

Thomas M. Barker, *Social Revolutionaries and Secret Agents: The Carinthian Slovene Partisans and Britain's Special Operations Executive*. Boulder: East European Monographs. Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 1990. xiii, 249 pages.

While the terrible civil strife which erupted in Yugoslavia during the second world war and the interaction of various Yugoslav politicians with either the Axis or the Allies (and sometimes with both) have been the subject of numerous scholarly studies, less is known about the wartime experiences of those Slovenes who were citizens of Austria until 1938 and were then transformed into subjects of the Third Reich. In the book here under review, Professor Barker seeks to throw new light on the armed resistance to Nazi rule which sprang up in 1942 in some of the Slovene regions of the Reich and on the involvement of the Special Operations Executive [SOE] (and other British Government agencies) in the ensuing struggle.

Making use of several recently published monographs, notably those written by Josef Rausch, Franci Strle and August Walzl, as well as British records and certain other new sources, Barker presents his findings on the first eighty pages of the book; the bulk of the volume (close to 200 pages) is devoted to documents, maps, photographs, backnotes and an index.

According to Barker, most of the Carinthian Slovenes who took up arms against the Axis authorities from 1942 on had a "basically rural-proletarian" background and were probably motivated as much by socio-economic grievances as by nationalism. Most propertied Slovenes, on the other hand, tended to stay on the sidelines or actually collaborated with the Axis authorities.

The Carinthian *Gau*, which was significantly enlarged in 1941 through the annexation of formerly Yugoslav territory, was the scene of approximately "600 shootouts and firefights" between August 1942 and the end of the war. According to Barker, the Germans were reasonably successful in their counter-insurgency efforts: aside from using their own forces (SS, police, army troops, home-guard units, etc.) they also employed a variety of non-Germans, including Slovenes, to keep track of and to hunt down the guerillas in the region. Though the latter achieved some spectacular coups, Barker concludes that their total impact on the industrial and transportation system of the Reich was very limited, and that they killed far fewer Germans than Slovene spokesmen have long asserted. As for the handful of British military men who were sent into the region by the SOE and other Allied agencies, Barker notes that they were bedevilled by a host of difficulties, some self-inflicted. One of the British operatives, Alfgar C.G. Hesketh-Prichard, also known as "Major Cahusac," died under mysterious circumstances in November 1941; most likely he was assassinated by his Slovene companions on instructions "from a higher political quarter" (49). Two other British officers sent into the region in 1943-44, Peter Wilkinson and Charles Villiers, were more fortunate and rose to some prominence in later years: Sir Peter served as Britain's ambassador to South Vietnam and Austria between 1966 and 1971, while Sir Charles became Chairman of British Steel.

In his last chapter, entitled "The Aftermath: A Legacy of Bitterness," Barker describes the chaotic conditions and the Anglo-Yugoslav frictions developing in Carinthia and adjacent areas in the days following Germany's surrender. He concludes that the mass slaughter of Yugoslav and other Axis "collaborators" by Tito's forces in May 1945 is an event that "all of Yugoslavia" must someday come to terms with, and that Britain's role in this bloody business was shaped by "pragmatic, if heartless, indeed ruthless military

considerations” rather than by a political “conspiracy” (74). Barker also notes that it is high time for the people of Austria to come to grips with their Nazi past.

Thomas Barker has been known for his expertise on the Carinthian Slovenes since the 1950s, and this book reflects his broad knowledge in the field. He also deserves high praise for his efforts to deal with friends and foes alike in an objective fashion. *Social Revolutionaries and Secret Agents* has some weaknesses, though. To begin with, it contains a number of stylistic infelicities and obscure passages which make it difficult, at times, to follow the author’s train of thought. Moreover, too many important details are buried in the back-notes, and some of these are rather puzzling (see, for instance, the reference to SS General Artur Phleps’ allegedly “obscure fate” (221), and to Paul Hehn’s work (225)). But by far the most serious defect of the book is the fault of the publisher! Like so many other volumes in the *East European Monographs* series, this one has, on average, at least two misprints per page, and at least three picture captions (out of twelve) are either transposed or make no sense at all.

Nevertheless, the patient reader will learn much that is useful from this book.

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The book which we wish to briefly discuss is, in fact, a surprise, and not just for those readers who have not yet heard of the American historian Thomas Barker. It is clear in this context that historians in the small Slovene world cannot afford to overlook this *via facti* by a friend of the Carinthian Slovenes; for it is well known that it was to the history of this sternly tested sector of the Slovene people that his doctoral dissertation—published in book form twice—was devoted.¹ The author, Professor at the State University of New York at Albany, is a specialist in modern European history; here we must voice the complaint that the book does not provide a more detailed introduction to Barker himself. Only in part, and only indirectly, does the author disclose himself as an individual, and namely in the book’s introductory paragraphs, where he explains the genesis of his interest in the Carinthian Slovenes and thus the genesis of the book. Indeed, his dissertation on the problems of the anti-Fascist resistance in Slovene Carinthia attracted too little attention and apparently Barker has attempted to repay this ‘debt’ with this latest book. We must confess however in advance that he has done so in a very original way. Indeed the combination of themes which is evident in the title and is also followed in the book is very surprising; and it is this that we have in mind when, above, we mention the idea of surprise. Here let us just mention that the author already presented an extensive summary of the contents of the book, although with a more classic kind of title, in the pages of *Slovene Studies*.² By virtue of its surprising contents and also its factual and yet lucid style this work has already reverberated on both sides of the Austrian-Slovene border. Professor Janez Stergar, our well-known specialist in the history of the Carinthian Slovenes, has published favorable reviews.³ In 1990 Professor Barker was interviewed in a number of Slovene newspapers; for 1991 both Slovene and German translations of the book have been announced, and to the latter we may expect a response also in the German-speaking regions, especially in Carinthia.