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OPPOSITION TO SOVIET RULE IN LITHUANIA 1945-1980

A REVIEW ARTICLE

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Thomas Remeikis, *OPPOSITION TO SOVIET RULE IN LITHUANIA 1945-1980* (Chicago, Ill.: Institute of Lithuanian Studies Press, 1980). Pp. 680.

Soviet sources dealing with interpretations of history of Soviet Lithuania since 1944, generally present a claim that manifestations of resistance to Soviet rule have been limited to the 1944-1950 period. Any discontent, or opposition encountered since that time has been only by a few disgruntled individuals, acting on the basis of their own personal pecuniary considerations, or opposing the system because of cravings of their own unbalanced minds. Claims are generally advanced that there are no objective reasons for popular resistance and opposition.

A substantial volume presenting a weighty collection of evidence effectively countering these claims is the present anthology of documents ably translated and edited by Professor Thomas Remeikis, a political scientist, well known for his editorship and compilation since 1972 of an annual publication *Violations of Human Rights in Soviet Lithuania*.

Dr. Remeikis has intensively studied the Communist Party of Lithuania in action, and has closely followed developments in Soviet Lithuania, particularly as they are reflected in a variety of Lithuanian dissident documents and publications. He, as the editor of the collection, wrote the lengthy introductory essay, setting forth the conceptual-theoretical and the chronological-topical frameworks for the numerous documents included from past and present resistance, opposition, and dissident sources.

The 680 page volume is organized into three major parts. Part I, contains a 157 page essay provided by the editor, which attempts to set forth the analytical framework of the Lithuanian resistance. The essay is further subdivided into four chapters.

In Chapter 1 Dr. Remeikis presents theoretical concepts, basic periodization, and definitions used in the present work, drawing in this regard heavily on the contributions of such American political scientists and sociologists dealing with the phenomena of dissent and revolution, as Rudy Tökes, Ted Robert Gurr, Michael Hechter, and Edward Allworth. Explanations of continuing resistance in Soviet Lithuania are couched here largely in the context of the clash of fundamental values, concepts of relative value deprivation, and of clashing fundamental group interests between the regime on the one hand and the resisters on the other.

In Chapter 2, he summarizes the Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisan (i.e., guerilla) armed resistance to the soviet regime during the 1944-52 period, analyzing the motivations behind it, and summarizing its results.

Chapter 3 focuses on the institutional and cultural national resistance movements during the 1953-1970 period. In this chapter the sources of resistance, its aims and motives are indicated, and the results of opposition during this period discussed.

Finally, Chapter 4, comprising about half of the introductory essay, deals with the great variety of opposition groups emerging since 1970. The editor presents here the circumstances and reasons for their appearance; outlines their main activities; and attempts to classify them on an ideological scale in terms of their demands and programs. He also presents

an overview of Soviet efforts to contain and to limit dissidence in Lithuania, to undercut popular support for it — efforts, which so far, have remained without much success.

The analytical essay provides the context and serves as a useful introduction for the bulk of the volume, namely some 500 pages of documentation which is included in Parts II and III of the book. A total of 74 translated documents are presented, some in full, others as substantial extracts averaging about 6-7 pages for each document included. Part II contains 48 documents dealing with national and political opposition. Part III includes 24 documents illustrating widespread existence of religious dissent in Soviet Lithuania, which forms an important facet of Lithuanian opposition to the regime, spelling out its major modes, substantive demands, and the regime's efforts to deal with it. Finally, a brief Epilogue completes this collection with a political document from 1979, in which general demands for restoration of independent states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are made by a group of signatories, citizens of the three Soviet Baltic republics.

The volume does not include a systematic bibliography, however, over 100 books and articles dealing with aspects of dissent in the Soviet Union in general, and with opposition in Soviet Lithuania, are referred to by the editor either in his essay, or in his introductions to the several parts of the collection, and in the footnotes annotating both the interpretative essay and explaining particular documents.

In the most general sense the present work is a largely successful effort to draw a picture of opposition to the Soviet rule in Lithuania basing it almost exclusively on opposition sources, and at the same time placing it within the stream of contemporary western political science and sociological concepts analyzing resistance, dissidence, and opposition to established authority not only within the Soviet Union, but also elsewhere. In a work of such scope and length it is perhaps inescapable that some interpretations and conceptual formulations dealing with such a complex development over a long period of time are not as accurately chosen as one might have wished, or can be regarded as being of questionable applicability.

For example, in Chapter 1 of editor's introductory essay to the theoretical and historical perspectives, one wonders about the precise historical applicability of the concepts of relative value deprivation, and of group interest conflict to the Lithuanian guerilla armed resistance to the reimposed Russian rule during the 1944-52 period. Can one subsume under the same heading and within the same conceptual framework armed resistance to what was regarded in the popular mind as a foreign occupation of the native country with the more moderate dissidence movements of the 1970's variety? Do concepts of theoreticians of revolution such as Ted Gurr, to whom the editor acknowledges an intellectual debt, really contribute to the more meaningful explanation of an armed resistance to a foreign occupation? It is granted that the theoretical framework used is more applicable to the situation in Lithuania since 1953; but one wonders if these theoretical considerations do not pale before the realities of 1944-52: the intensive, uncompromising, total resistance to the occupant, and the harsh treatment meted out to all those who in guerilla's eyes acted as collaborators and quislings to the regime, as the text of Document No. 12 (The Penal Code of the Guerillas) itself indicates? Surely, it was then not a question solely of relative deprivation of values, or a clash of limited, and therefore mutually compromisable group interests, but a question of self defense and a struggle for sheer survival. The hope was to establish sovereignty over Lithuanian territory, which was regarded by the guerillas — and by most of the local population — as having been brought under a foreign occupation controlled from Moscow, i.e., as not being under control of own government at all.

Also one should keep in mind, and the introductory essay does not make it sufficiently clear, that not only armed resistance but for that matter even mild criticism of Stalin and of his local minions during the immediate postwar period, called forth an immediate and most drastic retribution not only to the resisters and critics personally, but also to their family members and friends. The principles of the Cheka, enunciated by Dzerzhinsky and Lacia at the time of the formation of this organization, supported by Lenin during the 1918-1921 period, and practiced by Stalin during the 1934-1938 period in Russia, were being fully applied in the post-1944 period in the Lithuanian countryside — including mass arrests and deportations of real and of even just suspected "class enemies" and of their potential supporters.

It is only with the death of Stalin and the demise of the most harsh attributes of the rule, which are commonly associated with the "cult of personality", that the Soviet system grew "softer" in its treatment of opposition. Only since 1953, under Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's regimes, Gurr's, Moore's, and Hechter's concepts and analytical categories become more realistically applicable to the Lithuanian situation, and begin to be more helpful in accurately depicting the motivations behind the Lithuanian resistance to the pressures of the local Communist Party regime and to their ultimate directors at the Center — in Moscow.

In Chapter 2 of the introduction, dealing with the armed guerilla warfare, I also miss a clearer specification of those who did resist, and also a more precise discussion as to how this armed resistance was combated by local authorities. It is true that the influence of Western powers during the 1949-52 period is stressed by the editor; but the question still remains open about the resistance events of 1944-49, by the end of which period, the hopelessness of the continuation of armed struggle was pretty much perceived by everybody. Also the Suslov tactic of attempting to break armed resistance through mobilization and utilization of local population supporting the Soviet rule is not given its historical due. It is true that NKVD-NKGB (since 1946 relabeled MVD-MGB) troops were freely used in combing the forests and locations of suspected major guerilla concentrations. However, local security, point defense, patrolling and pursuit of smaller guerilla units, was substantially accomplished by the employment of the hated local "istrebiteli" (destroyer) units, in an attempt to involve native regime supporters into the armed struggle as much as possible, and thus to diminish the onus that the Lithuanian

population would place on the Russians for fighting with and killing Lithuanians. A tactic which, by the way, has been used elsewhere, most recently in Afghanistan.

Also, if the influence of Western intelligence agencies on Lithuanian guerillas is stressed during the final period of armed resistance, then why not — for reasons of historical balance — the influence, albeit moderate, of the German intelligence agencies during the early period of October, 1944 — May, 1945? Documentation of that is available in the volumes which the editor himself has cited in other contexts.

In Chapters 3 and 4 of the introduction the editor places the emphasis on the advances of technology: accessibility of typewriters, copying machines, and the like, on balance facilitating dissidence activities during the Sixties and the Seventies. To my mind improvements in technology were really a double-edged sword in this instance. Admittedly, there were improvements in technology favoring dissident movement during this period, but one should not forget also that the rising electronic sophistication in listening and recording apparatuses, the availability of computers for retaining and centrally controlling information, tended to facilitate controls, and to make surveillance and information gathering that much more effective. In my view, the already mentioned post-Stalin relaxation of secret police activities, and the diminution of the harshness of penal measures, prepared the ground much more effectively for the increased local dissidence, resistance, and information spreading activities. It was in the Sixties and the Seventies that for the first time in Lithuania it became possible to publicly express views on individual and constitutional rights, and after expression of such views, provided this was done in a measured and "cultured" manner, not to find oneself feeding white bears.

What is further really remarkable about the continuation and the increased spread of opposition during the Sixties and the Seventies is the intensification of that movement in the face of obviously improving overall economic conditions, which just proves, that regime's problems in Soviet Lithuania — just as elsewhere — are not soluble in simple economic, materialistic terms. As Czeslaw Milosz in his *The Captive Mind* suggested a generation ago, human beings do not live by bread alone, and therefore the Communist Party not only in Lithuania, but also throughout all areas of its control, is constantly confronting the damnable question: "What does a man really want?" The answer is suggested by this volume and the documents contained therein: on balance, he wants individual freedoms for *public* expression of his thought; he wants artistic creativity, political activity, unfettered opportunity to bring up his children in the faith and a system of values that he chooses: and he does not want to live in an army- barracks-type atmosphere where every move in the areas just listed is prescribed and proscribed by self-appointed, omnipotent controllers.

The editor places considerable emphasis on the economic autarkic aims as being significant aspects of the local intellectual and political elite opposition and cites documentation to support this point of view. That protests on certain aspects of local economic development were an issue between regime's plans and the views of the local elites during the Sixties is incontrovertible. However, their focus was less directed towards achieving any measure of local economic autarky — which given Soviet economic planning strictures is simply unattainable — but was *publicly* more directed towards avoidance of increased pollution of republic's natural environment. Only very indirectly, heavy industrial, and therefore almost by definition more polluting development, has been objected to. In areas of expansion of chemical industries, in building large powerplants utilizing fossil and nuclear fuels, with perhaps the *hidden* thought that such expansion might also serve as an excuse, or perhaps an attractive magnet, for the influx of additional non-Lithuanian labor force, and thus might lead to an unwelcome increase in Russification levels. However, on this score local Lithuanian elites have been much more circumspect in expressing their point of view than e.g., their counterparts in Latvia, where similar, but more openly expressed suggestions stated in 1959, resulted in a wholesale purge of important party and soviet leadership. After that the whole Latvian party and state leadership was increasingly placed in the hands of largely russified Latvians, who apparently were more inclined to do the local bidding by Moscow without any subsequent critical comments which could be even vaguely associated with the extremely dangerous and severely punishable charges of "bourgeois nationalism" or "excessive localism."

It must be pointed out that objectively the construction of large industrial plants and of highly specialized enterprises in Soviet Lithuania is not necessarily detrimental to the local economy and to the local living standards. The key question here, as elsewhere in any regional economic setting, is primarily the ability of the region to maintain equivalent exchanges between itself and the rest of the larger economic unit. It is because of actually existing non-equivalent goods exchanges that the living standard of the local population is lowered. Under the current Soviet economic rules of the game, this is largely an unresolved question of an establishment of an effective distribution system, and of its efficient functioning, rather than a problem of local goods production. Specifically, it is the shortages in supply of locally needed and desired goods to which the local population, including the dissidents, object. These objections become more intense in times of increased popular hardships, in the past caused in part by regime's mistaken agricultural policies, e.g., Khrushchev's "kukuruzchina" in the Fifties; and more recently largely due to prolonged weather vagaries.

One of the weaknesses of editor's analysis of the Lithuanian opposition to Soviet rule, and of the documentation this work provides, rests of necessity on the fact that he is forced to discuss, and can provide extensive documentation only for the major instances, as it were, of institutional and group resistance. In the nature of things he understates the existence of other aspects of continued largely underground resistance by individuals, which can be largely expressed through unpublicized bureaucratic means: footdragging, lukewarm implementation of centrally issued, but locally unpopular orders and instructions; of "bending" central laws and rules in order to protect local interests on national-ethnic grounds. The editor does not discuss within the context of resistance, the underlying oppositionist feelings and their day to day

manifestations among the Lithuanian youth. Is this opposition only dramatically "occasional" as in the events surrounding Kalanta's death in 1972, or the events in Vilnius in October, 1977? Or is it really more deep-seated, acutely felt, but expressed on an individual basis? It is true that extensive published documentation of such underlying opposition is lacking, but one could perhaps reconstruct a more accurate picture based even on available fragmentary evidence. It is interesting to note that the opposition documents cited do not anywhere analyze the underlying feelings of the Lithuanian "masses". It is a significant omission, because if anyone, then surely the local dissidents cited could have a much better feel of the pulse of the people, and yet they give no analysis, nor documentation, of this very important phenomenon. In that sense, Soviet publications in their statements continuing over a long period of time, are more instructive, because it is through the thrust and direction of their own propaganda and political socialization efforts that they disclose the existence of weaknesses and of continued lack of receptivity on the part of the ostensibly "silent majority" towards whose persuasion this propaganda and socialization has been directed by the party for decades.

Another weakness in the introductory essay, it seems to me, is the lack of attempted evaluation of gradation of resistance to things Russian and Soviet. Are all ills, shortages, policies, equally strenuously and intensely opposed? Or is there a detectable gradation among them, and if so, in what direction? What are the roots of the very much pronounced anti-Russian feelings among the populace at large, and particularly among the presumably more politically socialized Lithuanian youth? Do the regime's policies and its emphasis on "internationalist upbringing" bring any real results in the light of spreading opposition movements? Granted, fully documentable answers to these fundamental questions are very difficult to give, but even an attempt at them would have allowed the establishment of more accurate parameters of both publicly expressed and the more frequently privately felt — and within limits of safety and prudence acted upon — deep seated Lithuanian attitudes of opposition to the Soviet rule.

As far as the anthology-documentary parts of the volume are concerned, one must point out that they have been compiled from a number of Soviet official and opposition sources. Published Soviet security police interrogation materials, resistance and dissident communications, proclamations and programmatic statements by political and religious dissidents are utilized. The translations into English appear to be accurate, the style of presentation and the terminology used, with very few exceptions, is happily chosen. About three quarters of the documents included stem from the period since 1970, which is understandable, since this corresponds to the very much increased availability of dissident materials from Soviet Lithuania.

Unfortunately, from the point of view of a historian, some of the documents, especially those from the 1944-52 period, have been selectively abbreviated in this publication. The editorial introductions in most instances state in advance that this has been done. However, the texts of the translations do not properly show how much of the material contained in the originals has been omitted — a task which could have been relatively easily accomplished editorially through utilization of appropriate ellipses, brackets, etc. These omissions are regrettable for two reasons. One, the future likelihood of repeated full translation and publication of documents included here is very small. Two, the value of the documentary collection as presented is diminished for a future reader, especially one who does not have a command of the Lithuanian language, and might want to use this collection as a primary research source. Since the omitted parts: sentences, paragraphs, or even pages, are not editorially indicated, some of the translated texts (cf., e.g., Document No. 1) tend to show a degree of continuity and congruity of argument, which is not necessarily present in the original.

It must be added, that the translations of documents as cited do not depart from the main intent and thrust of their original arguments. As such they are fully illustrative and useful for proper appreciation of the tone and the content of resistance and dissidence materials, but that their selective editing, in the form it was done, diminishes the value of included documents as sources for subsequent historical research and citation.

The value of documentary collection increases for the period of the 1970's, since it appears that most of the important extant documents illustrating dissidence activities in Lithuania have been included here. This represents a boon to the researcher, who might not have a sufficient command of the Lithuanian or Russian languages, or who might lack easy access to the original documents.

The scholarly supporting apparatus provided in the collection is impressive. The footnotes, supplied by the editor, are informative, and give useful introductions to the individual documents, state the circumstances of their original publication, and give useful brief information on the names of key participants and on the context of events. A considerable number of good quality photographs, dealing with guerilla resistance and dissident activities, add a visual impact to the text. An index of names and of authors cited is appended, but there is no topical index.

The volume does not include even a brief, systematic bibliography of secondary works: books or articles in Western languages touching upon resistance and dissidence aspects covered here, e.g., from *Lituanus*, *Acta Baltica*, or the publications of the Association of the Advancement of Baltic Studies. An inclusion of such a bibliography would have further improved the reference value of the work. It is true that editor's footnotes contain scattered references to such material, but these references, together with useful editor's remarks on the availability of primary sources, only partially alleviate this shortcoming.

Another useful aid to the reader would have been an inclusion of a table of frequently used abbreviations in the texts of the cited documents themselves. Although they are explained by the editor at the time of their first use, memory of them tends

to fade when ploughing through several hundred pages of text, which leads to annoying hunting for the first place in which they had been originally described.

In conclusion, one can state that the publication of this work of Professor Remeikis builds a strong, well documented case, for the existence of widespread past resistance and present opposition to the Soviet regime in Lithuania. As such it can be successfully used to counterbalance effectively past and present Soviet assertions, misinterpretations, and omissions of this phenomenon from their own publications.

It also serves as a useful introduction to a more balanced picture of present political realities in Lithuania, which can be utilized by those interested, who do not happen to have sufficient command of the native tongue, nor an easy access to the Lithuanian versions of the documents cited.

Thirdly, it is a creditable scholarly effort introducing Lithuanian resistance and dissidence movements into the general framework of the dissidence in the Soviet Union as a whole, using concepts and analytical tools of Western scholarship.

And, finally, as a carefully prepared and effectively presented documentary collection it serves as an illustration not only of Lithuanian continued opposition to the Soviet rule over the past generation in the narrow sense, but also as a valuable illustration of the general trends in actual national nationality and religious policy in the Soviet Union, and of the actual operation of Soviet federalism in practice.