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DEPORTATION OF SLOVENES TO SERBIA DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Abstract:

Did this have to happen?

To make Lower Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola German again, Hitler organized the deportation of racially unclean and politically suspicious elements in May 1941. The goal was to emigrate the entire Slovenian intelligentsia, as well as those who had signs of someone else's blood. About 6,500 Slovenes and maybe more, were deported by train in three groups to Serbia. Refugee centres have been set up in almost every city or town. The Serbian population received them nicely, but the lack of food, beds and material resources for their basic existence made their stay difficult. Although there were many educated people among the deportees, they could not find employment and during the employment, they had to submit a confirmation that no one in the family was Jewish or Roma. The children of the deported Slovenes continued their education in Serbian schools, but during the classes, they had organized Slovene language classes. The difficult years of the war were spent in uncertainty, poverty and a constant desire to return to their homeland. After the end of the Second World War, many Slovenes returned home. That was the end of their forced deportation.

Keywords:

World War II, Slovenes, Serbia, deportation

Izvleček:

Deportacija Slovencev v Srbijo med drugo svetovno vojno

Se je to moralo zgoditi?

Da bi Spodnjo Štajersko, Koroško in Kranjsko napravil spet nemško, je Hitler maja 1941 v teh regijah dal izvesti deportacijo rasno nečistih in politično sumljivih elementov. Cilj je bil izgnati celotno slovensko inteligenco in ljudi mešane krvi. Okoli 6500 Slovencev, morda tudi več, je bilo v treh skupinah deportiranih v Srbijo. V skoraj vsakem mestu so bili vzpostavljeni deportacijski centri. Prebivalci Srbije so jih lepo sprejeli, vendar je njihovo bivanje otežilo pomanjkanje hrane, prenočišč in ostalih življenjskih potrebščin. Čeprav je bilo med deportiranci veliko izobražencev, so težko našli zaposlitev, če pa so jo, so morali predložiti potrdilo, da nihče v družini ni judovskega ali romskega porekla. Otroci deportiranih Slovencev so šolanje nadaljevali v srbskih šolah, kjer so organizirali tudi pouk v slovenskem jeziku. Težka leta so preživeli v negotovosti, revščini in z neprestano željo po vrnitvi domov. Po drugi svetovni vojni je veliko Slovencev šlo nazaj domov. To je bil konec njihove prisilne deportacije.

Ključne besede:

druga svetovna vojna, Slovenci, Srbija, deportacija

1 Introduction

The topic of the deportation of Slovenes during the Second World War was present in Yugoslav historiography in the 1970s and 1980s. After a break of more than three decades, Serbian historians, through professional and scientific works, pointed out the importance of this phenomenon for the evaluation of the position on Nazi Germany. The archival material, on which basis this crucial issue can be considered, is mostly located in the Military Archives, Archives of Serbia as well as in the Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. In addition, the newspapers published in Belgrade during the Second World War, *Renewal (Obnova)* and *New Time (Novo Vreme)*, contain many articles and news about the life of Slovenes in Serbia. When using these sources, *New Time*, and *Renewal*, it should be borne in mind that these were quisling newspapers and did not realistically present the events. The memories of deported Slovenes and their descendants were also used as a second-order source in the elaboration of this topic. Based on relevant facts, an extensive paper entitled *Refugees and Migrants on the Territory of Occupied Yugoslavia 1941-1945 Year (Избеглице и пресељеници на територију окупиране Југославије 1941-1945. године)*, author Slobodan Milošević, published in 1980, and Ivana Gruden, in the book *Suffering from Slovenes in Nis During the Second World War 1941-1945 (Страдање Словенаца у Нишу током Другог светског рата 1941-1944)* published in 2014, presented facts related to their daily lives, suffering and participation in the National Liberation War. It is important to mention the article by Marija Stanonik entitled *On Goodness the World Stands: The Temptation of Slovenian Exiles During the Second World War in Occupied Serbia and Nazi Germany (Na dobroti svet stoji: izkušnje slovenskih izgnancev med II svetovno vojno v okupirani Srbiji in nacistični Nemčiji)*, which was published in the newspaper *Slovenka* in 2018.

In this paper, we will try to analyse the real facts that indicate the Nazi tendency towards racial and political discrimination, the uncertain position of deported Slovenes, as well as the hospitality of the Serbian people. From a historical distance, we can revise the attitudes regarding the victims of fascism and nationalism, and from a time distance of about 80 years, each of us has the right to ask: Did this have to happen?

The Nazi Party project called *New Europe* meant the creation of German living space (*Deutscher Lebensraum*). To concretize this, a certain part of the population had to be deported, which, in the case of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was mostly organized in northern Slovenia, on the territory of Styria and Carinthia and Carniola. Namely, after entering the country, the German occupier divided the Slovenian territory into two parts: Lower Styria, with its headquarters in Maribor, and later in Graz, and into Carinthia and Carniola with its headquarters in Bled, and later in Klagenfurt.

With this division, the German occupation authorities occupied the largest and most fertile part of Slovenia. Nazi Germany, based on their ethnic and cultural law, considered that the appropriation of certain parts of Slovenia was completely justified. Hitler intended to make Styria, as a province, German, and to forcibly Germanize Carinthia Slovenes. The goal was to annex Styria to the Third Reich, which Hitler, during his visit to Maribor on April 26, 1941, pointed out: *Make me this province German again* (Milošević, 1980, 20).

Already at the very beginning of the war, the state administration in Slovenia was reorganized according to Nazi models, and members of the Kulturbunt prepared lists of people who were not loyal to the Third Reich. For this purpose, in April 1941, the Styrian Homeland Union and the Carinthia People's Alliance were formed. These pro German organizations had the task of evicting politically suspicious people, working on awakening the German national consciousness, spreading the German language, and

organizing the nationalist education of the male part of the population. The goal was to deport a part of the Slovenian people, and to Germanize the other part, that is, to remove all Slovenian symbols. In the beginning, it was said that 130,000 Slovenes emigrated, and that 58,000 Germans were colonized in that area (Milošević, 1980, 21).

One of Hitler's collaborators, Heinrich Himmler, already in April 1941, developed guidelines for the emigration of foreign elements from the area of Lower Styria. The planned emigration of the Slovene intelligentsia, the population that had other people's blood in it, and the Slovenes who came after 1914 were to be organized. The other part of the population was to be Germanized. Obviously, their aspirations were related to a racial and political issues. To implement this, the German occupiers had to form special institutions for the resettlement of Slovenes on the territory of Slovenia. Thus, in April 1941, the Resettlement Headquarters for Lower Styria was established with its headquarters in Maribor and the Resettlement Headquarters for Gorenjska and Mežiška with its headquarters in Bled (Military Archives, NDH Fund, A-VII, box 235, no. 46/1). After that, the arrest of political opponents began, and since the prisons were already full, the formation of concentration camps began. Thus, in Styria, in the second half of April 1941, there were larger concentration camps in Maribor, and in the second half of May in Brestanica near Krško and Celje, near Ptuj. The concentration camps in Gorenjska were in Begunje and near Ljubljana (Milošević, 1980, 21).

Initially, it was planned that about 260,000 Slovenes would emigrate from the mentioned parts of Slovenia, most of whom would be accommodated on the territory of occupied Serbia. To that end, representatives of the German authorities organized a conference in Maribor on May 8, 1941, which was also attended by the military commander from Serbia, Helmut Forster. After long negotiations, a detailed plan was adopted based on when the deported Slovenes could take with them thirty kilograms of personal belongings, food for eight days, personal documents, and 400 dinars (Milošević, 1980, 34). In order not to endanger the supply of food for the German army, it was proposed that the Slovenes from Belgrade immediately move in wagons all over Serbia. Based on a detailed timetable, the deported Slovenes were to be transferred from Raca in Slovenia to Arandjelovac in Serbia (Military Archives, NDH Fund, A-VII, box 27, no. 1/3).

2 Transport of deported Slovenes

The first transport with deported Slovenes started on June 7, 1941. A convoy of sixteen trucks with the population from Gorenjska was moving from the camp in Maribor to the railway station in Slovenska Bistrica (Milošević, 1980, 34).

The wagons housed mostly intellectuals, often entire families, and there was one doctor in each group. Former Yugoslav gendarmes, the militia of that time, who also served as translators, monitored every transport. The railway compositions, after rough examinations and racial evaluation, pushed the Slovenian population into uncertainty. While passing through Slovenia, members of the *Liberation Front* tried to stop the deportation with demonstrations, but they failed.

In the first wave, refugees were distributed in many places to Serbia: in Arandjelovac, Lazarevac, Gornji Milanovac, Užice, Požega, Čačak, Gruža, Kragujevac, Preljina, Mladenovac, Vrnjačka Banja and Trstenik. Most of them were deported to Užice and Čačak, about 650 people in each place. The first wave of emigrants lasted from June 6 to 10, 1941, when a total of about four and a half thousand Slovenes were evicted, including about a hundred children (Milošević, 1980, 35).

The second wave of deportations took place in the period from July 11 to 26, 1941. It was preceded by the arrest of many intellectuals who lived in and around Maribor. In the second wave, about 3,300 Slovenes emigrated to Serbia (Milošević, 1980, 38).

During July and August of 1941, partisan units carried out a large number of sabotage actions, so members of the German occupation authorities accelerated the arrest of Slovenian communists. However, the action gave poor results, as many Slovenes left their jobs and apartments and retreated to the woods to avoid arrest. Due to these communist actions, the migration of Slovenes was briefly interrupted, and the last tour was sent to the concentration camp in Slavenska Požega (Croatia) on August 21 and 22 (Milošević, 1980, 38).

The workers who were working in the arms industry were exempted from deportation, while some Slovenes were relocated to Germany and replaced by members of the German national group.¹

The number of refugees in Serbia, during the spring of 1941, was constantly growing. In the beginning, the *Council of Commissioners*, headed by Milan Ačimović, took care of their accommodation and nutrition, and on May 1 1941, the *Committee for Refugees and Immigrants* was established (Milošević, 1980, 251). The Committee, whose main task was to provide funds for food and the construction of homes for the accommodation of emigrants, consisted of representatives from almost all ministries, as well as representatives of the occupying German authorities. In addition, on May 24, 1941, the *General Committee for the Settlement of Slovenes on the Territory of Serbia* was formed with President Fedor Aranicki, Senior Adviser to the Ministry of Social Policy (Milošević, 1980, 38). Their work was regulated by the *Rulebook on the Structure and Scope of Work of the General Committee for the Settlement of Slovenes on the Territory of Serbia*. The members of this Committee took care of the transport and accommodation of the Slovenes, as well as the preparations of the population for their arrival. At the organized gatherings, the representatives of the Committee pointed out the difficult situation in which the Slovenian people found themselves, as well as the fact that the first transport will include doctors, engineers, lawyers, and other intellectuals who will benefit for the Serbian people. In the first half of June 1941, the Committee sent a letter, to all the banovina administration, in which it was indicated that it was necessary to form the list with all abandoned buildings, the list of families who could receive Slovenes and to provide transportation from the railway station to accommodation. In addition, it was necessary to form lists of immigrants with basic personal data. The letter also warned citizens: [...] *That they must be on hand and help the authorities to organize accommodation quickly, socially, and as possible, and that the necessary funds are obtained in time and in proportion to households and immigrant, otherwise, legal regulations will apply* (Milošević, 1980).

Among the deported population, were children who often fell ill due to the war conditions. For them, a central hospital for the treatment of children called the *Central Lazarus* was opened in Belgrade, in the building of the Theological Boarding School. In addition to children, adults also fell ill, mostly from typhus, so quarantine stations were established for them.

It should be noted that in addition to this organized deportation of the Slovenian population, there was also unorganized, illegal relocation because the people, before the terror, took refuge first in the forests and then came to Serbia. In this regard, on June 27, 1941, a letter was sent to all Serbian administrations to make a census of illegally

¹ The tendency was that Serbs to emigrate from Croatia and for Slovenes to settle in their places.

immigrated persons and to make lists with basic data: name and surname, place and year of birth, last place of residence outside Serbia, number of family members came to Serbia, the number of family members who remained and their means of subsistence (Military Archives, NDH Fund, A-VII, box 39, no. 8/1-1).

3 Accommodation and food for deported Slovenes

Upon arrival in Serbia, the refugees were accommodated in Belgrade and other smaller places, in school buildings and barracks of the Yugoslav royal army.² Later, they were placed by families or housed in special objects. To ensure an even distribution and at the same time use the competencies of the arrived Slovenian population, the Commissariat for Refugees developed a plan according to which they were displaced based on their expertise. Thus, forestry engineers were placed in areas that were to be afforested, and geologists and civil engineers had the task to channel rivers. Of particular importance were farmers, especially those engaged in viticulture. Senior and junior officials worked as auxiliary office staff, and doctors established health stations in the villages. Craftsmen were employed in companies and workshops, and educators, in larger towns and villages, worked as teachers and professors³ (Sekulović, 1973, 57).

In addition to the Commissariat, the German military authorities issued instructions to the district chiefs for the accommodation of refugees. As the school buildings were soon occupied by the Germans, the deported Slovenes had to be accommodated in abandoned state and private apartments. Thus, in the Moravian district, where there were most of them, all available empty buildings were confiscated in three days (Archives of Yugoslavia, Ministry and Social Policy and Public Health funds, box 10). Special attention, during the distribution, should have been paid to families with school-age children who were supposed to be accommodated in larger places or their nearby (Military Archives, NDH Fund, A-VII, box 39, no. 27/1).

When it comes to Slovenian children, they had the opportunity to continue their education in Serbian schools where classes in Slovenian language and literature were organized. At the beginning of 1945, a Slovenian school was founded in Belgrade, which had about 120 children in four grades.⁴

Upon arrival in Serbia, the refugees were obliged to report to the Commissariat and the police, and on June 12, 1941, a proclamation was issued based on which the deported Slovenes had to report to the public labour exchange for employment or accommodation.⁵ All applicants received refugee IDs.

Although the district and county authorities regularly sent monthly reports to the Commissariat for Refugees, the exact number of deported Slovenes has not been determined, so only some data related to their lives will be presented. From the preserved reports and lists, in the summer of 1941, there were 240 Slovenes in the Dragačevo district, 300 in the Ljubičko district and 268 Slovenes in the Požarevac district. (Milošević, 1980, 251) There were 290 Slovenes in the Uzice region, who organized their

² *The Slovenes deported to Belgrade were placed in a refugee reception camp located in Topovske šupe, that is, in the barracks of the Yugoslav army. A group of Slovenes with mental disorders caused by violent relocation was placed on medical treatment in the smaller town of Ivanjica (Milošević, 1980, 251).*

³ *There were about 600 educators among the Slovenes.*

⁴ *In accordance with social needs, due to the large number of children of forcibly relocated Slovenes who grew up for school, the Slovenian four-grade elementary school Ivan Cankar was founded in Belgrade in 1945 (Nikolova, 2012, 703).*

⁵ *N. N, 'Proclamation regarding the registration of refugees', New Time (June 12, 1941).*

kitchen in the city of Užice, which was subsidized by voluntary contributions and by the Commissariat (Milošević, 1980, 260).

To better understand the situation in which the deported Slovenes found themselves, we will mention a few memories of living together: »*We lived together. The local population helped as much as they could, but they didn't have much either, still more than us who had nothing. Adults found jobs, children went to school, there were also love, weddings and births. However, somehow everything is modest, accompanied by sorrow and sadness because we are far from home*« (Pavlović, 2016).

Among other places, a kitchen was organized in Cacak, which was subsidized by the Municipality of Maribor. Breda Blaznik points to the difficult life of deported Slovenes and the humane behaviour of Serbs: »*Every day at noon we ate at the canteen for refugees, which was financially supported by the Maribor municipality. There were many Maribor citizens and other Styria's in Čačak and its surroundings [...] Uncle Ljubo helped us a lot. We got an apartment, through his cousins, in a low basement with four rooms. [...] We lived like Robinson. We used the bottle instead of the rolling pin, and the wooden box served as a table. We spent four years in this house 1941–1945*« (Stanonik, 2018).

At the beginning of July, 1941, 522 Slovenes came to Valjevo and founded their organization immediately upon arrival.⁶ According to the decision of the Commissariat, their movement was restricted, and they needed the permission of the district administration to go to Belgrade. We will mention the memory of Mira Antonija Bernik about life, which was noticed by Matija Stanonik: »*On the third day at night, we were transported by train to Valjevo in Serbia. [...] After arriving from Ljubljana to Valjevo, we were disbanded and the Germans, as occupiers, no longer terrorized us. We were completely dependent on the help of Serbs. Far from our homeland and home with minimal luggage, we felt a lot of sadness. We did not know how long we would survive this fate. [...] I must say that the Serbs received us very well*« (Stanonik 2018).

In Aleksandrovac, the deported Slovenes, in the school building, founded a kitchen themselves, while the municipal authorities gave them money for groceries. In addition, the Slovenes received a piece of land that they cultivated and grew beets. The first group of deported Slovenes arrived in Krusevac on July 11, 1941, but most of them, immediately upon arrival, were distributed among rural households. They came to Paracin at the beginning of July, and some of them got jobs in a glass factory (Milošević, 1980, 265).

In places where it was possible, deported Slovenes gathered around the Catholic Church, finding understanding and comfort. They also exchanged information necessary for everyday life - the purchase of food, fuel and more. In places where there were more of them, they formed their associations.

The Slovenes are slowly starting to fit into the new environment. They started working independently, to be carpenters, shoemakers, or woodworker. During their work, they transferred their professional knowledge - they made a press for squeezing pumpkin and sunflower oil, they filled Carniolan sausages, and the dentist organized a dental office in his kitchen. Unemployed educators held courses for housewives and trained children (Milošević, 1980, 268).

The exact number of refugees has not been mentioned anywhere in the works published about the deportation of Slovenes. In the extensive work, already mentioned S. Milošević, statistics are taken from the *Report of the Liberation Front*, which was

⁶ N. N, 'Refugee distribution on the territory of Serbia', *New Time* (July 4, 1941).

submitted to the *War Crimes Tribunal* in Belgrade on December 27, 1944 (Milošević, 1980, 251). Based on these data, we can conclude that 5,445 Slovenes were forcibly relocated from Slovenia to Serbia and fled 3,306, which is a total of 8,571 refugees. Since some returned to Slovenia during the War, 6,362 Slovenes remained in Serbia at the end of the War. From further allegations, most of them were in the city of Belgrade 1,034 and the Moravian district 913, and the least in Leskovac region thirty-three and Mitrovica forty-one. As for the social composition in Belgrade, there were 519 held officials and 403 professors, at least a veterinarian and a gardener at three. In addition, there were farmers, traders, bakers, and other craftsmen, as well as students and pupils seventy-one. In Serbia, there were 2,666 children and 1,252 housewives, and one painter and cafe owner.

4 Courses for retraining of deported Slovenes and their employment

Slovenians who came with some money saw each other in parks and shops, modestly buying the most necessary means of subsistence. Both they and others, without funds, needed a steady source of income. The efforts of charities to hire Slovenes gave positive results, but that has not been enough. That is why the Institute for the Advancement of Industry and Crafts organized courses for all refugees to retrain them.⁷ In Belgrade and other larger places, various courses with practical and theoretical classes lasting thirty days were organized.⁸

On the other hand, since a large part of the male position was sent from captivity from Serbia to Germany, there was not enough labour force in Serbia. To compensate the labour force, the *Decree on Compulsory Labour and Restriction of Freedom of Employment* was issued on December 14, 1941, based on which everyone, from seventeen to forty-five years of age, had to respond to compulsory, free, work for six months.⁹ As for deported Slovenes and other refugees, this Decree could not be maintained, so the Commissariat for Refugees sent a call stating that only those who were well-off and those who did not support their families were sent to compulsory work.

5 Return of the Slovenes to their homes and *Brotherhood – unity train*

The positive outcome of the struggles of partisan units, towards the end of 1944, enabled deported Slovenian to return to their homeland. Grateful for their hospitality, they maintained contacts with their hosts through letters, inquired about everyday life, sent gifts and some of them came, with their offspring, to visit the hosts when they spent the war years. The friendship was mutual, so the Serbs went to Slovenia to work or study. It should be emphasized that the friendship based on human sensibility and suffering was much stronger than the then current ideology.

After the Second World War, Yugoslavia became a socialist state that tend the brotherhood and unity of all peoples. On the day of marking the 20th anniversary of the deportation, June 1961, it was agreed that the train that brought the deported Slovenes would leave again, and the friends would meet again. On that occasion the manifestation *Train brotherhood - unity (Voz bratstvo-jedinstvo)* was created. The first train set off, with

⁷ N. N, 'Refugee distribution on the territory of Serbia', *New Time* (August 22, 1941).

⁸ N. N, 'Vocational courses for refugees', *New Time* (February 6, 1942).

⁹ 'Decree on Compulsory Labour and Restriction of Freedom of Employment', *Official Newspaper* (December 30, 1941).

about 640 former deported Slovenes, from Ljubljana on September 14, 1961, and a festive atmosphere awaits them at the Belgrade railway station (Stanonik, 2018). The following year, Serbs visited Slovenia. The train, which brought people closer and deepened the friendships that were formed during the war, has been moving for three decades.

In the 1990s, political and military conflicts ensued, and the train had to stop. Cultural and social ties were severed, and the train went down in history. After 2010, the cultural and economic cooperation of these two nations continued, and the former route of deportation transport remained a strong memory.

6 Conclusion

At the beginning of the Second World War, most of the territory of Slovenia, which was then part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was annexed by fascist Germany, which tended to destroy the Slovenes as an ethnic group. For that cause, the deportation of Slovenes to Serbia was carried out. There were expelled intellectuals and the economically wealthier class, then those who were not loyal to the Third Reich as well as those who were not of pure blood. They were forced to leave their homes and move into a world full of fear, uncertainty, disease, and unreasonable things. Although the deported Slovenes were the first group victims of fascism and nationalism, they did not have the status of a victim of war violence.

Immediately upon their arrival in Serbia, they were deployed in primary and secondary schools and quarters, and later they were accommodated in barracks, social welfare homes, rented apartments and wealthy hosts.

As for the feed of deported Slovenes during the first year of the war, it went quite well. The harvest of 1941 was rich, and there were food reserves. Later, the nutrition of refugees was organized based on humanitarian organizations, the work of the Red Cross and voluntary contributions from citizens. As already mentioned, in places where there were many Slovenes, kitchens were opened that had their central storage. Food was mostly provided free of charge, while in some public kitchens the meal was charged.

To provide the basic means of subsistence, to adapt to the new living conditions, they had to work. Charitable organizations and the collaborationist government of Serbia tried to employ as many Slovenes as possible, although they, through their work, contributed to the support of their families.

The Serbian people gave them hospitality. Although they were threatened by housing, food and existential solidarity the local population was at an enviable level. It should be noted that there were those among the Serbian population who were not in solidarity and apathy, but most of the population, especially the less affluent, showed great compassion and care. However, due to the scarcity of war, they could not help the refugees as much as they expected. In effect, Serbian help to deported Slovenes was an expression of solidarity with a man in trouble, but also a means of resistance to the German occupier.

It is an indisputable fact that taking care of refugees, regarding to deported Slovenes, was a positive endeavour of the Serbian collaborationist government, but their insistence on the social and national significance of this issue must also be considered. With these moves, they wanted to affirm their power among the Serbian population and to prove themselves as reliable support before the German occupiers. That is why the refugee issue was present on all pages of the collaborationist press.

Upon arrival in Serbia, Slovenes encountered different mentalities, customs, and lifestyles. In an unknown environment, the basic components of human existence were shaken. Unsettled circumstances, everyday life full of uncertainty and unpredictability were their destiny. Suppressed by force, they had to fight for the basic postulates of life, bedding, cooking utensils, a roof over their heads and food.

During the four years of the war, the Slovenes experienced a lot of ugly and bitterness, but also something noble. These were children who, due to the war conditions of life, matured prematurely, but in an environment that many of them will remember fondly.

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POVZETEK

ŽIVLJENJE DEPORTIRANIH SLOVENCEV V SRBIJI MED DRUGO SVETOVNO VOJNO

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Po napadu sil osi na Jugoslavijo aprila 1941 si je večino ozemlja Slovenije, ki je bila do takrat del Kraljevine Jugoslavije, priključila nacistična Nemčija, ki je skušala uničiti Slovence kot etnično skupino. Zato so Nemci izvajali deportacije Slovencev v Srbijo. Izgnani so bili intelektualci in gospodarsko premožnejši sloj, nato tisti, ki niso bili zvesti Tretjemu rajhu, prav tako osebe nečiste krvi. Prisiljeni so bili zapustiti svoje domove in se preseliti v svet, polni strahu in negotovosti, soočeni z boleznimi in nerazumnimi dejanji. Čeprav so bili izgnani Slovenci prva skupinska žrtev nacifašizma, niso imeli statusa žrtve vojnega nasilja.

Takoj po prihodu v Srbijo so jih nastanili po osnovnih in srednjih šolah ter četrteh, pozneje pa v barakah, domovih za socialno varstvo, najetih stanovanjih in pri premožnih gostiteljih. Ob prihodu v Srbijo so se Slovenci srečali z drugačno miselnostjo, običaji in načinom življenja. V neznanem okolju so bili ogroženi temeljni elementi njihovega obstoja. Neurejene okoliščine in vsakdanje življenje, polno negotovosti in nepredvidljivosti, so postali njihova usoda. Morali so se boriti za osnovne življenjske potrebščine, posteljo, kuhinjski pribor, streho nad glavo in hrano.

Srbsko ljudstvo jim je ponudilo gostoljubje, s čimer je izrazilo svojo solidarnost z ljudmi v stiski. Nesporno dejstvo je, da je bila skrb za slovenske izgnance pozitivna plat srbske kolaboracionistične vlade, vendar je treba upoštevati tudi njeno poudarjanje socialnega in nacionalnega pomena tega dejanja. S tovrstnimi potezami so namreč srbski oblastniki želeli krepiti svojo avtoriteto med srbskim prebivalstvom in se na ta način izkazati kot zanesljiva opora proti nemškim okupatorjem. Zato je tudi kolaboracionistični tisk namenil veliko pozornosti tematiki izgnancev.

V štirih letih vojne so se Slovenci soočili z veliko slabega in grenkega, a je bilo vmes tudi nekaj plemenitega. Izgnani otroci so zaradi vojnih razmer sicer prezgodaj dozoreli, vendar v okolju, ki ga bo marsikdo od njih vseeno ohranil v lepem spominu.

About the author:

Maja Nikolova, M. Sc., graduated and past master's degree at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, group for pedagogy. She worked for several decades at the Pedagogical Museum in Belgrade like a museum adviser, where she realized dozens of exhibitions in the field of school history and contemporary topics. Now, she is leading UNIHUB, and her personal interest is the work of Serbian schools abroad and the life of children during war conflicts.

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Mag. Maja Nikolova je diplomirala in magistrirala na Filozofski fakulteti v Beogradu, smer pedagogika. Več desetletij je delala v Pedagoškem muzeju v Beogradu kot muzejska svetovalka, tam je pripravila več deset razstav s področja šolske zgodovine in sodobnih tem. Zdaj vodi nevladno organizacijo za raziskovanje in promocijo izobraževanja in kulture UNIHUB, osebno pa jo zanimata delo srbskih šol v tujini in življenje otrok med vojnimi spopadi.