

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 51, No.1 - Spring 2005

Editor of this issue: Stasys Goštautas

ISSN 0024-5089

Copyright © 2005 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



Book Review

Roger D. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion, Lessons from Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, hardcover, 321 pages, bibliography, index.

Roger D. Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence, Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, softcover, 296 pages, bibliography, index.

"How do ordinary people rebel against powerful and brutal regimes?" Roger D. Petersen, Associate Professor of Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, asks this question and searches for an answer in his remarkable study *Resistance and Rebellion*. He approaches the problem from the most basic level - how and why an individual decides to risk his job, his freedom, and sometimes his life in participating in a struggle against an oppressive and, in many cases, alien regime. However, an individual does not live in isolation; he is a member of a community, and his decisions are affected by the community structure and its prevailing values. Thus, the author uses an interdisciplinary approach, relying on insights from psychology, sociology and other social sciences. He examines the threshold or decision points of an individual, with reference to his local, work or school communities in both rural and urban settings.

The author identifies seven threshold points of individual roles in a rebellion. The *Zero level* is the position of neutrality and noninvolvement. *Plus one* is participation in low risk activities of opposition to the regime - scribbling graffiti, attending mass rallies against the regime. *Plus two* involves membership in a locally based armed resistance unit or providing direct support for such a unit and finally, *Plus three* - participation in an armed insurrection or full-time guerrilla unit. There are also corresponding levels of collaboration with the regime. *Minus one* level would encompass activities from participation in regime-sponsored mass rallies to taking up a job or a position in an administration working for the ruling regime. *Minus two* - joining a locally based armed militia unit, *Minus three* - participating in executions of the regime's real or perceived opponents or joining the regime's armed forces. The author then identifies mechanisms, that is, the causal patterns that may determine individual actions in a variety of circumstances. The basic assumptions of his study appear to be simple, derived from common sense and common experiences, but the author develops from these an innovative and sophisticated theory of human behavior in response to repression by an alien and ruthless regime.

The author tests his theoretical schema by applying it to actual cases. His examples range from the Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia through Ukraine, Belorussia (now Belarus), and Montenegro during World War II and the period of subsequent armed resistance against the Soviets. Another set of cases examines the massive demonstrations in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Lithuania during the perestroika period until the collapse of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. But his main example is Lithuania during the period of foreign occupations: from Hitler's annexation of Klaipėda in 1939 until the end of armed resistance against the Second Soviet occupation and then again during the Sąjūdis movement and an open nonviolent struggle for reestablishment of an independent Lithuania.

The author accomplished a daunting task in studying his selected subject. His bibliography indicates that he has consulted all pertinent publications in English on Lithuania during the period under study. He went in to the field and conducted twenty interviews in the United States with emigre leaders of the Lithuanian resistance during the First Soviet and German occupations; he visited Lithuania in 1991 and 1992 and interviewed twenty members of the resistance, as well as bystanders and collaborators, including a member of a Soviet armed militia *istrebiteli* unit.

During the night of 13 January 1991, the author joined an unarmed crowd of Lithuanian people in Vilnius who defended with their bodies the television tower, radio and television studio, and the Parliament building against Soviet tanks and armored personnel carriers. That night, Soviet paratroopers and members of special units killed fourteen unarmed defenders. Hundreds were injured. The author explains why he risked his life: "...I would have been ashamed to be studying resistance and rebellion and forgo such opportunities out of fear." (p. 276, note 8).

The author's studies, visits to Lithuania and extensive interviews resulted in his deep understanding and familiarity with the country's difficult and intricate recent history. His study provides valuable insights into the responses of individuals and Lithuanian society in general to different challenges during the First Soviet, German, and Second Soviet occupations, as well as during the struggle for freedom in 1987-1991. Indeed, it is a valuable study of how ordinary people resist and rebel against oppressive alien regimes.

There are a few misspellings (*Lituanas* should be *Lituanus* p. 154, note 4; p. 156, note 10; p. 305, 308, 310, 312, 313), Namarus River should be Nemunas River (p. 148). Other inaccuracies: the demonstration on 23 August 1987, held to condemn the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, took place in a square in the middle of Old Town in Vilnius, in front of the monument to the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, not in Vingis Park (p. 257); former prime minister Augustinas Voldemaras was arrested and deported to the Soviet Union in June 1940; a putsch against Lithuania's provisional government on 23-24 July 1941 was attempted by his followers, the Voldemarists, without his leadership or participation (p. 143 and 154); not all private Catholic high schools were closed by the Smetona regime; there remained a Jesuit school in Kaunas, a high school run by the Franciscan Fathers in Kretinga and another one operated by the Marian Fathers in Mairjampole (p. 109, note 80); finally, although Lithuanians like to say that of all occupied nations, only Poland and Lithuania had no native SS Legion, the list should be somewhat longer - there was no Serb, Czech, or Greek Waffen SS unit (p. 164). But these are minor mistakes; they cannot detract from the achievements of this incisive and knowledgeable study.

In many aspects, the second book by Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence*, is a continuation of the same study. In this book, the author is concerned with conflict and violence between ethnic groups living in the same country. He endeavors to explain why and how neighbors, who have lived peacefully next to each other, become bitter adversaries in a struggle for supremacy between their respective ethnic groups. He follows an emotion-based approach to compare and assess the different motivations that impel an individual to join violent actions against his neighbors of a different ethnicity during periods of collapse of state power and control. The author identifies four models of processes that motivate individuals to commit violent acts against ethnic others. These emotion-based motivations can be fear, hatred, resentment, or rage; and the study finds that, in most cases, ethnic animosity is inflamed by resentment arising from sudden changes in ethnic status hierarchies. Individuals of a losing ethnicity perceive these changes as unjust and intolerable and, when an opportunity arises, try to regain a higher status level. This explains violent ethnic struggles in many Central and Eastern European countries. It seems that mass movements based on emotions are behind ethnic conflagrations of violence, and instigation by elites is of secondary importance.

In this study, as in the first book, *Resistance and Rebellion*, the discussion of theory is followed by an examination and analysis of concrete cases drawn from several East European countries. The author applies his theory and establishes its validity for the Baltic countries during the revolution of 1905, violence against Jewish populations in Lithuania, Latvia, and Western Ukraine (but not in Estonia or Western Belorussia) in the wake of the 1941 German attack against the Soviet Union and compares it to the bloody conflicts between Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks (Bosnian Moslems), as well as to the expulsion of Albanians from Kosovo during the collapse of Yugoslavia in the last decade of the twentieth century. Two chapters in this section of the book have been contributed by Petersen's graduate students. John Ginkel writes about reconstruction of independent Baltic States and Beth Wilner about Czechoslovakia. Both authors examine the ethnic status changes and the resulting conflicts in these countries.

In the theoretical part of the study, the author emphasizes the emotion-based approach that concentrates individual motivations. It is, therefore, surprising that in the chapter on the reconstruction of independent Baltic States the policies of ethnic discrimination by the governments are put on a par with a spontaneous ethnic violence of the people in other countries or in other periods of the history of the Baltic nations. Ginkel, who has written the chapter on the Baltic States, assumes that establishment of government policies of discrimination is determined by the same emotion-based motivations which move individuals to participate in violent acts against members of other ethnic groups. That might be so, but it would have been helpful if a correspondence of motivations between governments and individuals had been examined and demonstrated.

There is no attempt to determine and define which policies constitute ethnic discrimination and which do not. This is by no means obvious. Ginkel does not mention that there is no discrimination against the Russian minority in Estonia and Latvia. This minority consists of ethnic Russians and their descendants who have lived in those countries before the Soviet occupation. They are all citizens of their countries with full political, social, and ethnic rights. The problem of granting citizenship and the question of what are proper requirements to obtain it, affect only the Soviet-era settlers. The Estonian and Latvian governments insist on a difference between Soviet settlers and the original Russian minority as a matter of principle. International law supports this position, since it forbids deportations of the original population from an occupied country and its resettlement with colonists of the occupying power.

The Russian Federation vehemently denies that the Soviet Union ever occupied the Baltic countries. According to its spokespersons, they joined the Soviet Union voluntarily. Therefore, Russia refuses to acknowledge any difference between the original populations of the Baltic countries and Soviet settlers. This is the basis of the incessant drumbeat of Russian objections to any requirements to obtain Estonian or Latvian citizenship.

Russia complained at the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Council, and the European Union about discrimination against and persecution of Russian-speaking populations in Estonia and Latvia. These international organizations then sent special commissions to explore the status of the unfortunate Russians. After several months, they came back and represented their reports, which invariably find that Estonian and Latvian laws and policies comply with international standards. In a week or two, a Russian representative complains again. Nobody want to argue with a great power, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, thus another commission is sent to Estonia and Latvia. Again, it finds no grounds for the complaint; again, Russia insists that there is an intolerable discrimination. Such a minuet continued for a long time until, apparently, even Russian diplomats got tired of it. They do not ask for international fact-finding missions any more; they simply assert that the human rights of Russian-speaking people are violated in Estonia and Latvia and demand that the European Union take adequate steps to protect them.

What is discrimination? Ginkel's disapproval of a requirement that Soviet-era policemen in Latvia learn the Latvian language, as a condition of their continued employment, expands the definition of discrimination beyond any utility. Would any municipality or state of the United States of America continue to employ a policeman, say, of Mexican descent who refuses to learn English? Would France hire a policeman of Algerian origin who does not speak French? In a democracy cannot a policeman be required to learn the language of the 61.5 percent or 52.0 percent of the general population, or rather has the population to learn the policeman's native language? If we accept such a definition, every country in the world discriminates against its ethnic minorities on the basis of language.

Ginkel cites the dissolution of local governments of Vilnius and Šalčininkai districts after the failed coup in Moscow in 1991 as evidence of Lithuanian hostility and discrimination against the Polish minority in Lithuania. But what alternatives were available to the Lithuanian government at that time? Would a tolerant government have had to maintain a hostile Soviet hard-liner reservation on its territory?

Since the February 1993 elections, a Polish political party dominates the municipal governments of the Vilnius and Šalčininkai districts. These local governments are responsible for education and schools in their districts. Local Lithuanians are a minority there (22.41 percent in Vilnius district and 10.4 percent in Šalčininkai), and they complain about Polish discrimination against them. The district governments maintain only a few, low quality, token Lithuanian schools. Local Lithuanians and those Polish parents, who want their children to be fluent in Lithuanian, demand Lithuanian schools, but their requests are ignored or rejected with the explanation that there are just too few Lithuanians to justify additional Lithuanian schools. Thus, a promotion of Polish language to the detriment of Lithuanian is not at all a groundless objection.

In his two books Petersen convincingly demonstrates that emotion explains motivation on an individual level to resist and rebel against oppressive regimes, as well as to engage in violence against vulnerable ethnic others. This is an innovative and valuable contribution to an understanding of the basic motivating forces behind violent mass movements and actions. However, the task still remains to examine and determine to what extent emotional motivation influences policies and decisions on the governmental level.

Algimantas Gureckas