

The Carinthian Plebiscite Issue of 1920

Introduction

The border between Austria and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) was dictated by the Treaty of St Germain under which the major part of the territory of the former Austrian Crownland of Carinthia was allocated to Austria. The border was the Karawanken mountain range, with many Slovenes remaining in Austria. Serbian troops promptly invaded, seeking to force a change in this decision. Three parts of Carinthia (Kanaltal, Seeland, and Mießtal) were handed over to other countries. So far as the Postal Historian is concerned, this included the post offices at Gutenstein, Köttelbach, Leifling, Mieß in Kärnten, Ober Seeland, Prävali, Schwarzenbach, Unter Drauburg, Pontafel, Tarvis, Malborgeth, Raibl, Uggowitz, Saifnitz, Lussnitz; and their associated Postablagen.



Grey = Kanaltal, transferred to Italy;
green = Seeland and yellow = Mießtal, both transferred to the future Yugoslavia;
red = plebiscite zone A; dark blue = plebiscite zone B.



As part of the provisions of the Treaty, a plebiscite was held on 10 October 1920 to decide whether Carinthia should remain as a province of Austria or should be joined with the new Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Legalistically, during the period of the plebiscite the province was not attached to either state, but both Austria and Yugoslavia overprinted stamps for use (and for propaganda).

For the purpose of the plebiscite, the disputed territory was divided into the south, Zone A (comprising the districts of Bleiburg, Rosegg, Ferlach, and Völkermarkt), and the north, Zone B (Klagenfurt area). The plebiscite was to be held first in Zone A, then Zone B three weeks later but only if Zone A had voted to join Yugoslavia. During the plebiscite itself, British and Italian officers kept order and the Yugoslavian troops were ordered by the Supreme Council to place themselves under the orders of the Plebiscite Commission. Everyone over the age of 20 with residential qualifications was entitled to vote. The plebiscite was overseen by an Inter-Allied Plebiscite Commission. The result for zone A was 22,025 votes in favour of Austria which is 59.04% of the votes. "The people had spoken", so in conformity with the Treaty of St. Germain the Austrian victory in this zone rendered a plebiscite in the northern zone unnecessary and the whole region went to Austria. Interestingly, if one presumes that the whole German-speaking minority had voted for Austria, about half the Carinthian Slovenes must have done so too.

The Austrian stamp issue

There was no time for a new design, so Austria printed 19 existing stamps in new colours, some on coloured papers (probably all that was available), and with a black typographed overprint **Kärnten Abstimmung** (ie Carinthia Plebiscite). The narrower low-value stamps were printed on coloured papers, and the low values were comb perforated 12½. The values from 2½ Kronen upwards (ie the Parliament Building design) were imperf on granite paper; as before, the 3, 4, 10 & 20Kr two-colour stamps were printed in two operations; alignment marks were provided at the top of the sheets. The plate numbers are in mirror-image. The 'H' variety is naturally also found on the 1 Krone value, since the 80 heller, 1 and 2 Kronen stamps were those of the previous set. In addition, these three stamps, alone of the set, also display a variety where the final "g" of Abstimmung is set lower than the remainder of the lettering. See table below. All the Parliament values exist in the new colours but without the overprint. "Bedarfsbrief" usage (ie correct franking on a contemporary item) is possible for many values; it is relatively rare and priced accordingly.

An organisation called the Kärntner Heimatdienst was founded in 1920 to further the interests of Austria in general and of German-speakers in Carinthia in particular, especially in the imminent plebiscite. It sought the issue of fund-raising propaganda stamps, which was approved on 9 September 1920. The numbers printed are tabulated below; there was a total of 300,000 complete sets plus various quantities of all values except the 30h & 60h. The stamps were issued on 16 September 1920. The "Handbuch Kärnten 1980" p116 adds that as well as sponsoring the issue, the Kärntner Heimatdienst bought 252,000 of the sets and 28,000 of various values, either at face value or at cost-of-printing; then sold them to the public in Klagenfurt. The remaining 48,000 sets and assorted values were sold at three times face value through the post offices of the northern zone of the plebiscite region in Carinthia. The excess over the face value was used to support a propaganda fund to organise the voting in favour of staying in Austria. The stamps, however, were valid for the whole of Austria up to 10 October 1920, the day of the plebiscite. [Similarly, the Yugoslavs produced and sold overprinted stamps in the southern zone: but they didn't start the process until the day after the Austrian stamps were placed on sale - presumably they were caught out! - so theirs didn't go on sale till 29 September.] During the plebiscite itself, British and Italian officers kept order and the Yugoslavian troops were ordered by the Supreme Council to place themselves under the orders of the Plebiscite Commission. Everyone with residential qualifications over the age of 20 was entitled to vote; the estimated southern-zone electorate was 22,800 'Germans' and 49,600 'Slovenes'. The result was a majority (22,025 vs 15,278) in favour of the area being retained by Austria. In conformity with the Treaty of St. Germain, the Austrian victory in this zone rendered a plebiscite in the northern zone unnecessary and the whole region went to Austria.



ANK	Face	Colour	Number
321	5h	grey on off-white paper	324,000
322	10h	scarlet on pale rose paper	324,000
323	15h	khaki on slightly yellow paper	324,000
324	20h	dark bluish green on blue paper	396,000
325	25h	violet on off-white paper	324,000
326	30h	brown on buff paper	300,000
327	40h	red on slightly yellow paper	324,000
328	50h	dark greenish blue on blue paper	420,000
329	60h	olive on blue paper	300,000
330	80h	red	495,000
331	1Kr	light brown	410,000
332	2Kr	pale blue	430,000
The 2½Kr upwards are in the Parliament design			
333	2½Kr	brownish red on granite paper	302,000
334	3Kr	blue frame, green centre on granite paper	302,000
335	4Kr	red frame, violet centre on granite paper	302,000
336	5Kr	blue on granite paper	302,000
337	7½Kr	green on granite paper	302,000
338	10Kr	green frame, brownish-red centre on granite paper	302,000
339	20Kr	pale violet frame, light brown centre on granite paper	302,000

Propaganda issues

A large number of propaganda issues were produced by the Austrians - and once they realised what the Austrians were up to, by the Yugoslavians also. These are discussed in Appendix IV.

The 30th anniversary



Austria Post issued this set of three on 10 October 1950 to mark the 30th anniversary of the plebiscite.