

SLOVENIA IN 1945

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“Welcome, Yugoslav Army, to liberated Slovene territory” were the ecstatic words written by the Catholic writer and priest Fran Saleški Finžgar on 9 May 1945, the day partisan troops arrived in Ljubljana. “Come with the olive branch of peace, respecting true freedom, and let us not be joined by any violence in this harmonious cohabitation.” And then he added: “Let neither we nor others be fooled by the golden age promised to us. The gold of this age is deeply buried and will need bloody blisters to extract it.”¹

In the first three decades after WW II—until the mid-1970s—a single image of 1945 prevailed in Slovenia and in Yugoslavia, and it was drawn from the victors’ point of view. According to that image, 1945 was the year of victory over the German occupier and of national liberation, which Slovenes of all classes and generations greeted with great relief and unrestrained enthusiasm. The war was over, and people massively supported the new government and zealously started rebuilding their home country. There was no mention of the violence of which Fran Saleški Finžgar warned in his post-war vision of 1945, or even that Slovenes remained fatally divided in 1945, and that while some of them were enthusiastically welcoming the victors, a long line of fugitives was winding its way towards Austria, struggling in the darkness of the unfinished tunnel at Ljubelj to reach British protection in Austrian Carinthia.²

A similar public silence reigned about the mass killings of thousands of fugitives who had been returned to the Yugoslav authorities within a few weeks. It is true that historical manuals and presentations of 1945 mentioned court proceedings against captured officers of the occupation, against the president of the Ljubljana Province, General Rupnik, against the bishop of Ljubljana Gregorij Rožman, and other “traitors and collaborators,” but not a word was said of the bloody

¹ Slovenski poročevalec, 9 May 1945.

² The “exodus” of the communist opponents through the tunnel under Karavanke was in an impressive and dramatic way described by Metod Milač in: Metod Milač, *Resistance, Imprisonment and Forced Labor, A Slovene Student in World War II* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002) 190–92.

reckoning with the mass of real and alleged opponents of the partisan resistance and of the post-war communist government in 1945 and in the years to follow.

This unproblematic picture of 1945 was first publicly questioned thirty years after the war, in 1975, by the poet Edvard Kocbek. Kocbek, a leading figure among Catholic intellectuals who joined the Liberation Front from 1941–45 and was later, between 1952 and 1964, excluded from public life as a dissident, then publicly admitted for the first time (on his seventieth birthday), in an interview for the Slovene cultural magazine *Zaliv* (Trieste), that he had known about the mass killings of Slovene fugitives and the home guard returned from Austria as early as 1946.³ In his interview, Kocbek otherwise claimed that the Catholic collaboration units (“white guard”), which with the “occupiers’ help confronted the Liberation Front as well as the forces fighting fascism and nazism ... were an abnormal phenomenon in Slovene clericalism” and there was no excuse for them. However, in the same breath he stated that in the communists’ eyes their appearance came in very “handy,” as the communists “through the white guard ... gained a partner they badly needed for the civil war.” Kocbek mentioned that he tried to find out already in 1946 from the leaders of the Slovene Communist Party what had really happened to the repatriated home guards and other fugitives. However, the communists, including Edvard Kardelj, categorically denied mass killings. Kocbek apparently did not further push his request for a precise answer to the question—first because of the Yugoslav conflict with Moscow, and later because he himself had lost political influence. Now, thirty years after the war, he felt it was time for the communists to start talking about and accept blame for the post-war violence and killings.

Kocbek’s interview was a real shock to the Slovene political leadership, which in 1975 had organized tumultuous thirty-year anniversary celebrations. The authorities initially prohibited distribution

³ Boris Pahor and Alojz Rebula, *Edvard Kocbek, pričevalec našega časa* (Edvard Kocbek, witness of our time) (Trst – Trieste: 1975). Two years before dr. Dušan Biber, a Slovene historian mentioned the post-WW II massacres in a series of articles, published in a Croatian weekly *Vijesnik u srijedu*, but there was no political reaction. See as well: Gregor Kranjc, “Two Solitudes Revisited: A Historiographical Survey of Collaboration in Slovenia during World War II,” *Slovene Studies* 25.1–2 (2002): 15.

of the publication with Kocbek's interview in Slovenia, while the editors—two writers living in Trieste, Božidar Pahor and Alojz Rebula—who had incited Kocbek to the interview, were prohibited from entering Yugoslavia. However, a few weeks later the communist leadership decided to reprint Kocbek's interview in Slovenia in order to discredit him politically. The determination of the Slovene political leaders to settle publicly with Kocbek and his statements clearly shows how firmly they believed in the power and persuasiveness of the officially popularized, unproblematic picture of the year 1945. In May 1975, Kocbek's interview appeared in the fortnightly periodical *Naši razgledi*.⁴ Kocbek was fiercely attacked by his former fellow partisans, who denied the killings of home guards and reproached him for catering to to "political emigrants" and "falsifying history." Nobody spoke publicly in his defence, although there were people, even among former partisans, who agreed with him. Kocbek was not allowed to answer the attacks, while the authorities seized the entire polemic in order to exclude him once and for all from public life.

When attacks on Kocbek abated in 1976, it seemed that his attempt to provoke public debate on the bloody killings of real and alleged opponents of the new communist government in 1945 had sunk quickly into oblivion. In fact, Kocbek's public call to the Slovene political leaders to admit openly that 1945 was not only the year of liberation but also of bloody massacres of more than ten thousand repatriated fugitives shot without trial by Yugoslav army units, caused the first cracks in the officially unproblematic picture of 1945. Already since the end of the 1960s, the Slovene authorities had been under strong pressure to admit that some post-war court proceedings—such as the trials against the interns of the Dachau concentration camp, who were accused in 1948 of collaboration with the Gestapo—were based on imaginary political plots, and that the post-war authorities had organized them following the Soviet Stalinist models. In 1976, therefore, in Ljubljana, the sentences against those condemned at the Dachau processes were overturned, although a political statement by which a year later the Slovene political leadership expressed its regret at the injustices to the condemned was published only in 1984.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the Slovene state security service (Slovene secret police) also started the first internal investigation into the

⁴ *Naši razgledi* 9 May 1975: 247–49.

post-war killings on Slovene territory. It soon came to a halt when a senior post-war political officer committed suicide. However, in 1984 public debate on the post-war treatment of white guards was reopened by Spomenka Hribar, whose article "Guilt and Sin," in a miscellany dedicated to Edvard Kocbek, advocated making peace with the dead and erecting a monument to all the victims of World War II, regardless of the uniform they had worn.⁵ The monument, with the inscription "To Those Who Died for the Homeland," was supposed to be the first step to reconciliation and to an ideologically unburdened, nationally and humanly open-minded evaluation of conditions in Slovenia during and immediately after WW II. Hribar's essay caused a genuine political storm. The authorities prevented publication of the miscellany (it finally appeared in 1987) and newspapers strongly attacked Hribar and her article, which the public was nowhere able to read. It turned out that a more concrete and ideologically unburdened debate on wartime and post-war conditions in Slovenia was not possible, even in the 1980s.

The Slovene political leadership embraced a new and more flexible attitude to WW II and the bloody post-war reckoning with the opponents of the partisans and communists in 1945 only when Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav communist system faced collapse. Thus, in the spring of 1990, the Slovene collective presidency (for the first time) spoke publicly about the responsibility of the post-war Slovene and Yugoslav authorities for the killings of 1945, and advocated "national reconciliation." This statement was welcomed by the Episcopal Conference, which also advocated "national reconciliation." In July 1990, after the restoration of a multi-party system in Slovenia, there was actually a celebration of reconciliation held at one of the largest burial grounds of the post-war victims, at Kočevski Rog, at which the president of the Republic of Slovenia, Milan Kučan, and the Slovene Metropolitan and Bishop Alojzij Šuštar solemnly shook hands.⁶ However, a pluralistic and open public debate about the period of WW II, 1945, and the

⁵ Spomenka Hribar, *Krivda in greh* (Guilt and sin), Kocbekov zbornik, ed. Dimitrij Rupel, Zbirka Znamenja 76 (Maribor: Obzorja, 1987).

⁶ Božo Rčep, *Povojna represija v nacionalni identiteti in kolektivnem spomenu Slovencev* (Post-war repression, national identity and the Slovene collective memory); *Zbornik žrtve vojne in revolucije* (Collection of Essays: Victims of war and revolution), ed. Janvit Golob (Ljubljana: Državni svet, 2005) 53–54.

conditions in communist Yugoslavia after WW II was only made possible by the political democratization brought about by Slovene independence.

Public debate about the real nature of the Slovene resistance, about the actual causes and intents of the Slovene anti-resistance units formed with the help of the occupying authorities, and what actually happened in 1945, has been even after 1991 (and to the present) outstandingly politicized. Advocates of the post-war, explicitly black-and-white communist interpretation of wartime and post-war developments have insisted (and partly still insist) on their views, while former members of the wartime anti-partisan units ("home guard") founded their societies at the beginning of the 1990s, only then getting an opportunity publicly to illustrate their views of the war and the bloody post-war reckonings. Nobody since 1991 has denied that the post-war mass killings of the partisans and communists' opponents actually occurred, but estimates of the real scale and consequences of the communist violence and reckoning with the vanquished have greatly differed.

In public and in cultural magazines at the beginning of the 1990s, there were several roundtables about reconciliation and modified views of wartime and post-war events, which, among other things, also began to deal with the issue of historiography and historians' responsibility for a one-sided presentation of wartime and post-war developments in Slovenia. However, there was no real willingness in the ruling political elites and political parties (Liberal Democrats and former Communists) for a more open and politically unburdened confrontation with the recent past. The parliamentary committee for the investigation of mass killings, political trials, and other political violence unsuccessfully finished its work in 1996, since parliament, because of the opposition of the deputies of the dominant parties, did not approve its report.⁷ The committee only succeeded in coordinating the evaluation of the legal and moral responsibility of post-war political elites for the post-war killings (especially for the killings of home guards), while insurmountable differences occurred in the evaluation of the direct guilt of the Communist Party and its leaders, since Liberal Democrats and reformed Communists did not agree to a strict condemnation of the communist actions. Thus in 1995, half a century after WW II, more than

⁷ Repe 55.

thirty mass burial grounds of those murdered without trial in 1945 were known, but none of them were marked.

From the beginning of the 1990s, the image of WW II and of the communist "takeover of power" started changing in historiography and literature as well. Even before 1990, Boris Mlakar devoted himself to research into groups opposed to the Slovene Liberation Front and into the Slovene home guards. His fairly impartial and non-political research systematically questioned the one-sided communist picture of wartime developments. In 1992 Jera Vodušek-Starič published an extensive book on the communist take-over of power in which she also described in detail the post-war communist reckoning with the political fugitives and home guards returned from Austrian Carinthia.⁸ In the 1990s, a series of other historical works critically and relentlessly questioned the one-sided picture of WW II and post-war political development in Yugoslavia and in Slovenia that had held sway for many decades⁹. In 1996, a special conference of historians conceived a research project into WW II's victims in Slovenia. In the same year, the historian Stane Okoliš published the first regional research on this topic, which he had carried out for Notranjsko.¹⁰

Altered political conditions and the change in the Slovene evaluation of the post-war communist regime already in the 1990s encouraged Slovenia's neighbours Austria and Italy to demand that the new Slovene authorities correct injustices in 1945 and afterwards against pre-war residents of Slovenia who spoke either German or Italian. Some Austrian, particularly Carinthian Austrian, politicians started to demand recognition of a German minority in Slovenia and the return of property to its members and/or their descendants, while some Italian parties called for the return of property to Italians who migrated from the Slovene part of Istria in 1947 and later due to the violent policy of the then Yugoslav Communist Party. The result of the Austrian and Italian pressures was the first extensive research into the post-war prosecution of Germans from Slovene Styria, which revealed that the communist authorities expelled somewhat less than 9,500 German-speaking

⁸ Jera Vodušek-Starič, *Prevzem oblasti* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1992).

⁹ Kranjc; Peter Vodopivec, "Historiography in Slovenia Today," *Slovene Studies* 25.1-2 (2003): 11–14.

¹⁰ Stane Okoliš, *Žrtve druge svetovne vojne na ožjem Notranjskem* (Victims of World War II in Inner Carniola) (Ljubljana: Partner graf, 1996).

inhabitants from Slovene territory in 1945, and 3,000 died as a result of violent treatment.¹¹ In 1993, a Slovene-Italian historical committee also commenced work. It was active until 2000 and established that, after the war, the Yugoslav authorities in the Province of Trieste and Gorizia were responsible for the deaths of about 1,600 people in 1945, while more than 27,000 were pressured or volunteered to leave Slovene Istria and the Littoral (before and after 1947).¹²

From the very start, part of the public, including historians, naturally did not accept the results of this research and its conclusions, rejecting them as a constituent part of the post-communist and unsubstantiated anti-communist revision of history. Thus, still in the second half of the 1990s, the Museum of Modern History in Ljubljana mounted a historical exhibit of Slovenes in the twentieth century, in which not a single word or picture mentioned the post-war communist violence. This provoked the author Drago Jančar publicly to protest and, together with professor of history Vasko Simoniti and some other scholars, to prepare a special exhibit about the dark side of recent Slovene history entitled "The Dark Side of the Moon." This exhibit was followed in 1999 by the first exhibit of the Slovene home guard movement. At the same time as in historiography the image of "victory," "liberation," and of the year 1945 changed in Slovene literature. Already in 1992 the author Miloš Mikeln had published an extensive novel, entitled *The Great Bear*, describing conditions at Teharje, the largest post-war communist camp.¹³ The author based the novel on persuasive historical documentation and personal testimonies, but in the atmosphere reigning in Slovenia at the beginning of the 1990s he did not receive the public attention he deserved. One part of public opinion felt that he was too critical of the communists, and another part that he was too lenient.

As for evaluation of developments during WW II and recent Slovene history, public opinion has been divided, even after Slovene independence, although, according to certain public opinion polls of the

¹¹ *Nemci na Slovenskem, Izsledki projekta* (vodja projekta in urednik Dušan Nečak (Germans in Slovenia, research project results) ed. Dušan Nečak (Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, 1998).

¹² *Poročilo slovensko-italijanske zgodovinske komisije*, (A Survey of the Slovene-Italian Committee of Historians) (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2001).

¹³ Miloš Mikeln, *Veliki voz* (Ljubljana: Mihelac, 1992).

mid-1990s already more than half of the population supported the erection of a common monument to Slovene victims of WW II, regardless of their political and/or military affiliation. The political elites were less conciliatory, since certain ruling parties (foremost reformed Communists and Liberal Democrats) strictly refused any attempt at a more radical revision of the historical picture of WW II and the period immediately following. In all elections since 1990, the recent past was one of the central political topics and all the parties adopted positions concerning various wartime issues and post-war Slovene history. All of them also took the stand that events during and after WW II should be thoroughly, critically, and systematically researched, but they lacked the political will to finance the research. Research into victims of WW II in Slovenia carried out by the Institute of Modern History in Ljubljana since 1997 has thus constantly faced not insignificant financial difficulties.¹⁴

The project of discovering and marking of burial grounds of opponents of the resistance and communism secretly killed after the war has encountered no less difficulty.¹⁵ As a result of the discovery of ever

¹⁴ See Tadeja Tominšek Rihtar's article in this volume. In recent years there have also been local and regional studies on the victims of the WW II—for example: Marjan Linasi, *Žrtve druge svetovne vojne na območju mestne občine Slovenj Gradec* (Slovenj Gradec: Muzej, 2002); Milan Šuštar, ed., *Zbornik žrtv druge svetovne vojne v občini Kamnik* (Kamnik: Občina, 1998); Lojze Peniš, *Žrtve 2. svetovne vojne in povojnih usmritev na območju občin Slovenska Bistrica in Oplotnica* (Slovenska Bistrica, 2004); Alfonz Zajec, "Vse žrtve druge svetovne vojne med Žirovci," *Žirovski občasnik, Revija za vsa vprašanja na Žirovskem* (Žiri) (1991 and 1992): 11–12.

¹⁵ At the beginning of the 1990s, at first only individuals (like the journalist Ivo Žajdela) and the Organization for Care of Suppressed Burial Grounds (*Društvo za urejanje zamolčanih grobov*) devoted themselves to discovering and marking burial grounds of those secretly murdered by the communists after the war. In some communes, committees were organized to identify the burial places, with varying success. A vast and systematic research of discovering and marking the burial grounds was, however, sponsored by the government and Ministries of Culture and Labor only in the years 2002–2003. In 2003, parliament passed a Law on Military Burial Grounds. Despite the new law, historian Mitja Ferenc's project for discovering and marking suppressed burial grounds encountered many difficulties. In the years 2002–2004, 390 burial places were located and over 160 still had to be investigated. See: Mitja Ferenc, "O izsledkih evidentiranja prikritih grobišč v Republiki Sloveniji" (On the results of the identification of secret burial

new facts about the communist violence during and after WW II, and through the sharpening of public debate in which not only critics of the communist regime have participated more loudly and visibly but also opponents of the partisan movement and of the wartime resistance towards the end of the 1990s part of the ruling coalition started openly to avoid debate about communist violence during WW II and in 1945, saying: "We should be interested in the future, leave the past to the historians."

A decline in interest in topics of recent history, which still filled the papers at the beginning of the 1990s, has also been noticeable in the media in recent years. A television documentary by the reporter Jože Možina and TV Šlovenia about the liquidations of actual and alleged Slovene opponents, killed by partisans and communists during WW II, still incited lively public interest and polemics in 2003. There was also strong public response to the articles of the philosopher Valentin Hribar, who stated in 2003 that responsibility for "the future" could not be separated from "responsibility for the truth," and thus the mass killings of 1945 should be cleared up and the persons responsible for them found. However, the first expert consultation about victims of the war and the revolution, organized by the State Council in November 2004, was virtually neglected by the media. As of 2004 the government had not yet succeeded in erecting a monument to the 1945 victims of post-war violence in the area of the communist camp at Teharje. The political parties were incapable of agreeing on wording for the inscription.¹⁶ While some political parties (and historians and sociologists, too) defended the standpoint that the monument should be dedicated to "Victims of the War and the Revolution," the ruling parties (led by Liberal Democrats) adamantly opposed mention of the revolution.

A more balanced picture of WW II and 1945 than that encountered in politics and public opinion prevails in historiography. Although historians' views and assessments of individual events and processes still differ in many points, the prevailing historiographic image of WW II may be summarized as follows: internal Slovene wartime conflicts which resulted in the fratricidal war and the communist revolution had their roots in pre-war political and ideological divisions

grounds in the Republic of Slovenia), *Zbornik žrtve vojne in revolucije* 115–16.

¹⁶ The monument was erected in 2005, only after a change of government.

and in the lack of a long-term democratic tradition in Slovenia. Upon and after the occupation of 1941, the major political parties underestimated the readiness of the population to actively resist and they lost the organizing initiative. This enabled a modest group of communists (at the beginning of the war it numbered little more than 1,000 mostly young people) to lead a mass revolt, which they gradually turned into a social revolution. The civil war, to which the communists significantly contributed by increasing violence against Slovene ideological and political opponents, was thus the result of an irreconcilable conflict between two mutually exclusive, authoritarian ideological concepts—between Bolshevik communism and Catholic clericalism. This was the more tragic as both sides—the one supporting the Liberation Front and the other opposing it—firmly believed in an Allied victory and tried to establish contacts with them, while the circle of sympathizers of Nazi Germany and of Fascist Italy, in spite of fairly numerous anti-resistance units supported by the occupiers, was very small. The price of the merciless Slovene internal conflict during WW II was extremely high (over 90,000 dead and, including emigration, a total population loss of about 150,000).

This historical picture also has its opponents, although they are in a minority. Some historians continue to reject critical evaluations of the communist policy and a search for the causes of the mass collaboration in the violent (communist) reckoning with opponents to the resistance. Some of them are not even willing to accept the viewpoint that civil war raged in Slovenia between 1941 and 1945 and they reject attempts at a modified, more distinctive interpretation of the wartime conflicts and battles as unacceptable “revisionism.” At the same time, a small but significant number of historians have entered the debate, declaring that the Slovene resistance movement as a whole was the result of communist manipulation and an instrument of the communist revolution. They are unwilling to admit that the Liberation Front had a fairly wide social base (including among rural, i.e. Catholic people). However, such (sometimes even extreme viewpoints), which cite German WW II propaganda brochures and proclaim the resistance in Slovenia in total a “terrorist” movement do not enjoy large much public support. since they are partly represented by people who, only twenty years ago, were equally zealous advocates of the communist black and white presentation of the wartime conflicts and events.

There is greater unity in evaluations of the mass killings of opponents of the partisan movement and communism in 1945, since historians of all persuasions and orientations agree that this was an incomprehensible and unjustifiable crime which should be investigated in detail. It is true that some individuals try to ascribe responsibility for the killings to the Yugoslav communist authorities. They explain the decision of the then communist leadership to deal ruthlessly with the fugitives and members of home guard units by the tense international situation, aggravated by the Trieste crisis. However, particularly among historians, the opinion prevails that the Slovene communist leadership must share full responsibility for the killings without trial. In settling accounts with its opponents, the leadership took the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union as its role model.

According to a 2003 public opinion poll, more than forty-five years after the war 45% of the respondents were of the opinion that the partisan resistance during WW II had the mass support of the Slovene population, and 37% replied that the collaboration of the home guards was an act of national treason. About 15% believed that the "home guards justifiably resisted the communists and the National Liberation Struggle," while "they should not have collaborated with the occupier."¹⁷ In view of such a public mood after the fall of the communist regime and establishment of Slovene independence, there was no mass removal of monuments to the resistance movement during WW II and to the communist revolution. The old monuments were joined by new monuments to the memory of those who fell on the anti-partisan side and those killed in 1945. These monuments were erected (and are still being erected) by local authorities—in some places by parish priests and relatives, in other places by home guard veterans and those prosecuted during communist times. Unveiling ceremonies at which speakers sharply attacked the communists and the partisan movement, declaring them the chief culprits of the civil war, caused public polemics for some time. Sharp public dissent was also caused by the inscriptions on certain monuments which referred to the "victims of communism and revolution." However, the people who lived (and still live) in the places in which these monuments were (or are being) erected have mainly accepted the new memorials calmly and with understanding. As the

¹⁷ Vrednote v prehodu III (Values in transition III), ed. Niko Toš (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2004) 470–73.

research carried out two years ago shows, the opinion prevails among the inhabitants of smaller settlements in the surroundings of Ljubljana that a monument should also be put up to the fellow locals who, during WW II and in 1945, found themselves on the anti-communist and anti-resistance side, since in many places they did not even have a grave for many years after the war.

Local inhabitants judge those whose names are inscribed on the monuments, erected either where they were killed or are buried, by their life stories and not by their allegiance to military units, in the uniforms of which they fought. In this way they undoubtedly distinguish between the "home guard as a political organization and between individual life stories."¹⁸ To a certain extent, this also applies to young people who have been acquainted with the conditions in Slovenia during WW II and in 1945 not only at home, but also through history lessons at school. Since 1990, the history books have been modified and new curricula have been adopted that reflect prevailing historical evaluations and interpretations. However, how teachers teach in schools depends mostly on themselves, since the school authorities have not so far paid any particular attention to the issue of how classes in modern history are conducted in practice.

In conclusion, it can be said that the image of WW II and of 1945 among the Slovene public and within the history profession has noticeably changed since the fall of communism and Slovene independence. It has become less black and white, less ideological, and more balanced, although the public and historians have remained divided in their views of the acute issues of recent Slovene history. Political parties, meanwhile, not only in their views of the contemporary period, but also in their views of the past, have defined themselves more or less in line with their political and ideological priorities. This not only makes it more difficult publicly to reconcile opposing views of the period of sixty and more years ago but also hinders more active research of wartime and post-war conditions, which cannot be carried out without adequate financial support.

Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino

¹⁸ Nina Vodopivec, "Analiza etnografije spomenikov medvojnih in povojnih pobojev" (An ethnographic analysis of monuments dedicated to those murdered in interwar and post-war killings), MS (Ljubljana: Research Center of the Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2002).

POVZETEK

LETO 1945

Avtor ugotavlja, da je vse do srede sedemdesetih let v Sloveniji prevladovala ena sama podoba leta 1945, ki je bila zarisana z zornega kota zmagovalcev. To enostransko sliko partizanske in komunistične zmage je leta 1975 prvi javno postavil pod vprašaj pesnik Edvard Kocbek, ko je v razgovoru za tržaško revijo Zaliv spregovoril o množičnem poboju domobrancev in drugih beguncev, ki so jih Britanci iz avstrijske Koroške izročili jugoslovanskim oblastem. Na ta način je v uradni, črno-beli podobi slovenskega leta 1945 povzročil prve pomembnejše razpoke. Vseeno je slovenski politični vrh vse do leta 1990, ko je prvič spregovoril o odgovornosti komunističnih oblasti za poboje leta 1945, onemogočal javno razpravo o brutalnem povojnem komunističnem obračunu z nasprotniki. Na Spomenko Hribar, ki se je leta 1984 zavzela za »pomiritev z mrtvimi« in postavitve spomenika vsem žrtvam druge svetovne vojne, se je še vsul plaz kritik in obtožb. Demokratično javno razpravo o času druge svetovne vojne, letu 1945 in povojnem komunističnem nasilju sta omogočila šele padec komunističnega sistema in slovenska osamosvojitev.

Javno razpravljanje o naravi slovenskega odporništva, o pobojih leta 1945 in o povojnem komunističnem nasilju pa je bilo tudi po letu 1991 močno spolitizirano. Zlasti v vladajočih strankah (med bivšimi komunisti in liberalnimi demokrati) ni bilo prave pripravljenosti za kritično soočenje z bližnjo preteklostjo. V državnem zboru ustanovljena parlamentarna komisija je preiskavo o povojnih pobojih in odgovornosti zanje leta 1995 zato končala brez posebnega uspeha. Hitreje se je spreminjala podobna druge svetovne vojne in komunističnega »prevzema« oblasti v zgodoviniopisju. Že sredi devetdesetih let se je začelo tudi sistematično raziskovanje števila žrtev druge svetovne in množičnih, v času komunizma prikritih grobišč povojnih komunističnih žrtev. Avtor opozarja na posamezna dela in raziskave ter njihove rezultate, omenja javne razprave in razdeljeno javno mnenje v zvezi z drugo svetovno vojno in množičnimi poboji leta 1945 v Sloveniji in na koncu ugotavlja, da se je podoba druge svetovne vojne in leta 1945 v slovenski javnosti v zadnjem desetletju in pol opazno spremenila. Postala je manj črno-bela, manj ideološka in bolj uravnotežena, čeprav so javnost in zgodovinarji v svojih ocenah in pogledih še vedno močno razdeljeni.