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*Preparations of the Communist Party of Slovenia  
for the Takeover of Power 1944–1945*

The revolutionary takeover of power was undoubtedly a strategic goal of the Slovenian communists ever since the moment they have organised the resistance against the occupiers and taken over the leadership of this resistance. Already the statements regarding the social classes, released immediately after the occupation and before the beginning of armed resistance, show that the communists saw the occupation as an opportunity to carry out the revolution and settle the score with the pre-war regime.<sup>1</sup> The open introduction of revolutionary concepts into the liberation struggle, or the initiation of the so-called second stage of revolution in the spring and summer of 1942 in the region of the Italian occupation zone (the Ljubljana province), held by the partisan units at that time, confirmed that the orientation of the communists was revolutionary.<sup>2</sup>

Due to the foreign policy and domestic policy considerations and directives from Moscow, the Communist Party of Slovenia (KPS) limited its radicalism and accepted the concept of holding back the open approach to revolution and its postponement to the post-war period. Therefore, in the period of occupation, it was supposed to persist in the so-called national liberation positions, in the context of which it was able to assert its leading role in the resistance movement, thus creating a solid basis for the completion of revolution after the war.<sup>3</sup> That meant the liberation struggle was used for revolutionary purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> Dokumenti ljudske revolucije v Sloveniji [Documents of the People's Revolution in Slovenia], book 1, Ljubljana 1962, doc. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Slovenska novejša zgodovina : od programa Zedinjena Slovenija do mednarodnega priznanja Republike Slovenije 1848–1992 [Slovenian Contemporary History : from the Programme of United Slovenia to the International Recognition of Slovenia 1848-1992], Ljubljana 2005, pp. 633, 634.

<sup>3</sup> Janko Pleterski: *Problemi součinkovanja narodne in socialne revolucije v nastopu Osvobodilne fronte in pojav antikomunizma* [Problems of the Combined Effects of the National and Social Revolution in the Appearance of the Liberation Front and the Emergence of Anti-Communism]. In: *Slovenski upor 1941 : Osvobodilna fronta slovenskega naroda pred pol stoletja* [Slovenian Resistance in 1941 : Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation Half a Century Ago]. Ljubljana 1991, pp. 229, 230.

Edvard Kardelj, member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) and the leading Slovenian communist besides Boris Kidrič, held a lecture on strategy and tactics at the Party school of the Central Committee of KPS in the beginning of 1944, and explained to the participants of the Party workshop that revolution in Yugoslavia started at the moment when "we took up arms and started bringing together the elements, faithful to the proletariat", and that the revolution would be achieved with a number of tactical successes, not a single battle. At that time, Kardelj evaluated the achieved level of revolution as a stage of bourgeois democratic revolution, when the Communist Party was nevertheless taking the positions which would enable it to proceed to the proletarian revolution. He expected that this process could also be carried out with reforms. He defined the revolution as a process, fundamentally determined by the liberation struggle in the circumstances of the occupation, in which the proletariat (in fact the Communist Party, which was by definition the avant-garde of the working class) had to ensure the leading positions, thus creating a solid basis for the completion of the revolution after the war. He also emphasized it was extremely important for the communists to define their struggle against their opponents at home on the national liberation foundation, not class, in order to prevail.<sup>4</sup>

The question of timing the revolution properly was answered about a year later, in the end of the war, at the inaugural congress of the Communist Party of Serbia (in the beginning of May 1945), by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of KPJ Josip Broz-Tito, who until as late as the summer of 1944 assured Churchill that it was not his intention to introduce communism, since all European countries after the war should have democratic systems and that Yugoslavia should not be an exception to this rule.<sup>5</sup> He stated, in regard to the frequent opinion among communists, that after the war ended, the so-called second stage would take place, that the Yugoslav Communist Party was already entering the second stage surreptitiously. He also stressed that they should not expect any decisive turning points ("communism will not take place overnight"), because the Party would achieve their goals following the path set before it by the facts of the liberation war, which were the reason for the unclear delineation of the stages of the bourgeois democratic and proletarian revolution. According to the discussion he had with Stalin in regard to this issue, this was not in contradiction with the Leninist principles in any way.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Vida Deželak Barič: *Narodnoosvobodilni boj kot priložnost za izvedbo revolucionarnih ciljev* [National Liberation Struggle as an Opportunity for the Realisation of Revolutionary Goals]. In: *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 1995, No. 1–2, pp. 148, 149.

<sup>5</sup> Tito–Churchill : *Strogo tajno* [Top Secret]. *Zbornik britanskih dokumentov* [A Collection of British Documents] 28 May 1943 – 21 May 1945, Zagreb–Ljubljana 1981, pp. 276, 277.

<sup>6</sup> Josip Broz Tito: *Sabrana djela* [Collected Works], book 28, Beograd 1988, *Govor v Beogradu 12. maja 1945 na ustanovnem kongresu KP Srbije* [A Speech at the Inaugural Congress of the Communist Party of Serbia on 12 May 1945 in Belgrade], pp. 33.

In accordance with these directives, due to tactical reasons the communists were forced to undertake a moderate popularisation of their Party in the final stages of the war, in order to avoid repulsing those who already opposed communism or the communists or at least had reservations towards them. Thus they presented their Party, when they discussed it in public, first and foremost as a national political subject with the greatest merits for the organisation and leadership of the resistance against the occupiers, or as a Party striving exclusively for the good of the nation. Simultaneously they emphasized the Party's honest devotion to national liberation goals, denied the class implications of the resistance, thus answering the reproaches of the counter-revolutionary side. For example, the publication *Komunistična partija v narodosvobodilni borbi* ("Communist Party in the National Liberation Struggle"), published in the autumn of 1944 in the Styria, concludes with the following finding: "During the liberation struggle, the Communist Party has truly become a national Party, therefore its goals are national goals, its gains are national gains, and its enemies are national enemies."<sup>7</sup> It has to be underlined that the expression *national* was often manipulated in the sense of *people's*.

Because of this, the members of KPS frequently felt the characteristic division when it came to tactics, which should ensure its broad scope and mass appeal, but at the same time not lead to relenting, thus making the future position of the Party more difficult and weaker. So, for example, the Secretary of the Central Committee of KPS Franc Leskošek told the participants of the Party conference in May 1944 that the Party should be raised to the "level of the soul of all movement in the region, to the level of that basic principle, providing the meaning and initiative for work"; at the same time he warned them that the "leading role of the Party should not dissolve the broad scope of our liberation movement, in contrary, it should result in an even greater unity of all of the positive forces of our nation and their even greater activation".<sup>8</sup>

In 1944, KPS as an integral part of the united, monolithic and centralised KPJ already controlled the whole partisan movement and was systematically getting ready for the revolutionary takeover of power after the war. Due to tactical reasons it never discussed the revolution publicly, and it covered the revolutionary nature of its political agenda with expressions like *people's democracy*, *true people's democracy*, *new democracy*, *the accomplishments of the national liberation struggle*, and so on. The situation was different in the internal Party

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<sup>7</sup> Arhiv Republike Slovenije (ARS) [Archive of the Republic of Slovenia] (hereinafter ARS), dept. 2, (AS 1887), National Liberation Struggle Press, Vinko Hafner: *Komunistična partija v narodnoosvobodilni borbi* [Communist Party in the National Liberation Struggle]. Published by the Agitation and Propaganda Commission at the Administrative Committee for the Styria, September 1944, sig. 209, pp. 22.

<sup>8</sup> ARS, collection Centralni komite KPS [Central Committee of KPS] 1941–1945] (AS 1487), A paper by Franc Leskošek at the Party Conference of the Ljubljana Province Party Organisations in Semič on 28 and 29 May 1944, a.e. 62.

circles, where the revolution was discussed openly. For example, in March 1945 the Slovenian Party leadership stated that the revolution in Yugoslavia was proceeding with all force, that the process of the revolution demanded victory, that the Soviet Union was the only friend and protector, but that a suitable policy should also be maintained towards the Western Allies.<sup>9</sup>

In 1944, the positions of Slovenian communists in the resistance movement were solid and fortified. Namely, in the political field KPS had also acquired a formally acknowledged priority apart from the actual position in the resistance movement, already with the adoption of the so-called *Dolomitska izjava* (*The Dolomites Declaration*) of March 1943, in which the Christian Socialists and the so-called *Sokoli* (a patriotic gymnastic society named Falcons) – besides the communists the founding groups of the Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation – renounced the further development of their own organisations.<sup>10</sup> Thus the Communist Party ensured a total political monopoly for itself, which in the further development allowed it to efficiently and without any obstruction interfere with the process of the formation of the new, the so-called people's authorities and state. In the final period of the occupation, just like before, KPS acted in a distinctly double manner. Outwardly it persisted in its national liberation positions, thus reinforcing the resistance in its military and political components. The concept of clandestine transition towards the revolution preserved the unity and power of the resistance, and it also paid off in the international arena in regard to the international acknowledgement of the Yugoslav resistance as a whole. At the same time, KPS also methodically strengthened its own ranks in the organisational and ideological sense, obviously acting to its own advantage and preparing for the assumption of power.

In comparison with the pre-war situation, when the communists were excluded from the public life or even forced to remain underground for as many as twenty years, during World War II KPS became a relatively numerous organisation. It especially grew stronger in 1943 and 1944, and before the end of the war it had around 12 000 members in the field and in the partisan army, which meant ten times as many members as in the beginning of the occupation, despite great losses due to early resistance and the persistence in constant resistance.<sup>11</sup> By distributing their members carefully, KPS has, even before the end of the war, more or less systematically established a network of its organisations in the

<sup>9</sup> ARS, AS 1487, t.e. 1, Zapisnik seje politbiroja CK KPS [Minutes of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of KPS Session] 29 March 1945.

<sup>10</sup> Dokumenti ljudske revolucije v Sloveniji [Documents of the People's Revolution in Slovenia], book 6, Ljubljana 1981, doc. No. 3; Bojan Godeša: *Prispevek k poznavanju Dolomitske izjave* [Contribution to Understanding the Dolomites Declaration]. In : Nova revija, 1991, No. 105–106, 107, 108; Spomenka Hribar: *Dolomitska izjava* [The Dolomites Declaration]. Ljubljana 1991, pp. 115–134.

<sup>11</sup> Vida Deželak Barič: *Organizacijsko vprašanje Komunistične partije Slovenije 1941–1945* [The Organisational Question of the Communist Party of Slovenia 1941–1945], doctoral thesis, University of Ljubljana, 1999, pp. 453.

whole ethnic territory, also among Slovenians who remained in Austria and Italy after World War I, in order to carry out one of the basic points of the Liberation Front programme by encouraging resistance also in these areas – to unite all Slovenians, which indicated an interest of the Yugoslav communists in spreading the revolution towards the west. Even though it was strong, during the war and immediately after it KPS remained a party of qualified staff. Masses of politically inexperienced and ideologically uneducated new members, who, during the occupation, have not only joined KPS out of social or explicitly revolutionary, but also out of national liberation intentions, represented a significant problem for the way of how revolution was being carried out and how strategy and tactics were being managed. Therefore the political and ideological education of the members and explicit training of cadre in the Party schools and workshops was a very important part of the Party life; in 1944, it was organised on all levels – from the central, regional, district and county KPS committees to individual partisan units. The study materials included the indispensable *History of VKP(b)*, Stalin's *Problems of Leninism*, the works of Lenin, etc.<sup>12</sup>

Among numerous directives, sent by the Central Committee to the Party organisations in the final period of the war in order to ensure their correct orientation, continuous work and maintenance of the leading role, the circular of October 1944 – a strictly obligatory study material – has to be emphasized. The Central Committee defined the main tasks awaiting the Party organisations – as stated in its introduction – in regard to the expected "victory against the occupiers and their treacherous collaborators as well as to the initiation of the national struggle for the protection of the accomplishments, ensured by the three and a half years of fighting, from everyone who would endanger them...", and it especially emphasized the weaknesses that the Party organisations should eliminate in these decisive moments. It believed that Party organisations together with the forums supposedly stopped being the motive of the liberation struggle, became self-sufficient, succumbed to bureaucracy, got lost in details and lost the wider perspective; due to the predominance of professional political staff they lacked true contact with the masses, individuals started losing personal modesty, started pursuing careers and became leaders; the organisations were too liberal or "inappropriately generous", there was a lack of meaningful criticism, and so on.<sup>13</sup> This was a kind of a list of intolerable mistakes and deficiencies, and it was urgent to do away with them before the imminent end of the war, thus creating a disciplined and reliable Party mechanism.

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<sup>12</sup> Vida Deželak Barič: *Partijsko šolstvo med narodnoosvobodilnim bojem v Sloveniji [Party Education During the National Liberation Struggle in Slovenia]*. In: *Prosveta i školstvo u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu i revoluciji naroda i narodnosti Jugoslavije*, Novi Sad 1984, pp. 505–516.

<sup>13</sup> ARS, AS 1447, Okrožnica O organizacijskih in kadrovskih vprašanjih naše Partije [A Circular on the Organisational and Personnel Issues of Our Party], a. e. 238.

In 1944, an efficiently functioning and hierarchically organised Party organisation was established, which used selected methods to ensure realistic influence in all of the organisations and institutions of the resistance movement for the Party. For example: the Liberation Front committees, especially at higher level, at that time consisted mostly of communists; even a principle of personal unions was being introduced – Secretaries of Party Committees were simultaneously Secretaries of the corresponding Liberation Front Committees. In the mass organisation of the Liberation Front – the *Slovenian Youth Association* – members of *Communist Youth Association* took over the leading roles, while the positions in the Communist Youth Organisation were held by members of KPS. The *Slovenian Women's Anti-Fascist Union* was also mostly led by communists.<sup>14</sup> In the partisan army, the Party organisation was the only organised and functioning political organisation. In 1944 approximately one quarter of military ranks was included in KPS, and if we take the communist youth into account, the communist organisation included up to a half of them; the command posts had belonged to the communists ever since the formation of the partisan army in 1941, and through the institution of political commissars, political education had been carried out in the army.<sup>15</sup> Communists also had a monopoly in the important field of propaganda.

The monopoly enabled the communists to enforce the revolutionary orientation in the character of authorities as they were established in the context of the Liberation Front after the first meeting, in February 1944, of the Slovenski narodnoosvobodilni svet (Slovenian National Liberation Council – SNOS), a representative and legislative body of the liberation movement, when the process of establishing so-called people's authorities was speeded up. It was oriented towards the long-term perspective, and its aim was to preserve the positions of the partisan movement and the rise to power under the communist leadership after the end of the war.<sup>16</sup> In this context, it was especially important to prepare the administrative apparatus and plans for the adoption of concrete measures when assuming the power, introduce the new revolutionary legal order and the judicial branch of power, as well as establish the political police, OZNA (Department for the Protection of People). The solving of aforementioned issues

<sup>14</sup> Vida Deželak Barič: *Vloga in značaj Komunistične partije Slovenije med drugo svetovno vojno* [The Role and Character of the Communist Party in Slovenia during World War II]. In: *Preteklost sodobnosti : izbrana poglavja slovenske novejšje zgodovine*. Ljubljana 1999, pp. 101–103.

<sup>15</sup> Dokumenti centralnih organa KPJ : NOR i revolucija (1941–1945) [Documents of the Central Committee of KPJ : National Liberation War and Revolution (1941–1945), book 17, Beograd 1986, doc. 76, pp. 280–282; Vida Deželak Barič: *Organizacijsko vprašanje Komunistične partije Slovenije 1941–1945* [The Organisational Question of the Communist Party of Slovenia 1941–1945], pp. 422–443.

<sup>16</sup> Tone Ferenc: *Ljudska oblast na Slovenskem 1941–1945* [People's Authorities in Slovenia 1941–1945], book 3. Ljubljana 1991, pp. 8–32.

took place in the context of the Communist Party's directives. The judicial power, refusing the case-law and legislation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, justified its legitimacy on the will of the people and their mass support to the liberation movement, following the example of the Soviet Union's legislation. The judicial system had an important task of preventing and punishing the actions of the movement's opponents and collaborators, which even worsened the differentiation among Slovenians, who at that time lived in an atmosphere of utterly tense mutual conflicts or a civil war.<sup>17</sup>

The establishment of OZNA in May 1944 was of special importance. In the Yugoslav context this was a strictly centralised organisation, which was, together with the State Security Army (VDV) as its armed enforcement authority, subordinate and responsible to Tito, Supreme Commander and Commissioner for National Defence of the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia, and Aleksander Ranković, Head of OZNA, otherwise an Organisational Secretary of KPJ. Thus OZNA was under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Party, excluded from the system of civilian authorities. Its basic activities besides protecting the movement were oriented against the opponents of the partisan movement and towards preparing the post-war state security apparatus with the aim of ensuring the new post-war authorities and protecting the revolution. It gained considerable powers and had the right, for example, to exile the opponents of the movement and their families as well as the families of Home Guard members (including the right to confiscate their property); it also had the right to initiate investigation procedures against the so-called national enemies who were then tried at military courts, supervise foreign military missions, etc. Above all, the Party had to provide OZNA with support in personnel and carry out the political work within it, but it had no right to interfere with its actual operations.<sup>18</sup>

Just like the Party leadership wanted to strengthen the Party ranks before the end of the war, it also strived for increased strength and unity in a broader sense. In regard to the administrative and activist cadre, a whole campaign about the struggle against bureaucracy, professionalism, careerism and other phenomena, unacceptable to the Party, was carried out. The elimination of these phenomena was supposed to purify the cadre, strengthen its discipline and selflessness, in order to prepare it for the time after the war. Should they fail to eliminate these phenomena, Kidrič warned that instead of "officials of a new kind, people's officials, who grow from the people and are permeated with all the qualities of true fighters and makers of free future", they would end up with

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<sup>17</sup> Jera Vodušek Starič: *Prevzem oblasti 1944–1946* [The Takeover of Power 1944–1946]. Ljubljana 1992, (hereinafter Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem oblasti*) pp. 11–26.

<sup>18</sup> Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem oblasti*, pp. 28–38; Ljuba Dornik Šubelj: *Oddelek za zaščito naroda za Slovenijo* [Department for the Protection of People for Slovenia], Ljubljana 1999, pp. 47–56, 219–221.

an apparatus, "brimming with the characteristics of the former, hated anti-people apparatus". Such an apparatus would be "the single greatest danger to everything our nations and people fought for during their three-year struggle". This would allow the reaction to take root in it, attempting to reclaim the lost positions and discredit the democratic nature of the movement.<sup>19</sup>

As the end of the war drew closer, the warnings of the leadership that not only did the final victory against the occupiers have to be insured, but that they also had a duty to "protect and further develop the democratic results of the national liberation struggle in order to protect that which our people shed rivers of blood for", were becoming increasingly frequent. There was talk about traitors and speculators, who would in the future seek new ways in order to reclaim their lost positions, which meant they would try to harm the unity of the Liberation Front and its revolutionary nature. The urgency of deepening the democratic awareness of the masses and the partisan fighters was emphasized, which would be, besides the democratic people's authorities, a guarantee for the preservation and further development of democratic accomplishments.<sup>20</sup> Democracy (with adjectives or without) and the achievements of the liberation movement, including the democratic and federal regime of the new Yugoslavia, equality of Yugoslav nations and people's democracy, were mentioned frequently. The army also counted among these accomplishments in the sense of guarantees for the working people, that is, workers, farmers and the so-called honest intelligence, that the national liberation would also bring democratic and social improvements.<sup>21</sup> By emphasizing the so-called people's democratic nature of the Liberation Front, this organisation also publicly became revolutionary.

In the autumn of 1944 the movement's leadership endeavoured for an as complete military mobilisation as possible, which now also included most of the activists. In November 1944, Kidrič wrote that if in the initial periods (1941 and 1942) the political organisations in the field were nevertheless decisive in regard to the missions at that time, in the final stages of the war (then frequently referred to as the patriotic war) the might of the partisan army would be of key importance. That, of course, did not mean that the political organisations of the Liberation Front in the field and the establishment of governance would be neglected, but the work in these areas would not affect the army. Men, capable to fight, would be replaced in the field by women and youth, and military mobili-

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<sup>19</sup> Boris Kidrič: *Zbrano delo* [Collected Work], book 2, Ljubljana 1978, Boj birokratizmu, kari-erizmu in drugim nezdravim pojavom [Struggle Against Bureaucratisation, Careerism and Other Unhealthy Phenomena], pp. 198.

<sup>20</sup> Kidrič, *Zbrano delo* [Collected Work], 2, Za poživitev in poglobitev političnega dela v naši vojski [For the Revitalisation and Enhancement of the Political Work in Our Army], pp. 214, 215.

<sup>21</sup> Kidrič, *Zbrano delo* [Collected Work], 2, O osnovnih značilnostih v graditvi demokratične in federativne Jugoslavije [On the Basic Characteristics of Building the Democratic and Federal Yugoslavia], pp. 111–115; Dve vojski, dva značaja in dva namena [Two Armies, Two Characters and Two Purposes], pp. 227.

sation, carried out as consistently as possible, would result in a broad political mobilisation and development of new cadres from these two groups.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time the women's rights to equality were emphasized, which supposedly belonged among the basic programme demands of any true democracy. Women supposedly acquired this right by themselves, that is, by directly taking part in the resistance by joining the army, assisting the army from the background, working in political organisations and in public authorities. Thus they have done away with "reactionary prejudice", "obstacles of the past", and enforced women's equality themselves. The propaganda stressed that by participating in the resistance women contributed the same share as men in casualties, shortage and suffering, thus they would also have the same share in victories. The liberation movement supposedly had a people's democratic character also due to the demands of its programme for women's equality and its practical implementation, but the leadership also cautioned against the phenomenon of feminism, since women's equality in the new Yugoslavia could not be separated from the general democratic movement, for it was a basic and integral part thereof. Before the end of the war, Kidrič stated that the question of whether to admit women's equality or not no longer existed, because women had fought for equality themselves. However, the question of the continuous implementation of the equal position of women as citizens remained – the more numerous their participation in the political organisations and public authorities during the war, the fuller the assertion of their equal role would be in the future, thus the question of activating women was of extraordinary importance, not only for the wartime, but also future development.<sup>23</sup>

Especially since the autumn of 1944, the Central Committee of KPS, operating in the context of the Political Bureau during the war, held a number of meetings, where it discussed the imminent end of the war and defined the tasks in regard to this and also in regard to the actual situation at the time. The accepted directives of broader importance or character were then implemented by the members of the Central Committee or the Political Bureau in the Presidency of the Slovenian National Liberation Council and the Executive Committee of the Liberation Front, which was a characteristic decision-making practice.

During the preparations for the takeover of power at the end of the war, the session of the Party leadership on 1 September 1944 was very important. Here the main measures to be carried out immediately after the end of the war were specified. The following measures were decided: when the occupiers break, especially urban centres and main transport connections have to be taken over and the main cadre deployed there; OZNA has to prepare everything for the man-

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<sup>22</sup> Kidrič, Zbrano delo [Collected Work], 2, Pošljite v vojsko, kar sodi v vojsko [Send Those, Who Belong There, to the Army], pp. 217, 218.

<sup>23</sup> Kidrič, Zbrano delo [Collected Work], 2, Pravica in njena uporaba [Justice and its Implementation], pp. 267, 268; Govor slovenskim ženam [A Speech for Slovenian Women], pp. 269, 270.

agement of these centres; the National Guard or militia has to be established everywhere, because crime will soar (the black market, for example); the movement of the population has to be limited (the introduction of curfew, passes and apartment controls); military administration has to be set up temporarily, releasing the first decrees; cities should be under military jurisdiction and a general mobilisation has to be carried out. In regard to economy and finance, the continued business operations of Slovenian banks and the confiscation of occupier's banks were envisioned, and the same went for industry. It was explicitly stated that the economic policy should be controlled by the Party, the basic direction would be state capitalism, and in the first period too much freedom as well as excessive rigidity should be avoided; measures which would frighten the bourgeoisie should not be taken. So they decided for a compromise, a middle way, which would allow the post-war authorities to speed up the renewal and economic strengthening and to stabilise the situation as soon as possible, which the Party itself saw as one of the main political issues after the war. Due to the economic crisis, they decided to enhance state control, while fighting the discouragement of the population because of the crisis and unemployment with agitprop. It was necessary to specify all the personnel, and the so-called cleansing of the existent state apparatus was required, while the departments of Slovenian National Liberation Council had to prepare the relevant plans.<sup>24</sup> Until the end of the war, numerous political decisions of strategic as well as tactical character were also reached. In September 1944, the movement leadership made a decision that the door to the Liberation Front would since then be closed to all Party representatives and those who waited for so long (the so-called center). The Party leadership saw such policy as the formal milestone between two stages in the development of the liberation struggle,<sup>25</sup> and it undoubtedly stemmed from the need to assume power after the war. Besides large numbers, the unity of the Liberation Front was also emphasized, and it was at that time justified with the need for unified resistance leadership, even though in reality the Party's control over it was the actual reason. The significance of the Liberation Front was further determined in March 1945, when a decision was reached by the Party leadership that no political parties except for the Liberation Front would exist in Slovenia after the war.<sup>26</sup> In regard to labour unions it was also concluded that they had to represent the unity of the working class under the Party leadership and that there were to be "no compromises and relenting" in

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<sup>24</sup> ARS, AS 1487, t.e. 1, Zapisnik seje politbiroja CK KPS [Minutes of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of KPS Session] 1 September 1944.

<sup>25</sup> Edvard Kardelj: *Pot nove Jugoslavije : članki in govori iz narodnoosvobodilne borbe 1941–1945* [The Path of the New Yugoslavia: National Liberation Struggle Articles and Speeches], Ljubljana 1946. Zaprta vrata [The closed door], pp. 423.

<sup>26</sup> ARS, AS 1487, t.e. 1, Zapisnik seje politbiroja CK KPS [Minutes of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of KPS Session] 29 March 1945.

regard to this issue.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, before the end of the war, numerous solutions were reached in regard to the deployment of the Party cadre; for example, just before the end of the war some of the most prominent Party members were sent to the Primorska (maritime province of Slovenia), since the question of its annexation was at that time one of the most important Slovenian and Yugoslav political issues. Special attention was paid to OZNA, which was discussed at almost every meeting of the Political Bureau in the efforts to politically strengthen it by allocating the cadre from the ranks of activists and the army to it before the end of the war. The units of KNOJ (People's Defence Corps of Yugoslavia), that is, the former units of the State Security Army, were also paid special consideration.<sup>28</sup> The suggestion about the structure of the Slovenian government, established on 5 May 1945, and the presidency of Boris Kidrič was also prepared by the Political Bureau.<sup>29</sup>

Slovenians awaited the end of the war with relief, but in regard to the differences, extremely intensified by the war, also with uncertainty and fear. The victory of the partisan army involved the retreat of numerous anti-partisan soldiers or anti-communist units and civilians together with the retreating German army. The leaders of the victorious side, which enjoyed mass support, once again, just like so many times during the war, announced severe vengeance against the occupiers' collaborators and opponents of the partisans. When Kidrič accepted his position of President of the first Slovenian post-war government, he explained that "the organisers and leaders of criminal activities deserve no mercy" and that the government would do everything in its power to completely support the authorities in charge of the uncompromising struggle against "fifth columnists and traitors". On the other hand, the government would not take any actions against the masses which had been led astray; after the war they would be given the option to make up for their wartime transgressions by working hard to renew their homeland, devastated by the war.<sup>30</sup> During his visit to Ljubljana on 26 May 1945, Tito stated at a mass gathering that "justice, the arm of vengeance for our people" has already found the majority of opponents ("traitors").<sup>31</sup>

This was a violent epilogue of the war or retribution against the wartime collaborating formations, but also a strike against the potential opponents of the new authorities. Home Guard units retreated to the Austrian Carinthia in the first days of May 1945, surrendering to the British units; however, the British turned them over to Yugoslav authorities, which executed the majority of them,

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<sup>27</sup> ARS, AS 1487, t.e. 1, Zapisnik seje politbiroja CK KPS [Minutes of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of KPS Session] 24 October 1944.

<sup>28</sup> ARS, AS 1487, t.e. 1, Zapisnika sej politbiroja CK KPS [Minutes of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of KPS Session] 29 March 1945 and 8 April 1945.

<sup>29</sup> ARS, AS 1487, t.e. 1, Zapisnika sej politbiroja CK KPS [Minutes of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of KPS Session] 7 March 1945 and 29 March 1945.

<sup>30</sup> Kidrič, Zbrano delo [Collected Work], 2, Govor na svečani seji predsedstva SNOS [A Speech at the Solemn Session of the Presidency of SNOS], pp. 299.

<sup>31</sup> Ljudska pravica, 27 May 1945, No. 28, The Speech of Marshal Tito in Ljubljana, pp. 1.

mostly without court proceedings, in the end of May and in June, after the war had already officially ended. Only until the amnesty in August 1945, mass and individual post-war executions claimed more than 14.000 lives. The number of everyone killed after the war represents as much as 15% of all World War II victims.<sup>32</sup>

In the end of the war, the Slovenian Communist Party had politics, the military and the police under complete control, which allowed it to seize the power. However, the takeover involved a lengthy and often controversial process. Namely, besides the key positions it already had under control, the Party had to fortify its position more broadly. At the Political Bureau meeting of 2 June 1945 they estimated that until then the first "general organisation phase" had already been completed, but the gradual consolidation of opponents ("adaptation of reaction") was characteristic for the ensuing second phase.<sup>33</sup>

The Yugoslav Army was among the key factors in the takeover of power in the end of the war, and it concentrated massive forces in the Slovenian ethnic territory, where the final battles took place. Furthermore, OZNA was very important – its main task immediately after the war was to imprison all members of counter-revolutionary and occupiers' organisations who had already been included into its lists, drawn up during the war, or accused at the end of the war. Together with the KNOJ units it carried out the task of protecting the revolution by the so-called cleansing or by executing the members of the Home Guard and other opponents. By means of a network of agents it started controlling public and private life, related to the political, economic and religious activities, but especially the work of the potential political opponents. It informed the relevant Party authorities of the events which could threaten the unity of the authorities. It monitored the activities of more prominent individuals involved in the pre-war and wartime political life and the clergy which opposed the revolution, since the evaluations of the political circumstances were important for the results of the 1945 elections (into National Liberation Committees in July and August, and into the Constituent Assembly of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia in November). It monitored the organisation of the elections and supervised the work of the government (especially the departments managed by non-communists) as well as the work of local committees. It also controlled most prisons and camps, postal services, railway, etc.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Boris Mlakar: *Slovensko domobranstvo 1943–1945* [Slovenian Home Guard 1943–1945], Ljubljana 2003, pp. 484–526; Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem oblasti*, pp. 225–250; The computer database of the Institute for Contemporary History – Casualties among the population in the territory of the Republic of Slovenia during World War II and immediately after it.

<sup>33</sup> *Zapisniki politbiroja CK KPS/ZKS 1945/1954* [Minutes of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of KPS/ZKS 1945/1954] (hereinafter *Zapisniki politbiroja CK KPS*). Ljubljana 2000, doc. No. 1, pp. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Jerca Vodušek Starič: *Prevzem oblasti po vojni in vloga Ozne – obračun* [Takeover of Power After the War and the Role of OZNA – Retribution]. In: *Slovenija v letu 1945*, Ljubljana 1996, pp. 93–110.

The next instrument in the strengthening of Party power was the judicial administration. From 1943 until the autumn of 1945, only special courts were actually functioning in Slovenia – military courts, national honour courts, special senates against speculators and so on. Their main task was to punish war criminals and the so-called enemies of the people. The category of war criminals was very loosely defined, and everyone who opposed the people's authorities or the new political system also counted among enemies of the people. The sentences and resulting measures disabled any opposition, not only economic, but especially political, since the active and passive right to vote was denied to a certain part of the population. Judicial proceedings against individuals, charged with economic collaboration, took place in July and August at the national honour courts. They were initiated on the grounds of the Political Bureau decision and had special significance or effect, since through them the new authorities took hold of private property, thus the state soon controlled as much as 90 % of industry. With judicial proceedings, whose aim was to eliminate the pre-war elite from the decision-making process and nationalise private property, the authority of the Party also strengthened in the economic field.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, KPS gradually took over the management of state and other institutions, political organisations and associations, while it also strengthened the control in the field by deploying its cadre in all districts. When the Liberation Front Committees (partly also public authorities, already elected during the war – the national liberation committees) started taking the power from the army and preparing the public authorities elections, these elections were accompanied by intense activities of the Party. The elections were of great political significance for the Party. They would mean the victory of the Liberation Front and mass support of the new people's authorities, and they also represented the political preparation for the Constituent Assembly elections. Mass organisations were supposed to be included into these preparations, therefore the Political Bureau speeded up their establishment where they had not existed before, interfering with the activities of associations. Namely, in June it decided to forbid all previous activities and set out that associations should be integrated into mass organisations.<sup>36</sup>

Initially, the Party ascribed a very important role to the Liberation Front as the only political organisation, since it was aware of the significance of the widespread Liberation Front Committees, allowing it to carry out its political work in the field. Thus the Political Bureau quickly convened the first Liberation Front congress, which took place in the middle of July 1945. Otherwise the political actions of the Liberation Front were completely consolidated; its tasks also included the struggle against political opponents, which ensured the Party a strong political support in order to eliminate the opposition and all those who

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<sup>35</sup> Vodušek Starič, *Prevzem oblasti*, pp. 266–279.

<sup>36</sup> *Zapisniki politbiroja CK KPS*, the session of 2 June 1945, pp. 27, 26.

resisted the new authorities. The role of the Liberation Front was weakened after the November elections, as the political role of labour unions started to get stronger.<sup>37</sup>

In accordance with the aforementioned standpoint, already adopted during the war, immediately after the war the Party refrained from interfering with the important economic issues or the issue of private property due to tactical reasons. This was decided due to extremely poor economic and social reasons, and the Party did not risk any radical interventions in order to avoid even worsening the situation. It decided to stifle this sector gradually, and to strengthen the state sector covertly. They nationalised the most important companies by confiscating them or assigning them a provisional national management, while others were made dependent on the state with economic and repressive measures. Revolutionary measures in regard to property relations and the adaptation of the economic system to the political system, whose political goal was to strengthen sector of state property in a Party state and weaken the previous authorities in the economic field, were mostly carried out after the Constituent Assembly elections in November 1945. At that time the role of the Liberation Front also changed, since the Party started openly and publicly appearing under its own name. If in the first period after the war the role of the Liberation Front was to expose its opponents and the Party needed it in the stage of strengthening, now its task was to attract the people for further revolutionary changes.<sup>38</sup>

KPS had to consolidate and strengthen its own ranks and solve the personnel questions in regard to the situation at that time. In the summer of 1945, the Central Committee of KPS determined that the Party had its stronger cadres only within more important authorities, while in the field there were no Party organisations whatsoever in certain regions, or they were organisations with new and inexperienced members, "at a very low level" ideologically and politically. Until then the reorganisation of districts and regions had been completed, and only then was the regular convening of Party organisation meetings achieved. However, the leadership still lacked a detailed overview of the organisational situation and the social makeup of the Party members. In five departments (Ljubljana, Maribor, Celje, Novo mesto, East (Vzhodna) Primorska) and in the area of the Ljubljana City Committee (or in 69 districts), 4978 members were in the field, while the Carinthia and the West (Zapadna) Primorska region with Trieste were not taken into account, since the leadership still lacked its organisational overview. Among internal issues and problems, the Central Committee of KPS emphasized that the number of Party professionals was too high and that they were not in contact with the masses, which is why their atti-

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<sup>37</sup> Zapisniki politbiroja CK KPS, the session of 2 June 1945, pp. 28 and 21 June 1945, pp. 30, 31; Kidrič, Zbrano delo [Collected Work], 2, Poročilo na I. kongresu osvobodilne fronte [The Report at the 1<sup>st</sup> Liberation Front Congress], pp. 353–360; Vodušek Starič, Prevzem oblasti, pp. 400, 401.

<sup>38</sup> Vodušek Starič, Prevzem oblasti, pp. 288–292.

tude to accepting new members was incorrect or sectarian. An improper attitude to criticism was also supposedly noticeable among the Party cadre, insufficient emphasis was placed on personal responsibility and discipline, and a "self-willed dictatorial attitude of some, especially the so-called old communists", was also detected. The Central Committee apparatus or its commissions have not started forming until summer, on the basis of the standpoint which Kardelj had emphasized – that the work of the Party cannot be separated from the state work.<sup>39</sup> The cadres for the commissions had already been selected, but the commissions were not functioning yet. The personnel department was the first to become operational, just as the war ended. In the summer, the Central Committee of KPS reported that it has just started to implement the personnel policy and that it was connected with personnel departments in the state apparatus. With regular activities of all the planned commissions, the Party leadership expected that the authority of the Central Committee and the Party leadership itself would improve thoroughly.<sup>40</sup>

The Party organisation in the city of Ljubljana was the most important one. The City Committee of KPS Ljubljana also encompassed the city district committees as well as the Party organisations of government institutions, OZNA, state railway direction, post office, universities, radio, agitation and propaganda apparatus, newspaper editorships (the *Ljudska pravica* and *Slovenski poročevalc* newspapers), theatre, etc. In September 1945, 120 cells with 1122 members and 236 candidates were operating in the city; in regard to social origin, 397 members and 84 candidates were labourers, 31 members and 4 candidates were peasants, 50 members and 15 candidates were artisans and traders, 106 members and 41 candidates were employees, while the group of intellectuals was the strongest with 538 members and 92 candidates.<sup>41</sup> On the basis of class standards, this composition was by all means unsuitable.

After the session of the Provisional National Assembly of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia in August 1945, the Party started to emphasize the implementation of legality or struggle against illegality as one of its most important tasks. In this regard, sectarianism or the distortion of the political orientation was supposedly the main mistake, reflecting itself, for example, in the frontal assaults against merchants and innkeepers as well as the implementation of the Electoral Registers Act, which was taken too strictly by the activists, who proceeded to illegally eliminate certain individuals from the registers. Illegal ac-

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<sup>39</sup> Zapisniki politbiroja CK KPS, the session of 21 June 1945, pp. 32.

<sup>40</sup> ARS, fond Centralni komite Zveze komunistov Slovenije 1945–1990 [Central Committee of the Communist Association of Slovenia 1945–1990] (AS 1589), t.e. 18, the report by Lidija Šentjerc – probably in August 1945 Central Committee of KPJ.

<sup>41</sup> Zgodovinski arhiv Ljubljana (ZAL) [Historical gArchive Ljubljana (hereinafter ZAL), LJU 684, Mestni komite Zveze komunistov Slovenije Ljubljana 1945–1954 [Ljubljana City Committee of the Communist Association of Slovenia 1945–1954], t.e. 3, a.e. 45, Pregled partijske organizacije mesta Ljubljane za september z dne 1. 10. 1945 [Overview of the Party Organisation of the City Ljubljana for the Month of September of 1 October 1945].

tivities, in the opinion of the Party leadership, were in conflict with the need that all available material resources be allocated towards rebuilding and renewing the state; furthermore, they were in conflict with the people striving for the normalisation of the situation and for normal life under the rule of law, while the opponents of the regime supposedly used illegalities to encourage dissatisfaction and discourage the unity. Due to these illegalities, the Ljubljana City Committee, for example, decided to establish a Board for Requests and Complaints within the Presidency of Slovenian National Liberation Council, thus ensuring legality, carrying out a mass campaign against sectarianism and pursuing legality and unity. Because the percentage of individuals eliminated from the electoral registers in Ljubljana was 10%, and because this percentage was also high elsewhere (in places even as high as 70%), the so-called reclamation campaign followed in Slovenia in order to ensure the necessary corrections and promote the sense that legality was being preserved. At the same time a campaign for joining the Liberation Front took place in order to stimulate the political work, while the registration itself would discipline the members. The Party had to supervise the electoral registers as well as the enrolment into the Liberation Front. Before the gatherings in regard to the Constituent Assembly Elections, which were supposedly manifestations in support of the new authorities, the cells had to meet urgently and prepare themselves for the discussions, and at the gatherings the members had to oppose the complaining, emphasizing the will to make sacrifices. They also had to stand up against the sectarianism against peasants and clear up the concept of black market – those who speculated and traded in the black market were not to be stigmatised as peasants, but black marketers.<sup>42</sup>

The results of the November elections in Yugoslavia and the victory of the People's Front in Slovenia, which concluded an important phase in the solidification of the Party's authority and building a Party state, were seen by the Party as "a confirmation of our struggle, our victory, a result of a revolutionary democracy", meaning the condemnation of the previous system, even though the Party was still not completely satisfied with the results of the elections in Slovenia. In contrary to the expectations that the Liberation Front would probably have the worst election results in certain parts of the Lower Carniola (where during the occupation the Home Guard enjoyed the strongest support, while in the end of the war this region suffered the most because of mass executions), the results were the worst in the Maribor region. With the analyses of the election results, the Party especially held itself responsible for failing to ensure even better results, and believed it had failed to appraise its opponents properly. In

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<sup>42</sup> ZAL, LJU 684, t.e. 3, a.e. 27: Minutes of the Ljubljana City Committee of KPS session with the Secretaries of District Committees and institutions of 3 September 1945, the Ljubljana City Committee of KPS session with the Secretaries of District Committees of 5 October 1945, and the Ljubljana City Committee of KPS session with the Secretaries of District Committees and institutions of 16 October 1945].

Ljubljana, where 7% of voters allegedly voted against the Liberation Front, they, for example, warned about inadequate monitoring of the remains of clericalism, underestimating the influence of the clergy, the so-called White Guard and Blue Guard organisations, those whose property had been confiscated, etc. All of this supposedly pointed to the fact that Party became a victim of bureaucratisation, while the Party members were "losing the revolutionary perspective, forgetting that we are still in the middle of a revolutionary process". Bureaucratisation supposedly reflected itself in loosing the contact between the Party and the people, leaving factory workers under the influence of the old social democrat trade union representatives, which was an especially pressing issue in Ljubljana, where few true proletarians were members of KPS, which resulted in the danger that the Party would fall victim to petty bourgeoisie. Careful enrolment of new members into the Party and placing the right people in the important positions was emphasized, and the Maribor region was stated as a warning – there, supposedly, kulaks and speculators infiltrated the Liberation Front, while the communists failed to make good use of the Agrarian Reform Act. The Party appealed to general vigilance, in the following sense: "Every Party member must be an eye of OZNA. Democracy is for broad people's masses, not for the reaction." Accordingly, the supervision of private companies was to be strengthened, while in the field of education schools on the "scientific basis" were to be ensured – this supervision was especially aimed against nuns in schools. The influence of social democrats in factories was to be eliminated, while the activities of the clergy, which was soon branded as the main opponent, were to be supervised, also by attending the church rituals. The black market and speculators were to be persecuted more strictly, while simultaneously supporting the establishments of cooperatives and so on.<sup>43</sup>

In short, Party was to regain its true revolutionary character, thus doing away with opportunism, the danger of its own weakening or drowning in the People's Front and the danger of the so-called petty bourgeoisie. In this sense, Tito was also critical of the Slovenian Party in the end of 1945.<sup>44</sup>

### *Povzetek*

#### *Priprave Komunistične partije Slovenije na prevzem oblasti 1944–1945*

V letu 1944 je Komunistična partija Slovenije (KPS) kot sestavni del enotno delujoče Komunistične partije Jugoslavije že obvladovala celotno partizansko

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<sup>43</sup> ZAL, LJU 684, t.e. 5, a.e. 91, Minutes of the Party Conference of 24 November 1945.

<sup>44</sup> Politbiro centralnog komiteta Komunističke partije Jugoslavije 1945–1948 [The Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia], Beograd 1995, doc. 11.

gibanje in se načrtno pripravljala na revolucionarni prevzemanje oblasti po končani vojni. Iz taktičnih razlogov o revoluciji javno ni govorila in je revolucionarno vsebino politične usmeritve prekrivala z izrazi *ljudska demokracija*, *pridobitve narodnoosvobodilnega boja* itd.

Po sprejetju Dolomitske izjave marca 1943 si je KPS pridobila tudi formalno priznano prvenstvo v odporniškem gibanju in si tako zagotovila popoln monopol na političnem področju ter učinkovito poseganje v proces snovanja nove t.i. ljudske oblasti. Kot dotlej je tudi v zaključnem obdobju okupacije delovala izrazito dvosmerno. Na zunaj je vztrajala na "narodnoosvobodilnih pozicijah" in skladno s tem krepila odporništvu v njegovi vojaški in politični komponenti. Koncept zadrževanja odkritega prehoda k revoluciji je ohranjal enotnost in moč odporništvu, kapitaliziral pa se je tudi na področju mednarodnega uveljavljanja jugoslovanskega odporništvu. Hkrati je KPS načrtno krepila lastne vrste v organizacijskem in ideološkem pogledu.

Dosežena monopolna vloga je komunistom omogočila uveljavljati revolucionarno usmeritev v značaju oblasti, kakršna se je udejanjala v okviru Osvobodilne fronte po prvem zasedanju Slovenskega narodnoosvobodilnega sveta februarja 1944, ko je pospešeno stekel proces izgradnje ljudske oblasti; le-ta je bil usmerjen v daljšo perspektivo, s ciljem zavarovanja pozicij partizanskega gibanja in prevzema oblasti ob koncu vojne pod komunističnim vodstvom. V tem okviru so bili pomembni še zlasti uvajanje novega – revolucionarnega pravnega reda in sodne veje oblasti, priprava upravnega aparata in načrtov za sprejem konkretnih ukrepov ob prevzemu oblasti, kar je vse potekalo v okviru smernic komunistične partije. V ožjem partijskem vodstvu pa so bile pred koncem vojne sprejete še interne taktične opredelitve glede vodenja politike do posameznih vprašanj (npr. glede odnosa do Cerkve) neposredno po končani vojni.

Ključno vlogo pri neposrednem prevzemu oblasti sta imeli vojska, ki je bila v političnem oziru v izključni domeni komunistov ter politična policija (OZNA), ki je bila ustanovljena leta 1944 predvsem zaradi poveljnih potreb utrjevanja nove oblasti in v tem okviru tudi zaščite revolucije, kar je po končani vojni potrdila njena vloga v zvezi s poboji domobrancev in preganjanjem političnih nasprotnikov. V prvih mesecih po končani vojni maja 1945 je KPS postopoma prevzemala nadzor nad državnimi in drugimi ustanovami, političnimi organizacijami ter društvi in z razmeščanjem kadrov po okrožjih krepila nadzor tudi na terenu. S sodnimi postopki, ki so med drugim imeli cilj izločiti iz odločanja predvojno elito in podržaviti privatno lastnino, se je partijska oblast krepila tudi na ekonomskem področju. Do volitev u ustavodajno skupščino novembra 1945 je KPS javno delovala predvsem prek Osvobodilne fronte, katero je še potrebovala v fazi utrjevanja ljudske oblasti.