

Opinion

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Assoc. Prof. Alexander Sililov is the only candidate in the competition for professor in the professional field: 2.2. History and Archaeology (Modern History - History of the USA and Latin America), launched by the Department of Modern and Contemporary History, at the Faculty of Arts of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and announced in the State Gazette on November 22, 2024, issue 99. The documents submitted by him comply with the provisions of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff. The candidacy of Assoc. Prof. Al. Sililov meets the scientometric requirements set out in the relevant law. A total of 13 studies have been presented, of which two are monographs. 14 are listed in the citations; the candidate also has two successfully defended doctoral students. To date, he has also participated in numerous scientific projects.

The main research of Assoc. Prof. Sililov is: "The Gangsters of the Prohibition Regime and the Great Depression in the Social History of the USA (1919-1936)". The monograph is built on a rich documentary base, diverse in nature, and historiographical research, as can be seen from the included bibliography. One of the main questions that puzzle me, however, is the chronological framework of the research. If the lower limit, i.e. 1919, is understandable why it was chosen, the upper one – 1936, in my opinion, is not particularly significant.

Chapter One is dedicated to the 1920s and, more specifically, to the period up to the outbreak of the Great Depression in 1929. Its focus is mainly on the political processes and social contradictions of the period in question, and they are covered in full. From the point of view of the country's economic development, the thesis widely held in historiography that the 1920s were an "era of prosperity" is successfully refuted. The author argues that this label is not relevant for the entire society. The references to the more distant past are an attempt to grasp lasting trends, the consequences of which escalated in the period under study.

At the same time, the text is burdened by the presentation of many facts that seem to me unnecessary: I specifically mean the detailed presentation of President Wilson's biographical data, as well as his foreign policy views. The corruption scandals during the term of the next

President Warren Harding - if they deeply affect society (but if so, this is not visible in the text) - are also a detail. On page 43, the example of the perception of Russian tsarist rule in the USA is told; my opinion is that it would be better if the passage were in a note. The history of the trade union movement is very detailed and in this sense unnecessary; too many biographies are included - it would be better if they were in the Appendices. Numerous specific examples of local strikes throughout the country are given, but there is no summary and clarification of the reasons why a national strike does not occur?

I assume that on page 42 the sentence was not edited precisely, because semantically it seems that the socialist was expelled from the RP. Also, the expression: "sympathizer strikes" - I do not like it. I think that "strikes in solidarity" would sound much better, including terminologically.

Cultural issues are rarely included in the research interest; they are presented in terms of social reality. This is definitely one of the great advantages of the monograph, because it shows a comprehension of the processes and their interrelationship.

Chapter Two: "The Peak of Social Division in the Early 1930s and the Great Depression" – is dedicated to perhaps the most difficult period in US history. In this regard, I think it would be good to pay a little more attention to the factors/causes of the Great Depression, including external ones, although they are not the leading ones. The collapse of the banking system and industry, sector by sector, is reflected in detail. The story creates a real idea of the scale of the tragedy.

It is logical to present the measures to deal with the Depression of the New Deal in both industry and agriculture. I have rarely encountered in historiography a critical attitude towards one of the main laws of the New Deal - the Agricultural Act (AAA). Assoc. Prof. Sivilov takes the liberty of reasonably pointing out its shortcomings.

The next paragraph is devoted to politics and social changes during the Great Depression, and the first subparagraph examines President Hoover's reaction to the Crisis. This is chronologically a "backward" move and creates a certain chaos in the exposition. Usually in historiography Hoover is presented as an inert president, but here too Assoc. Prof. Sivilov refutes this thesis. Hoover's approach is wrong, and even naive, but the author debunks the myth that his administration did nothing.

he reaction of the population to the extremely difficult economic situation is logical – it moves to the left in its political preferences in the first half of the 1930s. The increase in crime is also an expected phenomenon, which finds its place in the text. Hoover's statement about the problems with crime and the justice system is interesting, but here the more active president regarding these problems is definitely Roosevelt – this is how the FBI was born. The abolition of Prohibition is traditionally seen as a step that should provide additional revenue to the treasury and reduce crime. Assoc. Prof. Sivilov adheres to this thesis.

Social discontent, contradictions and clashes are the main theme of the monograph and they are given due attention – the huge strike wave in the first half of the 1930s and the Marches on Washington of 1932 (the specific form of protest of humiliated veterans). An interesting point is the reflection of the mental state of the population; such a picture rarely finds a place in research. And in this main component, there is a place for the ongoing cultural processes, viewed through the prism of the extremely acute social relations in society, which are also a form of protest. The conclusion of Chapter Two argues for a revision of the established chronology of the Great Depression – especially as it relates to its lower limit; this is definitely a merit of the monography.

If in the first two main components the author's approach is chronological (with some deviations noted above), then in the Third Chapter: "Mafia, Gangsters and the Threat of Social Change" a change is detected: thematically it is dedicated to crime both in a period of relative economic calm and in times of economic cataclysm. Both the mafiosi and the gangsters are illustrated through specific Case studies. The "most prominent" mafiosi are 4 in number. Their destinies are described in great detail. The symbiosis between power and the mafia is brought to the fore, especially when it comes to parrying social discontent. The second group - the gangsters - are presented through 5 specific cases. The construction of the myths around their images is presented. An interesting conclusion that the author offers is that crime prospers in a family environment, it is a supporting factor. He also offers an explanation for the motives for the criminal activity of the gangsters (robberies, kidnappings): misery and the desire for prosperity in a cruel social environment; as well as a form of struggle against the system. Attention is also paid to the geographical picture of gangsterism, as well as the ethnic composition of these people.

The second monography: "Leaders, Authoritarianism and Transitions (on the Example of Russia and Chile)" is the fruit of earlier scientific studies by Assoc. Prof. Sivilov; and in this

sense it can be considered an attempt to build on and re-evaluate already written scientific works.

The main characters of this study are Boris Yeltsin and Augusto Pinochet. Leadership is the unifying link between the two, as well as that they are representatives of change. The monograph begins with a theoretical development entitled: "The Problems of Authoritarianism and Transitions to Democracy". It contains the author's personal reflection on totalitarianism and his critical reading of Hannah Arendt's theses. Also, relying on the theoretical framework compiled in his book "The First September 11. Chile 1973-1993." (or the doctoral dissertation of Assoc. Prof. Sivilov), when it comes to authoritarianism and democracy, he builds on the understanding of the world's historiographical concepts about them.

The Russian transition to democracy is defined as a reversal model for the transition to democracy, with the author emphasizing the rapid return to authoritarian methods of governance in Russia. The lack of sustainable democratic development of Russian democracy is emphasized. Assoc. Prof. Silivov also analyzes the transition to democracy in Chile, according to the general typology of transitology, indicating that the Latin American country "guidedly" receives democratic governance. The Spanish transition to democracy (1975-1982) is also such, and a comparison between the processes in Chile and Spain would enrich the monography. I would also recommend that the Chilean transition to democracy be placed in a general Latin American context.

Chapter two is devoted to the "democratic Yeltsin." His rise in the party and government structures of the USSR is traced. Once established as Russian president, Yeltsin began to lose his image as a staunch democrat, dealing with the legislative branch in 1993 in order to institutionally strengthen the presidential institution that was in his hands, and manipulating the 1996 presidential elections to stay in power. Yeltsin greatly contributed to the erosion of Russia's fragile democracy and effectively enabled his successor to be an authoritarian leader.

The love of power is another unifying element with the other main character – Augusto Pinochet. It is precisely to his role in the government and in the transition to democracy in Chile that Chapter Three is dedicated: "The Protected Authoritarianism of Chile and Augusto Pinochet". The exposition follows the already established model: presentation of brief biographical data about the general. Detailed attention is paid to the character of the military junta. A key moment in its rule is the approval of a new Constitution of 1980, which was

prepared as a text for more than two years. Its main function is to “insert” constitutional mechanisms for “authoritarian enclaves”, which would leave Gen. Pinochet opportunities to influence political processes. Assoc. Prof. Sivilov points out that Chile is not a democratic state in modern times, with which I do not entirely agree. On page 108 it is claimed that the generals are preventing Pinochet from recognizing the results of the key referendum of October 5, 1988. I would point out another factor in the acceptance of the vote by the head of the Junta: the presence of 55 international observers, led by the Spaniard A. Suarez, who has actually been conducting the guided transition to democracy in Spain for a little over a decade.

Also in Chapter Two, Assoc. Prof. Sivilov points out that there is certainly data about Yeltsin's personal benefit from power, but why is this thread not being followed for Pinochet?

Finally, commenting on the monograph "Leaders, Authoritarianism and Transitions (Based on the Example of Russia and Chile)", I will also recommend the study: "Pinochet. Military and Political Biography, with author Mario Amoros, which would give additional depth to the image of Gen. Pinochet.

The other 11 smaller scientific texts with which the candidate is presenting himself at this competition cover a variety of topics. Some of them are related to his two previous monographs: “The First September 11. Chile 1973-1993” and “The Bear Hug. USSR and Latin”. I mean the following articles from the list: “The Good and the Bad in a South American Western: Salvador Allende and Augusto Pinochet”, “Augusto Pinochet – The Personality That Divided Chile”, “Stalin vs. Trotsky in the Foreign Policy Concepts of the USSR in the Late 1920s and Early 1930s”, “Ideological Basis of the Soviet Diplomacy”. As a separate thematic field in the scientific works of Assoc. Prof. Sivilov, American foreign policy at the beginning of this century is also taking shape, as well as the rise of the USA and the USSR as global powers.

My final assessment is positive.