

*Originating on the Baltic seacoast, the now-outlawed trade union Solidarność (Solidarity) claimed at one point to represent 10 million of Poland's 13 million workers. Led by Lech Walesa, who had been involved in the 1970 and 1976 disturbances in Poland, Solidarity received broad support from Western labor unions — and over \$185,000 from the AFL-CIO.*

# Poland

“Humanity must rejoice and glory when it considers the change in Poland.” The sentiments of Britain’s Edmund Burke were echoed by many Western politicians during the 16-month heyday in 1980–81 of the independent trade union Solidarity. Burke was referring to Poland’s adoption of the liberal “May Constitution” in 1791—a development that ultimately provoked Russia and Prussia into dismembering Poland in 1793. Two centuries later, the rise of free labor unions and the easing of constraints on political life were seen as a threat by both the Soviet Union and the regime in Poland itself.

What came to be called the “Solidarity period” began in July 1980 when Edward Gierek’s regime suddenly increased the price of meat. Popular protest initially took the form of scattered strikes around the country. Then, in mid-August, 16,000 workers seized control of the vast Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk. Led by an unemployed shipyard electrician, Lech Walesa, the Gdańsk strikers virtually shut down Poland’s major Baltic seaport. Soon, Walesa and his colleagues found themselves at the head of a nationwide movement that pressed for sweeping political and economic reform. The regime gave in. Under the Gdańsk Agreement of August 31, the communist government, in return for an end to the strikes, promised to recognize independent, worker-run trade unions, to honor the right to strike, and to relax censorship.

Solidarność—Solidarity—came alive, and so did Poland. Gierek resigned. The autumn air carried an intoxicating whiff of freedom. The Sejm, Poland’s Parliament, long a rubber-stamp legislature, began demanding real power. University officials started to insist on true academic freedom. Major newspapers began printing some straight news. Films banned for years started appearing on television. The Solidarity period was a time of extraordinary political and cultural ferment.

Walesa himself knew it would not last. On December 13, 1981, in a move that had been quietly planned for months, Gen-

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eral Wojciech Jaruzelski, now First Secretary of the Communist party, declared martial law and arrested Walesa and 6,000 Solidarity leaders and supporters. In time, the independent union was officially suppressed. The crackdown was unrelenting and, despite strikes and occasional flare-ups of violent opposition, successful—at least in the short run.

The long run may be another matter, our three Polish authors make clear as they discuss the party, the economy, and the intelligentsia.

## THE PEOPLE VERSUS THE PARTY

*by Leopold Unger*

What, Confucius was once asked, are the essentials of government? "First," the philosopher replied, "the people should not go hungry; second, the army should be powerful; and third, the government should enjoy the trust of the people." Which of these elements, the questioner continued, might be sacrificed in a pinch? "First," Confucius said, "I would do without the army; then I would sacrifice the people's food, since starvation and famine have existed since the dawn of mankind; but where there is no trust, common people will have nothing to stand on."

Confucius, of course, was unable to take into account 35 years of absolute Communist rule in Poland, where the Army is powerful, but shortages of food and trust persist. The people have "nothing to stand on," but the regime still endures. As far as Poland is concerned, it was not only Confucius who was wrong but also Stalin. In April 1945, he told Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito, "This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise." Thirty-eight years later, Soviet troops are still stationed in Poland, but Soviet ideas, though duly imposed, have yet to take hold.

What Poland's Communist masters failed to understand from the beginning is that Poland is a people before it is a state; it is the Polish people rather than the Polish state that has, over the years, lent coherence and continuity to the history of "Poland." For as a political entity, Poland's evolution has followed a

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tortuous course, often dictated by outsiders. As anyone familiar with European history knows, Polish territory was long treated as a kind of modeler's clay, sculpted (and diminished) by powerful neighbors. My own parents, for example, were born and married in the city of Lwów and never moved from there; yet what was Poland when I was born had been part of Austria when they were young, and was controlled by Germany when they were killed. They were buried in an unmarked grave in the city of their birth, which is now within the Soviet Union.

Of course, politically if not physically, the rest of Poland today also lies within the Soviet Union, even though a "sovereign" state has been reconstituted and can be found on any map of Europe. The state in question is ruled by the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, or PZPR). The chief source of discord in Poland today, of spiritual discord in particular, is that the Polish Communist party is not and has never been Polish—not Polish, at any rate, in a sense that would be understood by most Poles.

Poland is no stranger to travail. Thrice during the late 18th century, her powerful neighbors—Russia, Prussia, and Austria—carved her up and feasted upon various portions. For more than 120 years after the Third Partition in 1795, Poland as such did not exist at all. Neither the Duchy of Warsaw (1807–15), established by Napoleon, nor the Congress Kingdom (1815–64), established by the Congress of Vienna (and dominated by the Russian Tsar), altered this fact. Nor did two ill-fated uprisings (in 1830–31 and 1863–64) or the revolutionary ferment of the Spring of Nations (in 1848–49). Nevertheless, the Polish people continued to insist, or at least to hope, that their dead state would one day be reborn. And from the ashes of World War I, so indeed it was.

Two groups in Poland, however, were adamantly opposed to the state's rebirth. The groups in question were Rosa Luxemburg's Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, and the Polish Socialist Party Left (the left-wing faction of the Socialist Party). "The slogan of independent Poland," declared the socialist newspaper *Nasza Trybuna* on November 2, 1918, just days before independent Poland was established anew, "is the axis around which gather the powers of the social reactionaries." In the view of extreme leftists, economically depressed Poland was ripe for proletarian revolution. Creating a bourgeois state would only delay the inevitable; it would constitute, moreover, an obstacle to the triumphal march of communism from Russia to Germany. In December 1918, the Social Democrats and the Polish Socialist Left merged to form the

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Communist Party of Poland.

The Polish Communists regarded the new Polish Republic as illegitimate: "the easternmost segment of Western imperialism." They refused to seek legal sanction for their new party—though it would have been forthcoming—and boycotted the January 1919 election of a Polish Parliament, the Sejm. Having failed to register, the party was declared illegal and forced underground, where it stayed until 1944–45.

### Instinct for Self-Destruction

At odds with Lenin (who, ironically, recognized the potency of Polish nationalism), Luxemburg redirected her efforts towards Germany. Ethnic Poles then high up in the Soviet hierarchy—notably, Feliks Dzierzynski and Józef Unszlicht, creators and chiefs of the Cheka, Lenin's secret police and forerunner of the KGB—were able to exercise increasing sway over the Polish party. When the Polish-Soviet war broke out in 1920, the Polish Communists insisted that it was not a contest between two sovereign states but instead a struggle for socialist revolution. Calling unsuccessfully for a general strike, the party urged its members to sabotage the Polish war effort and work to aid Bolshevik Russia. General Józef Piłsudski's "miracle on the Vistula"—his stunning defeat of the Red Army in the battle of Warsaw—dashed Communist hopes.

From its very inception, then, the Communist Party of Poland found itself out of step with the desires of most Poles. "With you, gentlemen," Polish Socialist Party leader Mieczysław Niedziałkowski told the Communists in 1923, explaining his refusal to join them in a united front, "one never knows if you are genuine political workers or agents of the Russian government." The question continues to be asked.

Regardless of the integrity and courage that many of its activists displayed, the Polish Communist Party was permanently fixed in the role of the outcast. Few rallied to its banner. It is difficult in 1983 to evaluate the strength of an illegal and under-

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ground political party a half-century ago, but the most credible statistics indicate that out of a Polish population of some 20 million, the Communist Party could boast only 5,000 members in 1922; 15 years later, despite "favorable" economic and social conditions, it had fewer than 4,000.

And the party was caught in a trap: The more unpopular it became, the more it had to rely on the Soviet Union; the more it did that, the more unpopular it became. During modern Poland's first fling with parliamentary democracy (1918–26), and then during Piłsudski's military dictatorship (1926–35), the party proved unable to break out of this vicious cycle. And it manifested from the outset an instinct for self-destruction, as when, in 1932, at the Party Congress held in Belorussia, the Polish Communists openly commiserated with the German Communists on the "Polish occupation of Upper Silesia." Eventually, the Polish party became a creature of the Comintern, the Communist International. And after Stalin consolidated his power during the late 1920s, the Comintern served as little more than an instrument of the Russian government.

The internationalism of the Polish Communist Party was not enough to protect it from a dramatic end. Two blows removed it temporarily from history.

First, during the Great Purge of 1936–38, Stalin executed or



*The First Partition, 1772: Poland's last King, Stanislaw-August Poniatowski, despairingly clutches his crown as Russia's Catherine the Great, Prussia's Frederick the Great, and Austria's Joseph II divide nearly one-third of the Kingdom of Poland among themselves.*

## MODERN POLAND



Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency; Special Supplement to *National Geographic*, April 1982.

interned several hundred Polish Communists who happened to be on Soviet soil. Many Communists living abroad were lured back and executed. Of the 37 members of the Polish Communist Party's Central Committee elected in 1932, 30 perished, including the entire Politburo and Secretariat. (The few survivors, including Władysław Gomułka, a future First Secretary of the Polish party, owed their good fortune to the fact that, as members of an illegal organization, they were languishing in Polish prisons at the time.) Then, in 1938, on the pretext that the Polish party had been infiltrated by Polish police agents, Stalin dissolved it altogether.

There was, perhaps, a silver lining. Since it had ceased to exist, the Communist Party of Poland was spared the ignominy of having to endorse (as other Communist parties would do, after performing awkward ideological contortions) the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact signed on August 23, 1939. A week later, on September 1, came the German invasion of Poland—and World War II. The Polish Army, though it resisted valiantly, crumbled after a few weeks. The Red Army's attack from the east, launched on September 17, sealed the country's fate. By late September, Hitler and Stalin had split the conquered nation between themselves, like the partitioning powers of yore.

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The "Fourth Partition" was roughly along the Bug and San rivers. Germany took more than half of Poland and most (22 million) of its people. Part of the German conquest was formally incorporated into the Reich; the rest was treated as, in Hitler's words, a "vast Polish labor camp." All Jews and most educated Poles were marked for extermination. The concentration camps at Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek and elsewhere were in operation by 1942.

The Poles in the Soviet-occupied sector of their country hardly fared better. Several hundred thousand were deported and imprisoned in distant parts of the Soviet Union. Many others were killed. Most of the 15,000 Polish officers taken by the Soviets as prisoners of war disappeared. Stalin's foreign minister, Vyacheslav M. Molotov, boasted in October 1939: "Nothing is left of Poland, this ugly offspring of the Versailles Treaty."

But, already, the Polish resistance had begun. A government-in-exile was formed in Paris, with General Władysław Sikorski, politically a man of the democratic center, as Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief. Representatives of the Socialist, Peasant, and National parties were included in the government, which fled to London after the fall of France in June 1940. In Poland itself, the underground Armia Krajowa (Home Army) resisted the German occupation.

### Looking Ahead

After Operation Barbarossa—the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941—Moscow changed its tune. The "imperialist" war fomented by the British and French "warmongers" now became the "Great Patriotic War," and Britain and France became valiant allies. By the end of July, the Polish government-in-exile, under strong British pressure, uneasily reached an agreement with the Kremlin. The Soviets renounced the 1939 partition and gave "amnesty" to their Polish prisoners, allowing them to form a Polish Army, which fought in Africa and Italy.

Looking ahead, Stalin realized that a Polish Communist party would again be useful. He also recognized that his de facto (if short-lived) alliance with Hitler and his participation in the dismemberment of Poland—not to mention the old Polish party's extreme unpopularity—made it inadvisable to use the word "communist" in the new party's name. And so in the beginning of 1942, the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, or PPR) and its military arm, the Armia Ludowa (People's Army), came into existence. The new group's Moscow-trained leaders—



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notably Marcei Nowotko and Paweł Finder—were parachuted into German-occupied Poland to direct the underground movement. Of course, the Soviets remained uneasy about Polish Communists, particularly when operating beyond Moscow's physical reach. It is not surprising that both Nowotko and Finder soon met violent deaths—at the hands of comrades—under circumstances that have never been officially explained.

Stalin maintained his alliance with Sikorski's government only as long as necessary. After the Russian victory over the Germans at Stalingrad in early 1943, Stalin rejected Polish claims to prewar Poland's eastern territory. When the Germans in April announced discovery of the Katyn massacre—they had unearthed a mass grave containing the bodies of 4,250 Polish officers slain by the Russians in the Katyn forest near Smolensk—Stalin used the request of the government in London for a Red Cross investigation as an excuse to break off relations. In July 1943, Sikorski died in an air crash, and Stanisław Mikołajczyk, a leader of the Peasant Party, became Prime Minister.

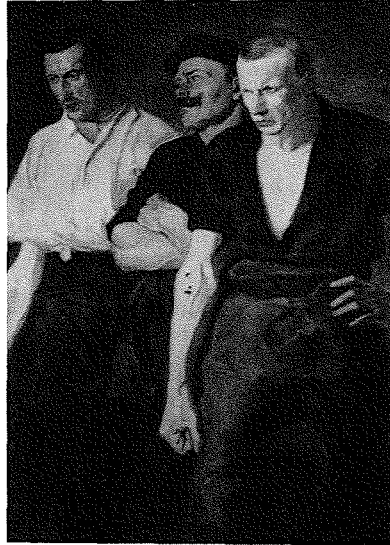
As the Red Army in the spring and early summer of 1944 neared the Moscow-recognized boundary with Poland (roughly the so-called Curzon Line, suggested by British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon in 1919), the Soviets began molding a subservient Polish "government," using underground PPR members but with trusted Poles from Moscow brought in to run the show: Bolesław Bierut, for example, a Comintern official, along with representatives of the Moscow-based and Kremlin-controlled Union of Polish Patriots.

### Caesar's Wife's Sins

Local Polish Home Army forces, as directed by the London government-in-exile, helped the Red Army's advance. But in most cases, once the Germans had sufficiently retreated, the Polish officers were arrested and their men impressed into the Soviet-commanded Polish Army. The liberated areas came under the control of the communist government installed in Lublin. In July, the Red Army neared the outskirts of Warsaw. On August 1, the Poles in the old capital rose up against the German occupiers—but Stalin's legions just across the Wisła (Vistula) River did not come to their assistance. The Warsaw Uprising, thus doomed, nevertheless lasted 63 days. Neither the uprising, nor its 150,000 victims, nor its lesson, would be forgotten.

By the time the "Big Three" met at Yalta in February 1945, the Lublin government was firmly entrenched in Warsaw. Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt were convinced that they

*The Strike (1910). Stanisław Lentz completed this painting five years after Polish workers, in a nationwide general strike, sought a shorter workday and a democratic republic. The desire for both "bread and freedom" persists.*



could do little, short of war with the Soviets, to change that reality. They went along with Stalin's designs for Poland, recognizing the Curzon Line as Poland's eastern boundary and thereby placing the cities of Wilno (Vilnius) and Lwów (L'vov), centers of Polish culture for centuries, inside the Soviet Union. (The Allies agreed to compensate Poland by making extensive annexations to the west at Germany's expense.) In addition, the communist government, rather than the London government-in-exile, was accepted by the Allied leaders as the nucleus of the future Polish regime, although, in an empty concession, Stalin promised to "reorganize" the Lublin government to include some "democratic leaders." Stalin promised, too, that "free and unfettered" elections would be held. They would be, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. "I did not know Caesar's wife," Roosevelt told Stalin, "but she was believed to have been pure." Replied Stalin: "I was told so about Caesar's wife, but in fact she had certain sins."

The Western leaders' hopes were in vain. The postwar period of "dualism"—when the PPR, although effectively dominating the provisional government, kept a low profile, and when substantial personal freedom still existed in Poland—did not last very long. When elections were finally held in January 1947, they were not like Caesar's wife. Had they been, Mikołajczyk's

## POLAND: A CHRONOLOGY, 1772–1982

**1772** First Partition: Russia, Prussia, and Austria split up almost one-third of the "Noble Republic" of Poland-Lithuania among themselves.

**1791** May 3 Constitution adopted. The Sejm (Parliament) is strengthened, and a hereditary monarchy supplants election of Polish kings by nobles.

**1793** Second Partition: Prussia and Russia slice into Poland again, leaving a powerless "rump state."

**1794** Opposing Second Partition, General Tadeusz Kościuszko, hero of American Revolution, leads doomed revolt.



Tadeusz  
Kościuszko  
(1746–1817)

**1795** Third Partition: Russia, Austria, and Prussia at last eliminate Poland from the map.

**1807** Napoleon rewards Poles after his victories over Austria, Russia, and Prussia by creating Duchy of Warsaw.

**1815** Congress of Vienna establishes quasi-autonomous Kingdom of Poland, dominated by Russia.

**1830** Uprising in Warsaw for Polish independence. It is crushed by Tsar Nicholas I the following year.

**1863** Insurrection against tsarist rule. It is put down after 16 months, and the Congress Kingdom is abolished.

**1882** Polish Socialist party (Proletariat) is formed in Warsaw, suppressed by tsarist police within four years.

**1892** A second Polish Socialist Party is founded; supports creation of sovereign democratic republic.

**1893** Rosa Luxemburg and others found revolutionary Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland (and Lithuania); favors close cooperation with Russian Socialists.



Rosa Luxemburg  
(1871–1919)

**1897** Roman Dmowski's National Democratic Party formed; seeks united and liberated Poland; is strongly anti-German.

**1914** With outbreak of World War I, Dmowski lobbies in Russia (and later in London and Paris) for a Polish state; to the same end, Socialist Józef Piłsudski forms Polish Legion in Galicia with Austrian assistance and attempts invasion of Russian Poland.

**1916** Central Powers proclaim formation of a Kingdom of Poland under protection of Austrian and German Emperors.

**1917** Russian provisional government and rival Petrograd Soviet call for establishment of an independent Polish state.

**1918** U.S. President Woodrow Wilson proclaims Fourteen Points, one of them calling for creation of Poland. Polish Socialists form provisional government and Piłsudski takes office as Commander in Chief and Chief of State. Polish Social Democrats and Polish Socialists-Left merge to form Communist Workers' Party of Poland.

**1919** Elections to Constituent Assembly. Treaty of Versailles fixes Poland's western borders. Poland annexes western Ukraine. Polish-Soviet war begins.



Józef Piłsudski  
(1867–1935)

**1920** Piłsudski's forces defeat Red Army in Battle of Warsaw.

**1921** Second Republic, dominated by Dmowski's National Democrats.

**1926** Piłsudski seizes power in coup d'état; sets up Sanacja "cleanup" regime.

**1935** Death of Piłsudski.

**1938** Stalin dissolves Communist Party of Poland.

**1939** Molotov-von Ribbentrop non-aggression pact. Nazis invade Poland (September 1), followed by the Soviets two weeks later. Polish government-in-exile, headed by Władysław Sikorski, established in Paris, later moved to London.

**1941** Germany invades Soviet Union.

**1942** Polish Workers' Party formed by communists. Hitler's "Final Solution" of "Jewish Problem" gets under way.

**1943** Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. For three weeks, the city's Jews forcibly resist deportation to death camps. Germans reveal Katyn massacre.

**1944** Polish Communists establish Committee of National Liberation, recognized as temporary Polish government by Soviet Union. Warsaw Uprising.

**1945** Soviets liberate Warsaw (January 17). A month later, Allied leaders meet at Yalta. Provisional Government of National Unity is formed by Communists and others and recognized by Western powers. Potsdam Conference (July 17-August 2).

**1947** Communist-dominated "Democratic Bloc" wins rigged elections to Sejm.



Władysław  
Gomułka  
(1905-1982)

**1948** Party boss Władysław Gomułka purged. Stalinist period begins under Bolesław Bierut. Polish United Workers' Party emerges from union of Communists and Socialists.

**1952** Adoption of Soviet-style constitution marks formal advent of Polish People's Republic.

**1956** Bierut dies in Moscow, succeeded

as First Secretary by Edward Ochab. Rioting by workers in Poznań. Gomułka, rehabilitated, becomes First Secretary. Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, Poland's primate, freed after three years in detention.

**1968** Students riot in Warsaw and Kraków. Regime launches campaign against intellectuals and Jews. Polish armed forces take part in Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia (August 20).



Edward Gierek  
(b. 1913)

**1970** Bloody rioting by workers in Baltic shipyards of Szczecin, Gdynia, and Gdańsk. Gomułka replaced as First Secretary by Edward Gierek.

**1971** Gierek starts effort to modernize economy and buy domestic peace with Western imports and credits.

**1976** Economy sags. Workers riot.

**1978** Kraków's Karol Cardinal Wojtyła is elected Pope John Paul II.

**1979** Pope visits Poland as economic crisis worsens.

**1980** Labor turmoil results in Gdańsk Agreement; Solidarity created. Gierek replaced by Stanisław Kania.

**1981** General Wojciech Jaruzelski succeeds Kania as First Secretary. Jaruzelski on December 13 declares martial law.



Pope John Paul II  
(b. 1920)

**1982** Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa is released from detention after trade union is formally dissolved. Jaruzelski lifts "main rigors" of martial law, but does not release all detained activists. Pope announces plans for June 1983 visit.

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Peasant Party, supported by most noncommunist forces in Poland, unquestionably would have won the largest number of seats in the Sejm. But thanks to terror and fraud—including mass arrests and raids on Mikołajczyk's headquarters throughout the country, as well as legal measures that struck his party's name from the ballot in about one-fifth of the election districts—the Peasant Party garnered only 28 seats out of 444.

Not surprisingly, the PPR and its Socialist and other allies in the "Democratic Bloc" emerged the winners. Before the year was out, Mikołajczyk himself, fearing that a price had been put on his head, fled to the West. In December 1948, the Polish Communists erased the last source of potential political opposition by effectively eliminating the Socialist Party—absorbing it into the PPR to form the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). At the Unification Congress in Warsaw, members of the assembly chanted over and over again: "Sta-lin, Sta-lin, Sta-lin." Poland as a state entered a new era. Poland as a people balked.

### No 'Polish Way'

Over Poland, as over the rest of Eastern Europe, night descended. The Communist parties everywhere did their utmost to interrupt institutional continuity, erode popular morale, and erase the memory of national history. Relying on force, corruption, blackmail, harassment, and sheer exhaustion, the Communists sought submission if not energetic support. Those in the parties' ranks who expressed misgivings about following Moscow's lead or adopting its economic model or embracing its ideas about cultural policy were accused of "nationalist deviation" and purged. In Poland, Władysław Gomułka, who had often spoken of the need to take "the Polish way to Socialism," did not hold his party post as General Secretary for long. He was, in fact, arrested and imprisoned for three years. Stalin's man Bierut took his place.

Outwardly, events in Poland resembled those taking place in its Eastern European neighbors. The Poles first heard of their refusal to accept Marshall Plan aid on Radio Moscow, just as Czech Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk learned of his nation's rejection from Stalin himself. Poland's leaders, like the leaders of other Eastern European states, paid obeisance to Cominform, the Communist Information Bureau, Comintern's successor. But, inwardly, the Polish situation was different. The Polish Communist party never managed to subdue the populace. Indeed, it has never ceased capitulating to the people whom it wanted to rule unconditionally. Four times in 25 years—in 1956,

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1970, 1976, and 1980—it faced a national revolt, and each time, whether armed force was employed or not, it was compelled to give in.

The history of the rest of Eastern Europe has not, of course, been uneventful. Albania, Romania, and Yugoslavia did, to various extents, break with Moscow, but the power of each nation's ruling Communist party was never effectively challenged. The Hungarian revolt in 1956 and the Czechoslovakian "spring" in 1968 both prompted Soviet intervention, but that was followed in each case by a quick return to normal (which meant that rulers and ruled led parallel lives in an atmosphere, insofar as possible, of mutual indifference).

### Rejecting the Graft

But in Poland, there has never been a return to "normal." The perverse cycle is by now familiar. It begins with the mismanaged economy functioning more eccentrically than usual. Then comes a spark, in the form of some ill-considered government decision (e.g., abruptly raising the price of basic foods). The resulting explosion fragments the party apparatus. Attempts to contain the conflagration, usually by force (54 people were killed at Poznań in 1956, more than 100 at Gdańsk in 1970), merely cause it to spread. Finally the party resorts to radical surgery, sacrificing its top leadership, promising reform, and finally, when all is calm, sliding back into its old rut.

Clearly, then, a question needs to be asked: What makes Poland so different? Why has the communist "graft" been repeatedly rejected as it has not been elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc?

The most fundamental reason, as I proposed above, is that the Polish Communist party has historically been unable to comprehend the nature of the Polish nation or to accept that the nation's basic characteristics are, indeed, basic, unalterable, inherent. With 30 million people in 1945 and a land area of 120,700 square miles, Poland was the largest country to come under Soviet sway. It could boast a cultural coherence unrivaled in Eastern Europe. Its people spoke a single language, and its key institutions—the Parliament, the universities, the church, the trade unions—had long histories: decades in the case of unions, centuries in the case of the Parliament, a millennium in the case of the church. To succeed in Sovietizing Poland, the Communist regime had to root out and overcome these impediments. It had, in short, to overcome Poland itself.

Nor, from the Communist point of view, were the circumstances after 1945 ideal. Poland had suffered greatly as a result

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of World War II. It had lost one-sixth of its population—six million people, including three million Jews—and endured the nightmare of Nazi and Soviet occupation. But Poland had also greatly contributed to Allied victory. Poles fought at Arnheim and Monte Cassino and Lenino and, altogether, constituted the fourth largest Allied armed force, surpassed only by those of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain. At war's end, the Poles who survived felt far more acutely than did the Czechs or Austrians or Hungarians that they had earned a right, ratified in blood, to shape their own destiny. The prospect of slipping permanently into a Soviet "sphere of influence" was abhorrent. It had been only a few years, after all, since the Russians had participated in Poland's partition, brutally thinned its population, and cavalierly murdered a generation of its military officers. Even before all this, the Russians had not been regarded by the Poles with bonhomie.

It was inevitable, then, that attempts by the Polish regime to Sovietize the country and siphon away its character would at best antagonize and at worst antagonize and fail. But the Communist leaders had no choice but to push ahead. They were, themselves, being pushed.

### Against the Grain

The regime promptly abolished the respected position of President of the Republic and in 1952 gave Poland a new socialist constitution that hollowly saluted "the fraternal bond with the USSR." National Constitution Day (May 3), the anniversary of the adoption of Poland's 1791 Constitution, the earliest democratic charter in Europe, was eliminated. The PZPR also proposed changing the Polish national anthem, Józef Wybicki's "Mazurka," which dated back to the period of the partitions. Even Stalin thought that was going too far and overruled it.

The success of such tactics is perhaps best judged by the fact that in 1981, taking advantage of the relative freedom of the 16-month Solidarity period, throngs of young people spontaneously celebrated the old "national day" of May 3, whose significance is not something learned in Polish schools. As we shall see, the events of the Solidarity period provided a window into a Polish consciousness unadulterated by the regime.

The Polish Army had always been irrationally precious in Polish eyes. The Warsaw government overlooked that. The Home Army, whose performance against the Nazis was a source of vast pride to all Poles, was reviled on posters as the "spit-soiled dwarf of the reactionaries." Polish citizenship was taken

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away from those who had commanded Polish forces in the West, and several high-ranking officers were condemned to death upon their return to Poland. The oath of allegiance was altered so that Polish soldiers swore loyalty not just to Poland but also to the Soviet Union. The regime accepted a Soviet Marshal, Konstanty Rokossowski, as Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army, Minister of Defense, and member of the Politburo. (On his new Polish uniform, Rokossowski wore the prestigious *Virtuti Militari* medal, pinning it, however, on the wrong side of his breast.) Soviet officers of Polish extraction were brought in to man sensitive posts, and a Soviet general, Seraphim Lalin, was put in control of Poland's secret police.

### Politicized Learning

It is worth noting that workers in Warsaw in 1980 named a bridge after General Stefan Grot-Rowecki, the Home Army Commander, and proposed turning the home of Marshal Józef Piłsudski in nearby Sulejówek into a national museum. The names of these generals do not reverently cross Polish teachers' lips. A year later, in August 1981, a heavy cement monument appeared at the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw. It consisted of a cross and a tombstone on which had been engraved a simple but resonant message: "Katyn—1940." The next morning, the monument had disappeared. Significantly, the Polish people had built the monument in broad daylight; the government had to remove it in the dead of night. Needless to say, Katyn as a Soviet atrocity is not in the textbooks either.

Nor is the best of Polish literature, past and present. Literature has long been Poland's conscience, but the regime from the outset tried to impose its own standards of style (a crude socialist realism) and, above all, of content while suppressing traditional classics along with the work of contemporary Polish writers. Polish censors (who would have found themselves aptly described by Orwell and Kafka, had their books been available in postwar Poland) spent their days compiling blacklists of books, movies, and plays. In 1968, the Polish authorities even removed *Dziady* ("Forefather's Eve"), by Adam Mickiewicz, from the Warsaw stage. *Dziady*, the most patriotic play in all of Polish literature, with the status of a national epic, was written in the 19th century when Warsaw was under Tsarist occupation. The regime felt obliged to shut the performance down, so up-to-date and anti-Soviet did it sound.

The effect of censorship was not, however, the end of Polish literature so much as the end of Polish literature published le-





Source: M. K. Dziewanowski, *Poland in the Twentieth Century*, 1977; Konrad Syrop, *Poland: Between the Hammer and the Anvil*, 1968.

*To compensate for the postwar loss of its eastern half (mostly poor farmland) to the USSR, Poland won from Germany important industrial and coal-producing areas, including Upper Silesia, as well as greater access to the sea.*

gally in Poland. The truly creative artists such as novelist Witold Gombrowicz and playwright Sławomir Mrożek continued to publish their work abroad. Inevitably, it filtered back and circulated widely in Poland. The regime, of course, has attempted to slay by silence the activities of *Kultura*, the émigré monthly and publishing house in Paris that has helped to keep alive everything the Warsaw government hoped to annihilate. Scores of Polish writers working in the West—including Czesław Miłosz, author of the powerful anticommunist critique, *The Captive Mind*—do not, as writers, officially exist. Yet when Miłosz was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1980, the Polish people expressed such pride in the work of this man of whom they were not supposed to have heard that the regime was forced to allow

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him a triumphal visit to his native land. Poland's best writers were among the founders, in 1976, of KOR (the Committee of Workers' Defense), which helped provide the intellectual foundation of the free trade-union movement.

Independent learning, like the creative impulse, was an early target of the Communist government. For 500 years, Polish intellectuals had been at the forefront of European thinking. The University of Kraków, founded in 1364, is one of central Europe's oldest. But in 1951, the regime replaced the venerable Polish Academy of Knowledge with a crude, Soviet-style Academy of Sciences. The government politicized learning and flooded the universities with a vulgar Stalinist Marxism. A number of university posts went to party hacks, and party leaders, infused with a new snobbism, obliged universities to provide them with academic degrees of dubious merit.

### Fighting for Souls

The corruption of the university, however, was far from total. Much of the professoriat maintained its integrity. In 1968–69, the regime was obliged to purge hundreds of eminent academics from their posts, including the economist Włodzimierz Brus and philosopher Leszek Kołakowski. Scholars continued nevertheless to agitate for liberalization in Poland. Their efforts supplemented those of the literary men who founded the KOR. Scholars from almost every conceivable field were instrumental in creating the "Flying University" which organized lectures around the country that would never have been permitted in the regular university seminar room—a recapitulation of the Warsaw Uprising, for example, or a revisionist assessment of contemporary Polish history, or a critique of the regime's economic policy, or a cold look at Poland's relations with the USSR. The durability of intellectual life in Poland is perhaps best attested to by the number of scholars the regime sees fit to expel year after year.

Of all the institutions the Warsaw government attempted to suborn, the most important was the Catholic Church. The church has long served as the main and practically invulnerable stronghold of the Polish national identity. Conservative, traditional, and often intolerant, the church nevertheless had always been *Polish*, a quality of particular importance during periods of war or occupation. The Communist apparatus lost no other battle more decisively than it did its contest with the church for the soul of the Poles.

The Communists' original sin, so to speak, was the creation

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in 1949 of the association PAX, a lay organization designed to “liberate” the populace from the church hierarchy. Under the leadership of Bolesław Piasecki (the prewar chief of Falanga, a Polish fascist organization), PAX expanded quickly, providing the government with an unpersuasive alibi whenever the regime wished to defy the official church hierarchy. PAX was at the Communists’ side when they shut down important Catholic publications like *Tygodnik Powszechny*; it helped organize the “patriot-priest” movement; and it assisted the government in its anti-Semitic campaign of the late 1960s.

### ‘Revolutionary Vigilance’

It must be granted that the regime tried its best to humble the church. It put Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek on trial in 1953, accusing him of “spying for the CIA,” arrested nine other bishops that year for sedition, and “isolated”—confining him to a convent—Poland’s Primate, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński. Party leader Bierut and others personally went to Moscow to coordinate an indictment against the Primate, and it was only at Moscow’s insistence that the Warsaw government did not actually put Wyszyński on trial. Meanwhile, the regime pressed a Soviet-style propaganda campaign, banning religion from the schools, taking steps to curb the training of priests, and creating museums, associations, and publications devoted to atheism. If only on cultural grounds, such actions were a slap in the face of the Polish people.

The results of the regime’s campaign against the church, predictably, were abysmal. Ostracized by local congregations, the patriot-priest movement fizzled. Catholic publications continued to appear underground and eventually were given official sanction. And after the workers’ upheaval at Poznań in 1956, the new First Secretary, Gomułka, freed Cardinal Wyszyński as a sop to public opinion. Since then, the first act of every new First Secretary has been to meet publicly with Poland’s Primate—as if to ask permission to form a government.

The election of Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, Archbishop of Kraków, to the papacy in 1978 further fortified Poland’s church. Pope John Paul II’s 1979 visit to his homeland may have marked a turning point in the country’s modern history by giving millions of Poles for the first time a sense of their own power. One year later, in August 1980, Solidarity was born. The relative position of the church and the regime in Poland was nicely summed up by a Polish cartoon that appeared in 1979. It shows the Pope celebrating mass in Warsaw’s Victory Square, looking

over a sea of heads. A party boss, standing behind the altar, points to the crowd of believers and orders a policeman: "Take down their names."

Unable to come to terms with the nation it had to govern, the Polish Communist party could wield power only by the continual reinforcement of "revolutionary vigilance"—the reinforcement, that is, of the apparatus of repression.

The party has never been monolithic. Its leadership, consisting not of ideologues but of adept individuals driven by the exercise of power, has remained distinct from its base, consisting of petty opportunists and even a few idealists. Over the years, the base of the party, periodically decimated by purges directed from on high, has proved to be anything but stable. Between 1959 and 1970, some 500,000 party members were expelled for "ideological apathy," 82 percent of them workers and peasants. It was a deliberate "de-proletarianization" of the party. The intellectuals came next, 8,000 of them, tainted by "revisionism," expelled in 1968. Who remained? The apparatus, the *nomenklatura*. Yet even the *nomenklatura* was not immune to factional infighting. During the 1940s, the "Soviets" were pitted against the "nationalists"; during the 1950s, the "dogmatists" against the "revisionists"; during the 1960s, the "veterans" against the "zionists"; and during the 1970s, the "technocrats" against the "regionalists."

### Stalin Was Right

Blinded by their internecine disputes, and more interested in retaining their hold on the instruments of power than in employing them effectively, the leadership of the Communist party always studiously ignored the danger signals.

A year after taking power, in 1956, Gomułka crippled the economic advisory council when Oskar Lange and Michael Kalecki were devising workable solutions to Poland's economic crisis. In 1965, Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski went to prison for their "Open Letter to the Party," which criticized the regime's stifling bureaucratization. During the 1970s, Edward Gierek, surrounded by his technocrats, spurned the four reports of the "experience and future" group, which warned of imminent social and economic chaos. Deaf to all alarms, the party leaders knew nothing of the mess they had created until the wave of strikes along the coast in 1980. By then it was too late.

The extent of the isolation of Poland's leaders from the rest of the Polish people is hard to overstate. In 1965, Gomułka, speaking on TV to a nation beset by shortages of food, clothing,

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and consumer goods, scoffed at the notion that women could not find tights to buy because "my wife just bought some" (at a state store for the elite). Gierek, according to an official party report, did not learn until 1978 of the massive increase of the Polish debt that had been building for years. Living in a small world of their own creation, the party leaders fought among themselves, jockeyed for influence, and by all accounts lined their pockets. After Gierek's fall from power in 1980, an official investigation showed that he, along with two Prime Ministers, seven Vice-Prime Ministers, 18 Ministers, and scores of Vice-Ministers, had used government money to build private villas for themselves.

Deep down, I suspect, Polish party leaders perceived the hollowness of their enterprise. The cynicism of Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz was legendary. Jan Pietrzak, for many years the manager of a satirical theater in Warsaw, once told him that they both had made a career out of running funny institutions. Cyrankiewicz replied, "Yes, but you have better results." Conscious of the lack of trust, party leaders have periodically sought empty legitimation in elections that they control. But what comfort, really, can they take from a pro forma 99 percent approval at the polls compared to the unofficial plebiscites represented by the strikes in 1970 and 1980, or by the welcome accorded the pope on his visit in 1979?

In the end, the party leaders had to resort to threats, as Gierek did in 1980 when he spoke of "the anxiety of our Soviet comrades." And when threats failed, there was only force.

By December 1981, after more than a year of social, political, and cultural ferment made possible by the emergence of Solidarity, the Communist party had nothing else to fall back on. A military man, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, had been Prime Minister since February, First Secretary since October. On the night of December 13, he became chairman of the Wron, the military council of national salvation. Martial law was declared. Bertolt Brecht, who knew the system well, once said that when a communist government lost the confidence of its people, it was the people who had to be dismissed. But in Poland, that was not possible; it had been tried and had never worked. Ultimately, the Army dismissed the party.

The events of the past 35 years make one conclusion inescapable. In August 1944, Joseph Stalin received Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the Polish Prime Minister, in the Kremlin. Responding to Mikołajczyk's doubts as to the future of democracy in Poland, Stalin said: "Communism does not fit the Poles. They are too individualistic, too nationalistic. . . ."

This time, Stalin was right.

## COMMAND PERFORMANCE

*by Zbigniew M. Fallenbuchl*

Well before the summer of 1980, when angry shipyard workers in Gdańsk rose up and led a strike that spread across the country, Poland's economy was in serious trouble. With the end of the false prosperity of the early 1970s, shortages of meat, flour, sugar, and other staples had become widespread. Industrial productivity was low, the rate of economic growth had further declined, and the country was burdened with a massive external debt. The agricultural sector, once one of Poland's great strengths, was in disarray.

Since the summer of 1980, the situation has only deteriorated. Rationing is in force, and as mundane an item as a tube of toothpaste now sells on the black market in Warsaw for four times its official price.

Poland's economic difficulties—nothing new—have often been blamed on the mistakes, ineptitude, and corruption of the Communist regime's leaders and bureaucrats. That, indeed, has been the official "line" following each successive economic debacle. First the "Stalinists," then Władysław Gomułka, and then Edward Gierek have had to take the rap for Poland's badly malfunctioning economy. More recently, the regime of General Wojciech Jaruzelski has blamed the outlawed independent labor union, Solidarity, for "ruining the economy."

Yet the current state of affairs is no more the result of strikes and labor unrest than the earlier ones were merely the fault of failed leadership. Poland's various Communist rulers did, of course, contribute mightily to economic calamity. But the origin of Poland's predicament lies in the Soviet-style economic system and development strategy that were imposed on Poland after World War II, and in the subsequent subordination of Polish interests to Soviet designs.

A centralized system of economic planning and management, as now exists to varying degrees throughout Eastern Europe and in the USSR, has the presumed advantage of being able, by fiat and force, to mobilize a nation's resources quickly and fully and to deploy those resources to achieve the goals spelled out in the Plan, usually a five-year plan, the country's overall economic blueprint. Poland, a nation of 36 million people, with abundant fertile land, and plentiful coal, copper, and other minerals, is not a poor country. But its "command"

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economy—overly centralized and lacking any significant market mechanisms—has proved inefficient at exploiting the country's riches and clumsy at balancing supply and demand. Even butter has been in short supply at times.

Poland's economy has suffered in other respects from the nation's subservience to the Soviet Union. In pursuit of economic growth, Poland, beginning in the early 1950s, was compelled to copy the development strategy of its vast, populous, and very different eastern neighbor. Like Moscow, Warsaw stressed expansion of typically late 19th-century industries (e.g., iron and steel, heavy machinery, transport equipment), which required great quantities of capital, energy, and raw materials and were geared to large-scale manufacture. Production of food and of consumer goods (profitable endeavors to which Poland was well suited) was de-emphasized, while modern industries such as electronics and petrochemicals were neglected.

The result was that those sectors of the economy that could pay their own way—via the sales of coal, meat, or furniture, for example—had to subsidize the others, and so had little capital available for their own expansion and modernization. That is one reason why, as late as 1960, horses still provided about 86 percent of the traction-power on Polish farms.

### Following Orders

Poland's commercial and financial relationships with other countries were also altered to serve Soviet economic and political interests. Though desperately in need of money for postwar reconstruction, Poland, on Soviet orders, rejected Marshall Plan aid and withdrew from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. During the late 1940s, Poland curbed its trade with the West dramatically, even as commerce with other Eastern European nations, and especially with the Soviet Union, increased. Until 1956, Polish coal was sold to the Soviets for much less than the world price. Other important—and probably unprofitable—exports to the USSR have included railroad cars and ships.

Finally, the economic system imposed on Poland was pro-

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*General Jarosław Dąbrowski, who fell leading the forces of the Paris Commune (1871), stares out from a 200-zloty bill, worth as little as 37 cents in 1983 and, in reality, worth even less, thanks to shortages of goods to buy.*

foundly at odds with Polish traditions and culture. One cannot put a dollar value on this factor, but it was important. As observers outside and inside Poland have long noted, its proud but troubled history as a state, its tradition of intellectual freedom, its openness to Western ideas, its anticommunism, and its powerful Catholic Church, have all combined to produce an implacably romantic, sullenly restive, and sometimes openly rebellious populace. When, during the early 1950s, the Warsaw government tried to collectivize agriculture, the peasants resisted, engaging in a slowdown strike, consuming whatever they could themselves and delivering little surplus to the government. Urban food shortages and rationing quickly ensued.

In sum, then, Poland's awkward planning apparatus, along with the other contradictions cited above, guaranteed that, whatever initial successes it might achieve, the country's economy would not work well over the long haul. The high economic growth rates of the early years became ever harder to sustain and in fact steadily declined—from an average of 10.3 percent in 1950–54 to seven percent in 1956. Improvements in the standard of living were increasingly costly and difficult to bring about. Despite all this, no basic economic reform was undertaken.

During the early 1950s, when Stalinism was at its peak, the regime launched its industrialization drive and, as noted, sought to collectivize the farms. Disgruntled over the results, workers rioted in Poznań in June 1956, demanding "bread and freedom." In October, Gomułka became the Communist party's



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new First Secretary, stirring popular optimism. The new regime quickly imported grains and foodstuffs to improve the average Pole's meager diet. The government also backed off on collectivization. (The acreage collectivized had never amounted to much more than one-tenth of the arable land in Poland.) To encourage improvements in workers' productivity, Gomułka increased output of consumer goods by reducing capital investment.

The period of hope was short lived. Bold proposals to decentralize the economy and introduce some market mechanisms—rather basic items like profits, interest rates, properly calculated costs, flexible prices—were discussed, but no lasting changes were made. In 1961, the industrialization drive was resumed. It came to a halt within two years, and the result was economic stagnation for the rest of the decade.

### Motorized Golf Carts

To turn the situation around, Gomułka sought to revive and modernize the economy through new investment. With no outside sources available, he decided to finance his scheme out of savings achieved by forcing workers to live more austerely. But when he tried in 1970 to raise the relatively low food prices (by nearly 18 percent in the case of meat) and to hold down future wage increases, workers in the shipyards along the Baltic sea-coast rioted, precipitating Gomułka's fall.

Edward Gierek, his successor, repealed the price increases. Then he and his advisers adopted a "new development strategy" (*nowa strategia rozwoju*) aimed at redirecting the economy toward engineering, electronics, modern food processing, and light industry. The key to the whole effort was to be an influx of Western capital and technology, made possible by the first stirrings of détente—and by Western credits. The borrowed money would not only cover the capital investment needed to restructure the economy, but also provide more consumer goods. For without that, workers would have no incentive to become more productive. "Our supreme goal," Gierek said in December 1971, is the "systematic improvement of living standards."

Gierek and his circle of planners had high hopes. They anticipated that the "new development strategy" would enable Poland to increase vastly its export of high-quality manufactured goods, from color TVs and hunting rifles to motorized golf carts. These would be produced in new, or newly modernized, plants with the aid of Western machines and equipment, under Western licenses or in cooperation with Western firms. The result be-

fore long would be a favorable balance of trade—exports would exceed imports—and the debt to the West would be repaid. In the process, Poland's economy would finally be "modernized." It all looked good on paper, and the money and technology began pouring in, notably from West Germany.

The Polish spending spree of the early 1970s made a mockery of the 1971–75 five-year plan. (The plan is the chief means of maintaining economic order where market mechanisms do not exist.) The myriad alterations—e.g., increases in investment rates, in personal income, in imports of investment goods—were made on an ad hoc basis and added up to "too much, too fast." The economy could not easily adjust to such rapid and poorly planned change. The "command" system was too rigid, and its managers were too dogmatic to undertake fundamental reform.\*

Gierek's success crucially depended on expansion of Polish exports to the West both to repay the loans and to secure a steady flow of the imported materials, spare parts, and machines needed in a modern, open economy. But that expansion proved beyond Poland's abilities. For one thing, since official prices did not truly reflect the actual economic costs, it was impossible to calculate the real profitability of various export alternatives. Potential export items were also selected "from above" by central planners who lacked adequate information about world market conditions and even about actual domestic production capacities.

### **A Siberian Snow Shortage**

Thus, nearly \$1 billion was poured into developing and then producing, at a sprawling facility near Warsaw, a Massey-Ferguson tractor. But it turned out that, contrary to what the Poles first thought, their license from the Canadian firm did not allow sale of the products in the West. The tractors could not be sold to Poland's communist neighbors, either, because they were too expensive. And they would not be widely used at home because they could not be coupled with most Polish farm equipment. Hence, instead of the planned 75,000 tractors a year, the enterprise produced only 500. Such fiascoes were commonplace.

By the mid-1970s, a serious balance-of-payments deficit and

\*The economic system was slightly modified in 1973 by the so-called WOG reform, named for the *Wielkie Organizacje Gospodarcze*, or "big economic organizations," that were involved. The idea was to introduce a certain measure of decentralization, along with some market mechanisms and flexible rules for setting prices, into the system. The decentralization, however, was only half-heartedly implemented and was soon abandoned.

a swiftly mounting debt had become alarmingly apparent. Thanks to official discrimination against private farmers and heavy investment in unproductive state farms, even grain was being imported. Clearly, some belt-tightening was in order. Yet, instead of reducing imports from the West gradually, thus cushioning the economy from the shock, the Gierek regime made deep cuts. The sudden shortage of parts and equipment reverberated throughout the economy. Poland's growth rate, which had experienced an artificial spurt during the early 1970s, now started to decline rapidly. From about 10 percent during 1972–74, it fell to five percent in 1977. Exports slumped, making matters worse.

By the late 1970s, the economy was careening out of control. The rate of growth of the national product fell to –2.3 percent in 1979 even as Poland's hard-currency debt rose to \$20.5 billion. City-dwellers experienced drastic shortages of foodstuffs and had to wait in seemingly endless lines to get what little they could. Poles joked that if the regime's economic planners were ever sent to Siberia, they would cause a snow shortage there.

The government seemed helpless to effect a recovery. At the Eighth Party Congress in February 1980, the regime manifestly had no program beyond hopelessly tarnished plans to shift resources from investment to consumption, to severely restrict



*In 1982, the Reagan administration considered declaring Poland in default on its U.S.-backed loans—but backed off, fearing the effects.*

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imports, and to expand exports. To make their formal "plan" for 1980 appear to work on paper, government economists simply doctored the numbers. The patient, however, did not revive.

After the Gierek regime's abrupt increase in meat prices in 1980 prompted a summer of labor turmoil—and the advent of the Solidarity era—the need for sweeping economic reform was given lip service. But that was all. No real reform of the economic system was ever undertaken, either under Stanisław Kania (who replaced Gierek in September 1980) or under General Jaruzelski (who replaced Kania in October 1981). All the flaws cited at the outset of this essay remained in place.

### **A Political Solution?**

In truth, the Communist leaders were far less interested in rescuing the economy than in suppressing Solidarity. In this, of course, they eventually succeeded. Meanwhile, farm and industrial production continued to drop, and the massive debt to Western nations and banks continued to grow (to \$26 billion in January 1983). A look at what has transpired since the imposition of martial law in December 1981 suggests that recovery is by no means just around the corner.

The regime's one economic success under martial law was an increase in production of coal. Coal output rose by 15 percent during the first three quarters of 1982 over the same period in 1981. But coal mining is a very special case. Unlike manufacturing microprocessors, say, mining coal is an industry in which the government can fix, and forcibly meet, high-output "targets" without worrying about quality.

This being so, the regime "militarized" the coal mines. Miners were subject to military discipline and could be court-martialed for disobeying orders. In addition to the "stick," there were some "carrots." For example, amid acute shortages of food, especially meat, miners got better meals in their cafeterias. And they got access to exclusive state stores where they could buy scarce items such as shoes and clothing.

But improved coal production, which meant more electricity, did not provide much relief for the rest of the economy. During the first three quarters of 1982, total manufacturing output (excluding production of coal and other minerals) decreased by six percent. In the textile industry, output declined by 14 percent; in iron and steel, by 10 percent; in food, by five percent.

Nor was the foreign trade picture any brighter. Not only did exports to nonsocialist nations decline under martial law, but so did imports from them, thanks both to Western sanctions and to

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dissatisfaction with the quality of some Polish products—portable tape recorders, to name one, that produced sounds all right but were housed in an ugly casing that deterred buyers. Imports from socialist countries fell off, too. For while exports to those nations did increase somewhat, Moscow compelled the Polish regime to pay back the Soviet Bloc countries for credits received earlier, thereby siphoning off Poland's export earnings. Poland, its economy now import-dependent, was unable to substitute imports from the Soviet Bloc for the imports it needed but could not get from the West.

The government often invoked the need to control inflation, fueled by widespread shortages, as an excuse for its imposition of martial law in the first place. Yet figures for the first three quarters of 1982 make it clear that, despite draconian increases in prices to relieve excess demand, inflationary pressures did not diminish. This was because the average Pole's nominal personal income shot up nearly 60 percent more rapidly than it had during the same period in 1981, even as shortages of goods and services persisted. The amount of idle cash in the hands of the populace went up by 45.9 percent. In other words, people had more and more zlotys—and less and less on which to spend them. This surprising failure of the regime to control inflation can only be due to the government's fear of popular unrest—and to its consequent attempt to lull the public into believing that, despite the widespread shortages, their wages at least were increasing.

Martial law was suspended in December 1982, but the social situation in Poland remains explosive and the economy remains inert. The regime has, I think, only one way out of the morass: to begin to seek a "political solution." That means getting the support (even if greatly qualified) of the workers and, indeed, of the entire populace; taking steps that will persuade Western governments to remove their sanctions; and reestablishing economic ties with the West as soon as possible, all without upsetting the Kremlin.

The regime's decision to move toward ending martial law was interpreted by many commentators outside the country as proof of the military government's confidence and strength. In fact, however, it was probably just the opposite—a desperate action born of the regime's inability to arrest Poland's economic decline by force alone.

## AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

*by Artur Międzyrzecki*

Fragments from a notebook.

◆ No notes, no clippings, no folders filled with manuscripts. All of that has remained in Warsaw, Marszałkowska Street, in my room piled with books. Despair and relief. To be honest, I was not capable of reading those pages, so densely covered with writing, that no longer interest me—and for a reason. Once again the earth had trembled under our feet, and once again one had to start from scratch.

◆ My arm is still wooden. Since December 1981 I have not, until now, written a single sentence of prose. For months I could not even read a book. Letter writing was a form of torture. This had nothing to do with my feelings toward the addressees. It was simply a physical incapacity, a numbness, a feeling I had known in other difficult periods of my life.

◆ From the brains. To shake something out of the brains.

I recall that this is how one of my notes begins in the yellow notebook, which lies under the glass paperweight.

I must have been exhausted by the stacks of papers which had been hemming me in, by that necropolis of words and memories.

And I am in a hurry. The glass paperweight is a remembrance of Antoni Słonimski, the poet; but I mention it reluctantly, for I would like to limit myself to the essentials.

◆ My first volume of poetry appeared 40 years ago, during World War II. At that time, I was an artilleryman in the II Polish Corps of the British Eighth Army, and I took part in the Italian campaign. I think about those times as my own prehistory, since the main events in my biography came later and can be identified chronologically with the history of postwar Poland. During the second half of the 1950s, my principal volumes of poetry, prose, and essays began to appear. At the same time began my participation in public life: on the board of the Writers' Union and in the Polish PEN Club, as well as in international associations of people of my profession. In 1980, I was invited by Solidarity in Warsaw to become one of its advisers on literary and cultural matters. I mention all of this with the American readers of these fragments in mind. The need for self-introduction is one of the unpleasant aspects of a foreign stay. In one's own country, this need does not exist; one is qualified once and for all from the moment when one pronounces one's

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meaningful "yes" or one's equally meaningful "no."

I realize that there is little left that I can change in my public image. Of course, I am the one who has shaped it but—today, years later—it is my image that exercises invisible control over every one of my moves. Indeed, many centuries are looking at us, as Napoleon reminded his soldiers in Egypt. But the most imperious of those looks comes from our own past. This applies not only to me. Every one of my friends acts within a similar crossfire of moral considerations and norms of behavior coded generations ago, with their conscious or instinctive limitations and tendencies.

This is not to say that none of them has encountered as well the gaze of the Grand Inquisitor and experienced anxiety because of it, or even—in more than one case—the unpleasant consequences of this threatening interest in their persons. It simply means that the traditions inherent in their position as intellectuals and writers, the moral pressures of their milieu and its social credibility, are sufficiently strong to mold attitudes—though promising nothing in return, apart from poetic justice, which in this case means no happy-ending melodrama but fulfillment of one's own often tired and embittered spirit.

The word "spirit" is not in fashion these days in political science and has gone out of circulation in literary criticism. But what else has been invented, what new infatuation, that is superior to the spiritual values of old European humanism with its natural tolerance, its universal fraternity, its recognition of the need for freedom in life and art? The usually vicious attacks on the Polish intelligentsia have been caused by the fact that the intelligentsia has always been and remains the social personification of such values. Its influence on public opinion, its support for democratic pluralism, its moralistic message—all of this gives the intelligentsia powerful enemies, especially in bad times.

◆ In its reference to 19th-century post-partition Poland, the *Larousse* encyclopedia sums up the situation laconically: The partitioning powers sought to destroy or reduce the influence of both the church and the Polish intelligentsia.

This should come as no surprise.

Polish literature would at such times serve as a substitute for the political institutions that no longer existed. A poem by Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) became the motto adopted by the insurgents of 1830. The theatrical writings of Mickiewicz, along with those of Juliusz Słow-

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wacki and Zygmunt Krasiński, became the stage for public debate and dramatized Poland's historical chronicles. Earlier, veterans of the Napoleonic Wars, philosophers, and reformers founded the Society of the Friends of Learning, the future Academy of Sciences. In every age and in every discipline, representatives of the leading intellectual groups in Poland ensured the continuity and vitality of spiritual life and the nation's cultural identity.

It should be noted that in the tradition of the Polish intelligentsia, a distinction has always been made between patriotism and fanaticism, between the desire for sovereignty and nationalistic excess. This tradition is naturally democratic and naturally antitotalitarian. Its respect for the past is not motivated by anachronistic nostalgia, but is rather an expression of the fear that a nation that loses its memory ceases to exist. The Polish intelligentsia, as a social group, is in a way memory incarnate.

I think that this has been determined by historical circumstances, and that one ought not to exaggerate the innate particularity of the place. The intellectual in any country would, in circumstances such as ours have been, describe his role in like fashion. This would not inevitably lead, as it does not lead in this case, to chauvinism. A nation is not a sect, warned Cyprian Kamil Norwid (1821–1883), a precursor of our modern poetry. The banners of 19th-century Polish insurrections bore the slogan: "For our freedom and yours." No motto reflects Polish thinking more than this one. It is often, and correctly so, linked with the heritage of Romanticism. Yet, earlier, our Enlightenment also had its own legions of volunteers, ready to work their way across frontiers, to give active support to the ideals considered universal, to sacrifice their lives for those ideals. Enlightened officers in General Dąbrowski's Polish legions, who fought in Italy in Napoleon's army, had the motto "All free men are brothers" sewn onto their uniforms.

◆ This same period gave birth to three legendary moments that, taken up later, and to which Romantic poetry added luster, would persist up to the present time as powerful stimuli to the collective imagination. These are the Polish legions in Italy (1797–1801), the Four-Year Sejm, or Parliament (1788–1792), and the adoption of the May 3 Constitution (1791).

The first of these events symbolizes participation in struggles for freedom, wherever they might occur. Seen in this perspective, the presence of Tadeusz Kościuszko at Saratoga and West Point appears as natural as the presence of Polish divisions alongside the Allies during World War II.

The Four-Year Sejm and the May 3 Constitution remain to this day symbols of the nation's past, the most venerated moments of which are still identified with the parliamentary tradition and the democratic spirit. What is more, the historic circumstances that accompanied the Constitution—the foreign intervention that prevented its implementation, the treacherous internal forces set in motion by that intervention, and the intervention's rhetoric of appearances—all of this turned into a



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political knowledge coded in the minds of generations and continually confirmed by the experiences of one's own life.

◆ Sixteenth-century Poland under the Jagiellon kings is also deeply impressed upon the collective memory. It was the Golden Age, when the state's might combined with freedom of thought, exemplary tolerance, and the growth of learning; the era of Copernicus the astronomer (1473–1543) and of Jan Kochanowski (1530–1584), perhaps the greatest of Polish poets. One should also mention this period because the spiritual families that make up Polish culture have together created a single chain of traditions, including political traditions. Foreshadowed by basic patterns of intellectual activity in the era of the Enlightenment, and beginning in the second half of the 19th century, the collective history of the Polish intelligentsia, in its role as the group that molds public opinion and voices the nation's aspirations, became part of them.

The intelligentsia's respect for the past, deep-seated as it is, hardly weakens the emotional force of its messages today. Voices from centuries long gone sometimes prove to be nearer to our own sensibilities than it might at first appear. Even today, the most popular Polish child is Urszula, the prematurely dead daughter of Kochanowski, to whom he devoted his *Laments*.

Yet the *Laments*, recognized as one of the outstanding poetic works of the European Renaissance, along with the rest of Kochanowski's writings, and the renown of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, the work of Copernicus, and the correspondence of the Polish King with Erasmus—all of this belongs both to the history of Poland and to the history of Europe. Like his contemporaries in other countries, the Polish Renaissance humanist, with his solid and multifaceted knowledge, was simultaneously a protagonist on the national stage and *l'uomo universale*. The equally natural coexistence of national and universal perspectives concerns all other historical periods. People resemble their fathers but also their contemporaries, as someone once said. Kościuszko was a hero of two nations, and his specific Polish character by no means prevented the poets of Germany and France from tying his person to the universal ideals of freedom. The free spirits of those times gathered in the Warsaw of the Four-Year Sejm with ardent hopes and curiosity just as did the foreign reporters who converged on Poland in 1956 and 1980.

The interweaving of the native and the universal is especially characteristic of Polish Romanticism as typified in the poems of Mickiewicz or the music of Chopin. The separateness of Romanticism in Poland is often cited, yet it was not only a literary phenomenon and an artistic novelty but also, if not above all, a political movement, a spiritual mission in the cause of national independence. Its messianic message linked Poland to the rest of the world and the rest of the world to Poland. The issue of Polish independence took on not only international but also metaphysical dimensions.

To the Romantics, freedom was indivisible, a political school of fraternity, an ecstatic flight of the independent spirit into the sky of the

*The poet Antoni  
Stonimski (far right)  
and two fellow poets of  
the group called  
Skamander at the  
Ziemianska Café with  
General Bolesław  
Wieniawa-  
Długoszowski, a  
popular figure in  
Warsaw literary circles  
after World War I.*



impossible. The fates of nations were identified with the fate of this nation. The future of all free peoples was being decided in every confrontation with every tyranny, with no matter which of its demons and local acolytes. Polish Romanticism became a movement of spiritual energy which, like every other movement, could suffer defeat and failure, but which, unlike other movements, could not be stopped. The torrent went underground at times, but it did not cease to flow.

◆ A special role in the formation of the Polish intelligentsia's attitudes was played by the dramas of Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907) and the writings of Stefan Żeromski (1864–1925). Without Mickiewicz, Wyspiański, and Żeromski, as one Polish poet has recently written, there would be no Poland. This statement needs no explanation in Poland, where the word retains its myth-making power and where the history of political ideas helps to create national reality to a no lesser—and sometimes to a much greater—degree than the history of political institutions. The constancy of national aspirations and the vitality of the public role played by the Polish intellectual yesterday and today would be inconceivable were this not so.

Wyspiański, one of the great innovators in modern theater—Gordon Craig counted him in the pantheon of European playwrights of that era—brought into being the monumental national drama aspired to by Mickiewicz, which on its enormous stage was to unite poetry with debate on current problems and with historical imagery. Żeromski, five years Wyspiański's senior, was a one-man moral institution. His novels educated at least three Polish generations in sensitivity to every man-

ifestation of national misery and social injustice.

Zeromski's protagonists, in revolt against such wrongs, usually stood alone and relied on their own spiritual reserves, not hesitating to sacrifice career or personal life or love. Some of them, such as Dr. Judym, hero of *The Homeless People*, became symbols of this sacrifice for service to society and points of reference not only in literary essays. One talked about them as if one knew them. Their fictional stories seemed to be the real biographies of our predecessors, their real lives. If Mickiewicz created the model of the Polish poet for 150 years, Zeromski, for his part, created the model of the Polish intellectual with his sense of obligatory responsibility for himself and for others.

◆ His writing is also an example of the particularly close association between Poland's political and literary history. The history of our literature is impregnated with politics because the long period of time in which Poland was deprived of a sovereign existence forced literature to take on social and political obligations, obligations that literature did not have in happier countries where, at most, one might wonder occasionally—as in post-World War II France—about the philosophical meaning of *engagement*. By the same token, the political history of our country is impregnated with literature. One would hardly have any idea about some of its periods without taking into account the role of books, of theater, or even of literary cafés (which were involved in the uprisings of 1830 and 1863).

In times closer to our own, it is not only books that serve as historical testimony but also open letters that concern matters of public importance, signed by representatives of culture and learning. So do the histories of films and of theatrical performances and of the literary cabaret, in its professional or student versions. The banning of Mickiewicz's *Forefather's Eve* in 1968 was the direct cause of that year's political and social events. The films of Andrzej Wajda have played not only an artistic but also a public role, and they have often drawn on literary sources. And it was on the stage of a literary cabaret that the song "Let Poland be Poland" was born, the song that was soon to become a slogan for the young generation who lived through the August miracle of 1980.

◆ *Ab urbe condita*. From the founding of the city in its contemporary form, the Polish intellectual has been the go-between in the contacts of his own society with other cultures. These contacts, like the internalizing of history—that is, a view of history as communal biography, into which one's own life is written—belong to the configuration of Polish culture. Simply put: They amount to accepted custom. Its nonobservance in any area—for instance, the absence at newsstands of the foreign press—as a rule testifies to bad times in cultural life. The Western character of Polish culture is not a matter of style; it is a fact that results both from religious inspirations—the presence of a Polish pope in the Vatican confirms their longevity and significance—and from humanistic traditions. These traditions, beginning with the Golden Age of the

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Renaissance kingdom and continuing up to the aspirations of the last few years, display their specific traits related to the history and the place on earth of this nation. But they are far from local particularism and monothematic exaggeration.

There are reasons enough—Norman Davies has collected them recently in his book, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*—to justify even bitter exaggeration. But the people of this plain over which invaders' armies have so often rolled kept their faith in the sense of universal moral values in human actions. It is sometimes said that cynicism is more interesting in society and more useful in professional life. Perhaps. But it is an ally of enslavement. There is nothing that the world can do for us, but there is at least one thing we can do for the world: Tell it about our sacred naiveté and our unshakable belief in the freedom of choice. Even when the sense of life and the authenticity of everyday norms of behavior are upset, when, as a result of war or catastrophe, everything suddenly collapses and when people are deprived of the churches and institutions to which they are accustomed, the book collections, personal customs, people to talk to and work with, friends, they are still left with one last thing: a choice. Though taken out of public life, in physical danger, dependent on their inner spiritual resources, they can still choose between the cry of the jungle and their responsibility for themselves and the world.

◇ Some will say: Yes, but this concerns the more general issues of generations and the longevity of culture. What does this have to do with your own life and writing?

In the introduction I used the words "once again the earth had trembled under our feet." This is a travesty of a sentence written by Pascal when he described the earth tremor that shook his contemporaries, occasioned by popularization of the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo. Our planet ceased to be the center of the cosmos, and this fact went hand in hand with a transformation of the European consciousness, a study of which has been written by Paul Hazard. It was the end of the world, one of many. And this is precisely what I had in mind, the end of the world with all its drama and grotesquery.

But why did I not dwell on this theme? It was probably a kind of self-censorship, unwittingly committed and which I, as a Polish writer, will not disown. There is already so much distress in the lives of my readers that it seems unworthy to add my own lament. Czesław Miłosz wrote in one of his poems:

You could scream  
Because mankind is mad,  
But you, of all people, should not.

So, is it writing "to comfort the hearts"? This 19th-century device is indeed present in my thoughts. It must not be all that anachronistic or all that native, since it was adopted by William Faulkner. In any case, I do not emphasize the ends of the world that have been experienced by me, along with my generation, and perhaps this unconscious

impulse is limiting in my writing.

What is more, I feel it is my duty to defend every form of expression, even the most hermetic, regardless of any personal tastes. The defense of literature as a whole may condemn one to eclecticism, not to be expressed in one's own work but in the way one looks at cultural questions; an eclecticism that is related to the more general demands of pluralism and tolerance, to a feeling that authentic culture is a whole in which all of its spiritual families must function, be they close or distant to one's heart.

One might say: Polish Romantics, with all their political specificity, did indeed fight the Classicists ardently. But there were exceptions to this rule, and Adam Mickiewicz in his lectures at the Collège de France did not leave out the role played by his Classicist forerunners in shaping the views of his generation. One might also mention the syncretism of today's reflections on the history of culture. We have inherited all of its messages, and the poet Antoni Słonimski, for instance, in his writing, was an heir both to Romantic traditions and to the Rationalist trust of the Warsaw positivists of the 1870s. This alliance of Romanticism and Rationalism in time became the source not of a spiritual split but of the spiritual force that flowed from this type of interrelation. Remembering after many years the Declaration of Human Rights, which he had co-authored, and the text of which had been sent to wartime Poland, Słonimski asked himself: "Was it a naive move to send these pious hopes to a country suffering the most cruel bondage?"

And he replied: "I think that something from our desires will, in some tiny quantity, find for itself a place in the future. I have learned to believe in the purposefulness of opposing lies, demagoguery, and hypocrisy."

For me, this attitude is represented in the endeavors of the Polish intelligentsia in the past few decades. Not based on illusions, but originating in a feeling for history so natural that it evokes live persons and authentic voices, not shadows or echoes, it is a trust combined with a sense of reality, a trust confident of its rights.

◆ As for the great earth tremors, the first one I experienced, along with my contemporaries, came in September 1939. The world in which we had grown up and which seemed to us as solid as rock suddenly collapsed. One had to begin a new life, underground, or in the Polish armed forces abroad, or in exile.

When I think about it today, I am struck by the naturalness of the impulse that made the then-young generation return to the traditions of the 19th-century uprisings and the conspiracies for independence that followed them. These boys had their first taste of battle right after high school, and they did not see themselves as volunteers, which they were in reality. They were simply fulfilling an obligation coded in their minds. The Polish army of that time, dominated by reserve officers from the intelligentsia, also recalled its historic forerunners. It was a wandering Poland, with a press network and school system, with social institutions that watched over civilian exiles, with its own theaters, and with quite an intensive—considering the situation—cultural life.

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My first volume of poetry was printed in the Middle East and I received the first copy on the Italian front. Our wartime officers' school terminated in the toast: "To moral courage."

From wartime, I have preserved in my memory another sentence worth mentioning. It was delivered at some difficult moment by a British general and, as it turns out, I adopted it for life: "Gentlemen: The situation is hopeless, but we are too stupid to lose this war."

◆ The currents and actors within the intellectual traditions I have attempted to describe: How do they affect my everyday life and those of my friends? I believe that they are reality itself, not only a symbolic reality, and that they sometimes decide the course of our biographies.

I have mentioned the events of 1968. The protest launched by a group of Warsaw writers against the banning of *Forefather's Eve* influenced their personal fates in the years to come. The Polish PEN Club was founded by Żeromski, and this to a great extent determined the moral posture and the social role of this association to which, in recent years, I have given much of my time and energies. Over the years, my friends have turned quite naturally to the works of Wyspiański and Żeromski: Antoni Słonimski wrote a screenplay based on Żeromski's *Before the Spring*; Andrzej Wajda created a film version of Żeromski's *Ashes*; Andrej Kijowski adapted Wyspiański's *The Wedding* for another Wajda film. One can hardly list all such ties and continuities that belong to the pulsating reality of life and art.

In everyday life, this reality has comprised the shared hopes and warm relationships that have connected past and present. Antoni Słonimski, the former poet of the Skamander group, and his wife were frequently our guests. Together with Antoni, a whole world of reminiscences would walk into our home, a world that lived in his stories and anecdotes and in his very presence. Antoni's apartment in Aleja Róż was for decades a meeting place for the elite of Warsaw's intelligentsia. Its seniors were professor Edward Lipiński, the distinguished economist whose public activities began during the 1905 revolution and ended with his close collaboration with the independent workers' movement of the 1970s and '80s; and professor Stanisław Lorentz, the eminent director since 1936 of the National Museum, a rare example of this kind of continuity in Polish history. The youngest habitués were angry young men, whose names were to become well known over the years and whose fates currently cause anxiety. Among the other frequent guests were Monika Żeromska, the writer's daughter, and Karol Estreicher from Kraków, the last representative of several generations of professors at the Jagiellonian University.

At least three generations of Poland's intelligentsia were represented in this one place. Their common presence together with their common activities served in the postwar years as evidence of the continuity of spiritual life.

I write these words at a time when this life, after a new earthquake, begins a new period, and no one can yet know what forms of survival it will find.

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## BACKGROUND BOOKS

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### POLAND

"The lands of the Slavs are the coldest of all . . . . When people breathe, icicles form on their beards, as if made of glass. . . ."

Thus, in 965 A.D., in the report of a Moorish Jew, Ibrahim-Ibn-Jakub, a diplomat from Cordoba, did the land now called Poland make its debut in recorded history. And thus do we learn of Mieszko I, self-styled King of the North and chief of the Polonians.

Mieszko was betrothed to a Bohemian princess, Dubravka, the same year Ibrahim paid his visit. And in 966, as part of the marriage agreement, he embraced Christianity. "Of all his feats," writes Norman Davies in his splendid, two-volume **God's Playground: A History of Poland** (Columbia, 1982), "none but his baptism was permanent. By this one act, he brought his people into the world of Western culture and Latin literacy." Mieszko's son, Bolesław I Chrobry ("the Brave") became in 1024, with papal approval, the first crowned King of Poland.

The new kingdom fared relatively well in its first century. But in 1138, Bolesław III Krzywousty ("the Wry-Mouthed") left a will dividing the realm among numerous sons. Fragmentation invited incursions by Czechs, Prussians, and Russians, usurpation of vast tracts by the Teutonic Knights, and ultimately, in 1241, invasion by the Mongols.

During such periods of distress, Václav L. Beneš and Norman J. G. Pounds note, the church in **Poland** (Westview, 1976) was "the chief instrument in perpetuating the concept of a single, united Polish state."

Not until the 14th century were Poland's pieces reassembled into a

single unit. The architect was Casimir III, the only Polish monarch ever to gain the epithet "the Great" from his people.

Casimir reformed Poland's currency, codified its laws, promoted commerce, transformed Kraków from a city of wood into a city of stone, and founded a university there in 1364.

Casimir's chief failing was that he did not perpetuate his line.

Succession passed briefly to Louis of Anjou, and then in 1384 to his daughter, Jadwiga. A year later, at age 11, she was forced to marry the Lithuanian Grand Duke Jagiełło, a pagan. Jagiełło converted to Christianity, defeated many foes, and made the federated state of Poland-Lithuania into a strong European power.

Under the Jagiellons, Poland entered its *Złoty Wiek*, its Golden Age. This was the era of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) and the great poet Jan Kochanowski (1530–84). The flavor of the period is well caught in **The History of Polish Literature** (New York: Macmillan, 1969) by Czesław Miłosz, who carries the story up through the late 1960s.

The last of the Jagiellons died in 1569. Poland became a *Rzeczpospolita* (Republic or Commonwealth) under an elected monarch and with a bicameral Sejm, or Parliament, composed of nobles. In practice, certain peculiarities of this system abetted the nation's gradual decline into anarchy. After 1717, Poland was little more than an appendage of tsarist Russia. By the end of the century, as Lord George John Eversley relates in **The Partitions of Poland** (Dodd, 1st ed., 1915; Fertig, 1973), the country

no longer existed.

That an independent Poland was reestablished at the end of World War I was a caprice of history. Nationalists such as Roman Dmowski and Józef Piłsudski realized that the war on the eastern front was a conflict among the partitioning powers—and hence represented an opportunity. Russia and her foes, Germany and Austria, competed with promises of future autonomy to secure the wartime loyalty of their Polish subjects, and two million Poles fought in three armies.

As it happened, Poland's renaissance resulted from the withdrawal of Russia from the war in the wake of the October Revolution in 1917 and the collapse of the Central Powers a year later.

Piłsudski arrived by train in Warsaw on November 10, 1918, and on the following day stepped into the vacuum, taking control of what would become, after Versailles, the Polish Republic.

The story is told in Titus Komarnicki's 776-page **Rebirth of the Polish Republic** (Heinemann, 1957) and in Hans Roos's concise **A History of Modern Poland** (Knopf, 1966).

Poland's experience between the wars was one of intellectual and cultural vitality, political turbulence, and, as the Depression set in, economic hardship—presided over by the dictatorial but somehow reassuring figure of Piłsudski (who seized power in a coup d'état in 1926). His death in 1935, Roos writes, "seemed a catastrophe, a forewarning of dark days to come."

The dark days arrived four years

later with Poland's dismemberment by Hitler and Stalin. The Poles' ordeal is described by the last chief of the Polish resistance, Stefan Korbonski, in **Fighting Warsaw** (Funk & Wagnalls, 1968).

Other worthwhile accounts of the war years include Jan Nowak's **Courier from Warsaw** (Wayne State Univ., 1982), Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski's **The Secret Army** (New York: Macmillan, 1951), George Bruce's **The Warsaw Uprising** (Hart-Davis, 1972), and Edward Rozek's **Allied Wartime Diplomacy** (Wiley, 1958).

There was no Poland when Władysław Gomułka, future party boss of the Polish People's Republic, was born in 1905. Nicholas Bethell traces his volatile career in **Gomułka: His Poland and His Communism** (Holt, 1969, cloth; Penguin, rev. ed., 1972), which does double duty as a survey of Poland's postwar evolution under communism.

Two other fine accounts of contemporary Poland are Peter Raina's **Political Opposition in Poland, 1954–1977** (Poets and Painters Press, 1978, cloth & paper), and Neal Ascherson's journalistic **The Polish August** (Viking, 1982), which focuses on the Solidarity era and culminates with the imposition of martial law "in the snowy darkness of Sunday, 13 December 1981."

What the future holds for Poland is the subject of a book not yet written, but whose epigraph could well be a quote from Rousseau: "If you cannot prevent your enemies from swallowing you whole, at least you must do what you can to prevent them from digesting you."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *Books were suggested for this essay by Wilson Center Fellows Maria Turlejska and Artur A. Międzyrzeccki.*