the fight of the workers for their jobs. They also report on the riots that broke out in the afternoon, but unlike *Il Piccolo*, which was stressing the dichotomy between institutional commitment to reform and the violent tactics of the extremists, *Primorski dnevnik* established a dichotomy between the workers who have taken up the struggle for their own jobs and the decision-makers who do not care about establishing a clear economic programme for the Trieste area.¹⁵

Before the protest began, there was a brief shower. *Il Piccolo* wrote that the workers dispersed and scattered, while *Primorski dnevnik* reported: “Although there was downpour of rain at the time of the official opening, the workers stayed outside the main entrance, which was blocked by a strong police force, whistling and shouting as various representatives of the authorities arrived.”¹⁶ There was no talk of whistling at the authorities in the reporting of *Il Piccolo*. In addition, the images also show a different focus of the reporting: *Primorski dnevnik* only published photos of the workers at the demonstration in front of the Fair while *Il Piccolo* only published photos from the afternoon rally in the city centre.¹⁷ In *Il Piccolo*, the aforementioned meeting of the trade union representatives with Andreotti was presented as a satisfactory conclusion to the strike. *Primorski dnevnik*, on the contrary, wrote that the meeting was, as usual, unfruitful and that this outcome was the reason why the general strike was prolonged.¹⁸

The coverage of the strike continues not only on the front page for two editions after the end of the major unrest, but also on the entirety of the first two pages of two subsequent editions (June 22 and 26). In *Il Piccolo*, except for the day after the protest, strike covering is moved from the front page to page four, into the Events in the City section. The images in the following issues are also in stark contrast to each other. *Primorski dnevnik* publishes many more pictures, including large ones, and it shows the crowds in the main squares, the speakers who addressed the participants, and police intervention where there is not just a single officer pitted against the crowd (as there was in *Il Piccolo*), but a large number of police officers intervening. They also publish a picture of an injured person among the protesters.¹⁹ Thus, the police are not portrayed as some kind of passive victims of the extremists. Rather, *Primorski dnevnik* clearly states that “The police unnecessarily attacked the crowd using tear grenades.”²⁰ Moreover, the usefulness of institutional dialogue with the stakeholders about the future development of the city is called into question. The position is represented by the statement that “Certain groups talk about future progress, but what kind of progress is this if the number of employees is constantly shrinking?”²¹

In the coverage of the two Trieste newspapers presented here, the discourse of the city and state authorities belonging to the Democrazia Cristiana

13 *Il Piccolo*, 26. 6. 1968: La città difende un passato ed è in ansia per l’avvenire, 4.

14 *Primorski dnevnik*, 21. 6. 1968: Danes zopet splošna stavka delavcev kovinarske stroke, 2.

15 *Primorski dnevnik*, 22. 6. 1968: Ob otvoritvi tržaškega velesejma nastop delavcev v obrambo delovnih mest, 1.

16 *Primorski dnevnik*, 22. 6. 1968: Ob otvoritvi tržaškega velesejma nastop delavcev v obrambo delovnih mest, 1.

17 *Primorski dnevnik*, 22. 6. 1968, 1, 2.

18 *Primorski dnevnik*, 22. 6. 1968: Splošna stavka, 2.

19 *Primorski dnevnik*, 26. 6. 1968, 1, 2.

20 *Primorski dnevnik*, 26. 6. 1968: Popoln zastoj vse dejavnosti v mestu in okolici zaradi splošne protestne stavke vseh kategorij, 1.

21 *Primorski dnevnik*, 26. 6. 1968: Popoln zastoj vse dejavnosti v mestu in okolici zaradi splošne protestne stavke vseh kategorij, 1.



Image 1: Clashes on the streets of Trieste.²²

political party and those belonging to the city and state opposition PCI are quite evident. This division, which characterised Italian post-war politics for several decades, then softened in the 1970s and transitioned to that of rapprochement, constituting the “compromesso storico”, the historic compromise of cooperation in 1973 described by Enrico Berlinguer, then Secretary of PCI.²³

Primorske novice

Primorske novice started to be published in 1953. First it covered mainly the Gorizia region, but in 1963 following the merger with *Slovenski Jadran* it became the main newspaper for both Koper and the wider Littoral region. The political orientation of the newspaper was evident from the extended version of its name, namely *Primorske novice: Glasilo socialistične zveze delovnih ljudi*, ‘Newspaper of the Socialist Alliance of Working People’.

²² *Primorski dnevnik*, 26. 6. 1968, 2.

²³ On the path of the PCI from 1968 to the strategy of cooperation with the Democrazia Cristiana, cf. Pons (2006, 3–41).

As we have seen, the Trieste press, regardless of its political orientation, undoubtedly paid a great amount of attention to the general strike. On the other hand, *Primorske novice*, the main newspaper for the city of Koper, devoted only one article to the Trieste strike. It should be stressed that *Primorske novice* was a weekly and not a daily like the Trieste papers, but comparatively speaking the coverage was still undoubtedly marginal. In the June 22, 1968 edition, a day after the first and most tumultuous day of the strike, there was no mention of the events in Trieste.

The only report of the events was published in the June 29 edition, which was not an article covering the entire strike, but merely an account of a press conference organised by PCI members of the Italian Parliament at the party’s headquarters in Trieste in response to the end of the strike on June 26. They note that the demonstrations held a high profile throughout Italy; nevertheless there is no lengthier comment on the events on the following pages or in the subsequent



*Image 2: The only photo of the strike in Trieste in Primorske novice.*²⁴

issues. In addition to the need to preserve the industrial character of Trieste, the inappropriate violence by the police against the participants in the strike rallies is also highlighted. It should be noted that the only (tiny) photo of the events depicted a crowd of workers under a trade union banner. The article adds that the strike took place on Tuesday, even though Tuesday's strike day was the last day of the wave lasting from Friday June 21 to Tuesday June 25. The dates are only used in the article to refer to the arrival of PCI MPs in Trieste on Tuesday and Wednesday. The reader thus does not learn that the strike lasted for several days, and the workers' demonstration is labelled as "the latest events in Trieste", without in any way describing the length and magnitude of the strikes and demonstrations, even though the word "events" is pluralized.²⁴

WORK STOPPAGE AT PORT OF KOPER,
MARCH 27, 1970

Who needs Port of Koper? From its foundation to the fight for the railway

In 1954, the London Memorandum determined Trieste's territorial fate. The Slovenian coast remained cut off from its former regional centre, and consequently it was necessary to establish a new regional centre for the area and, above all, to build a local economy that would no longer be dependent on Trieste. For Slovenian shipping and port sectors, this meant years of construction and investment, with *Splošna plovba* (the main Slovene shipbuilding company) established in 1954 and Port of Koper (*Pristanišče Koper* until 1961, then *Luka Koper*)

²⁴ Primorske novice, 29. 6. 1968: Vprašanje Trsta pred rimski parlament?, 3.

²⁵ Primorske novice, 29. 6. 1968: Vprašanje Trsta pred rimski parlament?, 3.

obtaining an investment plan in 1957 and starting to dredge the seabed to enable larger ships to reach the port site and to utilize materials to create new usable areas for its own development. The first berth was completed on December 7 1958, and the port was officially opened (Panjek, 2007, 446, 449; Jakomin, 2004, 58).

The port was seen by the local and republican authorities as a competitor to the ports of both Trieste and Rijeka, while the federal authorities were only interested in competing with the port of Trieste. This was evident from the financing structure of the construction and expansion of the Port of Koper, which was built mainly with the enterprise's own funds and loans. Nevertheless, the support from the Slovene government was important, and this was most evident in the 1970s. This goes against the received local version of the events saying that the port was built solely on individual initiatives, even if said individuals were competent indeed. In fact, individual inputs had to be supplemented by republican government's support, even if the understanding of on-field requirements was less than perfect (Terčon, 2008, 53–55; Terčon, 2019, 122).

The key problem preventing the further expansion and development of the port soon became the transport infrastructure of its hinterland. Post-war Koper was not yet connected to the railway—until 1967 it was only connected to its hinterland by a two-lane road (Petrijnja, 1999, 45). The long negotiations on the necessity of building a 31-kilometre railway link between Koper and Prešnica, connecting the port with Ljubljana and central Europe, were only resolved when the Port of Koper itself took over the role of investor and finally opened the line on December 2 1967 (Jakomin, 2004, 68–69).

On the other hand, it was the financing of transport infrastructure and the constant expansion of the port from the company's own resources that held back both improvements in working conditions and increases in wages. During the 1960s, the standard of living in Slovenia improved drastically (Rendla, 2009, 343). At the Port of Koper, however, the standard of living of the employees fell in the second half of the 1960s due to the above-mentioned resource allocation priorities. This was most evident between 1967 and 1968, when wages at the Port of Koper were reduced to cover the costs of building the railway link (Dato, 2006, 220). This created a clear gap between the growth of cargo traffic and the workers' standard of living. As a result, labour turnover began to

increase sharply, which also had an impact on the internal work organisation. Nevertheless, by 1970, the Port of Koper had become the second port in Yugoslavia, after Rijeka, in terms of the volume of cargo handled. On March 27, 1970, tensions over the management's demand for higher standards of labour discipline boiled over and crystallised in a strike and a mass rally of workers from the port to the centre of Koper (Rutar, 2015, 278–279).

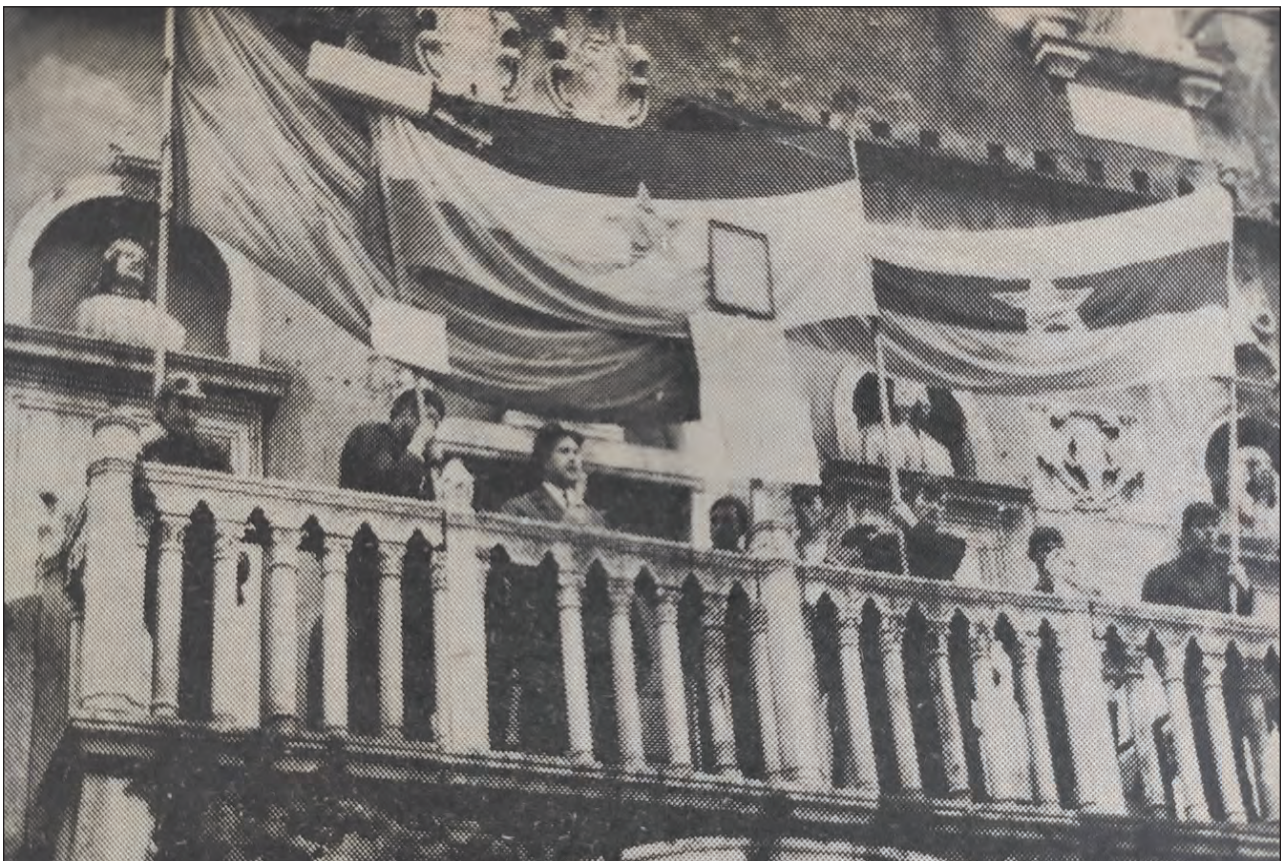
On March 27, 1970, the Port of Koper workers set off from the port and started marching around Koper. The assembled workers first headed towards the Tomos factory before arriving in the centre of Koper, so they covered the city considerably well with their presence. Their goal was Tito Square, the main square of the city. Miro Kocjan, then the President of Koper Assembly, was summoned with loud shouts to *Pretorska palača* on Tito square, where he tried unsuccessfully to appease the workers. They demanded a personal meeting with Danilo Petrinja, the director of Port of Koper since 1959. After his arrival (he had been called back from sick leave), the workers returned to the port, and twenty workers' representatives negotiated with the management in the company canteen until the evening. Thus the work stoppage ended.

The demands were mainly directed at the distribution of income and other benefits, which the workers considered to be unfairly distributed. It went so far that Petrinja offered his own resignation, which was not accepted by the Workers' Council. The workers, however, successfully demanded a review of the management's performance and a commitment to investigate the possibility of raising the employees' standard of living. The very next day (Saturday March 28) a meeting took place between the management, the city representatives, and the socio-political organisations with Stane Kavčič, then the President of the Executive Council of Slovenia, to discuss the Port of Koper problems. They summed up their dissatisfaction in a request to the decision-makers to "try to correct the ratio between investment and personal income in favour of the latter as soon as possible".²⁶

It is worth noting that on Sunday March 29, a very serious fire occurred in a cotton warehouse in the port. In addition to firefighters from all over the Slovenian Coast, firefighters from Trieste and Ljubljana were also needed to quell the fire. Arson was suspected, and an inquiry was ordered, which found no correlation with the work stoppage.²⁷

26 Primorske novice, 4. 4. 1970: O prekinitvi dela v luki Koper, 11.

27 Primorske novice, 4. 4. 1970: Velik požar v skladišču bombaža. Primorske novice, 11.



*Image 3: Port Workers on the balcony of the Pretorska palača.*²⁸

Primorske novice

After their modest account of the Trieste strike, let us look at *Primorske novice's* report on the 'home ground' work stoppage at the Port of Koper. The March 28 edition, the day after the work stoppage, did not yet report on what was happening, so the first (and extensive) report is given in the April 4 edition. In it, the picture of the workers' protest rally on the balcony of *Pretorska palača* in Tito Square, displaying the Yugoslav flag, is at the top of the front page. The workers' march from the port to the city centre is described under the picture as a very peaceful procession in which "[t]he workers of the port of Koper marched [...] to Tito Square and, carrying banners and flags, ascended to the *Pretorska palača* balcony".²⁹ Symbolically, like the student movement representatives of the time, they stood for the values of socialism, which they felt were not present enough, thus demonstrating their allegiance to the state system (Repe, 1992, 60).

However, the events were a nervier affair than the peaceful procession described above.

A more detailed picture of events was described in a longer article in the same issue on page eleven. For a robust description of said events, the reader is referred to the final part of the previous section of the present paper.³⁰

Reporting was then interrupted in the next edition, and a final analysis followed in the April 18 edition. This was a report on the analysis of the situation within the port by a three-member commission of the Coastal Conference Committee of the League of Communists, whose aim was to examine the causes that led to the work stoppage. It was agreed that there was a complex series of causes. Among the structural ones, they pointed to the way in which the port is financed, which is heavily burdened with infrastructure loans, and the problem of high labour turnover. Another major problem was seen to be the unsettled self-management relations within the company itself. The

²⁸ *Primorske novice*, 4. 4. 1970, 1.

²⁹ *Primorske novice*, 4. 4. 1970, 1.

³⁰ *Primorske novice*, 4. 4. 1970: O prekinitvi dela v Luki Koper, 11.



*Image 4: Firefighters in action against the fire at Port of Koper.*³²

responsibility for this situation must have lied with the communists within the company, especially those in higher positions. For it is precisely “[t]he way in which the port collective chose to deal with the accumulated problems [that] shows that self-management relations were not sufficiently developed.”³¹

Through such a conclusion, the overcoming of structural problems is transferred primarily to the collective, which should have been able to improve the situation through a proper regulation of self-management relations. At first sight, such a shifting of responsibility seems to be a matter of capitalist rather than socialist relations, yet such an analysis is in line with Kardelj’s thought that “[i]n our self-governing society, instead of the old relationship of worker-state-social affairs, there must inevitably be

a direct relationship between the workers of production and the workers of social affairs” (Kardelj, 1977, 21).

The fact that politicians presented the workers’ dissatisfaction with the situation at the Port of Koper as an underdevelopment of self-management relations is also in line with the attitude towards workers’ strikes in Yugoslavia in general. As already mentioned, strikes had no place in the political jargon of self-management and were therefore referred to as work stoppages. Although the ideological leaders of self-management accepted a small degree of social conflict as plausible even under socialism, they never really managed to incorporate the phenomenon of workers’ strikes into the system of self-management. Even if strikes were very rare at the Port of Koper, in the Yugoslav context they

31 Primorske novice, 18. 4. 1970: Več skrbi za delovnega človeka, 17.

32 Primorski dnevnik, 31. 3. 1970: Silovit požar v kopskem pristanišču povzročil za milijardo in pol dinarjev škode, 2.

were not a niche phenomenon that could be easily ignored (Hadalín, 2020, 308–309).

Primorski dnevnik

In *Primorski dnevnik*, unlike *Primorske novice*, we can read a report on the events as early as on March 28, the day after the work stoppage. The account is condensed and factual, which is understandable since, as the article notes, the late afternoon discussions between the workers and management had not yet been concluded by the time the edition went into press. It points out the same factors as *Primorske novice* as the reasons for the strike. It, however, puts a different emphasis on the relationship between structural and internal factors of the financial problems, summarising its reflection in the statement: “It is true that not enough attention has been paid to the self-management link between the management and the workers, but the reasons for the port being in the situation it is in must also be found outside the port.”³³ These external factors were located in the inadequate financing structure of the port, which was forced to take out loans to expand.

In the next issue, there was to be a report on the end of the Workers’ Council meeting, which spent seven hours discussing the situation at Port of Koper, a brief summary about achieving slightly better salaries, and adopting decisions aiming to improve working conditions.³⁴ A comprehensive report is given on the large fire in the cotton warehouse on the Sunday after the work stoppage, which is more than *Primorske novice* reported on. There are three possibilities given as the cause of the fire: spontaneous combustion, negligence, and arson. In addition to more technical information about the course of fire suppression, the broader picture of the possible causes is thus outlined. The report concludes with the work of the commission which was examining the fire, and which was keen to reach clear conclusions as soon as possible since “the event itself [...] has greatly upset public opinion in Koper and on the coast”.³⁵

The reporting of *Primorski dnevnik* thus follows the main lines of the reporting found in *Primorske novice*, even if in the end there are some minor differences in opinion pertaining to the Port of Koper work stoppage, and a somewhat more in-depth reflection on the possible causes of the fire outbreak. The key difference in the reporting on the work

stoppage is the criticism of the financing structure of the port. This also includes the criticism of the state funding of the port, which *Primorski dnevnik* perceives as insufficient. In view of the development in Port of Koper up to 1970, it can be argued that *Primorski dnevnik*’s review most closely resembles the complex situation at the port leading up to the work stoppage.

Il Piccolo

Il Piccolo first reported on the work stoppage at the Port of Koper on Sunday March 29 with a short note. Of the newspapers analysed, the situation in the Port of Koper was described in *Il Piccolo* in the most pessimistic terms. The workers’ talks with the local authorities and the top management of the port were described as inconclusive. In line with this statement, there was no indication that the work stoppage on Friday evening had ended. Instead of reporting on the return to work, the articles concentrated on listing the economic consequences that the strike had. In addition, it is claimed that, according to local authorities, the equipment in the port of Koper was inadequate for the increased volume of cargo arriving in the port and that, as a result, several shipowners were already diverting cargo to both Rijeka and Trieste.³⁶

Sunday’s fire at the Port of Koper got more attention in *Il Piccolo* than the work stoppage. A large photo of the firefighting is published on the cover of the first issue following the event.³⁷ Interestingly, it is only in *Il Piccolo*’s reporting that a link was made between the work stoppage and the outbreak of fire. Alongside two pictures of ships waiting to unload outside Port of Koper when the situation returned to normal, we find the statement: “The strike was then suspended due to a serious fire.”³⁸

The longer report on the fire presents the situation that followed the fire as a tense and dramatic crime drama. The port was “surrounded by agents armed with machine guns”, all persons in the area were brought in for questioning, and the police officers maintained “the strictest confidentiality” about the causes of the fire.³⁹ Only halfway into the article does it state that the cause of the fire was probably spontaneous combustion. It was also written that some people thought that the fire was related to the workers’ protest rally. Who these “some people” were is not entirely clear, as the article goes on to

33 *Primorski dnevnik*, 28. 3. 1970: Delavci koprské luke zahtevajo ureditev razmer, 2.

34 *Primorski dnevnik*, 29. 3. 1970: Položaj v koprski luki se je včeraj normaliziral, 8.

35 *Primorski dnevnik*, 31. 3. 1970: Silovit požar v koprskem pristanišču povzročil za milijardo in pol dinarjev škode, 2.

36 *Il Piccolo*, 29. 3. 1970: Sciopero a Capodistria dei lavoratori del porto, 2.

37 *Il Piccolo*, 31. 3. 1970: Incendio nel porto di Capodistria, 1.

38 *Il Piccolo*, 31. 3. 1970: Il primo sciopero portuale a Capodistria, 5.

39 *Il Piccolo*, 31. 3. 1970: Si aggirano intorno al miliardo i danni dell’incendio a Capodistria, Ragusin, 6.

point out that this link was categorically rejected by the Port of Koper management, as well as by a good part of the workers they spoke to. Perhaps some of the workers hinted at the link? Given that they would be the main suspects in this case, it does not seem likely. The investigation into the cause of the fire then concludes with a note that the police is looking into all possible scenarios.⁴⁰

The criticism, which in *Primorski dnevnik* originated from reflecting on the development and financing structure of the Port, was replaced in the case of *Il Piccolo* with an overly negative and speculative description of the situation at Port of Koper. That a right-wing newspaper in Italy should criticise a strike in Yugoslavia is, of course, not surprising. Describing the events as excessively chaotic probably also served to discredit one of the main rivals of the port of Trieste.

PRESS, CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION AND POLITICS

Beyond the various ideological preferences in reporting both on the strike in Trieste and on the work stoppage at Port of Koper, the fact that the workers' standard of living had been deteriorating on both sides of the border is evident. It is interesting that *Primorske novice* does not use the general strike in Trieste to give more explicit support to Italian workers' organisations and to criticise the capitalist system. The Italian *Il Piccolo* adopts a conservative stance in both its reports, and a parallel can be drawn with *Primorske novice* in that they both emphasise institutionalised dialogue and see the solution to the unrest in the strengthening of such dialogue—naturally from different ideological positions, either emphasising self-management or glorifying the role of the police in maintaining law and order. *Primorski dnevnik* turns out to be the most resolute supporter of the protests and provides a slightly more in-depth reflection of the events. Covering the protests in Trieste, it shows clear photographs of police repression that were not present in *Il Piccolo*, which misrepresented the magnitude and manner of police work. However, on the pages of *Primorski dnevnik* there is noticeable reticence in reporting on the events in Koper, which is understandable from their position since they are a pro-Yugoslav newspaper of the Slovenian minority in Italy. There appears to be a clear restraint present in *Primorske novice* in its coverage of the events in both Trieste and Koper.

These were times of political tensions on both sides of the border. In the summer of 1969, Slovenia as well as Yugoslavia were gripped by the “road affair”, which began to seriously undermine Kavčič's

“liberal” reform plans (Repe, 1992, 48). Italy, on the other hand, had been affected by the so-called *anni di piombo* (years of lead) since 1968, culminating in the 1970s, when political activism took over most of society and turned into years of confrontations, many of them literally explosive (Giannuli, 2008, 7–10). The relations between the two countries at the end of the 1960s were positive, ranging from support for economic integration to the common goal of defending the Adriatic against possible intervention by the Soviet Union after the Prague Spring (Meneguzzi Rostagni, 2011, 216). The last years before the Treaty of Osimo in 1974 brought back the tensions that had been present since the negotiations pertaining the Trieste Question. These tensions, however, became more manageable with the pressure exerted by the international community on Italy, eventually leading to de-escalation and agreement on border placement (Pirjevec, 2015, 389).

Cross-border cooperation also concerned media space. Thus, during the days of the strike in Trieste, we can read of a joint meeting between Italian and Yugoslav journalists in Koper, where the representatives of both delegations advocated mutual cooperation and support in carrying out their own reporting. They also agreed on “[t]he exchange of newsletters and experiences, the exchange of regular information on international activities of the two organisations, and possible joint appearances at international meetings.”⁴¹

CONCLUSION

The analysed newspapers give us a basic insight into the modalities of reporting, and an initial exploration of workers' problems on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The analysis therefore presents itself as a fragment of a hitherto relatively unexplored topic. Beyond the analysis of media discourse, it seems important to delve deeper into labour relations at both ports to better understand the position of the participants in the protests described.

In terms of protest legitimisation outside the institutional dialogue by the selected media in our analysis, two positions emerge. On one hand, *Il Piccolo* and *Primorske novice* saw workers' discontent as a kind of excess that should only be resolved through official agreements; on the other hand, *Primorski dnevnik* tried to present the workers' discontent as a cause in both protests, and was also the most committed to the workers' right to protest.

In addition to supporting the workers' protests, *Primorski dnevnik* has also been the most outspoken proponent of workers' demands, in particular the

40 *Il Piccolo*, 31. 3. 1970: Si aggirano intorno al miliardo i danni dell'incendio a Capodistria, Ragusin, 6.

41 *Primorski dnevnik*, 22. 6. 1968: Sporazum o sodelovanju in medsebojni izmenjavi, 2.

right to work in Trieste by fighting to preserve jobs in the port sector. In its coverage of the events in Koper, it clearly supported the need for increased state support, not only for the development of the port, but also for a suitable standard of living for workers. *Il Piccolo* did not directly address the workers' demands. Concerning the economic future of Trieste, it did clearly show the concern and the need for action by the authorities, but primarily for a clear plan for economic development, not for the demands of the workers. *Primorske novice* did not address the demands of the workers in Trieste, and apart from a rough description of what was happening, it was only critical in its condemnation of police violence. In the case of the work stoppage in Koper, it sought to incorporate the workers' demands into the system of workers' self-management, or rather to claim that the workers are not doing enough to make it work. It did not, however, address the criticism of the system of workers' self-management itself or of the financial

support from the state. Thus, we are presented with a somewhat paradoxical situation, where the only newspaper seeking the reasons for workers' discontent with the situation in the enterprise primarily in the workers themselves is the very newspaper which openly presents itself as socialist.

The links established above show that the division of workers' organising strictly along the lines of Western and Eastern Bloc is not very useful, and that it is necessary to look at developments on both sides of the border in parallel for a more complex and complete picture. As already mentioned, irrespective of the differences in the political system, the problems of workers on both sides of the border appear to be strikingly similar, ranging from the lowering of the general material standard to the decreasing influence in the labour process. In the light of these and other parallels we have mentioned, the boundary between the two blocs, at least in the case we have analysed, becomes rather blurred.

ČASOPISNO POROČANJE IN NEKATERI POLITIČNI DEJAVNIKI V OBMEJNIH SINDIKALNIH BORBAH: PRIMERJAVA SPLOŠNE STAVKE V TRSTU LETA 1968 IN PREKINITVE DELA V LUKI KOPER LETA 1970

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POVZETEK

V drugi polovici šestdesetih let se je v pristaniščih severnega Jadrana razširil močan stavkovni val. Ta val se je najprej pojavil v Trstu, kjer so se na podlagi dolge tradicije delavskega organiziranja sindikalni organizatorji osredotočili na ostro nasprotovanje načrtu CIPE, katerega popolna uresničitev bi pomenila zaprtje ladjedelnice svetega Marka v Trstu. Družbeni nemiri so med večjimi protesti v Trstu v letih 1966, 1968 in 1969 prestopili tudi jugoslovansko mejo s prekinitvami dela v pristanišču na Reki v letih 1969 in 1971 ter prvo množično prekinitvijo dela v Luki Koper marca 1970. Položaj regije ob najbolj odprti meji med Zahodom in Vzhodom sproža vprašanja o medsebojni povezanosti socialnih vprašanj, trenj na delovnem mestu znotraj pristaniške panoge in metodah spoprijemanja z njimi. Za vpogled v poročanje o stavkovnih aktivnostih preko ‚železne zavese‘ je v članku podrobneje predstavljeno novinarsko poročanje o splošni stavki, ki je junija 1968 potekala v Trstu, in o prekinitvi dela v Luki Koper marca 1970. Članek prikazuje način poročanja na obeh straneh meje ter družbeni odmev delavskih zahtev. Nakaže tudi na čezmejna povezovanja, ki so se odvijala v obdobju prikazanih stavk.

Ključne besede: Pristaniški delavci, stavka, severovzhodni Jadran, poročanje v medijih, sindikalni boji

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