

COMMENTARY ON "INSTITUTIONAL NATIONALISM" IN LITHUANIA

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In a multinational state such as the Soviet Union, the persistence and growth of nationalistic tendencies among its non-Russian inhabitants adds a new dimension to the set of factors which promote or inhibit change within the Soviet system. The question of nationalism, as noted by Thomas Remeikis, used to be dismissed by Western scholars as an insignificant aspect of Soviet politics.¹ In fact, the nationality question was viewed as a factor impeding the potential liberalization of the Soviet regime. In the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski, "the nationality question acts as one of the major sources of restraint inhibiting the Soviet political elite and other relevant groups from embarking on the road of constitutional as well as broader political reform."² In the economic sphere, the growing centralization of economic planning and administration has led some students of Soviet nationalities to conclude that "union-republics were, by the end of the 1970s, weak representatives for national interests."³

Nevertheless, the very fact that the system has tended to remain inimical to fundamental reforms, coupled with growing economic stringencies, has exacerbated the nationality problem in the Soviet Union. In this context, institutional nationalism is becoming a significant internal force. According to Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, institutional nationalism (or, as she calls it, "orthodox nationalism") has developed with varying degrees of intensity between all union-republic national groups. It has led to a growing conflict between the vested interests of the major republics and the imperatives of All-Union political and economic integration.⁴

Institutional nationalism can be defined as the use of the Soviet system itself to promote national interests vis-a-vis central policies. Specifically, the federal territorial-administrative structure of the Soviet Union, together with the presence of an irreconcilable branch-territorial duality in Soviet planning and management, has created conditions which promote the growth of institutional nationalism. This is most evident in the economic arena where there is overlapping jurisdiction of All-Union and Union-republic administrative organs. The duality of administrative organs not only has permitted the surfacing of local initiatives and plans, but also has created opportunities to criticize, and in certain cases, to circumvent central directives.⁵

Institutional nationalism is a form of "within system" as opposed to "system rejective" opposition.⁶ Having an established administrative-territorial base and a unifying goal, institutional nationalism transcends narrow interest group or factional opposition. It includes a broad spectrum of participants who, while articulating specific concerns which reflect their institutional affiliations, advocate policies which tend to maintain or enhance the position of the eponymous population. In this respect, the underlying motivation of republic decision-makers, as pointed out by Remeikis, is of secondary importance. If a given policy or program is supportive of national interests, it can be considered to be a manifestation of institutional nationalism.⁷

The manifestations and dynamics of institutional nationalism in the non-Russian union-republics remain largely unexplored. As noted by Jerry Hough, "American studies of the nationalities have tended to focus on individual republics and to be more concerned with demonstrating the fact of central control than with exploring variations in the precise degree of control and de facto autonomy."⁸ This lack of research has made the analysis by Remeikis of institutional nationalism in Soviet Lithuania during the 1953-1970 period an important pioneering endeavor. Remeikis pays special attention to the role of institutional nationalism in the economic sphere and discusses tendencies toward economic autarchy.⁹ The concept of economic autarchy, as used by Remeikis, might cause some confusion.¹⁰ Nevertheless, there is no basis to interpret it as an attempt to develop the economy of Lithuania in isolation from the rest of the Soviet Union. In the context of institutional nationalism, economic autarchy has to be understood in terms of the efforts by the republic elite to shape the course of economic development in Lithuania. These efforts for the most part were successful and Remeikis

correctly concludes that "the economic well-being, prosperity, and ethnic identity of the republic are in part a consequence of the efforts."¹¹

Manifestations of institutional nationalism in Soviet Lithuania after 1970 remain to be investigated. The abolishment of the *sovmarkhoz* system in 1965 placed a new emphasis on the branch principle in planning and management. This enhanced the role of the Ail-Union ministries, reduced the prerogatives of republic institutions, and created a number of basic systemic dilemmas. The autarchic behavior of growth-orientated industrial ministries not only hampered cooperation and coordination between functionally related enterprises, but it also made it difficult for republic institutions to resolve problems which cut across the specific jurisdictions of individual ministries and enterprises. This is particularly evident in respect to manpower utilization questions, environmental protection, and the development of the service sector.

As the economy and the standard of living in Soviet Lithuania deteriorated in the late 1970s and early 1980s, criticism of the primacy given to the branch principle in Soviet planning and management increased. A. Drobnyš, the Chairman of the Lithuanian SSR State Planning Committee, has remained an important spokesman for republic interests. In a number of statements made in the republic and Ail-Union press, Drobnyš has focused on the contradictions found between the branch and territorial principles in planning and management.¹² Drobnyš regrets that territorial planning plays a very passive role and that in practice, it is "usually limited to summarizing and refining the branch plan in some territory. Therefore life itself and the interests of increasing the effectiveness of social production requires a change in the established planning practices as well as changes in the procedures and methodology of formulation and approval of territorial plans."¹³ V. Valiukonis, referring to the Lithuanian experience, states that "the practice of regional planning indicates that the branch planning principle is not effective in regional development."¹⁴ According to Valiukonis, this has led to the creation of serious spatial and structural disproportions in the economic development of the republic.¹⁵

Current institutional dissatisfaction in Soviet Lithuania stems from: (1) systemic shortcomings in the centralized system of economic planning and management, and (2) specific problems which arise as a consequence of these systemic shortcomings. In order to resolve these problems, Lithuanian planners not only have advocated an expansion of the legal rights and prerogatives of republic institutions, but also have stressed the necessity of addressing local problems and concerns. This response undoubtedly contains some nationalistic undercurrents. As noted by Martin C. Spechler, "Baits may oppose further industrialization because it brings in more Russians, but the language of debate is environmentalism and solving the labor and housing shortages."¹⁶

1 Thomas Remeikis, *Opposition to Soviet Rule in Lithuania 1945-1980*, (Chicago: Institute of Lithuanian Studies Press, 1980), p. 71.

2 Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Political Implications of Soviet Nationality Problems," in *Soviet Nationality Problems*, ed. Edward Allworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 76.

3 Peter R. Zwick, "Soviet Nationality Policy: Social, Economic, and Political Aspects," in *Public Policy and Administration in the Soviet Union*, ed. Gordon B. Smith (New York: Praeger, 1980), p. 161.

4 Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, "The Study of Ethnic Politics in the USSR," in *Nationalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe*, ed. George W. Simmonds (Detroit: The University of Detroit Press, 1977), p. 22.

5 Thomas Remeikis, "Political Developments in Lithuania During the Brezhnev Era," in *Nationalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe*, ed. George W. Simmonds (Detroit: The University of Detroit Press, 1977), p. 167; Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, "The Dialectics of Nationalism in the USSR," *Problems of Communism* 22 (May-June 1974): 10.

6 Rudolf L. Tokes, "Varieties of Soviet Dissent: An Overview," in *Dissent in the USSR: Politics, Ideology, and People*, ed. Rudolf L. Tokes (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 16-19.

7 Remeikis, *Opposition to Soviet Rule*, p. 71.

8 Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 517.

9 Remeikis, *Opposition to Soviet Rule*, pp. 71-85.

10 Benedict V. Mačiuka, "Opposition to Soviet Rule in Lithuania 1945-1980: A Review Article," *Lituanus* 27 (Winter 1981): 64-65.

11 Remeikis, *Opposition to Soviet Rule*, p. 85.

12 A. Drobnyš, "Science of Management: Vertical and Horizontal," *Pravda*, 14 July 1975, p. 2; translated in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 27 (6 August 1975), p. 13; and A. Drobnyš, "The Science and Practice of Management: The Town is Small," *Pravda*, 21 May 1978, p. 2; translated in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 30 (14 June 1978), p. 13.

13 A. Drobnyš, "Kai kurie šakinio ir teritorinio planavimo tobulinimo klausimai," *Liaudies ūkis*, No. 5 (1979), p. 6.

14 K. Valukonis, "Socialinė infrastruktūra ir negamybinės sferos vystymo planavimas," *Liaudies ūkis*, No. 4 (1978), p. 14.

15 *Ibid.*

16 M. Spechler, "Regional Development in the USSR 1958-78," in U.S. Congress, Joint Economic Committee, *Soviet Economy in a Time of Change*, Vol. 1 (Washington: U.S. Govern. Printing Office, 1979), p. 158.