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THE POLES AND THEIR PAST: SOCIETY, HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE LEGISLATION PROCESS

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I. NAZISM AND COMMUNISM IN POLAND: EXPERIENCES AND MEMORY

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The Polish nation had experienced both Nazism and communism. These were not equal experiences, and social memory about them differs to a considerable degree. In order to perform such an operation, it would be necessary to halt history in June 1941. Since it is impossible to stop history in order to examine the period from mid-September 1939 to June 1941, it is helpful to study Polish recollections of their experiences so as to understand their continued impact on national history and memory.

The Nazi Occupation

This was an exceptionally brutal and bloody period, even if we were to exclude the Holocaust and limit ourselves to the fate of the "ethnic" Poles. There is no reliable statistical data, although it is accepted that due to German crimes and wartime hostilities no fewer than 1.5 to two million Poles and almost three million Poles of Jewish descent perished during the Nazi occupation.

In Warsaw, from October 1943 to July 1944, at least eight thousand people were shot, which means that about twenty-five people were killed daily. The losses suffered by the Underground resistance from the autumn of 1939 to July 1944 (until the Warsaw Uprising) are estimated at about 60,000-70,000 people in the area under Nazi occupation. In the years 1940-44, the number of people sent to concentration camps totaled at least 10,000 annually. The autumn of 1939 witnessed deportations of the population from territories incorporated into the Third Reich, and in the course of the first six months, about 400,000 people were affected. At the same time, the Germans initiated "street round-ups" and the deportation of forced laborers; in the summer of 1944, there were some 1.3 million Polish slave laborers working in the Third Reich. An estimated 20,000 Polish children were subjected to a denationalization campaign. Particularly severe persecutions were applied in relation to the intelligentsia—from priests to landowners,

teachers and professors. In certain vocations, the losses amounted to one-third of the total profession. Although the experiences of the 1939-44 period were sufficiently dramatic, the massacre of Warsaw—first the population (180,000) and after the stifling of the Uprising, the destruction of the town itself—comprised the final act of Polish martyrdom.

It is obvious, therefore, that Nazism was a traumatic experience, on both an individual and a collective scale. Since the summer of 1941, all lands inhabited by the Poles were under occupation. This was a national experience, shared by the decisive majority of the nation. Only about a million Poles managed to find refuge in Allied countries or, prior to the Soviet-German war, in the innermost recesses of the Soviet Union.

Although before the war Poland had a nascent, strong, nationalistic right wing and did not lack supporters of Hitler—though Mussolini was the more frequent object of adoration, envisaged as a model of a truly effective politician—the "Nazi experience" was essentially associated exclusively with the occupation. No important public person or any political group cooperated with the Third Reich, and the Nazis did not seek any Polish forces ready to embark upon such collaboration, nor did they attempt to create such forces. The single collaborationist attempt made in 1939 by a branch of one of the extremely rightist parties (ONR-Falanga) ended several weeks later with the arrest of its members. The only better known politician, who presented a memorial to the German authorities, was an elderly Germanophile from the First World War (Wladyslaw Studnicki), who was placed under house arrest. Finally, only a single renowned publisher (Emil Skiwski) undertook more systematic cooperation once Goebbels announced the defense of Festung Europa.

Rightist parties which conducted underground activity were repressed just as any other Polish party. This state of things does not alter the fact that in January 1945, the moment the Red Army crossed the line of the Vistula, one of the partisan formations of the extreme right wing (the Holy Cross Brigade) set off westward, under the cover of the withdrawing Wehrmacht (and reached Czechoslovakia where, according to plans, it found itself in terrains occupied by the U.S. Army).

In this way, in the memory of the Poles, and in the reality of the war and the occupation, Poland remained the only nation that did not tarnish itself with collaboration with Nazism. Without even mentioning the Vichy regime, Quisling, the Walloon-Flemish, or Latvian members of the S.S., emphasis is placed on the fact that even among the eastern neighbors there existed significant and influential political groups that, even more frequently than before the war, relied on the Third Reich to act as a protector in the struggle both against Poland and against the Soviet Union. The German occupation authorities even provided the collaborating factions with opportunities to pursue their aspired national goals, as exemplified by the Ukrainian S.S. "Halichina" division or the Lithuanian detachments of General Plekhavicius. The Russians had Gen. Andriey Vlasov and military detachments, which fought side by side together with the Wehrmacht, while auxiliary units, including those active in occupied Poland, were composed of hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens of various nationalities.

For the Poles, Nazism was only and exclusively a brutal occupant, and its condemnation was universal. It bred only boundless hatred and the desire for revenge. True, after the defeat of the Third Reich, mass-scale lynch mobs and excesses did not take place even during the deportations of more than two million Germans, but certain camps for the "Folksdeutschen," whose inmates totaled about one hundred thousand, were sites of deaths and torture inflicted on the detained women, old people, and children. On several occasions, tens of thousands of spectators applauded public executions of sentenced war criminals. Some of these executions were performed by former victims of concentration camp inmates, wearing their striped camp uniforms.[1]

Poland was viewed by the Poles not merely as an innocent victim, but also as outright holy due to the dimension of its martyrdom and the lack of the country's collaboration. Moreover, in universal conviction, Poland was not only tormented, but betrayed by its allies: in 1939, neither the French or the British stirred to help in the struggle against the Third Reich, and afterwards at Yalta, Poland was left at the mercy of Stalin. Poland was the only country, next to Great Britain, that fought from the very first to the last day of the war against the Nazis on tens of fronts, including the bloodiest one—the Underground.

This opinion, with slight alterations, remained obligatory to this day. The Poles are proud of their participation in the war, convinced that they had suffered the greatest losses, and do not like talking about or hearing that this unblemished image could be sullied in any way. Not a single monograph has appeared on "daily collaboration," which, after all, was indispensable for sheer survival. The rail workers operated German trains, workers were employed in German factories, traders sold commodities to the Germans, the prostitutes plied their trade also, and possibly chiefly, with Wehrmacht officers. Journalists, albeit a few, wrote in German newspapers published in Polish. Similarly, scarce actors played in vaudevilles, despite an obligatory ban. Identical prohibitions did not discourage Polish members of the audience from attending the spectacles. The same holds true for the cinema-goers or readers of newspapers, which were described as "reptilian."

Up to now, only a single monographic study has examined the Polish police, an order-keeping force whose tasks frequently exceeded the pursuit of petty thieves and included assistance during street round-ups, village pacifications and the deportation of the Jews into ghettos. There is no systematic study on persons who denounced the Jews to the Germans nor on those who turned the threat of such denunciation into a profitable business. No author wrote about the way in which the Poles took over "former Jewish property" after the establishment of the ghettos, or participated in the plundering of abandoned homes and shops. There is no work on information provided to the Gestapo (Kripo, Sipo, etc.) about "suspicious" persons gathering in a flat, members of the conspiracy, distributors of clandestine leaflets, etc. After all, General Rowecki, the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army, was detained owing to the help of the Polish co-workers of the Gestapo. Informers acted also because they wished to harm a disliked neighbor or to seize his property.

Finally, no study mentions banditism, which became extremely widespread during the war. Wartime is frequently a period of profound social change—certain groups gain while others lose. The former also included those that benefited from commercial exchange with the Germans, those who agreed to become administrators of property, those who speculated and entered into corruptive contracts with the occupant. Not a single thorough publication examined the postwar fate of collaborators, informers, policemen, and Polish co-workers of the Gestapo, although some of them were subsequently sentenced to imprisonment and forbidden by the trade unions to pursue their professions. Naturally, it could be said that such neglect is the fault of the historians, a charge that, to a considerable degree, is true. Polish historians rarely deal with social history. Not many cultivate "micro-history," which is particularly sensitive to behavior and stands. In my opinion, the true reason, or rather a number or a tangle of reasons, lies elsewhere. Quite possibly, contrary to the vocation of intellectuals, historians reacted similarly to society as a whole. Since, in the fashion of most nations, the Poles do not like reading about that which was evil or dishonorable in their past, the historians do not like writing about such matters.

The postwar course of events had a great impact on the attitude toward the war and occupation, not only on negative aspects such as informing and anti-Semitism, but also on those aspects that were regarded as positive (for instance, conspiracy, participation in battles). Since this is a broad subject requiring its own separate study, I would like to draw attention to a couple of examples.

A significant role was played by the official interpretation of the occupation events—the "official history"—imposed by the centrally-controlled propaganda media and schools. An essential element of this interpretation was the depreciation of the role played by non-communist underground efforts. By 1944, it was proclaimed that the Home Army and rightist groups acted in favor of the Reich, and accusations *sensu stricto* were formulated. At the turn of the 1940s, during the intensified Sovietization and Stalinization of Poland, death sentences were passed in cases involving Polish officers and underground activists who were sentenced for supposed collaboration with the Nazis. This was one of the less effective undertakings of the authorities, but it became the reason why public opinion contrasted such propaganda with a glorification not only of the conspirators but also of the attitude of the entire nation.

Later, when communism took roots and acceptance of the system was much more advanced, emphasis was placed on the "moral-political unity of the nation." Consequently, the propaganda spread by the center indicated universal participation in the struggle against the occupant as well as the dignity with which the Poles survived the fearful occupation. The attitude toward the non-communist Underground changed, or rather was slowly altered, but the enormity of losses and the moral assets of the nation, which universally opposed the invader, were stressed even more.

A "thorn" or impediment to this "moral political unity of the nation" however, also existed—the fate of the Poles who found themselves under Soviet occupation. This unfortunate development made it necessary to impose greater stress on Nazi crimes both

in propaganda and in official opinion in order to obliterate the memory of the events in the eastern parts of Poland during 1939-41 and 1944-45. The less it was possible to write about the former, the more frequent and the louder was the mention made of the nightmare of the latter. Another important factor, affecting both memory and the manner in which the war and the occupation were described, stemmed from the fact that one of the most important factors legitimizing the system was an awareness of the German threat, associated with the conviction that only a close bond with the Soviet Union could protect Poland against a German reprisal. This attitude was useful not only for reinforcing beliefs about eternal German hostility toward Poland but also as a constant form of emphasis on Nazi crimes and the uniform, unwavering stand of the nation *vis a vis* the occupant. This viewpoint was not altered by the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Germany (GDR), although it was necessary to shift the content somewhat. With the birth of a communist German nation, it became increasingly difficult to speak about crimes committed by the Germans. A "Marxization" of the German issue, which had to be perceived in class categories occurred —in the East there are the good, progressive Germans, and in the West the bad, reactionary heirs of Nazism, or more or less camouflaged Nazis. These nuances are reflected in the very names of the institutions dealing with the prosecution of war criminals—the original one encompassed the term "German crime," now supplanted by "Nazi crimes."

The majority of historians dealing with modern history, conducted and published their research in accordance with these tendencies. In the first years after the end of the war, emphasis was placed on an analysis of the losses, population and material suffered by Poland. In reading these studies, one is struck by the absence of a clear-cut definition of the object: as a rule, we do not know whether the topic refers to "ethnic" Poles or citizens of the prewar, multinational Polish state. Moreover, it is not obvious whether the losses included those incurred under the Soviet occupation. As a rule, all losses were ascribed to the Germans.

Subsequently, attention was paid more often, and on a wider scale, to the resistance movement; not until after 1956 did studies, with distinct limitations, encompass non-communist Underground groups. These restraints consisted, among others, of an eternal contrast between the "reactionary game" played by the Home Army command, the authorities of the Republic of Poland in exile in London, and the "patriotic soldiers," as well as the absence or total destrcution of knowledge about the activity of rightist conspiracy environments. Such restrictions remained binding even at a time of increasingly strong tendencies toward widening the legitimization gamut and references to national and even nationalistic tradition, as in the mid-1960s in connection with the activity of the so-called partisan faction (concentrated around General Moczar). Efforts intent on "installing" national or nationalistic elements into communism led to a strengthening in social memory of that which was most readily accepted: the conviction about one's innocence. The decisive majority of historians supported these tendencies: some did so for ideological reasons since they were nationalists or the sort of communists who felt uncomfortable while restrained by "proletarian internationalism." Others were of the opinion that there had appeared an opportunity for spreading the truth about the World War II.

For society as a whole the problem of the war and the occupation became gradually less and less important. This tendency was the consequence, among others, of the natural generational rhythm (a smaller number of Poles remembered the war personally) and possibly due to an “overdose” of the theme of Nazi crimes. Certain institutions experienced the “boomerang effect” of frequent and insistent presentation of the official version.

In one way or another, the Nazi experience was predominantly, and perhaps exclusively, an existential experience of life and death. The German occupation did not constitute an intellectual challenge unless we have in mind questions concerning evil inherent in man. Even then, it pertained to evil rooted in someone else, the enemy. It did not have to lead to a question about the condition of the Polish “national spirit.”

“We are not the evil ones”—such was, and continues to be the most frequent response. Moral dilemmas, and especially collaboration, were relegated below the threshold of consciousness, into limbo. This approach was favored by a natural tendency toward obliterating from memory all that which created an obstacle or stood in the way. At the same time, to a considerable degree among the intellectual elites, this “guilt-free” viewpoint was favored because after the war and the occupation, an overwhelming number of Poles became absorbed into a system they had not chosen themselves. This system, in turn, imposed a false, selective, and unjust settling of accounts with the recent past, which did not encourage self-assessment or self-criticism.

Soviet Occupation

The first encounter between the Poles and a state based on communist ideology took place in 1919–20, and thus soon after the latter’s establishment. A fragment of this confrontation, which left the greatest imprint upon national memory, was the 1920 summer defensive of the Red Army, repelled with utmost difficulty. The offensive was inaugurated with the famous call formulated by Tukhachevsky: “Over the corpse of Poland to the very heart of Europe.” In the course of the onslaught, a Polish Provisional Revolutionary Committee was set up and a fervent, fortunately short-lived attempt was made at transferring onto Polish territory the technique of the Russian civil war: executions, expropriations, the Cheka, and intensive “brainwashing.”

When Soviet divisions crossed the state frontiers of Poland on September 17, 1939, memory of the previous episode was soon revived, although now there was no Lenin urging the Polish proletariat to start a revolution. This time, the “Polish proletariat” was the enemy on par with the “Polish lord.” The Soviet occupation in 1939-41 is comparable to the German occupation during the same period, at least from the Polish point of view. At least 250,000 Poles (and about 100,000 citizens of the Second Republic of other nationalities, mainly the Jewish) were deported in four mass-scale tides into the depths of the Soviet Union. It was much more difficult to survive these deportations than the German versions. After all, the Poles deported from territories incorporated into the Third Reich found themselves in Central Poland, among their countrymen, in the same climate, and in a familiar environment. The Poles deported from lands annexed by the

Soviet Union were sent to the famine-ridden steppes of Kazakhstan or the taiga of the Komi Republic, where they were surrounded by totally alien and hostile natural conditions. The death rate in the convoys and at the place of stay exceeded 10 percent, and thus was much higher than that of the non-Jewish population under German occupation. The aforementioned four tides were accompanied by smaller-range deportations to closer destinations, but always to total strangers. It is estimated that the deportees totalled at least 50,000. Tens of thousands of young men were forcefully enlisted into the Red Army, in which they served as compulsory workers in construction battalions, while several thousands of prisoners of war were employed as laborers in "the distant regions of the Soviet Union."

On March 5, 1940, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the All Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) decided to execute 25,000 persons, including 14,700 Polish prisoners of war and internees. Although for reasons that remain unclear this directive was not carried out completely, 21,900 persons were executed (including 4,400 in the Katyn Woods). The majority were representatives of assorted groups of the intelligentsia. Soviet prisons and NKVD arrests housed probably no fewer than several thousand Poles, of whom a considerable number were sentenced to labor in one of the islands of the Gulag Archipelago or to compulsory settlement in Kazakhstan or the Urals. The executions, which took place in the spring of 1940, were not the only mass-scale crimes. During the later withdrawal after the German attack in June 1941, at least 12,000 prisoners were murdered (a considerable majority of which were not even sentenced or imprisoned upon the basis of the legal code).

The experiences of daily life were just as dramatic: factories of all sizes were nationalized as were landed estates. Artisans were forced to enter co-operatives. The language of instruction in schools was Russian or Ukrainian. All organizations and newspapers were shutdown. NKVD functionaries wielded control over everything, everyone, and everywhere (in a much more "airtight" manner than the Gestapo), and shops and open air markets suddenly became empty. In 1941, work was started on collectivization. Arrests and deportations produced fear. Most of the Polish communists were ready to collaborate, but Moscow was not keen on utilizing them immediately. Although Poles were given some of the leading posts, their superiors always included communist officials from Kiev, Minsk, or Moscow, and even the local Ukrainians and Belorussians. There was no mention of a Polish Socialist Soviet Republic, which they could have co-ruled.

In many respects, particularly regarding repression, Soviet occupation did not differ radically from its German counterpart. Naturally, the occupation system itself was entirely different since it entailed the participation of Polish communists. Moscow also left open certain opportunities for activity within the domain of culture, which involved a group of writers, artists, and scientists. The former Prime Minister Kazimierz Bartel, professor at Lvov Polytechnic, continued to head his university. Lvov University became "Ukrainianized," but some of the Polish professors preserved their posts. By contrast, the Third Reich liquidated all schools of higher learning, and tens of lecturers at the Jagiellonian University were sent to the Sachsenhausen camp. The barrier between the

occupant and the occupied was not so visible as under the Germans, a fact that resulted, among others, from linguistic proximity. Despite these differences, the feeling that collaboration with the Soviets was simply an occupation was shared universally.

Soviet communism, therefore, was an experience of occupation, which, like Nazism, was treated as a hostile and alien body. Whenever some elements of adaptation did appear, they were passive, although the occupant strove persistently toward the Sovietization of the local population—all nationalities and creeds. Schoolchildren were forced to sing Soviet songs, workers to attend political meetings, the town population to take part in May Day parades, and the peasants to participate in a ceremonial supply of quota deliveries—activities which were never applied during the German occupation. The Soviets even organized "elections" with mandatory attendance and voting for a single list, without any deletions. The voting procedure was closely guarded by suitable services and trusted people. Józef Mackiewicz, a careful observer of moods and attitudes, estimated that society had already started to adapt itself to the new conditions by 1941, and that the number of informers, by no means solely communists, grew as did that of conformists.

The Soviet occupation was experienced directly by a minority of the Poles: the territories incorporated into the Soviet Union were populated by about one-fifth of the Polish population of the Second Republic. Those repatriated westward to former German lands and who had survived the NKVD terror now had to deal with the German terror. Those in a considerable part of the eastern territories also had to face the bloody and drastic ethnic purges conducted by the dominating Ukrainians. Paradoxically, the "second coming" or return of the Red Army in the spring of 1944 was greeted by many Poles as liberation from Ukrainian terror, and Polish local self-defense groups gained an official status as battalions of the NKVD. In the autumn of 1944, the inauguration of the deportation campaign meant that the majority of people had abandoned their small homelands and became part of an exodus to formerly German lands. These re-settlers were known as repatriants, although they were not so much returning to their native land as pursuing it while fleeing westward.

From the very outset of communist Poland, no topics were surrounded with a more rigid official taboo than the murder of Polish officers, the interned and prisoners, deportations, and the Soviet camps. Naturally, these facts were embedded in social consciousness. For many years, they became relegated to intimate conversations and confessions. The very word "Katyn" was ousted from public use to such an extent that from a certain moment it was simply never used. Efforts were no longer made to place the guilt on Germany. Kazakhstan and Siberia appeared in enigmatic statements, hazily explaining the presence in Russia of people who were celebrated as brothers-in-arms of the Red Army and the creators of the People's Polish Armed Forces. The fate of the Poles under Soviet occupation was described only by emigré authors, whose statements reached home with utmost difficulties, and in an extremely small trickle.

Since 1944, talk of Soviet communist occupation has been forbidden, and for many years it appeared that it remained part of fading memory. The trauma suffered by

millions of Poles during the period of both onslaughts of the Red Army (1939, 1944) was, alongside the activity of the local security services and terror, one of the components of a system of fear, which was an indispensable and inseparable element in the strivings of the communists authorities at subjugating society. Only thanks to the appearance of an independent (and illegal) publication circuit, and primarily due to the sudden social and political upheaval in the wake of the establishment of Solidarity, did fear begin to diminish and a spontaneous re-creation of events unfold uncontrolled by the authorities. Recalling these experiences was one of the main tools used to delegitimize the communist system. This system, in its Polish variant, was produced by the "Katyn lie," since placing the blame upon the Third Reich provided Stalin with a pretext for breaking off relations with the legal Polish government and creating an alternative center of power—the embryo of the Polish communist state. This was "a civil war waged for the sake of tradition."

Communism in Poland

Despite symptoms of adaptation and collaboration, Polish experience with Nazism and communism, from 1939 to 1944, was predominantly (or exclusively) that of an occupied nation. Although in the People's Republic of Poland the authorities incessantly deployed the threat of German revanchism and neo-Nazism, even the authors of such propaganda probably did not believe the reality of the recurrence of Nazism and the emergence of a German "Nazi state without Hitler." In the case of communism, the situation differed distinctly. One could say that the true experience with communism started only when the latter was finally installed in Poland. The fact that it was "installed" or, as it is often said, "brought in Soviet tanks," exerted a considerable impact on the way in which it was perceived and experienced. Although in forty-five years the range of Polish independence changed and, from 1956-onward, disclosed a general tendency toward the expansion of autonomy, it always remained enclose din the form of a satellite communist state.

The lack of ideological independence was due not only to the fact that the Polish state was dependent economically and militarily but because, without support provided by the might of the imperial center, it would have been unable to survive. It seems purposeful to ask whether this was communism in Poland or Polish communism?

Naturally, there is no lack of people in Poland, including historians, political scientists, or publishers, who succinctly describe the state of dependence upon Moscow as an occupation. Nonetheless, they too are aware of the fact that if we were to recognize as collaborators only members of the Communist Party then this would mean that the co-workers and partners of the occupant included millions of Poles. In other words, this must have been a rather specific occupation. Perhaps one should use the term "self-occupation"; although it sounds more than paradoxical, it at least partially reflects a state of things in Poland in 1944–89 and the state of the spirit of at least some of the Poles.

In the initial years, the actual state of things justified such an opinion. The post-Yalta Polish territories were the site of the stationing of a million-strong Soviet Army whose soldiers and commanders behaved often as in an occupied country, engaging

freely in plunder and violence. Later on, the stationed Northern Army Group in Poland totaled more than one hundred thousand men, and Soviet advisers and officers were present in all structures of the security apparatus. After 1956, the physical presence of Moscow was much more discreet. Nonetheless, at least upon two occasions, the Soviet armies stationed in Poland were ready to engage in direct intervention (1956, 1980-81).

In 1944-45, the opinion about Poland as an occupied country was widespread. True, there are no public opinion surveys for this period, but thanks to the results of the referendum held on June 30, 1946, the Communist Party, together with three allied (satellite) parties and assorted "conveyor belts," had at its disposal an overwhelming supremacy in propaganda while the administration and repression apparatus won the backing of more than one-quarter of the population. Almost no one, including the communists, doubted that they could have managed to wield power if not for the presence of Soviet troops. Given the presence to the west of the Odra of half a million soldiers the country found itself within military pincers.

Conclusions

In an attempt at a maximally synthetic presentation of the problem of interest to us, I would like to hazard an assumption. It seems purposeful to reduce the attitude demonstrated by the Poles to four main types of stands: resistance or rejection, adaptation, acceptance, and affirmation. Similarly to every such attempt at an abbreviated typology, this one too probably has more faults than virtues and permits us differentiation and presentation of the dynamics of change. The reason lies in the fact—and this is the second assumption—that these attitudes did not comprise a chronological sequence (first resistance, then adaptation, etc.), but occurred simultaneously, the only difference being the dominant. It would be a blatant simplification to say that it is possible to propose a precise and reliable presentation of proportions occurring between these types of attitudes in particular years or even periods. Actually, we are doomed to resort to loose reflections; this is frequently the lot of historians, not only those dealing with modern history.

Originally, the dominating stand was rejection and resistance. It assumed the form of both armed and underground resistance as well as its open variant expressed by legally exiting political forces, primarily, the Polish Peasant Party. On a national scale, this attitude was accompanied, probably just as frequently, by adaptation. It entailed a search for social niches, concern for material sustenance, the securing of a future for one's children and safety for the family, as well as efforts aiming at the possibility of pursuing a profession. The breakdown of legal and conspiracy resistance (basically already in 1947) and the growing feeling of helplessness in the face of the powerful system led to a transformation of resistance—from group activity (participation in a partisan detachment or conspiracy group, membership in an opposition party) to individual reactions expressed in views shared with trusted people, the reading of banned books, or the listening to foreign radio stations. Although acts of active protest continued to occur, they were scattered and revealed a tendency to grow weaker. As a result, the more universal stand was adaptation, which in time became, quite possibly, dominating.

Although it would be difficult to assess the impact exerted upon social stands by the Catholic Church (other creeds, being marginal, remain outside our interest), it seems that its activity, both pastoral and social, encouraged adaptation rather than resistance. Naturally, the Church spoke in the defense of the faith, its own rights and the believers. In this respect, certain pastoral letters issued in 1945-47 and, in particular, the dramatic "non possumus" uttered by Cardinal Wyszynski in 1953, were characteristic. Never, however, did the institutional Church call for an insurrection or even civic disobedience. This was not because it had adapted the tactic of survival, close to the the stand of adaptation or even concurrent with it. Such was the principle applied by the Church throughout the whole existence of communist Poland, even in those cases when it was engaged or became embroiled in conflicts with the authorities, as during the period of Gomulka's Kulturkampf, whose apogee took place during the "war for the Millennium." The attitude of resistance (rejection) appeared on a mass scale once again at the end of the 1970s; after the emergence of Solidarity, it assumed a range embracing the whole of Polish society. True, repression during the martial law period considerably limited its dimension, but until 1989, resistance (rebellion) remained a permanent and widely disseminated stand. It was a visible element of the social and political situation.

We may propose the hypothesis that after 1956 and the triumphant return to power of of Wladyslaw Gomulka, the stand of acceptance expanded relatively rapidly. It was expressed, among others, by the swiftly growing membership of the Communist Party, which in 1960-70 had doubled. The acceptance of this attitude was facilitated both by Gomulka's disassociation from Stalinist crimes and by his emphasis on sovereignty. A special role was played by attempts at an introduction of increasingly numerous elements of national tradition and even nationalistic models into the binding ideology. This was a "Polonization" of the system. Spontaneous symptoms of resistance in the form of strikes combined with street demonstrations and skirmishes with the police or battles for crosses did not undermine the view about the considerable range of acceptance. Ultimately, the authorities were always capable of localizing, socially or territorially, active resistance, and making it impossible for particular outbursts to turn into permanent, organized forms of protest. Special attention is due to the stance of affirmation, if only because it encompassed at least a large part if not the whole category that, emulating George Orwell, we may call "an internal party" as well as persons concentrated in the supreme institutions of power—the party apparatus, the security services, the officer cadre, etc. Sincere affirmation, truly internalized, was, I believe, the widest in those years when the Communist Party based its mobilizing force on a vision of revolution and social utopia. Later on, when other legitimizing elements were placed in the foreground, at least hundreds of thousands of Poles not only supported the system actively and with full conviction, but also placed their trust in the ideals it proclaimed. Furthermore, they believed that the system would realize them. This does not exclude the fact that everywhere, even at the highest levels of the party apparatus, there were numerous cynical technicians of governance who made the ritual declarations and performed the ritual gestures, treating ideology as a convenient screen and an effective tool. The debate on which factors were decisive in the creation of certain proportions between the aforementioned model-like stands could be extremely long. I shall mention them as briefly as possible in two sequences, which is not to say that they excluded each other.

On the contrary, some factors were frequently reinforced by others, belonging to a different group.

Factors exerting a positive impact:

- social promotion of numerous, traditionally handicapped groups, which produced a strong feeling of loyalty in relation to the system, both among direct beneficiaries and those milieus that previously deplored the former's fate;
- an associated leveling of strata differences and the emergence of a relatively homogeneous society regarded by many as a value in itself, notwithstanding whether they were adherents of Marxism-Leninism or not;
- the industrialization and urbanization of a country belated in development, processes treated rather universally as modernization that was to produce technological progress and material advancement;
- a strong conviction that communism ensures Poland the unconditional support of the Soviet Union, necessary due to the permanent division of the world into two camps.

***Oppressive factors*:**

- the approximately ten-years-long period (1944-55) of intensive mass-scale terror, whose victims totaled probably no fewer than 15,000 people (executed, killed, perished in prison), while several hundred thousands were arrested and incarcerated;
- this terror, true to its aim, effectively, and for a long time to come, intimidated a considerable part of society, and eliminated the majority of existing (and potential) alternative elites;
- the same period witnessed the construction of a powerful machinery of control over society—a network of agents, the surveillance of correspondence, wire-tapping, personnel services, and Communist Party cells located in all institutions and enterprises;
- the creation of an effective machine for rendering the citizens dependent upon the state and professional promotion (the nomenclature system), among others, thanks to a general etatization of the industry and trade, the expansion of the bureaucracy and the leveling of social organizations.

A considerable part of the Poles experienced the 1944-55 period as a trauma, either by being the victims of repressions or by being acquainted with such victims. Fear for life, rank, the future of the children, material goods (frequently gathered laboriously for generations) taught humility and imposed conformist stands. Despite changes that took place after 1956, the communist system did not resign from the existing institutions of repression, control, promotion, and dependence, and although terror became considerably limited, the awareness that the institutions executing it continued to exist and was widespread. In 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, and 1981-89, hundreds of thousands of participants of strikes and street demonstrations became familiar with the strength of the apparatus of repression, expressed in several hundred fatalities, thousands of wounded, tens of thousands arrested and dismissed from work. It was universally known that in case of need the authorities would not waver and would resort to troops to stop a protest. Just as frequent was the feeling of helplessness and humiliation, both when encountering

overwhelming forces in the street and in everyday life, especially in workplaces and offices.

Why did the Poles rebel so often? Let us keep in mind however, that the entire population did not join in. Furthermore, those who stifled such rebellions, were also Poles, who by no means were necessarily communist. This is the very nature of the Polish experience with communism. Little or nothing, may be explained by resorting to statements about "strangers," "Jews," "NKVD agents," "janissaries," or "traitors." In reality, the Poles performed the roles of both the victim and the hangman, the superiors and the *kleines parteigenossen*, the supporters and the opponents, those who benefited and those who lost, those who resisted (in words or deeds) and those who informed. This state of things lasted for more than four decades, and thus, for the lifetime of several generations; there were millions of Poles on both sides. Today, it is truly difficult to say which side attracted more, or when. Quite possibly, the more numerous were simply those who chose the strategy of adaptation, those usually known as "the silent majority."

An important instrument applied for the subjugation of society, though it is difficult to estimate its effectiveness, was the official canon of historical events and their interpretations. In the People's Republic of Poland, the contents of this catalog succumbed to changes, among others, due to the increasingly extensive introduction of non-communist or even non-leftist elements of national tradition. This effectively put an end to the excessively one-sided assessment of the Polish state in 1918-39, as well as the rehabilitation of part of the Underground and the Polish armed forces fighting together with the Western Allies. Naturally, this canon was most rigid in reference to the history of the People's Republic of Poland (and, as I have mentioned, Soviet repressions).

Indoctrination consisted not so much of strict censorship control, but predominantly of steering the topics of research, donations, and the selection of persons permitted to conduct investigations. The majority of historians, therefore, wrote in accordance with the currently binding political line of the ruling party and, at times, observed the detailed directives devised by suitable organs (such as the Department of Science at the Central Committee). The same directives were addressed to authors of school textbooks, publishers, and journalists. In this way, both the schools and the media disseminated a uniform image of the independent past. A large number of historians belonged to the party, and a sizable group, especially those dealing with post-war history, worked in party institutions.

As a result, for many years, publications independent of the party center could appear only abroad. The emigré publishing houses, however, were interested mainly in the topics connected with the war and the Second Republic. Not until the 1970s, and the emergence of small groups of independent historians as well as the general growing boldness of researchers, did independent analyses of Polish postwar history appear. The presence of such tendencies encouraged the authorities to give "their" researchers more leeway. This development was a direct result of the fact that the party leadership was anxious about the increasingly strong attacks on such an essential element of legitimization as the genealogy of the system and its own tradition. In addition, the

existence of underground publications favored the spread of “opposition history.”

In her numerous sociological studies conducted since the 1960s, Barbara Szacka arrived at the conclusion that the “reversal from the People’s Republic of Poland” became marked in the second half of the 1970s. Before the communist system in Poland collapsed, “all that which to an even slightest degree was used for the legitimization of the communist state disappeared from social memory.”[2] For example, in 1965, 29 percent of the respondents “would be willing” to celebrate the anniversary of the establishment of the People’s Republic of Poland (22 July), while in 1988 such an opinion was expressed only by 6 percent. In other words, Szacka declared, communism was vanquished in the minds—and hearts—of the decisive majority of the Poles already prior to its ultimate defeat.

Former divisions, however, into “we-they” or the more drastic ones into ”hangmen-victims,” “oppressed-oppressors,” albeit frequently unclear, were experienced so profoundly that they exist up to this very day, ten years after the fall of communism. They appear in the attitude both toward the past and its symbols—anniversaries, monuments, heroes—and toward the present. According to one of the most recent public opinion surveys (conducted in December 1998) a positive attitude toward the former Communist Party is expressed not only by 34 percent of its former members, but also by 18 percent of those who never belonged to it, and even by 10 percent of those respondents who were too young to join.

These percentages may be regarded as rather high and could appear astonishing considering what every (or almost) Pole knows about the Gulag, Katyn, deportations, shots fired against strikers, the fate of the heroes of the anti-Nazi conspiracies, the election frauds, and the abuse of power. It is difficult to say to what extent this state of things affected is by current experiences, nostalgia for a time that today appears to be one of stability, or loyalty toward oneself and one’s remembered beliefs.

After 1989, communist Poland had bad ratings in public opinion. By way of example, in a survey carried out in 1996, almost one-third of the respondents asked about “ facts that shame Poland” indicated various events and phenomena connected with communist rule. According to the same survey, “facts of which the Poles may be proud” include the downfall of communism and the emergence of a democratic state (29 percent of the respondents), slightly more than the part played by the Poles in the Second World War (28 percent).[3] The fact that communist Poland has bad ratings does not mean that the Poles hold an unfavorable opinion about themselves, including those, and there are millions of them, who accepted or affirmed the communist system, and who (in assorted ways) contributed to its installation, reinforcement and duration, to its ”errors and deviations.” To a large extent, therefore, the settling of accounts with communism is tantamount to the settling of accounts with oneself. The easiest tasks belong to those who opposed, fought, and suffered. A slightly more difficult one, although by no means hazardous, is assigned to those who were active members of the system: activists, managers, functionaries, and ideologues. The most difficult situation is undoubtedly experienced by those who carried out the directives issued by the authorities but who did

not believe in the joyous future promised by ideology and did not exceed the strategy of adaptation. For them, refuge is to be sought in oblivion or a search for the guilty.

The Poles did not, and this is still true today, regard Nazism as a nascent problem. There is no need to settle any national accounts. If there are limited cases, these are exceptions which concern distant events and almost individual instances. There is no awareness that the issue at stake may involve any sort of group accountability. Apparently, similar stands are appearing increasingly often also in the case of communism. Many persons claim that communism is not a "Polish issue." It is the others who are guilty. Or, rather, no one is guilty, with the exception of historical fate.

Notes

[1] These questions are the topic of a highly interesting monograph by Edmund Dmitrow, *Niemcy i okupacja hitlerowska w oczach Polaków. Poglady i opinie z lat 1945-1948* (The Germans and Nazi Occupation as Seen by the Poles. Views and Opinions from 1945–1948) (Warszawa, 1987).

[2] B. Szacka, *Transformacja spoleczna i swiadomosc historyczna* (Social Transformation and Historical Consciousness), in *Ofiary czy wspolwinni. Nazizm i sowietyzm w swiadomosci historycznej* (Victims or Accomplices. Nazism and the Soviet System in Historical Consciousness) (Warszawa, 1997), 59.

[3] Tomasz Zakowski, *Swiadomosc historyczna Polakow w polowie lat dziewiecdziesiatych* (Polish Historical Consciousness in the Mid-1990s) in Szacka, *Transformacja spoleczna,* 65–76.

II. THE "THAWING OF IDEOLOGY" AND "ARCHIVAL REVOLUTION"

The opening of the national archives was a fragment of a profound and rapid systemic transformation that took place in Poland in the years 1989 to 1990. Without delving more widely into the determinants and the course of this change, it seems worthwhile to draw attention to at least two other components, both of a more general nature but referring directly to studies on the past:

- the liquidation of censorship that entailed not only control over texts prepared for print or publication licenses, but also a system of control over paper and a restriction of the inflow of foreign, including emigré publications to Poland; and

- the abolishing of the "leading role of the Communist Party," which meant both the elimination of a steering center and the control of scientific research as well as the liquidation of scientific institutions that belonged directly to the Communist Party (such as the Academy of Social Sciences at the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party).

I mention the latter because such institutions enjoyed a monopoly on the history of the communist movement and a quasi-monopoly on investigations dealing with recent history. As a result, Polish historiography found itself, for the first time since 1939, in conditions of legal and actual pluralism.

The situation in Poland differed from that in the majority of the other former communist states of Eastern Europe. This distinction was the outcome of the fact that for many years prior to the celebrated *Annus Mirabilis* of 1989, Polish political and intellectual life—and thus Polish historiography—disclosed the presence of elements of pluralism *de facto*, although not *de jure*. The year 1997, witnessed the emergence of a systematically growing "illegal publishing circuit,"[1] with history, especially the recent years, being one of the most frequently examined problems.[2] Some bibliographers report that every tenth book published illegally concerned history. At the same, the works of Polish historians were issued by emigré publishing houses, whose production reached intelligentsia readers in an ever widening tide since 1956.[3] From 1980, this phenomenon assumed significant dimensions.

The situation generated an "alternative historiography," and certain researchers published their texts mainly, or even exclusively, in the illegal circuit or abroad. The origin and development of this brand of historiography was associated with the significance of investigations focusing on the period of the delegitimization of the communist system. The call for the liquidation of "blank spaces," or, the elimination of falsifications, remained a recurring postulate of the most varied social milieus. It was particularly strong in 1980-81, when Solidarity created Workers' Universities, whose lecturers included professional historians. As a result, prior to 1989, illegal publishing houses issued a number of books that up to this day retain their significance; they include such titles as Krystyna Kersten's *Narodziny systemu wladzy* (The Birth of the System of Power, 1984), Jerzy Holzer's *Solidarnosc 1980-1981. Geneza i historia* (Solidarity 1980-1981. The Origin and the History, 1983), Teresa Toranska's *Oni* (They, 1985), a three-volume textbook on the history of Poland, 1914-84 by Wojciech Roszkowski, and a selection of documents entitled *Gomulka i inni* (Gomulka and Others, 1985), which I prepared. Many books were reprints of emigré publications, while new proposals included translations of works on the history of the Soviet Union and the communist bloc (Helene Carrere d'Encausse, Francois Fejto, Alain Besancon, or Mikhail Heller).

"A civil war for tradition"[4] ensued. Since the Communist Party opposed the new state of things, it was incapable, without resorting to Stalinist methods, to liquidate illegal publishing houses or to force independent authors to keep silent by arresting them. It tried, therefore, to intensify indoctrination and, in 1985, even devised a special "historical education" program intended for young people. Well aware, however, of the slight chances for its realization, the only solution was to "escape forward"—the subjugated or system-dependent historians were forced to undertake research concerning certain negative aspects of the past in order not to "leave the field to the opponent." A Polish-Soviet commission of communist party historians was established in 1987 to examine the "blank spaces" in the history of Polish-Soviet relations, a veritable Achilles heel of the legitimacy of the regime.[5] Another solution was the statute "On the liquidation of the remnants of Stalinism in Poland," passed in March 1989; it follows from its contents that these remnants were identified with orthodox Marxist-Leninist interpretations of recent history.

These measures enabled party historians to win permission to publish select "strictly secret" documents. However, "leaks" from private collections of former activists and party archives became an increasingly frequent occurrence. A number of books revised the heretofore obligatory views. They include Andrzej Werblan's biography of Gomulka (1988), Andrzej Glowacki's work on the events of December 1970 (1985), or Ludwik Landau's publication about the economy (1987). It is characteristic that although historians connected with the opposition readily reached out for publications by "legal" historians, the latter rarely referred to books issued underground or abroad. Nonetheless, a pluralistic configuration emerged not only within the range of professional historians but also among certain publicaitons. A number of illegal publications achieved an output close to that of official publishing offices (five to six thousand copies). They were also presented or even read in installments on Radio Free Europe, at the time regularly heard by about one-quarter of the Polish population.

Similar to the breakdown of the communist system, the “archival revolution” was not violent in Poland, and certain tendencies and phenomena occurring after 1989 were essential for the continuation of those that had existed already in the period 1987 to 1989. These basic changes denoted an enormous widening of research opportunities, and was the outcome, predominantly, of the handing over, upon the basis of a Spring 1990 parliamentary decision, of all documents of the already dissolved Communist Party to the network of state archives, rendering them available according to normal principles regulated by law. Since party documents had been the actual source of power, both at the central and at the local levels, this access made it feasible to penetrate secrets that for decades remained closely guarded.[6] The state archives also received a majority of documents of the central and local administration as well as various assorted organizations, which acted as a conveyor belt for the Communist Party. Unfortunately, unlike in Germany a similar procedure did not encompass, the archives of the security apparatus and special services, although since the summer of 1990, access to numerous documents became if not easy then at least possible. The distinctness of military archives and those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was preserved, although access became incomparably easier than prior to 1989. Overall, historians dealing with the most recent past enjoy an unprecedented opportunity to examine archival sources.

An important effect of this new situation was an opening to the rest of the world: Polish historians could freely conduct research abroad, while obstacles for bringing books into the country disappeared. The main restricting factor remained sufficient funding, although, at least in 1989-1995, the interest shown by the West in recent history was sufficiently extensive to make it relatively easy to attract generous partners willing to cooperate.

Another consequence of this openness to the outside world was the introduction of new ways of financing research—the grant system—modeled on existing Western patterns, which visibly improved the effectiveness of work and rendered possible additional funds for less celebrated historians and provincial scientific centers. Although historians working on modern history are still concentrated in Warsaw, other centers, such as Wroclaw, have become more important. This trend is favored also by the decentralization of publishing, which stemmed both from the freedom to publish and the emergent rivalry between publishers. To a certain degree, this is a continuation of the state of things prevalent before 1989, and illegal publishing houses that specialized in history, such as Rytm or Volumen, continue to exist. Visible changes, however, have not taken place within the infrastructure, apart from the liquidation of the party academy, whose staff became scattered among assorted, mainly provincial, state and private schools of higher learning. No institute of historical studies was established, although this is the domain of research pursued by a much larger number of persons than in the past.

It could be said that one tangible tendency was an evolution of a number of party researchers (members of the Communist Party or workers of party scientific institutions) toward a critical attitude vis a vis the communist system. Some of them, however, have found themselves in a state that could be described as “cognitive discomfort.” This phenomenon is discernible in those cases when, for example, accentuation of the crimes

committed by the system leads researchers to the conclusion that “the overall balance sheet is positive” and, thus, to adhere to the Khrushchev paradigm about “errors and deviations.”

The former opposition historians maintain their critical approach. They exert an overwhelming impact upon the younger generation of researchers, and their works are most frequently cited; moreover, they act as promoters and reviewers of Ph.D. theses and are employed as experts by the media, although in the majority of universities many of the most prominent posts are held by historians once associated with the authorities or neutral, due to their inherent conformism. Such a situation is even more marked among the authorities of the Polish Academy of Sciences, especially the academicians who include several high-level party activists and not a single leading historian from the former democratic opposition. Inner divisions, which came to the fore already in 1968 when the authorities regarded some of the intellectuals as opponents, and which became drastically profound after the proclamation of martial law, to a considerable degree survived up to this day. Divisions apparent against this background are expressed and experienced much more vividly than, for example, methodological ones.

The End of Communism: The Impact on Content and Research

In what manner did this situation—from the ending of censorship and the opening of the archives to the maintenance of political and world outlook dissonances—influence the themes of research and their forms?

One could say that the principle of the pendulum, so characteristic for the period of the ”civil war for tradition” still functions in today’s Polish society. Party and, generally speaking, official historiography supported by the authorities expressed primarily an affirmation of the communist system, conceived as an unavoidable and positive phase of national history. The opposition historians however, concentrated their attention on an analysis and a description of the negative aspects of the not-so-distant past. At the end of the 1980s, when the former were permitted (and even advised) to pursue selective criticism, the pendulum swung distinctly toward studies on the negative effects of the system and its pejoratively perceived beginnings. This trend continues up to this day, and is particularly visible at the level of monographs, contributions, or source publications. Studies of a synthetic nature appear to be much more well-balanced.

Polish historiography of the recent past continues to be under the strong influence of martyrdom interpretations. If we were to compare, for instance, the subject matter of monographs published in Germany with their Polish counterparts, we would be struck by the fact that German historians pay much more attention to the security apparatus (Stasi) than to its victims, while in Poland, the trend is the opposite.[7] This is obviously the result of the fact that many more Poles were the victims of the communist system and that social requirements differ to the west of the Odra. Attention is correctly drawn, however, to the fact that this “martyrdom deviation” produces negative effects for becoming acquainted with the past, although it must be noted that history is not a theoretical and abstract science and thus cannot be indifferent to the opinions and memory of the victims.

Interest in the victims favors a black-and-white interpretation, as well as emphasis placed not so much on the distinctness than on the total alienation of members of the apparatus of terror or its overseers. A tendency toward martyrdom was present in Poland already in the past, although previously, especially in the period of 1945–80, research focused exclusively on the victims of German terror, a current that today, naturally, has been relegated to the background.[8] Currently, the most copious literature concerns Soviet crime committed against Poles and Polish citizens.

Research was decidedly dominated by political history. This as a natural feature of research, since in the communist system, politics, motivated by ideological or pragmatic reasons, enjoyed absolute primacy in the process of decision-making, which, in addition, was extremely centralized. Research studies therefore, very often concern institutions and organizations and less frequently, biographies. I am unfamiliar with any pertinent statistics, but I believe that research has so far been dominated by works depicting anti-communist activity, both underground and pursued by the legal opposition. Similar emphasis is placed on studies dealing with the Catholic Church, which was treated as the main alternative to communism. Second place is occupied by research on the Communist Party; satellite parties are ignored. Relatively few studies pertain to state institutions, with greatest attention paid, understandably, to the years of 1944-48, although for the past few years, an increasing number of studies examined the period up to 1956.

A specific feature is the concentration of attention on several events described differently: as breakthroughs or crises. This tendency stems from the course of history, which included distinct culminations: the year 1956, the student revolt of 1968, the strikes of December 1970, strikes in the summer of 1980, the origin of Solidarity, and the proclamation of martial law. As a rule, such descriptions are dichotomous—society striving toward change versus authorities determined to defend their position. Hence the frequent martyrdom tone. Naturally, thorough and reliable research on political history necessitated the possibility of utilizing documents issued by the former "leading force in the state and society."

For several years now, an increasingly frequent theme among research studies concerns group attitudes and behavior in longer time-spans. It is characteristic that these topics are examined more willingly by younger researchers, who benefit either from the accomplishments of sociological methodologies or from social history as presented by American Sovietologists. Research on group behavior has been made possible by the opening of party and security apparatus archives. [Party organizations and the security apparatus had previously gathered information about views and opinions.] Results of the extremely extensive and modern sociological studies conducted in 1955-80 proved not very useful, at least up to this stage, although Polish sociologists were correctly regarded very highly throughout the world. In the light of the confidential nature of the information concerning stands and behavior, the majority of the studies prove to be static and based on schematic socio-professional categories (or even class ones), which could not be translated directly into views and activity. It is symptomatic that, as a rule, young historians are interested rather in the stance of those who opposed the system than those

who actively supported the communist system. This approach may be the outcome of the fact that the studies concentrated on the 1945-56 and 1980-89 periods, in other words, those years when the dominating attitude was hostility toward the authorities; it is also partly the outcome of the pendulum principle. For decades, it was the affirmative attitudes that were described, and now it was high time to deal with the opposition views.

It is a paradox that the attitude of society toward the system (communism, power) became a vivid divergency between historians proposing critical descriptions of Polish postwar history. In a greatly simplified form, these divergencies could be summarized as follows: some historians claim that the overwhelming majority of society—supported by the unwavering stand of the Church—always opposed the power wielded by the "Moscow lackeys," renegades, non-Poles (here anti-Semitic tones come into being); while others draw attention to the fact that society adapted itself to the system, and relatively numerous institutions and social strata not only accepted but also affirmed it, while attitudes of conscious resistance were, for most of the time, rare and elitist. This is one of the most important, interesting, and difficult research problems. This holds true at least for Poland, which is envisaged as a constant hotbed of rebellion and a weak link in the communist camp.

Synthetic interpretations and historical publishers share the almost universal view about the causal role played by Poland—or rather the Poles—in the collapse of the communist system in Europe and the Soviet Union, and even in the global crisis of communist ideology. Special emphasis is placed on the part performed by John Paul II as the "spiritual father of Solidarity," which dealt the Communist Party the final blow. Naturally, such opinions are rarely expressed in detailed research and monographs, but it seems that they constitute a *sui generis* psychological background for the majority of Polish historians. They could also be treated as a reference to Romantic historical philosophy, which conceived Poland as the "Christ of nations"—simultaneously victim and savior.

Finally, the opening of archives caused a deluge of publications that frequently did not meet basic editorial standards. Material, including archival documents and accounts, diaries, and reminiscences, even documents comprising a foundation for quantitative research, such as lists of the condemned, executed or only detained, and hundreds of recollections by victims of the system (mainly inmates of Soviet camps and deportees), were published hastily and in a fragmentary or incomplete form. The justifications for this type of publication are the consequence of numerous reasons. One of them, worthy of attention, is the striving to obtain reliability, a rather natural current after decades of falsified historiography, steered and subjected to the current political demands of the state. Many people are of the opinion that "the document does not lie" and offers everyone an opportunity for an individual interpretation. Yet another reason is the willingness to present the outcome of one's own research as rapidly as possible. At times, the reason lies in the inability to interpret and conduct an analysis of the highly-personal events.

In conclusion, a change of the system that enabled the opening of archives exerted an essential impact on the range and forms of research on newest history but did not turn out to be the reason for essential changes in research techniques. The archival revolution did not give rise to a methodological revolution. I do not know, however, whether anyone expected this to take place. Historians are expected to offer the truth and not modernity.

Notes

[1] I have in mind publications duplicated in various ways, from primitive silkscreens to small printing offices, and not samizdat, or typewritten texts. Up to 1989, there appeared about 6,500 books and brochures, and approximately 3,500 titles of periodicals.

[2] It was probably not by accident that the first book to be issued illegally was *Pochodzenie systemu* (The Origin of the System) by Jakub Karpinski (Warszawa 1977, Wydawnictwo NOWA).

[3] Since 1962, the largest emigré publisher, Instytut Literacki run by Jerzy Giedroyc in Paris, published the quarterly *Zeszyty Historyczne*, which originally concentrated its attention on inter-war and wartime history, but in time, issued an increasingly large number of material concerning postwar history.

[4] A. Paczkowski, "Guerre civile" pour les traditions," *La Nouvelle Alternative*, (32) (December 1993).

[5] The main topics were to be the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1920, the extermination of Polish communist leaders in 1936-38, the invasion of September 17, 1939, deportations of Poles in 1939-41, and, naturally, the Katyn massacre.

[6] Here are several examples: 1) the discovery in party documents of a collection of strictly secret data (unavailable even to party historians) concerning the real results of the referendum held in June 1946, whose falsification was one of the legitimizing milestones of the system; 2) the discovery of the results of work conducted by a party commission established in 1971 to examine the events that took place along the Baltic coast in December 1970, making it possible to establish who made the decision to permit the use of firearms; 3) the discovery of protocols made by the Polish side at international sessions concerning the situation in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

[7] Naturally, this is the outcome of the fact that Stasi documents are easily available, while in Poland, access to the archives of the communist security apparatus continues to be rather complicated.

[8] Previously, mass-scale studies concerning the communist partisan movement shared the same fate.

III. DECOMMUNIZATION IN POLAND 1989-1999: POLITICAL AND LEGISLATIVE PROBLEMS

"Among many other decisions, the new democratic governments were compelled to resolve what should be done with the symbols, doctrines, organizations, laws, civil servants and leaders of the authoritarian systems." Samuel Huntington in The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century

Social need for knowledge about the past, although not as great as in the 1980s, when the democratic opposition in Poland waged a "civil war" against the communist authorities for the sake of the historical consciousness of Polish society, was and continues to be great. Probably in no period was so much written and said about national history in such a short time. Nevertheless, today, society continues to demand, "we want to learn the truth."

One of the most difficult tasks of the new leadership in Poland today involves undoing or solving crimes committed by the functionaries of the *ancien régime* and accepting liability for the introduction or maintenance of nondemocratic and, at times, outright criminal systems.

Although one may have reservations regarding the comparisons proposed by the author of *The Clash of the Civilisations,* who paid insufficient attention to the differences between regimes, there is no reason why, in describing the Polish case, we should forget about Iberian or Latin American "classical transformations," despite the fact that these states were almost *ex definitione* anti-communist systems. Decommunization however, is a very broad phenomenon with a wide range of problems. The recurring problems such as those experienced by the French collaborationist Vichy regime, which lasted nearly four years and came to an end more than a half a century ago, are a case in point example. The complexity of decommunization entails both the settling of accounts with collaborationist leaders and functionaries ("they"), as well as the social and individual process of settling accounts with the section of society who did not collaborate with the system, but who revealed conformist or indifferent attitudes toward the fate of victims. In other words, attitudes which for a considerable part of the existence of the authoritarian

system, were universal.

Nonetheless, it has been generally accepted that the concept of decommunization concerns the “problem of the hangman.” “Accounts with oneself” were left to the conscience of individuals, while public attempts to describe passive, but mass-scale participation in crimes committed by the communist system were relegated from public discourse under the most varied demagogic or nationalistic slogans.

Although during the twilight of real socialism, Polish anti-communists and opposition leaders had a long tradition of uninterrupted activity and were incomparably more numerous and better organized than in any other country ruled according to the prescriptions of Marxism-Leninism, they greeted the dissolution of communism unprepared for managing systemic transformation. This also holds true for decommunization.

The popular conviction about the need to punish the guilty was very different from the actual preparation of legal and institutional instruments necessary to embark upon such an endeavor. The “fundamentalist” wing of the opposition shared the conviction that the system would collapse—there would be a revolution or even a war. Thereby, the very course of events would posses a purifying force and eliminate representatives of the *ancien régime*. For the “evolutionistic” faction, the horizon was delineated by institutional (i.e. Parliament) social control over the state and economic administration, civic liberties, and, in international relations, a status similar to the one enjoyed by Finland. Meanwhile, the international contextual arena was blurred by a mist of complicated relations between the super powers. The “problem of the hangman,” then, did not transcend beyond acts which, for purely socio-technical purposes, were perpetrated by the communists themselves.

Regardless of what sort of preparations were made for an eventual bringing to justice for crimes (and errors) committed by representatives of the preceding system, the future course of events was determined by the manner in which the period of systemic transformation was entered and the moment in which this process originated. If the events of 1989 led to a revolution, then undoubtedly this was a “negotiated revolution,” an expression coined by Laszlo Bruszt, the Hungarian political scientist. These negotiations (the 1989 Round Table talks) did not address the responsibility of members of the ruling camp—neither the principle of collective penalization or eventual guarantees of individual (group) security. This situation was probably the consequence of the fact that neither side anticipated the results of the June 4 Polish election or that the latter would produce a “domino effect” in the form of a serial collapse of communist regimes in the whole of East-Central Europe. A similar situation occurred in Hungary, which, after Poland, was the second state to initiate negotiations (and transformation), although in contrast to their Polish counterparts, the Hungarians were much more aware of the fact that the issue at stake exceeded the reform of real socialism. These negotiations were furthermore concurrent with the logic of transition from authoritarianism to democracy, according to the principle of voluntary concessions. One such characteristic of transformation and voluntary concessions was abolition (or amnesty). In the case of

Chile, "operation oblivion" went so far as to destroy all the documents of the special forces—the political police and the gendarmes—in order to make it impossible to bring to court its functionaries even in the future.

The first step toward decommunization in Poland, was taken relatively rapidly once work was initiated by the so-called contract parliament, elected in June 1989. Not quite a month after the inauguration session, which took place on July 4, the Extraordinary Committee headed by Jan M. Rokita, a member of the anticommunist opposition, was established to examine the activity of the Ministry of the Interior. The intention of the commission was to determine who was responsible for the deaths of almost 100 persons who perished during the course of martial law campaigns to impose order or in unexplained circumstances, at the hands of the security services or the civic militia. At the same time, the Extraordinary Committee was expected to deal with the Mieczyslaw Rakowski government scandal over the bankruptcy of the Gdansk Shipyard (declared on 30 October 1988). All these events, however, took place at a time when the communist side had yet to issue a reaction to the celebrated article by Adam Michnik, entitled *Wasz prezydent, nasz premier* (Your President, our Prime Minister)—in other words, at a time when the opposition continued to act as an opposition.

The creation of the Tadeusz Mazowiecki coalition government, in which nominations to the posts of ministers of the Interior and National Defense were entrusted to General Wojciech Jaruzelski (who appointed General Florian Siwicki and General Czeslaw Kiszczak respectively), made it impossible to initiate decommunization "at the top," i.e. upon the basis of government decisions or legislation initiatives. Consequently, lively attempts at decommunization "at the bottom" were pursued mainly by the Confederation of Independent Poland (CIP). In October, the CIP members occupied a number of the buildings belonging to the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) and the Socialist Union of Polish Youth (SUPY). This campaign was accompanied by a petition signed by 133 activists of the former opposition concerning the "disinheritance" of the Communist Party. "Solidarity" members also mentioned a settling of accounts, which inclined Lech Walesa to announce that "the settling of accounts should not replace striving toward a prosperous and just Poland." The emphasis on settling accounts, however, proved to be so strong that a government commission was established for the purposes of "determining the legal state of the property of political parties" (naturally, this signified the PUWP) and youth organizations (*de facto* the SUPY only). This initiative was belated, since already a week after its proclamation, the PUWP no longer existed, having disbanded itself. The very mention of party property led to an examination of the crimes of Rakowski`s cabinet and its responsibility for the country's overall economic catastrophe.

The preparatory process itself took a long time, and the Mazowiecki government and the former opposition parliamentary representatives were as much responsible for the delays as their socialist opponents. Presumably, delays were caused by a lack of legislative resources, accompanied by the absence of any sort of models, although the primary role was played by the caution of the Prime Minister and his advisers, as well as the government's concentration on foreign affairs (mainly Polish-German relations) and

pressing economic issues. Increasingly distinct dissonances within the camp of the "Solidarnosc," which absorbed a considerable portion of the energy of the political leadership of the country, played a special part in delaying the process. In March 1990, the "inner opposition," which assumed shape in the form of the Center Alliance Party, produced a team that was to prepare decommunization statutes; the Center Alliance Party also disclosed a levy to be paid by former PUWP functionaries ("a tax on being a Commie"). The liquidation of the PUWP, which meant that one of the two decisive parties present at the Round Table talks was no longer and overnight turned into a nonparty, doubtless an inspiring factor for the latter development.

Other stumbling blocks included the ill-conceived establishment by the government of a committee to survey the archives of the Ministry of the Interior on March 20, 1990. The committee was merely a reaction to press information, which proclaimed that the Ministry's special services files were being destroyed, and did not stem from a wider conception about a need to manage and secure the legacy of the security apparatus, although its general reorganization and verification were already under way. The dismissal of Siwicki and Kiszczak was slowly attained (approved by the parliament on July 6), and soon afterward, General Jaruzelski recognized that his mission as a guarantor of a peaceful turnover of power was coming to an end. The legal and legislation machinery continued to grind on, albeit slowly. On July 24, 1990, a supplementary inquiry concerning the murder of Rev. Jerzy Popieluszko (committed on October 19, 1984 by men from security services) was commenced, and two months later, the Supreme Army Prosecutor's office was entrusted with the inauguration of a preparatory course of action concerning the massacres of December 1970 on the Baltic coast. On 9 November, in the heat of the presidential campaign, the parliament passed a statute in which the state treasury would assume the property of the former PUWP (a week later, the former seat of the Central Committee would be turned into bank offices).

Apparently, the slow progress of assorted aspects of the "problem of the hangman" resulted not only from the cautious policy of the government and its political hinterland or the composition of the parliament, in which the post-communists had at their disposal a rather considerable force, but also owing to the division and configuration of forces in public opinion.

According to a survey conducted in November 1990, 42 percent of the respondents supported the stripping of the former communists of the right to hold public offices, while 45.5 percent represented the opposite point of view. In September 1991, in the course of a lively election campaign, during which violent attacks launched against communism and the communists were an everyday occurrence among significant political forces, as many as 52 percent of the respondents maintained that former communists should not be deprived of the right to public office. Interestingly, that a significant percentage of persons declaring their support for such decidedly anti-communist parties as the Christian National Union, the Center Alliance Party, or the CIP, regarded this form of decommunization to be improper. Thus, the communists not only did not flee "beyond the Don," but they occupied strong positions within the democratic state, having gained the permission of a large part of society, which would show its

support in the coming elections.

A decisive step concerning inquiries into crimes committed in the 1940s and 1950s by functionaries of the security services was the statute of April 4, 1991, which recognized “Stalinist crimes” to be tantamount to genocide. The same statute expanded the nature of the Main Commission for Studies on Nazi Crimes (which now assumed the new name of the Main Commission for Studies on Crimes against the Polish Nation). True, subjective rights remained unaltered—the Commission’s prosecutors could not present acts of indictment in courts of law but only the results of inquiries in prosecutor’s offices; nonetheless, the work performed by the Commission assumed a rapid rate. Despite the large number of cases, both began (in 1991-95, they totaled about 950) and even completed (620 in the same period), the courts received a relatively small number of acts of indictment.

The inquiries revealed considerable problems with the amassing of evidence due to the state of its preservation, the sheer principle of making documents of the special services readily available to the public, and the process of obtaining of suitably detailed and reliable testimony of the defendants, who, naturally, also played the role of witnesses. Some inquiries were discontinued, because it was impossible to ascertain perpetrators. The prosecutors, as a rule burdened with daily work, also did not long to embark upon such cases. Some acted in this way because they disliked the prospect of being compelled to delve into untypical cases, often from the distant past and badly documented (such as the Kielce pogrom in July 1946), others probably for political reasons.

Although the majority favored punishing security functionaries (only those who could be presented with concrete charges—about 58 percent of the respondents, according to a survey conducted in May 1994), about 20 percent of the respondents were opposed to any form of punishment for a variety of reasons. Similar arguments were made about prolonging court cases in which the defendants and the witnesses were elderly and frequently suffered from illnesses and the effects of years of imprisonment and repression in the “outside” world. As a rule, the defendants negated the findings of the acts of indictment and, at times, behaved in an outright bellicose manner. Greatest attention was focused on the trial of Adam Humer, a high-ranking official of the Ministry of Public Security in 1945–4, and his colleagues, which ended with guilty verdicts but which only lasted for two and a half years (September 1993 to March 1996). The majority of cases took place in provincial courts (for example, Piotrków Trybunalski, Aleksandrów Kujawski, Krotoszyn, and Gizycko, Wloclawek), with a relatively slight interest of the local opinion. All told, by 1998, up to twenty verdicts had been delivered.

A specific “reverse” of the regulations of April 1991 was the preceding statute on February 23, 1991, which annulled verdicts passed in 1944–56 concerning “activity conducted for the sake of the independent existence of the Polish State.” This statute provided legal foundations for compensation, which proved beneficial for thousands of persons and indirectly supported organizations that offered compensation, for example, to compulsory workers (predominantly from the so-called Coal Corps). The February

statute was to act also as an element of decommunization: a stimulus for the ejection—according to the principle of "self-cleansing"—from courts of law and prosecutors' offices of those persons who by passing these verdicts betrayed their professional vocation. Nonetheless, only in the single case of a "court murder" (the death penalty for another hero of the resistance General August Fieldorf "Nil," who was executed in 1953 as "Nazi collaborator") was an inquiry inaugurated against Maria Gorowska, member of a court, which in the last instance confirmed the sentence. An inquiry was also inaugurated against Stanislaw Zarako-Zarakowski, an army prosecutor infamous for his part in many show trials in the 1950s. Both cases did not come to an end due to the deaths of the defendants.

After lengthy efforts, a statute in force since August 25, 1998 proclaimed the deprivation of old -age pension privileges for those judges and prosecutors who in 1944–56 were functionaries of the apparatus of repression, or who worked in the military administration of justice, secret sections, and on- the-spot courts. A much more determined "self-purification" took place only among attorneys at law.

Another distinct problem involved the determination and punishment of those guilty of crimes committed after 1956, in other words, those not encompassed by the clause on " Stalinist crimes." As already mentioned, the first initiatives (concerning the murder of Rev. J. Popieluszko) originated in 1990; in the following years, investigations concerned all the most important or celebrated cases: the death of Stanislaw Pyjas, a member of the democratic opposition (in 1977); the deaths of the miners from the "Wujek" mine (after introduction of martial law in December 1981); the case of the demonstrators from Lubin (killed in August 1982); the death of the schoolboy Grzegorz Przemyk, linked closely to underground "Solidarnosc" in 1983; and the death of Reverend Stanislaw Suchowolec (in January 1989); as well as the attack against the church of St. Martin in Warsaw. Characteristic features were the long duration of the inquiries and the extraordinary slowness of the court trials, if they took place at all. For example, the act of indictment against the functionaries of a special platoon that participated in suppressing the strike in the "Wujek" mine was filed in court in December 1992, fourteenth months after the inquiry. In November 1997, six years after the initiation of the case and five years after the initiation of the trial, the court adjudicated that none of the accused should be regarded as guilty of the death of any of the miners. After procedures initiated in October 1990, indictments in the Baltic littoral massacres were finally processed five years later in April 1995. The trial itself was delayed because of the absence of the defendants; it started in the middle of 1998 without five of them.

The introduction of this case in a court of law was possible thanks to the passage of a regulation stating that the period of the negative prescription of crimes committed by public functionaries prior to December 31, 1989 starts on January 1, 1990. Not until the statute of May 31, 1996, forbidding the application of amnesties proclaimed by the People's Republic of Poland in relation to functionaries who perpetrated crimes, were doubts eliminated about whether these amnesties were still binding—an issue raised by attorneys at law, and in the case of the Lubin murders, also sustained in court.

It became obvious that courts acting within the framework of the state of law and applying requisite principles (such as the assumption of innocence) and procedure (for example, the presence of both sides) experienced enormous difficulties with sentencing functionaries of the non-democratic regime. The majority of trials were based on circumstantial evidence: there was no evidential material which, to a great extent was destroyed immediately after the crime was committed. When witnesses, as a rule, were incapable of indicating the guilty, the defendants denied the accusations. As of 1999, only a single valid ruling was passed in the case of a security services functionary condemned for killing a demonstrator in Nowa Huta in 1983.

This inability to identify the guilty caused numerous and urgent protests by various milieus and social groups as well as negative assessments by a considerable part of public opinion. Sixty percent of the respondents of a survey recognized that the decision passed by the court in the trial of members of the ZOMO (Motorized Detachments of the Civic Militia) who took part in the "Wujek" mine incidents was incorrect; 22 percent regarded the verdict as justified. The more radical respondents demanded a "communist Nürnberg"—applying decommunization outright on the basis of the process of postwar de-Nazification of Germany and the Germans. Various charges were formulated regarding the judges or, more generally, the entire administration of justice as well as, much more frequently, concerning that part of the political class that was held liable for an intentional "dissolution" of the moment of a transition from dictatorship to democracy. In this context, frequent mention was made of a certain passage from a parliamentary speech delivered by Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki on August 24, 1989, in which he talked about drawing a "thick line" that separates the past—an obvious supra-interpretation of the words spoken by the first non-communist Prime Minister east of the Elbe River since 1947.

These opinions were accompanied by statements borrowed from the repertoire of a conspiracy theory of history, from its paranoiac variant about the "Jewish conspiracy" to the more subtle arguments about the conspiracy of the "pinks with the reds" or "agent connections." Although the public was disillusioned by the fact that the murderers and torturers (as well as their superiors), servile judges, and bloodthirsty prosecutors avoided punishment while those convicted were inappropriate representatives of the crimes committed, there was a sense that this was justified from the moral (and even political) point of view. The fulfillment of the postulates proved to be almost impossible without violating the fundamental principles of a democratic state and a departure from the logic of this astonishing "revolution without a revolution," in the words of CIP leader Leszek Moczulski. This statement is confirmed by the fact that an analogous situation existed in all post-communist states in Eastern Europe, including Germany, which witnessed the most radical break with communism.

A special place in the decommunization process was occupied by General Jaruzelski. In the eyes of a considerable part of the public, this *l'homme forte* of the last decade of communist Poland became its personification: for some negative, and for others positive. It did not come as a surprise, therefore, that on December 5, 1991, on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the proclamation of martial law, the CIP parliamentary

club filed a motion for General Jaruzelski and twenty-five members of WRON (Council of State) to be tried by the Tribunal of State. The motion, addressed to the parliamentary Constitutional Liability Committee, immediately yielded a statute passed by the Parliament on February 1, 1992, recognizing the decree on the introduction of martial law as illegal. Albeit the majority of the committee was composed of groups stemming from the former opposition, it acted according to the mode of prosecutors offices and courts: work was not initiated until September 22, 1992 and was not completed prior to the dismissal of Parliament. It was obvious ahead of time however, that, considering the new composition of the Parliament, in which the majority were reformed communists, the original motion would not be accepted. This became apparent when on February 13, 1996, the Committee voted 2 to 1 for the discontinuation of the procedure; several months later, Parliament approved this decision at a plenary session.

The prolonging of the procedure was the reason why, among others, the question of martial law, intermingled with opinions concerning what took place prior to and after its proclamation, stirred a large part of society and almost all the political elites and opinion-creating milieus for a long time. There were hundreds of interviews and statements (already in 1992, Jaruzelski himself published reminiscences from this period), and tens of documents were published. General Jaruzelski was accused of still other misdeeds: co-participation in the decision that the army use firearms in December 1970 and the directive issued in the autumn of 1989 to destroy the stenographs from Political Bureau sessions. Furthermore, it was frequently recalled upon assorted occasions that he was the Minister of National Defense at the time when the Polish Army took part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and that Jaruzelski was responsible for anti-Semitic purges in the army after 1967; his relations with Soviet generals and special services or even the legality of the purchase of a villa in Warsaw were also examined. There even appeared hypotheses that he was not the “real” Jaruzelski, but an NKVD officer who took the place of a young man from a Catholic, landowner family, murdered as a deportee in the Ural forests.

Certainly the Jaruzelski persona gave rise to extreme emotions, from publicly expressed admiration to physical assault. In a number of repeated public opinion surveys concerning the proclamation of martial law, the majority of the respondents, regardless of the revealed facts, invariably declared that martial law was a correct (or justified) decision. This was also the response given in studies conducted at the turn of November 1997; even after elections were won by anti-communist groups, 54 percent of all respondents agreed that martial law was justified. Among persons describing their convictions as rightist, only 55 percent found no justification for this decision.

The attitude to the proclamation of martial law, probably to a considerable degree concurrent with the attitude toward Jaruzelski himself, reinforced the conviction of the existence of profound and recurring divisions within society, concerning assorted issues referring to the past. According to numerous politicians, this fact cannot be ignored by political forces aiming at avoiding lengthy destabilization, regardless of the reasons why these divisions demonstrate considerable durability.

A prime component of decommunization is lustration, conceived not as a routine examination of persons who are to assume important posts in public life—the object of suitable procedure in democratic states—but the disclosure of secret collaborators within the security apparatus. On April 7, 1991, the National Civic Committee regarded as absolutely necessary to reveal a list of informers, and on 19 July, the Senate (29 votes for, 22 votes against) called for a lustration of all the candidates in the coming parliamentary elections. Despite emotional statements associated with the election campaign and the establishment of the Jan Olszewski government, which described itself as a "breakthrough cabinet," no concrete legislative initiative appeared, although lustration procedures had been initiated in Czechoslovakia and even in Romania and Bulgaria. Antoni Macierewicz, Minister of the Interior, however, did create a special Bureau of Study whose task was to prepare lustration, and work was initiated on a project for a suitable statute. Unexpectedly, on May 22, 1992, before these efforts were even commenced, the Parliament, upon the basis of a motion filed by Janusz Korwin-Mikke from the Union of Realistic Policy (UPR), passed the "lustration statute." This statute obligated the Ministry of the Interior to provide information about persons fulfilling public functions, who in 1945–90 were secret co-workers. Data pertaining to deputies, senators, and state civil servants were to be presented to Parliament by June 6, while information about prosecutors, lawyers, communal councilmen, and members of communal boards would be presented at a later term. By June 4, the Minister of Interior presented the parliamentary club chairs with a list containing sixty-four names, and a separate, much shorter one, which included the names of the President and the Marshal of Parliament, was made available to supreme state authorities.

The course and form in which lustration took effect led not only to the fall of the cabinet, but, in the eyes of many people, compromised the very idea of lustration. Nonetheless, it also acted as a sharp spur, and from July 6, the Marshal of Parliament was presented with successive projects of statutes. Over several weeks, seven such projects were prepared, including those devised by the Senate and the President. Not all, however, pertained to lustration; a single document also mentioned decommunization *sensu stricto*, in other words, it contained a list of party and government posts that, held at the time of "the commune," now made it impossible to fulfill certain public functions. These projects were rather far reaching regarding both their objects (for example, they concerned former students of the party academy) and their subjects (the prohibition of holding the post of a scientific secretary in an scientific institute). The combination of different matters hampered work on the projects, but a decisive role in the failure of these initiatives was played by the fact that the Polish political scene was not stable and the Parliament was incapable of producing a lasting majority, which led to premature elections and the victory of post-communist groups.

Not until April 11, 1997, after a long interval and in a new configuration of forces, did it become possible to pass a statute "on the disclosure of work or service in state security organs or cooperation with them in 1944–90 by persons fulfilling public functions." The contents of this statute were criticized by parties of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition; thus when the new elections altered the configuration of forces, the statute in question was amended (June 18, 1998). This time it was

questioned by the post-communist President, who returned it to the Constitutional Tribunal. As a result, none of the lustration procedures were commenced before the summer of 1999, although for the whole period the ban on holding high posts and public functions by former secret collaborators enjoyed strong public support, peaking in December 1997 with 85 percent in favor in the case of certain state posts.

During the period of 1994-97, the number of adherents of lustration grew noticeably (from 57 percent to 76 percent). Such consensus was the result, it seems, of the fact that lustration was supported by both anti-communists and post-communists, whom it did not affect. The outcome of the absence of a suitable legislation assumed, upon a number of occasions, the form of a "wild lustration," either as the published "Macierewicz list" or leaks, which were exploited more often by writings associated with the post-communist Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland. Even President Lech Walesa became embroiled in a "file battle" against his recent supporters.

The problematic lustration process was further complicated by the nature of the material gathered by the security apparatus—mainly thanks to secret collaborators but also with the help of other operational techniques. This material concerns particular citizens, especially those who had antagonized the authorities in any way. The issue is known as the "files case."

The first and, for a long time to come, the only one to address this question was Germany. On January 1, 1992, Germany initiated a statute about the opening of Stasi documents and their availability as well as the establishment of a special office administering them. Other post-communist countries in Central Eastern Europe passed similar statutes from 1994 (Hungary) to 1998 (Bulgaria), but not everywhere was it possible to prepare an organizational hinterland indispensable for profiting from the right to examine "one's own file." In Poland, this problem was effectively discussed only in 1997, in connection with work on a "lustration statute" creating, at the president's initiative, a Civic Archive within the framework of state archives. In the wake of the parliamentary elections held in September 1997, this project was *de facto* absorbed by the governmental project of the Institute of National Memory, which began operating only in July 2000 after several months of parliamentary struggle. (The Institute of National Memory regulates access to information amassed by the security apparatus during the period of 1944-89 and expands the chronological range of the work conducted by the heretofore Main Commission for Studies on Crimes to December 31, 1989, outfitting its prosecutors with a full gamut of rights.)

The initiative of making the files available to the public was greeted favorably by the public at large: according to a survey conducted in the middle of December 1997, 73 percent of the respondents said each citizen should have access to his or her own file, and only 11 percent expressed an opposite view. Nonetheless, 42 percent of the respondents were interested in access in a purely theoretical sense and believed, probably correctly so, that the special services had not collected any information about them. In reality, the number of persons who would not discover any files about themselves simply because there were none is much higher, since the archives of the Office for the Protection of the

State and the Ministry of the Interior and Administration preserved only three million assorted files on living persons.

Quite possibly, if the components of the "problem of the hangman," such as the penal liability of the functionaries and the (at least political) liability of their superiors, as well as the lustration of the administration of justice and of secret collaborators and access to the "files," had been rapidly and effectively resolved, the question of decommunization *sensu stricto* would not have absorbed public opinion and (this is less certain) the political elites. The actual situation, however, assumed a different form, among others, due to the fact that all undertakings, even those providing legislative support, were slow, or rather intentionally delayed. The political instability created by the consecutive government collapses, predominantly during the four-year term of the post-communist majority, comprised the main, or one of the prime reasons for this delay. The successive change of the political forces in Parliament was the reason behind a return to already abandoned legislative initiatives as well as a revision of those that had been already passed. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first half of 1998 was characterized by amendments of the existing statutes and proposals of new projects. It was high time to accept the decommunization statute, whose text was the outcome of a compromise achieved within the Solidarity Election Campaign (AWS) and the Freedom Union (UW) coalition, soon followed by the preparation—already only within the AWS—of a project for a radical decommunization statute.

This statute was directed against those persons who "betrayed the interests of the Polish nation," evidenced by posts held in the state apparatus, the administration of justice, the apparatus of the Communist Party, and the mass media. Such persons could not be entrusted with public functions (including managerial posts in state firms) or work in security and inner security posts, and were forbidden to pursue certain professions (prosecutors, attorneys at law, notaries) for five to ten years, depending on the post. This initiative is similar to those that were presented in the summer of 1992, with the sole exception that the list of "banned" posts is more restrained, while the list of posts held during the communist era, and now the cause of recrimination, is longer. The authors took into consideration the *casus* of the parliamentary elections of 1993 and the presidential election of 1995, since all elective functions were bypassed. Moreover, they backed off a proposed decommunization of the Army. Alleviation of the most radical notions is testified also by the fact that the project no longer suggests a ban of "decommunized" economic concessions, proposed six years earlier in two projects (devised by the ZCHN and the Senate).

Obviously, both the decommunization and the planned statutes are of country-specific political significance in their capacity as a factor delegitimizing post-communists and a tool to restrict their staff potential by the elimination of some of the present-day activists (and sympathizers) located in financial and economic structures. This aspect is readily utilized in polemics and SdRP propaganda, in which one of the constant arguments is the presentation of decommunization as the "revenge of the victors," which has nothing in common with democracy, whose eager lovers now include the post-communists. The Parliament of the Republic of Poland embarked upon an attempt at

formulating its own assessment of the communist past and did not follow the example of the Bundestag, which in 1992 established a Commission for Overcoming the Effects of the SED Dictatorship, granting it inquiry privileges (albeit not those of a prosecutor) and equipping it with sizable funds. As a result, after six years of work and the publication of tens of thousands of pages of documents and testimony, in June 1998, the Commission presented the Bundestag with a 700-page report. The Poles must remain satisfied with a 1-page resolution of Parliament.

I limited myself to a fragment of the phenomenon of decommunization expressed in the decisions of cabinets and Parliament. I did not mention, among others, the problem of compensation (including material) for the victims of the communist system and those issues encompassed by general systemic changes (for example, economic ones, such as re-privatization). Ultimately, transformation itself is decommunization or a more or less effective disassembly of the former system. I did not write about the questions known as the "balance sheet of the People's Republic of Poland" –in social consciousness, in public debate, and in historical research. Although decommunization and the "balance sheet" are closely intertwined, their themes would require a separate presentation. It seems worth indicating, however, that the political struggle waged in connection with decommunization favors a public and professional debate on the recent past.