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"Barykady i katorga. Wspomnienia anarchisty", Noj Giter-Granatsztajn, Poznań 2015 : [recenzja]

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In recent times, we can observe a growing interest in the history of events that unfolded between 1904 and 1908, a period now known as the “Revolution of 1905”. We can distinguish two main approaches to the subject: analyses of historical processes that have led to the revolution and the heroic narrative that focuses on the heroes of the struggle, the so-called terrorists.

The narrative of the first approach focuses mostly on the historical processes and presents the revolution as evidence of an emerging new social order based on mass struggle that in consequence constituted modern society with public opinion, political activity of people, etc. This modern society, as stressed by those with sceptical approach to the revolution, was very ambivalent. *Endeks* (Polish far-right national democrats) were terrified of the “socialist anarchy” and tried to put an end to the rebellion. The “unity of nation” has been challenged and removed

from the public discourse by “brotherly fights”.

The second approach focuses on the participants of the revolution. It talks about heroic deeds committed by revolutionaries, like terrorist attacks, bombs, assaults on the soldiers of the regime, and state repressions and Tsarist prisons that followed. This approach gives the reader a chance to look at these events through the eyes of the revolutionaries.

The second trend is represented by a book issued by *Bractwo Trojka* (Trojka Fraternity). It is an anarchist publishing house that published amongst others Wolin’s reflections on the Russian revolution 1918–1921, a monograph on disputes between Marx and Bakunin, and a collection of texts on the history of *Ruch Społeczeństwa Alternatywnego* (Alternative Society Movement); moreover, it has recently published memoirs of Noj Giter Granatsztajn, Jewish-descent revolutionary, member of Bund (Jewish socialist

party), anarchist, and a mutineer in prisons in Moscow and Tobolsk.

The book consists of a preface, two parts of memoirs of Granatsztajn, an ending, and two annexes. The book was written between 1906 and 1909 and published in Russia for the first time in a political-historical periodical as a series between 1921 and 1925. The narrative revolves around a teenager that moves from Bełchatów to Łódź, in which were hell-like massive industrial complexes, to earn a living. He finds himself in a conflict with an immense, modern capitalist world. He quickly makes connections with comrades in illegal trade unions, and after suffering from social injustice himself, he gets involved in revolutionary struggle. His memoirs are full of dramatic events: fights with police, springing prisoners from jail, workers' demonstrations, and random victims of violence on both sides. Then the story moves to Tsarist machinery of prison violence and the struggle against it. Even inside, the inmates, both political and criminal, fought for better living conditions and against slavery (*katorga*), to which many radicals in Russia were condemned. Granatsztajn's death is covered in one of the annexes. After being accused by Stalinists of participation in a counter-revolutionary organization, he was condemned to death by a shooting squad. The execution was carried on 4 June 1938. He was rehabilitated in 1956.

Memoirs of Granatsztajn paint a very interesting image of not only radicalism, but also of mechanisms of building a modern public opinion. For instance, the narrator a lot of times writes about reading books, which was the desire of workers and also of prisoners¹. To prevent radicali-

sation and empowerment of prisoners and workers, the Tsarist regime would deny access to books by not only censorship but also through intense, long hour work days and anti-reading regulations. He also shows us how the general public evolves from being a passive object to an active subject of the political process.

The book is also a good source of information on limitations of terrorist forms of fight for social change. Granatsztajn did not want to empower the masses and build a social movement, he would only seek out people with similar world view and in time focus only on his own aims. He would advocate the most radical tactics without any consideration for social mood. This led to alienation of terrorist groups from the society, and a shift of focus from social change to fight for better conditions in prisons.

What the book lacks is a proper critical apparatus. Despite having a professional historian on the editorial team, Adrian Sekura (the author of monograph on *Rewolucyjni Mściciele* [Revolutionary Avengers]), the editors have made some very irritating errors. In a footnote about "Bund" they cited English Wikipedia². The history of Stefan Okrzeja lacks necessary details and it would serve the audience better if that footnote was omitted completely. Puzzling is the statement in the preface about truth in historical sources³. This contradicts the anarchistic approach to historiography (and to another spheres of life) in which truth is plural and each member of society has a chance to define their own values.

In summary, the book released by Bractwo Trojka is very important to the history of the revolutionary left. It tries

¹ N. Giter-Granatsztajn, *Barykady i katorga. Wspomnienia anarchisty*, Poznań 2015, pp. 84.

² Ibidem, p. 6.

³ Ibidem, p. 4.

to save Granatsztajn from oblivion and as such becomes a part of the wider trend that brings the history of left-wing terrorists back to the public memory (just like right-wing authors try to recover the lost history of the anti-communist “partisans” in the post Second World War Eastern Europe, like *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne* [National Armed Forces] in Poland and Ustashe in Croatia). The book can also be read as a very entertaining detective story. However, I am not so sure that seeking out forgotten heroes is the best approach to showing the significance of the revolutionary struggle of 1904–1908. Perhaps

a better way would be prosopographic studies that would show the participants of the rebellion in a wider context.

As put by Marc Bloch, history is “people in time”. Books like Granatsztajn’s memoirs give us a chance to look at people as they were in a long bygone epoch, a world now gone and closed to us. Despite his uncompromised approach to struggle, Granatsztajn was trapped not only in Tsarist prisons but also in the cultural context of his times. From this point of view, we can see the terrorists of all epochs as products of social instability and isolation.