

ON NUTRITION, SUPPLY, HARVEST AND PURCHASE OF FOOD IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR: EXAMPLES FROM SLAVONIA AND SRIJEM*

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Due to the production of food and cattle fattening, the Slavonian and Srijem peasants were in the centre of interest of both the state authorities and the partisan movement during the Second World War. Both sides were very preoccupied with finding a way to win them over or force them to give the surplus to one or the other. Unwillingness to cooperate with the state authorities and partisans put the peasant's both life and property in danger. Sowing, harvesting and other agricultural work were often only possible with an armed escort. The wheat harvests in the Slavonian and Srijem fields in 1942, 1943 and 1944 was followed by the destruction of crops, i.e. burning of wheat and the destruction of threshers. Despite such conditions, the local population managed to meet their needs, and therefore there was no famine. Due to the destruction of transport infrastructure and means of transport, in attacks by partisans and later by the Western Allies' air force, it was difficult to transport the collected food. The population of Slavonian cities, especially workers and low-income civil servants, were in a difficult position due to irregular and scarce supplies in appropriations; and therefore, they were forced to purchase the basic foodstuffs on the "black market" at extremely high prices. The daily life became even more difficult in 1944 due to air strikes by the Western Allies and the Red Army air force. The paper gives a brief overview of these issue in the cities, mostly with examples from Brod na Savi / Slavonski Brod, and as for rural areas, mostly with examples from the mountain areas and to a lesser extent from the plains, eastern Slavonia and Srijem.

Keywords: World War II, Slavonia and Srijem, food, supply, harvest, buyup

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Introduction

In the territorial structure of the Independent State of Croatia, the area of Slavonia and Srijem consisted of four large counties: Great County of Baranja with the seat in Osijek, the Great County of Vuka with the seat in Vukovar, the Great County of Posavje with the seat in Brod na Savi / Slavonski Brod and the Great County of Livac-Zapolje with the seat in Nova Gradiška.¹ The authorities of the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) expected Slavonia and Srijem, the farming areas where growing grains and fattening cattle, especially pigs, were primary activities, to carry a large part of the burden of feeding the civilian population of the newly established state and members of the ISC armed forces during the war, but also to participate in settling the obligations assumed from the allied states, the German Reich and the Kingdom of Italy. An important feature of this area was the multiethnicity because large Serb, German, Hungarian and Czech communities as well as some other smaller groups lived in the area along with Croats.² The buyup of surpluses to meet the needs of the state was difficult from the first war-time harvest in 1941 until the end of the war, so the state authorities had to look for a solution in the import of grain, especially from Romania.³

¹ Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*. [Ustashas and the Independent State of Croatia 1941-1945] (Zagreb: Sveučilišna naklada Liber, Školska knjiga, 1978), p. 104.

² Ivan Lajić, Mario Bara, "Etnodemografski razvoj Slavonije u dvadesetom stoljeću (utjecaj ratova i kolonizacija) [Ethno-Demographic Development of Slavonia in the Twentieth Century (Impacts of Wars and Colonizations)] in: *Migracije i regionalni razvoj Hrvatske* [Migrations and Regional Development of Croatia], ed. Ivan Lajić (Zagreb: Institut za migracije i narodnosti, 2010), pp. 95-101.

³ For more information on the economy, agriculture, food and payments of the Independent State of Croatia to the German and Italian armies, see: Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*. [Ustashas and the Independent State of Croatia] (Zagreb: Sveučilišna naklada Liber, Školska knjiga, 1978), pp. 123-134; Jere Jareb, *Državno gospodarstveno povjerenstvo Nezavisne Države Hrvatske od kolovoza 1941. do travnja 1945. godine* [The State Economic Commission of the Independent State of Croatia from August 1941 to April 1945] (Zagreb: Hrvatski institutu za povijest – Hrvatski državni arhiv – Dom i svijet, 2001); Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 611- 714; Jozo Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941 – 1945.: Okupacija i kolaboracija* [War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and collaboration] (Zagreb: EPH – Novi Liber, 2010), pp. 685-798; Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, "Hrvatsko gospodarstvo u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj" [Croatian economy in the Independent State of Croatia], *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 27 (1995), No. 3: 527-542.

Civilian population – between state authorities and partisans

For the predominantly rural population of Slavonia and Srijem, the only regions in the ISC that could produce food surpluses, of the numerous economic measures implemented by the state authorities, the one on the mandatory buyup of grain and other foodstuffs at prices prescribed by the state was particularly important. Slaughter of piglets, pigs up to 100 kilograms and female calves was also prohibited as those were to be fattened and used for breeding. As of mid-1942, the state introduced a monopoly purchase of grains, potato and legumes, and significantly limited the quantities available to the direct producer, the farmer. A rationed supply of groceries was much more important for the urban population who had to buy most of their food. The quantities of food that the state was supposed to provide for the population throughout the state were subject to change and the supplies were often insufficient. The state-prescribed amount of bread of 250 grams per person per day changed in August 1942 due to a poorer harvest. Thus, the Ministry of Crafts, Wholesale and Trade sent a circular on “bread meals”, which prescribed 150 grams of grain or corn per day, or 110 grams of flour per person. For persons who performed heavy physical work, a slightly higher amount of 300 grams of grains or 320 grams of flour was prescribed. It was ordered that “public authorities” in the state could distribute food only to the poorest people. All those who procured food in other ways, for example from their own production or received food as a salary in kind, were not to be given food from the approvisionnement. The concluding sentence of the circular was: “The issue of nutrition is one of the most important problems of the State, and all public authorities shall devote closest attention to this issue.” Reduced bread amount of 150 grams or 112 grams of flour were applied quite earlier in some areas of ISC, even since December 1941. In September 1943, the ISC Ministry of National Economy had the information that of all European countries at war, the ISC was distributing the smallest amount of bread per day. Not even those 150 grams could be distributed to everyone regularly or in the prescribed quantities.⁴

⁴ Hrvatska [Croatia, HR], Državni arhiv u Slavonskom Brodu, Odjel Požega [State Archives in Slavonski Brod, Požega Department, DASB-OPŽ] Kotarska oblast u Požegi [Požega district authority], f 16, box 26, 16159/1942; *Regesta dokumenata za historiju NOB-e* [Regesta of documents for the history of the National Liberation War], vol. 1 (Zagreb: Arhiv Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske, 1964), doc. no. 224; Jareb, *Državno gospodarstveno povjerenstvo Nezavisne Države Hrvatske od kolovoza 1941. do travnja 1945. godine*, pp. 62, 225, 365; Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, p. 711; Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941 – 1945.*, p. 795. For comparison, in the capital of Greece, Athens, at the end of 1941, less than 100 grams of bread were distributed per person per day. Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece. The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 28.

In the summer of 1941, in some Slavonian towns, it was planned to distribute 15 kilograms of flour per month per person, and already in July in Vinkovci the stock of flour ran out, and therefore permission was sought to thresh barley in order to overcome the shortage. This was followed by a shortage of lard and meat in the city. An article in the Vinkovci newspaper says that “citizens of Vinkovci have the right to eat to satiety at least once a day.” In December 1941, only small quantities of corn flour were distributed to the population of Slavonski Brod. Poorer citizens and workers could not buy on the “black market”, and therefore many were short of food. Given the festive Christmas period, people found it harder to accept such a condition. During 1941 in Osijek, the food situation was satisfactory. Lard and oil were hard-to-reach products.⁵ In the following years of the war, the supply situation was uncertain and difficult. Due to the lack of food, the workers of Našička d.d. from Našice announced a strike at the beginning of 1942, and therefore the prefect of the Great County of Baranja urgently demanded that two wagons of flour be delivered to them. In Slavonski Brod, too, with a large number of workers, there was a constant supply problem. Therefore, in early 1943, the City Council conducted a revision of consumer cards as a measure of control, but also as an attempt to improve the supply in the city. The new cards could be used to buy food and textiles. Civil servants and factory and railway workers were supplied in special provisions, and due to the constant rise in prices, some factories paid workers a monthly allowance, a “bonus for expensiveness”, the amount of which had to change frequently due to the constant rise in prices, and which was rarely sufficient.⁶ In June 1943, the authorities of the city of Brod continued to monitor more closely the yields that residents could obtain from their estates, fields, orchards or vineyards. The city helped them by giving them threshers that they could use if they had previously submitted a verification of the size of the property, and they had to give exactly determined quantities of products for buyup. Citizens who did not have grains were given the opportunity to obtain them in exchange for fruit, grapes or some other

⁵ *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta (NOP) u Slavoniji* [Archive Records for the History of the National liberation movement in Slavonia] vol. I, (Slavonski Brod: Historijski arhiv u Slavonskom Brodu, 1962), doc. no. 22, doc. no. 81, doc. no. 98; Kolar-Dimitrijević, “Hrvatsko gospodarstvo u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj”, p. 535. Josip Korda i Slavko Puškarić, *Vinkovački kraj na putu u slobodu i socijalizam 1895.-1945.* [Vinkovci region on the way to freedom and socialism 1895-1945] (Vinkovci: Skupština općine OK SKH Vinkovci – SUBNOR Vinkovci, 1976), p. 67

⁶ *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta (NOP) u Slavoniji*, vol. IV (Slavonski Brod: Historijski institut Slavonije, 1965), doc. no. 37, doc. no. 88; *Regesta dokumenata za historiju NOB-e*, vol. 1, doc. No. 10; Slavica Hrečkovski, *Slavonski Brod u NOB i socijalističkoj revoluciji 1941-1945* [Slavonski Brod in the National Liberation War and the Socialist Revolution 1941-1945], (Slavonski Brod, 1982), p. 52.

products. Persons who failed to comply with the protocol were to be sanctioned by denying the supply of products to which the state claimed monopoly rights, such as wheat, corn and potatoes, and they could also be denied the supply of rationed products, flour, sugar, oil, firewood, kerosene, tobacco, and other.⁷ In the autumn of 1943, the city authorities warned the citizens that an inspection of homes would be carried out to determine whether food supplies were being accumulated. Namely, some consumers, despite large stocks, continued to take groceries from the city or factory approvisations. Violators could be fined or sent to concentration camps. At the same time, the city authorities appealed to the solidarity and humanity of citizens who had food, either from their estates or had received food as a compensation for the work of wage earners in agriculture, not to take food from approvisations but to leave food provisions for poorer citizens and the elderly.⁸

During the summer and autumn of 1944, until the end of the war, air strikes marked the daily lives of the inhabitants of Slavonia and Srijem, especially in urban areas. During this period, cities as well as other smaller settlements in the Slavonian and Srijem area were experiencing air attacks by Western Allies and by the Red Army air force. Slavonski Brod and Vinkovci suffered severe damage due to traffic and industrial significance. Slavonski Brod suffered extremely heavy bombing, which in the summer of 1944 turned most of the city into ruins. People were left homeless and without any property, food, clothing and footwear. Most city services and government bodies operated at significantly reduced capacity. Supplying the city was extremely difficult. The rural population did not bring their products to the markets for fear of bombing, and those who would dare to do so were prevented by the partisans. The population had nowhere to go or leave the city, and thus they lived in dilapidated houses and severe scarcity. The food prices in the villages surrounding Brod and in the city were constantly changing, as elsewhere, but they also differed significantly. Namely, in the city, the prices for many products were almost twice as high, so for example in the nearby village of Kaniža 1 litre of milk was sold for 25 kuna, and in Brod for 50 kuna per litre.⁹

⁷ *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta (NOP) u Slavoniji* [Archive Records for the History of the National liberation movement in Slavonia], vol. VI (Slavonski Brod: Historijski institut Slavonije, 1968), doc. no. vol. VI, doc. no. 114.

⁸ *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta (NOP) u Slavoniji* [Archive Records for the History of the National liberation movement in Slavonia], vol. VII (Slavonski Brod: Historijski institut Slavonije, 1970), doc. no. 130.

⁹ Hrvatska [Croatia, HR], Državni arhiv u Slavonski Brod [State Archives in Slavonski Brod], Osnovna škola Kaniža [Primary School of Kaniža], f. 132, Spomenica škole, inv. no. 1, p. 108; Marica Karakaš Obradov, *Angloamerička bombardiranja Hrvatske u Drugom svjetskom ratu: Saveznički zračni napadi na Nezavisnu Državu Hrvatsku 1943.-1945.* [Anglo-American

Since the beginning of the war, the rural population in Slavonia and Srijem has been preoccupied with the levies imposed by the state in terms of mandatory buyup of surplus products, especially grains. They were also concerned about the standardization of the amount of food for livestock. Since they could produce large quantities of food on their own, they were more concerned about the prices of what they could not produce. At the end of the year, there were complaints from the rural population in the Novska area about the price of raw cowhide which was purchased at pre-war prices, while on the other hand, the price of shoes made from that same leather was three times higher than before the war.¹⁰ The dissatisfaction of the rural population further increased due to the fact that they could not dispose of their products. The tension was further intensified by the fact that in some areas members of the German national group in the ISC, which was widely independent in its activities, were selling their products. By the way, Slavonia and Srijem were the areas where the majority of Croatian Germans / Volksdeutscher lived. There were other objections to the conduct of a part of the German population. Some Germans in Vukovar believed that they did not have to feed “hungry and lazy Bosnia” or Croats and that their food belonged to the German Reich. As a large German population in Slavonia and Srijem lived in the villages and was threatened by partisan attacks, the German Volksgruppe in the ISC made a proposal at the end of 1942 to the ISC Ministry of National Economy that councils should be established in all municipalities, which would include representatives of all national and religious communities living in a certain area, regardless of pre-war political affiliation, except communists. These councils were to be responsible for peace and order in their areas, which were important preconditions for carrying out agricultural activities as well as collecting grain and other food for buyup.¹¹

Although the areas north of the Sava were far quieter than the insurgent areas in Bosnia, Lika or northern Dalmatia, the General Staff of the Croatian Home Guard in mid-1942 emphasized the role of Slavonia and Srijem as the

Aerial Bombardments of Croatia in World War II, Allied Air Attacks on the Independent State of Croatia, 1943-1945] (Zagreb, 2008), pp. 243-46, 272-280.

¹⁰ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. I, Addendum, doc. no. 4; Korda, Puškarić, *Vinkovački kraj na putu u slobodu i socijalizam 1895.-1945*, 68. For more details on price trends from 1939 to 1945, see: Holm Sundhaussen, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte Kroatiens im national-sozialistischen Grossraum 1941-1945* [Economic History of Croatia in the National Socialist Greater Area 1941-1945] (Stuttgart: Deutsches Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), pp. 301, 302.

¹¹ *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta (NOP) u Slavoniji* [Archive Records for the history of the National liberation movement in Slavonia], vol. II, (Slavonski Brod, Historijski institut Slavonije, 1963), doc. no. 114, doc. no. 150; *Regesta dokumenata za historiju NOB-e Slavoniji*, vol. 1, doc. no. 796.

breadbasket and demanded that troops in that area be more heavily armed. In May 1942, the Economic Committee of the ISC Parliament pointed out the inevitable problem with the harvest, because about 45% less area was sown than in the previous sowing season, and it was certain that there would be less crop. The next sowing was somewhat better, but in the autumn of 1942 the Economic Committee of the ISC Parliament envisaged problems with harvesting and buyup, mostly due to the strengthening of the partisan movement. Similar problems were present in other countries. In Greece, for example, due to the war, the grain yield in 1941 was significantly lower than in the previous year, but even that amount would have been sufficient to feed the entire population had the state managed to collect and distribute grain.¹² In the ISC territory, the orderly implementation of buyup was threatened by a combination of factors ranging from the lack of motivation of farmers to sell surpluses due to low buyup prices, aversion to the regime and especially the strengthening of the partisan movement that played a significant role in harvesting and buyup, and that will be elaborated later in the text. The state also had to engage military forces to implement the buyup. Some farmers in the area of Donji Miholjac were arrested in 1943 for avoiding buyup, which the local communists saw as a favourable opportunity to expand their influence among the farmers. In September 1943 the Požega district had to hire armed assistance to be able to carry out buying of cattle for slaughter. In the Brod area, in the autumn of 1943, representatives of the city authorities resorted to additional intimidation and announced that surpluses of those who had not responded to the buyup would be commandeered by members of the German Army's 1st Cossack Division, which had a reputation for cruelty, and that those farmers would even have to support them. During 1944, the ISC authorities also counted on the German Army's 1st Cossack Division and their involvement in sowing, harvesting and buyup in the areas of Slavonia and Srijem. Spring sowing of sunflowers as well as food collection in the Nova Gradiška and Požega regions were done with their support. In the area of Požega and Pleternica, members of that division were destroying crops in operations against partisans.¹³ The

¹² *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. II, doc. no. 127; Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*, p. 132; Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44*, p. 26,

¹³ *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta (NOP) u Slavoniji* [Archive Records for the History of the National liberation movement in Slavonia], vol. V (Slavonski Brod: Historijski institut Slavonije, 1966), doc. no. 52; *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta (NOP) u Slavoniji* [Archive Records for the History of the National liberation movement in Slavonia] vol. VIII, (Slavonski Brod: Historijski institut Slavonije, 1973), doc. no. 40; Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*, p. 133; Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, p. 710; Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945*, p.794; Nikica Barić, "Njemačka 1. kozačka divizija u Slavoniji tijekom Drugog svjetskog rata" [German 1st

strong partisan propaganda saying that the state would not use the collected food to feed the local population but would export it to Germany or Italy or feed the German and Italian armies additionally motivated part of the rural population to boycott the buyup. The already mentioned Greece had a similar problem. Not only producers but also government officials who carried out the buyup reluctantly participated in it on suspicion that the bought-up food would end up on the battlefields of North Africa rather than on the tables of the local population.¹⁴

The support that the ISC authorities primarily expected from the Croatian population was weakening at an unexpectedly rapid pace, among other, due to insufficient and disorganized supply of food and other products, but also due to general insecurity in the country. Home Guard reports state that farmers were forced to sell their products on the “black market” in order to earn enough money to buy foodstuffs that they did not produce themselves. Furthermore, the reports emphasized the need to combat the destitution and poverty of the population, as a further deterioration of the situation with food could lead to the “unification of all the hungry”. They thought that this would benefit the partisans the most, and a revolt could occur in Slavonia, as well as in Lika, Kordun and Bosnia. The rural population from some Catholic and even some Orthodox villages sought protection from the state authorities against partisan incursions, but did not receive it due to a lack of manpower and weapons. In the summer of 1942, the Home Guard General Staff stated in its report: “The people have gone crazy, they are afraid of the partisans, they are afraid of our authorities, and especially the Ustashes, because of some arbitrary outbursts by unscrupulous individuals from the Ustasha ranks, who unknowingly persecute those who are not in favour of cooperation with the partisans, and all that goes to the benefit of the partisans.”¹⁵ Rumours and false news were another battlefield on which various military, political and interest groups fought. The rumours led to the premature slaughter of cattle

Cossack division in Slavonia during World War Two], *Scrinia Slavonica* 18 (2018): 389, 390-391; Mira Kolar Dimitrijević, “Pregled organizacije poljoprivrede u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi na oslobođenom području Slavonije” [Review of the organization of agriculture in the national liberation struggle in the liberated area of Slavonia], *Zbornik, Historijski institut Slavonije* 4 (1966):125.

¹⁴ Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44*, p. 27.

¹⁵ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. I, doc. no. 207; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. II, doc. no. 50, doc. no. 130, doc. no. 131, doc. no. 150; *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta (NOP) u Slavoniji* [Archive Records for the History of the National liberation movement in Slavonia], vol. III (Slavonski Brod: Historijski institut Slavonije, 1964), doc. no. 58; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. V, doc. no. 33; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VI, doc. no. 69; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VII, doc. no. 121.

for fear that the state would commandeer the fattened cattle, and some representatives of the state authorities tried to refute those rumours.¹⁶

The operation of mills and their supervision also played a significant role in providing flour, an important foodstuff for the nutrition of the population. Namely, as of 1942, many mills could not operate at full capacity or were out of operation due to lack of coal, oil or grain for grinding. In time, the ISC authorities lost control of the numerous mills that had been taken over by the partisans. In January 1944, the partisans controlled about 170 smaller and larger mills in the Slavonian area. They planned to take 50% of the multure¹⁷, and thus secure about 40 wagons of grain, corn and flour, which was enough, according to their estimates, to feed all Slavonian partisans. Until the end of the war, the ISC authorities, with the help of the army, were making great efforts to keep several larger city mills in operation by providing security and supplying raw materials.¹⁸

Smuggling, hiding of food and illegally raising prices were problems that were present since the beginning of the war. In September 1941, the state expanded the jurisdiction of the courts marshal over these issues. Producers of food, especially grains, who did not offer surplus products for buyup could also be sanctioned. Bakers, butchers and millers also needed special control. This provision was not implemented in practice and that is corroborated by the minutes of the session of the State Economic Commission from September 1942, which reads that this legal provision is “just ridiculous” because none of the offenders has been tried in a court martial.¹⁹ Large quantities of food were smuggled from Slavonia. In early 1942, the state established the Economic Wardens Service, which was supposed to prevent such conduct. Slavonski Brod was an important traffic centre through which the areas north and south of the Sava River were connected. Also, it was on the route of supply for Bosnia, Herzegovina and Dalmatia. Therefore, the state authorities put in special effort to suppress smuggling in the Brod area. In the autumn of 1942, the smuggling of potatoes and grains escalated in the Požega area as well, and the Požega District Authority demanded stronger involvement of the police

¹⁶ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. II, doc. no. 207.

¹⁷ The share of flour that the miller receives for the grain grinding service in the mill.

¹⁸ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. I, doc. no. 128 ; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. II, doc. no. 150, doc. no. 207; *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji* [Archive Records for the History of the National liberation movement in Slavonia], vol. X (Slavonski Brod: Centar za društvena istraživanja Slavonije i Baranje, 1984), doc. no. 2; Kolar-Dimitrijević, “Hrvatsko gospodarstvo u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj”, p. 535.

¹⁹ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. I, doc. no. 126; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. II, doc. no. 126; Jareb, *Državno gospodarstveno povjerenstvo Nezavisne Države Hrvatske od kolovoza 1941. do travnja 1945. godine*, pp. 88, 278.

stations and municipal authorities in combating this problem. Since a large number of people came to Slavonia to get food to feed their families, and not to resell the food they bought, in mid-1942 the state allowed people from “passive areas” to buy a maximum of 30 kilograms of food, or if they worked on a farm for three days, they were allowed to carry the same amount of food. The state also tolerated the refugees returning to the “old region” to take the food they had grown, earned or bought.²⁰ In a letter to the ISC Ministry of National Economy at the end of 1942, the German national group in the ISC emphasized that, in order to achieve better economic results, it was important to prevent food smuggling from Slavonia and Srijem to Bosnia and Serbia. The most permeable points for both smugglers and partisans were the rivers, the Sava, the Drava and the Danube. This problem had been pointed out earlier by some state bodies, which had demanded a stronger presence of the army and home guards in these areas.²¹

During the war, food was an important means of punishing or rewarding the population or gaining their cooperation. An example for that is a letter that was in January 1943 sent by Stjepan Hefer, the prefect of the Great County of Baranja, to the ISC Ministry of the Interior requesting that during military operations against the partisans the unarmed population is to be treated more cautiously and should not be deprived of food, livestock and other goods, because it puts them in a difficult position. Also, in the spring of 1943, after military operations against the partisans, the ISC authorities distributed salt, sugar and other foodstuffs in the Voćin area, which caused concern among the partisans; and they believed that they had to intensify political work among the population in Papuk and Krndija areas. The ISC authorities did the same in the villages in the Požega and Virovitica areas.²²

²⁰ Hrvatska [Croatia, HR], Državni arhiv u Slavonskom Brodu, Odjel Požega [State Archives in Slavonski Brod, Požega Department, DASB-OPŽ], Kotarska oblast u Požegi [Požega district authority], f 16, box 20, no. 10952/1942; box 28, 19.362/1942; Jareb, *Državno gospodarstveno povjerenstvo Nezavisne Države Hrvatske od kolovoza 1941. do travnja 1945. godine*, 224; Marica Karakaš Obradov, *Novi mozaici nacija u “Novim poredcima”: Migracije stanovništva na hrvatskom području tijekom Drugog svjetskog rata i poraća* [The new Mosaics of Nations in the “New Orders”: Migrations of the Populations on croatian Territory during the Second World War and the Postwar Period] (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2014), p. 90; Nikica Barić, “Brod na Savi i krijumčarenje hrane na željeznicama za vrijeme Nezavisne Države Hrvatske” [Smuggling of Foodstuffs in Railway Traffic through the Town of Brod na Savi during Independent State of Croatia], in: *Prilozi za povijest Broda i okolice*, vol. 2, ed. Marijan Šabić (Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest – Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2015), pp. 164, 185-188.

²¹ *Regesta dokumenata za historiju NOB-e Slavoniji*, vol. 1, doc. no. 456, doc. no. 796.

²² *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. IV, doc. no. 35; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. V, doc. no. 60; doc. no. 106.

Crop yields during the war were greatly influenced by the circumstances of the war, but also by those that people and the war could not influence – climatic conditions, which in some years were not favourable even during the war. The 1942 drought caused poorer yields of grains, wheat, rye, barley, oats, corn, and the yield of potatoes was significantly reduced. Due to the drought, there was a lack of hay for cattle, so there were also problems with the nutrition of cattle and other domestic animals. Also, in 1944 rainy periods in the summer caused a problem in both harvesting and threshing; the situation was additionally worsened by common bunt of wheat and the lack of disinfectants to treat wheat which was to be used for sowing.²³

From the autumn of 1944 until the end of the war in the area of Slavonia and Srijem, there was a large concentration of Ustasha-Home Guard forces and the German army, which established a new front line in western Srijem. In the area of the large counties of Baranja, Vuka and Posavje, a state of emergency was proclaimed and military administration introduced. Due to the invasion of the Soviets and partisans on the eastern ISC borders, Slavonian and Srijem Germans were evacuated to the German Reich territory with large quantities of wheat, rye, barley, oats, corn and sunflowers. The ISC authorities tried to collect what was left on their estates, but they did not collect as much as was expected. They also sought to organise cultivating on the abandoned German estates. The work on these estates was one of the tasks of the People's Uprising Corps under the command of General Josip Metzger, which was manned with the civilian population of Slavonia and Srijem. The partisans, through the National Liberation Committees (NOO), were trying to use the harvest from the abandoned German estates and continue cultivating them, and that issue will be discussed later.²⁴

²³ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. II, doc. no. 207; Kolar Dimitrijević, "Pregled organizacije poljoprivrede u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi na oslobođenom području Slavonije", p.129.

²⁴ Jareb, *Državno gospodarstveno povjerenstvo Nezavisne Države Hrvatske od kolovoza 1941. do travnja 1945. godine*, pp. 640-641; Vladimir Geiger, "Iseljavanje Njemačke narodne skupine u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj s područja Slavonije potkraj Drugog svjetskoga rata" [Emigration of the German National Group in the Independent State of Croatia from the territory of Slavonia towards the end of World War II], in: *Sezonstvo in izseljenstvo v panonskem prostoru. Sosedstvo Avstrije, Hrvaške, Madžarske in Slovenije* [Seasonal Work and Emigration in the Panonian Space: the Neigh-Seasonal Work and Emigration in the Panonian Space: the Neigh-bourhood of Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia], ed. Marina Lukšič Hacin, (Ljubljana: Znanstvenoraziskovalni center Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti, 2003), pp. 164-166. For more information on the activities of General Metzger's People's Uprising Corps, see: Nikica Barić, "Pučko-ustaški zbor generala Metzgera i općenarodna obrana u NDH krajem Drugog svjetskog rata" [Use of the Civilian Population in the war efforts of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) during the final Phase of the World War II], *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 32 (2000), No. 1: 29-49.

The state had high expectations from Slavonia and Srijem as regards food production. However, agricultural work required manpower, which was significantly reduced due to recruiting able-bodied men into the Ustasha, Home Guard and German forces. Many people were sent to work in the German Reich, mostly men but also women, and a large proportion of them were Serbs. The lack of labour could not be compensated by the large number of refugees who came in large numbers to Slavonia and Srijem as a large proportion of them were children and the elderly. Working-age refugees, both men and women, worked as wage earners. In March 1942, the state decided that seasonal workers should be brought in from “passive areas” to cultivate the land, and they would be paid for their work partly in cash and partly in kind.²⁵

The outflow of labour, both male and female, also occurred due to their joining the Communist-led partisans²⁶ who, along with the ISC authorities, were a significant factor in the daily life of the population in Slavonia and Srijem, especially in rural areas. They filled their ranks at first with the rural population, especially those who avoided recruitment into the ISC armed forces or avoided going to work in the German Reich. In addition to joining their ranks voluntarily, the partisans also carried out mass mobilisations of villagers which were not voluntary. Since the partisans were stationed in the forests, the villages were their main source of food and other goods. At first, the partisans sought and received support in Serb-populated villages over which the ISC authorities carried out repressive measures and which were averse to the new state. Afterwards, Croats and members of minority nations, such as Hungarians and Czechs, joined them. The partisans had their first strongholds in the mountainous regions of Slavonia, on Pšunj, Papuk and Krndija. Attacks by small groups of insurgents on government officials, sabotages and diversions began during the second half of 1941, and in the summer of 1942, when groups of partisans from Banovina and Bosnia came to Slavonia, attacks on villages, lonely houses and farmsteads, from where they collected food and other necessities, became more frequent.²⁷ The German

²⁵ Jareb, *Državno gospodarstveno povjerenstvo Nezavisne Države Hrvatske od kolovoza 1941. do travnja 1945. godine*, pp. 167, 182; Karakaš Obradov, *Novi mozaici nacija u “Novim poređcima”*, pp. 97-100, 167-173; Kolar Dimitrijević, “Pregled organizacije poljoprivrede u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi na oslobođenom području Slavonije”, 119.

²⁶ There were no significant activities of armed Chetnik groups in Slavonia. Karlo Mrazović, “NOP i borba protiv pokušaja stvaranja četnički oružanih odreda u Slavoniji” [People’s Liberation Movement (NOP) and the fight against attempts to create Chetnik armed detachments in Slavonia], in: *Slavonija u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi*, ed. Martin Kaminski (Slavonski Brod,; Historijski institut Slavonije, 1967), pp.137-170.

²⁷ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. II, doc. no. 56, doc. no. 110, doc. no. 130, doc. no. 131; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. IV, doc. no. 136; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VI, doc. no. 4; Ivan Mišković, *Pregled narodnooslobodilačkog rata u Slavoniji*

population from western and central Slavonia was a constant target of partisan attacks, and the German national group in the ISC moved Germans from that area to safer areas within the ISC borders.²⁸

The strengthening and popularization of the partisan movement in Slavonia led in the middle of 1942 to the establishment of a military quartermaster which dealt with the supply of partisans in that area, and then the pressure on the rural population increased. Food and all other necessities for the partisans were to be obtained through aid, which the population was to give in kind or in money, as well as by purchase. Seizure of surpluses from the wealthier population with the issuance of receipts and confiscation of movable and immovable property of “enemies of the people” were also a means of supply. Confiscation of property was also to be carried out on persons who hid food and other goods from the partisans.²⁹ By organizing a company to fight “against the fifth column” (the so-called PPK company) partisans wanted to control traffic and trade in food and other products and control the movement of the population.³⁰ Significant efforts were made among the rural population, by distributing leaflets and organising rallies in the villages, to persuade the peasants not to participate in the buyup, and to encourage them to hide their food.³¹

From the autumn of 1941, the partisans began to promote the idea of establishing People’s Liberation Committees (NOOs) that were to be the holders of civilian power in areas under partisan control. In addition to helping to supply the partisans, their tasks were to supply the population, especially poorer families, then the families of active and killed partisans, and to organize and supervise the economy, trade in food and other goods, sowing and harvesting. They were supposed to cooperate with the military authorities i.e., the headquarters of the partisan units that were in essence directing their work. In Slavonia, the most numerous were the village NOOs, and their formation started in the summer of 1942, and at the district level in the autumn of the same year. Their activities were then quite limited and for the most part they only fulfilled the task of providing material assistance to the

[An overview of the people’s liberation war in Slavonia] (Slavonski Brod: Historijski institut Slavonije, 1968), pp. 36-91.

²⁸ Zdravko Krnić, “O iseljavanju pripadnika Njemačke narodne skupine (Volksdeutschera) iz NDH za vrijeme II svjetskog rata” [On the Emigration of Members of the German National Group (Volksdeutscher) from the Independent State of Croatia during World War II], *Zbornik, Historijski institut Slavonije*, Slavonski Brod, 4 (1966): 77-78; Geiger, “Iseljavanje Njemačke narodne skupine u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj s područja Slavonije potkraj Drugog svjetskoga rata”, pp. 161-163.

²⁹ *Grada za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. II, doc. no. 112, doc. no. 131.

³⁰ *Grada za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. V, doc. no. 174.

³¹ *Grada za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. II, doc. no. 67, doc. no. 82.

partisans and, to a lesser extent, to the rural population supporting the partisans. Elections for the Regional NOO for Slavonia were only partly conducted due to military operation against the partisans in the spring of 1943, and so in late April and early May 1943 the Provisional Regional NOO for Slavonia was established, which was called, as of November 1943, the Regional NOO for Slavonia. Increasing the number of NOOs and expanding their activities was difficult to implement during 1943, as spring military operation against the partisans was followed by another one in July. Most NOOs operated in the area of western and central Slavonia, and significantly less in eastern Slavonia and Srijem. During 1944, the Communists removed “destructive elements” from the NOO, and those were primarily the members who supported the Croatian Peasant Party and were a potential political obstacle to the Communists. The number of NOOs did not increase during 1944, when they were re-organized. Within NOOs, economic and food commissions began to operate, which were to play a significant role in the supply and nutrition of the civilian population.³²

During 1942, the NOOs mostly, operating in villages, helped the partisans with food, and conducted propaganda among the population in their favour. They paid special attention to women who were encouraged to prepare the winter stores and dry the fruit. They prohibited the production of brandy; instead, plums were to be used for jam to feed the population and the partisans.³³ During the sowing and harvesting periods in 1943 in the area of western and central Slavonia, the NOOs were providing support to the peasants in field work. They organized mutual assistance in agricultural works due to the lack of labour, as well as the exchange of agricultural tools and seeds. The NOOs also helped the population of the villages which suffered in military operations in the spring and summer of 1943 due to their support to the partisans, and in particular supplied the families of the killed partisans. In the Požega area, the NOOs, with the help of partisans, focused their work more on controlling the harvest and preventing state representatives in charge of the harvest from accessing the villages. In some villages, the locals

³² *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. I, doc. no. 206, doc. no. 245; *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta (NOP) u Slavoniji* [Archive Records for the history of the National liberation movement in Slavonia] vol. X (Slavonski Brod: Centar za društvena istraživanja Slavonije i Baranje, 1984), doc. no. 36; Đorđe Kosanović, *Ekonomsko politička djelatnost narodne vlasti u toku NOB-e* [Economic and political activity of the people's government during the National Liberation War] (Zagreb: Institut za historiju radničkog pokreta, 1964), pp. 9-24; Mijo Cicvarić, “Razvitak narodne vlasti u Slavoniji od 1941. do 1945. godine”, in: *Slavonija u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi* [Development of people's government in Slavonia from 1941 to 1945], ed. Martin Kaminski (Slavonski Brod: Historijski institut Slavonije, 1967), pp. 73-92.

³³ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. III, doc. no. 22.

were not allowed to have threshers delivered from Požega because threshers were accompanied by a state commissioner who would then gain knowledge of the amount of harvest, and the partisans demanded that the peasants perform manual threshing, which was a more physically demanding job and took longer. The NOOs' campaign to build special food storages, especially grains, expanded among the rural population in the villages under their supervision and those who supported them. Considering the circumstances of war, the food situation in Slavonia was satisfactory in the areas under partisan control. Significant issue for NOOs in Slavonia in 1943, especially in western and central parts, was to control infectious diseases due to military operations against partisans which caused the population of the villages that supported them to live in exile in poor hygienic conditions.³⁴ Very often, the Anti-Fascist Women's Front (AFŽ) was involved in the activities of the NOOs in providing assistance with the supply and nutrition of the population, whose members were also expected to campaign against the buyup, export of food and high prices.³⁵

During 1944, the Regional NOO for Slavonia, in its instructions related to the cultivation of all agricultural land, placed emphasis on the previously mentioned "abandoned estates". Their number increased significantly after the autumn of 1944, when the Germans of Slavonia and Srijem were evacuated from the ISC area. The cultivation of abandoned estates, along with their own arable land, required a great deal of effort by the peasants and led to the exhaustion of both humans and draft animals. Another important negative factor that needed to be overcome was the lack of manpower, so the District NOO recommended sowing crops, barley, oats and fodder plants, the cultivation of which required less human labour than planting potatoes, for instance. They especially encouraged the planting of sunflower because the production of oil could compensate for the lack of lard. They also encouraged the cultivation of fruits, vegetables and grapes. The NOOs in Brod, Našice, Nova Gradiška, Požega and Virovitica emphasised as their success the establishment of "work brigades" manned with women and youth to work in the fields, and the campaigns of mutual assistance of villages in field work and cultivation of abandoned German estates.³⁶ From the autumn of 1944 until the end

³⁴ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. V, doc. no. 85, doc. no. 108, doc. no. 158; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VII, doc. no. 4; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VIII, doc. no. 47; *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta (NOP) u Slavoniji* [Archive Records for the history of the National liberation movement in Slavonia] vol. IX (Slavonski Brod: Historijski institut Slavonije i Baranje, 1981), doc. no. 151.

³⁵ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. III, doc. no. 22; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VII, doc. no. 4, doc. no. 106.

³⁶ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. X, doc. no. 122; Kolar Dimitrijević, "Pregled organizacije poljoprivrede u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi na oslobođenom području Slavonije", pp. 117-125.

of the war in the area of Slavonia and Srijem, there was a large concentration of Ustasha-Home Guard forces and the German army, which established a new front line in western Srijem, so that the work of NOOs was significantly weakened, especially in the immediate vicinity of the front line. In early 1945, NOOs and partisans initiated the evacuation of a large number of people from the Virovitica, Slatina, Našice and Brod areas via Hungary to Vojvodina, and in February 1945, a military operation was carried out by German and Ustasha-Home Guard forces against partisans in Slavonia, which further weakened the NOOs.³⁷

Battle for the harvest on the fields of Slavonia and Srijem

In 1942, the first in a series of battles for grain from the fields of Slavonia and Srijem began. The situation literally heated up when threshing machines and even crops were set on fire, especially in the area of the districts of Daruvar, Požega and Novska. Harvesting and threshing were carried out under the armed escort of one or the other side. The partisans were ordered to destroy or disable the threshers, in a way that they could still be repaired with minor interventions. Threshers of those owners who protested against that were set on fire. They also demanded that the National Liberation Committees convince the peasants of the correctness of these decisions, which in their opinion should not be a major problem because the peasants were not motivated to sell surplus grain to the state due to low purchase prices and the fact that many villages, especially those with Orthodox population, had already provided support to the partisans or were reluctant to cooperate with the state authorities. In mid-August 1942, partisans reported that in some areas they had destroyed almost all threshers and set fire to grain in fields that were state-owned as well as the grain of peasants they considered Ustasas. During 1942, over 100 threshers were destroyed in Srijem and Slavonia, and the fact that they encouraged peasants to hide their crops was pointed out as a significant success.³⁸ In the Pakrac area, it was estimated that the surplus of grain could reach 80 to 100 wagons (1 wagon contains 1000 kilograms), and local authorities expressed the opinion that the state could lose about 70 wagons

³⁷ Mišković, *Pregled narodnooslobodilačkog rata u Slavoniji*, 186-192; Srećko Ljubljanović, "Evakuacija stanovništva Slavonije u Mađarsku i Vojvodinu početkom 1945." [Evacuation of the population of Slavonia to Hungary and Vojvodina at the beginning of 1945], *Zbornik*, Historijski institut Slavonije, 4/1966, pp. 15-34.

³⁸ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. II, doc. no. 149, doc. no. 150, doc. no. 165; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. III, doc. no. 61; Kolar Dimitrijević, "Pregled organizacije poljoprivrede u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi na oslobođenom području Slavonije", pp. 112-113.

of surplus grain for several reasons. In addition to the non-cooperation and aversion of part of the population to the ISC authorities in this multiethnic area, there was also the arbitrariness of part of the Croatian population who wanted to appropriate crops from the fields owned by the Serbs who had been evicted, sent to work in Germany or camps. In the area of the Great County of Vuka, it was difficult for the state authorities to estimate the expected surpluses because the records on sowing were destroyed by the partisans, and the buyout could hardly be carried out without an armed escort. The Great County of Vuka informed the competent Ministry that the harvest was quite disorganized and that the wheat was taken by “everyone who wanted it”, i.e. the army and the Ministry of National Economy. Buyup could only take place in villages with Croatian and German population. Large quantities of grain were transported across the border to Serbia, and therefore stronger control or closure of the border was required. In August 1942, partisans attacked in the Županja area, in the village of Drenovci, and took away a Home Guard work unit³⁹ of 300 persons, of whom 50 returned, and the rest of them joined the partisans. The members of this battalion were predominantly Serb conscripts. The battalion was established by the ISC authorities as a measure to appease the situation in the country during 1942, trying to use them as labour and thus deter them from rebellion. Members of that unit were hired, among other, to perform agricultural work. In the area of the Great County of Posavje in June 1942, local authorities demanded that in areas with stronger partisan activity, constant night and day monitoring of crops be carried out in order to prevent destruction. In the area of the Great County of Baranja, the harvest and threshing went mostly well. There were only a small number of cases of threshers and grain set on fire. The food situation for the local population was satisfactory, and there were problems with the nutrition of a large number of refugees who were arriving there in large numbers, especially from Bosnia.⁴⁰ During the autumn of 1942, harvests and other agricultural work as well as the earlier harvest were accompanied by attacks and conflicts. In the districts of Daruvar and Pakrac, partisans obstructed the harvest, and it was similar in the nearby area of Grubišno Polje and Garešnica. In September 1942, plums were to be harvested in the village of Šeovica for the ISC Ministry of National Economy. The partisans opened fire on them. They took some of the pickers

³⁹ Nikica Barić, “Položaj Srba u domobranstvu Nezavisne Države Hrvatske, 1941.-1945” [Position of the Serbs in the armed forces of the Independent State of Croatia 1941.-1945.], *Polemos* 5 (2002), No. 1-2:164-169.

⁴⁰ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. II, doc. no. 207; *Regesta dokumenata za historiju NOB-e*, vol. 1, doc. no. 411, doc. no. 481, doc. no. 643, doc. no. 861.

with them into the woods and released the women in the evening.⁴¹ During the autumn, the partisans requested that the peasants, in the villages where they had strongholds, build shelters for food in the woods, away from houses and villages. That was the plan to save food for both the partisans and the villagers from destruction during the military operations of the Ustasha-Home Guard and German forces, in which the villages that supported them were also destroyed. During the following year, the construction of such shelters was widespread. The collected food was partly sent by Slavonian partisans to the areas of Banija, Kordun, Lika and Bosnia to feed the partisans there as well as the civilians who supported them.⁴²

In the period before the 1943 harvest, the pressure on the rural population was extremely strong and they were expecting the “battle for grain” with intense anxiety.⁴³ In the grind between the ISC civilian and military authorities and the partisans, there were examples of peasants from Orthodox and Catholic villages trying to find a solution on their own and, according to a Home Guard report in mid-June, “without written contracts” they were negotiating armistice during agricultural work and even helping each other. In the Srijem area, the population eager for a “normal life” agreed to cooperate with the state authorities, but they also demanded armed protection because the partisans liquidated them as “people’s traitors” for their conciliatory conduct towards the ISC authorities.⁴⁴

Both the state and the partisans had high expectations from the 1943 harvest. The ISC authorities planned to push the partisans to Papuk and thus ensure a more peaceful harvest, especially in western and central Slavonia. In the second half of June 1943, the Ministry of the Armed Forces demanded that the threshers be moved from areas without military crews to the areas protected by the army, thus preventing the destruction of threshers by the partisans. The gravest difficulties in Slavonia and Srijem regarding harvesting and threshing as well as wheat collection were expected in the areas with stronger partisan activity or those under their control, in the districts of Pakrac, Daruvar, Virovitica, Podravska Slatina and Našice. The news of increased partisan activity arrived from the Great County of Baranja, which had had a calmer

⁴¹ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. III, doc. no. 39; Kolar Dimitrijević, “Pregled organizacije poljoprivrede u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi na oslobođenom području Slavonije”, p. 139.

⁴² *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. III, doc. no. 22; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VII, doc. no. 145; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VIII, doc. no. 47, doc. no. 167; Kolar Dimitrijević, “Pregled organizacije poljoprivrede u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi na oslobođenom području Slavonije”, pp. 113, 115.

⁴³ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VI, doc. no.100.

⁴⁴ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VI, doc. no. 69.

harvest than other Slavonian and Srijem counties in the preceding year. They were setting threshers and crops on fire and requested from the peasants as much of the harvested wheat as was enough for their own use. In the area of the Great County of Livac Zapolje, in the Pakrac, Nova Gradiška, Novska and Daruvar areas, the harvest was carried out mainly under the partisan supervision; the partisans were giving all orders regarding the harvest, and many peasants adhered to them because of real support for partisans but also because of threats to those who would disobey their orders.⁴⁵ The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia, on the other hand, asked the partisans to continue destroying threshing machines, crops and warehouses. The Brod communists distributed a leaflet with the slogan “Do not give the fascist occupier a single grain of yours”; they asked the rural population not to join the armed guards set up by the state authorities to protect the harvest and encouraged them to give surpluses to the partisans or destroy them. For their own needs, the peasants were allowed to leave the quantities of grain they needed to feed their families and livestock. Partisans and representatives of the Provisional Regional NOO for Slavonia formed the Main Harvest Committee, which gave instructions and was supposed to manage the harvesting and grain storing. “Harvest committees” were also established at village, municipal and district NOOs, and consisted of four members, a representative of the partisans, NOO, AFŽ and the United Alliance of Anti-Fascist Youth of Croatia. The main instruction to the peasants was to donate the surplus grain to the partisans. They were encouraged to prevent the ISC authorities from accessing grain by destroying threshing machines, grain, silos and mills. The leaflet, which was distributed in the villages, stated that the harvest would not be a “celebration” but rather a “fierce and bloody battle”.⁴⁶ At the time of the harvest, the partisans were to assist the NOOs, not only as armed guards, but they were to be involved in the harvesting, threshing and storing of grain. They were also supposed to deliver threshers from areas that were not under their control, and if that was not possible, they were to take the machines’ belts off and destroy the threshers. Their priority was to destroy the grains in fields they could not harvest. The crops of the “five-columnists” were the first to be destroyed, as were all the large estates, both privately and state-owned.

⁴⁵ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VI, doc. no. 40; *Regesta dokumenata za historiju NOB-e*, vol. 2 (Zagreb: Arhiv Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske, 1964), doc. no. 584, doc. no. 588, doc. no. 595, doc. no. 596, doc. no. 597, doc. no. 604, doc. no. 674.

⁴⁶ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VI, doc. no. 45, doc. no. 46, doc. no. 100; doc. no. 172; *Izbor iz štampe narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji 1941 – 1945* [Selection from the press of the National liberation movement in Slavonia], prepared by Milenko Patković (Slavonski Brod: Historijski institut Slavonije, 1968), pp. 365-366.; Kolar Dimitrijević, “Pregled organizacije poljoprivrede u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi na oslobođenom području Slavonije”, 116-117.

The order was that all civil servants in charge of threshing work should be either persuaded to cooperate or disabled in their work, which included liquidation. Among the priority tasks, the partisans were also supposed to destroy trucks and other means of transport by which wheat would be transported. Due to the destroyed railways and roads and the uncertainty of traffic, the transport of purchased food was also organized by water.⁴⁷

A good grain harvest in 1943 enabled most peasants in Slavonia and Srijem to gather enough food from their fields and feed their families, despite the destruction of threshers and grains by the partisans and military operations by Ustasha-Home Guard and German forces that destroyed both villages and crops in their campaigns against the partisans.

In the spring of 1944, sowing and other agricultural work were about to start in Slavonia. Partisans expressed their expectations in slogans: "Our harvest – our victory", "Rifle and sickle to the victory" and many others with similar content. The regional NOO for Slavonia demanded that the partisans destroy records on the areas sown with grains, as well as all records on the quantities of barley, wheat and oats. As in previous years, the threshers were to be taken from villages that were not under their control, or disabled or set on fire. State commissioners for threshing were to be arrested and tried as "enemies of the people". "Harvest committees" were still active at NOOs, which were supposed to take special care of storing grain in warehouses.⁴⁸ The Osijek District NOO considered that abandoned arable land in their area, which belonged to landowners, could only be cultivated with the armed protection of partisans. Military operations of the Ustasha-Home Guard and German forces against the partisans during April and May 1944 also limited the activities of the NOO in agricultural work in other Slavonian areas as well. Such a situation lasted during the harvest and threshing, which in some areas was until late autumn. In the Osijek, Našice and Nova Gradiška areas, the partisans, who were normally acting as military security, joined the harvest as labour. In the Požega and Đakovo areas, partisans and NOOs collected a large quantity of grain from the properties of evacuated Germans. Due to the lack of threshing machines in the areas controlled by the partisans, in some places threshing was done manually, which significantly slowed down the work. Whatever they could not reap, thresh or take for themselves the

⁴⁷ *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VI, doc. no. 127; *Građa za historiju NOP-a u Slavoniji*, vol. VII, doc. no. 115.

⁴⁸ Stjepan Brlošić, *Đakovština u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi i socijalističkoj revoluciji 1941.-1945.* [Đakovo region in the People's Liberation Struggle and the Socialist Revolution 1941-1945] (Đakovo: Skupština općine Đakovo, 1986), pp. 262- 264; Kolar Dimitrijević, "Pregled organizacije poljoprivrede u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi na oslobođenom području Slavonije", p. 123.

partisans sought to destroy in this harvest as well.⁴⁹ Neither the partisans nor the ISC authorities collected the desired amount of grain. Agricultural works in autumn 1944 and spring 1945, which were supposed to provide food for the next period, could hardly be carried out due to the intensity of war operations in the Slavonian and Srijem areas at the end of the war. This led to a large increase in prices of grains and flour. In mid-1944, the price of 100 kilograms of flour in Slavonia was 12,000 kuna, and in April 1945 the price of wheat in Slavonia reached 50,000 kuna per 100 kilograms, which was the amount of almost three teacher's monthly salaries.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Considering the war conditions, the rural population in Slavonia and Srijem was able to provide a satisfactory amount of food: grains, vegetables, fruits, meat and lard for their needs. How much food would be left for the nutrition of the family, which was not generous during the war, and leave some aside to sell or exchange, depended on the state as well as the armies operating in the area. The state expected significant surpluses for buyup of grain from the Slavonian and Srijem peasants, and the partisans also counted on that part of the harvest. Support for neither of the sides put individuals and entire villages as well as their properties in danger. Therefore, we can say that the advantage of easier availability of food products for the rural population, as the main food producer, was also an aggravating circumstance. German and Ustasha-Home Guard forces and partisans were destroying crops, orchards, gardens, agricultural tools, carts and cattle, and forced the peasants to flee. Food collected through buyup could hardly be transported due to traffic collapse, destroyed roads and lack of means of transportation. The urban population was less exposed to state demands and the arbitrariness of the armies, but was left to irregular and scarce supplies in provisions and to high prices on the "black market", where workers, often without employment, and

⁴⁹ Brlošić, Đakovština u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi i socijalističkoj revoluciji 1941.-1945, pp. 315, 318; Kolar Dimitrijević, "Pregled organizacije poljoprivrede u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi na oslobođenom području Slavonije", pp. 118-125; Milan Lukić, "Razvoj partizanske privrede na oslobođenom teritoriju požeške kotline" [Development of the partisan economy in the liberated territory of the Požega valley], u: *Požeška kotlina u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi i socijalističkoj revoluciji 1941-1945*, ed. Nada Lazić, Dane Pavlica, and Milan Vranešević (Slavonski Brod: Centar za društvena istraživanja Slavonije i Baranje, 1984), p. 346

⁵⁰ HR-DASB-Osnovna škola Čajkovci [Primary School of Čajkovci], f. 117, Spomenica škole, inv. no. 1, p. 101; Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, pp. 710-711; Tomasevich, *Rat i revolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945*, pp. 794-795; Kolar Dimitrijević, "Pregled organizacije poljoprivrede u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi na oslobođenom području Slavonije", pp. 125-126.

lower civil servants could not buy food or other necessities. Their position became more difficult when air strikes by the Western Allies and the Red Army Air Force began in 1944. The eating habits of the inhabitants of Slavonia and Srijem and the peasants from the Dalmatian hinterland were also influenced by their notion of starvation. This notion is clarified in partly caricatured, but rather illustrative manner in an ethnological study from the mid-1930s, which states that people in Slavonia and Srijem say that they will starve and live “on dry bread” unless they slaughter a pig of two hundred kilograms in the autumn, while in the Dalmatian hinterland people did not have bread for the whole year even with the best harvests.⁵¹ Therefore, we can conclude that the local population in Slavonia and Srijem lived in poverty during the Second World War, but did not starve.

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⁵¹ Rudolf Bičanić, *Kako živi narod. Život u pasivnim krajevima* [How the People Live: Life in the Passive Region] (Zagreb: s.n., 1936; pretisak: Zagreb, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb – Naklada Globus, 1996), p. 69.

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