

Jonas Račkauskas, **Švietimo reforma Lenkijoje ir Lietuvoje XVIII a. (Education Reform in Poland and Lithuania in the 18th Century).**

Vilnius: Mokslo ir Enciklopedijų Leidykla (Science and Encyclopedia Publishers), 1994, 244 pp. with notes and tables.

Dr. Jonas Račkauskas is a professor at Chicago State University and the president of the Lithuanian Research and Studies Center in Chicago. His book is a solid and comprehensive academic monograph about an expression of Lithuania's cultural life that has not yet been closely examined. Dr. Račkauskas focuses on the Educational Commission - virtually the first ministry of education in Europe - and its rather successful implementation of educational reforms which sought to solve the problems of schooling. In Lithuania, some specific aspects of this very important and unique cultural development were examined time and again by M. Lukšienė, A. Piročkinas, A. Šidlauskas (he assisted in the preparation of this book for the press) and others.

The author is not a newcomer to research on this subject. He has examined aspects of 18th century education in various academic publications, such as "Lietuvių tautos praeitis" *Lithuanian Historical Review*, (1971, vol. 3) published by the Lithuanian Historical Society and in the journal *Lituanus* 22:4 (1976). He has also presented papers at the conventions of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Lithuanian Studies and various other venues. Račkauskas is very familiar with pertinent manuscripts preserved in the library of Vilnius University, with documents found in the Central Lithuanian Historical Archives, and with the works of many Polish historians who analyzed aspects of the various Educational Commission's activities. The author pays special attention to historical fact and the observations of scholars who have studied this particular time period. The conclusions that Račkauskas arrives at are independent; they are quite interesting, valuable and significant for the educational historians of today.

The author approaches the problems under examination gradually: he analyzes various developments from the formation of the Lithuanian educational structure up until the abolition of the Jesuit Order, the conditions under which the Vilnius Academy was founded, and he also discusses the educational activities of the Piarist Order. There were many defects in the educational systems existing before the establishment of the Educational Commission. The careful examination and inferences made from these defects, maintains Račkauskas, created the prerequisites and laid the foundations for creating new educational plans suitable for that particular time period, and for implementing the reforms designed by the Educational Commission. The book discusses, at length, the structure and activities of the Educational Commission, which was headed by Ignas Masalskis, bishop of Vilnius, an erudite scholar. Also covered is the work of the Textbook Publishing Society, which functioned under the Commission.

Even now, the suggestions offered by the Educational Commission are topical for school reform. The author devotes most of his attention to topics such as: a discussion of individual commission members of that time along with their projects and suggestions, curriculum, school visitation, and a system for training teachers. The statutes of the Educational Commission stated: "The Commission guarantees to the estate [teachers] tremendous respect and gratitude for their chosen path and their dedication, for everything that is best in them, for their experience and for their service to their country." Would not all of the work of this early Educational Commission be important to the individual dedicated to Lithuanian education or the Lithuanian teacher of today?

Much attention is paid to early education in parish schools, and that is understandable because they were attended by children from many different backgrounds. That is why the Educational Commission sought to establish 2,500 of these schools throughout Lithuania and Poland. The person responsible for this work was the chairman of the Educational Commission, Bishop Masalskis, a defender of public education for the peasantry, a well-known physiocrat, striving to establish a school in every third parish. This determination was prompted by his belief that, "a child's development, thinking and behavior are dependent upon the first experiences of childhood," which are acquired in a parish school.

Especially valuable and scientifically grounded are the author's observations about an education based on folk culture, and the development and maintenance of Lithuanian culture in the Commission's schools. Here, Račkauskas enters into a dispute with those Lithuanian educational researchers who look askance at the activities of the Commission because of its polonization of the Lithuanian nation. The, author discusses the many textbooks that were published for the parish schools and observes that most of them were published in Lithuanian. He draws the conclusion that the native language was mostly taught to the children of ethnographic Lithuania. Polonization, the author states, was promoted in the district schools, where Polish was the only language that was taught and where the textbooks that were available were all in the Polish language. Polonization was not that overt in the parish schools. In addition, as Račkauskas observes, "the peasants were the main group that fostered the Lithuanian language and cultural traditions, thanks to cultural education. This could be due to the peculiarities of the peasants' social class and also their national sentiments."

The author demonstrates the uniqueness of the existence and work of the Educational Commission by analyzing its influence on the educational systems of Chile, the United States, Russia and Prussia. One interesting but obscure fact that the author presents is that the author of Chile's educational reform project of the first part of the 19th century was a Lithuanian, Ignas Domeika. He was an alumnus of the University of Vilnius and later became an eminent professor and rector of the University of Santiago.

There is one thing missing in the book, though - a summary in English and Polish. With this, it could more easily reach the international educational and cultural research market. Undoubtedly, this book belongs there.

Kęstutis Pečkus