

The Partisan Press¹

»We reject culture that speaks through guns, rifles, aircrafts and bombs and is characterized by violence, injustice, arsons and murders, one brought in by the representatives of the thousand years old Roman culture – the Italians. We want to create a new culture, one that will grow from the depths of our honest people and attain an enviable level among nations. We are no recognized artists. *We are the working people so we do not flinch before any tool, be it a hammer, scythe, sickle, gun or pen.*” (underlined by B.R).

This quotation from the first issue of the Levstik brigade paper called *Naprej* (Forward), one among many Partisans’ gazettes, aptly illustrates the enthusiasm and determination of the creators of the partisan press. The passage was signed by a certain Šimen and rescued from oblivion by Djuro Šmicberger in his famous monograph *The Partisan Fourth Estate*. Actually, the term “press” in this context is inappropriate, because what was involved was a much wider information network of the national liberation movement (popularly referred to as the “partisan fourth estate”). It comprised a multitude of publications including those signed by central and local political bodies and mass organizations, books and other cultural titles, brochures, various propaganda material such as posters and hand-outs, publications produced in prisons and camps, as well as the war-time correspondent network, the Slovenian section of Tanjug (The Telegraph Agency of New Yugoslavia), and broadcast news (radio Kričač and later Radio Osvobodilna fronta). In the widest sense of the word, the partisan press (the press of the national liberation forces) was part of the powerful cultural movement that served as an inspiration and a source of moral support in the national liberation war.

In addition to its popular nature and self-initiative (the most obvious manifestation of the latter was the local press and army gazettes), there are at least two other outstanding traits that importantly define the partisan press: its absolute devotion to the goals of the national liberation movement, and self-education and amateurism in the positive sense of the word. The press of the national liberation forces was created as an alternative to the so-called bourgeois press in the Ljubljana region where, unlike in Prekmurje, Štajerska and Gorenjska, the main newspapers continued to be published after the outbreak of war, although only 13 of the 53 pre-war periodicals carried on. These were later joined by several new titles, among these the publications of Domobranci (Home-guards²) that appeared after 1943 (plus various illegal publications of anti-Partisan or anti-revolutionary character that were published all through the war). Undoubtedly, to call this press “alternative” is to define it too narrowly, since the significance and the purpose of the partisan press was much wider. Although systematic data about the participation of journalists in the liberation war are not (yet) available,³ the impression is that the majority of professional pre-war journalists and editors in the territories occupied by Italy adjusted

¹ Repe, Božo. Partizanski tisk = The Partisan press. V: PAVLINEC, Donovan (ur.), PEČAN, Marija (ur.), MOČNIK, Rastko, ŠKRJANEC, Breda, PAVLINEC, Donovan, REPE, Božo, STEPANČIČ, Lilijana, ŠEMROV, Andrej, ŠKRJANEC, Breda. *Partizanski tisk*. Ljubljana: Mednarodni grafični likovni center: = International Centre of Graphic Arts: Muzej novejšje zgodovine Slovenije: = National Museum of Contemporary History, 2004, str. 41-58.

² Domobranci - Home Guard (1943-1945), collaborationist units established by Germans in Ljubljana to fight against partisans. They numbered about 15 000 men. Home Guard confirmed their loyalty to Germans in a public oath-taking Ceremony on April 20, 1944 (Hitler's birthday). At the end of the war they retreated to Austria, where they were met by the British, disarmed as German collaborators and returned to Slovenia. Most of them were brutally murdered in June 1945. During the war they published review Domobranci.

³ The only document that exists is the list of partisan journalists published by Šmicberger. By contrast, the wealth of data about doctors, teachers, lawyers and cultural workers indicate their high participation.

their work to the new circumstances, meaning that they followed the line of occupier's politics and were subject first to Italian and later German censorship. Only a minor part changed sides and joined the partisans, or secretly worked for the national liberation movement (for example, the group of journalists working for the *Jutro* (Morning) was connected with the OF (Liberation Front); on May 9th, 1945, when the partisan troops entered Ljubljana, they published a special edition with the banner headline *Ljubljana Greets the Liberators*, but the new ruling power blocked the sale of this edition and instead distributed the *Slovenski poročevalec* (Slovenian Reporter); it was the first issue of Reporter printed in the liberated country). The confirmation of the bourgeois party press' orientation also came from Dr. Lovro Kuhar, one of the leading SLS politicians in emigration. In his letter of March 1943 to the bishop Gregorij Rožman he wrote: "Is it necessary and politically tactical at all for our papers to carry on and report in the Italian spirit?"

The partisan press evolved from the well organized, albeit small-scale and illegal, pre-war press activity. It was introduced into the liberation movement by the Communist Party and then upgraded and expanded with the help of contributors who had no previous media experience. The combination of several factors – the pre-war practice of communist revolutionaries to impersonate several functions (they were politicians, trade unionists, cultural workers, writers and editors all at once), the polarization that occurred during the war yielding the partisan and anti-partisan (i.e. revolutionary and anti-revolutionary) camps, and the existential struggle of the Slovenians – produced the type of journalism in which, in the words of Boris Kidrič, politicians were journalists and journalists were politicians. Politics, propaganda and journalism fused into an effective whole. Some of our contemporaries (including those who experienced the socialist-era journalism) may be tempted to reproach the partisan press for its ideological bias. However, who could (and who would want to) act differently at those times? And who could (would want to) act differently now, if such vital issues were at stake? One only needs to recall the reporting of the Slovenian press and other media in 1991, the year of Slovenia's struggle for independence, to realize that its tone of reporting was comparable to that of the partisan press during the Second World War.

As for the content of the partisan press, it closely followed the political (and military) developments during the war. Its first phase of development was characterized by decentralized reporting and, taking into account the circumstances, even plurality manifested through the existence of a number of local and regional editions of the main newspapers (sometimes even slightly "edited" local editions). During the second phase i.e., after the second AVNOJ⁴ session and the beginnings of the formation of the new Slovenian and Yugoslav state, it was most decidedly characterized by increasing centralization, the strengthening of the role of agitprop, external censorship (which replaced the former, instinctive following of the "line"), uniform propaganda, a systematic development of the correspondent network and no less systematic education of the cadres.

⁴ Antifascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia - Antifašističko veće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije (AVNOJ) was the central political and representative body of the National Liberation Struggle of Yugoslavia. Founding meeting was in Bihać (Bosnia) on November 26 and 27 1942. The second, historic meeting held in Jajce (Bosnia) on November 29 and 30, 1943. AVNOJ elected a state presidency and a government National Committee of Liberation of Yugoslavia under Tito's leadership. AVNOJ also proclaimed itself supreme legislative and executive body and announced a reunited Yugoslavia on the basis of democratic federalism. Slovenia after war would join the new Yugoslavia as one of the six republics. In 1944 Ivan Šubašić, prime minister of the Yugoslav government-in-exile met with Tito and accepted the Jajce provisions. At his third meeting, held in Belgrade on August 7 and 8, 1945, AVNOJ officially became a provisional Parliament.

It is possible to identify several milestones that marked the otherwise “smooth” transition from one stage to the next. One was the journalistic conference held on May 5, 1944 in Metlika with more than 100 partisans-journalists participating. According to Marija Vilfan⁵, at that time the partisan press comprised 378 publications, accounting for almost 70% of all the Slovenian language newspapers printed in Slovenia. For new, inexperienced journalists (who constituted the majority) the conference marked the beginning of their systematic professional and political education. Vida Tomšič⁶ thus summarized the purpose of the meeting (and the partisan press): “Our entire press bears the mark of our liberation war; our entire press is a political press arising from our identical understanding of the political events and from our shared aspiration – to promote our nations’ struggle for liberation.”

The second milestone was the establishment of the alternative (Partisan) association of journalists (Slovenian Journalistic Society) on October 22, 1944. On July 15, 1945 the Society took over the function (and the property) of the pre-war Slovenian Journalistic Society (the latter was dissolved on May 20, 1945, or rather, the two organizations merged). Even before that, at the time of Ljubljana’s liberation, the *Slovenski poročevalec* (Slovenian Reporter) and *Ljudska pravica* (People’s Justice) took over the printing plants and other facilities of the two main pre-war dailies, *Slovenec* and *Jutro* (Morning). Regional dailies experienced a similar fate.

The third pivotal event was the systematic creation of the new Yugoslav awareness based on the policy of brotherhood and unity. It was first announced in the mid 1944 by Boris Kidrič in an article entitled “Več jugoslovanstva” (More “yugoslavism”). The partisan press and propaganda were meant to surpass various localisms, and the idea about the united Slovenia was to be emphasized within the context of the emerging federal state of Yugoslavia.

The generation of journalists that developed along with the partisan press subsequently formed the core of the post-war socialist journalism.

The *Slovenski poročevalec* was the main newspaper and for a long time a kind of informal “official gazette” of the liberation movement (it published all important decisions and orders issued by the leadership of the national liberation movement, while the first official gazette of the Slovenian National Liberation Council appeared only in March 1944). The newspaper dated from the pre-war period (two issues of the *Slovenski poročevalec* were published in July and October 1938). The first war issue, indeed without the date printed, appeared in May 1941 and its circulation totaled 2,000 copies, while the second issue bears the date June 8, 1941. From that time on it was published more or less regularly, once or twice a week, depending on the circumstances. The nameplate of the initial several issues bore the line that read “*The paper of the anti-imperialistic front*”, later replaced with *The News Gazette of the OF* and eventually with *The Gazette of the OF*. The tone of its reporting was influenced by the prominent politicians of the liberation movement, most notably Boris Kidrič, whose leading articles clearly and comprehensibly

⁵ Marija Vilfan, journalist, editor, political worker, in that time Chief Editor of *Slovenski poročevalec*, later head of the Press bureau for Slovensko primorje (Slovenian Coastal Region). After war among the other posts she was Yugoslav representative in Unesco.

⁶ Vida Tomšič, political worker, national heroine, in that time editor of *Slovenska pravica* and member of Slovene national liberation council (*Slovenski narodnosvobodilni svet*, SNOS) - Slovenian parliament established in February 1944 in Črnomelj. First woman to be appointed for the minister in Slovenian history (minister for social policy in 1945-46). Representative of Yugoslavia in different international institutions, expert for women’s rights and family policy.

explained the orientation of the Liberation Front. The titles of these articles unambiguously point to the turning points in the development of the national liberation movement. In Ljubljana alone *Slovenski pročevalec* had the readership (including the pass-along readership) of around 50,000. This number further increased when it became accessible all over the Slovenian ethnic territories thanks to the extensive courier network and local editions (there were local editions in the Ljubljana region, Gorenjska, Primorska, Štajerska and Koroška). The *Slovenski poročevalec* continued to be published after the war, until 1959 when it merged with the *Ljudska pravica* (People's Justice) into the newspaper *Delo*. During the period 1941 – 1942, the OF published another newspaper as well, called *Osvobodilna fronta* (Liberation Front). Early in 1942, both OF newspapers published the Basic Principles of the Liberation Front.

The newspaper *Delo*, the paper of the Communist Party of Slovenia, was published before and during the war (1941 and 1942). The first war edition of the *Delo* is connected with a small historical secret. Not one copy of the first, May 1941 edition has been preserved. In the opinion of some historians (Bojan Godeša), it secretly disappeared because it featured the communists' eulogy to the end of the then Kingdom of Yugoslavia. It was a piece written in the spirit of the (short-lived) "anti-imperialist" politics of the time and inspired by the communists' expectations that the revolution was going to produce quick results. According to the testimony of Janez Martinc, this lost issue contained the following sentence by Boris Kidrič: "I'm proud that we brought down that Yugoslav monster." The third issue of the *Delo*, dated September 1941, featured the invitation "Join the Partisans!" and the famous poem by Oton Župančič entitled "Sing after me", nowadays better known under the title "Poet, Know Your Debt." In this poem Župančič called on the Slovenian poets and writers to break the silence and join the liberation movement. The *Delo*, a party newspaper, was followed by the *Ljudska pravica* (the paper was randomly published even before the war, in 1934, 1935, 1939 and 1941).

Other groups too published their own gazettes, among these the Christian socialists. Their paper was called *Slovenska revolucija* (Slovenian Revolution) and its editor (and the main contributor) was Edvard Kocbek. It was not a widely read newspaper, but it is significant for those historians interested in the intellectual group of Christian socialists and their position within the OF.

The titles with longer tradition that continued to be published after the war (some of these are still around) were mainly gazettes of various mass organizations. The trade union's paper *Delavska enotnost* (Workers' Unity) first appeared in December 1942. It emerged after the conference at which the communists, Christian socialists and socialist expert organizations agreed on a joint trade union, which was an event that significantly strengthened the workers' component within the Liberation Front and anticipated its unification that occurred three months later with the famous Dolomite Statement. At the Workers' Unity conference, the Christian socialists acknowledged the proletarian avant-garde role of communists. Among other important newspapers, we should mention *Kmeti glas* (Farmers' Voice), another paper with a pre-war tradition that gained wider popularity.

The *Naša žena* (Our Woman), originally called *Našim ženam* (To Our Women), was a gazette of the Anti-Fascist Women's Association. It first appeared in 1943 following the founding congress of the organization, and there were five issues published during the war. It has survived to date and it undoubtedly deserves credit for the emancipation of the Slovenian women during the war and particularly during the post-war decades. In fact, all until the 1970s the *Naša žena* was the only magazine targeted at women, promoting their

education and gender equality. The *Mladina* (Youth) played a similar role. Originally titled *Mlada Slovenija* (Young Slovenia), it was the gazette of the Youth Association of Slovenia (this organization was a result of the merging of several youth organizations in 1943, more specifically the Sokol, Christian socialist and communist youth organizations). Initially, its content provoked grudging remarks by the leadership as well as individual parts of the then youth organizations, but over time it managed to gain a foothold. However, viewed from the perspective of a wider historical context, its time of glory came only forty years later, in the mid 1980s, when it began to stab at the failed idea of the brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav nations and the until then glorified Yugoslav People's Army. Other youth magazines were *Mlada Slovenija* (Young Slovenia) and *Slovenski pionir* (Slovenian Pioneer).

Outstanding among the numerous war time gazettes – at the peak of the war-time publishing activity, in 1944, there were 378 titles altogether including two daily newspapers, 60 periodicals, 72 pocket editions and 30 wall papers – was the *Partizanski dnevnik* (Partisan Daily). It first appeared in 1943 as the gazette of the Triglav division (later the 31st division). Its initial circulation of 400 copies later rose to 5,000 copies and as the war was drawing to a close it amounted to 20,000 (at that time it was published by the *Il Piccolo* daily's printing house in Trieste). In total, 437 issues of the *Partizanski dnevnik* were published during the war. On May 15, 1945 it was renamed *Primorski dnevnik* (Coastal Daily). For many decades after the war it gauged the pulse of the Slovenian minority in Italy and the coastal, Slovenian and Yugoslav everyday while pursuing a unique, temperamental Mediterranean reporting style.

Actually, the first Slovenian army paper was the *Slovenski partizan* (Slovenian Partisan), a cyclostyled paper that first appeared in October 1941. The main contributing authors were partisan commanders Aleš Bebler, Stane Rozman and Dušan Kveder.⁷ Originally, the Slovenian Partisan was conceived as a one-time publication, so the next issue appeared only in June 1942. The first issue described the purpose of the partisan movement and the role of partisan and Narodna zščita (National Protection) units within the national liberation movement.⁸ It also included practical advice on how to organize partisan units, how to survive through the winter and prepare various actions. The Nazi propaganda unit located in Bled translated it into German and distributed it as classified material to the regional NSDAP⁹ headquarters.

The surge of war time gazettes during the early stages of the national liberation movement was characterized by variegation in terms of publishing intervals, circulation and technical characteristics (according to some sources, in July 1942 the *Slovenian Partisan* was even outstripped by the printed edition of broadcast army news distributed by Peter Šprajc, a teacher from Savinjska dolina). The situation remained largely unchanged during the next few years – most of these publications were low circulation, hand-written or cyclostyled sheets. Some appeared only once, while others even aspired to become daily newspapers, for example *Partizanski vestnik krimskega bataljona* (The Partisan Messenger of the Krim Battalion) that first appeared on January 5, 1942 and was followed by 23 issues within the next two months. Virtually every partisan unit had its own paper or at least its own wall newspaper (stenčas).

⁷ Even before the appearance of the Slovenian Partisan, there was issued a Slovenian translation of the Bulletin of the Headquarters of the Yugoslav National Liberation Partisan Units, which began to be published on August 10, 1941 in Beograd and was initially edited by Josip Broz Tito.

⁸ Article entitled "Partisans – the Iron Fist of the Slovenian Nation."

⁹ Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeitpartei (The National Socialist Workers' Party)

It is definitely impossible to delineate all of the various aspects of the partisan press (the press of the national liberation forces) in this short essay. However, one of its components that should be mentioned here is the local press, particularly the regional papers that covered the areas on the edges of the Slovenian national territories: Beneška Slovenija, Koroška, and, towards the end of the war, Prekmurje. In addition, there were satirical periodicals (Bodeča Neža, Pavliha, Partizanski toti list), then publications produced in prisons and penitentiaries across Slovenia and in the concentration camps in Italy, Germany and Austria (Kibla, Kapucinski toti list, Arestant, Naša bolha-naša uš, Želja, Rdeči cvet, Glas slovanskega juga, Spoletski poročevalec, Razsvit, Dachauski poročevalec and many others). These publications brought at least a partial relief to the humiliated and tortured prisoners who were living in impossible and hopeless conditions and helped them cling to a shred of hope that they would survive and see the day of the liberation. Those rare prisoners who managed to escape disseminated news about the horrendous circumstances in Italian, Home Guard and German prisons and concentration camps. One of them was Sveto Kobal (Florjan), initially a Mathausen prisoner subsequently relocated to a working camp from where he escaped, managed to reach Slovenia and joined the partisans. In 1944 he published the first known brochure about the horrors of the concentration camp in Mathausen.

The partisan press also comprised publications in Italian and German targeted at Italian and Austrian fighters within the Slovenian national liberation movement.

Such a range and diversity of partisan publications could exist thanks to partisan workshops (initially Centralne tehnike KPS – various technical units that existed before the war). During the war, this organization united under its roof an assortment of activities ranging from the partisans' puppet theater to the units for the production of explosives, cold steel and other army accessories. However, its main activity was printing, which was carried out by public printing houses and technical workshops in the liberated territories and by illegal workshops elsewhere. These illegal technical units, which operated throughout the national liberation war, were characterized by extremely hard working conditions. Workers worked by poor light and under the permanent threat of being discovered by the enemy. So they remained in the same location three to four months on average and were then forced to move to evade the enemy. Initially a large number of these workshops were located in Ljubljana, but later moved to the liberated territories. Towards the end of 1942 there were more than 20 illegal workshops. Almost every larger partisan unit had its own cyclostyle workshop. Towards the end of the war some publications of the Slovenian liberation movement were printed in Dalmatia and in the bases of the overseas brigades in Italy.

Modern propaganda and new norms of information provision were born during the First World War. Ever since the Second World War, the psychological war exploiting the word, either written or spoken, has been as much important factor of success as the armed struggle. Of course, the "partisan fourth estate" in Slovenia would not have been able to score victory on its own, without other components of the liberation movement, particularly the partisan combat units that represented the "armed fist" of the Liberation Front¹⁰. The Partisans' press (the press of the national liberation forces) provided the direct support to the armed struggle without which the nation would not be able to survive, and so did many other non-combat groups providing services such as medical care and other forms of assistance, among these the Scientific Institute of the Slovenian National

¹⁰ We should add here that there were numerous other forms of liberation movements that restricted their activities to espionage, press publication, propaganda and perhaps several commando-style actions. They too deserve their share of credit for the victory over Fascism.

Liberation Council. At the same time, the partisan press was the promoter of the emerging Slovenian statehood and nation's faith in a more just society following the war. A "march to the sky," whose important segment was directed by the partisan press among others, perhaps took a different twist after the war, such as was not envisaged by the more critical journalists and editors who matured during the war (France and some other countries experienced a similar situation; there, pluralism of the press later evolved from a different platform). In Slovenia, the war-time press was turned into the messenger of the victorious socialist ideology. Freedom of the press was won only in the second half of the 1980s, and among the most deserving contributors were precisely several newspapers and magazines that evolved from the partisan press.

Viewed from the historical perspective, it is not possible to imagine the survival of the Slovenian nation, its victory as part of the anti-Fascist coalition, and the first modern form of statehood as a Yugoslav republic, without the contribution of the partisan press. As part of the unique and unmatched cultural movement that was born out of resistance, it provided information and moral support, and boosted national awareness.