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EDUCATIONAL WORK IN PARTISAN SCHOOLS IN SLOVENIA*

First of all, it may be noted that the specificities of educational work in the partisan schools in Slovenia described in this article were not characteristic only of the Slovene partisan schools, but of all similar institutions that had been founded throughout the occupied Yugoslav territory in order to preserve national language and culture.

The causes for such a proliferation of partisan schools during the National Liberation War are to be sought long before the beginning of the Second World War in 1941, when the progressive Slovene teachers gathered in the so-called "Club of the Friends of Village Culture," and earlier, in 1936, in the "Teachers' Movement," led by teachers-communists.

At that time the Slovene people were exposed to strong nationalistic and clerical-fascist propaganda. Aware of the seriousness of the situation, the Communist Party assumed leadership of the country (Slovene nation) and thus created the necessary conditions for the founding of partisan schools.

Among the invaders that divided up the Slovene territory in April 1941, the Germans were far better prepared than the Italians and the Hungarians; nevertheless, all of them had the same aim: to root out the Slovene nation, fortify the frontier regions, and forever exterminate all that bore testimony to Slovene autochthony. The division of the Slovene territory caused changes in educational policy. In the areas occupied by the Germans and Hungarians Slovene schools were abolished, and Slovene teachers dismissed, exiled or imprisoned. Children were taught in the language of the invader. The Italians at first promised to allow the Slovene children instruction in their mother tongue, but later on they merely kept putting off the new regulation till the postwar period - provided they were victorious, of course.

Slovene books and textbooks were systematically burnt, and the Slovene children were forced to attend the invaders' schools. Various denationalization pressures soon gave rise to a general rebellion that grew into an organized liberation movement with the establishment of the Liberation Front on 27 April 1941. In its programme the Liberation Front underscored also a number of tasks connected with the development of Slovene partisan schools and with the preservation of the national language and culture.

The expansion of the national liberation movement and of partisan troops was evident also in the life and work of the schools. Pupils took part in all kinds of activities that contributed to

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successful operations of partisan troops. In April 1942 the enemy troops concentrated in larger towns with strong fortifications. The first parts of the occupied Slovene territory were liberated by partisans, the new people's government was established, and the members of the National Liberation Boards were elected. The Executive Board of the National Liberation Front, first located at Ljubljana, moved to Suha Krajina and then to Rog. Some basic legislation based on the new foundations was necessary to regulate the life and work in the liberated areas. One of the first of such documents was the Act passed by the Liberation Front on 17 May 1942, regulating the establishment of people's government in the liberated areas. In the field of education, the Liberation Front had passed the following Act:

Art. 1: Classes in schools are to be given regularly every day, the school year lasting up to 27 June 1942.

Art. 2: All activities contrary to the orientation provided in the Act of the Liberation Front are prohibited.

Art. 3: The teaching personnel as a whole will assume the function of electing the principal from among the staff.

Art 4: The leading school staff members will act according to the directives obtained from the people's authorities, thereby realizing the fundamental aims of the national liberation movement: liberation, complete self-determination of the Slovene nation, the democracy of life.

Art. 5: The leading school staff members should take further steps towards the total elimination of all external and psychological consequences of the invader's imposition (they are to remove the occupier's pictures, flags, textbooks, and cease teaching in the enemy language).

Special meetings were to be organized in order to uphold the idea of the successful struggle against the occupier's forces, so as to strengthen in them the feeling of patriotism and gradually develop the positive attitude towards the new political, social and cultural values. Schools had to dedicate some of the regular lessons to the special liberation programme.

Art. 6: The leading Liberation Front staff members were to take special care of the financial status of schools and teachers.

The Act itself comprised the core programme of the organization, where a special emphasis had been laid on the contents of educational work and the development of patriotism. In this way, teachers were given the basic orientation on what to teach and how to educate. More attention was paid to the introduction of new methods of work in order to prevent the new contents from remaining mere propaganda.

Special meetings were organized for teachers who were in this way provided with the basic guidelines for the practical implementation of the above-mentioned Act.

From the organizational point of view, the new Act broke with tradition in that the principal of the school was to be appointed

by the government or its agencies. Now it was the teaching staff itself that elected the leading personnel of the school from among the members of the collective. With this the importance of collective leadership was underlined. It represented a further step towards the democratization of educational policy.

Nevertheless, the above-mentioned Act did not regulate in detail some aspects of the existence of partisan schools, as for instance the financial status of teachers and schools themselves. This deficiency was often felt later, also after the end of the Second World War.

There were no dilemmas as to the ideology of the new school. Many problems arose, however, due to the lack of funds and the shortage of teachers who were often regular members of partisan troops in addition to their educational work.

In spite of the fact that the liberated areas could not always provide all the security necessary for uninterrupted educational work, there is no doubt that the Act on Education, passed by the Liberation Front, represented the basic document not only for the development of partisan schools but also for the affirmation of education after the end of the National Liberation War.

The second period of the development of partisan schools was heralded by the Italian capitulation, which brought to life a number of schools in Lower Carnolia, Inner Carnolia and the Littoral, where instead of Italian, Slovene became the language of instruction. The school system became more centralized, and a special school commission was appointed by the Liberation Front.

Secondary schools were reestablished at Crnomelj, Novo Mesto, Kocevje and Sticna.

The Italian capitulation and the liberation of sizable areas enabled the systematic organization of compulsory schooling, which was once more interrupted by the great German offensive in 1943. It was only in February 1944 that the Section for education could assume all the responsibility for further development of schools.

Among the weightier tasks of the Section, we must mention:

- care for regular work of the schools and organization of different forms of instructional work (courses, evening courses, travelling schools) in the occupied areas;
- the foundation of regular schools in the areas secure from enemy attacks;
- uniformity of compulsory education in Slovenia; this task had been partially carried out also by regional and district supervisors. Within the Section for education, a special pedagogical council was founded in November 1944 to deal with all the questions related to the contents and methods of instructional and other educational work;
- organization of special teachers' meetings and conferences, political courses, in-service training, and preparation of new syllabuses for compulsory schooling.

The third period of partisan schools spanned the period between the Session of the Slovene National Liberation Council at

Črnomelj in February 1944, and the final liberation of the country in May 1945.

The Slovene National Liberation Council founded a special administrative board to undertake all the activities related to the organization, development and supervision of schools. This period of the development of partisan schools was characterized by special care devoted to new teachers and the strengthening of the function of the parents' council as one of the basic steps towards real democratization of the educational and school policy.

It follows from what we have said so far that the organization of partisan schools was not based on a stable system of life and work, because each individual school had to fight its way through the maelstrom of war. Nevertheless, the provisional and temporary organization of the elementary school grew into regular instructional work after the war. The location of schools had changed regarding the movement of the enemy army. The partisan schools in Lower Carnolia, Inner Carnolia, White Carnolia and the Littoral had the best possibilities for work. In all these regions teachers and pupils were in close contact with the population of the particular region where the school in question was located.

There were many more troubles with the organization of compulsory Slovene schooling in Upper Carnolia and Styria.

The circumstances during the war were not favourable to the introduction of any organizational changes. Nearest to the type of partisan schools was the organization of the pre-war elementary school.

A very important role was assigned to the Pioneers' organization, which connected the life in school with out-of-school activities and thus took an active part in the liberation movement. Pupils and teachers took part in special kinds of competition organized under the aegis of the Slovene National Liberation Council. This form of instructional work was carried out at the third anniversary of the establishment of the Liberation Front in March 1944.

Pupils and teachers competed in different fields of educational work; for instance, in the arrangement and cultivation of school gardens and in the knowledge of the most important events that occurred during the National Liberation War. Pupils were keen on collecting medicinal herbs, fruits and different spare materials which could be of any help to the partisans.

Besides their obvious practical usefulness, these activities strengthened the feeling of collectivity, affiliation and dependency. In the general atmosphere of friendship and understanding it was not difficult to sustain the discipline necessary in those circumstances.