

TAMPERE 1992

Extracts from an American's impressions of the 1992 conference of the International Society for History Didactics held in Tampere Finland.

1. Although the intellectual discussions that occurred at the 1992 Tampere conference included colleagues from all the Scandinavian states (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) and although these colleagues construed themselves as part of some kind of a larger Baltic "confederation", it became clear during the discussions that a real economic and historical division separated them from their eastern European and former Soviet-dominated colleagues. Again, this division does not exist on the level of discussion or friendship. It exists on a historical and teaching level. The Scandinavian states belong to two alliances at once: the large Baltic region and the Nordic League. The first includes formerly Soviet dominated states, the latter, consistently free states.

This division creates a difference in the teaching of history. The former Soviet and Warsaw-Pact states allowed the public teaching and writing of history according to only one format, i.e., Marxist-Leninist history. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its communist satellites has freed the teaching of history and the perspective on the present and past. But, for several reasons, this has not spelled historiographical equality with the Scandinavian and other Western states. (My comments here do not mean that the West has no ideology. It does, but it does allow a greater latitude and variety in the viewing of the present and the past).

2. Baltic historians themselves recognise that the teaching and study of history has been liberated from Soviet domination. One historian has characterised this change as "Clio without chains". However, our discussions showed that the results of this liberation have not been immediately happy. As several colleagues pointed out, history

teachers are not yet been trained to teach a non-Marxist, freed history. Unhappily, some previously orthodox and employed history teachers now find themselves unorthodox and unemployed. (This situation was already discussed last year at our meeting in Berlin.) They know the old "truths" and are not yet trained in new methodologies or historiographies. It's a mixed situation. Our colleagues from the former East Germany and the former Soviet Union were particularly poignant on this issue.

3. Related to this point is the report that Russians living in now free states cannot learn their "own" history. While "melting-pot" theory might argue that in a generation or so ethnic instabilities in the new liberated states ought to "take care" of this problem, this American attendant was not left with a sense that these ethnic differences would be quickly or easily healed. They are fraught with political and not just educational differences and memories.

4. Another political problem seems to be internally though not ethnically generated. The results of political liberation in eastern Europe have left a situation in which "who really rules" is still unclear. History teachers and researchers do not want to abandon the old verities too quickly, as they admitted that it is not at all clear who really rules and what history will be permitted to be written. If the wrong individuals or side come to power, then a too hasty change of historical perspective could prove very dangerous. This observer found this situation very troublesome and its discussion by our colleague from Poland extremely moving.

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