

IN DISPUTE: the city of Trieste

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You run along the coast road into Trieste past the original of Wellington's suburb of Miramar—a castle of that name built for Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, and (would-be) Emperor of Mexico. The old city is picturesquely built on terraces around the castle hill with streets steep and irregular. But its more recent overflow, along the broad busy Via del Corso, sprawls rectangular and modern on reclaimed land along the crescent bay. This is the part the New Zealanders have occupied. On their bay-wards the New World holds a balance for the Old.

Some History

See how complicated this Trieste problem is—and how typical of many that must be settled in the next few months or years. By population the port is Italian, overwhelmingly so. But then (say the Yugoslavs, quite truthfully) most Dalmatian ports are, or have been, manned by Italians because Venetians occupied them during the Middle Ages to prevent pirates cutting Venice's searoutes. Trieste, in fact, is historically less Italian than most Adriatic towns, since it was never Italian territory before the last Peace Settlement. The reason is that way back in 1385 it put itself under the German Emperor's protection to get beyond the grasp of its rival Venice. This brought Austria into the picture as yet another jigsaw section. For the Austrian Empire, lasting down to 1917 as carry-over of the medieval Holy Roman (i.e., Germanic) Empire, naturally inherited Trieste. It was instructions from Vienna, indeed, that built the modern city, its dockyards and its industries, to house the great Lloyd Triestino shipping line which drained all Central Europe, and to feed the Navy of which Horthy, ruler of landlocked Hungary, was Admiral. All the mid-European States have therefore a stake in Trieste. Czech and Magyar merchants have actually been using it more than Italians and Yugoslavs put together.

Yet it is the Yugoslavs, hardly mentioned so far, who claim Trieste to the point of insisting upon some sort of military occupation, real or token—and not merely claim Trieste, but claim all the hinterland up to "Tarvitch" and those Austrian valleys of Carinthia as well. And their claim, too, is real. For the people of these areas are largely Slovenes.

The Slovene-Italian and Slovene-German ethnic frontiers illustrate the

kind of European racial and cultural boundary which is just the opposite of that clear-cut line we saw at Tarvis.

Only in the section just north of Trieste has anyone been able to say just where Slovenes begin and their neighbours leave off. And the reason here has been a barren belt containing, in so far as it contained anyone, speakers of Switzerland's fourth language, Latin or Romansch, which — though scattered in pockets throughout the Alps — has never caused any minority problems since no newspapers are published in it. Ten years ago we rode into the brand-new little city of Udine over still wet bitumen between fields ploughed for coming Italian settlers, but with no cottages yet built. Power politics was "planting" the desert.

South of Trieste, however, Slav and Latin along the Istrian peninsula have always been inextricably mixed since the Avars, invading in the fifth century, left here among the Roman winemakers and orchardists the slaves (called Slovenes) whom they had brought with them from the far side of Poland. And all along the German-Slav border the same intermingling occurs. In these wide rolling valleys—none pleasanter anywhere in the world—that make up south-east Austria and north-west Yugoslavia, we New Zealand trippers could not tell whether any village that we passed was German or Slovene.

Further Complications

For—to further complicate matters—Slovenes, for all their racial origin and their integral part in the country officially called the "Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes," are more German than Balkan in their habits of thought and of life. Their dialect, too, is different from even near by Croat. They write Latin script, not Cyrillic like most Southern Slavs. They are Roman Catholics, not Orthodox like the Serbs and Montenegrins, or Moslem like the Bosnians. And not only their cities—picture postcard Klagenfurt in Austria and Ljubljana in Yugoslavia—but even their villages, hold highly-mechanised and most un-Balkan industries.

How many Triestes are there in Europe? Six at least of similar complexity. How far any of them can be unravelled so long as frontiers remain as important as they are is an arguable point. What we all can agree, however, is that military possession must not set the scales rocking. Some day, we hope, it will not settle—or unsettle—such problems anywhere.

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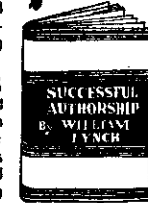
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