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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Stefan Karner.** *Die Steiermark im Dritten Reich, 1938-1945.* Graz: Leykam, 1994. 640 pp. DM 42 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-7011-7302-0.

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Stefan Karner's *Styria in the Third Reich, 1938-1945* bears all the marks of a thorough study. Abundantly footnoted and illustrated, carefully researched and well written, this hefty volume comprises a veritable encyclopedia of all that happened in Styria between the Anschluss and the collapse of Nazi rule in 1945. First published in 1986 and now in its third edition, Karner's book is based on interviews, printed sources, and archival research in Germany and Austria (where the 50-year barrier unfortunately still rendered some materials inaccessible). Chapter 1 provides background on the Nazi movement in Styria before 1938, as well as on the Anschluss and its immediate aftermath. Subsequent chapters divide up the war years thematically, examining questions such as day-to-day Nazi rule, Lower Styria, racial policies, culture, the economy, armaments production, agriculture, and the workers.

Karner rings many bells for this reader. Repeated mention of Graz, the Styrian capital, as well as of turn-of-the-century Austrian-German voelkisch author Peter Rosegger, for example, bring to mind an article published by Rosegger in *Der Tuermer* in 1913. Entitled "My Leader in a Dark Time," the article honors the man who "discovered" Rosegger and helped launch him on his phenomenal career: Adalbert Svoboda, editor-in-chief of the *Grazer Tagespost* from 1862 to 1882. Rosegger begins with a scene from 1870, in the midst of the Franco-Prussian War. Two men, he writes, stormed into Svoboda's office to protest the *Tagespost*'s support for Prussia – which at that time, only a few years after the Austro-Prussian War, ranked in the minds of many as Austria's archenemy.

Svoboda (described by Rosegger as having long blond locks and broad shoulders) countered quickly that Aus-

tria still had Germans who saw their archenemy not in Germany, but in France. One of the two men, deeply loyal to the Habsburgs, retorted to this that he found it strange that such a German nationalist position should be taken up by, of all people, a Czech. (Svoboda, biographical dictionaries reveal, had been born in Bohemia, had answered in Czech to the first name of Vojtech, and published a Czech-language school reader in the early 1850s). According to Rosegger, Svoboda "was not rattled by this impertinence, but rather replied: 'I am a German, had German teachers, and was myself a German teacher. Please be so kind as to leave the room!'" By the end of the 1870s, Svoboda would prove that he was indeed German; he ranked by then as one of Austria's most radical German National journalists, and was competing with Georg Ritter von Schoenerer in the incitement of public passions and denunciation of Habsburg institutions. Yet even such behavior would fail to discourage some Czechs from claiming Svoboda as one of their own after his death in 1902.

What relevance does this story have to a book focusing on Styria during the Second World War? Plenty. As Karner writes, "National Socialist cultural policy in Styria, without consideration of developments since the First World War or even earlier, can be understood only with difficulty. ....The beginnings [of German defense, or *Schutzarbeit*] in Styria reach deep into the nineteenth century,...." (page 191) In the Habsburg hereditary duchy of Styria, German National political and cultural figures such as Rosegger and Svoboda helped lay the foundations of an aggressive, racist, even fascistoid movement that displayed remarkable and fateful affinities to Adolf Hitler's National Socialism. Karner sketches in at least some of the historical background. He brings out successfully the tradition, well developed among certain

Styrians by 1918, of viewing their duchy as a German borderland, a cultural bulwark against South Slavdom and the barbaric Balkans. Until 1918, after all, Styria had included a considerable Slovene-speaking population in its south. In the final decades of the Habsburg Monarchy, both the Diet and the University in Graz had possessed ever more active Slovene factions or clubs, meaning that German political movements in Styria, as they developed, had faced a national Other not at arm's length, but up close. For that matter, Germans and Slovenes confronted each other face-to-face elsewhere in the duchy as well; Karner highlights the clash in Lower Styria between a Slovene-speaking countryside and marketplaces or towns having many German-speakers as residents. He also notes the prominence of Germans from Lower Styria in Graz's radical circles.

After the First World War, of course, predominantly Slovene-speaking Lower Styria became a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Not until April of 1941, when Hitler's armies destroyed Yugoslavia and annexed Lower Styria, did the two parts of the duchy belong once again to the same country (although, as Karner notes, the much-discussed unification of the two parts into a single National Socialist administrative district, or Gau, never took place). SA Squadron Leader Dr. Sigfried Uiberreither, the Styrian Gauleiter and Reichsstatthalter, also headed from 1941 the so-called Civilian Administration for Lower Styria, and staffed his new offices with many Nazis native to the duchy. The occupation and "re-Germanization" of Lower Styria occurred under their direction, with little interference from Berlin and according to elaborate plans they had developed in Graz during the 1930s.

Karner, in what may be the best chapter of the book, details this "re-Germanization." It involved, among other things, the wholesale deportation of Slovene intellectuals, the resettling to the area of Volksdeutsche from elsewhere in Europe, and a contradiction-filled, violent, yet genuine attempt at winning over the Slovene-speaking masses of Lower Styria to the German nation and the Nazi cause. A less consistent or ambitious historian, perhaps, or one who found the Slovene language too difficult, would have focused only on that part of Styria belonging to modern, democratic Austria. Karner, however, by taking on the whole of the historic Habsburg province, pries open a new window into Hitler and his regime. The Fuehrer, it should be remembered, had grown up not in Hamburg or the Ruhr, under the Hohenzollerns, but near Linz, under the Habsburgs. As a young man, he had spent time in Vienna, and acquired

there a deep dislike for Slavs. The party he took over after 1918 had its roots not in the class conflicts of Baden or the Black Forest, but in turn-of-the-century national struggles between Germans and Czechs in those parts of Bohemia known to some as the Sudetenland. Personal and institutional memories of this sort persist, even when a leader and his movement shift their base of operations to Munich, then Berlin.

Styria, in other words, was quite unlike most regions of Bismarck's Little Germany. Rather, it resembled Bohemia and Moravia, as well as other parts of greater Germany that straddled the fat and fuzzy line – reaching from the Baltic almost to the Adriatic – where the Central European land mass of compactly settled German-speakers tailed off and a territory inhabited primarily by speakers of Slavic or non-Indo-European languages began. Here, being German consisted not of doing the only natural and modern thing, but of *choosing* (or submitting to) one nation instead of another, of opting, like Adalbert/Vojtech Svoboda, either for the native language of one's parents or that of one's teachers. Karner writes that during the Second World War, unlike people elsewhere in the Reich, Lower Styria's population lived "simultaneously with two wars: one that raged on distant battlefields, ... and a second that was just out of sight. Often concealed and taking place under cover of night, it surfaced with the greatest of brutality, then disappeared, only to strike again a few days later on the neighboring farm. The war was always there for people, but hardly anyone knew the enemy or the fronts. When gun butts pounded on the door at night, one had no choice but to open up. This time it was the Germans, next time the partisans. Both wanted food, drink, and care. Neither could learn of the other." (page 159)

To push Karner's point about a domestic front on which friend and foe all too often looked and sounded alike: for a regime so obsessed with ethnicity and descent as to enact citizenship laws of stupefying precision, then to set about systematically murdering Jews, Gypsies, and other outsiders, the sloppiness (or flexibility) it displayed in determining who was German and who was not in Styria comes as a surprise. Uiberreither and his associates, during the second half of 1941, made little effort to sort the sheep from the goats according to any criteria – linguistic, genealogical, or otherwise. To be sure, thousands of priests, lawyers, and other intellectuals in Lower Styria had been branded almost immediately as non-Germans and treated accordingly by the Nazi system in April and May. But in the summer and fall, the Civilian Administration, after conducting a laughably per-

functory racial examination (which people who, like Svoboda, were blond presumably passed with flying colors), herded more than 300,000 Slovene-speakers into a “Styrian Homeland Union” [*Heimatbund*], Germanized their names, and sought to convince them of their ancient German ancestry. At the same time that Styria’s Jews (less than 0.2% of the population, as Karner notes, although this does not excuse his brevity in addressing the Styrian Holocaust) were finding themselves stripped of their Germanness, their possessions, and eventually their lives, most Christian Slavs of the former Habsburg duchy faced great encouragement, not all of it heavyhanded, to learn German if they did not know it already, to assimilate into Hitler’s *Herrenvolk*, and to acquire all that *Herrenvolk*’s rights and responsibilities.

Karner, unfortunately, devotes little space to explaining this policy. Twice, in incomplete sentences forming part of a summation, he cites the “calculated incorporation of historical traditions, such as the borderland (marches) function of the province, into the argumentation of the NSDAP” (page 25) or the “adoption of already-existing ideas of the Styrian homeland movement.” (page 205) Nowhere does he dissect just how Nazi and local impulses interacted, how Berlin, in emphasizing nationality, race, and blood, tapped into a specifically Styrian dynamic.

Fictionalized accounts of individual or mass shifts in sentiment, when written by eyewitnesses with a talent for observation, can illustrate much for the historian. Take, for example, a 1939 novel by Hermann Pirich, a Styrian author far less popular than Rosegger, but in some sense his successor. Centering on a fictitious town called Schlossau that closely resembles the Lower Styrian town of Pettau (known in Slovene as Ptuj), the book has as one of its protagonists a local policeman, Stoeckl. The reader learns he was “one of the few officials of k.u.k. Austria taken over by the new state [in 1918-1919] and left at their posts. To achieve this... Stoeckl had simply claimed without batting an eye that he was a Slovene by birth, and had...concealed his real nationality only so as not to expose himself to humiliation or persecution at his job.” (footnote 1)

If Styria’s German movement had gained an adherent in Svoboda back in the 1860s and ’70s, in other words, it had lost one in Stoeckl/Stekelj – or this fictitious figure’s equivalent in fact – after the First World War. The policeman justifies his decision to switch sides with the inclusion of Schlossau in a new South Slav state, telling an acquaintance that “One has to howl with the wolves,

as the saying goes.” (page 177) Whatever the reasons for real-life dissimulation in 1918-19, it came as a shock to German nationalists in Styria. What wonder, then, that when the Nazi state, through the application of great force, reopened the issues of borders, citizenship, and nationhood during the Second World War, these nationalists saw an opportunity to turn back the wheel of history and stop it at a point more advantageous to them, to rescue for Germania her lost sons and daughters – whether or not individuals like Stoeckl/Stekelj wanted rescuing? And what wonder that, this time around, Germanness entailed much more than previously, and required personal and public identification with an ideology so extreme as to make yet another switch, back to the Slovene side, almost impossible? —

This reviewer’s own bias in favor of more historical background, more comparison with cases outside Styria, and more belles lettres by now should be clear. Karner, however, states explicitly his intent to focus on economic and administrative issues: to what extent does he succeed? In one sense, he presents a model worthy of emulation. Great quantities of statistical and archival material, distilled into lucid paragraphs and charts, stand ready for use by the scholar interested in the living conditions of Styrian workers, the organization of wartime production, and so on. But if Karner spends little time explaining cultural and political motivations, then in matters of the economy – clearly the center of his interests – argument and effort at binding all into an explanatory narrative disappear almost completely. What purpose, for example, does Chapter 10, on “Electricity as the Basis for the War Economy and Armaments Industry,” serve? It is almost as though the author considers the relevance of his topic too self-evident to merit discussion.

Perhaps in a half-hearted attempt to address the problem of so much “what” and so little “how” or “why,” Karner refers in his introduction to the “polycratic” theory advanced by scholars Peter Huettenberger and Martin Broszat. Indeed, their refusal to understand Nazi Germany as a centralized, rationalized state and their depiction instead of a chaotic administration filled with political entrepreneurs, each operating on his own account, would serve as an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding why Nazi rule in Styria in some ways resembled a takeover less than it did a joint venture. But Karner does not pursue the polycratic model, and makes no other effort to place his own work in a larger historiographical context.

How does Karner’s book and topic fit in with trends

in the literature that were only just emerging as he completed the first edition in 1985 or 1986? As regards works on nationhood, the history of Styria offers strong confirmation of the constructed nature of nations. Not only could Germans and Slovenes switch national sides with ease, but the very categories of German and Slovene prove to be of relatively recent provenance within the duchy. In a turning sideways of Habsburg institutions and loyalties (to paraphrase Katherine Verdery in her 1983 book, *Transylvanian Villagers* (footnote 2), peasant, burgher, and noble subjects had become national citizens grouped in mutually exclusive camps. The 1940s marked the complete territorial separation of those camps, and thus the end to a process dating back at least to the middle of the nineteenth century. By the end of 1945 the only flag flying in Graz was the red and white of the Republic of Austria. In Lower Styria, the towns had lost not only their Nazi and German flags, but their German names and their Germans.

As regards studies of the interaction between local and supraregional traditions or trends, Karner's book provides an intriguing glimpse into how Celia Applegate's *A Nation of Provincials* (footnote 3) might look like if written not about Germany's Pfalz, or Palatinate, but about a linguistically and socially far less homogeneous part of Central Europe. Applegate shows how conscious political actors succeeded in making local loyalties within the Palatinate yield fairly smoothly to German national ones; Pfaelzer united more tightly not only with each other, but with a much larger, imagined community. Peter Sahlins' *Boundaries* (footnote 4), in contrast, addresses locally the question of how a state border, over

generations, made Frenchmen out of people on one side and Spaniards out of people on the other, although in the beginning all had been like-minded residents of one and the same valley.

Could one argue that Styria combines the two cases and packs them into a shorter chronological span – to great, albeit confusing effect? Before 1918, and between 1941 and 1945, the duchy belonged to a single country, yet contained two nations in the making (perhaps three, depending on whether one sees Germans and Austrians in Styria as distinct nations or the same nation at different points in time). From 1918 to 1941 and since 1945, Styria has been divided between two states, yet has contained a population interested in various ways at various times in reasserting a common culture. What better place exists in Europe to study the complex dynamic among states, nations, and local loyalties?

#### NOTES

1. Hermann Pirich, *Suedsteirisches Grenzland* (Salzburg-Wien-Leipzig: Bergland, 1939), 102-3.
2. Katherine Verdery, *Transylvanian Villagers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
3. Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials. The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
4. Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries. The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

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