A Visit To Warsaw

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Poland Has Begun to Liberate Itself

The first thought which came into my mind as I drove into Warsaw from the airport was, "I'm in Europe again." Some of the apartment house fronts on the streets through which we passed recalled Paris; others, Italian palazzi. The people in the streets were not only better dressed but looked *chic*. At the airport limousine station I was met by a Polish gentleman who spoke English with an Oxford accent rendered subtly different by an undertone of the softer and slower intonations of the Slav. He had the grand manner whose impress the lordly Polish aristocracy have left on their country, a manner more seignorial than anything to be encountered in London or Paris. There were still terrible scars and ruins amid the newly rebuilt areas—apartment house fronts sheared away as if by a giant hand, exposing the rooms within in all their pitiful vanished intimacy. I was taken to the Bristol Hotel which escaped the war with little damage since it was the German headquarters. All foreigners now stay there. It gave one a strange feeling to check into the rooms from which SS and Wehrmacht directed the deliberate extermination of so many millions of human beings.

A Portent in the Coffee Houses

The Bristol, small and provincial, was quite a contrast to the enormous caverns of the Metropol in Moscow, but the Bristol was in better repair, and the furnishings were modern. The prices, at four zlotys to the dollar, were fully as expensive as Moscow, and I copied down a few at breakfast. Coffee was 8 zlotys, $2; ham and eggs were 12 zlotys, $3; tea cost 65 cents a glass and a pat of butter, a quarter dollar. There were a half dozen Chinese in the dining room, but though they spoke English I never succeeded in talking to them. The newspaper stand at the Bristol, like that in the Metropol, carried only Communist publications, but the Bristol had Western as well as Eastern Communist papers. There was *Le Drapeau Rouge* from Belgium, *L'Unita* from Italy, *L'Humanite* from France and an old copy of the New York *Daily Worker* as well as *Pravda, Neues Deutschland* and *Rude Pravo*. But I soon learned that the great event on the intellectual front in Warsaw was that for two months at five main cafes, it was now possible to read the *Manchester Guardian,* the London *Times, Le Monde, L'Information* and *L'Express*. A limited number of copies were also on sale daily at the book stalls adjoining these coffee houses. I went to one of them, a big coffee house in the Central European tradition, its walls lined like a library with newspapers and magazines neatly racked for the use of its customers. There were as yet no American publications except the *Daily Worker* and *Masses and Mainstream.*

Warsaw is now the first Soviet capital in which foreign, i.e. "capitalist" papers can be read in the coffee houses and bought on the book stalls. Only those who know Central Europe will fully appreciate what this means. On the Continent, where intellectuals customarily read several languages, people read foreign papers far more than they do in the United States, and a visit to a cafe in Prague or Vienna was a chance to get a quick bird's eye view of the world press. I am sure that nothing so irritated the Czech intellectuals with the Communist regime in that country as that they could no longer read the London *Times* or even the *New Statesman and Nation.* They still can't in the Prague coffee houses. The appearance of Western papers in Warsaw symbolizes better than any other single event the change taking place in Poland, and the difference between Warsaw and other Soviet capitals. I expected to find some slight variations. I found instead a completely different atmosphere. I have nowhere in the world, East or West, not even in Tito's Belgrade in 1950, heard Communists talk as they are talking in Warsaw, without Communist cliches or party cant, and a good deal more freely than in the loyalty purge haunted government circles of Washington. My visit to Warsaw was a revelation and a pleasure.

Others Report The Same Surprise

Those who may be tempted to write this impression off as enthusiasm will find similar reports in politically diverse circles. Richard H. S. Crossman of the *New Statesman and Nation,* who was in Warsaw a few days before my visit, and Syd Gruson of the *New York Times,* who was there a few days later, both reported much the same impressions. The London *Observer* (May 13) and Hamburg's *Die Zeit* (May 17), both independent conservative weeklies, carried long articles treating the changes in Poland with surprise and respect, indeed the latter (though usually an Adenauer supporter) seriously discussed diplomatic relations between Bonn and Warsaw on the ground that Warsaw could no longer be regarded as "nur eine Filiale Moskaus" (only a branch office of Moscow). I am sure that Poland remains in many fundamental ways a satellite of Moscow, but there is nevertheless an atmosphere in Warsaw, a change in the government and a spirit in the Polish press which goes far beyond the regimented de-Stalinization in Moscow or the obedient but tepidly cautious imitations dutifully arranged in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria. Germans will goose-step in any direction, the Czechs are as submissive as Russians, the Hungarians have been politically devitalized by one dictatorship after another since World War I. But the traditionally and historically rebellious

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Poles—invited to speak up by Stalin's detractors—have answered with a loud and enthusiastic roar.

Polish Communists talk a language one does not hear elsewhere. "We have our own McCarthies," said a Polish party journalist at lunch; no Russian, no American Communist, would admit that there were "McCarthies" among his comrades. "You can't knock Marxism into people's heads with a hammer," a second echelon party functionary told me in describing the difference between the Polish and the Russian approach to the peasant problem. Even during Stalin's heyday Poland avoided the "Bolshevik logic" he applied to the peasantry with such singularly disastrous results—as Krushchev now testifies in discussing the Russian farm problem. "The Socialists have good reason to mistrust us," said another Polish Communist in discussing the desire to revive the Popular Front, "we have to prove to them that this time joint action will not mean their political liquidation." A Polish official, discussing the Gomulka affair, said "We disagreed with Gomulka before and we disagree with him now. But we never thought him a traitor. Our secret police are experts at faking evidence. They produced all kinds of material incriminating Gomulka. It had a fishy smell but we didn't know how to disprove it. At least we didn't stage a trial and force a confession and kill him and we're proud now that we can release him." No Russian official would admit, simply, that the secret police were expert at faking evidence. I got no double-talk in Warsaw.

A Polish Krushchev?

Not that Marxist-Leninist gobbledegook has been abandoned. The new First Secretary of the Polish United Workers Party, Edward Ochab, sounded a little like Krushchev in his speech of April 6 to the party activists in Warsaw. "The Third Plenum," he said, "served as a starting point for the struggle to eliminate a number of distortions in our State apparatus, particularly in the security organs, military information and prosecutor's office. It served the Party and Party apparatus as a signal to return to the Leninist party norms. . . ." This reference to the abuses of the past as mere "distortions" to be corrected by a "return to Leninist norms" (the Cheka?) has a Russian rather than Polish flavor. So did his *Pravda*-like alarm about the freedom of speech cropping up in Poland. "It seems advisable," Ochab said, "to draw attention to the fact that it looks as if some of our comrades were losing their sense of balance and also their sense of proportion—between correct criticism and utterances from positions which cannot bring any benefit to the Party. *This is also occurring in the columns of our press.*" (Apparently the Polish press, unlike the Russian, was acting up.) "The fact," Ochab went on, "that statements are made in the press against the Party proves the existence of unhealthy manifestations, of a loss of a sense of Party responsibility, of a confusion of ideas." Ochab said such utterances "were hysterical, they signify an anti-Party attitude." This Russian style idolatry of the Party makes it easy to believe the report that Ochab was picked by Krushchev to succeed Beirut, who contracted influenza and then heart trouble after hearing Stalin downgraded in the 20th Congress in Moscow, a striking case of political psychomatic illness. (Many Poles believe Beirut committed suicide.)

If Ochab's speech was intended to dampen down enthusiasm, it did not succeed in its purpose. The week I was there, that which began on April 23, saw the first meeting of a Communist parliament in which there was real debate, real differences of opinion and real criticism of the government. This was no Supreme Soviet, invariably unanimous even in condemning its own past. The Sejm meets in a building of chaste and refreshing simplicity after the Byzantine baroque of Moscow; plain Doric columns surround the huge semicircle of a sky-lighted Chamber in which the delegates convene. It was built by Pilsudski in 1928 and reconstructed in 1946-47. The lovely white building contains no "icons"—no busts or paintings of governmental leaders; Poland, unlike Stalin's Russia and Tito's Yugoslavia, never really had a "personality cult." The day I was there the session of the Sejm looked about as bored and desultory as a normal session of Congress in Washington; the press galleries looked equal "normal," i.e. bored. The discussion during my visit was on science and the schools. A Deputy Zofia Zemanek boasted that higher education in Poland had outstripped Britain; that while there were only 30 higher school students per 10,000 in Britain, there were 52 per 10,000 in Poland. Even in this a new note was struck. The official summary quoted her as saying "a certain degradation of science had been evident in the past few years. Schematism and vulgarization had led to the ossification of science which, deprived of broader contacts with foreign countries, *without polemics,* could not develop properly." (Italics added).

Plenty of Polemics Now

There was no dearth of polemics at the session. The Prime Minister, Cyrankiewicz, invited them in his opening address. His tone was quite different from Ochab's. The Prime Minister welcomed "the sound wave of criticism" sweeping over Poland, said it meant that "every conscious citizen is becoming an activist," and he demanded a new attitude on the part of the government toward the Sejm. "Undoubtedly," Cyrankiewicz said, "we will have to break with the practice by which the overwhelming majority of legal acts come into life in the shape of decrees, without previous discussion at Sejm committees." The Sejm was no longer to be a rubber stamp. Instead, like any normal legislature, it was to exercise "control over the organs of the executive power and the activities of the Government." Such control was "a no less essential factor in consolidating the rule of law." But in order to do so the members of the Sejm "must have access to sources of information" and in this respect "the situation was bad in the past." Questions from Sejm members had been treated in the past "as an irritating nuisance." He promised an end to such practices, "Cooperation with the Sejm will be, and must be, a fundamental rule for all organs of Government."

Cyrankiewicz is one of the Socialists who joined with the Communists in the formation of the "United Workers Party," indeed the last one left in high position. His speech had a non-Communist flavor in its discussion of civil liberties. He thought "the vigilant reaction of public opinion to each violation of binding laws and civil rights can be of great assistance" in maintaining "the strict observance of the rule of law." He said debate was taking place in Poland in a society "where there still exist class antagonisms and where the class enemy undoubtedly is still active." But the lesson he drew from this echoed the rationale of classic liberalism. He said that "in the atmosphere of political activisation, when in the course of this great debate the political armor is growing more perfect, when

the maturity of the masses is certainly growing at a double rate, while complaints and grievances are being revealed and, thanks to this, can be overcome, the enemy is finding it increasingly difficult to operate. . . . Of what importance," he asked, "are insinuations, slanders, gossip, whispering campaigns and intrigues at a time when all of us are openly exposing all shortcomings and errors . . .?" Strikingly absent was any implication that "democracy" was to be limited to the Party, much less that it was to be channelled within "correct" limits of "Marxism-Leninism," Russian style.

Against A "Droplet" Press Policy

The week before the Sejm opened, the government had already begun to activate this policy by providing real information to the parliamentary committees; for the first time in Polish postwar history, these committees began to discuss and work on pending legislation. When the session opened, the deputies were not slow to take advantage of the cue given them by the Prime Minister. A newspaperman deputy, Osmanczyk, launched a vigorous attack on press policy. He said too much space was consumed by "tremendously long official statements" and so-called "original articles telling us the same thing in slightly different words." He protested that the government was "still providing mere droplets of information for the Press, meted out according to the various strata of the population—the larger the circle of readers, the smaller the droplet." This is a perfect description of Soviet press policy. Another deputy, Drobner, once a Left Wing Socialist, assailed the system under which the Sejm passed decrees "as if at a military command—get up, sit down, get up again, sit down again, and make ourselves the laughing stock of the community."

Two Catholic deputies spoke up on behalf of non-Communist Catholic opinion. Deputy Horodynski said millions of believing Catholics were helping to build socialism and protested "the false division of the nation into Marxists and Catholics." The former Count Lubienski, a member of Pax, the Roman Catholic organization which supports the regime, asked that Catholics be allowed to set up their own youth organization or that the Communist Youth Union be transformed into "an organization of young people embracing various world outlooks." This challenge to the monistic and monolithic character of a Communist regime drew replies from two deputies. One, Gwiazdowicz, dwelt on the hostility of the clergy to the people and the anti-clerical traditions of the peasantry. The other, Deputy Helena Jaworska, accused the clergy of intolerance and of exercising pressure on young people. She said young people were free to join the official Youth Union or not as they pleased and that persuasion was the only method of ideological influence it used. The tone of this debate, the fact that it took place at all, was significant. It was equally noteworthy that five Catholic deputies voted against the bill to legalize abortion. There was unanimity—but it was genuine—in the approval accorded the amnesty under which 30,000 political prisoners are being freed and compensation will be paid the wrongfully imprisoned. And there was unanimity within the Sejm as well as without in the summary dismissal of Radkiewicz, former head of the secret police; of the public prosecutor, and of the chief military prosecutor. Most indicative of all was the decision to restore the full civil rights of all who fought in the rightist Polish Home Army during the last war.

The Jews in Poland

It was a pleasure to find Jewish cultural life flourishing in Poland. There is a Yiddish press and a Yiddish theatre—indeed the Jews of Poland even during the last days of Stalin suffered no such period as befell the Jews of the Soviet Union, a period in which Jewish artists and writers were liquidated, and Jews themselves made targets of public scorn. In this respect, too, the Polish record is the best in Eastern Europe and notably better than in the neighboring Czechoslovakia with its Slansky frameup and the long imprisonment of the now freed Israeli journalist, Mordechai Oren. The leaders of the Jewish community in Warsaw speak with none of those apprehensive inhibitions one feels in the Jews of Moscow even today, and it was an encouraging experience to start up a conversation with a stranger at a book stall, to find that he was a Jew and to walk about Warsaw with him talking Yiddish.

For me the high point of my visit to Warsaw was to see what the Poles are doing to rebuild their capital. Before leaving it the Germans systematically destroyed what was left, house by house and building by building. The Poles are rebuilding the old Warsaw *exactly as it was*. The ancient market, the old churches and monuments are being reconstructed in precise and loving replica of the past. The new apartments are being built and planned to fit in with the old; Poland is an architect's paradise and socialism is demonstrating its great advantage in this heroic task of rebuilding and resurrecting the old city treasures. No effort is being spared to make Warsaw rise again from the ashes of Germany's wanton malevolence. In this resurrection of their beloved and lovely capital, the Poles demonstrate a national will to live that must stir all who believe in courage and in indestructible spirit. Their one big architectural problem is what to do with that huge Soviet superduper Roxy theatre, that stupefyingly huge and tastelessly opulent Palace of Culture and Science which Stalin gave them. The problem of how to make it fit into the quiet elegance of Warsaw seems to be an insoluble one.

Poland was the first of the Soviet satellites to react vigorously to the down-grading of Stalin. Just four days after Krushchev's speech attacking the dead dictator, a speaker on Radio Warsaw called for greater freedom of thought and declared that Poland had been too long "spoonfed on an insipid, messy hash of slogans. . . . Today everyone must realize that he has not only the right but the duty to think and to express his thoughts. . . ." Every Communist leader there goes out of the way to assure the visitor that this does not mean a break with Moscow, that on the contrary the new line will make it easier for Poland to remain in friendly alliance with the Soviet Union. The Polish leaders feel that the old policy of trying to play an independent role between Germany and Russia is bankrupt, that Poland must for its own safety stand with the U.S.S.R. But they are determined to find a way within these limits to a freer society. For them this does not mean the restoration of capitalism—or that mixture of feudalism, fascism, clericalism and capitalism which was prewar Poland—but they see no reason why socialism cannot be combined with freedom of thought and security of the person. This is a struggle to liberate Poland which deserves sympathy from all liberals and socialists abroad. And in my opinion it may far better than Tito's Yugoslavia provide model and inspiration elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

A Vivid Document Published Here For the First Time Abroad

Poland's Leading Communist Poet Pens A Bitter Attack On Its Secret Police

Last year a political sensation was created in Poland when the poet, Adam Wazyk, dared write and the Polish magazine, Nowa Kultura (New Culture), dared print a bitter poem of protest against the regime called "Poem for Adults." A similar sensation was created a few weeks ago on April 29 when Trybuna Ludu, Warsaw's official Communist newspaper, published a poem, "Psy Policyjne" (Police Dogs) by Poland's leading Communist poet, Wladyslaw Broniewski. This is a somber and horrifying attack on the secret police and those practices which are referred to vaguely in the Soviet press as "impermissible" means of obtaining confessions.

Except for a brief reference in the London Times of May 19, Broniewski's poem seems to have gone unnoticed abroad. We publish it here for the first time in English as a document which strikingly manifests the new spirit of Poland. The poem and the fact that it was published in an official newspaper reveal a great deal about the all too recent past and tumultuous present of that country. Unfortunately this translation is only a literal line-by-line rendition, an impromptu and volunteer performance with the aid of a friend who knows Polish. It does so little justice to the rhymed quatrains of the original that should Mr. Broniewski ever read it, he may find this translation a torture more exquisite than anything the secret police could think up for him. But, still, here it is—IFS

Police Dogs

By Wladyslaw Broniewski

Transform tears into stone
Prick up your ears and listen
Police dogs are howling
Steadily, hoarse and deafening.

Why are they being heard here
When night falls over Poland
Although the sound of hobnailed boots
Police and military march.

Although they shout, "Long live
Freedom gained at last!"
One hears the howling of police dogs
In Lutsk and in the police interrogation centers.

The training of dogs, tedious and skilful,
Is the forte of Commissar Zaremba.
Dogs can grab by the genitals
The prisoner, who clenches his teeth.

As Commissar Zaremba interrogates,
One hears the creak of the cords being twisted.
"Hit him on the kisser, Postowicz! What, what does he say?
Do you want more, carrion-kite? Give him more, pour it on."

The throat, distended with water, aches.
Strength ebbs, strength gives out.
The heart slows down. It dies.
The police dog in the corner growls.

"Out with him! Next! Mr. Commissar
"Here are girls. . . . One who'd say nothing. . . .
"If Mr. Commissar would only give the order
"A way would be found. Perhaps . . . this. . . ."

Naked, numb, a stranger to pain,
Legs and arms tied straight as a stick.
Eyes! Eyes! . . . Wolves in a dog kennel!
"Now with a whip! Tkaczuk, strike!"

The police dog howled long,
In the prison yard during the night.
Because he smelled blood from the cut veins
He whimpered and howled: Help!

He howled again, drawn out, muted,
Frightening—almost human—
They tied him on a chain
And it was quiet again in Lutsk.

I heard the howling and I hear it yet
The heart beats faster in resistance.
Friends, I speak more and more quietly
But my whisper can be heard afar.

Because with this whisper I ask for strength
And the whisper summons up anger again,
My song, rebellious and beaten,
Just like you, Comrade Nina.

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