

STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Boris Stoyanov,
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scientific jury

on the research work of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alexander Mihailov Sivilov, candidate for
the academic position of Professor in PH 2.2 History and Archaeology (Modern
History: History of the USA and Latin America), in an open competition announced
for the needs of the Faculty of History of Sofia University in the State Gazette, no.
99 of 22 November 2024.

In the competition for the academic position of "Professor" in the field of
American history announced by the University of Sofia, one candidate took part -
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alexander Mihailov Sivilov. The documents submitted by him for
admission and participation in the procedure are in order. They comply with the
provisions of Article 2b of the Law on Human Rights and Social Development. The
submitted reference with the minimum national requirements is also correctly
completed. It shows that the applicant meets the required number of points in
indicator groups A, B and C and exceeds them in the other three groups: D, E and F

The soundness of the documents and the scientometric data gives me a reason
to proceed to the evaluation of the research work of my colleague Sivilov.

Assoc. Prof. Alexander Sivilov participated in the competition with two
monographs, four articles and seven studies. Four of the 13 publications are in
English. The two early works on Augusto Pinochet and Salvador Allende
(Appendices 12 and 13 of the Report on Meeting the Minimum National
Requirements) do not, in my opinion, meet the high professional level required of a
prospective professor and the standard of a serious scholarly publication to be
evaluated here. Therefore, I do not accept their inclusion in the number of points for
indicator 7, which reduces the total number of points in Group D from 245 to 225,
but leaves them above the required minimum of 200.

A quick review of the other publications makes a good impression. It turns out that in the last 14 years Alexander Sivilov has worked on various topics related to the history of the left idea, Soviet foreign policy, Latin America. There is also material devoted to the controversial topic of the September Revolt in Bulgaria in 1923. Since I feel most competent in the field of modern American history, I will turn my attention to the main work submitted in the competition.

The monograph *The Gangsters of the Dry Regime and the Great Depression in U.S. Social History, 1919-1936*, out of print in 2025, serves up a surprise with its title. First of all, it marks a new field of research and teaching into which Alexander Sivilov is entering-the history of the United States. Entirely new, because from the submitted documents (№10a List of all publications, №10b List of publications for participation in the competition and №11 List of scientific contributions from the "Authors" system of Sofia University) it is clear that he has not published an article/study, has not presented a paper at a scientific conference/seminar, nor has he participated in a project on American domestic politics, economy and society in the twentieth century. Assoc. Sivilov does not teach a stand-alone course in U.S. History in the University's undergraduate and graduate programs. All this means that he has not approbated his ideas to a professional audience and students, nor has he communicated the results of his directives for discussion and, accordingly, validation or elaboration in this publication. A move that contains a certain risk.

The next surprise is his ambition to work in the field of social history, which requires significant prior training: theoretical and practical. The claim to write social history deserves special attention.

The approach chosen by my colleague Sivilov is justified insofar as historians have long not viewed the Great Depression and its aftermath as an isolated phenomenon. They have explored their role in changing individual behavior, social structures, and government policies by examining: the labor union movement and demands for more workers' rights; gender roles associated with increased labor mobility for men and increased employment for women; regulations and government intervention in the life of society; challenges faced by particular racial communities; poverty; migration; reduced fertility, and more. At the same time, the author's desire to write a social history of a society as complex as America's, even in a short period of time, is an impossible goal. First, because of the eclectic nature of this part of

history and second because of the author's demonstrated ignorance of its development, achievements and tools. In fact, the text shows that Assoc. Sivilov has an idea only of the first more notable steps in the making of social history after 1950, but for unknown reasons refrains from communicating it.

In my view, the work reflects early and now outdated notions of social history as a way of explaining social protest and its political manifestations, as well as the leading role of economics in social change. For Eric Hobsbawm, it began with the exploration of the broad issues of the poor and lower classes, only to narrow to working-class and socialist ideas and movements. And for some of the circle of French *Annales*, it not only stands outside political history but is subordinated to economic history because production, trade and geography shape the structures of society and determine its behaviour and dynamics (Hobsbawm, E. J. (1971) *From social history to History of society* - In: *Daedalus*, vol. C, № 1; Woolf, D. (2011) *A Global History of History*)

On the other hand- again without being explicitly stated by the author, the text is strongly influenced by the ideas of The New Left through the works of Howard Zinn and Robert Murrin- two of its most prominent representatives in the US and the UK. It was the young American historians of the 1960s to the 1980s who brought to the fore themes of family, migration, the urban environment, work, leisure, education, etc., and were interested in the perspectives of groups such as African Americans, industrial workers, the urban poor, peasants, women, and children. They put the spotlight on the neglected and oppressed, and seek to rewrite history from the perspective of ordinary people, and give whole populations back the sense of being subjects of history and thus provoke their activism. Radical historians rejected the consensus historiography of the mid-twentieth century, emphasizing the heterogeneity of American society and presenting social conflict as a persistent dominant feature of the American past and present (Harrison, R. *The 'New Social History' in America* - In: Lambert, P. and Ph. Schofield (2004) *Making History: an introduction to the history and practices of a discipline*). The latter is also the leitmotif of the monograph under review.

Unfortunately, the achievements of social history from the late twentieth century to the early twenty-first century do not find a place between the covers. Neither does the understanding that this is an inherently interdisciplinary part of

history and its development requires a continuous dialogue with the social and natural sciences (sociology, cultural anthropology, psychology, criminology, biology, etc.). Uncovering the material, social and mental aspects of society with its rules, rituals, symbols, behaviours and structures is impossible without their tools: quantitative methods, personal diaries, stories, memories, interviews, etc., as well as without the proven in practice method of the case study - description and analysis of a concrete example, including fieldwork. While Chapter Three imitates such a study, it is far from the example, largely for objective reasons, of academic peers such as Lizabeth Cohen's (2014) *Making a New Deal: Industrial workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* and John Landesco's study of a member of the Chicago Gang of 42. (1933) *The Life history of a member of the "42" Gang* - In. XXIII, NO. 6). Contemporary social history resembles a sphere of microhistories, which are not intended to create a general picture of dynamic industrial societies, such as the American one of the 1920s and 1930s, which is the intention of Assoc. Sivilov.

Although Sivilov glosses over the influence of Marxism on his work, I find the presence of ideas from different strands of this school. To the proximity to the views of a Marxist scholar such as Eric Hobsbawm and to the Marxist perspective of the New Left already highlighted, I add the author's understanding of the origins of crime and the role of criminals. It is in line with the Marxist interpretation of Conflict Theory in criminal sociology, according to which capitalist society creates the conditions for the development of crime through the inequalities, marginalisation and alienation it engenders, and gangsters are a specific kind of social resistance against the ruling class and misery, or as Sivilov presents them: saviours, protectors, helpers and modern Robinhottians (Quinney, R. (1970) *The Social Reality of Crime*). The text's repeated claim to reject and completely revise 'traditional history', responds to the task that the Marxist philosopher Walter Benjamin sets for the historical materialist to 'distance himself from tradition' and 'to consider history not in the conventional way' ('On the Concept of History' - In: Benjamin, W. (2014) *Kairos*). Finally, the recurring claim that "people with expensive suits, flashy cars, and big cigars" deny the American Dream to the average American fits neatly into the Vulgar Marxism defined by Karl Popper. By this definition, Popper means a departure in the interpretation of classical Marxism, according to which various forms of social misery and unhappiness: wars, depressions, unemployment,

starvation in the midst of plenty, are created by forces hidden behind power, business elites, and warlords who, in pursuit of profit, oppress the proletariat and deprive it of perspective (Popper, K. (2020) *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. 2 *The apogee of prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the aftermath*).

The closure in Marxist views has not allowed for more contemporary notions and approaches to be reflected, which ultimately predetermines the one-dimensional nature of the study.

From the beginning of the introduction, Alexander Sivilov makes the "struggle of the ordinary American for a better life" the focus of his interest, and then criticizes the one-sidedness of the "official story" with its "official narrative." However, he does not specify whom he means by the collective image of the ordinary American, nor does he explain what he means by the official story. In turn, he introduces simple oppositions of police versus workers, army versus veterans, government versus socialists and anarchists, which has allowed him to reach equally one-sided conclusions, but with the opposite sign, about a very bleak social picture and deep divisions in society, and to justify the image of thugs as saviors in the mass consciousness. His stated guiding purpose is to link social reality in the United States to the emergence of organized crime and gangsters (p. 9). In reality, however, he presents the history of the United States through the prism of the rebellious spirit of the era, which found expression mainly in the discontent and protest of social lowlands and individual allied communities. The outlaws are thus placed in line, or rather on the same front, with the trade union movement and striking workers, with socialists, anarchists and communists advocating a new vision of America's future, and with African Americans and ethnic minorities suffering from the burgeoning American patriotism. If the study had been structured problematically in its sequential examination and comparison of the affected groups and the authorities' treatment of them, it would have had its research value. It would have revealed and conceptualized more accurately the relationships and connections among people, processes, and phenomena unfolding in specific social settings but within a general political context. And the predominantly descriptive narrative style would have given way to an analytical one.

It is not clear from this section why 1936 was chosen as the upper chronological limit of the study. Mentioned in passing as a year of partial recovery

from the Depression (p. 11), it is essentially a watershed in neither U.S. political, social, nor criminal history. Instead, a brief acquaintance with the contents of the three chapters reveals that the book does not include new moments, themes, or interpretations.

Chapter One, entitled "The Dark Face of the Roaring Twenties," is a kaleidoscope of well-known issues in American history during the 1920s, situated between the historiography's established assessments: an age of dynamic jazz versus a time of depressive blues. In the arrangement and especially in the internal structure of the development of the individual themes, the traditional scheme of their presentation is followed. The only exception is the section on Red Scare, which does not include the strike wave of the early period. It is narrated in the one on social contradictions, a choice less frequently made by historians, but in this case reinforcing the notion of a predominantly social rather than politically motivated discontent.

There are significant gaps in an otherwise eventful chapter. The first is the absence of an assessment of the legacy of the Progressive Era, which set the leading trends in US development in the first third of the twentieth century, most of which the First World War only catalysed (see : Klein, M. (2007) *The Genesis of Industrial America, 1870 - 1920*; Katz, M. B. and M. J. Stern. (2000) *One Nation Divisible: What America was and what it is becoming*). The next is in the refusal to represent and defend the social stratification of society and the stratification of working-class communities that have lost their homogeneity since the nineteenth century. Each of the groups of red neck, blue-collar, white-collar workers/farmers and peasants who do not own land has different needs, interests, status, standard of living and attitudes to politics. It is not clear from Sivilov's work what proportion of wage-labourers are classical proletariat types and what the social mobility from the lower to the middle class is, because the latter includes not only representatives of the new white-collar phenomenon. Its lower echelons are filled by enterprising workers who have opened their own businesses in the face of economic expansion. Hence the ambiguity as to how large and how it actually measured the "extremely small proportion" (p. 29) of the population to whom the 1920s brought prosperity and, correspondingly, the "broad sections of the population" (p. 170) who were denied it. I find the author's other major generalization about the very plight of workers unsupported since the

dynamics of labor wages (which continue to be the highest compared to the rest of the world's industrial countries) are not presented, changes in the structure of American household expenditures are not analyzed, and insufficient information is given about the expanding geography of the consumer society to include more and more rural residents. (A useful source here is Recent Social Trends in the United States: Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends

The emergence and early development of social capitalism (welfare capitalism), characteristic of the "Roaring Twenties", is completely ignored. The text fails to appreciate the efforts of employers to maintain the confidence of their workers by attracting them to the lower levels of management, introducing criteria for career advancement, increasing wages when turnover increases, providing insurance in case of injury and sickness, guaranteeing better working conditions and the possibility of leisure, in return for waiving the right to strike. Large corporations are forming unions with a total number of over 400 with a membership of nearly 1.5 million. Gone are the workmen's compensation laws passed and implemented in almost all states at this very period (Fishback, Pr. And Sh. Cantor (2007) A Prelude to the Welfare State).

Without clarification of the problems outlined above, the questions posed in this section cannot be answered comprehensively as to why the strikes are subsiding so rapidly, the main unions are shrinking, the anarchists remain isolated, and the left has not gained visible political ground. To these should be added: the moderate course of Presidents Harding and Coolidge, middle class fears of aggressive Bolshevik ideas of violent and total overthrow of society, and the reluctance of the majority of workers and peasants to enter into a new civil war labelled as class war.

After 1919, there were no conditions in the United States for the growth of extreme currents and for a revolution based on exacerbated social conflict. Americans in a definite way showed their general aversion to all manifestations of radicalism: from pacifism through socialism, anarchism, communism to the women's movement (Grozev, K. (1998) The United States of America between the Two World Wars - In. Before and After the Iron Curtain). The only exceptions are patriotic xenophobia and segregation.

Developing the Dry Regime through the lens of social history, in turn, requires uncovering the clash of American society's utopianism with the founding American

principle of unfettered freedom of initiative and the failure of Prohibition as a project of social engineering that "did not bring minorities into the Anglo-Saxon mold" but facilitated their consolidation (Johnson, P. (1993) *Modernity*).

The exposition in chapter two, called "The Peak of Societal Division in the Early 1930s and the Great Depression," also does not break out of the traditional pattern of presenting the unprecedented crisis and the changes it caused in the United States. The only structural problem I notice is that the text between p. 215 and p. 231 is not set off in a separate paragraph focusing on Roosevelt and his policies. Here again, Siviloff remains true to his penchant for spectacular but unproven generalizations. For example, on p. 226, he writes of indirect foreign influences on American politics, but makes no argument for their existence. The cited reference David Kennedy's work does refer to Hugh Johnson, accused of fascist sympathies and close to the president, but it is clear from Kennedy's text that Johnson was actually following the example of his idol Bernard Baruch, not Mussolini.

In the conclusion of this part of the book I find false, controversial and misleading conclusions:

On p. 298 it reads that "from an economic point of view, the Great Depression should have been pushed back earlier, probably to 1927." The suggestion, which occurs with varying degrees of explicitness elsewhere in the text, is not an innovation but an error. The Depression is clearly defined by economic science and should be treated as an established term. What happened in 1927 was a brief recession, and by the fall of 1929 the American economy bore no signs of depression. I agree that the introduction of "easy" money policies in the short run contributed to the commodity market boom and set the stage for a more severe crisis (Friedman, M. and A. J. Schwartz (1993) *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867 - 1960*). Together with the other disturbing developments in production, trade and finance in the second half of the 1920s, it formed the complex of causes that led to the Great Depression (1929-1941) without being a sign of collapse before the autumn of 1929. However, in doing so, the emphasis shifts away from an understanding of the degree of freedom of the American system, which Sivilov neglects throughout the text. What happened is evidence that it was so liberal that it allowed practices and structures to develop unhindered that eventually led it into dramatic upheaval.

The conclusion about President Hoover's response to the Depression's challenge is incomplete. Historical scholarship has long since moved beyond the notion that "his economic philosophy was overly associated with the idea of laissez-faire" (p. 299) and expanded it to encompass the lessons of Hoover's experience as Secretary of Commerce in dealing with the 1921-1922 recession, but especially to present and explain the three-level response system that he introduced: local and state; activation of domestic forces and mechanisms of support and control in American society; and mobilization of federal resources as a last resort (Bruner, D. (1979) *Herbert Hoover: A public life*; Horwitz, St. (2011) *Herbert Hoover: Father of the New Deal*; Jeansonne, Gl. (2012) *The Life of Herbert Hoover: A fighting Quaker, 1929 - 1933*).

The conclusion that agriculture has been in a "permanent deep economic crisis since the end of the First World War" (p. 300) is also misleading, because so phrased it leaves the reader with the impression of a total failure of the New Deal in the field. It is proper to specify here that after its failure in the first stage of reform, agricultural policy was imposed as a priority for the Roosevelt administration in the second period. Positive signs of recovery in the sector were seen as early as 1937, and the process was completed in four years, allowing American farmers to produce 2.5 times more on an annual basis during the Second World War compared to the First World War years (Walton, G and H. Rockoff (2014) *History of the American Economy*)

It is also too far-fetched to conclude that the left was "bloodied and crushed by power in the 1920s" (p. 310), which may apply to countries like Italy, Germany, and Spain in the interwar period, but not to the United States. Trade unions and socialist formations continued to exist and be active among industrial workers. Similarly, the Communist Party did not cease its organizational life. In the years of the Depression it even gained more sympathizers, mainly from among the intelligentsia and fewer among the people of wage labor. In other words, the reasons for the weakness of the trade union and left movement are to be sought elsewhere than in the measures of the authorities, all the more so since these are mostly within the law. This is not to alienate workers and left trade unionists from politics. On the contrary, they participate more actively in it, but now through the Democratic Party, driven by a desire to see the New Deal continue and because they recognize it as a

platform for democratic socialism with a large dose of social justice (Dubofsky, M. and J. McCartin (2017) *Labor in America: A history*).

The general impression of a system that generates crises, the outcome of which requires a high social cost and leads to inequalities whose growth cannot be stopped, is one-sided and clichéd. The Great Depression and the New Deal are proof of the free market's ability to reform and self-correct. In a democracy, its ever-adapting model becomes more social, narrowing inequalities and expanding social protection. President Roosevelt's policy, which since the late 1930s can now be called Keynesian, has as its main objective the provision of employment and therefore income to the maximum number of citizens, the improvement of the living environment and the reduction of social contradictions and discontent. All important social implications of the Depression and indicators of its importance to changes in American society. However, none of this has found a place in the work.

In the introduction of the book, the third chapter "Mafia, Gangsters and the Threat of Social Change" is described as the "icing on the cake", but in reality it delivers the biggest disappointment. Rather than being the core of the study, as the title anticipates, this section is more of an appendix. Without a solid connection to the previous parts, it could easily be replaced by any other topic. Would the coherence of the work not be greater if the focus were shifted to how social reality and discontent in the United States are reflected in the work of three American writers: Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Faulkner, for example? At least because culture-related paragraphs are present in the preceding chapters...

The topic itself is particularly suited to study through the prism of social history. This implies the use of the achievements and methods of sociology, urban anthropology and of course criminology, which are lacking in the present text. Instead, it offers a criminal summary with biographical elements. Learning about the lives and criminal activities of a few mobsters and gangsters, separated into separate subparts, is by no means a case study. The historical narrative is bogged down by a lot of unnecessary and clichéd information and is burdened by repetition (the "Valentine's Day Massacre" is presented in all three chapters) and persistent myths (about Clarence Bush's house, which has nothing to do with the Bush brewing family). It is rarely diversified by controversial hypotheticals, such as the one that "life outside the law is the fast track upward in society" (p. 409). Although associated

with social mobility, banditry does not function as a social elevator in American society.

I get the impression of a hastily written text, which I think explains the author's insufficient and superficial analysis. As well as the many substantive shortcomings highlighted in the next few paragraphs.

Organized crime and gangsterism existed in America long before the Drought and the Great Depression. Their development, however, is not represented by Siviloff and, accordingly, it is difficult to grasp the differences in the criminal world before and after World War I, and hence to highlight the novelty of the criminal horizon of the interwar period. It is not possible to understand well why the segregation of criminal groups occurred along ethnic lines (Irish, Jews, Italians), and cities such as Chicago and New York emerged as gang centres, without knowing the early stage of US criminal history (Critchley, D. (2009) *The Origin of Organized Crime in America*; Allerfelt, K. (2011). *Crime and the Rise of Modern America: A History from 1865 to 1941*).

Although mentioned several times, Hobsbawm's theory of social banditry has never been explained, something that could have been easily achieved through the synthesized debate between Hobsbawm and Bloch in the pages of *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (Vol. XIV, No. 4, 1972). However, social banditry is not applicable to the mafia and gangsters of the period. Again, Sivilov refrains from fitting his work into a theoretical framework, as a professorship should. Yet the choice of theories of crime and criminal motivation is rich: Strain Theory, Divergent Association Theory, Social Learning Theory, Labeling Theory, Subculture Theory, Conflict Theory. In my opinion, the most useful research is that of the Chicago School of Sociology, especially since one of its early representatives, John Landesco, did fieldwork with gangs during the Beer Wars. She examines the emergence of crime in America from two competing positions. The first sees the Mafia as the result of a criminal conspiracy imported to America from southern Italy, while the second explains it in terms of conditions inherent in American society that foreign migrants exploited. Their roots are in cultural deviance theory and social disorganization theory, respectively (Lombardo, R. M. (2013) *Organized Crime in Chicago: Beyond the Mafia*).

Among the important issues that the study does not even hint at are: the structure, network, and recruitment of mafia organizations; the size and dimensions of their hidden economy; the Americanization of families; the role of tradition and innovation in the criminal activities of mobsters and gangsters; the growing public discontent with the boldness of gangsters and their sense of impunity associated with the environment changed by the New Deal; and attitudes toward leftist and trade union ideas, leaders, and organizations.

This chapter lacks a summary overview of federal actions against organized crime. It does not answer the question of why, for the government, mafia bosses are primarily perpetrators of economic crimes. As a reminder, it was not until 1951 that Congress acknowledged the existence of crime syndicates and their major activities were made federal crimes. Hence the absence of an explanation of J. E.'s conduct. Hoover prior to World War II, although S. Raab, included in the bibliography, provides at least three good reasons for the delay and inconsistency in the FBI head's counter-actions (Raab, S. (2005) *Five Families...*).

No attempt has been made to build a personal profile of the leading mobsters and gangsters represented in the work on the basis of their background, upbringing, environment, qualities, weaknesses, tastes, attitudes, behavioural traits, and representation.

Nowhere does one encounter a problematization of literature. Not a single historiographical debate on a significant issue in U.S. criminal history is presented, and consequently the author's position on it is not stated. The work of Assoc. Sivilov's handling of the sources raises a number of question marks. The most serious of these arise from the almost complete overlap of portions of the paragraphs on Al Capone and Bonnie and Clyde from the text of Chapter Three with sections of the articles on the historical figures mentioned from the English version of the electronic encyclopedia Wikipedia. I make a detailed account of the similarities after my conclusion, and attach the two Wikipedia articles in their version as of 16 March 2025 in full.

Conclusion:

Alexander Sivilov's book *The Gangsters of the Dry Regime and the Great Depression in U.S. Social History, 1919-1936*, which he entered in the announced

competition, is not a social history of America in the 1920s and 1930s, nor does it present and analyze convincingly the role of organized crime and gangsters in American society. It is not contributory and is more like a lecture course focused on the poor and marginalized classes and their forms of social protest. It shows that the candidate has no in-depth knowledge of the criminal history of the United States beyond the positive description of commonly known facts and personalities. His handling of sources in certain parts of the text is unprofessional. All of this gives me reason to reaffirm my opinion from the Departmental Council of September 10, 2024, that a professorship is much more than a matter of points and that my colleague Sivilov is not yet ready for it. As I now more confidently and reasonably express my opinion that at this stage Assoc. Kliment Ohridski".

16 March 2025.
Sofia

(Assoc. Prof. Boris Stoyanov)