**Is history repeating itself? Golob repeated Cerar’s mistake that cost him the position of prime minister**  
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Prime Minister Miro Cerar resigned in 2018, triggering early elections, because the Constitutional and Supreme Courts ruled that his government had acted fraudulently by allocating one hundred thousand euros for a propaganda campaign during the referendum on the second railway track. I pointed out the unfairness of this in *Spletni časopis* as soon as the government announced its participation in the campaign. Opponents of the project did not receive an equal amount of public money — in fact, they received none at all. The Supreme Court’s decision to annul the referendum on the second track was the final straw, Cerar said when he stepped down. The government fell, and the referendum was repeated.

At the start of the referendum on granting massive privileges to the cultural elite, Robert Golob repeated the mistake of former Prime Minister Miro Cerar. They learn nothing. Just a week ago, Golob appeared on both of the country’s largest TV networks — POP TV and RTV Slovenia — as Prime Minister, urging the public to boycott the referendum and promoting the privileged pension scheme. He wasn’t there as a party leader.

He shouldn’t have done that. And he mustn’t do it again. This is an abuse of power. The government and its leader must not intervene in party disputes before a referendum. They must serve all citizens, not just the projects of Freedom, SD, and Levica parties, which are trying to enshrine new privileges into law. Using our money. But since the opposition party SDS gathered 40,000 signatures, the people will have the final say. If the people reject the idea, there will be no privileges. Since Golob joined the campaign as Prime Minister — something he should not have done — any rejection will also be a vote of no confidence in the entire government.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Culture Asta Vrečko can of course campaign as leaders of the Freedom and Levica parties. But the Prime Minister and ministers must not use public funds or their positions to gain an advantage over competitors in elections. To be clear: they must not send secret services, police, or the army into the campaign or to polling stations to prevent votes for opposition parties. They must not threaten opposition supporters with punishment or monitor how they vote. They must not pay for votes using public funds. Or anything similar.

We are no longer a communist dictatorship. It is strange that no one seriously pointed out to Prime Minister Golob that he must not call for a boycott of the referendum in his official capacity. Even the legal experts around him remain silent.

Previously, similar pension rights — guaranteeing the highest possible pension (over 3,000 euros net) — were legally granted in 2017 to athletes and to Peter Vilfan himself (a former MP of PS, SAB, and DeSUS) through a law widely supported by the left, during Cerar’s government.

Somewhat comically, the most vocal critic of Golob’s and Vrečko’s excesses in this campaign has been entrepreneur and former politician Marko Bandelli — now a critic of the very government he once supported. He criticized Levica for equating cultural pensions with culture and art, the latter being under their ministry.

It’s absolutely clear that the referendum is not for or against culture. Cultural activity does not depend on privileged 3,000-euro pensions. If that were true, culture wouldn’t exist. Not even in the rest of Europe. Such extensive pension privileges have never existed here in past centuries — nor do they exist in wealthier parts of Europe. Yet those places are still centers of great cultural achievement.

Another major manipulation we are witnessing is the argument that these huge pension bonuses are necessary because previous governments — under socialist law — already granted them, and that rejecting them means attacking the legacy of the previous regime and Josip Broz Tito. The opposition cannot repeal socialist-era laws. Only the government parties could — but they haven’t even considered it. Instead, they are expanding those rights. They are building on Tito’s legacy.

The differences are in very practical consequences. Under the socialist-era law, since Slovenia’s independence, only a handful of athletes received such privileges — for example, the father of former PM Miro Cerar. But under Peter Vilfan’s 2017 law, enacted during Cerar’s government, already over a hundred individuals have received them — including Vilfan himself.

The same will happen now with cultural workers if the majority of voters do not reject the massive pension privileges in the referendum. Governments — especially since independence — have handed out these privileges to cultural workers more generously than to athletes. The new law would turn what used to be a possibility into a guaranteed right. The socialist law allowed the government to approve or reject all applications. The proposed law makes these rights enforceable — the government would no longer decide.

There’s a similar manipulation going around: that privileges under the old law could be inherited, while under the new one they cannot. The socialist-era law never allowed automatic inheritance. It only allowed the government to grant privileges to family members if it chose to do so and issued an official decree. This happened after independence, when left-leaning governments like Janez Drnovšek’s widely granted such pensions (for example, to Svetlana Makarovič over 25 years ago). This is one case of a family member receiving such a privilege:

Automatic inheritance appeared in the past decade — not because of the socialist-era law, but *despite* it. According to the new pension system (ZPIZ-2), widows, widowers, and similarly “deserving” individuals suddenly gained automatic rights to inherit bonuses — as did war veterans, revolutionaries, and other privileged groups. ZPIZ didn’t even inform the public about these allocations. Under the old law, the government had to publish decisions when granting family benefits.

Names and surnames of recipients were hidden. The allocation became automatic. When I requested data, the government and ZPIZ even tried to withhold who inherited these bonuses. Eventually, the Information Commissioner forced them to send me the list for 2022.

Before the referendum, I have now requested from ZPIZ a complete list of all heirs who received this bonus in the past decade — including dates. I’m still waiting for a response. But people deserve to know. Everything. Because we’ll be voting in a referendum. And we can’t do that without all the facts. The government must help citizens with accurate explanations and information — which is incompatible with the propaganda we’ve already seen.

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