

Review of *Duch Młodych: Organizacja Polska i Oboz Narodowo-Radyklanych w Latach 1934-1944. Od studenckiej rewolty do konspiracji niepodleglosciowej*, by Wojciech Jerzy Muszynski. 2011. IPN, Warsaw

Reviewer: Mr. Jan Peczkis

REVIEW TITLE: A Long-Overdue, Magisterial Analysis of the ONR (Oboz Narodowo-Radykalny)(Polish National Radical Camp)

Book Title: THE SPIRIT OF THE YOUNG: THE POLISH NATIONAL RADICAL CAMP IN THE YEARS 1934-1944. FROM STUDENT REVOLTS TO CONSPIRACY FOR POLISH INDEPENDENCE. It is a shame that this encyclopedic work has not been translated into English. It is based on a great deal of archival materials (pp. 13-on), and serves to correct decades of Communist propaganda about this movement. (p. 15).

This work is very rich in biographical detail, and includes many photographs of ONR individuals and ONR publications. For instance, I recognize Stefan Marcinkowski "Poraj" (1906-1996)(p. 339), whom I knew from childhood, and with whom I had endless discussions.

The reader learns about many organizations: The ONR, the Falanga, the SN (Stronnictwo Narodowe), and many others. In Polish, a member of the ONR was an oenerowiec (onerowiec), and this was oenerowcy (onerowcy) in the plural. Owing to the exhaustive detail given to various organizations, it is not always easy for the non-specialist to keep track of what organization is being discussed. When I use the term "ONR" in my review, it may be in reference to an organization, founded during or after 1934, whose views were similar to that of the ONR.

Because this work has so much detail, I focus on a few issues. I also omit discussion of the ONR and its struggle against the Nazi German and Soviet Communist enemies of Poland during WWII.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ONR

The ONR was a university student movement, supported by young, elite educated Poles. (p. 7, pp. 25-on). Later, workers joined the movement. (p. 41).

The ONR thought of the Sanacja as incompetent, and lacking the vision to solve Poland's social, economic, and political problems. (p. 21).[Reader: Does this sound like today's Polish government?]. Far from being a reactionary movement, the ONR was, in the words of Witold Staniszkis (1908-2008: p. 63), a youth movement dedicated to the

modernization of Poland, and supported by confidence in new developments, in the elevation of the standard of living, and in social progress. (p. 21).

Contrary to the stereotype of rightists wanting to preserve the status quo, and to benefit the wealthy and privileged, the ONR adopted a leftist-style approach to social problems. (p. 193). More on this below.

ONR: NOT POLISH FASCISM

The oenerowcy did evaluate their political philosophies in juxtaposition with various fascist movements in Europe at the time. However, the ONR did so not in order to emulate them, but rather to compare them with its own, especially in the light of Poland's realities. (p. 19).

The ONR rejected Mussolini's Fascism over the distancing of the latter from the Catholic Church (p. 23), for its totalitarianism (p. 44), and for its cult of the state (p. 203). In addition, the oenerowiec frowned upon fascism for its lack of respect for the individual, for its excessive collectivism in economic matters, etc. (p. 44).

The young in the ONR were sympathetic to the concept of strong leader. Roman Dmowski, according to Wojciech Wasiutynski (1910-1994: p. 63), decidedly was not. (p. 70).

Uniforms, symbols, greetings, slogans, etc., were a common military-style form that was widely popular in Europe at the time. Their use by the ONR did not indicate an affinity for fascism, at least not necessarily. (p. 35). Apparent similarities between the ONR and fascism were outward only. (p. 204).

The ONR rejected Nazism, not only because of its anti-Polish German-imperialist character, but also over its racism, which was a form of materialism incompatible with Christianity. (p. 44, 481). The stiff-arm salute, used by the ONR, was widely employed in various contexts by various organizations, and had no Nazi, pro-Nazi, or Nazi-imitating connotation at the time. (p. 35).

According to some opinions (not shared by author Muszynski), the Falanga, an offshoot of the ONR led by Boleslaw Piasecki, did flirt with fascism, racism, and the cult of the leader. After WWII, Piasecki served the Communists. (p. 481).

The oenerowcy (onerowcy) were centered on Catholicism. The ONR thus offered a third way between western-style parliamentarianism, capitalism, and democracy on one hand, and the various totalitarian movements (fascism, Nazism, Communism) on the

other. (e. g, p. 7, 194).

NUMERUS CLAUSUS, NUMERUS NULLUS, AND GHETTO BENCHES

The Jews, based on the Talmud, had a fundamentally different civilization from the Poles, according to the ONR. This made them fundamentally incompatible with Poland's Catholic civilization. (p. 197).

The ONR understood its discriminatory policies against Jews as ones that were not anti-Semitic or imitating Nazi-style racism, as charged by the Jewish and socialist critics, but as ones that were necessary in order to create more opportunities for Poles of disadvantaged (peasant and worker) backgrounds. (pp. 147-on, p. 197). [The same considerations apply today to the affirmative action debate in the USA.]

In 1931 (and especially from 1934), the numerus nullus came into play, based on the notion that the numerus clausus was insufficiently aggressive in ending Jewish overrepresentation at universities. According to the numerus nullus, Jews, at minimum, should not be admitted to Polish universities until the proportionate share of Polish professionals matched that of the Jews. (pp. 150-151). As for the ghetto benches, these essentially formalized the already-existing polarization between Poles and Jews, in that most Poles already did not wish to sit next to Jews. (pp. 151-152).

Contrary to the "Jews as scapegoats" notion, the ONR actually promoted a multi-faceted program for increasing the access, to a university education, for the common Pole. It was not a matter of blaming the problem entirely on the Jews--far from it! In terms of specifics, the ONR favored the reduction of the cost of university education (by at least 35%: p. 147) in order to make it more affordable, tuition-free university courses for the children of peasants and workers, increased scholarships for Polish students, universal education to eliminate illiteracy, etc. (p. 138, 147, 153, 195, 200).

Author Muszynski questions the effectiveness of the numerus clausus and numerus nullus. (pp. 152-153). These policies were not applied either consistently or comprehensively. There was indeed a drop in the relative percentage of university students who were Jewish, but this had multiple causes. Note, for example, that there was never a numerus clausus or numerus nullus at the gimnasja (secondary schools), yet the share of the Jewish students dropped from 23.7% in 1921 to 16.5% in 1936. (p. 153).

SYSTEMATIC ECONOMIC BOYCOTT OF JEWS

The proposed removal of Jews from economic positions enjoyed brought-based

support. It was promoted not only by the Endeks and the ONR, but also by various members of other parts of the political spectrum, and then not only those who were part of the OZN. (p. 200).

The ONR's policies, again, did not make scapegoats of Jews. Instead, the ONR realized that Poland's economic problems went much deeper than Jewish economic dominance, and had a systematic program for addressing these problems. For instance, not only the Jews, but also foreign capitalists would be prevented from owning businesses. (p. 376). The ONR favored the abolition of social classes in Poland (p. 195), and the empowerment of the Polish proletariat through such things as guaranteed adequate-paying employment. (pp. 200-201).

ONR: NOT UNILATERALLY ANTI-MINORITY

The Endeks in general, and the ONR in particular, have been widely misrepresented as teaching that only ethnic Poles, and Roman Catholics, can be true Poles. This is far from the truth!

The ZPK! A fraternity, a forerunner of the ONR, rejected into membership those who declared themselves to be of German, Ukrainian, or Jewish nationality. However, in this respect, it was no more exclusivist than German, Ukrainian, and Jewish fraternities, all of which typically excluded ethnic Poles from membership! (p. 27). As for the ZPK! A, there were no barriers to membership of those of other nationalities, as long as they considered themselves Poles and were Christians. (p. 27). For instance, Leon Ter-Oganian (1910-2001), a prominent ONR author, was an Armenian Pole. (p. 27). However, membership was not necessarily limited to Christians. Pointedly, the Polish Tatars, who were Muslims, were welcome. (p. 27).

The Germans and the Jews were deemed by the oenerowcy to be unwilling to be part of Poland, and their continued existence on Polish soil was considered inimical to Polish national interests. (p. 68). The ONR favored not only the forced emigration of Jews, but also the forced emigration of Germans. (p. 199).

However, the Slavic minorities (Byelorussians and non-separatist Ukrainians) were welcome in Poland as long as they were loyal to Poland. (p. 68). The ONR rejected the premise that only Polish-speakers can be Poles (pp. 195-196), and specifically opposed the forced Polonization of the Byelorussians and Ukrainians. (p. 199).

ONR VIOLENCE WAY OVERBLOWN

Violence was a common feature of political action in pre-WWII Poland, and was

conducted by both leftists and rightists. Ironically, according to author Wojciech Jerzy Muszynski, the ONR copied the Communist methods of violence. (p. 7).

Jewish groups, such as the militant Zionist Betar and certain Bundist units, also practiced violence, often disguising their conduct as "self-defense". (pp. 81-82). The ONR and the Betar were essentially mirror images of each other. The ONR and Betar both agreed that Jews and Poland were fundamentally incompatible with each other, and that violence was an acceptable means of accentuating the polarization between Poles and Jews. Sometimes, the Betar and ONR fought against each other, but the majority of Betar violence was directed at those Jews deemed to be "too Polish", too friendly to the Polish state, etc. (p. 150).

How much overall violence actually stemmed from the oenerowcy? Muszynski has examined 30,429 police records from 1935-1937 Poland (p. 82), and found that the ONR, SN, and similar rightist organizations collectively accounted for only 2-4% of violent incidents in Poland during this time. (pp. 82-87). The overwhelming majority of violent incidents were by Communists. Clearly, the characterization of the ONR as a hotbed of violence is off the mark.