

## REGIME

On the wings of victory, political power in Celje was taken over by a new leadership emerging from the resistance and partisan movement. Although the district, municipal, local, and neighbourhood committees of the Liberation Front were closely connected with the structures of the Communist Party, its dominance was not immediate but established gradually over time. Alongside the political leadership, two other power centers emerged: the army and, in particular, the Department for the Protection of the People (OZNA). This security and political police force was tasked with identifying and eliminating the so-called *internal enemy*. As the “iron fist” of the revolution, OZNA operated largely autonomously and wielded significant influence, independent of other state institutions.

Following the first postwar local elections in August 1945, the city was governed by the National Liberation Committee – later known as the District or Municipal People’s Committee – through its various departments, headed by the president of the Executive Committee. This renaming of the former mayoral office symbolized a complete break with the past and with the prewar bourgeois forms of political and social life. The postwar regime, authoritarian and in its early years clearly totalitarian, closely followed the Soviet Bolshevik model. It formalized and consolidated its rule – referred to as “people’s democracy” – through the elections to the Constitutional Assembly of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1945. In what was effectively a referendum for or against the new Tito-led regime, more than 90 percent of voters in Celje supported the unified list of the People’s Front. Its candidate was Franc Leskošek, a prewar revolutionary from Celje and one of Slovenia’s leading communist politicians. The only alternative offered to voters was the so-called “blank ballot box.” Despite irregularities in the election process – such as manipulation of results, incomplete voter rolls, and strong propaganda – the outcome largely reflected the genuine will of the population. Despite its undemocratic nature, repression of actual and potential opponents, and numerous injustices, the new “people’s” government enjoyed broad popular support. This was due in part to its wartime merits and moral authority, dissatisfaction with prewar conditions, and, above all, its promises of a better future: social justice, national equality, women’s emancipation, and general progress and modernization.

From this point onward, the formal authority of the working people was, in practice, exercised and represented by the only legally permitted political party – the Communist Party. It held complete control over the direction, supervision, and implementation of the new socialist society and its ideal of the “new man.” The foundation of this system was state ownership, which led to a sweeping wave of dispossession and nationalization. Large factories, smaller enterprises, and workshops were expropriated, followed by radical reforms in agriculture (agrarian reform) and across all other sectors of public life.

*“It’s astonishing, how many people see a sudden change of power as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for personal advancement. When the country, the language, the entire order of the world changed in 1941, people who had once lived on the margins – nameless, poor, and desperate – suddenly aimed for the top, or at least for a good job with those now in charge. Overnight, they wore red armbands with swastikas, raised their right arms in Nazi salute with proud, lifted chins, shouted slogans and clapped at rallies, all while obsequiously flattering the real new masters of fate. But what was most telling – and most dangerous – was how they shoved aside anyone who didn’t fit the new order. /.../ At the time, I was too young to understand – it only filled me with fear. Four years later, in ’45, I wasn’t afraid at all. On the contrary, I was joyfully mischievous. And yet, the same thing was happening again – only with different people. And once again, I didn’t understand. Nor was I surprised by the sudden surge of enthusiastic supporters of the Partisans and the new regime. They sewed flags with red stars and went from house to house selling them. Some even smeared stars on old prewar flags with red paint and shouted and cursed at anyone who didn’t want to buy such a mess.”*

*(Miloš Mikeln, City by the River {Mesto ob reki}, Celjska Mohorjeva družba, 2008, pp. 63–65)*

