

In Slovene history writing, the figure of Ferdinand II is often presented in the shadow of Tomaž Hren, the Bishop of Ljubljana, who led the Counter-Reformation committee in Carniola and engaged in fierce conflicts with the Protestant nobility in the Provincial Assembly, yet despite his own fervour in his home region, he actually only implemented Ferdinand's political programme. Ferdinand carried out his Counter-Reformation policy gradually and within legal boundaries, in accordance with the programme formulated in 1598 by the Lavantine bishop Jurij Stobej. This study presents the progress of the Provincial Prince's Counter-Reformation in the case of Carniola, focusing on the period after 1603, when the Archduke had already won a key political victory over the Provincial Estates of the Inner Austrian lands by not confirming the religious concessions from the Pacification of Bruck (1578), and the provinces, including Carniola, had already been combed through by Counter-Reformation committees. Despite the success of the Counter-Reformation, which converted all the Carniolan population to Catholicism except the nobility, the nobles themselves mostly still persisted in the Augsburg Confession and in the period 1604–1609 led a decisive opposition to the Counter-Reformation policy of the court. The Protestant nobility of Carniola, together with their Styrian and Carinthian colleagues, demanded the restoration of the religious concessions, which was flatly rejected by the emperor. In the realm of domestic politics, life was marked by the conflict between the Protestant nobility and Bishop Tomaž Hren, which considerably eased the emperor's position. In the following stage, 1610–1624, the Protestant nobles were rendered politically passive, although the majority still persisted in their faith. Conflicts with the Jesuits calmed down, and the conflict with Bishop Hren also lessened, which indicates the weakening of the Protestant side. Then the Provincial Prince, who had been strengthened by his army's victories in the Holy Roman Empire from 1625 to 1630, finally and decisively took over the initiative. Ferdinand's political and military strength influenced the process whereby the Protestant nobility in Carniola began to cross over into the Catholic confession. The wave of conversions began in 1625 with the Auerspergs converting to Catholicism and reached its peak when the emperor, using a special patent in 1628, commanded the nobles still persisting in Protestantism to convert within one year or else leave the country. Approximately one third of the nobles then left. New Catholic aristocratic families, mostly from Italy and the Military Frontier, moved in. Among the nobles who remained and converted there were many lukewarm Catholics.

A Jesuit chronicle records that 133 persons were considered to have converted during the years 1627–1633; most of these are likely to have belonged to the nobility. In his list (1629) Philipp Hainhofer cited somewhat fewer than 102 aristocratic persons who left Carniola between 1628 and 1629. These included 32 adult males, who cannot all be definitely classed as Carniolan. Nevertheless, on the basis of these data we can deduce that approximately one third of aristocratic countrymen left Carniola, or one quarter of all the members of the Provincial Estates.

Moreover, on the basis of several sources we know that in the period 1630–1635, 36 new countrymen from several noble families (these numbered between 22 and 27) moved into Carniola.