

II.

Power and the Limits of Historical Representation

A postmodern re-examination of the western obsession with power and time and a reconsideration of western inability to cope with revisionism

“When a man begins with the pompous formula – ‘The verdict of history is’ – suspect him at once, for he is merely dressing up his own opinions in big words ... There is no ‘verdict of history’ other than the private opinion of the individual ...” *was Trevelyan’s warning. In his opinion* “history should not only remove prejudice, it should breed enthusiasm ...” *Therefore it should not be* “‘the light and the truth’ but a search therefore, a sermon thereupon, a consecration” (*Droysen*) ...

We should be aware that “historical narrative always depends on the culture in which and from which it springs” (*Huizinga*), *and that there has always been a struggle for an interpretation of historical facts, a struggle between different social and cultural groups who wanted to establish their vision of historical truth (Voltaire). And finally, Nietzsche has already shown (and Foucault brought it with all the emphasis again) that discourses emerge in a field of relations of power, defying some, supporting others, hardly coming into the scholarly world as innocent pursuits of truth (Poster).*

Thinking about these dimensions and also about a definition of history given by Keith Jenkins (in which products of history “... once in circulation, are subject to a series of uses and abuses that are logically infinite but which in actuality generally correspond to a range of power bases that exist at any given moment and which structure and distribute the meanings of histories along a dominant-marginal spectrum.”) we invited historians to participate in a discussion in which the relations between traditional and “new” history or “new philosophy of history” (Ankersmith) is metaphorically situated in a power-resistance relation.

We got a response from excellent authors (scholars) such as Keith Jenkins discussing Elizabeth Deeds Ermath’s Sequel to History (Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time) as “...one of the most important consideration of postmodernism, history and ethics/morality” and what he “construe as ways of living in time but outside history; in morality but outside ethics.” We received the text from Viennese, Reinhard Sieder, who is reconstructing the turn to social history, claiming that in “new” social history, the historian still seeks to attain the truth about the “real”.

We have a text written by Paul Freedman ("Peasant Resistance in Medieval Europe") in which he is trying – on the basis of a rediscovery of the rationality of the peasant economy, of the 15th and 16th centuries to show how one-sided was Marxist and free-market economists' and historians' view on peasantry as an obstacle to progress. And finally, here is my contribution, in which I discuss the main problem of east and south-east European transitional or post Cold War historical reinterperetations of the past fifty years. It is the problem of the reinterpretation of collaboration-resistance relationships during fascist and (or) Nazi occupation. It is a critique of a recent revisionist attempt to possess the past ... and control the future. It is a critique of the lack of flexibility, openness, and willingness to reflect.

Finally, I would like to thank all who decided to contribute to the "historiographical section" of the Power & Resistance volume of Filozofski vestnik/Acta Philosophica. I would also like to thank Gabrielle Spiegel who taught me much about the current questions connected to this topic during her visit to Ljubljana in May 1997.

Oto Luthar