

Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce (Communism, Legitimation, Nationalism. Nationalistic Legitimation of Communist Power in Poland)*, Warszawa 2001, Wydawnictwo TRIO and Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 426 pp.

This book by Marcin Zaremba, a graduate of Warsaw University, is, in my opinion, the most interesting and the most solid work of the "W krainie PRL" (In the Land of the Polish People's Republic) series which was initiated by Professor Marcin Kula a few years ago and has been appearing ever since with great consistency and success. Its publisher is the TRIO publishing house. The author of this

excellent work which substantially enriches our knowledge of Poland's post-war history is, despite his young age (b. 1966), an outstanding full-fledged researcher. A splendid, brilliant career is wide open to him.

The work in question consists of two parts. The first, entitled *Legitimation — Theoretical Context*, is a kind of introduction which attests to the author's great erudition not only in historical literature but also in literature dealing with sociology and political science. Though such an introduction was undoubtedly needed, I think that its size should have been reduced for as it is, it accounts for almost a quarter of the book. The second, main part of the book is entitled *Nationalistic Legitimation in People's Poland*. The author has adopted a chronological approach; the successive chapters concern the years 1942–1944, 1945–1947, 1948–1955, 1956, 1957–1970 and 1971–1979. He discusses the end of the Polish People's Republic in the *Epilogue*, instead of dealing with it in a separate chapter equal in size to the previous ones.

Let me start my polemical remarks with the very title of the book or, to be more exact, with the terms "nationalism" and "nationalistic legitimation". I realise that the author has used these words in the sense they have in literature published in English, that is, without the pejorative undertone they so clearly have in the Polish language. However, since nationalism has pejorative connotations in Poland while the connotations of patriotism are, as a rule, positive, I wonder if the title *Patriotic (National) Phraseology in the Legitimation of Communist Power in Poland* would not have been more apposite.

As I said above, the first chapter of the book covers the years 1942–1944. It is a kind of introduction discussing (perhaps too concisely) the wartime opinions of communists, both those active in occupied Poland and those staying in the USSR. My complaint is that the author has ignored the 1939–1941 period of Soviet occupation in Poland's eastern territories, in particular the propaganda activity launched there in the summer of 1940 when after the defeat of France, the Poles began to be viewed as political allies in a probable struggle against the Nazi Reich. It is from this point of view that one should consider the celebrations of the 85th anniversary of Adam Mickiewicz's death, organised in November 1940. It would also have been worth while to analyse the contents of "Nowe Widnokreği".

I do not think it was the right decision to devote only a short epilogue (pp. 383–395) to the years 1980–1989. In my opinion it was then that we witnessed the last attempt, doomed from the start, to legitimate power by patriotic phraseology. It is enough to analyse the publications on contemporary history which, despite censorship, were allowed to appear in official circulation in those years. Let me quote an example from my own experience. In the volume *Stefan Rowecki in Accounts*, published in 1988 under my editorship, we were allowed not only to repeatedly quote Tadeusz Żenczykowski but also to refer to the periodical "Na Antenie" which contained texts of the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe. It can be said that the persons then in power in Poland engaged in a "patriotic contest" with the opposition, with underground publications and the Polish emigration, a contest which they were doomed to lose for all the trump cards were in the hands of their adversaries.

What was important was that the attempts to legitimate communist power in Poland were synchronised with the state anti-German propaganda which kept warning people of West German revisionism; they corresponded with Polish society's feelings after the ordeal of the war and occupation. How significant is the statement made by Jan Szydłak in 1970, quoted by Mieczysław Rakowski in his diaries: "for twenty years we kept integrating the nation by fear of the Germans ... The German card is worn-out, it can no longer be used. What shall we now use to integrate the nation?" (p. 305). As far as the German question is concerned, Zaremba seems not to be paying enough attention to the results of the establishment of the German Democratic Republic and the Zgorzelec Treaty and, on the other hand, to the consequences of the Treaty of December 7, 1970. Let me recall that after 1949 the Chief Commission for the Investigation of German

Crimes in Poland was renamed Chief Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes; the term "German occupation" practically disappeared in publications and it is the Nazis and not the Germans who still figure as the perpetrators of crime on the plaques commemorating places of executions.

The author is fully right when he says: "whenever the system was shaken by a crisis, the rulers sought refuge in nationalistic argumentation and made legitimization efforts in order to establish a symbolic communion with society, a communion the main axis of which was the concept of «nation»" (p. 38). Very impressive in this context are Zaremba's remarks on the "little thaw" in 1951 during the Korean war (pp. 192 ff.). At a meeting on December 6, 1951, the Secretariat of the Political Bureau discussed the purposefulness of reconstructing the Warsaw Castle as the seat of the supreme authorities of People's Poland (p. 213). While the rulers tried to establish dialogue with the nation by the liberalisation of censorship and by patriotic phraseology, the people ruled by them always seized the authorities' concessions as an opportunity to revive elements of national tradition which were rejected or combated by the communists. As an example let me recall the publications on the Home Army brought out in Poland in 1956–1957, 1967–1969 and after 1981. I have in mind not only books but also articles in "Stolica", "Wrocławski Tygodnik Katolików" and "Odra".

The very formulation of the title indicates that anti-Semitic opinions expressed privately by communist leaders and activists and views contained in official state propaganda will be a theme repeatedly raised by the author. This is indeed the case. Information on this subject can be found in almost every chapter though, of course, Zaremba focuses on this question in discussing what is known as "the March events" of 1968. He has his own opinion on this subject and he convincingly demystifies the role of Mieczysław Moczar and the "partisans", and emphasises that Gomulka connived at those events and even partly approved of them. In another place he quotes, after Andrzej Werblan, Gomulka's letter to Stalin of December 1948 (p. 186). Very significant are also the anti-Semitic statements made by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956–1957 and 1962 (pp. 228, 267), the discussion on the role of "comrades of Jewish origin", held by the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) leaders on May 2, 1956 (pp. 230–238) and Stanisław Kania's conviction that the oppositionists' hunger strike in St. Martin's church in 1977 was the work of Jews (p. 379). Zaremba is right when he frames the hypothesis that "the Jews' inclination for emigration may have suited the party authorities" (p. 254), but he has only the years 1954–1956 in mind while I think that the same can be said about the exodus after the Kielce pogrom of 1946. This can be clearly seen in Ichhak Cukierman's reminiscences *Overabundant Memory*.

Let me pass on to more detailed remarks. The author is, of course, right when he says "Nothing delegitimizes the claimants to power more than suspicion of treason" (p. 63). Zaremba states this when he recalls "the second-world-war slogan «Paid flunkeys of Russia» directed against the PPR, that is, the communists". In another place (p. 122) he says: "the unscrupulous struggle for rule over men's souls in the country was the reason why accusations of national treason were frequent. Inscriptions «PPR — Paid Flunkeys of Russia» (the Polish word for "flunkeys" begins with "p") could be seen on street walls". It is difficult to determine who invented this slogan and when. However, thanks to Lucjan Dobroszycki's studies it is known that in the spring of 1944 the Hauptabteilung Propaganda in the General Gouvernement distributed yellow labels with this text in Polish among its local branches. The aim was to discredit communists in the eyes of Polish society<sup>1</sup>.

On p. 130 Zaremba alludes to "the constantly repeated propaganda slogan «The Home Army is standing with arms at their feet»" (in Polish this means is on

<sup>1</sup> Cf. L. Dobroszycki, *Die legale polnische Presse im Generalgouvernement 1939–1945*, München 1977, pp. 202, 267.

the alert, is ready for battle). It is true that the Polish Workers' Party used it in its propaganda, but the author should have discussed this question in more detail in one of the preceding chapters, drawing attention to both the insurrectionary plans of the *ZWZ-AK* (Union of Armed Struggle — Home Army) and to the unfortunate ambiguous title of the article published in "Biuletyn Informacyjny" on 11.3.1943.

The author is right when he says (p. 168) "in addition to launching a cult of heroes of national uprising and appointing themselves as the only genuine priests of this cult, the ruling communists began to create their own pantheon of heroes of 'revolutionary descent' ... Marian Buczek and Karol Świerczewski were then put on a pedestal". I regret that Zaremba has not dealt more penetratingly with the communist national pedestal. He could have made use of the results of sociological research presented in Eugeniusz Olczyk's book *The Second World War in the Consciousness of Contemporary Poles*. It turns out that the communists' ideological indoctrination was almost a full success. In a national poll conducted in 1973, the following ten Poles were considered to have rendered Poland the greatest services during World War II (in the order they were ranked): Karol Świerczewski, Władysław Sikorski, Michał Rola-Żymierski, Zygmunt Berling, Bolesław Bierut, Henryk Sucharski, Wanda Wasilewska, Stefan Starzyński, Aleksander Zawadzki and Marcei Nowotko. Colonel Olczyk, who discussed the results of the poll, pointed out with satisfaction that of 5,922 respondents only 32 voted for Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski and 29 for Stefan Rowecki.

I was pleased to see that the author quotes large fragments of the speech made by Władysław Gomułka at a meeting with representatives of the youth of Poland on October 29, 1956, a speech which concerned the Katyń question (p. 253). Adam Rapacki is said to have been a witness when in the autumn of 1956 Nikita Khrushchev proposed to Gomułka to "settle the problem". In view of the anti-Soviet moods in Poland one can understand that "Comrade Wiesław" was afraid that this would only add fuel to the flames. Rapacki's account was not put down. But is it not possible to get some additional account that would confirm the Soviet leader's proposal?

In the chapter dealing with Poland under Edward Gierek the author says: "In the search for roots, the Stalinist period was referred to"; Zaremba even speaks of "a partial rehabilitation of Stalinism". I cannot agree with this interpretation even though flowers were laid on Bolesław Bierut's grave on March 12, 1971, the fifteenth anniversary of his death. Yet, there is a certain similarity between the years 1949–1955 and the 1970–1979 period. In my opinion what was similar was the deliberate attempt to stop pondering over the past and concentrate on the present. In this sense Gierek's slogan to build a New Poland (which was to become a new Japan) resembled the mirages of Poland's capital in Bierut's album *The Six-Year Plan for the Reconstruction of Warsaw*.

It must have been due to hasty correction that Professor Jarema Maciszewski's first name is twice given as Jerzy, that Ryszard Halaba appears as Halba and Tadeusz Sierocki as Sieradzki (pp. 173, 182). What I cannot understand is that the author did not think it proper to thank the persons to whom he owes his scholarly career.

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