

Joshua Muravchik

## THE SOUND OF FREE POLAND

While shipyard workers and coal miners struck, a historic conference near Krakow marked another step in Poland's internal drive toward independence.

In 1947 Poland's Communist sa- traps held a plebiscite designed to confer a veneer of legitimacy on the rule that had been placed in their hands by the Soviet Army. Although the Communists tried to rig the balloting, the city of Krakow, the country's traditional home of learning, voted more than 80 percent against them.

To neutralize this center of "reaction," they devised an ingenious plan of social engineering. They would clear a section of farmland on the city's outskirts and build a huge industrial enterprise with housing for tens of thousands of workers and their families. These workers would turn their backs on the benighted religious piety of the existing peasant population—the new community would be built without any churches—and would imbibe Communist ideology. They would become exemplars of the new Socialist man and would form the social base of progressivism in Krakow.

The industrial plant was a steel-works, which more sensibly would have been located in Silesia, hundreds of kilometers to the west, where the coal for the steel is mined. The surrounding church-free community built for the workers was given the euphonic name Nowa Huta—New Steelmill.

Large gray slab apartment blocks were thrown up all over the hilly ground, some of whose despoiled peasant owners, it is said, died fighting the expropriation. Little else was built or planted there to relieve the ugliness of cleared ground no longer farmed.

Nowa Huta began to produce steel, but not the hoped for "new man." Unreconciled to their church-free life, residents erected a cross on a public street, which the authorities duly tore down. A second cross was erected and

this time housewives took shifts guarding it. Eventually Krakow's Bishop Wojtyla conceived a plan. The residents of Nowa Huta would construct a church with their own resources; no public assets would be used. It took until 1968 to win official approval, and a church was built in the shape of a large ark reflecting Cardinal Wyszynski's transparent metaphor: "We need an ark to carry us through the Red Sea."

In the years since, the gray of Nowa Huta's buildings has been progressively darkened by the soot that pours from the mill's chimneys untouched by modern filtration. The ground is muddy, the air is polluted, and Nowa Huta's proletariat has become a bastion of resistance to the Communist regime.

The spiritual center of resistance has shifted from the ark to another church, Mistrzejowice, an imposing structure of aesthetically pleasing architecture standing out in dramatic contrast to the surrounding drab. It was here that Wojtyla, now Pope John Paul II, said mass in 1983 to nearly a million people and here, too, that some 800 delegates from twenty or more countries gathered during the last days of August this year for the first international human rights conference ever held behind the Iron Curtain.

The conference was the audacious project of two "independent social groups." One, the Intervention and Lawfulness Commission of Solid-

arity, is the lineal descendant of KOR, the Committee for Social Self-Defense. Led by Zbigniew and Zofia Romaszewski, it works to defend strikers and other activists from government reprisals. Last year it assisted over 1,600 people fined for their union activities.

The other sponsor, Freedom and Peace, is an organization of young people whose defiant spirit and style owes something to the Western protest movements of the 1960s, but whose substantive views exhibit a thoughtfulness that the latter never achieved. Since its birth three years ago, it has campaigned for the rights of conscientious objection, and this summer it won! The government announced the creation of an "alternative service" option for conscientious objectors (albeit double the duration of military service) and also amended the oath of induction, as Freedom and Peace had demanded, to eliminate a pledge to defend fraternal socialist countries (i.e., the USSR). Freedom and Peace also won the release of most of its members who had been jailed.

Mistrzejowice's interior offers many allusions to Polish struggles. Its walls are covered by a series of paintings of the stations of the cross. Among the throngs of disciples in the background, one can make out the faces of Jacek Kuron, Adam Michnik, and other figures from the Polish resistance. One corner of the chapel is dominated by a huge cross constructed of painted panels forming a collage of scenes

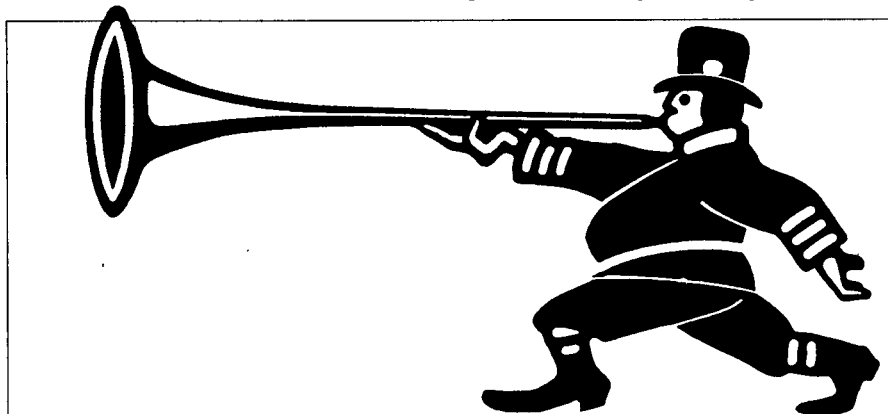
about John Paul II. The lower panels depict the shooting of the Pope, but above them he is shown healthy and robust again, his arms flung wide across the cross's transverse panels, while above his head, doves of peace soar skyward. The Pontiff's triumph over the attempt on his life makes a ready metaphor for the renewal that Poland awaits.

The other front corner of the chapel is occupied by a mass of votive candles placed before an image of the Holy Mother, flanked on one side by a picture of the Pope and on the other by one of Jerzy Popieluszko, the fearless defender of Solidarity who was beaten to death by agents of the secret police.

These are permanent features of the church's decor, but in addition its long corridors were lined with exhibits prepared especially for the human rights conference. Along one was a display of underground publishing. I counted 278 separate titles, a fraction of the hundreds published each year using fairly rudimentary materials either purchased on the black market or expropriated from the expropriators, so to speak. A recent important release was a translation of Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies*, issued in four thousand copies. Another was Milton and Rose Friedman's *Free to Choose*. A major translation project now contemplated by one of the underground presses is Paul Johnson's *A History of the Jews*.

The spirit of Mistrzejowice reflects its pastor, Father Kazimierz Jancarz, who welcomed the gathering. A tall bear of a man, whose full beard obscures the youthfulness of his face only from a distance, Father Jancarz looks like the original model of which Merlin Olsen's television priest was but the palest imitation. His unflinching commitments and the devotion he commands from congregants are reminiscent of the charisma of Krakow's Wojtyla.

Each afternoon, a truck arrived at the



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church with vats of soup prepared for the conferees by women from the parish. These hearty soups, flavored with bits of sausage or fatback, were served by the parish women with plenty of good rye bread, and some sliced tomatoes, pickles, and occasional homemade cakes. No beverage was available with lunch, but often it was possible to get a glass of coffee or tea afterward. This, I was told, was one of the many impressive feats of the conference organizers, and may have required a foreign subsidy, for coffee and tea are scarce commodities in Poland today outside of hard currency shops. So is most everything else. During one sermon, Father Jancarz underlined the point by jesting to the group of youngsters seated in front of him, "Children, is any of you old enough to remember what a sausage is?"

From the moment the conference opened the atmosphere inside the church was electric. Lech Walesa, one of the sponsors, was to have delivered the first address but had to remain with his fellow strikers at Gdansk. Instead, a message from him was read: "It would appear that even in this part of the world, the time of totalitarianism is coming to an end." A little later, a representative of the striking miners of Jastrzebie arrived. He was introduced—albeit carefully without the use of his name—to a standing ovation. Reaching the microphone, he burst into the Polish national anthem. All who knew it joined in, waving Solidarity's two-fingered "V" sign overhead.

"We want the truth about everything that happens in our country and the world," said the miner. "We want the truth about our strike told." And then, the most fundamental issue: "We protest miners being treated as incapable of helping to shape the fate of our country . . . we are citizens."

Another who brought the gathering to its feet was Anna Walentynowicz. Short and gray, she is the Rosa Parks of the Polish freedom movement. Walentynowicz was fired along with her fellow electrician Lech Walesa for union organizing activities at the Gdansk shipyards before the birth of Solidarity. Their firing ignited the fateful strike in which Solidarity was born. "We will have as much freedom as we will demand and use," she declared.

Such inspirational speeches were interspersed with more dispassionate intellectual ones. The sharpest debate at the conference focused on the subject of state sovereignty. To what extent should a government be free to do what it wants, so long as it does it to its own people? The Soviet and other East European governments generally dismiss Western criticism of their

human rights abuses as "interference" in their "internal affairs." To the people of Eastern Europe, this attitude is bitterly ironic, since the governments that abuse them, though legally recognized, have mostly been imposed from abroad. The weight of Western pressure is one of the scant protections that they have against oppressors whose ultimate power resides in Moscow.

Jan Maria Rokita, leader of the Krakow branch of Freedom and Peace, cited the principle of sovereignty as "one of the chief psychological and legal obstacles to the efforts to broaden the sphere of social control [i.e., the

## In August, some 800 delegates from more than twenty countries gathered in Krakow for the first international human rights conference ever held behind the Iron Curtain.

control of governments by their people] in the world." He said that it should be subordinate to principles of law and right. This theme was echoed by Jerzy Turowicz, chief editor of the legal but highly respected Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*, who argued that "the human community has the right and duty to take care of the fate of each of its members across frontiers, whenever the defenseless and helpless are victims of violence or injustice."

They were answered by Juan Mendez of Americas Watch who warned that to weaken respect for state sovereignty would mean to weaken international law, which he described as a bulwark of international human rights, and would also encourage the nefarious tendency of the United States to throw its weight around in the name of human rights. Mendez's warning may have been persuasive to some of the participants—mostly leftish Westerners—but not to the majority, especially Western labor representatives and participants from Communist countries. The final resolution of the conference contained a clause declaring that "the principle of . . . sovereignty can by no means become a justification of the violation of human rights."

Another resolution created a preparatory committee to convene a successor conference in two years somewhere in Eastern Europe. And another, sponsored by James Moorhouse, a British Conservative member of the European Parliament, called for expansion of that body to include observer representatives from Central and Eastern Europe chosen in "free and democratic elections. In the case of such elections being impossible the observer representatives could be elected from independent social movements."

In addition to the opportunity to exchange views and strengthen ties with

their Western counterparts, the conference afforded East European activists an occasion for affirming solidarity with one another. Speakers from various Eastern bloc countries dwelt on the extreme conditions of brutalization and privation to which Romanians are currently being subjected by the Ceausescu regime, and a resolution was adopted and a petition circulated on their behalf. Only one Romanian—an exile—made it to the conference. Representation of other Communist countries varied in accordance with current political conditions.

Messages from Soviet dissidents

Sergei Grigoryants and Alexander Podrabinek revealed that the invitations sent them had not been delivered and that they had learned of the conference only through Western intermediaries, probably radio broadcasts. The Soviet Union, however, was represented by Natalya Gorbanevskaya, a veteran of the Gulag now living in Paris, and by a long-haired youth from Kazakhstan who happened to learn of the conference while visiting in Krakow and who delivered an appeal on behalf of participants in last year's Alma Ata riots still held in prison.

A representative from Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 arrived on the second day, after a larger delegation had been prevented from coming. He dared not bring a copy of the declaration of support for the Polish strikers that Charter 77 had just adopted, he said, fearing that if it had been found on him his journey would have been abruptly terminated. He apologized for his inexperience at oratory, explaining that for twenty years Czechs like him have had no opportunity to practice public speaking.

The largest group of East Europeans at the conference besides Poles were Hungarians representing an array of what they prefer to call "independent" organizations. One of these was the Democratic Trade Union of Scientific Workers. Formed three months ago by 1,024 dues-paying members, it had already doubled its membership. Recently, its broadside against the government's economic policy was published in a large official weekly. Another Hungarian group, the Federation of Young Democrats, has put itself forward as an explicit alternative to the Young Communist League. A leader of an umbrella organization of such groups likened the

atmosphere in his country to the "Prague Spring" of 1968. He and others reported that in Hungary today the issue they face is no longer whether the government will let them survive but whether it will give their demands a hearing.

Western representation included groups from the German Green party, the Italian Radicals, and various representatives from the European parliament. One of the Greens confided in me his consternation that despite his party's active relationship with the Polish Freedom and Peace organization, they have not been able to convince the Poles of the desirability of (Western) unilateral disarmament. The largest Western contingent—about twenty—comprised Americans, most of whom had been invited by the New York-based Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe.

The American delegation was shaped to some extent by the vagaries of the Polish government's response to visa requests. A contingent from the American Federation of Teachers (AFL-CIO) had no difficulty, but one from the AFL-CIO headquarters, including president Lane Kirkland, was denied visas. This magazine's managing editor saw his visa application stalled until it was too late to make the trip, and something similar happened to a contingent of congressional aides until State Department intervention allowed them to make the journey, although later than scheduled. On the other hand, the eminent Soviet exile Vladimir Bukovsky was granted a visa, but when the news of his impending visit was broadcast by an overeager correspondent for Radio Free Europe, the visa was quickly revoked.

In other ways the Polish government's response to the conference was erratic. A colonel from the Ministry of the Interior attended every session, taking copious notes. I attempted to interview him with the help of an interpreter. He did not refuse to talk but he evaded all my questions about what he thought of the conference, at one point accusing me of trying to "trick" him when I persisted. He was eager for me to understand, however, that he was there in an official capacity, apparently apprehensive that I might get the impression he was there on his own as an aficionado of human rights.

One thing the government was determined to prevent was a visit by conference participants to a struck mine in Jastrzebie. Each day, conference organizers attempted to arrange such an outing, but no bus company would rent to them. The drivers of buses that the conference had already rented to take the delegates to visit Auschwitz refused to take the group on to Jastrzebie.



Militia roadblocks on the highways served to discourage travel by private car, and our colonel resorted to thinly veiled threats to prevent a move by delegates to travel there by public train. He took aside the conference chairman, Zbigniew Romaszewski, to convey his fear that if the conferees managed to reach Jastrzebie, they were likely to fall into ditches, get into scuffles, or in other ways come to harm.

But inside the walls of Mistrzejowice, the conference proceeded unimpeded (although the phone service had been disconnected). One activist took me to a back room where a couple of his ink-spattered colleagues were operating an old Gestetner mimeograph machine. They were turning out materials for the conference, but the method, he said, was the same used for much of their underground publishing. The only difference was that the mimeographing is usually done in basements with the equipment moved every few days. The printing I observed was barely sequestered because "this week this church is Free Poland."

The final day of the conference was devoted to a tour of Auschwitz and Birkenau, which remain as they were

found by their liberators. I had wondered if Polish authorities, like their Soviet comrades, continued to obscure the Jewish character of the holocaust, and was relieved to find that the exhibits and the commentary by the camp tour guide did not do so at all. The Polish authorities did, however, add a resonant touch to the macabre ambience of the camp by surrounding our group with a contingent of seven or nine secret police thugs. They did a poor imitation of tourists, with their cameras always trained on us rather than the surroundings.

After laying a wreath at the monument to the martyrs, we went for lunch to a church that has been created out of a building in the corner of Birkenau built originally for the camp administrators. I was told that some Jewish groups had opposed putting a church there. I know nothing of the rights and wrongs of the dispute. But a quite beautiful chapel has been built within the shell of a building that was horribly ugly both in purpose and structure. We held an ecumenical service and kaddish—the Jewish prayer of mourning—was said. As buses of the conference participants pulled away, local women coming to mass stood on the steps

and waved the Solidarity "V" sign. One of them said to me: "You don't realize how much your visit means to people here. In Krakow many people defy the government, but Oswiecim [Auschwitz] is a small town, and people are afraid." She told of a friend who had helped to make some of the arrangements for our visit. Never before had she dared defy the authorities and she would likely be visited by the police the next day, but she felt joy in the courage of her act.

Within an hour after the conference adjourned, I was told Mistrzejowice would be emptied of the physical paraphernalia of "free Poland." That evening I joined some of the activists at a picnic hosted by Father Jancarz at an idyllic mountain retreat that he was having built by a rippling brook in a glen surrounded by a pine forest. The largest of the small unfinished wooden structures is designed to be the chapel; it has a rustic cross made of two wooden branches. There Father Jancarz conducted a mass which he dedicated to the poetess Gorbanevskaya, who also

was present, and to all those struggling for human rights within the Soviet Union. I recognized that I was back in another, spiritual corner of "free Poland."

The regime's decision a day later to open negotiations with Solidarity—which for seven years it had steadfastly consigned to the dustbin of history—shows that it, too, is beginning to recognize that, like the underground publishing, free Poland is portable and hard to extinguish. Most Poles carry it inside them, nourished by their religious faith. All of the grandiose and monstrous plans to generate a "new man" who will be rid of this embryo have come to naught. As long as the Soviet Army remains in Poland, the Communist party will sit in the seat of power. But without a fundamental change in its relation to society, the party has no hope of achieving any modicum of popular legitimacy or of arresting Poland's economic decline, much less fulfilling Communism's more visionary goals. Meanwhile, Polish society presses forward in its drive to widen the space for independent activity, slowly hollowing out totalitarianism from within. □

Robert S. England

## THE CATASTROPHIC HEALTH CARE BLUNDER

The story of how Ronald Reagan, Otis Bowen, and a rogue Congress came up with what might be the most expensive piece of social legislation since the Great Society—and still failed to provide real catastrophic care for our elderly.

The bill-signing ceremony on July 1, 1988, was an event of supreme irony. On the podium in the Rose Garden was President Ronald Reagan, who as governor of California two decades ago had railed against Medicare and who had won the White House on his pledge to contain runaway government social spending and strengthen competition and free markets. The bill he was about to sign, beamed the President, would "provide countless Americans with peace of mind," echoing a line worn thin by his Secretary of Health and Human Services, Otis R. Bowen, former governor of Indiana and godfather of the initiative. Reagan then signed the Medicare Catastrophic

Coverage Act of 1988, a massive new entitlement program for the elderly.

There was only one sour note: Reagan warned that costs would have to be kept in line, even as the White House Fact Sheet boasted that the Act was the biggest expansion of Medicare since it began in 1965. The White House was being modest. In fact, the Catastrophic Coverage Act could turn out to be the biggest expansion of the welfare state since Lyndon Johnson launched the Great Society.

The impetus for the law was the Bowen plan, which started out to expand Medicare modestly by taking over existing private catastrophic insurance coverage for short-term illnesses, and extending the coverage to everyone not covered by either Medicaid or a combination of Medicare and private "medi-

gap" insurance. Bowen's proposal would have added about \$6.2 billion a year in new social spending by 1993, to be paid for by the elderly with an additional optional premium to their Medicare coverage. But once it was sent to Capitol Hill, the plan grew like topsy. Congress added generous new hospital and physician benefits, along with a costly drug benefit at the behest of the powerful American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). Says one Capitol Hill veteran: "The President put catastrophic on the front burner, and Congress worked its will." These benefits, HHS estimates, will raise the cost to \$17.2 billion a year by 1995, and more thereafter.

Also at the Rose Garden podium for the ceremony were some of the President's friends and a large number of his

bitterest political and ideological foes. It wasn't a stubborn President Reagan that hot July day who had succumbed to an invincible Congress controlled by Democrats. It was a chastened President, painted into a corner not only by his own desire to help the elderly, but also by a colossal failure in strategy and competence at the White House and, most importantly, by a stubborn, vain-glorious Secretary Bowen.

One embittered former member of the Office of Management and Budget, who fought to stop the original Bowen proposal, says, "It was like George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. There's been a revolution and the pigs have overthrown the farmers. But in the end a horse looks into the barnyard and sees the pigs and farmers dancing together, and he can't tell the pigs from the farmers."

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