

John Corsellis & Marcus Ferrar. *Slovenia 1945: Memories of Death and Survival after World War II.* London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2005. xi + 276 pp., £24.50 (\$47.97) (cloth). ISBN: 1-85043-840-0.

Slovenia 1945 is a well-crafted blend of personal memories, historiography, and eyewitness accounts. The result is moving narrative that avoids the turgidity and dryness historical studies may fall prey to, as well as the indulgent emotionalism of some memoirs. The starting point for the volume was the letters written by John Corsellis, a conscientious objector working in the Friends Ambulance Unit in Austrian Carinthia from 1945 to 1947. This material was fleshed out with several dozen interviews, a diary by camp survivor France Pernišek, and the journalist Marcus Ferrar. Although Corsellis is a central participant in the story, his presence in the book is subtle and unobtrusive.

Structurally, the book is attractive to both casual readers and serious researchers. In addition to the main text, there are fifteen photos, three maps, an outline of the chief characters, a four-page catalogue of other persons, a tightly packed six-page bibliography, and a five-page index of people, subjects, and places.

A striking feature of the book is its impartiality—a goal that the authors explicitly state in the prologue (p. 2). Negative sides of all participants are depicted: Germans (slave labor, attacks on civilians, book burning), Italians (the Rab concentration camp, the myth of kind and romantic soldiers), Partisans (theft, murder, rape), Catholics (the Black Hand death squads), the western Allies (shooting at civilians, looting), and the Village Guards (burning prisoners to death). However, the book is much more than a catalogue of crimes; it also relates the human sides of all involved: individual acts of kindness by combatants and civilians on all sides. The narrative is replete with religious imagery—priests, bells, and prayers—but this is both unsurprising and fitting, given the conservative Catholic character of the refugees and Corsellis's own religious convictions as a Quaker.

The volume opens at the end of the Second World War, depicting scenes of chaos as civilians and soldiers alike stream north out of Slovenia, ahead of Tito's advancing Partisan forces. They faced not only danger from roadside mines and snipers, but also theft and conflict as various forces—Nazi, Slovene Home Guard (*domobranci*), Croatian Ustaša, Serbian Chetnik—sometimes turned against one another. Flooding into British-occupied Austrian Carinthia, civilians were subjected to the indignity of being robbed by British soldiers. Chapter 2 steps back from the story, outlining the historical events that led to Slovenia's incorporation into Yugoslavia, the transformation of the Second World War into a civil war

and a social revolution, and the sheer unavoidability of involvement for anyone in Slovenia at that time.

The story resumes in chapters 3 and 4, describing the enormous mix of persons at the refugee camp in Viktring, and culminating in the return of some 12,000 Home Guard troops to Slovenia and their murder by Partisan units. The repatriation occurred from 21 to 31 May 1945 under various circumstances: not only through British deception, but also force, resignation, and loyalty to comrades. It is here that the Canadian camp commandant Major Paul Barre and the British Red Cross commissioner John Selby-Bigge emerge as heroes for their refusal to repatriate an additional 6,000 civilians. Chapter 4 examines the motives for the massacres (postwar lack of infrastructure, revenge, and consolidation of power) and describes the torture, concentration camps, executions, and mass graves that awaited the repatriated combatants. Three survivors of the Kočevski Rog killings are profiled: France Kozina, France Dejak, and Milan Zajec.

Chapters 5 through 7 detail life in the Viktring camp (subsequently relocated to Lienz, Spittal, St. Veit, and Judenburg). The refugees were assigned displaced person (DP) status and subjected to pressure to return to Slovenia, especially following Yugoslav-British collaboration after the Bled Agreement in 1947. However, reports that the Home Guard troops and voluntary returnees had been killed or imprisoned made it clear that they could not safely return to Slovenia.

Chapters 8 through 10 focus on various countries of emigration for the refugees, starting with Argentina, where they joined approximately 25,000 Slovenes that had emigrated two decades earlier following Italy's annexation of western Slovene territory under the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo. The leadership of Marko Bajuk was instrumental in guiding this group and preserving its Slovene identity. Those that emigrated to Canada faced physical hardships working as lumberjacks and railroad workers in undeveloped areas but, like in the US, eventually assimilated and largely lost their Slovene identity in subsequent generations. The UK was the only European country to accept a large number of the refugees, but its record remains marred over steadfast refusal to officially acknowledge the betrayal at Viktring, despite historians' investigations since the 1970s (e.g., Bethell 1974, Tolstoy 1986). As Tine Velikonja poignantly wrote in 2002: "It is also said that the only crime committed by the British Army during World War II was that at the Viktring field... Our question is: why did you choose us, why was it us?" (p. 193).

Chapters 11 through 14 examine the post-1991 situation in Slovenia. Returnees' sense of alienation from Slovenia—now very different from the land they left in 1945—is profiled, and there is an overview of the grim statistics: 12,000 Home Guard troops killed after the war, and an

estimated 70,000 to 200,000 postwar killings altogether in Slovenia (pp. 205–206; cf. also Reindl 2001). Personal portraits include Milan Kučan, who made an ambivalent attempt at reconciliation in 1990, and two returnees: Archbishop (now Cardinal) France Rode and former Prime Minister (and current Minister of Finance) Andrej Bajuk. Chapter 12 considers the Argentine economic collapse of 2001 and its impact on the Slovene community, and chapter 13 profiles Slovenes that have worked for recognition of the massacres, especially Spomenka Hribar and Drago Jančar, as well as reassessment of the legacy of the Second World War in other countries. The volume concludes with a call for reconciliation and remembrance.

In today's Slovenia far too much has been forgotten about the excesses of the communist era, especially the period from the end of the Second World War to the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, and then the Informbiro period (1948–55). Many Slovenes today look back at the communist era with nostalgia, remembering the welfare state and relative prosperity of the 1960s and 1970s (propped up by Western loans and capital inflow from those working abroad). Images of purges, prison camps, political prisoners, secret police, and summary executions are associated with other countries further east. However, this was as much a reality in Yugoslavia as in the Soviet bloc during the early postwar period: one cannot forget Tito's violent suppression of "Cominformists," the Goli Otok camp (cf. Markovski 1984), the OZNA and UDBA, and (in addition to the immediate postwar massacres) an estimated 200 political assassinations and kidnappings, including the 1968 murder of Croatian writer Bruno Ante Bušić. Although earlier excesses unarguably later gave way to less strict authoritarian rule, this does not negate them.

Because of the personal narrative that it involves, *Slovenia 1945* can be classed together with other eyewitness testimonies to events in the Second World War and postwar communist Yugoslavia. To name only a few, these include Ljubo Sirc's *Between Hitler and Tito*, Metod Milač's *Resistance, Imprisonment, and Forced Labor*, and Željko Kozinc's *Dotik sveta*. Such vivid personal accounts serve to reify this historical period and are a sobering reminder of a regime and a time that entails more than the current Yugo-nostalgia for feel-good music and seaside vacations. The written history of Yugoslavia was monopolized by the communists after 1945, and it is only now that other voices are beginning to be heard.

For a historical work, *Slovenia 1945* generated a considerable amount of attention in both Slovenia and the UK. In addition to the appearance of a Slovene translation (Mladinska knjiga, 2006), the book was discussed on Aleksander Čolnik's television program, *Večerni Gost* (11 June 2006) and launched with favorable commentary by Jože Dežman (director of the Museum of Contemporary History), Andrej Bajuk, Kajetan

Gantar (former vice-president of SAZU), Cardinal Aloysius Ambrozic, and France Rode. In Britain, the book occasioned a sympathetic letter from then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw as well as a motion signed by sixty-two members of parliament and a formal expression of regret from John Austin, chairman of the British-Slovenia Parliamentary Group.

Slovenia 1945 is a book with a great deal to offer to a broad variety of readers: historians (of the Second World War, Austria, and Yugoslavia), political scientists (especially those interested in the former communist regimes of Eastern Europe), and, of course, Slovene specialists.

Donald F. Reindl, University of Ljubljana

Works Cited

- Bethell, Nicholas. 1974. *The Last Secret*. London: Andre Deutsch.
- Corsellis, John & Marcus Ferrar. 2006. *Slovenija 1945. Smrt in preživetje po drugi svetovni vojni*. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga.
- Kozinc, Željko. 2006. *Dotik sveta: zgodba arhitekta Janeza Hacina*. Ljubljana: Modrian.
- Markovski, Venko. 1984. *Goli Otok: The Island of Death*. Boulder: Social Science Monographs.
- Milač, Metod. 2002. *Resistance, Imprisonment & Forced Labor. A Slovene Student in World War II* [= *Studies in Modern European History* 47]. New York: Peter Lang.
- Reindl, Donald F. 2001. Mass Graves from the Communist Past Haunt Slovenia's Present, *RFE/RL Newslines* 5.225 (29 November), available at <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2001/11/5-not/not-291101.asp>
- Sirc, Ljubo. 1989. *Between Hitler and Tito: Nazi Occupation and Communist Oppression*. London: Andre Deutsch.
- Tolstoy, Nikolai. 1986. *The Minister and the Massacres*. London: Century Hutchinson.