

Wojciech Roszkowski, *Communist Crimes: A Legal and Historical Study*, IPN, Warszawa 2016

It is one of the great paradoxes of the contemporary discourse on communist crimes that even today, nearly thirty years after the spectacular fiasco of Marxism-Leninism, these crimes are perceived by many public opinion makers as a *controversial* topic. It is especially so in Western countries never ruled by communist regimes. In the light of copious evidence of crimes and abuses committed by every communist regime that ever existed (ranging from the genocidal campaigns in the USSR, China, Cambodia all the way through the “moderate” totalitarianism in Cuba and Yugoslavia), one may ask: What can be controversial about hunting down millions of innocent people and shooting them in the back of their heads or annihilating them slowly by slave labor? What are the pros and cons of systematically denying food to millions of starving men, women and children, and forcing them into the subhuman state, in which some of them would devour each other before their own deaths? It turns out, apparently, that even these phenomena can be rationalized and relativized. One of twentieth-century’s most celebrated historians, Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012), explained: “The modern political choice is a choice between different prearranged packages in which we buy, among others, things we don’t want, because there is no other way of getting the rest which we desire.” It is still unclear what exactly is so desirable in the communist

“package” that it makes it worthy of all the evil committed in its name.

Wojciech Roszkowski’s *Communist Crimes: A Legal and Historical Study* makes short work of this sort of politicized rationalization of communist atrocities. Two decades after *The Black Book of Communism*, the eminent Polish historian gives us an updated global account of communist crimes. In 327 pages, he manages to present a dense and informative study of the topic, replete with recently established detailed factual data. This account encompasses not only the history of communism in the USSR and its outer empire but also examines communist crimes in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Before delving into this impressive body of knowledge, the author reflects in interesting ways on the main legal concepts by which mass political crimes are perceived and judged on the global stage today. He traces the fundamental notions of *genocide*, *crimes against humanity*, *war crimes*, and *crimes against peace* back to their historical origins and shows how specific political contexts influenced the formulation of these ideas. This sheds interesting light on the elusive status of communist crimes in today’s international legal framework, reminding us that this framework was, to a considerable degree, established by the victorious powers after World War II. It is important to remember that Stalin’s regime was among the principal authors of this framework.

Analyzing the ideological and, more generally, intellectual roots of communist crimes, Roszkowski starts

from the fundamental philosophical premises of Marxism-Leninism and the quintessential role played in them by violence. What is original and innovative about Roszkowski's approach to the early Bolshevik revolutionary violence is that he places it in a context of imperial aggression and conquest. He does not follow unconditionally the tradition of referring to the Soviet Union as simply the continuation of the Russian empire under a new rule. Instead, Roszkowski emphasizes that the Bolshevik state originated in the process of reconquering most of its territory, parts of which had already been claimed by local nationalities. He analyzes many Bolshevik crimes as motivated by the inner dynamics of conquest both "domestic" and foreign. Another central motivation was, of course, the task of imposing the ideological design on living human beings. The chapter devoted to this theme lists principal methods of this implementation in the titles of sections: "the reign of terror," "violation of civilized legal rules," "murder," "torture," "mass murder," "forced labor," "displacement." At the end of the chapter, the author provides the "body count." The implementation of Marxist-Leninist ideological blueprint through violent crimes is presented in its Soviet context as well as many other national variations.

Another factor distinguishing Roszkowski's treatment of communist crimes is a result of special attention paid to the communist aggression against religion and national identity. Roszkowski argues effectively and provides serious evidence emphasizing the communists' strong preference for violence perceived as a necessary method of fulfilling the ideological requirement of eradicating religion and national identity. Considered

key impediments to the communist transformation of man and society, both religion and ethnicity were often eradicated through the destruction or suppression of their human carriers on the scale of entire populations. What makes Roszkowski's discussion of this topic especially enlightening is, in addition to its detailed focus, also its comparative nature including many countries under communist regimes.

Wojciech Roszkowski's *Communist Crimes* has been written with English-speaking global readership in mind. The author displays intimate knowledge of his primary audiences and provides them with an excellent, eye-opening study of a topic of utmost importance still shrouded in confusion. With appropriate promotion among educated Western audiences, this book is capable of seriously impacting the contemporary international discourse on the twentieth century's legacy of communism.

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Adam J. Koch, *A Captain's Portrait. Witold Pilecki – Martyr for Truth*, Freedom Publishing Books, Bayswater Vic. 2018, 446 pages.

The legacy of Witold Pilecki is still not sufficiently known worldwide, so any new attempt to present it must be warmly welcome. This recent book by a Polish-born Australian author is therefore worth a special attention for two reasons: for bringing Pilecki closer to a wider reading public and for a high quality of scholarly work. No wonder then that it was strongly recommended by Professor Tracey Rowland of the University of Notre Dame.

"I strove to live such a life that at the hour of my death I would rather rejoice than be fearful," said Pilecki at the end of his life. Given his strong integrity and trust in God, despite tragic circumstances of his death, he would probably have not revoked this declaration to the very end.

Born in 1901, already in 1914 Pilecki became active in the pro-independence scouting movement. At the end of 1918 he volunteered to serve in the Polish Army and in January 1919 he joined the cavalry regiment led by the famous Polish major Jerzy Dambrowski "Łupaszka." In 1921 Pilecki graduated from a non-commissioned officer school and from 1922 to 1924 he studied agriculture at the Poznań University. In peacetime he lived a life of a loving husband and father at his family estate of Sukurcze near Lida (now in Belarus). During the German invasion in September 1939, he fought as a cavalry platoon commander. In November 1939, he helped to found the Polish Secret Army [pol. Tajna Armia Polska]. In September 1940 he became a voluntary prisoner of the German concentration camp in Auschwitz, in order to set up an underground resistance network and to report atrocities committed by the Germans. Under the false name of "Tadeusz Serafiński" (prisoner number 4859) he founded the camp United Military Organization Union, which in 1942 became part of the Home Army [pol. Armia Krajowa, AK]. In April 1943 he escaped from Auschwitz to prepare a report about the situation in the camp for the intelligence department of the AK High Command. He later fought in

the Warsaw Rising under a false name of Roman Jezierski. Taken prisoner of war after the collapse of the rising, he was held in the officer POW camp at Lamsdorf (now Łambinowice, Poland) and at Murnau, Germany, until the end of the war. After liberation in April 1945, he volunteered to serve in the 2nd Polish Corps in Italy. At the end of 1945 he returned to Poland. In May 1947 he was arrested by the Communist State Security Office on charges of collecting intelligence for General Anders. Brutally tortured and sentenced to death, in March 1948 Pilecki was executed and buried in an unmarked grave.

Adam J. Koch has led the reader through these steps of Pilecki's life with deep understanding of inter-war, wartime and postwar reality. The author was also right to sketch a brief outline of earlier Polish history in order to show the mental background of his hero. Reading the book, one cannot help feeling strong emotions but the author is not only a good story-teller by a thorough scholar.

A symbol of moral resistance against Nazi and Communist barbarity, Pilecki will always remain a hero for all the people for whom freedom and human dignity are not empty words. When the European Parliament voted a resolution against totalitarianism in 2009, majority of its members rejected an amendment seeking that his name be mentioned as a symbol. This sad development is a call to all people of good will to remember and appreciate heroes such as Pilecki.

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