H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Hannes Leidinger, Verena Moritz. *Gefangenschaft, Revolution, Heimkehr: Die Bedeutung der Kriegsgefangenenproblematik für die Geschichte des Kommunismus in Mittel- und Osteuropa 1917-1920.* Wien: Böhlau Verlag/Wien, 2003. 754 S. EUR 85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-205-77068-8.

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Published on HABSBURG (March, 2004)

Prisoners of War and Communism

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During the World War I era, about 8,500,000 to 9,000,000 prisoners of war (POWs) were captured on all fronts. Perhaps two-thirds of them were captured on the "eastern front." The Russians took more than 2,000,000 Austro-Hungarians of various ethnic identities, 167,000 Reich Germans, and about 50,000 Ottoman subjects. The Habsburg Monarchy captured about 2,000,000 Russians and the German Reich held around 3,000,000. The fate of the POWs in Russian hands was the most tragic. Forty per cent of them died or remained missing at the end of the war, revolutions, and civil war that destroyed the tsarist empire and left a pariah state in control of Russia. War, famine, and revolution also destroyed the Habsburg Monarchy and the German Empire but data from their successor states indicate much lower mortality among their POWs

According to the authors of this large and important work, these data and the intricate social, economic, and political processes they represent enable new interpretations of the closing phases of World War I. They call for re-evaluation of the roles of POWs in shaping successor states of the Russian and German Empires and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and revolutionary movements within them.

POW captors seldom had facilities to accommodate tens or even hundreds of thousands of hungry, exhausted, wounded prisoners. Accordingly POWs suffered grave privations and heavy mortality during the first year of the war, before their captors could find adequate ways to care for them. Thereafter the captor states with varying degrees of efficiency administered care and arranged employment of POWs. Those captured early in the war endured long years of captivity and isolation from familiar environments. This tested capacity for survival and remolded personalities. Adolescents grew into men, young men matured, middle-aged men grew older quicker and less gracefully than they might have imagined. Conditions in camps and other places of captivity, such as farms, factories, and mines, hardened some, weakened some, and destroyed others. In time, routines of daily existence absorbed their attention and redefined their social roles and concepts of self. Lost contact with families and familiar places isolated them and left

them vulnerable to so-called "barbed-wire fever" which replaced energy and hope with lethargy and cynicism. Fear that they had been abandoned plus contact with persuasive revolutionaries led many to forget that POWs were still soldiers[1] bound by general orders of homeland authorities

In the deadly accountancy of war, POWs were subtracted from home forces and reckoned as casualties. Yet they still burdened resources of their captors, who fed, sheltered, transported and guarded them. Captors supposedly bore the short-run costs of this arrangement. They hoped to recover some of the costs from the enemy through some sort of ad hoc transfer of funds or, should they win the war, from reparations. Meanwhile, they could use POW labor to replace shortages created by the war. International standards established at The Hague conferences of 1899 and 1907 stipulated that officer POWs should not be required to work and that the captors should pay them salaries to cover their living expenses. Sergeants and common soldiers received no salaries and had to be fed and housed at the captor's expense, but they could be forced to work (theoretically on non-strategic employment) for which they received wages. When the captors could not or would not provide for the prisoners, neutral agencies could bring in food, medical supplies, and mail to the POWs.

In a conflict as massive and desperate as World War I these practices seem absurd. Hardened war leaders were committed to disruption of the enemy's forces and destruction of its state, even starvation of its people if necessary. Why would they even consider putting money and food supplies for POWs under control of an enemy who could seize much or all of it? Why would they protect burdensome enemy POWs in their homeland or help their own soldiers in enemy hands whose labor served the economy and hence the war effort of the foe? The short answer is: reciprocity. Each side came to depend heavily on the labor of its captives. Each side practiced or was trapped into schemes that seemed to protect POWs until their captors could be defeated, destroyed or forced into revolution, leaving the prisoners with scant means of survival.

Researching both sides of reciprocal action can be awkward and balanced history of POWs in central and eastern Europe has been hard to discover. Lack of interest and linguistic skills by scholars, journalists, publishers and readers; dispersal and destruction of sources caused by war and political tumult; distortion and concealment of data by memoirists and political regimes, concentration by researchers on blame-seeking topics– all drew historians' attention away from POWs and rendered them ignorable. Since the 1980s there has been a rise of interest in POWs during World War I and the revolutions associated with it. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its client states in the 1990s raised cultural hopes for open access and scholarly exchange between west and east.

By this time young scholars with multilingual skills were interested, prepared, and authorized to exchange historical perspectives and to research archival sources long concealed or ignored. They continue to produce important studies of POWs in Russia, Germany, and the Habsburg Monarchy. Reinhard Nachtigal, Alon Rachamimov, Georg Wurzer, Hannes Leidinger, Verena Moritz, Yucel Yanikdag, and others are now expanding the fund of knowledge and refining the language of discourse. [2] They are exploiting archives and engaging new concepts and methods peculiar to investigation of war captivity. They are seeking new answers to major questions about the World War I era of international war, revolution, civil war, and failed peace. They are writing first-class history.

Leidinger and Moritz are affiliated with the *Institut fÃ¼r Zeitgeschichte* at the University of Vienna and have collaborated on other projects. Here they describe and analyze the experiences and organizational environments of three profound shocks endured by Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war. These were: 1) captivity which isolated them from previous ways of life; 2) revolution in "host" countries which forced them to take sides and to modify their own ideals and identity; 3) repatriation into transformed homelands where they had to seek new ways to guide or be guided. The book contains an enormous fund of information about these experiences and ties them to a specific question of European history: How did World War I POWs affect the origin and early development of Communism in central and eastern Europe?

The authors divide the writing tasks and attach their names to the chapters and subchapters they contribute. Leidinger presents the overall rationale, emphasizing the Russian side; Moritz takes the Central-Powers scene. Leidinger uses Russian as well as "western" archives and publications to narrate the story of "internationalist" POWs of pro-Bolshevik conviction who were mobilized to help save Bolshevik power in Russia and who were later charged to return to their homelands to spread revolutionary ideals and power. Moritz details eastern-front

military operations that "collapsed" whole armies and dumped hundreds of thousands of captives into enemy hands. She also shows the efforts of captors on both sides to organize the care of POWs and describes prevailing conditions in German and Austro-Hungarian camps. She has an impressive chapter on confinement of returnees from Russia who were "quarantined" to prevent "bacilli of bolshevism" from entering the homelands!

A principle thesis of the book is that Internationalists, particularly Hungarian POWs, contributed significantly to Bolshevik victory in the Civil War of 1918-1920, even though their service was mostly behind the firing lines, holding positions taken by combat troops. Bela Kun organized Internationalists in Russia, set up a short-lived Bolshevik-style state in 1919 in Hungary, and was a founder of the Comintern. The book contends that estimates of Kun's historical significance should be upgraded, as should other returnees such as Matyas Rakosi, German Communist Ernst Reuter, Yugoslav revolutionary Nikola Kovacevic and others. There is only passing mention of Josip Broz Tito, who rose higher, held more power, and lasted longer than any other alumnus of Russian POW captivity.

Leidinger and Moritz rely heavily on Austrian and Russian archives and have mastered published documentation and literature based on American, British, French, German and Hungarian sources. They have researched newspapers, diaries and other personal history sources to augment official documents, hoping thereby to avoid too much "history from the top". They present a full bibliography, copious footnotes, excellent photographs and a good index. Their book could use some good maps.

This book addresses a common shortcoming of war history, that is, weak continuity between wartime conditions, war-induced collapse of regimes, and remnants of turmoil after peace has been concluded. It takes effort and imagination to discover such links when all states that began fighting on the eastern front lost the war. Those states had revolutions or drastic "regime changes" which destroyed, disrupted, and concealed documentation and purged or corrupted such vehicles of historical memory as schools and universities, libraries, social societies, and newspapers. By presenting prisoners of war as active historical figures during and after World War I, Hannes Leidinger and Verena Moritz have created a major work that belongs in every research library

Notes

[1]. I use army terminology to simplify the narrative. Naval and air force personnel as well as certain categories of civilians with POW rights are included.

[2]. See Reinhart Nachtigal, *Die Murmanbahn: Die Verkehrsanbindung eines kriegswichtigen Hafens und das Arbeitspotential der Kriegsgefangenen (1915 bis 1918)* (Grunbach: Greiner, 2001); Alon Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front* (Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers, 2002); Georg Wurzer, "Die Kriegsgefangenen der MittelmÃ¤chte in Russland im Ersten Weltkrieg," PhD Dissertation, University of TÃ¼bingen, 2000; Hannes Leidinger, "Zwischen Kaiserreich und RÃ¤temacht: Die deutschÃ¶sterreichischen Heimkehrer aus russischer Kriegsgefangenschaft und die Organisation des Ã¶sterreichischen Kriegsgefangenen- und Heimkehrwesens 1917-1920," master's thesis University of Vienna, 1995; Verena Moritz, "Gefangenschaft und Revolution: DeutschÃ¶sterreichische Kriegsgefangene und Internationalisten in Russland 1914 bis 1920" master's thesis University of Vienna, 1995; Yucel Yanikdag, "Ottoman Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914-22," Journal of Contemporary History 34 (1999), pp. 69-85.

Citation: Gerald H. Davis. Review of Leidinger, Hannes; Moritz, Verena, *Gefangenschaft, Revolution, Heimkehr: Die Bedeutung der Kriegsgefangenenproblematik für die Geschichte des Kommunismus in Mittel- und Osteuropa 1917-1920.* HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. March, 2004.

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