

Slovenia during the Second World War¹

INTRODUCTION

The war in Yugoslavia began on April 6th 1941 with bombing Belgrade. Yugoslavia was quickly defeated, surrendering in Belgrade on April 17 1941. The government fled into exile. Slovenia was occupied by Germans, Italians and Hungarians. The German Reich claimed the northern and eastern areas (Carniola, Styria and Posavje (neighbouring areas with Croatia along rivers Sava and Sotla), Hungarians took Prekmurje, Italy the Central and Western part of Slovenia. All three occupiers wanted to include Slovenian territory into their states. Italians and Hungarians did that officially. Germans due to various reasons did not (troubles with deportations of Slovenian populations and with germanisation, resistance movement), but they used German racial legislation on occupational territories. All the three occupational forces condemned Slovenians to ethnocide. However, their methods and the required time in which the plan was to be carried out differed. Most drastic deportations were carried out by the German occupants. The German leadership assigned the responsibility for the solution of the "Slovenian question" to various offices under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler, the state secretary for reinforcement of germanness. The Germans planned to deport between 220 000 and 260 000 Slovenians. First they brought them to collecting camps from where they were shipped to Germany, Croatia and Serbia. The deportation was to be carried out in several waves: the first to come were the nationally feeling Slovenes who were followed by those who moved to Slovenian territory after 1914, and finally by those whose estates and property were needed for the German colonisation (about 80 000 German immigrants were planned to be settled in this area). This plan was intended to be carried out in five months.

Due to the problems of transportation, the uprising of the population and because Croatia and Serbia were unable to accept as many deportees as planned, only 80 000 Slovenians were deported (about 17 000 of them fled to Italian occupation territory). 12 000 Germans from Slovenia (Gotschee Deutsch) were settled, mostly to the borderland with the Independent State of Croatia, along the rivers Sava and Sotla in agreement with the Italian occupational authorities.

In the Italian occupational territory similar plans as in German were made in spring 1942: there were planned mass deportations of the Slovenians and Italian colonisation of the emptied Slovene territories. However, Italy surrendered before the above plans could be implemented. Yet, the Italians succeeded to deport about 25 000 thousands Slovenes into Italian concentration camps. The preserved documents let us believe that in case of their victory, the Italians would have introduced the same denationalising regime as the one was carried out in the Slovenian coastal area and Istria during both World Wars.

The Hungarian occupiers deported those Slovenes who moved to Prekmurje (the river Mura region), which was allotted to Yugoslavia after World War I, until World War II. About 600 of them (mostly immigrants from Primorska, the territory awarded to Italy after World War I) were deported to the concentration camp Szaszvar in the spring of 1942. After the German occupation of Hungary and Prekmurje, most of the Prekmurje Jews (452 persons) were imprisoned in concentration camps. 328 of them were then killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau in April 1944.

¹ Repe, Božo. Slovenia during the Second World War and the current perspectives on that period. Moscow, Russia, International scientific conference "The Second World War and the XX century", 5. - 9. 9. 1994.

Resistance was organized by Slovene Liberation Front (first named Anti-Imperialist Front), established on April 27th 1941 in Ljubljana. Slovene Communists took the initiative. Christian Socialists, the liberal Sokol (Falkon) patriotic gymnastic society members and group of intellectuals were founders of Liberation Front. The actual uprising extend after German attack on Soviet Union to most Slovene lands. The partisan movement liberated Slovenia, coordinating operations with Tito's National Liberation Struggle in Yugoslavia, which was since 1943 a part of allied Antifascist Coalition.

During the war Communist Party in Slovenia, which organized and operationally controlled the resistance, began articulating revolutionary goals. In March 1943 it persuaded non-Communists in the Liberation Front to submit to unity under Communist leadership.

Liberation Front had the support of the majority of Slovenian population, but not all in Slovenia joined to it. Former middle – class parties and leadership of Catholic Church in Ljubljana Province (Provincia di Lubiana) in collaboration with occupiers organized the resistance (counterrevolution) to the Liberation Front. First in 1942 the Village Guard (Milizia Volontaria Anticomunista) and later (after Italian capitulation in September 1943) the Home Guard (Landeswehr) mounted armed opposition to the leftist character as well as the excesses of the Partisan resistance. This led to a civil war in a part of Slovenian territory. The partisan movement won, middle – class politicians and Home Guardists after unsuccessful attempt to establish their own parliament and government in May 1945, mostly fled to Austria together with German Army. They were sent back by the British and majority of them, treated as traitors, were executed without a trial.

In September 1943 a wartime assembly had already come to represent Slovenians in Partisan – held areas. Delegates were sent to Antifascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), the central political and representative body of the National Liberation Struggle of Yugoslavia (established in November 1942 in Bihać, Bosnia). AVNOJ on his second meeting on November 29th, 1943 in Jajce, Bosnia, proclaimed itself supreme legislative and executive body under Tito's leadership. Royal government in exile later accepted the Jajce provisions. In 1945, the participants of Yalta Conference requested that AVNOJ include also representatives of other political parties outside the liberation movement (those who had not collaborated with Axis powers). At its third meeting, held in Belgrade in August 1945, AVNOJ officially became a provisional Parliament of Yugoslavia. In Slovenia, on May 5th, 1945 the Liberation Front established a Slovene government. In November 1945 a federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was proclaimed and Slovenia became one of the six republics. The settlement of borders at the Paris Peace Conference in September 1947 was - due to active resistance during the war – quite favourable for Slovenia. It was unable to obtain Carinthian Slovenian lands in Austria (Austria was considered a victim, not an aggressor in WWII) and also not some territories in Italy, including port Trieste, but it did acquire most territories that had belonged to Italy between both of World Wars.

Illustration:



Occupying zones in Slovenia

Document No 1²

Illustration:



Lines behind the shop in Ljubljana during the war. Lack of everything, especially of food, distribution of necessities of life by coupons and rations was a triviality during the war.

Document No2³

A FRAGMENT FROM THE REPORT OF A FEDERAL OFFICIAL OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR WITH THE HEAD OF THE CIVIL ADMINISTRATION FOR LOWER STYRIA DATED MAY 30, 1941 ABOUT THE MASS EVICTIONS OF THE SLOVENIANS⁴

The most difficult problem to be solved within the Lower Styria is to cleanse the lower Styrian national body from the foreign Slav element, which cannot be submitted to the Germanising process. If the regermanisation of the lower Styria is to succeed at all, and this south-eastern end of the German Reich is to become a reliable barrier against the ever tumultuous Balkans, the local population has to be freed of every substance which either racially or behaviourally sabotages germanisation. The task of the Styrian Patriotic Association can only succeed if the ground is accordingly cleansed.

Therefore a deportation (removal) of the population is planned, which will be carried out in four stages and in a way which has proved successful in similar activities in other regained territories of the Reich (especially in the east).

The deportations to Serbia and partially to Croatia will be carried out in trains containing about 1000 persons. The time of its beginning and its extend (for the time being one or two trains daily are planned) have not been determined yet.....

According to the plan, the deportations will take place in four waves.

Document No 4⁵

² Tone Ferenc: Okupacijski sistemi na Slovenskem (Occupational Systems on Slovenian Territory), Modrijan, Zgodovinski viri, Ljubljana 1997

³ Tone Ferenc: Okupacijski sistemi na Slovenskem (Occupational systems on Slovenian Territory), Modrijan, Zgodovinski viri, Ljubljana 1997

⁴ Germans between both world wars counted Slovenian territory as German and after occupation they wanted to include it formally in Germany as south border of Reich. This should be done in six months (till the end of 1941). Slovenians should be deported or Germanized and country inhabited by Germans.

**REPORT OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR THE PROVINCE OF LJUBLJANA,
AUGUST 24, 1942 ON A PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION⁶**

The Kingdom of Italy

High Commissioner for the Province of Ljubljana; The Office: personal secretariat

No 1387/2 confidential
To the Ministry of Interior
The Cabinet

August 24, 1942/XX
Highly confidential

Regarding the confidential document No 1362/2, dated August 16, I allow myself to give an outline of the programmes of activities I intend to carry out in this province.

- a) The problem of the Slovenian population could be solved in three ways:
 - 1) By its destruction;
 - 2) By deportations;
 - 3) By removal of opposition elements, which could be reached by carrying out a hard, yet fair policy of bringing together, with the purpose of laying the foundations for a useful and fair cooperation. This would give us a possibility for assimilation, which could be achieved only with time. Thus we have to decide which way we want to choose.
- b) For mass deportations of the population we would have to follow a programme prepared in advance, which would have to be carried out within the entire province. It would be better to set up work camps instead of internment camps in which people do nothing but idle.
- c) For the purpose of replacing Slovenian population with the Italian, the following has to be determined:
 - 1) Where Slovenian population should be moved;
 - 2) Where suitable Italian population should be found in which case it has to be considered, that the people from the northern and the central areas are the most appropriate ones to be settled in Slovenian territories;
 - 3) If the area along the border is to be completely Italianised, its width is to be determined (20 to 30 km);
 - 4) If the entire Slovenian population is to be moved, the process should be started in the areas along the border, where Slovenians live under Italy.

It is my opinion that a complete or even a partial relocation of the Slovenian population would hardly be possible during the war.

⁵ Tone Ferenc: *okupacijski sistemi na Slovenskem* (Occupational systems in Slovenian territory), Modrijan, Zgodovinski viri, Ljubljana, 1997.

⁶ While Italian "soft" occupational policy was unsuccessful, military and civil authorities, following the instructions of Mussolini, took the same measures as Germans in their occupational zone: shooting of hostages and mass executions of captured partisans, illegal activists of Liberation Front, inhabitants of places suspected of allegiance to the liberation movement but also completely innocent persons (in the total period of the Italian occupation of the Ljubljana Province the Italian armed forces shot at least 416 individual persons and 238 groups with 1153 persons, a total therefore of 1569 persons, not taking into account those convicted by the military court in Ljubljana, and mass deportation. Final goal was to "clean" Slovenian national territory and prepare it for Italian settlement after war.

Illustrations:



Poster with the names of killed hostages in German occupying zone

Illustration:



Neznana deklica avgusta 1942 v zbirnem taborišču v Celju pred odhodom v taborišče Frolnheiten pri Gradcu (Stano Teržak, Ukrojeni otroci).

Unknown girl, waiting for the deportation, near Celje

Document No 5⁷

BASIC POINTS OF THE OSVOBODILNA FRONTA (OF) (THE LIBERATION FRONT OF SLOVENIAN NATION)⁸

⁷ Božo Repe: Sodobna zgodovina. Zgodovina za 4. letnik gimnazij (Contemporary History. History for the 4th Grade of Grammar School), Modrijan, Ljubljana 2002

⁸ Shortly after Germany, Italy and Hungary occupied Slovenia in April 1941, the Communist Party of Slovenia (CPS) organized an Anti - Imperialistic front, whose aim was to liberate Slovenia with the help of Soviet Union. Such organization did not extend in the other parts of Yugoslavia. Beside the CPS founding groups were Christian Socialists, liberal group named Sokol (Falcon) and left and liberal oriented cultural intelligentsia. After Germany's attack on the Soviet Union (June 22th, 1941) organization was renamed in Liberation front of Slovenian nation (Osvobodilna fronta slovenskega naroda – OF). OF in the summer of 1941 called to armed resistance against the occupiers. Many people of different political persuasion went in Partisans. In autumn 1941 it accepted the program, called basic points of the OF. Although the OF included political groups of different ideologies, CPS had taken control. Beside the liberation, the goal of the CPS was also revolution what repelled many people and also provoked Civil War in the part of Slovenian territory. But in general, majority of Slovenians supported OF which joined the Antifascist Council of the Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), which laid down the basic principles of new federal Yugoslavia. In October 1944 at the OF Congress, attended by delegates from all of Slovenia, National Liberation Committee was elected, year later renamed in parliament, which formed its presidency as provisional government. OF as part of People's front of Yugoslavia seized the power on first after war elections in 1945.

1. A merciless armed battle against the enemy is to be carried out.
2. This activity represents the foundation for the liberation and uniting of all the Slovenians.
3. Understanding the community of Yugoslav nations as a natural and historic one, the Liberation Front (OF) does not recognise the break up of Yugoslavia. It will use all its efforts to fight for good understanding and unity of all Yugoslav nations. At the same time it strives towards a union of all the Slav nations under the leadership of the great Russian nation on the grounds of the right for self-determination of every nation.
4. By the liberation act and activation of Slovenian people, the Liberation Front (OF) will reform the Slovenian national character. Fighting for their national and human rights, the Slovenian people create a new form of the active Slovenianship.
5. All the groups participating in the Liberation Front have agreed to be loyal to each other.
6. After the liberation of the nation, the Liberation Front will assume power in the Slovenian territory over the Slovenian nation as a whole.
7. After the liberation, the Liberation Front will consequently introduce people's democracy. All the questions exceeding the scope of the Liberation Front will be solved in a democratic way /.../
8. According to the solemn statement of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin, the Slovenian nation will be able to decide by itself about its internal order and foreign affairs. The Liberation Front will defend this fundamental right of the Slovenian people with all the means.
9. The Slovene national army will be raised from the Slovenian national liberation partisan and national defence troops, which all the nationally minded Slovenians are invited to join.

Illustration:



Secret partisan hospital Franja, near Cerklje ob Krki. Illegal medical service inside Liberation Front - probably the most humanistic mission during the war - was organized very well, despite extremely hard conditions. In January 1945 it had 281 secret hospitals and 6

legal (another 62 under construction) hospitals, all together with 2260 beds. During the war 11 321 wounded and ill people were under the medical care of thirty doctors and 652 nurses and other members of staff. 19 doctors lost their lives.

Document No 6

Don Pietro Brignoli⁹: Holly mass for my shooting dead (fragment from diary)

“25. August. Desperate women. One of them is asking for justice.

In the village, we just come in, we imprisoned all men, as elsewhere. At the beginning of the operations people didn't get anxious when we imprisoned adult men, because they new nothing about what to expect. As news about what was going on spread around ,¹⁰ some kind of desperation wave rose. The same was in this “liberated” village.

Because they took men and guarded them in the meadow, women gathered not far away, they plead for the men and cried with such emotions, that even less sensitive soldiers were struck by that. From time to time someone scold this miserable group and threatened that all of man will be shot if women would not pleading. For a moment, all became silent, than we heard restraint sobbing and at in the end they cried even more desperately then they did before...”

Dok No7: Fragment from the interview with Cveto Kobal¹¹

“After a few days they crowed us together for transport. About 1000 people were transported in one single train. The drive took two days. On the way some people already died in our wagon. There was terrible heat, unbearable conditions. The wagons were cattle trucks, without any possibility to use toilet. Then we carried the dead bodies from the railway station to the top of the hill, where concentration camp was. Just before we came to Mauthausen, one prisoner was shot only because he picked up green apple from the ground...”

Speaking from my experience, I would like to say to the younger generations how necessary it is to fight against any violence. No violence, even with the best of intentions, can't be justified...”

Illustration:

⁹ Don Pietro Brignoli was curate in Italian occupation army in Slovenia and Croatia. During the war he was writing a diary which was published it in the sixties. He was loyal to Italy, but he also described and condemned the cruel treating of Italian soldiers with civil population during the Italian offensive in summer and autumn of 1942: burning of villages, shooting hostages, deportations in concentration camps, robbery... Brignoli for all the horrors he saw, blamed the war itself and he was somehow searching for the answer of his distress in war as the universal culprit.

¹⁰ Shooting of hostages or sending people to the concentration camps (remark B.R.)

¹¹ Cveto Kobal was born on 15.12. 1921. He became a member of resistance movement in Slovenia in 1941. In January 1941 he was arrested and sent to the concentration camp in Auschwitz, and afterward to Mauthausen. In the spring of 1944 he escaped from working camp in Linz (Austria) and joined partisans in Slovenia. In June 1944 illegal partisan printing works published his brochure on Mauthausen which is first known published text about one of the most horrible concentration camps.



Front page of the brochure on Mauthausen, written by Cveto Kobal in June 1944, first known published text about one of the most horrible concentration camps.

Dok. No 8: Interview with Jože Požar, boy orphan from WW II

JOŽE POŽAR (1932)

“I remember war like nightmare, which was, unfortunately, true. But all memories were mist with fact, that one day Italian soldiers took away my father Jože and shot him as a hostage in Podpeč, together with five other villagers of Brest.

My memories on youth are painful. It that time life was very hard. On the small farm we lived four children: me, sisters Milka and Marija, brother Marin, father Jože and mother Ivanka. We made a living by farming, despite that father was cartwright, but he didn't find proper job. Our life was alike life of the other families in village Brest and in the neighborhood.

All changed, perhaps I should say broke down, when they took and shot my father. It was even get worse, when in 1944 mother was sent to German concentration camp. I had twelve years than and at first I took care for the home and the family. Later sisters Milka and Marija and brother Martin were provide by aunt Alojzija Gruden from Ljubljana and for me our neighbors took care. I rested at them till 1945, when my mother returned from concentration camp....Life is going on. We all managed some – how, but it would certainly be better if we had father, when we need him the most...It still distress for me any time when I stand before father's grave in Tomišelj and think on his death in time, when we needed so much.