

Polish Contradictions

EDITORS' NOTE: One year after the October events, Poland still presents a checkered and, to some extent, contradictory picture: intellectual freedom side by side with party control, hatred of Russia but military and political alliance with Moscow, an official anti-religious ideology fostered by a regime that has granted the Catholic Church rights denied to it in pluralistic and democratic countries (*e.g.*, freedom of religious instruction in the public schools)—paradoxes and contrasts that could be multiplied *ad infinitum*. The articles below depict two facets of this contradictory scene:

the first deals with the accomplishments as *vs.* the continuing difficulties of Polish writers and intellectuals; the second reveals the problem of persisting Stalinist influences in Polish life, as epitomized in the peculiar career and personal power of the once Fascist, now Stalinist head of the pseudo-Catholic "movement" Pax—Boleslaw Piasecki. For a more general report on Poland, the reader is referred to "Poland—A Political Glimpse," by Zbigniew Brzezinski, in the preceding issue of this journal (September-October, No. 5, 1957).

Intellectual and Literary Revival in Poland

By *Lucienne Rey*

THE RECENT SUSPENSION of the crusading Polish student weekly *Po Prostu* (Plain and Simple) has again brought into relief the question asked anxiously by Poles as well as by the world at large: can and will the limited democratization process, ushered in by the dramatic events of October 1956, survive? The present article cannot claim to answer this all-important question. Its purpose is merely to delineate certain aspects of it more clearly—to sketch the history of Poland's intellectual rebellion against Stalinism, to depict the situation as it exists today, and to point out the difficulties and pitfalls, the dangers and obstacles that stand in the way of the Polish intellectual's struggle for greater freedom and dignity. There is no doubt that much has already been

accomplished, but it remains to be seen whether the Communist regime will be willing—or be forced—to continue the process of liberation, or whether it will decide to halt and possibly even reverse it.

The Beginnings

The intellectual ferment that spearheaded the October events began unobtrusively in a somewhat out-of-the-way corner of Polish cultural life. Polish intellectuals had their first opportunity to air independent opinions in a press debate that began in the autumn of 1953 and continued until spring of 1954, on the subject of the ossification of the educational system. Among other defects in instruction, they criticized in particular the tentatiousness of courses on literature and literary criticism. From there it was only a step to the critical re-examination of Stalinist aesthetic doctrines, of the literary products of the Stalinist period, and of previous-

Lucienne Rey is a French writer specializing in Polish affairs. She is the coauthor (with Jean Malara) of *La Pologne d'une occupation à l'autre* (Poland from One Occupation to Another), Editions du Fuseau, Paris, 1952.

ly-accepted judgments concerning the whole development of Polish literature between the two World Wars.

This step was taken at the June 1954 Congress of Polish Writers, where Mieczysław Jastrun and Antoni Slonimski, both writers of considerable renown before the war, ventured to make unprecedentedly daring statements in defiance of the established Stalinist critical canons. Other writers, responding to an inquiry launched by the literary weekly *Nowa Kultura* under the heading, "The Writers Look Back Over The Past Ten Years", sent in comments which were conspicuously lacking in enthusiasm for the literary contributions of the Stalinist era.

The pulse of intellectual dissent quickened when the more radical literary weeklies began publishing short satirical sketches with thinly veiled political implications. Some of these satires, such as "The Lament of the Paper Heads" (*Lament papierowych glow*) by Jerzy Andrzejewski, a lampoon on ludicrous party propaganda, were circulated in typed copies passed secretly from hand to hand. Moscow's initial moves toward emancipation from the Stalin cult gave added verve to the intellectual stirrings in Poland, and the deceased tyrant, without being mentioned by name, was exposed in the press and on the stage to a raillery that encompassed everything connected with his name.

Up to this point the critics had advanced cautiously, resorting to hints, allusions, and secretly-circulated manuscripts, but the regime's inauguration of more liberal policies from January 1955 was the signal for a much more pronounced frankness. *Nowa Kultura* began publishing critical articles which reflected the deep-seated dissatisfaction of the entire Polish population. Adam Wazyk's sensational "Poem for Adults" (*Poemat dla doroslych*), published in August 1955, marked the first expression by a Polish Communist writer of revulsion at the misery and despair of Polish workers worn out by toil, living in hovels, and waiting and hoping in vain for justice. Wazyk's outburst, amply reported in the Western press, touched off a veritable explosion in the Polish literary world. Despite the reproaches of the party, Wazyk five months later published a sequel entitled *Critique of the Poem for Adults*, a further indictment of the system under which "men lived on dreams, and the lie had become their daily bread." From September 1955 on, *Po Prostu*, a weekly expressing the ideas of the students and young intellectuals, became the standard-bearer of disaffected Poland, attacking the regime with a new spirit of courage and dynamism.

All this paled into insignificance, however, compared to the new tide of intellectual rebellion which swept Poland after the Twentieth CPSU Congress. Khrushchev's

"secret report" acknowledging the crimes of Stalin was for many Polish intellectuals an "upheaval," an "earthquake," which sharply accelerated the already growing ferment. The regime found its policy of controlled democratization from above suddenly and hopelessly outdistanced by events.

End of Idols and Dogmas

Scholars, historians, writers and economists began to denounce the misdeeds of "the preceding period" with a new bluntness. Attacking the "cult of personality," certain writers did not even hesitate to challenge a number of the fundamental theses of Marxism-Leninism.¹ One of the most authoritative voices was that of Leopold Infeld, a professor at the University of Warsaw and former co-worker of Albert Einstein in the United States, who began denouncing the "obscurantism" which had developed in Polish science as a result of Soviet influence and control.² The poet Julian Przybos assailed the bureaucratic controls imposed by the regime upon cultural institutions, particularly the Writers' Association, for the purpose of "suppressing critical thought and transforming writers into inept instruments of the Propaganda Office."³

Economists meanwhile set out to prove that the management of industry and agriculture was irrational and the living standard of the workers abysmal. Their contentions were underlined by revealing factual accounts in the press, which no longer "embellished reality" in the Stalinist tradition but instead pictured conditions in the towns and countryside in the raw. These reports not only revealed the omnipresent poverty of the masses but denounced the abuses of the local party "henchmen," the indifference of the authorities, and the stagnation of social life.⁴

The Poznan workers' uprising of June 1956, which was a direct result of these very conditions, gave a new stimulus to the ferment. But the real intellectual awakening reached its peak only after "the revolution without

¹ For instance, Professor Jan Kott and the poets Antoni Slonimski and W. Wirpsza at the 19th Council of Culture (March 1956). Also, articles in *Nowa Kultura*, April 8, 1956, and *Przegląd Kulturalny*, April 11, 1956.

² Leopold Infeld, "O godnosc nauki" (For the Dignity of Science), *Przegląd Kulturalny*, June 27, 1956.

³ Julian Przybos, "Dyskusja o Związku Literatów (Discussion on the Association of Writers)" written in June and published in *Nowa Kultura*, September 2, 1956.

⁴ B. Galeski, "Wies spokojna, wies wesola" (Sweet Countryside, Radiant Countryside), *Przegląd Kulturalny*, June 27, 1956; A. Czarski, "W Kacykowie bez zmian" (No Changes in Kacykow), *Nowa Kultura*, June 17, 1956; J. Piorkowski, "Kult czy tradycja?" (Cult or Tradition?), *Nowa Kultura*, August 5, 1956.

barricades" of October 1956 had softened the last rigors of Stalinism. The first writings to reflect the new spirit were stories appearing in the press, characterized by almost complete objectivity and frankness. Such were the reports from Polish correspondents in Budapest at the beginning of the Hungarian Revolution.⁵ Such were the published results of investigations made by Warsaw newspapers into conditions in various provincial towns. The journalists unleashed their criticism against all the ills inherited from the Stalinist period: the housing shortage, inadequate hospital services, unemployment, power and machinations of the secret police, institutionalized spying and denunciation, and political terror justified by alleged "plots" against the regime. The compulsory optimism of former times was replaced by bitter reflection and honest "self-criticism." The very style of journalistic writing changed: relieved of artifices and grandiloquence, it took on life, color and vividness, at the same time that it became sober and precise.

The Literary Rebirth

The new spirit in journalism also found its way into the intellectual and literary periodicals like *Po Prostu* and *Nowa Kultura*, their number swelled by the appearance of new publications. Consequently, when the Polish Writers' Association met in November 1956 for its first congress after the revolution, it had only to ratify the sweeping transformation that had taken place in the world of letters. The chief obstacle to literary creation, "socialist realism," had already been scornfully condemned as "bureaucratic pressure exerted on the writers."⁶ On the opening day of the congress, the central party organ, *Trybuna Ludu*, itself acknowledged that "the writers have not been able to stand this administrative pressure, which threatened all literature with sterility."⁷

The keynote of the congress was sounded by Leon Kruczkowski, then still president of the Writers' Association, who declared that "false concepts and bureaucratic methods have encouraged glibness . . ., corrupted the writers, particularly the young people . . ., [and created] a school of cynicism."⁸ Another speaker, the

poet Jastrun reminded his listeners that they were not yet safely through the storm:

In the recent period, liberty meant servitude, sovereignty meant submission, and orthodoxy meant abasement. Totalitarianism, whatever its form, corrupted style . . . The totalitarian manner of thinking persists to this day; it is this that prevents the emancipation of the word from the oppression of authority, even if it is an enlightened absolutism.⁹

Other spokesmen at the congress stressed the unhappy consequences for Polish culture of the country's enforced isolation from the West during the Stalinist period. In this area, however, they took heart from the fact that the barriers had already been largely broken down, promising an opportunity to further the development of close cultural contacts with Western countries. The progress achieved in this direction has, in fact, been one of the most interesting aspects of the new era in Poland.

France has naturally been the first pole of attraction, as much by reason of old tradition as of the affinity and mutual admiration which link the two peoples. French authors have been experiencing an extraordinary vogue among Polish readers. Translations of some classics as well as of contemporary works banned during the Stalinist period, particularly of André Gide, François Mauriac and André Maurois, are being republished. On the library shelves one now finds translations of almost all the currently popular French writers: Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre, Vailland, even Françoise Sagan. The plays of d'Anouilh have been presented since last autumn on the stages of Warsaw and Cracow, inaugurating a real international theatrical festival in which not only French but other Western authors have been represented—Beckett, Cocteau, Kesselring (*Arsenic and Old Lace*) and Agatha Christie. There have also been visits to Warsaw by the Comédie Française and the dramatic troupe of Laurence Olivier.

The new interest in American arts and literature is particularly significant. The Cleveland Symphony Orchestra, which recently visited Poland, was received with exceptional enthusiasm. Translations of American authors—notably Steinbeck, Hemingway, Wilder and Margaret Mitchell—are being printed in remarkably large volume for a country that suffers from a paper shortage (*Gone With the Wind* was run off in 50,000 copies). The literary weeklies, which continuously keep their readers informed of literary activities abroad, make more and more frequent mention of American poets and writers.¹⁰

⁹ For Jastrun's speech, see *Nowa Kultura*, Dec. 9, 1956.

¹⁰ *Nowa Kultura* recently published two poems by Carl Sandburg and reprinted an article from the *New Leader* (New York), a contribution by Norman Podhoretz.

⁵ W. Woroszyński, "Dziennik Węgierski" (Hungarian Diary), *Nowa Kultura*, November 25 and December 2, 1956; R. Jurys, "Poznan i Budapeszt" (Poznan and Budapest), *Zycie Warszawy*, November 23, 1956.

⁶ Przybos, *op cit.*

⁷ *Trybuna Ludu*, November 29, 1956.

⁸ Leon Kruczkowski's speech, published in *Nowa Kultura*, December 9, 1956. Kruczkowski, a faithful party writer, is the author of numerous novels and plays, the most recent of which, *Julius and Ethel*, is based on the Rosenberg case. Since the congress he has been ousted as head of the Writers' Association and also from the weekly, *Nowa Kultura*.

Notwithstanding the customary attacks on American "imperialism," still voiced in some strictly political writings, Polish newspapers and literary publications reflect a growing curiosity about the United States. In a series of articles for a Warsaw daily, Grzegorz Jaszunski related his impressions of an American tour which included Washington, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Detroit. Certain of his observations were open to debate, but in general he tried to picture American life with careful objectivity, not neglecting to mention the well-being of the workers, including specifically those of Polish origin.¹¹

Recent Literary Trends

The new trends in Polish literature are evident in both choice of subjects and treatment. Understandably enough, themes drawn from the recent past have engaged the attention of writers more than any others. Thus, the first works published since the summer of 1956 have a clearly political character.

The themes include the pernicious effects of the activities of misguided student *aktywi*,¹² Communist discrimination against former fighters in the wartime Polish resistance against the Germans, and police terror in general.¹³ A recent novel by Jerzy Andrzejewski, *Darkness Covers the Earth*, has its setting in Spain at the time of the Holy Inquisition, but it is clearly meant to assail the evils of the Stalinist period in Poland. The atmosphere of terror and the personality of the Grand Inquisitor, lying in wait for men suspected of the least heresy, leave no doubt on this score.¹⁴

Far more direct and explicit is a book (*The Bad One*) by the young writer and journalist, Leopold Tyrmand.

¹¹ "Return From America," *Zycie Warszawy*, December 9, 1956, and January 9, 1957.

¹² In *The Musician*, by Josef Kusmierek, a militant zealot of the Communist Youth causes the mental collapse of an old schoolmistress and the dismissal of two teachers.

¹³ *The Sargasso Sea*, by Aleksander Scibor Rylski.

¹⁴ J. Andrzejewski, *Ciemności kryja ziemię*, Warsaw, published by Czytelnik, June 1957. On the threshold of death, taking stock of the crimes he has committed, the Grand Inquisitor says to his disciple and successor: "We are not allowed to delude ourselves any further. Our power is illusory and our strength is only apparent. . . . We have made of the world a prison and a dungeon. Catastrophe is inevitable. There is no longer either faith or hope. We have broken men, destroyed their spirit and their souls. We are hated and scorned. Nothing can be saved from this dark madness. Other ways of salvation must be sought. We ourselves have to destroy that which is condemned. We can no longer . . . delude ourselves into thinking that the mistakes which we made are due only to the methods of the exercise of power."

Reflections of a Writer

I still cannot control my burning anger when face to face with evil and stupidity. "Stupidity is eternal, it cannot die." This saying is of no help at all. Today I read that a certain young critic took issue with advocates of a certain type of realism. Does he really think that it pays to enter into polemics on this subject; doesn't he know what it is all about? One of the most monstrous products of totalitarian education, among others, is the art of dissimulation, an art mastered so effectively that it often succeeds in blurring the line between reality and camouflage. I find this type of pretense, demanded of us until recently, particularly hateful. In some countries, this pretense has assumed thoroughly repugnant features. An old writer, who has grayed in the dangerous game of saving his own skin—he who knows the hellish depths of fear, of compromise, of self-degradation—simulates a young man, concerned about the loftiest ideals of mankind. This does not come easily to anybody. Many a candle he burned, before he made his first step. As soon as he took it, he was lost.

* * *

Here comes a young critic who, with one sweeping gesture, blots out the work of a poet, the product of years of artistic endeavor. "Even if his works have any value, they should be annihilated, removed, so as to pave the way for the new literature."

So, too, spoke the directors of our cultural life at the beginning of the Stalinization of Polish literature. "We must annihilate him, even though his works have a certain value, we must break him, remove him, thus paving the way for our young poetry, which will sing the glories of our achievements and the glories of our government agencies with their achievements, and other agencies at the top." In the meantime, poetry has survived. Poetry will survive.

—From "Fragmenty" (Fragments), by Mieczysław Jastrun, *Przegląd Kulturalny* (Warsaw), Sept. 19-25, 1957.

First published in late 1955, prior to the more dramatic renaissance, it was republished in 1956 and became a best seller. The novel deals with a topic of current importance and interest—namely, the activities of the young street ruffians (officially termed "hooligans") who have constituted a perennial problem in postwar Poland. Tyrmand views the problem in a way that contrasts sharply with the official version. He paints a startling picture of Warsaw's underworld, where an organized gang disguised as a "work cooperative" spreads dis-

order and defies the police. Without making any explicit political points, the author succeeds in presenting a haunting indictment of a system which has given birth to a group of social outcasts possessing no moral values, cynical, embittered, and poverty-stricken.¹⁵

The young authors who have emerged in recent months, whatever their literary genres, are fiercely opposed to any controls on literature. Not only do they steer clear of the clichés of "socialist realism", but some take delight in deliberately violating established Communist literary taboos. Production is now replaced by love, and politics by lyrical reflections; the evil of living and the evil of loving, prostitution and alcoholism, the misery and promiscuity engendered by inadequate housing—these are the subjects once spurned and now openly treated. It is principally the young authors of the trend represented by Marek Hlasko, Monika Kotowska, and the poet, Jerzy Harasymowicz, who excel in the graphic description of daily life seen in its dark and brutal aspects, and in the precise observation of details, replacing psychological analysis. They seem to be under the strong influence of certain American writers—Caldwell and Faulkner in particular. Hlasko, perhaps the leading member of this school, is the author of several novels distinguished for their vivid, direct and incisive style. He does not hesitate to describe scenes and conversations full of brutal realism. The lives and loves of his characters are saturated with a despair from which alcohol is the only escape. Despite the protests of the more conservative writers, Hlasko's work has been recognized as an essentially honest artistic portrayal of conditions in contemporary Poland.¹⁶

The new women writers depict the same painful aspects of life, though with a lighter touch. Monika Kotowska writes of love wilting for want of a home (*Saturday*) and ending in disillusionment, bitterness and suffering because of poverty (*A Kiosk at the End of the World*).¹⁷ Maria Paczowska pictures a worker driven by his dismal existence and the promiscuity of the family hovel to seek oblivion in the cafés and liquor (*The Palms*).¹⁸

¹⁵ Leopold Tyrmand: *Zły, Czytelnik* Warsaw, 1955. 2nd edition, 1956.

¹⁶ One of his stories, *The Noose*, introduces the reader into the hallucinatory world of an incurable alcoholic. Another, *The Eighth Day of the Week*, depicts the wretched life of a Warsaw family and the trials of a young couple in search of a place for their secretive love-making, terminating in the young girl breaking away and, in bitterness, giving herself to the first comer.

¹⁷ Monika Kotowska, "Sobota," in *Nowa Kultura*, November 18, 1956; "Kiosk na koncu świata," *idem*, March 10, 1957.

¹⁸ Maria Paczowska, "Palmy," in *Nowa Kultura*, March 10, 1957.

It is not only the subject matter, but the whole tone of the new literature which is striking. There is a pervading atmosphere of deep sadness and melancholy, of nostalgia and of the pessimism of men who have lost their illusions and no longer wish to be carried along by a spurious hope. These writings, with their direct language, their facile and lively style, express genuine sentiments, real states of mind, authentic situations. After the novels and poems of the "rose-colored glasses" or optimism-on-order period, Polish literature seems to have entered a phase of "black writing." A normal reaction to the past, this phase may be expected to last for some time. It may very well contain, however, the seeds of a more happy and truly optimistic flowering of Polish literature.

Political Tendencies

The official view which holds that there are only two ideological trends in Poland, Communist and Catholic, between which floats a formless "mass of people who do not belong to any party," is just as unrealistic with respect to the political scene as it is for the literary life of the country. Actually, the "formless mass" embraces many whose politico-philosophical concepts, though as remote from dialectical materialism as from the spiritualism of the Catholics, are far from "formless." These concepts are often expressed by writers who disclaim kinship with either of the officially recognized trends.

The literary world is still in the process of reorienting itself, and the political situation remains too fluid for the writers to take unequivocal positions. The most one can do is to point to certain characteristic traits rather than identify distinct groups. By and large, those writers who made a name for themselves between the two World Wars—such as Antoni Slonimski, Maria Dąbrowska, Julian Przybos and T. Peiper—and who kept their dignity during the darkest moments of the Stalinist period, remain attached to liberal thought, more or less colored with socialist ideas. They have exercised, albeit discreetly, a strong influence on their colleagues and were instrumental in preparing the ground for greater freedom of expression.

The authors whose production dates from the first years of "People's Poland" are divided into two groups: the Catholics, represented by the weeklies *Kierunki* and *Tygodnik Powszechny*, and the "revisionists." The latter, whom their opponents call "the enraged," embrace those Communist writers and publicists who played an important role in Gomulka's victory. They are opposed to dogmatism, whether Marxist, Leninist or any other. They

advocate a strictly critical approach and place great emphasis on the moral aspect of social and political problems. Led by Leszek Kolakowski, a talented young philosopher and political writer, the "revisionists" include such vigorous writers and journalists as W. Woroszyński, R. Żimand, K. T. Toeplitz and A. Braun. They are not however, a homogeneous group, for there are various shades of opinion among them. Through their courageous writing in *Po Prostu*, and *Nowa Kultura*, as well as in the daily *Życie Warszawy*, they have been exercising a strong influence on Polish intellectual life.

Though instrumental in Gomułka's victory, the "revisionists" now find themselves at odds with his evident reluctance to proceed more boldly and unequivocally along the road of liberalization. Today, the regime's cautiously conservative policies have lost the support of the majority of intellectuals, and few writers of real standing in the literary world are to be found in the

pro-government camp. Those writers who do represent the official viewpoint are, for the most part, party journalists and polemicists such as L. Kruczkowski, J. Putrament and S. Żółkowski, grouped around the weekly *Polityka*.

The youngest Polish writers under the age of 30, who were educated entirely in Communist schools, completely ignore doctrinal political problems in their writings. Given the oppressive sterility of ideological "discussions" in the Stalin era, their aversion to politics can easily be understood.

Continuing Difficulties

It was undoubtedly during and immediately after the October events that Polish writers and intellectuals attained their greatest freedom of speech and expression. Later, the Gomułka regime thought it necessary to apply the brakes and revived, though less rigorously than

TWO VOICES ON POLISH CULTURE

The Bureaucrat . . .

The Eighth Plenum of the Communist Party broke with the distortions and mistakes of the past not for the purpose of weakening the role of the party in any sector of public life, but—on the contrary—in order to restore to the party its real function, not of administrative, but of ideological and political activity in every sector. Can this aim be accomplished by the almost complete withdrawal from a sector as important as culture? . . . If the answer is no—and it certainly is no—then we must initiate a new party policy on this front—a policy that is free of dogmatism and falseness, a policy that is designed to benefit socialism and our national culture. . . .

In literature and the arts, in books and journals, in the cinema and theatre, socialism can find an important ally. But it may also find there a source of additional, and hardly negligible, difficulties. It is the task of the party to see to it that this *difficult* ally become an ally nonetheless. This requires the *existence of the party on the cultural front*.

—Leon Kruczkowski "A Difficult But Indispensable Ally," *Trybuna Ludu*, June 3, 1957.

. . . And the Artist

I cannot imagine what, under our circumstances, could be the meaning of "cultural policy" of the government and party—aside from ensuring the most general conditions for the growth and popularization of culture and art. Representatives of the party may express sympathy or antipathy towards given cultural manifestations, but the concrete and practical implementation of these manifestations lies and must lie in the hand of individual artists and artistic media. Among such media there can also be the editorial boards of newspapers and magazines. They do not fulfill this function, however, if, instead of paying concrete attention to cultural matters, they issue apocalyptic declarations and appeals.

—W. W. in *Nowa Kultura*, June 30, 1957.

before, censorship controls and restrictions applied through the state publishing houses. Marks such as B-27, B-15, or B-1, discreetly appearing in small type at the bottom of a daily or periodical publication, or on the last page of a book, indicate that the text has passed the censorship. Despite the reduced severity of the controls, articles considered undesirable for one reason or another are still being barred from newspapers and periodicals. In the recent case of *Po Prostu*, the whole publication was suspended, and the editor, Elegiusz Lasota, as well as nine other members of the staff, were expelled from the United Workers' [Communist] Party. Some books are also refused publication, though less openly: the publishing houses can always turn down a manuscript that is too daring by resorting to such convenient pretexts as shortage of paper, lack of funds, and so on.

While the regime has re-imposed curbs on freedom of expression in print, it has not actively interfered with the new freedom of thought prevailing within the walls of Polish universities. A number of professors dismissed between 1947 and 1952 because of their political "undesirability" have now been reinstated; others have been given positions in the Academy, in archives, libraries and other cultural institutions. Through its own vigilant "guardians" in the universities, the regime continues to keep a weather-eye on what is being taught, but in general both teachers and students in the institutions of higher learning have enjoyed a substantially greater measure of academic freedom than in the past.

On the other hand, censorship of scholarly and scientific works, particularly those in the field of the humanities, is still very much in existence. In fact, such works must also be passed by the Polish Academy of Science, which has dominated the scientific life of the country since 1952. The control exercised by the Academy of Science remains much more bureaucratic than that of the Writers' Association in the literary field, headed as the latter organization now is by the liberal-minded poet Antoni Slonimski. Some scientists and scholars, though willing to recognize the Academy as a central institute of science, are demanding that it be "rid of politics" and "debureaucratized." Others are seeking to reestablish the former Academy of Letters and Science, an autonomous body founded in Cracow in 1873, with a distinguished record in behalf of Polish science.¹⁹

¹⁹ In 1952 the Communists arbitrarily closed the old Academy, pillaged its records, collections and property, which they turned over to a new Academy (P.A.N.) patterned on the Soviet model and subject to governmental control. On February 16, 1957, some members of the old Academy, meeting in Cracow, declared that it had never ceased to exist since it had not been dissolved, and decided to resume its interrupted scientific ac-

The intellectual rebirth, achieved in Poland despite all opposition, is now again being exposed to bureaucratic pressures. To be sure, these pressures are not cast in the Stalinist mold; yet in some essential respects they bear a startling resemblance to it.

Before Gomulka's victory, the Polish writer was a virtual lackey of the regime. Deprived of any intellectual or artistic freedom, he was expected to serve the party cause by producing crude and blatant propaganda works, written in accord with the principles of "socialist realism." Quite obviously, Gomulka and the ruling party do not desire a return to this sterile and debilitating phase of Polish culture. At the same time, they are opposed to "cultural anarchy," which inevitably fosters tendencies hostile to one-party rule. Consequently, they have now launched in the name of "the building of socialism" and in the ostensible "interest of the masses" a campaign for "a cultural choice" and a "cultural policy." The writer's duty is no longer crudely defined as one of total, unquestioning loyalty to the party, but rather is expounded in terms of his obligation to the "higher good" of the "masses."

Thus, the present Minister of Higher Education, Stefan Zolkiewski, recently expressed himself in favor of "complete liberty for the artist," but added significantly: "The artist must, however, consider that the dissemination of culture at the level of the masses imposes at the outset the standards of the masses."²⁰ Leon Kruczkowski, after his expulsion from the revisionist *Nowa Kultura*, published articles in the party daily expressing similar ideas.²¹ Both writers bemoan the absence of a "cultural policy" and contend that this will lead to the "commercialization of art" and a "lowering of literary standards." The euphemisms they employ hardly disguise their true objective: they are hankering for a partial return to the "good old days" when the writer was an "ally" of the regime, and his literary work a form of political propaganda.

It goes without saying that the new attempts to bind the writer to the party and state meet with vigorous and bitter opposition on the part of the Polish intelligentsia.

But the P.A.N. did not concede defeat. To check the initiative of the Cracow professors, it created a branch in that city, directed by its agents. The battle of the Polish scientists is not yet at an end, and it is impossible at the moment to foresee the outcome. The P.A.N. has the support of the party and the government. But it has a poor reputation and neither the traditions nor the long activity of the Cracow Academy.

²⁰ "Need For a Cultural Choice," *Polityka*, March 27, 1957.

²¹ "A Difficult and Indispensable Ally," *Trybuna Ludu*, June 3, 1957. The two articles have provoked a lively debate. Several writers have replied in *Nowa Kultura* (April 14, June 16, July 7, 1957.)

Mindful of the past, Polish writers feel nothing but aversion toward a "committed literature" in any shape or form. One Polish writer, taking issue with the asseverations of Kruczkowski *et al.*, wrote recently:

I agree that we face the problem of a struggle against yellow literature, pseudo-artistic products and commercialization of art. I agree that the ideological colorlessness of some of our literary and artistic creations is an expression of the profound ideological and esthetic crisis among many of our artists.

However, he added, "it must be understood that this crisis is a reflection of the political crisis from which we are emerging," and that the only solution for it lies in "intelligent patience and comprehension of the autonomous laws of art," and not in an attempt to transplant rules of political struggle into the field of art and literature. The writer continued:

The merits of a work of art can be determined only by public discussion, by a confrontation between the artistic product and its recipient, the judgment of contemporaries and, in the final perspective, the judgment of history. . . . The artistic universe possesses . . . even though it emerges from an objective reality, its own artistic reality and its own autonomous laws. And although an artistic work exists very concretely in our

reality, or in our future, it never for a moment ceases to function according to its own unique laws. Even as a political statement it only exerts an influence on society to the extent that it is a work of art. . . . Politics, then, is not alien to art . . . but it must be subordinate to it.²²

The idea that the esthetic and the political are separate worlds and that if politics is to figure at all in art it must be subordinated to purely esthetic laws is so revolutionary in the Communist universe as to stagger the imagination. These are of course, truisms that were discovered, discussed and accepted by Western thinkers a long time ago (and by Leon Trotsky, be it noted, in his *Literature and the Revolution* thirty years ago), but in a Communist country they constitute a profound and radical break with Stalinist dogma and, as such, are refreshingly new and startling. They constitute proof of the survival of artistic integrity despite totalitarian repression, proof that artists and writers under Communist rule are continuing their struggle for greater freedom of thought and expression.

²² Włodzimierz Sokorski "Not These Fronts" *Nova Kultura*, July 7, 1957.

Strange Alliance:

Piasecki and the Polish Communists

By Alexander Korab

ON OCTOBER 16, 1956, just before the dramatic events of Poland's anti-Stalinist revolution, the attention of the Warsaw public was attracted by an article which appeared in the newspaper *Slowo Powszechne*, organ of the pseudo-Catholic *Pax* movement, under the signature of the one-time Polish Falangist leader and present head of *Pax*, Boleslaw Piasecki. Entitled "Instynkt Panstwowy" (State Instinct), the article was a deviously-phrased but nonetheless transparent attempt to discourage current tenden-

cies pointing toward a drastic reshaping of the political system and leadership of Communist Poland. Especially significant was the author's warning that any "irresponsible" Polish move in this direction would very likely precipitate measures of a military nature "for the brutal realization of the interests of the state." It was perfectly clear that what Piasecki meant to imply was forcible Soviet intervention.

Three days later events began bearing out this threatening "prediction." On October 19, in the midst of the plenary Central Committee session held to install Gomulka as head of a sharply-reoriented "national Communist" regime, the Committee itself was startled

Mr. Korab reports regularly on Polish affairs for *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and other European newspapers. His "Poland: The Search for Independence," appeared in the November-December, 1956, issue of this journal.