



Michael Fleming. *Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland, 1944-1950.* BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies. London: Routledge, 2010. 224 pp. \$145.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-47651-5.



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M. Fleming: Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland, 1944-1950

The bibliography of works devoted to nationalism and ethnic issues in East Central Europe after the Second World War consists of hundreds of titles. One could fill several library shelves with books solely on Russian nationalism, ethnic consciousness in GDR or national communism in the Romania of CeauÅescu. Although the notions of nation, independence, national interest, and national treason are basic for the comprehension of the last two hundred years of Poland's history, Polish nationalism in the communist period has not been a preferred subject of English speaking authors. There are more works in German. And since it seems quite impossible to omit the subjects in reflection over the history of communism in Poland, works discussing the issues are extremely needed and long awaited. This difficult task was now taken on by Michael Fleming, who centers his interest on the years 1944-1950.

This period was crucial for communist nationalism in Poland. Its main foundations were defined, and its threads entered into the legitimization strategy of Polish communists for good. The Polish national appearance, which was so willingly spotted by the ruling, was

to convince the society that the government was of said national character, which proved to be of special importance in a period of time when displacements of Polish, Belorussian, German and Ukrainian people took place, based on the decisions of Yalta and Potsdam. Poland transformed from being a country rich in ethnic minorities before the war, into a practically one-nation country after the war.

The question of legitimization of power using national phraseology, symbolism and, to a wider extent, nationality policy, in the period directly following the war is the main subject of Michael Fleming. The opening pages of the book are devoted to the wider context of the Polish cause after 1939, mainly the policy of the Allies and their game over Poland against Moscow. The introduction reaches even further back, to the pre-war period and shows the evolution regarding the attitude towards the national cause of Polish communists. It is important to notice that they initially denied the genuineness of national sentiments, perceiving them as a manifestation of "false consciousness", and of "bourgeois nationalism". Remaining faithful to Rosa Luxembourgå's

testament, the communists did not associate the postulate for national independence with the revolution's slogan. A radical ideological turn took place in 1935 under the auspices of a growing threat from the side of Hitler's Germany. Since then the communists began to depict themselves as the only defenders of Poland's independence. The party line was further strengthened after the outburst of the Soviet-German war. In 1942 the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) was established, whose ideological declarations were practically filled with national phraseology.

Throughout the book, the reader will find a shortened description of diplomatic negotiations, which in consequence led to post-war displacements of people. Fleming traces the gradual process of cooling of the British positive feelings concerning their former 'number one ally'. He also describes the process of displacements, which frequently were dramatic, carried out in the conditions of post-war poverty by a country that was not at all prepared for it in terms of organization. People usually travelled, often for a month or so without running water, in hot weather, rain, not infrequently together with farm animals, all of which was both physically and psychologically exhausting. The repatriates from the East were encamped for weeks at little railway stations which were not able to host masses of people. This way 1.5 million Poles left the territories incorporated by the USSR between the years 1945-1947, and in the opposite direction, to the East, 36,000 Belorussians left, and 482,000 Ukrainians. During the same period displacements of the German population from the Reich's territory which was incorporated into Poland took place, which were especially brutal in the initial period. Polish people were returning from Germany and other European countries. Poland's territory served also as a stepping stone in the journey of Polish citizens of Jewish origin, who managed to survive in the USSR. The majority of them left Poland and emigrated to Palestine. This part of the book can hardly be treated as cutting-edge (the subject of displacements has been thoroughly discussed in literature), but it constitutes an important background for further reflection.

In order to explain post-war group behavior, including ethnic violence, Fleming uses the social anger conception, taken from David Ost. David Ost, *Defeat of Solidarity. Anger and Politics in Post communist Poland*, London 2005. Social anger is in his perspective the result of structural, economic and political tensions, organized by political actors in order to achieve various political objectives. It can take many forms, but not any form. Even though social anger is essentially connected to the

financial situation, its character and direction can also be influenced by culture, class divisions, and current political situation. Fleming draws attention to, among others, psycho-social consequences of the World War, the sharpening of national identification. But most of all, the author emphasizes the lack of public support for the communists, who, reaching for national slogans, were trying to break the hostility of the Polish people against the new regime associated with Moscow.

The post-war social anger resulted from many circumstances. One of the most important factors was the acute feeling of defeat. The fall of the Warsaw Uprising and the destruction of Poland's capital caused an enormous shock. In the course of the previous five years, Polish people kept themselves alive believing in victory. All their collective effort was centered around the anticipated defeat of Germany and the reconstruction of an independent and justly governed country. They believed that the nightmare of occupation, filled with hunger, fear and ill-treatment, would all come to an end one day. The Polish people also believed in their Anglo-Saxon allies. The failure of the uprising, accompanied with the cynical attitude of the Red Army, the installation of the new communist government - it all together shattered the hopes, raised the awareness of hopelessness and the national tragedy dominated.

The years 1944-1947 were the time of 'the second occupation' for Poland. Political repressions were of massive character, thousands of people were sent to Siberia or put to prisons across Poland. Soviet stragglers committed numerous robberies and rapes. In certain areas of the country there was regular civil war. The political party with the largest support, the Polish People's Party (PSL), was also hit by repressive measures. Its leader, Stanisław Mikołajczyk, was forced to leave the country in secret in 1947. The situation led to concealed anger, especially since expectations concerning stabilization and order were enormous. However, Fleming does not focus solely on the political causes of the anger. He rightly points out the enormous economic difficulties resulting from war destruction. Many regions of the country were threatened by famine. Workers often were not paid their salaries. A land reform was carried out in the countryside, peasants saw it as a test before collectivization. Another cause of social anger that can be added to the list was the monetary reform in January 1946, which was perceived by the society as thievish; and which admittedly prevented hyperinflation, but at the same time it deepened pauperization of the society. Among the group of mercantile and industrial work-shops owners, there

was anxiety and anger aroused by the nationalization of the industry, which gained momentum in the beginning of 1946. As it was written in the post-war press: "The atmosphere, in which we are still living, is charged with electricity. The storm around us has stopped, but what is the worst the storm inside us is still (keeps on) roaring." Zofia Zelska-Mrozowiecka, *Nie bAdÅ°my tacy surowi*, "Dziennik BaÅtycki", 15.06.1945.

In this context it is not surprising that the Polish Worker's Party (PPR) which was small in numbers of members and devoid of social support decided to continue the national line. In the book reviewed one can find numerous examples of communists' propaganda filled with nationalistic contents. Fleming does not limit his interpretative perspective like for instance Jan Tomasz Gross who focuses in his works exclusively on Polish anti-Semitism. He rightly points to the dramatic context of the years 1944-1947, and shows that the post-war aggression and anger were not directed exclusively against the Jews, but also against other minorities: Belorussians, Germans, and Ukrainians. On the territories which had formerly belonged to the Reich, polonization was organized: German names were erased, and all manifestations of German culture were removed. Subjective purges arising from the ranks of combatants hit Belorussians and Ukrainians. Squads of independence underground burnt villages and murdered civilians. The post-war atmosphere of chaos, insecurity, and continuing civil war had a large impact on the violent behavior. In cities, anti-Semitic pogroms occurred. Fleming asks the ques-

tion: why did the PPR tolerate widespread subjective violence? He challenges the most popular answer, that the party could do nothing else, since it was small and not in full control of the situation. PPR on the other hand strengthened its position with a divide et impera-policy. But in fact, the communist party's position was rather weak, especially in the summer of 1945, and the country was on the verge of anti-communist revolt. On the other hand, the anti-German feeling and the hostile attitude particularly against Ukrainians and Jews, who were accused of supporting communism, enabled PPR to orientate social anger in a direction convenient for the party.

Fleming needlessly sets the caesura on the year 1950. It is commonly accepted that the new period, also in the history of national policy, began with Stalinist acceleration, which took place in 1948, like in other countries of the Eastern Block. The prolongation of the time perspective for "Communism. Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland", seems to be unnecessary, since it caused certain strands to be treated in a superficial manner. This stands primarily for a wider discussion over psycho-social consequences of the war. Another element missing is a comparison between social emotions in Poland and what could be observed in other countries, not only within the Eastern Block region, but also in the West. A high level of aggression, the lack of resilience, sourness, the feeling of defeat, ethnic violence were not only the Polish people's experience. Nevertheless, summing up, Fleming's work will have a significant place on our "nationalism shelf".

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