

Mojca Šorn

LIFE IN OCCUPIED SLOVENIA DURING WORLD WAR II⁴⁸⁶

World War II affected everybody's life, embroiling not only soldiers and leaving its mark on them and their families, but also invading the general civil sphere on multiple levels and thus determining the everyday lives of urban and rural populations across the entire Slovenia. Slovenian historiography focusing on World War II has produced a comparatively large body of work consisting of academic and scholar texts; these, however, mostly shed light on political and military aspects. The present article thus attempts to show what everyday life was like in Slovenia during World War II, an issue that has not yet been considered by historiography (at least not in detail), and in order to do so relies on fragments from various archives, on printed sources

⁴⁸⁶ The present article deals with those areas of Slovenia that were, from 1929 to 1941, part of the administrative unit of the Drava Banate (one of the nine Yugoslav banates formed in accordance with the Act Altering the Appellation and Administrative Divisions of the Kingdom after the establishment of the 6th January Dictatorship by King Aleksander Karađorđević) whose capital was Ljubljana, and which previously (from 1922 to 1929) belonged to two different administrative or territorial units – the Ljubljana Unit and the Maribor Unit. For details see: Jurij Perovšek: Dravska banovina in banski svet [The Drava Banate and Ban's Council]. In: Fischer et al. (eds.), *Slovenska novejša zgodovina 1*, pp. 327–332.

and memoirs and especially on periodical publications. Although the latter is not particularly revealing – from the very beginning of the war, the press was subject to censorship and later faced problems due to paper shortages and was subsequently often reduced in extent – it remains a valuable indicator of the actual situation: it reflects both the violence perpetrated by the occupying forces against the population in all aspects of life as well as other hardships that everybody was facing during the time of war.

From 1941 to 1945, Slovenia was primarily characterized by the violence perpetrated by the occupying forces against the population that was clear in all walks of life and culminated in physical terror. Repressive measures were used by all occupying countries as they counted on such measures to effectively support their plans for the forcible assimilation of Slovenes, which would of course be preceded by the annexation of the occupied Slovenian territory to their own countries. However, whether people lived or died was determined not only by the occupying forces, but also by the two “companions” of war: the “danger from above” and the scarcity of all necessities of life – particularly comestibles – which form the central theme of this article.

* * *

Upon being occupied (in April 1941), the Yugoslav part of the Slovenian territory (i.e. the Drava Banate, see footnote 486), home to over 1,200,000 people, was divided between four occupying countries. Germany took Styria, part of Lower Carniola, the Mežiška dolina Valley, Upper Carniola and four villages in Prekmurje. In addition to Ljubljana, Italy got most of Lower Carniola and Inner Carniola, while Hungary received Prekmurje and two municipalities that had previously (until June 1941) been part of the Croatia Banate.⁴⁸⁷ The fourth occupying force is not represented in the contribution, since the Independent state of Croatia acquired only 5 smaller settlements in the division of the Slovenian territory.

The occupation and division of Slovenia among the occupying countries were an incontrovertibly critical moment for the existence of the nation, but also affected the lives of ordinary people.⁴⁸⁸ All occupying countries used various violent methods to try and annex the occupied territories to their own and to incorporate them in their own existing social systems along with the assimilated population.

487 For more details on this, see: Tone Ferenc: Ozemlje in meje [Territory and Borders]. In: Fischer et al. (eds.), *Slovenska novejša zgodovina 1*, pp. 575–576.

488 Bojan Godeša: Zasedba razkosane Slovenije [Occupation of the Divided Slovenia]. In: *Slovenska kronika XX. stoletja 1941–1995* [Slovenian Chronicles of the 20th Century 1941–1995]. Ljubljana, 1996, p. 10.

The German occupying forces showed their ruthlessness soon after the beginning of the occupation.⁴⁸⁹ Desiring to prevent anything Slovenian from existing among the people who had not been deported, they instituted German as the only legal language of public and social communication. They Germanized personal and family names as well as toponyms. The Slovenian language was banned even in churches⁴⁹⁰ and schools. Because classes, taught by new, German teachers, were thus conducted in a language most children were not proficient in, the curriculum initially only included physical education and music classes.⁴⁹¹ High school students got the worst of it as the German occupying forces drastically limited the number of students accepted to high schools.⁴⁹² This was the result of the idea that the Slovenian folk (as potential workforce) only required basic education. The Germans disbanded all Slovenian parties, organizations and associations (even the firemen's), destroyed and blocked the Slovenian press and even burned books in Slovene, and drafted men into their military formations. To facilitate effective Germanization, mass organizations were established (Kärntner Volksbund, Steirische Heimatbund, Hitlerjugend etc.) that operated among the people in the field. The German forces occupying the Slovenian territory remained true to their harsh policy of assimilation until the end of the war, except in Upper Carniola (north from Ljubljana), where the treatment was slightly more relaxed and the people were allowed Slovenian primary schools and some bi-lingual papers.⁴⁹³

The attitude of the Hungarian occupying forces towards the people of Prekmurje was similar as the Hungarians were convinced that these people should live in Hungary. Like the Germans, the Hungarian occupying forces deported those Slovenes who were nationally conscious or educated,⁴⁹⁴ disbanded Slovenian parties, organizations and associations, and suppressed the use of the Slovene language, even in schools where classes were thus conducted in Hungarian. The only type of press that was allowed were religious publications, but although these were written in the Prekmurje dialect, they had to be printed using the Hungarian alphabet. To support Hungarization, the Hungarian Educational Society⁴⁹⁵ and a youth organization were established, which operated in the towns

489 For details regarding the Nazi assimilation policies in Slovenia, see: Tone Ferenc: *Nacistična raznarodovalna politika*.

490 *Slovenec*, 18 May 1941, Iz Spodnje Štajerske.

491 *Slovenec*, 4 June 1941, Iz Spodnje Štajerske.

492 In the autumn of 1942, only 100 students were anticipated to enrol in Maribor high schools, while Maribor had about 1,900 high school students prior to World War II. – *Slovenec*, 12 June 1941, Iz Spodnje Štajerske.

493 Tone Ferenc: *Okupacija Slovenije 1941 [Occupation of Slovenia 1941]*. In: *Dokumenti slovenstva [Documents of Slovenianism]*. Ljubljana, 1994, pp. 343–347.

494 For more details on the Hungarian occupation of Prekmurje, see: Godeša, *Kdor ni z nami*, pp. 108–117.

495 For details see: Ferdo Godina: *Prekmurje 1941–1945. Prispevek k zgodovini NOB [Prekmurje 1941–1945. Contribution to the History of the National Liberation Struggle]*. Murska Sobota, 1967, p. 28.

and countryside of Prekmurje. Like the Germans, the Hungarians also drafted Slovenian boys and men into their military formations.

In the Province of Ljubljana, which was established in the Italian-occupied territory after annexation, the guidelines followed by the Italian occupying forces were initially softer. In this occupied area, men were not subject to being drafted, the Province was bi-lingual and Slovenes were allowed to be involved with the administration. Cultural autonomy was planned as well, with the Italians counting on a widespread cooperation of the Slovenian nation with the Fascist regime. On the other hand, all political parties were disbanded, while cultural, sports, charity and other non-political organizations and associations were generally incorporated into the Italian system. The Italians were also more tolerant towards the Slovenian press (which was, however, heavily censored) and the school system. Regarding the latter, numerous new ideas were implemented to gradually facilitate the incorporation of the Slovenian system of education into the Italian framework, and throughout the war, classes were conducted in Slovene. The Ljubljana university remained operational throughout the Italian occupation; starting with autumn 1943, however, it was only open to students who were there to take their exams. After the September 1943 capitulation of Italy, the Province of Ljubljana was occupied by the Germans who incorporated it into the newly formed operational zone called “the Adriatic Littoral” (Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland).⁴⁹⁶ The German occupying forces did not interfere with the everyday lives of the people of the Province of Ljubljana as much as the Italians before them. They even allowed the new regional administration, headed in accordance with the Order Determining the Implementation of Public Administration in the Province of Ljubljana by President Leon Rupnik (a Slovene), to remove some of the remaining traces of the Italian occupation.⁴⁹⁷

Policies of the occupying forces largely shaped the cultural and even social lives of the people. In the towns located in the territory occupied by the Germans, exhibitions, concerts, cinemas and libraries⁴⁹⁸ only showcased works created by Nazi and Fascist artists or those evidently sympathetic to the new rulers. The Slovene language was banned from theatre stages as well (e.g. as early as in May 1941, the Maribor theatre ensemble was replaced by the Austrian Provincial Theatre from Graz, which set up productions throughout the war in Maribor and other towns of the Slovenian Styria⁴⁹⁹ and was later reinforced by “new blood from

496 See e.g.: Karl Stuhlpfarrer: *Die Operationszonen “Alpenvorland” und “Adriatisches Küstenland” 1943–1945*, 7. Vienna, 1969.

497 For details, see: Mojca Šorn: *Življenje Ljubljančanov med drugo svetovno vojno* [Life of the Ljubljana Citizens during World War II]. Ljubljana, 2007.

498 *Marburger Zeitung*, 8 July 1942, Das gute Buch in jedem Haus des Unterlandes.

499 *Slovenec*, 20 May 1941, Iz Spodnje Štajerske.

all major German centres of culture⁵⁰⁰). Even in the countryside, where “village evenings” became a regular feature,⁵⁰¹ Nazi organizations assisted by visiting bands and theatre groups, puppet shows for children, film projections (locations that lacked the necessary facilities for this were visited by a “car with sound film”⁵⁰²) and numerous lectures propagated the idea of “Eternal Germany.”⁵⁰³

The Hungarian occupying forces intently watched over the activities of the Prekmurje population as well and tried to foster interest for everything Hungarian. In their efforts, authorities went as far as to establish special groups who circled around towns and villages with cars equipped with giant loudspeakers, playing records and thus trying to popularize Hungarian song.⁵⁰⁴

In the territory occupied in 1941 by the Italians, both written and spoken Slovene remained legal throughout the war. Major Slovenian institutions of arts and entertainment were allowed to operate as well but it was impossible to overlook the tendencies of the new regime in their programmes⁵⁰⁵ – these were mostly geared towards familiarizing people with the Italian, and from late 1943 onward the German, culture. Nevertheless, the stages of these institutions were well-visited throughout the war, with one of the reasons being that the “Slovene language was not suppressed and, more importantly, there was a Slovene spirit present, while the public media of the time were public in name only [author’s note: due to the previously mentioned censorship]”⁵⁰⁶

* * *

From the end of World War I, the European nations were aware that military strategy and engagements would take on a completely different form in the future. They assumed that a new war would hurt not only the soldiers on the front, but that air raids and bombings as scare tactics would greatly endanger civilian populations in the rear as well, particularly the populations of major cities, centres of industry and settlements along important traffic (road and rail) routes, and hit, in addition to the people, their homes and industrial buildings, depots holding basic necessities.⁵⁰⁷

500 *Slovenec*, 10 September 1941, Iz Spodnje Štajerske.

501 *Karawanken Bote*, 23 January 1943, Aus dem Kreise Radmannsdorf.

502 *Karawanken Bote*, 3 July 1943, Kreis Stein.

503 *Karawanken Bote*, 20 March 1943, Aus dem Kreise Krainburg.

504 *Slovenec*, 20 August 1941, Življenje v Prekmurju.

505 On the double-edged Italian occupation policies, see: Aleš Gabrič: Odziv slovenskih kulturnikov na okupacijo leta 1941 [The Response of the Slovenian Cultural Workers to the Occupation of 1941]. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino. Slovenci in leto 1941*. Ljubljana, 2001, No. 2, pp. 211–223. Godeša, *Kdor ni z nami*, p. 84 and elsewhere.

506 Ivan Jerman: *Slovenski dramski igralci med 2. svetovno vojno* [Slovenian Theatre Actors during World War II]. Ljubljana, 1968, p. 50.

507 SI ZAL 501, box 4, 1933, 18/33.

In the early 1930s, such reasoning and the example of many European countries led the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to decide that the country's training for possible air raids and anti-air defence would involve not only the military, but also the civilian population.⁵⁰⁸ Every individual was to be informed on how they should and must act before, during and after the dangerous event. In accordance with the guidelines of the Ground Defence Inspection Service that collaborated with the Ministry of the Interior and the Administration of the Red Cross Society, education and awareness campaigns were the responsibility of individual banates and commanders of army groups, and were executed by city administrative authorities. Numerous municipalities thus established "protection committees" that worked with civil authorities to train the people for anti-aircraft protection and defence. These committees organized various information lectures and exhibitions on anti-aircraft protection, and the subject was frequently discussed in newspapers and academic literature, with cinemas and the radio also informing the people of certain details associated with various defence services and procedures. In the years prior to World War II, Slovenia held a number of air raid drills (with "staged air raids") in which the civilians were able to learn what to do in case of danger from above.

About four months before the beginning of World War II, on 15 April 1939, the Minister of the Army and Navy issued a decree on the protection of the people in wartime,⁵⁰⁹ and on 6 May 1939 a decree of the central government regarding anti-aircraft protection was published by the Slovenian official gazette. This decree, whose aim was, among other things, to provide for the defence and protection of people and their property against the effects of enemy air-attack devices, was further used as the basis for the rules on anti-aircraft protection.⁵¹⁰ In early December (on 4 December 1939), a decree on national mobilization was issued as well.⁵¹¹ The mobilization plans of various ministries included the creation of "directorates" that would assist with countermeasures against certain disruptions in case of war. The Ministry of Construction thus established a Directorate for the Anti-Aircraft Protection of Buildings and the Ministry of the Interior established a Directorate for the Anti-Aircraft Protection of the People.⁵¹²

508 For details see: Mojca Šorn: Sistem protiletalske obrambe v Dravski banovini in v času druge svetovne vojne (s poudarkom na Ljubljani) [The System of Anti-Aircraft Defence in the Drava Banate and During World War II (with an emphasis on Ljubljana)]. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 2010, No. 3, pp. 27–36.

509 *Službene novine Kraljevine Jugoslavije*, 15 April 1939, pp. 435–449, Uredba o zaščiti od vazdušnog napada.

510 *Službeni list kraljevske banske uprave Dravske banovine*, 10 May 1939, pp. 398–403, Pravilnik o zaščiti pred zračnimi napadi.

511 *Ibid.*, 30 December 1939, pp. 969–975, art. 662.

512 *Trgovski list*, 13 December 1939, Organizacija gospodarstva v vojni. Uredba o državni mobilizaciji.

The new provisions led to new activities. People were encouraged to prepare private bomb shelters and build public ones. Firemen's and technical squads were being trained for cleaning up the ground in case of an air raid. Provisional field clinics and first aid teams that would take care of casualties were organized as well. A defence measure was planned according to which people, or at least the younger segments of the population, would be evacuated from densely populated or precariously positioned cities,⁵¹³ but the measure was never put into practice.

Although anti-aircraft protection of the Drava Banate in the 1930s was comprehensive in the sense of territorial coverage (the network included all major and strategically important cities), it was inadequately funded and thus lacking in material organization. This fact left a mark on the doctrine of anti-aircraft defence. The effectiveness of passive defence was questioned by those in power as well as the media, which pointed out its ineffectiveness in terms of propaganda and education, and cautioned that the public was not taking it seriously because of its poor level of readiness and lacking equipment. The truth of this is indicated by a fragment of an article on a black-out drill in Maribor: "In particular, one could note that the people living in poor neighbourhoods of the city were extremely disciplined, while virtually every second window and especially large stairwells remained lit in the big blocks of flats housing mostly the intelligentsia and the better-off population. With respect to factories, where issues in this regard were expected to be most pronounced, the managers generally followed their instructions. The only exception was /.../ one major factory. The whole building was lit as normal and visible from afar. /.../ We do not know whether the company was penalized or not, but it definitely should have been, and the penalty should have been made public, so that the people could see nobody was privileged or exempt."⁵¹⁴

Once the war began, anti-aircraft defence and protection drills, black-out drills and dry runs for alarm activities turned into an everyday reality. Throughout the war, official policy dictated the black-out of all private and public spaces as well as vehicles. The hours of black-out changed with the seasons, and the changes were noted in the official gazette. Protection authorities called on the people to be particularly mindful of their actions in cases of air-raid alarms. Throughout the war, people were encouraged to be prepared and always have the following ready: water and sand, bags with clothes, blankets, torches, food, thermos bottles, children's toys, documents, money, valuables and small works of art. Upon hearing the alarm sound, people were supposed to remain calm, close all gas valves, lock their apartments and go to the bomb shelter with these

513 AJ 66, Ministarstvo prosvete 1918–1944. Poverljiva arhiva, box 23, 1940, Evakuacija dece.

514 *Vazдушna odbrana. List za pouku stanovništva protiv vazдушnih napada*, 20 November 1936, Problem popolne zatemnitve mest. Nočna vaja za zatemnitev mesta Maribor.

bags. During the air-raid alarm, civilians were not allowed to freely move outside. The only people who were permitted to do so were those with passes issued by the Anti-Aircraft Protection Committee and members of the military.⁵¹⁵ When people returned to their apartments after the danger had passed, the first thing they had to do was ventilate them. They were only allowed to turn on the lights once the windows were closed and shuttered again.

According to the provisions on passive defence measures, every building or group of buildings had to have an appropriate bomb shelter. Such shelters had to be adequately spacious and resistant to fragments, fire and falling ruins. They had to be located in the basement; if this was truly not possible, they could also be set up on the ground floor, in the centre of the building. Shelters had to avoid areas with gas pipes as well as rooms with steam boilers and similar equipment. The doors and windows of shelters had to be secured in such a way as not to be pierced by shell fragments. As they had to be fireproof as well, earth was piled up in front of any openings and compacted; in some cases, crates and sacks were packed with soil instead and again placed in front of openings. The latter were frequently blocked with wooden beams. Shelters also had to offer protection against gasses. All holes, cracks and keyholes had to be plugged and pasted over with paper. Window panes had to be protected with cardboard or wooden boards and pasted over with paper. It was also recommended that ceilings be further reinforced with wooden beams. Shelters had to have at least one emergency exit. Each shelter had to be equipped with electric lighting as well as an oil lamp and extra candles, with benches, dry toilets (buckets with lids and sand), sand, water in enamel buckets, shovels, crowbars, pickaxes and medical supplies. The walls of houses with shelters were painted with recognizable symbols that also indicated shelter capacity. Building interiors also had to be marked with symbols pointing towards the shelter.

In the first few years of the occupation, however, the decrees on anti-aircraft protection were not always diligently observed. The impertinence of certain individuals and the breaches of these decrees are attested by numerous reports to the police administration⁵¹⁶ as well as by comments from the more mindful individuals: "I and anybody who has ever witnessed an air raid anywhere simply cannot keep from being bewildered by the flippancy of the people of Ljubljana, who, upon hearing an air raid alarm, act as if this was an extraordinary piece of entertainment that is not to be missed. /.../. During the most recent air raid alarm, I watched people who were extremely reluctant to follow the instructions

515 *Norme sulla protezione antiaerea. Navodila za protiletalsko zaščito*. Lubiana = Ljubljana 1943, pp. 386–387, *Pravila za zadržanje civilnega prebivalstva ob nočnem in dnevnem "letalskem alarmu"*.

516 SI AS 1876, box 79, I, 1, No. 5.

of security authorities to go to the public shelters. /.../. I also saw people who, instead of heading for the house shelter upon hearing the sirens, lingered behind their windows, looking inquisitively towards the sky and with condescending disdain upon those who were hurrying towards the shelters. /.../. So I urge all people of Ljubljana: upon hearing the air raid alarm, go to the shelter, and no buts about it! Anyone who doesn't do this and pays no heed to the warnings and instructions is criminally negligent of his own life!"⁵¹⁷

In 1944 and 1945, the Allied aircraft started appearing over Slovenia as they were flying towards Germany. However, they also targeted Slovenian railways, which were used by the Germans to supply their armies, and a number of cities that were the centres of the enemy's industry.⁵¹⁸ People from all Slovenian provinces thus came to know the terror of air raids and the horrors of their effects. Alarms sounded from one day to the next, even in the capital, where 100 alarms were recorded in the final four months of the war, lasting a total of almost 200 hours.⁵¹⁹ "For 10 days now, alarms have been sounding continuously every day, starting as early as 10 am and usually lasting until 3 or 4 pm. This has always been annoying, but it's even more so now as the area being bombed is becoming ever smaller."⁵²⁰ Even the bravest had to admit to the psychological pressure: "Every day ... two, three, four hours of alarms ... there finally come moments when this constant, threatening, clattering merry-go-round ... the thunder of the "Fortresses" above our roofs ... the unceasing groaning makes you sad ... yes ... when you become sorrowful, depressed ... nervous, /.../ The sirens! ... The whistling! ... And then the barrages! ... And so we were sitting among sandbags and under the basement ceiling propped up with wooden beams for two, three, four hours and getting bored, tired of each other."⁵²¹

The data shows that the fear of the bombings was quite justified as bombing raids over Slovenia killed over 1,500 people from April 1941 to May 1945, with casualty counts being the highest in 1944 and 1945 and particularly in the final months of the war.⁵²²

517 *Slovenski narod*, 6 March 1944, Ne bodite lahkomišelní!

518 Zdenko Čepič, Damijan Guštin and Martin Ivanič: *Podobe iz življenja Slovencev v drugi svetovni vojni* [Images from the Life of Slovenians During World War II]. Ljubljana, 2005, p. 189.

519 SI AS 199, box 1001–1600, 1945, No. 1412–45.

520 Pismo Ljubljančanke, 16 March 1945, personal archives of the author.

521 Lojze Kovačič: *Prišleki* [Newcomers]. Ljubljana, 1984, p. 401.

522 Baza podatkov Seznam žrtev druge svetovne vojne in zaradi nje (1941–1946) [Database "The List of Casualties of World War II and Its Aftermath (1941–1946)"]. Ljubljana: Inštituta za novejšo zgodovino, retrieved on 17 February 2009.

* * *

During the war, the lives of the people in the Slovenian provinces were made even harder by shortages of food and other necessities that largely shaped their everyday activities. German historian Detlef Brandes believes that wartime supply issues overshadowed all other problems, even the socio-political ones and the issue of mobilization.⁵²³

Fearing the German politics and Germany's possible military invasion and influenced by the negative experiences from World War I, European countries initiated organized preparations for supply during wartime conditions in the late 1930s. The "war economy"⁵²⁴ became a subject of intense study by experts, who tried to draft legislation in advance, aiming to ensure the population would have everything necessary with as few interruptions as possible. In spite of these (optimistic) plans, both imports into and exports out of European countries were severely limited from 1939 onward, and many traffic pathways were broken. This resulted in decreased production and subsequent price increases. Speculative trading increased, and the situation was further aggravated by the masses of anxious consumers who emptied out stores and the masses of worried savers who were knocking on the doors of banks.

These problems did not bypass Yugoslavia, which relied on other European countries in many ways:⁵²⁵ "In 1938, signs were already showing that predicted better times for our agriculture. These better times would have come in the following years, had we lived in normal circumstances. However, we have lived all this spring and summer under constant pressure of events happening beyond our borders. And although we may not be directly affected, we will be unable to resist the impact of such a great war on our agricultural economy."⁵²⁶ Soon after the outbreak of World War II, scarcity and price gouging were felt by Slovenes as well. In the spring of 1940, their everyday lives were marked by first supply shortages, and autumn of the same year saw the introduction of the "regulated economy": Decrees aimed at controlling the prices and stemming remorseless speculative trading were followed by a decree on meat conservation in May 1940. The decree dictated two days of the week, Tuesday and Friday, to be meatless days. On Tuesday and Friday, butchers were not allowed to sell meat and restaurants

523 Detlef Brandes: *Die Tschechen unter deutschen Protektorat*, I. Munich, Vienna, 1969, p. 159.

524 Ciril Žebot: *Vojno gospodarstvo. Slovenec*, 27 September 1939.

525 For details see: Bojan Himmelreich: *Namesto žemlje črni kruh. Organizacija preskrbe z živili v Celju v času obeh svetovnih vojn* [Black Bread Instead of Bread Rolls. Food Supply Organisation in Celje during Both World Wars]. Celje, 2001, p. 130 et seq.

526 SI AS 77, box 14, Poslovno poročilo Kmetijskega oddelka kraljevske banske uprave dravske banovine za XII. redno zasedanje, p. 4.

were not allowed to prepare or serve dishes that contained it. The authorities that drafted the decree were not completely heartless, however, as butcher's shops and restaurants still offered lamb and goat, poultry and venison throughout the week. In 1940, as the economic situation was becoming increasingly tense in spite of attempts to stabilize it, Ban Marko Natlačen issued a decree creating the Banate Institute of Food for Slovenia (Prevod), which was based in Ljubljana.⁵²⁷ Its creation (on 5 October 1940) meant that the principle of a wholly free economy has been abandoned – and replaced by a planned economy. The principal mission of Prevod was to foster a unified organization and execution of deals aimed at supplying the people with the necessities of life. This rough draft of a mission description included the following obligations: keeping stock of supplies, procurement and control over distribution of the goods, and general rationing control. Prevod was authorized to monitor price movements and the work of salespeople as it was also in charge of fighting the black market. The Institute had to organize and execute supply campaigns in order to renew the stock of various comestibles in accordance with the decree on food reserves. All this led to Prevod playing an important role in the supply of the population once the war came to the Slovenian territory as well.

The first interventions of the Institute, which were carried out in collaboration with the highest instances of the banate, concerned wheat, as a poor harvest (the Yugoslav harvest of 1940 was by as much as 100,000 railway cars of grain lower than in 1939) resulted in a greatly increased demand. The authorities tried to regulate the wheat and corn traffic with a decree determining their highest possible prices at the producing end, requiring inventory checks for all stocks and introducing a compulsory purchase policy that benefited the major entities on the supply side.⁵²⁸ The authorities allowed bread to only be made from 70 % of unified wheat flour, while the other 30 % had to be replaced with sifted maize flour.⁵²⁹ However, the first day of 1941 already brought new measures. The Ban of the Drava Banate issued a decree that dictated the baking of bread that was even more modest, the so-called unified or people's bread. The mandated composition of the bread was 40 % of unified wheat flour and 60 % of maize flour.⁵³⁰

The efforts were unsuccessful as the Drava Banate only had enough wheat to last it two months at its disposal,⁵³¹ leading the Ban to issue a decree on the supply

527 SI AS 1931, box. 570, XXVIII (1–4), 12730–12750, II 40954. For details on Prevod, see also: Himmelreich, *Namesto zemlje*, p. 155 et seq.

528 SI AS 77, box 15, 1. seja XIII. zasedanja, 17 February 1941, pp. 51–52.

529 *Službeni list*, 14 December 1940, pp. 1021 and 1022.

530 SI AS 77, box 15, 1. seja XIII. zasedanja, 17 February 1941, pp. 32–34. See also *Trgovski list*, 1 January 1941, p. 8, Nove določbe o peki in kruhu.

531 On the first day of 1941, the Drava Banate only maintained a stock of 1,100 railway cars of wheat, and the average consumption was 600 railway cars per month. – SI AS 77, box 15, 1. seja XIII. zasedanja, 17 February 1941, pp. 32–34.

of wheat and wheat flour that rationed the sale of wheat flour. On 20 January 1941, the Banate administration issued a decree on flour and bread ration cards, which the Drava Banate was then the first Yugoslav banate to introduce in practice on 1 February 1941. The category of bread and flour included pasta as well as other products made out of wheat or rye flour. Food ration cards were available to people who did not own any land or owned only as much as to still be exempt from paying the national land tax. Each month, adults were entitled to 4 kg of wheat flour each and children to 2 kg (0 to 6 years) or 3 kg (6 to 14 years). Workers who performed heavy manual labour were entitled to 5 kg of flour per month.⁵³²

A day before the ration cards were introduced, on 31 January 1941, a young man wrote the following in his diary: “Today is not only the last day of the month, but also the last day when we’re able to buy bread without bread ration cards. People have invaded the bakeries. The housewives are nervous and confused: they’re crowding in front of bread shops as if a large amount of bread they’d buy would keep for longer.”⁵³³ However, people “gradually got used to or were rather forced to get used to the bread and flour ration cards and to the amount of food these cards could buy. It’s hard to get used to corn flour bread: a hard crust on the outside, while the bread is moist on the inside. This bakery product is similar to baked polenta shaped like bread.”⁵³⁴ In spite of the previous assurances from the bakers, the bread apparently wasn’t very appetizing: “Bread is no longer the bread we’ve been used to. The people of Ljubljana justifiably complain about the quality of unified bread /.../. They’re saying it’s like concrete and that it falls apart. Regarding quality, it’s not much different from the corn flour loaves people call ‘baked polenta.’” A number of consumers agreed: “... but the bread, /.../, well, that was unappetizing. Like overcooked flour, roasted corn. The loaf would break along the crack. And as you brought it home, all you had left in your basket were clumps of sticky polenta.”⁵³⁵ Some compared it to nothing more than mud.⁵³⁶

On the eve of the attack of the Axis powers on Yugoslavia, President of Prevod reassured the people that Slovenia was stocked with enough food for the event of war, everything from rice to beans and lard,⁵³⁷ even sugar and salt; as Slovenia

532 An adult ration card specified one kilogram of flour or pasta or 3.33 kg of unified bread per week. The monthly amount for an adult was thus 4 kg of wheat flour or 13.32 kg of bread. For their ration cards, children below 6 received 2 kg of flour or 6.66 kg of bread per month, while children from 6 to 14 received 3 kg of flour or 10 kg of bread for their ration cards. Manual labourers received a bonus that amounted to one kilogram of flour or 3.33 kg of bread per month. – *Trgovski list*, 1 January 1941, Banova odredba o prodaji moke. See also: Himmelreich, *Namesto žemlje*, p. 146 et seq.

533 Miran Pavlin: *Ljubljana 1941. Pričevanja fotoreporterja* [Ljubljana 1941. Photojournalist’s Testimonies]. Ljubljana, 2004, p. 24.

534 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

535 Kovačič, *Prišleki*, p. 233.

536 Mira Mihelič: *April*. Ljubljana, 1959, p. 18.

537 *Slovenec*, 13 March 1941, *Za preskrbo Ljubljane s prehrano in kurivom*.

was occupied, however, it turned out his statements were not at all accurate.⁵³⁸ Statements given by the Italian authorities indicated that the shops and depots of the area they had occupied only held enough comestibles to satisfy about 15 days of demand.⁵³⁹ Things were no better in the area occupied by the Germans.⁵⁴⁰

Due to the worsening economic situation, the system of rationed supply, which remained in use during the occupation, was updated numerous times in the period from the summer of 1941 to the spring of 1945: an increasing number of foodstuffs (not just flour, bread and pasta, but also meat, potatoes, rice, milk, salt, sugar, oils and lard etc.) and other bare necessities (fuel, soap, clothes, footwear, tobacco etc.) could only be purchased with ration cards and also gradually declined in quality and available quantity.

Throughout the war, the authorities encouraged people to self-supply. City dwellers were advised to rent gardens, fields and meadows (financially weaker families and families with many children were allowed to rent free of charge), and some municipalities fostered the development of war gardens (e.g. the biggest of such gardens in the capital was the Tivoli park that encompassed 8,000 m² of cultivated area planted with potatoes and oats). In addition to land cultivation, authorities tried to use public media and various classes to introduce people to the keeping of small animals as those in power realized this would allow many people to at least partly take care of their own food supply and improve it without having to resort to the black market.⁵⁴¹ In particular, the focus was on the raising of rabbits, poultry, sheep and goats, which were considered the “poor man’s cows”.

To sum up, the entire of Slovenia suffered heavy shortages towards the end of the war, while for some locations, particularly cities that were cut off from their hinterland or countryside due to transport interruptions, the period from late 1944 to the liberation in May 1945 was a time of hunger.⁵⁴² A woman from Ljubljana wrote to her friend in the summer of 1944: “It’s hard to get new potatoes

538 The situation among the Slovenian population further worsened by the poor exchange rate between Yugoslav dinars and the currencies used by the occupying forces (German marks, Italian lire and the Hungarian pengő). For details on this, see: Andrej Pančur: *Ena država, en denar?* [Single State, Single Currency?]. *Zgodovina za vse*, 2006, No. 2, pp. 26–48.

539 Even if the piece of data is not wholly accurate, it is certain that Italians had to import comestibles from other provinces in order to supply the Province of Ljubljana. – SI AS 1790, box 144, III, II. *Obletnica ustanovitve Ljubljanske pokrajine*.

540 Marjan Žnidarič: *Do pekla in nazaj. Nacistična okupacija in narodnoosvobodilni boj v Mariboru 1941–1945* [To Hell and Back. The Nazi Occupation and National Liberation Struggle in Maribor 1941–1945]. Maribor, 1997, p. 146.

541 Just to illustrate the supply situation: black market flows between Ljubljana and Upper Carniola, which were quite lively during the war, dried up completely in 1945. A few weeks before the end of the war, the flow of black market foodstuffs stopped.

542 In the Province of Ljubljana, which was hit even harder than Slovenian Styria in terms of food supply, the daily amount of rationed foodstuffs in early 1945 amounted to no more than 675 calories. – Šorn, *Življenje Ljubljančanov*, p. 192.

because every seller can only bring up to 5 kg, and so, you know, only few people get any. Oils and lard, they say, are impossible to get, and the only vegetables that come to the market are domestic, there are no imports. Fruits – you really have to go to great pains to get blueberries /.../. You can't even get beans if you're not treated favourably from a seller at the farmer's market. Only white and Savoy cabbage seem to be plentiful /.../. Our stomachs are like gardens, nothing in them but greens ...”⁵⁴³

The impact of insufficient nutrition was reflected by the weak physical condition and the poor health of the people: Many children were malnourished and even adults started showing the typical effects of shortages – weight loss, anaemia, nervous exhaustion, rapid tiredness after any kind of work, a weak heart, skin disorders, irregular or missed menstrual cycles in women, and even an increase in tuberculosis:⁵⁴⁴ “Deaths from consumption increased literally overnight. /.../. The most appropriate explanation for having that many people die from consumption in the past year: that they had rapidly exhausted their physical (and perhaps mental) powers during the past few years and that they “grew mature” sooner. /.../. Social conditions were not aggravated so much by the housing crisis as they were by diet changes.”⁵⁴⁵

* * *

Regardless of the social structure, education and profession or income, political and religious affiliation, all people of Slovenia had three things in common during World War II: deprivation, fear and suffering. Although the majority met the occupation with pain and anger, and despite the weight of the days of war that left its mark everywhere, including Slovenian provinces (compulsory black-outs, curfew and other compulsory measures, absence of a part of the male population, long lines in front of stores, transformation of city parks into fields used for grazing by livestock etc.), life went on: “One gets wonderfully used to all such and similar inconveniences, and life tends to go its own way.”⁵⁴⁶

543 Pismo Ljubljancanke, 20 July 1944, personal archives of the author.

544 Ivo Pirc: *Zdravje v Sloveniji, II. Zdravstvene prilike in delo higijenske organizacije v Sloveniji 1922–1936. Spomenica ob petnajstletnici higijenskega zavoda v Ljubljani* [Health in Slovenia, II. Health Situation and Work of the Hygienic Organisation in Slovenia 1922–1936. Memorandum at the Fifteen-Year Anniversary of the Hygienic Institute in Ljubljana]. Ljubljana, 1938, p. 595.

545 *Domovina in kmetski list*, 11 May 1944, Je Ljubljana zdravo mesto?

546 SI ZAL 439, box 3, 30, Pismo Dolžanovih, 22 September 1944.