

RECOVERY

The joy of peace and freedom, and the mending of war's wounds, intertwined with the daily struggles for survival and the effort to restore life to something resembling normalcy. While facing severe shortages, people began – driven by great zeal, sacrifice, and enthusiasm – to rebuild their homes and homeland. Alongside this physical reconstruction unfolded the creation of a new social, political, and economic order.

To prevent famine and ensure the basic supply for the entire population – around 20.000 people in the Celje-City district – the Trade and Supply Department of the Celje People's District Committee conducted an inventory of goods and food supplies in local shops. It issued ration cards and managed the distribution of confiscated, acquired, and allocated goods, as well as agricultural products collected from farmers through mandatory procurement by purchasing commissions. Rationed supply lasted until 1948.

Housing was also a pressing issue, as most buildings were old and damaged, and at least a fifth of the housing stock had been destroyed during the war. There was a shortage of adequate living spaces, repair materials, and skilled craftsmen. The authorities addressed this crisis in various ways, particularly by placing multiple families into a single apartment. In the following decade, they began to tackle the problem more systematically through organized housing construction.

One of the key postwar priorities was the reconstruction of the economy, with the goal of returning to prewar levels as quickly as possible. In line with the slogan "*Let the heroes of battle be followed by the heroes of labour,*" the authorities encouraged factory workers to maximize productivity, embrace a spirit of competition, and exceed production targets. The most dedicated individuals were awarded the honorary title of *Udarnik* (shock or strike worker). The energy and enthusiasm of the youth were harnessed through the organization of voluntary labour actions, ranging from clearing rubble to working in the fields. These were followed by large-scale work campaigns to build transport and other infrastructure across Yugoslavia, in which many young people from Celje also took part as members of youth labour brigades.

Cultural life flourished in all areas, as demonstrated by the rich program of the People's Culture Week held in September 1945. In July 1945, primary school classes for Celje's children resumed in the Slovene language; until the building of the 1st Municipal School was at least partially restored, lessons took place in the schoolyard. This was followed by the revival of the Slovene-language grammar school. Culturally and ideologically purified, the fields of culture and education became central pillars for raising new generations in the spirit of socialism, whose iconography and slogans accompanied the people of Celje at virtually every turn.

"At the district committee of the Liberation Front, there was a special department for public education. It included the very hardworking choir conductor and composer Radovan Gobec, the poet and visual artist Aladin Lanc, Hinko Leskovšek – later a renowned director of the Ljubljana Opera – and Karl Zelenko, a sculptor and painter. This extraordinarily imaginative group brought cultural life back to the city, which had been silenced for four years by the Nazis. They did all sorts of things. Among other things, Lanc and Zelenko made large portraits of political leaders of the time for propaganda purposes. They sketched the features onto enlarged grids on canvas using charcoal, then fixed the drawings with milk. Milk was very hard to come by back then /.../ The school system also began to be reestablished. At the grammar school, a so-called partisan high school was introduced, intended for those who had fought against the Germans and therefore couldn't attend school. It was quite a sight to see armed students in uniform attending lessons alongside boys and girls from the regular grammar school."

(Bruno Hartman, On the road, everything comes your way {Na poti pride vse naproti}, Litera, 2007, pp. 137–138)

"The year forty-five was truly diverse. It brought an end to the constant confrontation with death, the end of Hitler's nightmare, then the end of the war and peace. Fate was kind to me – I returned home, to my family, to friends and acquaintances, to my fellow townspeople. We were elated with joy; we expected only the best – the future was ours. Into this richness, drops of bitterness would sometimes fall, which we were reluctant to accept. We did not let go of the hope that the years ahead would be beautiful /.../ On Christmas Eve, after four harsh years, acquaintances gathered once again in the choir loft of the parish church in Celje. Among us were believers, non-believers, and doubters, united as one. We sang Christmas carols – some only whispered them if they had no sense of pitch. But they were sung in Slovene, a language that had been banished from this house of God in Celje under Hitler. We were overcome with a deep sense of happiness and pride, of gratitude, for having been granted this precious reunion."

(Bruno Hartman, On the road, everything comes your way {Na poti pride vse naproti}, Litera, 2007, pp. 142–143)