

Vilius Ivanauskas, *Lietuviškoji nomenklatura biurokratinėje sistemoje: tarp stagnacijos ir dinamikos (1968–1988)*, Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2011. 662 p. ISBN 978-9955-847-42-7

In examining the social life of political and Communist Party elites in Soviet Lithuania, ‘The Lithuanian Nomenklatura in the Bureaucratic System: Between Stagnation and Dynamics (1968–1988)’ by Vilius Ivanauskas offers new and important insights into how socialist society was organised and how it was transformed in late socialism. It focuses on three groups known as *nomenklatura*, or key actors in the socialist state apparatus, including the technocrats, the ‘partycrats’, and the scientific and cultural elites, to open doors to a world that was inaccessible to common citizens, yet imagined through speculation and rumour. In his analysis of social networks, informal exchanges, and the everyday life of the Lithuanian *nomenklatura*, Ivanauskas shows how members of the ruling class negotiated national and local interests within the Soviet Union and how they engaged with the changing political climate in the last years of the socialist regime. Presenting a nuanced analysis of the workings of power in the highest ranks, Ivanauskas’ study documents the ways in which socialist Lithuania’s *nomenklatura* developed a repertoire of informal rules, political performances, and rich social life through which they advanced their individual, institutional and national goals.

‘The Lithuanian Nomenklatura in the Bureaucratic System’ is based on an impressive array of historical sources, including extensive archival work in Lithuania, Russia, and the United States. These sources are effectively complemented by oral histories based on 44 semi-structured interviews with former members of the *nomenklatura* as well as a textual analysis of popular writings and memoirs published since the end of socialism. It is an example of rigorous interdisciplinary work, combining classic historical research with qualitative social science methodologies to produce an empirically rich and theoretically sophisticated study.

Covering a period of 20 years, the book starts with the aftermath of the Prague Spring in 1968 and ends in 1988 with the formation of institutions of the national independence movement in Lithuania. While this period is often defined as an era of stagnation, Ivanauskas shows that the daily operations in the highest governing bodies and the Communist Party headquarters were far from predictable, requiring creativity, charisma, and negotiation skills on the part of its members. Building on Amir Weiner’s point that the socialist state relied on weak institutional structures, but

strong interpersonal relations (p. 31), Ivanauskas emphasises the formation of intensely localised social networks in socialist Lithuania based on trust, shared experience, socialisation rituals, and a particular identity politics that placed nativism at its centre.

To pursue these themes, the book is divided into four parts. The first part introduces the organisation of the *nomenklatura*, and explains how it operated in socialist Lithuania. In addition to covering formal structures, including government, industry, agriculture, and the Communist Party, this part also provides insights into how social networks were formed and cultivated, particularly through rituals (hunting, fishing, drinking, and family relations, among others) and shared experience such as education. The second part delves deeper into the question of how these networks were activated and, more broadly, how the *nomenklatura* reacted to the reforms and political pressures exercised by the centre. It does this by examining three cases, including the policy of agricultural consolidation and institutional reorganisation of the agricultural sector to form what was known as Agroprom; the push towards centralisation in energy infrastructures and the construction of the Ignalina nuclear power plant along with the Mažeikiai oil refinery and processing plant; and the expansion of Russian-language curriculum in schools. In all three cases, the *nomenklatura* relied on personal networks to tweak these policies and directives.

The third part focuses on the ways in which the *nomenklatura* engaged with socialist ideology and how it dealt with its mandate to manage the socialist economy. This is the longest part in the book focusing on identity formation and the efforts to negotiate one's place in the ideological and institutional structures. It explores work relations on three levels, starting with the city of Alytus as an example of local politics, moving to an analysis of the national or republic level, and ending with a discussion of relations between the Lithuanian *nomenklatura* and the central USSR apparatus. This part also examines lifestyle politics and consumption patterns to reveal tensions surrounding the formation of the socialist identity among the political elites. The final part extends the analysis to explore the role of national identities in the lives of the Soviet Lithuania's elites. It shows how members of the *nomenklatura* grappled with the changing political climate in the 1980s by negotiating their interest in preserving socialist institutions with their efforts to advance national goals.

Throughout the book, Ivanauskas contributes to three areas in the historiography of socialist institutions both in and outside of the Lithuanian academia. First, 'The Lithuanian Nomenklatura in the Bureaucratic System' engages with the debate about the political organisation of the socialist state, particularly the question about the extent to which socialism should be seen as a totalitarian state ruling all spheres of life or whether it is best understood as relying on the consent and participation of its citizens. Enlisting the revisionist and post-revisionist school of thought that

emphasises the role of citizens in the reproduction of socialist institutions, Ivanauskas argues against a totalitarian approach to show tensions, contradictions, and ongoing negotiations in the making of the socialist identity. But unlike classic revisionist and post-revisionist approaches focusing on workers, peasants, and public servants, Ivanauskas' study provides insights into everyday of life among the political and economic elites to reveal a dramatic interplay between their identification with socialism and implicit critiques of the socialist state. Ivanauskas argues that along with official proclamations of communist ideals, local members of the *nomenklatura* managed to pursue their personal, institutional, and national agendas.

Furthermore, Ivanauskas' study complicates scholarly and public debates about the unravelling of socialism that tend to present the fall of the socialist bloc as a historical break and institutional collapse. 'The Lithuanian Nomenklatura in the Bureaucratic System' suggests that the political and economic changes culminating in the national movements at the end of the 1980s reach back to earlier decades and that the *nomenklatura* were privy to the transformations in the national consciousness and liberalisation of economic philosophies taking root in Lithuania. This approach is important in that it helps to explain why and how many members of the *nomenklatura* who had been staunch supporters of socialism have thrived in independent, capitalist Lithuania.

Finally, Ivanauskas advances our theoretical understanding of the functioning of state institutions. Relying on anthropological insights, 'The Lithuanian Nomenklatura in the Bureaucratic System' shows how Party officials, industrial and agricultural managers, and cultural elites made the system work by relying on informal rules and social networks. Engaging with Max Weber's analyses of the social and political effects of bureaucratisation, Ivanauskas criticises the orthodoxy of the sociology of social institutions to argue that it overlooks the role of unwritten rules, cultural capital, and personal connections that were central in the maintenance of political and economic organisations in socialist Lithuania. In other words, while Weber's approach captures major institution-building patterns in industrial capitalism in the West, his theory has little to offer for different cultural and political contexts. As Ivanauskas' extraordinarily rich empirical analysis suggests, the emergence of bureaucracies and rational management techniques in the socialist system were mutually constituted with the formation of informal exchanges, rituals, and social relations.

'The Lithuanian Nomenklatura in the Bureaucratic System' is one of the most innovative and rigorous interdisciplinary studies published in Lithuania in recent years. While it is aimed at academic audiences studying modern history, it also engages with classic social theories that anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists as well as the general public will find illuminating. The book is a pleasure to read: it is well written and accessible, and it features an impressive array of previously unpublished

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empirical evidence, including rare photographs. Given the breadth of its scope, theoretical sophistication, and depth of empirical materials, I hope that it will be translated into other languages so that East Europeanists working on related topics gain access to this outstanding research project.

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