

Wiktor Marzec, *Rebelia i reakcja. Rewolucja 1905 roku i plebejskie doświadczenie polityczne* [Rebellion and Reaction. The Revolution of 1905 and the Plebeian Political Experience], Universitas, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź and Kraków, 2016, 236 pp.; series: Horyzonty nowoczesności, 118

Wiktor Marzec's background is clearly reflected in his recent book: he is a sociologist, rather than a historian. Although he discusses events that occurred more than a hundred years ago, *Rebellion and reaction* is not a classical historical study in its broad inclusion of philosophical issues – and, certain theoretical ambitions. As emphasised by the author in the conclusive section, his monograph covers the period in which the ethnic concept of nation was taking shape – to remain prevalent in Poland to this day. Hence, the proposed findings might, as Marzec believes, be of some relevance for the later (and present-day) political life in Poland.

The 'plebeian political experience' is, expectedly, the focus of this study. Central to this experience was the political mobilisation of masses, which took place on such scale for the first time during the Russian Revolution of 1905. The said mobilisation is investigated from a triple standpoint, reflected in the tripartite arrangement of the book. The first part ('Rebellion') describes the process of spontaneous, bottom-up mobilisation of workers, who in a revolutionary situation get self-organised, put forth their postulates, and take action not limited to political considerations but extending to cultural and educational aspects. The second part ('Revolution') discusses the political parties and organisations in the time of the Revolution: their stance towards the workers, and the ways in which these parties/organisations tried to influence them; the workers' issues in the programmes of these parties/organisations. Finally, the third part ('Reaction') focuses entirely on the National Democracy and the evolution of this political group's attitude toward social democratisation that stemmed from the revolutionary developments. The basic problem addressed in section part is the National Democracy's departure from the

democratic ideals advocated by its followers in the pre-revolutionary period and adoption of elitistic ideas; connected with this is the replacement of this organisation of the former conservative groupings in the political arena.

The first part is probably the most interesting section from the standpoint of 'traditional' historiography. For the most part, it analyses leaflets from the Revolution period. The author considers the extent to which such a specific type of source can inform us about the senders *as well as* the recipients; that is, how deep an insight can be into the psyche, worldview, and expectations of the 'no-source-generating' strata, represented by the leaflet readers. True, such an approach implies the assumption that the compilers of the leaflet messages – the vast majority of whom were educated individuals associated with different political parties – had some idea about what the expectations of the recipients might be, and adapted their messages accordingly, thus not letting their messages being received in a vacuum. This assumption is, I believe, completely legitimate, and the author's argument can be followed with interest. The final subsection of part one analyses several autobiographies of worker parties' activists whose background was the working class, with the aim to present the typical ways in which the working-class youth were attaining the awareness of their situation, and turning politically active.

The second part also revolves around the leaflets – not as the main source, though, but as an element accompanying the political programmes, memoirs, press articles, and other material. Leaflets are examined at this point from a different angle: a reconstruction is attempted of the awareness of the recipients, rather than the senders. The point is, what rhetorical strategies were employed by each of the political parties; what vision of the world, and place of the workers in such a world, they attempted to instil in the addressees. The glaringly outstanding differences between the purport of the messages communicated through the leaflets distributed by the social democrats and the National Democrats are worth of one's attention no less than the differences between the leaflets of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland [Pol.: *Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego*, SDKP] and those of the Polish Socialist Party [Pol.: *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, PPS]. Marzec notes that the socialist leaflets tended to create a community bond between the message compiler and the recipient (incl. by using the first person singular) – whilst their National-Democratic counterparts used the second person singular, thus intensifying the air of separateness between the authors and the readers. The proposed conclusions regarding the difference between the National Democratic and socialist publications are very interesting (and worth being checked based on a broader source material): the former offered different pictures of the world depending on the recipient – worker, or intellectual, whereas the social democrats described a world in the same manner, regardless of the projected addressee. Interesting is also the analysis of the leaflets produced by the National Workers' Union [Pol.: *Narodowy Związek Robotniczy*, NZR], a rightist

organisation close to the National Democracy which endeavoured (for which there is source evidence) to maintain its independent position and contributed, at least in the initial period, to political emancipation of workers.

Part 3 is the most sophisticated theoretically. Referring to a number of philosophers and political theorists, the author proposes, basically, the following pattern of National Democracy's transition from democracy, or democratism, to authoritarianism. In the first period of its activity, the ND assumed a broad concept of 'people' [the Polish *lud* otherwise denotes 'common people' or 'folk'], extending to the nation as a whole. Since such an understanding was not obvious at the time yet, it had a democratising potential to it. However, astonished with the society's radicalisation in the course of the 1905 Revolution, the formation increasingly often emphasised the importance of a nationally conscious elite. Subsequently, the notion of 'people'/'nation' was narrowed again, and finally referred to nationally conscious ethnic Poles (whatever 'ethnic' should have meant). The author argues, very interestingly, that the vague vision of nation among National Democrats (ethnic, historical, cultural, or biological?), causing so much trouble to historians, did not arise from a negligence or carelessness of ND theoreticians, and from a coexistence of various ideological threads within the formation's thought. This incoherence was, instead, part of its concept, for membership in the nation was supposed to be an emotional experience, not subject to reasonable explanation. No less interesting is the consideration of the meaning and significance of the metaphors employed: the author highlights the role of biological imagery, which intensified during the Revolution and after its eventual failure. As convincingly argued by Marzec, the use of such imagery is not explainable solely in terms of the educational background of Roman Dmowski himself (he had a degree in Natural Sciences). Biological metaphors contributed to progressing biologisation of the concept of nation, which in turn reinforced exclusivist attitudes: with use of an easy argument provided by this process, groups regarded as unwelcome (for any reason) could be left outside the limits of the Nation. Anti-Semitic attitudes are not covered in detail, since the author believes the issue is fairly well examined.

One of the key arguments put forth in the third part is that the Polish elites (the liberals or the Catholic Church to be mentioned along with National Democrats) were astonished at the eruption of grassroots social activity during the Revolution (the 'reaction' in the section's title refers to these developments, among other things). It is the response to the spontaneous activity that Marzec identifies as the reason for why the ND shifted rightward. To his mind, the Revolution has abolished the possibility to pursue policies built on sustainable and unshaken foundation. The National Democrats wanted the foundation restored, and thus sought to respond to the old questions in the new situation. The foundations of yore, such as the tradition or the religious sanction, proved useless now; radical nationalism came in their place.

Wiktor Marzec's book, very interesting and innovative in many ways as it is, shows new perspectives for research in the 1905 Revolution – though it might have seemed that the topic has been studied in depth. Of the various interpretative traditions it is grounded in, the one of research into the history of concepts (Ger.: *Begriffsgeschichte*), in the spirit of Reinhart Koselleck, is the most interesting one for a historian. Reciprocal interdependence of soci(et)al history and history of political language is one of the key methodological assumptions behind the study, and such interrelationship is well demonstrated indeed. Yet, the author's extensive methodological awareness has not made this book purely theoretical: on the contrary, albeit not a historian, Wiktor Marzec has carried out a thorough source-based work by analysing the leaflets and other records in detail, and successfully extracting the meanings that have never before attracted the historians' attention to a satisfactory degree. In effect, the study combines empirical historical research and theoretical setting. For a historian – and not so much for a sociologist or political scientist – one of the most interesting problems is the differentiation between the bottom-up activity of common people and such activities that were instigated by the political parties. These two types of conduct are not always clearly differentiable, but the formulation of the problem and the attempt at analysing it is an important achievement in itself.

With all these words of praise, it should not be concealed that the book contains certain – mostly formal, and at times content-related, deficiencies. As to the formal facet, one might consider whether the theoretical sections must be so lengthy indeed; whether it is always necessary to secure oneself with a citation from some highly-esteemed philosophers in order to propose a conclusion that is apparently commonsensical. An example of the latter is that entanglements of various long-existing phenomena may lead to the appearance of a novel phenomenon. Some of the problems might have probably been exposed in a less complex manner; does the poor reader really need to know what a 'catachresis', or 'aleatoric', means? On the other hand, though, so many studies written by Polish historians suffer from complete lack of any theoretical perspective; hence, a monograph based on a thoroughly thought-over methodological approach deserves praise rather than critique.

The misspellings or misprints are apparently chargeable on the publisher (rather than the author), though they do not make the comprehension of this uneasy text any easier.

My objections as to the content or substance primarily concern a few issues of marginal significance for the central topic addressed. To (repeatedly) state that the changes in the Russian Empire's politics and internal situation which stemmed from the Revolution of 1905 were superficial or apparent is an oversimplification. To my mind, these changes were critical; the political life of the Empire, the Kingdom of Poland included, evolved afterwards in conditions entirely different compared to those prevailing before. The similarities between

the liberals' and the National Democrats' attitudes toward the Revolution are shown too precipitately. The liberal paternalism was, after all, different from the nationalistic paternalism (to cut, for now, the long story short). One could, furthermore, not avoid doubting whether anti-Semitism was in the worker milieus merely an effect of the National Democratic propaganda (as it might seem from the text). And, it may be pondered whether the Revolution in question was an upheaval so crucial as the author perceives it; to this end, the evolution of the political language in use in Poland from the Enlightenment age onwards would need being examined. Such investigation might lead to the finding that in, for instance, the Kościuszko period, or among the exponents of the Great Emigration, or during the Spring of Nations, certain phenomena could be spotted which are approached as novel ones in this book. Finally, I would personally polemicise against the author's observation that the National Democrats' ethnic concept of nation was an important factor behind the formation's evolution toward authoritarianism. In fact, an ethnic understanding of nation (which means ethno-cultural, rather than racist) was commonplace at the time, and 'professed' in East Central Europe by almost all the authors referring to the subject – including adherents of a broadest national tolerance (the leaders of the Austro-Marxists among them). I am positive that it was not the assumption of an ethnic vision of nation that proved critical for the National Democracy's authoritarian-oriented evolution.

Back to the core aspects: I was wondering while reading this book how far the author's apparent, and overtly declared, sympathy for his plebeian characters, and for the socialist formations fighting for their emancipation, might have informed his own line of thinking. It might at some points seem that a reader who does not share the author's philosophical views will not have to accept the outcome of his analytic effort. It may also be guessed that certain National Democratic texts are interpreted with a slightly malicious bias: what I am saying is, their purport could be interpreted in more moderate terms. However, with a closer examination, one finds that expressing one's own views – this being the right of any research scholar – does not affect or depreciate the scientific character of the reflections and conclusions proposed by him (or her): they can be accepted, or denied, by any reader regardless of his/her philosophical or historical views.

In sum, my assessment of Wiktor Marzec's study is definitely positive – albeit the book under review is not flawless, and my view on certain points varies from that proposed by the author. Given the multiplicity of lacklustre, atheoretical, often intellectually shallow studies, this particular one offers the reader a real respite: the author's deep concern with the topic investigated shines through every single page. He is clearly passionate about certain problems of significance, rather than striving to present several 'new' and completely abstract facts – as, regrettably, all too often happens with historians. It is a very interesting piece of reading, and one can follow the cohesive

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and logical argumentation offered. The subjects tackled are really important in terms of Polish history. The study broadens the reader's mind, and is debate-provoking. I wish there were more such books!

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