

Kinder empfanden.⁸³ Der Einmarsch der deutschen Truppen wurde von der alten Oberschicht dazu benutzt, sich an denen zu rächen, die sich angeblich ihr Hab und Gut angeeignet hatten. In einer Situation, in der traditionelle Moralvorstellungen nicht mehr zu gelten schienen, nahm diese Rache eine extreme Form an. Die Rückkehr der Bolschewiki zu Beginn des Freiheitskrieges wurde wiederum vielerorts genutzt, um sich für die Ungerechtigkeiten während der deutschen Besatzung zu rächen. Weil Ungerechtigkeit nur neue Ungerechtigkeit gebiert, brach mit der Befreiung des estnischen Territoriums von der Roten Armee eine neue Gewaltwelle aus. Diese wurde erst durch die Stärkung der Zentralmacht gebändigt. Schließlich nahm nach den Wahlen vom April 1919 eine demokratisch gewählte neue Volksvertretung ihre Tätigkeit auf und ergriff energische Maßnahmen zur Lösung der Landfrage, die ohne Zweifel dazu beitrugen, das Gewaltpotenzial in der estnischen Gesellschaft zu vermindern.

SUMMARY

*The Vicious Circle of Violence:
Terror and Repression in Estonia, 1917–1919*

The direct consequences of World War I did not just include changes on the political map of Europe, but also great human losses, unprecedented inflation and economic chaos. The war also led to major changes in the social order of the belligerent countries, above all in Eastern and Central Europe, where the pre-war society ceased to exist due to war and revolutions. The state of society fostered by the destruction of collective consciousness and older moral standards was termed “anomie” by Émile Durkheim. One noteworthy consequence of the revolutions and World War I for the Eastern and Central European region was a certain brutalization of human relations. As formerly strong institutions crumbled, they were displaced by a cultural vacuum that provided a conduit for extremist views, deviant behaviour and nihilism. Cyclical patterns of violence arose in many places, where the terrorisers and the terrorised often traded places in the new situation as victims sought revenge on those who had kept them in fear only a short time ago.

Estonia saw three major “paroxysms” of violence in 1918–1919, which, although small in scale, were good examples of how human relations became more brutal in post-World War I Eastern Europe. At the beginning of the 20th century, the most burning issue for the majority in Estonian

⁸³ JUHA SILTALA: *Sisällissodan psykohistoria* [Die Psycho-Geschichte des Bürgerkrieges], Helsinki 2009, S. 143, 172.

society was the agrarian question and not the question of independence, as 60 percent of the rural population did not possess any land at all. As the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia, they passed the infamous Land Decree on the 26th of October 1917, which abolished private property and encouraged poor peasants to take over the lands of nobility and peasants who were economically more well off. Of course, this step did not reduce tensions within the society, nor did it bring people closer to a more equitable social order. In Estonia, the (mostly German) class of ex-owners got the perfect opportunity to strike back as Imperial Germany occupied the Estonian mainland by the beginning of March 1918, and some of them did not let this chance go by. About 5 000 people, who had shown their sympathy to the Bolshevik regime, had been involved in the takeover of land or who were not seen as trustworthy by the new regime, were arrested, often with the help of the local residents, and then turned over to the Germans. About 400 people were executed. The German occupation ended in November 1918 and shortly afterwards, the Estonian War of Independence began, as the Red Army stormed Narva on the 28th of November 1918, pushing the weak and ill-equipped Estonian Army westwards. This event “ignited” the next stages of this cycle of violence: in 1918/19, the “Red” Terror claimed the lives of approximately 650-700 people (3 000 were imprisoned) and the “White” Terror claimed 700-800 lives (5 000 were imprisoned). Most of the victims of the Red and White Terror were accused of collaboration with the enemy or with the respective previous regime. Violence began to decline in April 1919 with the strengthening of central power and the democratically elected legislature, which was dominated by the Estonian Social Democrats and the leftist Labour Party and which took energetic steps in order to solve the Estonian agrarian question, and by that satisfying the “land hunger” of the Estonian rural population.