

## // A New Evolutionism 1976

// The historic events that we call the Polish October [1956] were a source of hope that the communist system could evolve. This hope was grounded in two visions, two concepts of evolution. I will label them "revisionist" and "neopositivist."

The revisionist concept was based on a specific intraparty perspective. It was never formulated into a political program. It assumed that the system of power could be humanized and democratized and that the official Marxist doctrine was capable of assimilating contemporary arts and social sciences. The revisionists wanted to act within the framework of the Communist party and Marxist doctrine. They wanted to transform "from within" the doctrine and the party in the direction of democratic reform and common sense. In the long term, the actions of the revisionists seek to allow enlightened people with progressive ideas to take over the party. Władysław Bieńkowski, one of the most typical representatives of this group, defined these ideas as enlightened socialist despotism.

Stanisław Stomma, a leading exponent of the second type of evolutionist vision, called his orientation "neopositivist." In that vision, the strategy chosen by Roman Dmowski,<sup>1</sup> at the turn of the century,

1. Roman Dmowski (1864–1939) was the spiritual father and political leader of the National Democratic party (SN-Endecja) and an antagonist of Józef Piłsudski.

EDITOR'S NOTE. The essays in this part were written between 1976 and 1979, when Michnik and others were formulating the plan and vocabulary that led to the radical changes of the years 1980 to 1981.

was to be applied to today's historical and political conditions. Stomma considered himself a Catholic and recognized Catholicism as a permanent component of Polish public life. As head of the Catholic *Znak* group, he wanted to repeat the maneuver of the leader and ideologue of the national democratic camp and, like Dmowski when he joined the tsarist Duma in 1906, Stomma and his colleagues entered the Sejm of the Polish People's Republic in January 1957. The group of Catholic activists around Stomma, who based his thinking on analysis of the geopolitical situation, aimed at creating a political movement that, at the right moment, could lead the Polish nation. For Dmowski, that moment came with the outbreak of World War I; for Stomma, it could possibly come with the decomposition of the Soviet bloc.

From 1956 to 1959, Stomma's ideas had the partial support of the episcopate, owing to the concessions granted the Catholic Church by Władysław Gomułka's ruling group. Stomma's evolutionist concept differed fundamentally from the revisionist idea. First of all, neopositivism took for granted Poland's loyalty to the USSR while at the same time rejecting Marxist doctrine and socialist ideology. Revisionists, by contrast, tended toward anti-Soviet rather than anti-Marxist sentiments, as was the case in Hungary. To use a metaphoric comparison, if one considers the state organization of the Soviet Union as the Church and the Marxist ideological doctrine as the Bible, then revisionism was faithful to the Bible while developing its own interpretations, whereas neopositivism adhered to the Church but with the hope that the Church would sooner or later disappear.

The two concepts shared the conviction that change would come from above. Both the revisionists and neopositivists counted on positive evolution in the party, to be caused by the rational policies of wise leaders, not by incessant public pressure. They both counted on the rational thinking of the communist prince, not on independent institutions that would gain control of the power apparatus. Most probably without making these assumptions, neither the neopositivists nor the revisionists would have been able to conduct their public activities, although, as it turned out, adoption of these assumptions inevitably led to political and intellectual defeat. Both the Church's revisionist critics and the neopositivist opponents of the Bible's principles were defeated.

The revisionist orientation definitely had some positive characteris-

tics alongside its negative ones. We should remember both the intellectual fruits of the revisionism of that era and the political activity of important groups of the intelligentsia who were inspired by revisionism.

The former are obvious: it is enough to recall the outstanding books written by Leszek Kołakowski, Oskar Lange, Edward Lipiński, Maria Hirszowicz, Włodzimierz Brus, Krzysztof Pomian, Bronisław Baczko, and Witold Kula. Revisionism, in its broadest conception, was manifested on the literary front in the works of Kazimierz Brandys, Adam Wazyk, Wiktor Woroszyński, and Jacek Bocheński. All these books, whatever their scientific or artistic value, popularized the ideas of truth and humanism, which were under attack in the official propaganda. The publication of each of these books rapidly turned into a political event.

In addition to positively influencing Polish learning and culture, revisionism inspired political activity among the citizens. By opposing passivity and internal exile, revisionism laid the basis for independent participation in public life. Faith in one's ability to exert influence on the fate of society is an absolute prerequisite for political activity. In the case of the revisionists, this faith depended on a belief that the party could be reformed. We can see clearly today that their faith was based on delusions; still, civic activity and open demonstrations of opposition were its real and positive results in the years from 1956 to 1968. The majority of oppositionist initiatives during that period originated in these circles, not among steadfast and consistent anticommunists. It is important to remember this fact in weighing the responsibility for the Stalinist beliefs of Poland's leftist intelligentsia. It was the revisionist ex-Stalinists who originated and disseminated dissenting points of view among the intelligentsia—points of view which would later help to revive civil life in Poland in the midst of its difficult reality.

And yet revisionism had been tainted at its very source by the belief that the strivings and goals of the "liberal" wing in the party apparatus were identical to the demands of the revisionist intelligentsia. I think that the revisionists' greatest sin lay not in their defeat in the intraparty struggle for power (where they could not win) but in the character of that defeat. It was the defeat of individuals being eliminated from positions of power and influence, not a setback for a broadly based leftist and democratic political platform. The revisionists never created such a platform.

Revisionism was terminated by the events of March 1968. In that month the umbilical cord connecting the revisionist intelligentsia to the party was severed. After March 1968 the idea that a progressive and democratic wing existed in the party's leadership was never to regain wide currency. One of the few people who continued to cherish this political hope was Władysław Bieńkowski,<sup>2</sup> although his formulations were generally considered as protective coloring and not genuine reasoning. In fact, by popularizing his work, Bieńkowski created a completely new style of political activity. Previously, "staying inside the party"—that is, appealing for support only to party members—was an unwritten law of revisionism. Bieńkowski gave new substance to the old formulas; revisionism, conceived by him as a belief in the existence of a wise party leadership, was transformed into merciless and unceasing criticism of current leaders and their stupidity. On the one hand, he propagated ideas clearly hostile to the authorities and a program that was explicitly oppositional; but on the other hand, his program was addressed to the authorities and not to the public. Those of Bieńkowski's readers who were not party members could not learn from his writings how to live, how to act, and what to do to further democratic change.

Also in 1968, the year revisionism died, the demonstrating students chanted: "All Poland is waiting for its Dubček." For a while, the leader of Czech and Slovak communists became the symbol of hope. To this very day, the myth of Dubček and the Prague Spring has played an important role in Poland, and the meaning of this myth is far from simple. It serves to justify both radiant optimism and the darkest pessimism; it provides a defense for attitudes of conformism as well as for gestures of heroism. Why?

In October 1956 the threat of Soviet intervention in Poland made a national hero out of Władysław Gomułka—a man who would walk off the political stage covered with infamy and contempt fourteen years later.<sup>3</sup> His example reveals the basic ambiguity in the whole myth of the heroic party leader. There are reasons to believe that even if there

2. Władysław Bieńkowski wrote several books critical of the communist regime. Formerly he was an activist of the Polish Communist party and a close associate of Władysław Gomułka.

3. Władysław Gomułka is credited with winning in 1956 the trust of Nikita Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders and thus preventing a Soviet invasion.

had been no armed intervention the extreme polarization and open conflict between the progressive wing of the party and the extraparty opposition KAN (club of the Non-party Engagés movement) were bound to surface in Czechoslovakia. It is difficult to predict the future, but I would venture that more than one "Dubčekite" would quickly have been transformed into a tamer of the turbulent opposition.

The myth of the "good" party leader is necessarily ambiguous. Many of those who joined the PUWP defended their decision in the following manner: "This way I will be able to serve the cause of Polish democracy, because in this way alone I will be able to lend effective support to the Polish Dubček when he appears." So far, this service to the cause of democracy has amounted to service to the totalitarian powers. Those who did not join the PUWP and who declared themselves to be totally anticommunist also use the example of Czechoslovakia to justify their decision to shun all oppositional behavior. These people call oppositionists "political troublemakers," and view the fate of Czechoslovakia and Dubček as proof that "there is no way anything is going to change here."

For me, the lesson of Czechoslovakia is that change is possible and that it has its limits. Czechoslovakia is an example of the fragility of totalitarian stability, and also of the desperation and ruthlessness of an empire under threat. The lesson of Czechoslovakia is that evolution has its limits and that it is possible.

The experiences of the neopositivists should also be closely examined. There is no doubt that their actions had the positive effect of helping to create an independent public opinion and of popularizing a way of thinking that differed completely from the obligatory official style of party propaganda.

As I have already mentioned, a starting point for the ideas of the Znak movement in 1956 was geopolitical realism and a rejection of the Poles' supposed predisposition to revolt—a lesson learned from the tragedy of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. In return for backing Władysław Gomułka's new party leadership, the Znak movement received significant concessions from the authorities. Several Clubs of the Catholic Intelligentsia were formed, and *Tygodnik Powszechny*, the *Znak* [Sign] monthly, and the Znak publishing house were reactivated. The Znak movement gained the right to express its own opinions and to formulate

its own model of national culture. One cannot overestimate the importance of the assimilation of contemporary Christian thought by Polish intellectual life. It would be equally difficult to overestimate the role of books written by Stefan Kisielewski, Hanna Malewska, Jerzy Turowicz, Jerzy Zawieyski, Stanisław Stomma, Antoni Gołubiew, or Jacek Woźniakowski. Because of the works by these authors, a broad base for a culture independent of official norms and molds came into existence in Poland. Thanks to speeches made in the Sejm by Stefan Kisielewski, Jerzy Zawieyski, and Stanisław Stomma, young Poles were given an opportunity to become familiar with an ersatz political pluralism. By its very definition, the small group of Znak deputies was destined to fulfill the role of a realistic, pragmatic, and Catholic "opposition to Your Royal-socialist Majesty."

The *Więź* group of the Polish Catholic left occupied a different niche, combining revisionist hopes with the political strategy of Znak's neopositivists. The innovative ideas of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Anna Morawska, and other essayists published in *Więź* brought its editors into conflict with the episcopate; but these ideas also made possible an ideological dialogue with the lay intelligentsia. As paradoxical as this may sound, it was the *Więź* group which enabled the leftist intelligentsia to revise traditional stereotypes of Christianity and the Church.

The support lent to Gomułka by Znak and *Więź* was limited to a specific political objective—to expand the domain of civil liberties. An important component of this goal was normalization of relations between Church and State—for example, by freeing of the [then imprisoned] Primate of Poland, by relinquishing administrative harassment, by legalizing religious instruction, and so on. In these circumstances, the Znak movement confined its activities to loyal, albeit restrained and dignified, support of the authorities' policies. Much like the revisionists, the Catholic politicians believed in having concessions and rights "granted" from above rather than in organizing pressure from below. They sought harmony, not conflict; they cared for order, seeking agreement with the party, and sought to avoid imputations of oppositional attitudes.

Even though the leaders of Znak never committed the fundamental mistake of the revisionists—instead, they always stressed their ideological and political separateness—the history of their movement inspires

critical thoughts about the line of action chosen by the Catholic neopositivists.

A policy of conciliation makes sense only if both sides take it seriously. In relation to communist power, whose political vocabulary lacks the word *conciliation*, such a policy has meaning only if it is conducted from a position of strength. Otherwise, conciliation turns into capitulation, and the policy of conciliation into a march toward political self-annihilation. This is how the Znak group of deputies evolved.

Agreement to a succession of personnel changes in the Znak group of deputies dictated by the authorities led to an increasing conformity of the movement's political line with the official line. Abandonment of its principles led the Znak deputies to lose their authority in the eyes of the people, who, even though they themselves were powerless, respected courage and consistency. The deputies followed a path that proceeded from compromise to loss of credibility. I am using strong language, yet it is difficult to find other words to describe the votes of the Znak deputies (except for those of Stanisław Stomma) in favor of the government amendments to the Constitution of the PPR [1976]—for amendments that were opposed by independent public opinion in Poland.<sup>4</sup> This was the last stage and the final product of their abandonment of principle in exchange for immediate but illusory gains. It is one of the many paradoxes of Polish history that Stanisław Stomma, a politician whose eyes were fixed on the example of Alexander the Great and his policy of *realpolitik*, ended his political career in the Polish People's Republic with a romantic gesture worthy of Rejtan.<sup>5</sup>

The ideas of the revisionists and the neopositivists contained two basic answers to the political dilemmas of the years 1957 to 1964—a period of social normalization and political thaw, increasing prosperity among the people, and relative expansion of civil liberties. Both groups reflected to a great degree the atmosphere of political peace and socio-psychological stability.

4. The protests against the changes in the Constitution were the beginning of the self-organization of the opposition in Poland.

5. Tadeusz Rejtan (1746–1780), a deputy from Nowogródek to the 1773 Diet, tore his clothes and threw himself on the floor begging other envoys to reject the partition of Poland.

The fragility of both revisionism and neopositivism surfaced when social conflict became more acute, in the late sixties and seventies. The student and intellectual movement in March, 1968, the workers' explosion in June, 1976—both spontaneous public manifestations led to the downfall of the revisionists and neopositivists. The uselessness of both abstract formulas adopted from the history of philosophy and the tactical programs that resulted from these formulas was bared in the clash with real social processes. The conflicts between the public and the authorities showed the illusory character of the hopes held by both the revisionists and the neopositivists, and placed them in a situation in which they had to make a dramatic choice. When there is open conflict, one must clearly state a position and declare whose side one is on—that of those being beaten up or that of those doing the beating. Where the conflict is open, consistent revisionism as well as consistent neopositivism both inevitably lead to unity with the powers-that-be and assumption of their point of view. To offer solidarity with striking workers, with students holding a mass meeting, or with protesting intellectuals is to challenge the intraparty strategy of the revisionist and neopositivist policies of compromise. Social solidarity undermines the fundamental component of both strategies: acceptance of the government as the basic point of reference.

The dilemma of nineteenth-century leftist movements—"reform or revolution"—is not the dilemma of the Polish opposition. To believe in overthrowing the dictatorship of the party by revolution and to consciously organize actions in pursuit of this goal is both unrealistic and dangerous. As the political structure of the USSR remains unchanged, it is unrealistic to count on subverting the party in Poland. It is dangerous to plan conspiratorial activities. Given the absence of an authentic political culture or any standards of democratic collective life, the existence of an underground would only worsen these illnesses and change little. Revolutionary theories and conspiratorial practices can only serve the police, making mass hysteria and police provocation more likely.

In my opinion, an unceasing struggle for reform and evolution that seeks an expansion of civil liberties and human rights is the only course East European dissidents can take. The Polish example demonstrates that real concessions can be won by applying steady public pressure on

the government. To draw a parallel with events at the other end of our continent, one could say that the ideas of the Polish democratic opposition resemble the Spanish rather than the Portuguese model. This is based on gradual and piecemeal change, not violent upheaval and forceful destruction of the existing system.

The Soviet military and political presence in Poland is the factor that determines the limits of possible evolution, and this is unlikely to change for some time. The desire to resist has been paralyzed by the specter of Soviet military intervention and Soviet tanks in the streets of Warsaw. The memory of Budapest and Prague has led many people to believe that the Soviet leaders will not allow any changes whatsoever. But on closer examination, the matter seems much more complicated.

Let us recall: Władysław Gomułka owed his enormous popularity in 1956 to his skillful definition of the "Soviet question." Every competent party leader can win obedience and allegiance by cleverly juggling fear and the public's desire for security. Mieczysław Moczar tried to strike the right note, and Franciszek Szlachcic appealed to these popular sentiments with a phrase that made the rounds in Warsaw: "Polish-Soviet friendship should be like good tea: strong, hot, but not too sweet." These two politicians [and security service officials] started their march to power by seeking greater popularity, and though they did not succeed, the Soviet question remains a showy stage for political exploitation.

When one analyzes the complexity of Polish-Soviet relations, it must be noted first of all that the interests of the Soviet political leadership, the Polish political leadership, and the Polish democratic opposition are basically concurrent. For all three parties, a Soviet military intervention in Poland would be a political disaster. For the Polish leadership, such an intervention would signify dethronement or the reduction of its position of leader of a nation of thirty-four million, with limited sovereignty, to that of policeman acting on behalf of the Soviet imperium. The Soviet leaders, however, certainly remember the international repercussions of their interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, as well as the resolve of the Polish workers in December 1970 and June 1976. If we include also the traditional anti-Russian sentiments of the Poles, and their propensity to fight out of sheer desperation (as demonstrated, for instance, in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944), then we

can conclude that a decision by Soviet leaders to intervene militarily in Poland would be equivalent to opting for war with Poland. It would be a war that Poland would lose on the battlefield but that the Soviet Union would lose politically. A victorious Soviet war with Poland would mean a national massacre for the Poles, but for the Soviets it would be a political catastrophe. This is why I believe the Soviet leaders, as well as the leadership of the PUWP, will go far to avoid such a conflict. This reluctance delineates the area of permissible political maneuver; this alignment of interests defines the sphere of possible compromise.

I am not contending that Soviet intervention in Poland is impossible. On the contrary, I believe that it may be unavoidable if the Moscow and Warsaw authorities on the one hand, and the Polish public on the other, lose their common sense and a sense of reality and moderation. The opposition must learn that in Poland change can only come—at least in its first stages—within the framework of the “Brezhnev doctrine.”

The revisionists and neopositivists also believed that evolutionary change should be planned within the parameters of the “Brezhnev doctrine.” I believe that what sets today’s opposition apart from the proponents of those ideas is the belief that a program for evolution ought to be addressed to an independent public, not to totalitarian power. Such a program should give directives to the people on how to behave, not to the powers on how to reform themselves. Nothing instructs the authorities better than pressure from below.

“New evolutionism” is based on faith in the power of the working class, which, with a steady and unyielding stand, has on several occasions forced the government to make spectacular concessions. It is difficult to foresee developments in the working class, but there is no question that the power elite fears this social group most. Pressure from the working classes is a necessary condition for the evolution of public life toward a democracy.

This evolution is not easy to chart; it requires that fear be constantly overcome and that a new political consciousness be developed. Factors that retard this process include the absence of authentic workers’ institutions and of models and traditions for political resistance. The day the first independent organization for workers’ self-defense was founded,

when the strike committees in the shipyards of Szczecin and Gdańsk were formed, a new stage in worker consciousness began. It is hard to tell when and how other, more permanent institutions representing the interests of workers will be created and what form they will have. Will they be workers’ committees following the Spanish model, or independent labor unions, or mutual aid societies? But when such institutions emerge, the vision of a new evolutionism will become more than just a creation of a mind in search of hope.

The role of the Catholic Church is a crucial element in Poland’s situation. The majority of the Polish people feel close to the Church, and many Catholic priests have strong political influence. The evolution of the Polish episcopate’s program of action should be carefully analyzed. This evolution can be observed easily in official Church documents. The Church hierarchy’s consistently and specifically anti-communist position, in which all social and political changes that have taken place since 1945 were rejected, has been evolving into a more broadly antitotalitarian stance. Jeremiads against “godless ones” have given way to documents quoting the principles of the Declaration of Human Rights; in pastoral letters, Polish bishops have been defending the right to truth and standing up for human freedom and dignity. Most important, they have been defending the civil liberties of the working people, and particularly their right to strike and to form independent labor unions.

The Catholic Church, which consistently resists pressure from the government and defends Christian principles as well as the principles of the Declaration of Human Rights, has necessarily become a place where attitudes of nonconformity and dignity among the people can mingle. It is therefore a key source of encouragement for those who seek to broaden civil liberties.

The new evolutionism aims at gradual and slow change. But this does not mean that the movement for change will always be peaceful—that it will not require sacrifices and casualties. In the past, this movement partially consisted of mass actions by workers and students—and this may continue into the future. Such actions are usually followed by disputes in the power elite. Therefore, we should ask whether forces within the party and its leadership exist which are capable of adopting

a program of reform, and whether revisionism might reappear within the party. Can the democratic opposition find an ally in one of the party coteries?

Revisionism is a movement of intraparty renewal which came into being in the fifties and is now an outdated phenomenon. It is difficult to imagine a movement that would use Marxist-Leninist doctrine, or even any of its elements, to enforce reforms in Poland today, since this doctrine is a dead creature, an empty gesture, an official ritual. It no longer stimulates discussion or fires up emotions. It is incapable of causing internal tension and division.

I believe nevertheless that change within the party is inevitable. Among the hundreds of thousands of party members who have no interest whatsoever in dialectical materialism, there are many for whom membership in the PUP is simply a necessary precondition for participation in public life. Among them are many believers in *realpolitik*, pragmatism and economic reform. Their political beliefs and decisions are shaped by the pressure of public opinion and by forces within the national economy. Pragmatism causes these people to let narrow ideological criteria be overridden by the need for the development of education, stronger scientific-technical cooperation with capitalist countries, and increased competition. This obviously does not mean that these individuals are striving for democracy. A party "pragmatist" has no reason to aim for democratic change—for pluralism and authentic self-government. But he does have reason to understand the effectiveness of compromising with forces favoring plurality instead of brutally suppressing them. For he knows very well that repression solves nothing and instead prepares the ground for the next explosion of social discontent, the consequences of which are impossible to foresee.

The party pragmatist will therefore do his best to avoid such situations. This is why he can be a partner of the democratic opposition, with whom it will be possible to reach a political compromise. But he will never be a political ally. I think that this distinction is important. If the people of the democratic opposition fail to distinguish the various trends that exist within the power apparatus, I believe they may ignore reality, become fanatical maximalists, and go astray into political adventurism. Identifying their own goals with those of the pragmatic wing of the party, however, could lead them to repeat the mistakes of the

revisionists, to form false alliances and lose their ideological identity. The people of the democratic opposition should not place excessive hope in "reasonable" party leaders, or give in to arguments that "one should not make things more difficult for the current party leadership because the next one may be worse." The democratic opposition must formulate its own political goals and only then, with those goals in hand, reach political compromises. Take, for example, a situation in which the workers revolt and the government declares that it wants to "consult with the working class" instead of organizing a bloody massacre. The people of the democratic opposition should treat this reaction neither as a sufficient concession ("but they are not shooting") nor as a meaningless fiction. On the contrary, the democratic opposition must be constantly and incessantly visible in public life, must create political facts by organizing mass actions, must formulate alternative programs. Everything else is an illusion.

The intelligentsia's duty is to formulate alternative programs and defend the basic principles. More precisely, I refer to those small groups of intellectuals who believe in continuing the traditions of the "insubordinate" intelligentsia of the early 1900s—the traditions of writers such as Stanisław Brzozowski, Stanisław Wyspiański, Stefan Żeromski, and Zofia Nałkowska. I feel solidarity with those traditions and those people, although I am the last person to overestimate the importance of their actions. But those voices, albeit weak and sporadic, are nonetheless authentic: they form an independent public opinion, with nonconformist attitudes and oppositional thought. This course is being followed by people from various traditions and social strata: former revisionists (including the author of this article), former neopositivists, and those who became ideologically aware after the events of 1968.

The direction the ideological thinking of the young generation will take—as well as the drift of political change in Poland and in other countries of Eastern Europe—will depend on the convergence of these groups with the activities of the working class. When a free press and independent organizations do not exist, the moral and political responsibility of these groups is much greater than at any other time. The people of the opposition should renounce material profit and official esteem in order to fulfill this exceptional responsibility, so that we can expect the truth from them.

In searching for truth, or, to quote Leszek Kolakowski, "by living in dignity," opposition intellectuals are striving not so much for a better tomorrow as for a better today. Every act of defiance helps us build the framework of democratic socialism, which should not be merely or primarily a legal institutional structure but a real, day-to-day community of free people.

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