Saulius Grybkauskas, *Sovietinis „generalgubernatorius“: Komunistų partijų antrieji sekretoriai Sovietų Sąjungos respublikose*, Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2016. 388 p. ISBN 978-609-8183-14-6

‘The Soviet “Governor General”: Communist Party Second Secretaries in the Soviet Union Republics’ is the first systematic historical study of the institution of second secretary in the Soviet Union. It takes readers on a journey into the origins, genealogy and functioning of this institution. Saulius Grybkauskas asks several important questions: What was the relationship between the centre and the periphery? How did the institution of second secretary function as a control mechanism? And what does this institution tell us about the Soviet Union as an ‘empire’? The book is based on Lithuanian, Russian, Latvian, Estonian, Georgian and Kazakh archives, and the Hoover Institution Archives in the USA. The author also reviewed memoirs by the former leadership of the Communist Party, and conducted interviews with former second secretaries, staff of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and with the top nomenclature in the republics, including Eduard Shevardnadze and Algirdas Brazauskas, who after 1991 became presidents of Georgia and Lithuania respectively.

Grybkauskas argues that the institution of second secretary was closely related to the Soviet Union’s control of the periphery (pp. 24–28). The preceding other important control institutions included representatives of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party to the republics. The representatives were replaced by the Republic Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party (p. 360). The institution of second secretary replaced the Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party. The institution of second secretary was established the earliest in the Baltic States, in 1944 (pp. 35, 38). According to Grybkauskas, no specific resolution was adopted regarding the founding of the institution of second secretary; otherwise, the replacement would have happened in all Soviet republics (p. 360). A full list of second secretaries was formed only in 1979 (p. 360).

The institution of second secretary, which included the appointment of a Russian cadre to the republics, and which is at the centre of the analysis in the book, emerged in 1955. It was related to de-Stalinisation, and to the strengthening of Khrushchev’s hold on power. At that time, Khrushchev’s followers were sent to occupy important posts in the republics to implement de-Stalinisation (p. 361). Grybkauskas argues that the presence of the

second secretary as the main representative of Moscow confirms that the Communist Party, rather than Soviet security or other institutions, was the leading power in the USSR. The importance of the Party leadership was initiated the night before the 19th Congress in 1952 (p. 163).

Grybkauskas reconstructs the 'collective biography of the second secretaries'. The second secretaries were older bureaucrats: the average age of second secretaries in Estonia was 53, in Lithuania 51, and in Latvia 49 years old (p. 138). The average period of tenure was five years (p. 139). There were some exceptions, as in the case of Latvia's second secretary Nikolai Belucha, who served as second secretary for 16 years, from 1963 to 1978. More than half of all second secretaries had industry-related education (p. 141). After their tenure as second secretaries, they became first secretaries in Russian regions, envoys to foreign countries, or members of leading Party and government committees (p. 151).

The essential characteristic of the institution was that the second secretary was a Russian, while the first secretary was a national cadre. It had to be an SUCP Central Committee apparatus cadre, who felt his own temporariness and a special connection with the centre, and who also projected his own future career outside the republic in which he served. In many cases, prior to their appointment, second secretaries were functionaries in the Department of Organisational Party Work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (p. 136). From December 1955, when Dmitri Yakovlev became second secretary in Azerbaijan, until the collapse of the USSR, there were 83 appointments of second secretaries to the republics (p. 365).

The second secretaries were in charge of curbing nationalism. Grybkauskas cites the definition of nationalism in Soviet dictionaries as: 'National closure, overvaluation of national particularity, distrust of the great nation proletariat' (pp. 170–171). However, the book shows that it is difficult to say in specific cases what counted as nationalism. Some, like Latvia's second secretary N. Belucha, related nationalism to fascism, and Latvian participation in Nazi SS divisions (p. 186). In other cases, accusations of nationalism could have been used strategically against the nomenclature or social and cultural elites, to suppress tendencies towards autonomy for the republic.

The author argues that second secretaries consolidated the local nomenclature. The leadership of the Party over other institutions since the 19th Congress in 1952 shaped the centralisation of local leaders around the first secretary (p. 166). Without the uniting influence of the second secretary, the local nomenclature could become fragmented, sections of it would support the government, state security or economic departments, and only a few would be first secretary clients (p. 166).

In Lithuania, the appointment of the second secretary was related to agrarian problems in the republic. Grybkauskas argues that it is unlikely

that national leaders welcomed the 'strengthening of cadres' (p. 120). They understood that the second secretaries were an imposition of control (p. 120). At the same time, a request to appoint a second secretary could mean that the local nomenclature was willing to pay for their 'mismanagement', and express their openness to Soviet governance (p. 120). The second secretary 'created smoother relations with Moscow' (p. 120). He had to mediate and secure proper engagement with the centre's agenda (p. 120).

As we learn from the book, the second secretary was the most important political agent of the Kremlin, called by local leaders the 'governor general', 'Moscow's eyes and ears', or 'Moscow's regents' (p. 356). Grybkauskas even argues: 'We might say that the ability of the Kremlin [...] to analyse and understand the situation in the republics was limited to the information gathered by its main agent, the second secretary' (p. 358). The second secretary also carried out certain roles that only he was entrusted with, such as giving information on the international policy of the Central Committee at plenary sessions (p. 204). 'Foreign policy was reserved exclusively for the centre, and any interpretation by the leadership of the republics arising from "local specifics" was undesirable.' (p. 370).

Importantly, Grybkauskas challenges the accepted notion that the second secretary was more influential than the first secretary, the real leader, in the republic (p. 250). The second secretaries could not expect to become first secretaries, with the exception in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (p. 273). The first secretary had the most support from the centre (p. 250). The first secretary could also influence the recall of a second secretary to Moscow (p. 242). For the second secretary to initiate the removal of the first secretary might even have been dangerous, since it would expose his leadership incompetence (p. 240). Like the local nomenclature, the second secretary was responsible for the political, social and economic situation in the republic (p. 214). Grybkauskas has not found any resolution criticising a second secretary for activities against a republic's Party elite. On the contrary, the second secretary was criticised for his conformity and for making concessions (p. 207).

Various tensions in the exercise of power are revealed in the book: tension between the centre and the republics/the periphery; tension between the second and first secretaries; tension between the second secretary and the local nomenclature, and even the 'centre'. The book gives readers ample evidence of negotiations and a clientalistic governance regime. The author argues that 'we can imagine the relations between the Kremlin and Soviet republics as ongoing negotiations over the execution of political and economic tasks, loyalty to the system, and securing Moscow's rule in a republic' (p. 368).

However, the author downplays these negotiations by implicitly using an institutional approach, analysing how the institution of second secretary functioned, and what kind of behaviour it determined. To some extent,

as in a rational-choice approach, the relevant actors have a fixed set of preferences, and behave instrumentally in a strategic way.¹ According to Grybkas, three options were available to the second secretaries: 1) to act as a strong agent, the 'eyes and ears' of the centre; 2) to get involved in local affairs, and represent not so much the centre but local interests; 3) or to find a balance between 1) and 2), which was the most common case (pp. 370–371). For example, he argues, it was rational for the second secretary to hide shortcomings from Moscow, and escape punishment for bad governance (p. 215). Importantly, informal norms and conventions such as hunting rituals, or moral imperatives such as collective responsibility in the governance of the republic, are recognised in the book as part of the institution. Such an approach, which stands in contrast to interactionist perspectives, contributes to our understanding of the asymmetric relations between the 'centre' and the 'periphery', by showing the Russian/Slavic-centric politics of the USSR. Such a model is intrinsic to the conceptualisation of the USSR as a centralised and controlling 'empire', and the institution of second secretary as a platform for the USSR's 'imperial' politics.

The 'empire' in this book is predominantly defined at two interconnected levels: 1) the hierarchical governance of the USSR (centralisation, regions versus centre, Slavs versus others, national cadres versus the centre's cadres); 2) the second secretary's role as an 'imperialist' (the interests and responsibilities of the second secretary in the republic). Centralism, an important feature of the Soviet 'empire', is manifested in the practices of the bureaucratic expansion of cadres. The second secretaries were 'knights of the empire' (p. 95), and their position was important to the educational and governance platform of the Moscow bureaucracy (p. 94). According to Grybkas, the Kremlin engaged in discriminatory politics by distrusting the elites of the republics and excluding them from the highest level of governance (p. 91). Moreover, behavioural aspects of regional leaders, such as 'submissive listening to remarks and requests by regular employees of the apparatus' (p. 58), or the acknowledgement of guilt by leaders of the periphery when criticised, were 'an important element of interaction with the representatives of the centre, which expressed the essence of democratic centralism' (p. 60), and revealed unequal power relations.

'Moscow's imperialism' was embedded in the role of the second secretary in the republics. The appointment of a second secretary was temporary, because the 'centre' was afraid that he would become too close to the local nomenclature (pp. 161–162). The 'imperial nature of the institution of second secretary' is also supported by the second secretary's interests and areas of responsibility: he was in charge of the control of cadres and administrative departments, he also got involved in all spheres

¹ P. A. Hall, R. Taylor, 'Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms', *Political Studies*, XLIV (1996).

of political and social life (p. 162). Moreover, the second secretary was 'a hidden imperialist': while he was 'part of an essentially imperialist institutional structure and imposed on the *nomenklaturas* of the republics, at the same time he declared he was coming to help the republics resolve issues in agriculture, nationalism and the like' (p. 374).

The book invites us to engage in other discussions, such as how the approach to the USSR as an 'empire' is more analytically useful than seeing the USSR as a 'totalitarian' or 'authoritarian' power. Using the concept 'empire' allows the author to emphasise spatial differences in the USSR, and to establish the relevance between the centre and the periphery, as well as between the actors of the centre and actors on the periphery. However, even if the author defines Sovietisation as a complex phenomenon, which included not only control, supervision and repression, but also close collaboration, the local elites are very much receivers of 'imperial' politics rather than proponents of it. It is considered that 'the Kremlin did not offer it [the new titular elite] anything else except serving as diligent executors of the centre's decisions and broadcasting those decisions to the territories of the republics' (p. 365). I would argue, in agreement with the author, that national communists were complicit in the constitution of the 'empire.' Thus, the readers should not confuse the search for autonomy with transgressing from the politics of the centre, which the discussion of the Soviet 'empire' as constituted through a hierarchical regime of governance might imply, but as being definitive of Soviet power relations. As postcolonial studies illustrate, empires were created, as well as changed, by the peripheries as well.

This book is an important contribution to studies of the upper levels of Soviet power, and of centre and periphery relations in the USSR, especially during the still little-researched post-Stalinist period. Its special value is its rich examples of archival data, as well as its scope, capturing trends in the Baltic States, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Through the lens of one institution, Grybkauskas is able to uncover circulation of power and authority in the USSR, discuss the development of the regime of Soviet governance in the Soviet republics, especially in the Baltic States, and contribute to a theoretical discussion of the late Soviet Union as an imperial power.

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