

REJOINDER

I should like to comment upon the two reviews of my book, *Social Revolutionaries and Secret Agents: The Carinthian Slovene Partisans and Britain's Special Operations Executive* (*Slovene Studies*, Vol. 12 [1990], pp. 231-236). Since both reactions are essentially positive (and I am of course grateful for this), I am only seeking to update and clarify several crucial subjects in a spirit of useful scholarly discourse.

My first point is that, had it been possible to review the extended and revised 1991 Slovene edition (Ljubljana: Mladinska Knjiga), certain issues quite properly raised by my critics would not have been pertinent. The Slovene version, based upon some new data, definitely supersedes the English one and also constitutes a genuinely professional editing and production job.

Dr. Mlakar's interesting, if hardly "brief," evaluation of my work requires a special riposte, again, in part, because much time has elapsed since the original text left my hands and since he wrote his review. I refer above all to the "conspiracy theory" of Nikolai Tolstoy, who, it must be emphasized, is *not* an historian, at least not in terms of educational background, professional training, and peer recognition. (Nor, for that matter, is he a "count," having been born in the U.K. unequivocally as a commoner.) All that I wish to say here is that, since the Slovene edition of my study appeared, Mr. Tolstoy has been found guilty of libel in a suit brought by Lord Aldington, ex-chief of staff of the British Fifth Corps in Carinthia in May of 1945. The trial was based upon a minute examination of the greatest mass of historical source material ever presented to a British court. I have pursued this topic further in my essay "A British Variety of Pseudo-history."¹

Another important observation in this regard is simply that the gullible general public readily swallows conspiracy stories that have been slickly packaged by talented popular authors — Tolstoy is a darling of the British literary set — or their film and television *confrères*. Rarely, if ever, do serious historians — notoriously disputatious among themselves — find anything that corroborates such tales. E.g., an amateur's claim that U.S. President Zachary Taylor died of poisoning went up in smoke after his embalmed body was rudely exhumed and samples of it subjected to chemical analysis; Oliver Stone's genial exercise in imagination, the movie "JFK," will most likely suffer the same fate. The chief result of pranks of this ilk is to make money for their perpetrators. Incidentally, at no point did I write or imply that Soviet intelligence "supported" (p. 235) Tolstoy's conspiracy fable: does this perhaps reflect a misunderstanding of the English text?

Dr. Mlakar also raises the question of SOE sources. I should explain that the SOE archives remain under lock and key, access being granted only under extremely circumscribed conditions (including a prohibition on note-taking). I was able to study the original Clowder Mission materials under circumstances that I am, unhappily, still not at liberty to reveal. It is clear from this that I was

¹ In Ambrose, Stephen E. and Bischof, Günter, eds., *Eisenhower and the German POWs* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 183-198.

in no position to publish the texts of the relevant documents, which, I believe, would show among other things the high degree of the Carinthian partisans' dependence upon British logistical support (the bulk of the airdrops having taken place on the *southern* edge of the Karawanken crest over which the guerrillas regularly scampered). British officialdom still suffers from an intelligence records security complex, and there is as yet no Freedom of Information Act. The modicum of World War Two data of this kind that is in the public domain (i.e. in the Public Record Office) has been severely vetted and is thus fragmentary. And this is not even to broach the question of the MI6 archives and those of other wartime subversion-espionage organizations. It is possible, however, to argue on the basis of available, more strictly military, PRO evidence that the Slovene partisans struggle was *altogether* heavily, if not solely or even predominantly, reliant in a material way upon the Western Allies' grace and favor.

In all events, Carinthia was an overwhelmingly British and SOE "show" amidst hot competition between a host of mutually jealous undercover operations. A very few others, including OSS people, got in toward the end of the war, as Dr. Dušan Biber has called to my attention, and were aimlessly messing about when the Fifth Corps occupied the Klagenfurt Basin. However, there is not the slightest evidence to suggest that their antics had any meaningful political or military impact upon the Slovene partisans. Austrian (i.e., Nazi period) records, to the extent that they can be perused under currently prevailing conditions in Carinthia, have already been exploited in Josef Rausch's book.

I did not mention the late Dušan Pirjevec-Ahac by name — Dr. Mlakar does not hesitate to do so — as the putative agent of Alfgar H.G. Hesketh-Prichard's death because my knowledge of the matter is thirdhand and lacks documentary substantiation. If those persons closely associated with "Ahac" who are still alive have anything to say about "Major Cahusac's" presumptive murder, now is the time, in the interest of historical truth, for them to step forward. The hope of garnering evidence from British sources, considering what I have just said, is — at least for the time being — illusory. The SOE, for its part, was dissolved in early 1946 and had no role in the postwar investigation of the matter, which was presumably carried out by Army intelligence and MI6.

I should also like to point out that I did read a carbon copy of the Stossier report and evaluate it in *The Slovenes of Carinthia*; I likewise addressed myself there at length, though of course not definitively, to the overall question of the Nazi plans to wipe out the Slovenes as a people. I did stress, in the present work, the appeal of the call for a United Slovenia and the fact that there were no quislings among the *nationally conscious* Carinthian Slovenes (see pp. 10-11). Finally, I believe that Dr. Mlakar's comment about topographical-linguistic nomenclature reflects, perhaps because of a certain ethnic oversensitivity, miscomprehension of the principles of correct English usage. However, I see little profit in debating so arcane a matter.

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