

ESSAIS

Acta Poloniae Historica
28, 1973

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NATIVE CULTURE AND WESTERN CIVILIZATION

(Essay from the History of Polish Social Thought of the Years 1764 - 1863)

I

Widely known is the dispute between occidentalists (*zapadniki*) and Slavophiles in Russia which grew into one of the major conflicts in the Russian social thought of the 19th century. It concerned a question by no means trivial: whether the Russian society advances (or: should advance) along the same road of development as capitalist Western Europe — only with a considerable delay; or whether, on the contrary, that society, basing itself on ancient Slav communal institutions, realizes and will realize an entirely different and incomparable model of civilization.

It is easy to notice that similar discussions arose in the 19th or 20th centuries in all the countries where the expansion of Western industrial civilization reached, bringing along both the enticement of a more prosperous and a more dynamic life, and a threat to the specific features of the local tribal or national culture. The response to this challenge is therefore, as a rule, of a defensive character; there exist, however, at least two strategies of defence. One consists in rejecting the challenge and the temptation of modernization: its method is the tendency to cultural isolation and economic autarchy, its ideology is ethnocentrism, the glorification of one's own native tradition, xenophobia, struggle against cosmopolitanism. The other consists in accepting the challenge and resolves itself into the dilemma: how to assimilate the attractive patterns of industrial civilization, not allowing at the same time an annihilation of the originality of one's own culture? and how to learn from foreigners without losing the sense of one's own value?

In this essay we propose to investigate what forms the strife between these two attitudes assumed in the Polish thought and culture from the time of the partitions until the Uprising of 1863.

It must be said at the very outset, however, that — unlike in Russia — this strife did not determine in Poland the main line of ideological divisions and was often overshadowed by controversies which in the consciousness of the Polish people had superior importance. After all, in Poland throughout the 19th century the paramount question was: how to go about to secure the nation's survival and to regain independence? Depending on the attitude in this problem, we divide Polish ideas and programmes into the camp of conciliation, the camp of organic work and the camp of underground and insurgent struggle. The other major problem concerned the attitude towards social issues, especially towards the most swollen issue of enfranchisement of peasants and of doing away with the supremacy of the landed gentry. Depending on the attitude in this question, we distinguish the conservative, the liberal and the revolutionary-democratic currents which partly coincide with the former divisions but are by no means identical with them. In the Polish thought a considerable role was also played by the disputes and struggles among philosophical and literary schools (romanticism, positivism, Catholic orthodoxy, etc.). Naturally therefore, the debate over the future road of Poland's economic development and over the relation of her native culture to the capitalist civilization of the West took place, as it were, in the shadow of those momentous conflicts and the Polish intelligentsia did not become more deeply involved in that discussion until the 1870s. No wonder, therefore, that the historical science has not so far devoted much attention to this problem, either; until the present day, there does not exist any synthetical work on this subject.

We shall endeavour to demonstrate, however, that the attitude of various Polish authors and of various ideological currents towards the West, the industrial revolution and foreign influence and, on the other hand, their estimation of Poland's own cultural tradition, were by no means a trivial matter. We even believe that without analyzing those attitudes it is not possible to understand the transformations in the social consciousness of the Polish people and even certain complexes that have burdened this consciousness until our times.

Before passing to specific matters, we must yet point to certain peculiar features of the situation of the Polish nation in the postpartition period, namely to those circumstances which accounted for the fact that the dialogue between "occidentalism" and ethnical traditionalism had a different sense in Poland and for instance in Russia.

If — as we have already said — the economically underdeveloped countries face, one after another, a threat to their spiritual autonomy from the levelling expansion of the industrial civilization, it must be remembered that the Polish people after losing independent statehood, incomparably more strongly felt another menace: the danger of denationalization by the partitioning Powers. In overseas colonies, political domination went hand in hand with economic domination and civilizational pressure: it all came from the Western metropolises. In Poland, this was to a certain extent the case only in the Prussian-occupied part of the country: the higher level of German economic development and the higher material and educational standards made it possible for the partitioning Power to use, in its policy of Germanization, the hypocritical ideology of “civilizing mission”. In the Austrian-occupied part of Poland, there was less ground for that claim, and in the Russian part the claim was altogether nonexistent.

Obviously, to a nation with a many centuries historical tradition which has lost independent statehood and has been partitioned among three alien political organisms, the preservation of its own language, customs, literature and art is not a self-evident attribute of existence but requires active defence on its part. The more fiercely the partitioners were destroying the remnants of Poland’s political autonomy and the institutions of public life, the more did Poland’s own tradition and culture become the last refuge of national autonomy and, consequently, a distinguished object of cult, focussing the emotional energies of the enlightened classes. It was precisely that cultural and spiritual aspect of national existence that was above all the content of the notion of “nationality” which became prevalent in Polish literature after 1815. Particularly significant of Poland’s situation, however, was the fact that that “nationality” had to be defended against two dangers at the same time: against the foreign influence and against the reprisals of the partitioning Powers. In Poland the threat of “foreignism” always and invariably meant West-orientated snobbery. “Foreignism” — the object of innumerable pamphlets, comedies and satires — always meant affecting French, English or German ways, almost never Oriental or Russian influence. This was so not because the latter was completely absent; the situation in Poland developed in such a way that if one saw a menace from the West — it was in the invasion of heterogeneous civilizational patterns (philosophical doctrines, commercialization of life, fashions, licentiousness, etc.), if from the East — then above all in physical force. Germany alone combined both the dangers in the eyes of the Poles. That

complex situation determined the dual defensive function of the Polish traditionalism and ethnocentrism in the time of enslavement.

However, the above-described situation was intertwined with another and no less complex phenomenon springing from the fact that in the Polish territories two different supra-national communities had been overlapping: the Latin and the Slav community. Poland belonged to the former one by her religion, alphabet, literature and art, her school and universities, the elements of her political system, political and legal culture, the centuries-long reception of Western humanism, by her participation in the intellectual achievements of Europe. She was linked with the Slav community by cognation of language, by many similarities in the economic and social structure of Europe's East and, from the beginnings of the 18th century, also by ever closer ties of political dependence.

Subjectively, the ties with the Western world — the Romance one above all — had always been felt here incomparably more strongly than the affiliation to the family of Slavs. That feeling intensified even more at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries because in all their history the Poles never had so strong an awareness of their destinies being connected with France as at the time of the Napoleonic epos. From that time on, all Polish efforts at regaining independence were always connected with hopes for French aid: military, diplomatic or at least moral.

On the other hand, however, it was precisely in the early part of the 19th century that the feeling of community of the Slav peoples began to revive rather intensely in Poland. It is true that it was a largely "artificial" process: it was promoted by poets, professional or amateur linguists, collectors of "Slav antiquities", historians — one could hardly point, on the other hand, to phenomena occurring in the broader sphere of social consciousness and corresponding with that current. All the same, in the first half of the 19th century the influence of that current on the Polish ideological life proved rather material. One wrote — and quite much, at that — about "Slav philosophy", "the Slav spirit", even about "Slav nationality". "Slavonic literature" was the subject of Adam Mickiewicz's lectures at the Collège de France in the years 1841 - 1844.

That idealized, patriarchal and agricultural, deeply feeling Slav world was the spiritual land that one opposed to the West absorbed with material interests, and torn by social struggles. It would be erroneous, however, to consider that current as an exact equivalent of Russian Slavophilism. In the eyes of the Slavophiles, Poland was in fact "a traitor of the Slav world" as the most latinized country within that world and,

beside Bohemia, the most yielding to Western influence. On the other hand, according to a view widely spread in Poland, a genuine Slav idea could not originate and develop in Russia living for centuries under despotic rule and subjected to Asiatic influence: it was Poland who had the fullest right and title to preserve and express that idea. Those two attitudes could hardly be brought close together; that was why an understanding between the Polish and the Russian exponents of the Slav idea proved well-nigh impossible, in spite of certain common points in their opinions, e.g. the criticism of bourgeois civilization.

The Polish concept of an ideal community of Slav peoples could neither leave out of account the conflict between the aspirations for independence and the tsarist thirst for conquest, nor obliterate the cultural dividing line which had become quite deeply rooted in the social consciousness of both the Russians and the Poles. However, it undoubtedly contributed — and that was its great merit — to abate the feeling of strangeness and to assuage the national antagonism; this can best be seen in the works of Mickiewicz.

It follows from the above observations that in Poland the conflict between the idea of belonging to the Western community and the idea of belonging to the Slav community, was very relative and not acute at all. The Slav idea easily turned in Poland into the doctrine of “bridge”: according to that concept, the Polish nation was called upon to introduce into the Western civilization the spiritual values of the Slav world and, at the same time, to be in that world the outpost of “Western education” and of ideas of freedom, a propagator of the achievements of modern civilization. It was in that dual role that the historical mission of the Polish nation was to consist.

The conflict between native traditionalism and occidentalism in Poland was not always decided and distinct, either. These two attitudes — although usually rooted in a broader philosophical and social outlook — performed clearly utilitarian functions. To Polish thinkers and writers of all schools and currents, the matter of paramount importance was, as has already been said, the preservation of the identity of the nation that had been erased from the map of Europe. Instrumental in the defence of that identity against the levelling action of Western “foreignism” and of capitalist progress, was the cult of native tradition with the Slav idea added to it. Instrumental in the defence of national identity against the destructive effects of the partitions was the same cult of native tradition but with the occidental idea added to it. The two combinations performed important psychotherapeutic functions, they compensated for the humiliations the Polish nation suffered both from

the partitioners and from the West. In Poland there arose various systems of thought — Messianism above all — the task of which was, among other things or even first of all, to make the Poles believe that they were a chosen people, a nation called upon (by God or by History) for special destinies; that, because of their Western culture and their love of freedom, they were the best nation within the Slav world and, because of their Slav features, i.e. their soulfulness, they were the best nation among the countries of the West. This was accompanied by the sacralization of their own history, both past and present. Such ideological phenomena are encountered, as it is well known, in nearly all peoples and tribes conquered and forcibly subjugated by alien powers or subjected to violent changes of social structure and suffering acute moral or economic deprivation. The saving of the sense of one's own importance and value, threatened by the progress of events seems in general one of the most significant functions of all ideologies, both ethnical and class ones.

It is not their only function, however. While laying so much emphasis on processes in the sphere of social psychology, let us not forget the programme-building function of ideologies. In Poland, not only openly political doctrines but also the great schools of thought such as romanticism or positivism, shaped the human motivations of rational action, mobilized the social energy and directed it towards some goals or other, whether closer or more distant, realistic or utopian. Literature and philosophy acted to a certain extent as substitutes for public institutions, political parties, civic organizations — since all those were missing, at least after the defeat of the Uprising of 1830 - 1831. When investigating the attitudes towards Poland's own culture and towards the Western civilization, we cannot leave out the practical consequences of those attitudes. We therefore pose the question what hierarchy of goals and values those currents and schools propagated in the Polish society and in what direction they steered the activities of people. It turns out at once that in that practical sphere, in the sphere of everyday patterns and ideals, the conflict between the Polish occidentalism and traditionalism (or "ethnocentrism") appears much more distinctly than on the purely intellectual plane. It appears so distinctly in fact that we can adopt the kind of civilizational option and the vision of the future Polish landscape as the defining elements of the typological notions we are using here.

Thus, when speaking of the 19th-century Polish occidentalism, we shall mean the view that Western urban and industrial civilization constitutes a new and higher level of economic and social development, serving as a measure and as a norm; that the advantages and values of

this civilization have a universal importance and will radiate to ever more distant countries; that the Poles—without relinquishing their aspirations for independence—must at the same time set before themselves the task of learning from the West, that they must acquire the scientific and technological achievements of the West, and join the universal race of economic modernization.

While speaking of the 19th-century Polish traditionalism or ethnocentrism, we shall mean the view that specific tribal features—precisely because they are specific and thereby determining the individual character of the nation—constitute a superior and autonomous value; that basic spiritual values of Polish and Slav life are related to the countryside, agriculture and patriarchal social relations as well as to the virtues of the citizen-soldier; finally, that vested in those tribal features is the power to dispense sacramental confirmation to political and social programmes when the latter are proved to be in conformity with the “innate” tribal idea or with the “national spirit.”

II

The origins of the so-conceived occidentalism date back to the Age of Enlightenment. After a long period of cultural stagnation and of decline of education under the reign of Augustus II and Augustus III, towards the middle of the 18th century the more enlightened Poles began to rediscover Europe; that was accompanied by the realization of Poland's retardation and backwardness in nearly all fields. Among the first who wrote it forcibly and without sparing the gentry's megalomania, was the great reformer of the Polish school system, Father Stanisław Konarski. In his renowned work *O skutecznym rad sposobie* (*A Way to Effective Counsels*, 1760 - 1763) and in his minor writings, he advocated the view on the similar nature of all nations, and appealed to his compatriots to follow the example of England and other Western countries both in administration, in economy, in strengthening the country's defences and in improving education.

The reformatory ideas of Stanislaus-Augustus and of his closest collaborators were motivated by the aspiration to restore to Poland the character of the civilized and European State which she had been as late as the beginnings of the 17th century. The last King of Poland (1764 - 1795), a true man of the Age of Enlightenment, dreamed of rousing the country from cultural and economic stagnation, he wanted to initiate, to use his own words “a new creation of the Polish world.” The journal “Monitor”, established on the King's inspiration and modelled after the English “Spectator,” became a tribune of those ideas; it stressed again

and again how greatly inferior in every respect Poland was to England or the Netherlands, yet that statement of fact was accompanied by the optimistic and didactic conclusion that "our nation does not lack the opportunity to catch up with, or even to overtake those whom it only envies now."¹ That programme of learning and imitating, also promoted by several leading publicists of the Polish Enlightenment (Józef Wybicki and others) was not easily brought home to the conservative opinion of the gentry. Relatively less controversial were the demands for the economic lifting of the country but the programme of modernization of the political system met with extremely sturdy resistance of the magnates and the mass of the gentry, persistently convinced that the Polish republicanism of the gentry was the world's greatest political discovery. It ended, as is well known, in the gentry's Confederation of Bar and, as its consequence, the armed intervention of Russia, a partisan war and the first partition of the country (1772). Those events greatly reduced the impetus of the reformatory activity from above. There had begun, none the less, a thorough work aimed at the secularization and modernization of school system (the Commission of National Education) which resulted in the education of a new generation of the gentry, more open to progressive ideas.

The programme of a reform of the State and of Europeanization gathered new vigour in the late 1780s but again it clashed with the recurring wave of "sarmatism," i.e. the traditional gentry customs and national megalomania. The preservation of those customs — that is of the Polish costume, of the severe principles of upbringing at home, of patriarchalism, xenophobia and neophobia, in short — of the whole old ethical code of the gentry — passed for a sign of patriotism while the "fads" in the field of philosophy, fashions or politics arriving from the West became the object of innumerable satires scoffing at "foreignism." Under such circumstances, the leading champions of the reform camp adopted the tactics of a peculiar compromise: while struggling consistently for the modernization of the political system, for the emancipation of the urban middle class, for fiscal and military reforms, in secondary matters of customs and in the manner of motivating their reformatory postulates, they were wooing the gentry's opinion and even took over some of the latter's axioms themselves. Thus for instance Stanisław Staszic in his *Przestrogi dla Polski* (*Warnings to Poland*, 1791) exclaimed with dramatic emphasis that Poland lagged by three centuries behind Europe but when

¹ "Monitor" 1766 — quoted after: J. Michalski, *Sarmatyzm a europeizacja Polski w XVIII wieku* [*Sarmatism and the Europeanization of Poland in the 18th Century*] — now printing.

tracing out the programme of a reform of the State, he readily referred to the idealized old Polish tradition and condemned cosmopolitanism in education.

The public opinion of the time of the Four Years' Sejm (1788 - 1792) showed particularly impassioned interest for political and legal problems; it was also significant, however, that it was precisely in those last years of Poland's independence that the first Polish programme of economic development and industrialization took shape; it was elaborated by such people as the already mentioned publicist and jurist Józef Wybicki, the journalist Piotr Świtkowski, the economist Ferdynand Nax, the very dynamic nobleman-capitalist and entrepreneur Jacek Jezierski, and Stanisław Staszic himself. Each of them wrote and acted on his own, independently of the others, and they differed considerably among themselves in the degree of social radicalism. Yet they all had in common two basic assumptions: firstly, they all showed a vivid interest in the progress of the English industrial revolution; secondly, they were all aware of the fact that if the entire Polish economy continued to be based on the grain farm and on the exportation of agricultural products, it would be threatened with a permanent stagnation and the gap between Poland and the West would grow ever deeper. Those authors also came out against "foreignism;" they did so, however, no longer in the name of a sentimental defence of the traditional way of life but in order to stimulate and protect the domestic industrial production. They wanted to import to Poland not the foreign goods but foreign production patterns and technology. They demanded of the King and the Sejm a vigorous action for the promotion of manufactories, the participation of the State in the accumulation of capital, the building of roads and canals, the establishment of a national bank and of industrial schools, finally — a system of customs protection; they readily cited examples of the achievements of Prussian cameralism. The forthcoming definitive fall of the Polish-Lithuanian State (1795) precluded any practical success of this programme; yet it initiated a new civilizational orientation.

However, already in the critical years 1791 - 1794, and even more so after the last partition, the situation of Polish occidentalism became more complex because referring to Europe lost its former relatively univocal sense. Western models were referred to by the radical Left, the so-called Polish Jacobins, who were convinced that the French Revolution was but a prologue to the overthrow of feudalism, the emancipation of the working masses and a radical change of the social structure all over Europe. Also referring to Western models were liberals, with their eyes fixed on the ideals of constitutionalism and orderly parliamentarism and who studied

eagerly the writings of Benjamin Constant and of Jeremy Bentham. Finally, referring to Western, especially English, patterns were conservatives who in the British system of government and jurisdiction, in its traditional institutions with the House of Lords at the top, saw the most perfect example to follow. The problem of the road of economic development naturally receded into the background in these discussions.

Under these circumstances, it is not always easy to unravel tangled-up threads and to distinguish the ideologically different sense of apparently similar verbal formulations. There were, however, certain moments and certain problems conducive to a more distinct polarization of positions.

Such moments were: the entry of the Napoleonic army in Warsaw, the promulgation of the Constitution of the Duchy of Warsaw, then the famous December Decree (1807) that regulated the agrarian relations, and the introduction of the Civil Code. The basic social contents of these legal acts resolved itself into the abolition of serfdom, the proclamation of formal equality before the law, the reduction of differences between the noble and the burghers' estates to mere prestige ornaments — all this, however, with ensuring the landed gentry the full right of ownership of peasant land and with political rights being based on property census. The attitude towards that "French" legislation revealed at once how contrasting the approach of liberals on the one hand and of the conservatives on the other was to the essence of national and social bonds. The conservatives, although the material interests of their class had not been affected, saw in the Napoleonic laws the destruction of the hierarchical and patriarchal social structure, based — in their opinion, at least — on the personal links and mutual services of the landlord and the peasant. They also saw the social status and authority of "old families" threatened by "new people," arrivistes and upstarts. To their mind, it all led to some total destruction of the social organism and to a disintegration of the nation. The liberals, on the contrary, accepted the new legislation with more than passing enthusiasm: they believed that the nation was only just arising under their eyes because the national bond cannot be but a relationship of free and equal men. They were not afraid of revolutionary egalitarianism because the ensuring the possessory titles constituted a sufficient safeguard against it. In the codification of the Duchy of Warsaw, they saw the ultimate triumph of the principles of Enlightenment, an act that introduced Poland into the family of the civilized European nations.

From these two different points of departure, there subsequently developed two doctrines which sometimes met in political tactics but

which were based on fundamentally different assumptions of social philosophy. The time of the most intense development of the liberal current was in the period of the Kingdom of Poland (1815 - 1830), terminated by the November Uprising. The liberal camp was partly composed of the wealthy and educated fraction of the gentry, especially from the Western part of the Kingdom (the Voivodship of Kalisz), partly of the urban intelligentsia: journalists, economists, professors of the Warsaw University. A rather small group of members of the Sejm and publicists strongly influenced the public opinion in the Kingdom although the abridgements of the Constitution, of the freedom of expression and of political activities, introduced successively by Alexander I, soon drove that group into opposition and deprived it of propaganda media.

The liberals were at that time the vanguard of the "European" idea in Poland. Inheriting the philosophical thought of the Enlightenment, they were convinced that there existed only one direction of development of mankind — common to all — towards prosperity, universal education and ever greater freedom of the individual. On that civilizational ladder, the countries of Western Europe had come the highest: Poland should follow them and, at the same time, demonstrate to Europe at every step that the Poles were an orderly, free and enlightened nation. Wrote the press organ of the group of Wilno liberals: "It is a fine property of civilization that it immediately adopts all useful things, that it propagates national virtues and transplants on native soil the good qualities of foreign peoples for the happiness of its own nation. In this respect all peoples come closer together and become one enlightened community to which laws are given by the ever improving reason of man."²

Thus, with all the respect for the idea of nationality, the liberals launched a hard struggle against all antiquated feudal principles and, above all, against "Sarmatian" xenophobia and national megalomania which they mainly blamed for Poland's backwardness and weakness.

The progressive programme of the liberal occidentalists proved very poor in the social and economic sphere, however. It was in those matters that revealed itself most clearly the class character of that current which, after all, originated from the gentry. The liberals did not grasp the significance of either the problem of enfranchisement of peasants or of the country's industrialization. They readily applied in their estates the new techniques of land cultivation, animal husbandry or agricultural industry, tested in the West, but they did not propose to copy the leading capitalist

² "Wiadomości Brukowe" 1819 — quoted after: A. Zieliński, *Naród i narodowość w polskiej literaturze i publicystyce lat 1815 - 1831* [*Nation and Nationality in the Polish Literature and Journalism of the Years 1815 - 1831*], Wrocław 1969, p. 34.

countries in the transformations of the social and economic structures. They also advocated the policy of free trade, not realizing the consequences of the fact that the West had already become self-sufficient in food supplies and could very well manage without Polish grain. As a matter of fact, the liberals had therefore nothing to propose as far as the programme of economic development was concerned.

Much superior to them in this respect were the active advocates of Poland's industrialization. There was only a handful of them before 1830; the most distinguished personalities among them were the economist Wawrzyniec Surowiecki and the Minister of Finance in the Kingdom of Poland, Franciszek Ksawery Drucki-Lubecki. Neither of them can without reservations be called an occidentalist: Surowiecki was one of the prominent originators of the Slav ideology, and Lubecki a faithful champion of the Polish-Russian union and a loyal civil servant of Alexander I and Nicholas I. Yet those two grasped most fully two matters of basic importance: that there was no other way of raising Poland from backwardness but by building there modern factory industry, mining, good roads and waterways and by creating there a class of enterprising bourgeoisie, and that in a country poor in capital and experience there was no other way of attaining these goals but through the initiative and protective activity of the government and of the public purse (which was, of course, incompatible with the whole political dogmatics of liberalism). They also understood perfectly the paradox of imitation, typical of all economically retarded countries: it boils down to the alternative that one wants either to have the Manchester factories or the Manchester political economy — because it is only in Manchester that one can have both at the same time. The programme of industrial construction, launched upon Lubecki's initiative collapsed after a few years, however, because of the total change of political conditions brought about by the November Uprising and its defeat (1831).

The conservative doctrine of that period was most fully represented by Józef Kalasanty Szaniawski, in his young days a Jacobin, in mature age an ultrareactionary official of the Ministry of Education in Warsaw, head of the censorship office — but at the same time the most educated Polish philosopher of the first three decades of the 19th century. An ardent reader of the works of French and German romantics and religious thinkers (Chateaubriand, Schlegel, Baader, Schelling and others), he drew from them extremely ethnocentric conclusions. Having recognized that the philosophy and ideas of any nation can develop “only from their natural base” because “any other norms copied from foreign base tend to

destroy the individuality proper to the nation,"³ for the first time in Poland he revealed so manifestly the paradox of nativeness which consists in a situation where one puts a stop to the assimilation of foreign doctrines, institutions and discoveries by using arguments borrowed from foreign doctrines.

Szaniawski's works were written in too hermetic a language to win wider public response; yet all those who in the later years fought against ideological or civilizational imitation in the conviction that in its history every nation fulfills some "thought", "idea" or "mission" peculiar only to itself — had to refer to Szaniawski in some measure, whether their interpretation of the "Polish idea" was revolutionary or conservative.

III

The ideological configuration of Polish intellectual and political life changed after the fall of the November Uprising. First of all, the democratic current, previously marginal and weak, after the tragical experience of 1831 established itself, especially among the émigrés, as the foremost and best-organized national force. Its most important organization which for the next twenty years led most of the underground preparations in Poland and most of the armed outbursts in all sectors of the partitioned country, was the Polish Democratic Society set up in Paris in 1832; it succeeded in rallying in its ranks a considerable part of the Polish political émigrés. While attacking the liberals for lack of revolutionary courage and for the laxity of their social programme, and while going much further than the liberals, especially in the question of granting freeholds to the peasants and of revolutionary insurrectional agitation, the democrats nevertheless adopted at first quite much from the ideological arsenal of the "enlightened liberalism". Above all, counting strongly on the solidarity of the free peoples of Europe and of those struggling for freedom, and counting on the vigorous support of the leftist movements in the West for the cause of Poland's independence, in their early manifestos they endeavoured to present that cause as a common interest of all Europe, of her freedom and progress. Thus their programme was characterized by universalism rather than by occidentalism. The charter of foundation of the Polish Democratic Society proclaimed: "The association of different peoples — this is the goal towards which progressive mankind is tending, and in this progress those outward shades of hitherto separate parts become more and more obliterated". The Polish democracy is but a section of the European democracy: "In order to exist in Europe, one has to be

³ J. K. Szaniawski, *O naturze i przeznaczeniu urzędowań w społeczności* [*On the Nature and Purpose of Offices in the Community*], Warszawa 1808.

similar to her", and one must therefore part with the past and with all particularism, one must "incorporate Poland into Europe by an identity of ideas and of moral and material aspirations."⁴ Free Poland will implant those ideas and aspirations, European education and the understanding of human rights, true freedom and social equality further in the East, thus fulfilling her so to say natural role of a civilizational brigde.

However, as calculations upon the help of foreign nations were more and more shattered, leaving a sediment of frustration and embitterment, and as the interest in Poland's fate, so vivid in the West in the early 1830s, was ebbing away, there occurred a gradual change of accents in the ideology of the democratic fraction of the Emigration. One spoke less of the international solidarity of peoples, more of the particular and specific character of the Polish question, of the necessity of counting only on oneself and one's own programmes. On the theoretical plane, a material role in that evolution was played by the influence of the doctrine of Joachim Lelewel, Poland's greatest historian of the first half of the 19th century. Lelewel, the most leftist member of the National Government at the time of the 1830 - 1831 Uprising, after the defeat an émigré, expelled by the French Government for his political activity in 1833, settled for the rest of his life in Brussels; for many years (until 1846) he shunned the Democratic Society and there came more than once to serious frictions between him and his collaborators on the one side and the Society on the other. All the same, Lelewel enjoyed immense authority, especially as a scholar, in the whole Polish democratic camp. And so Lelewel was, *inter alia*, the author of the theory of primitive Polish communocracy, i.e. a popular democratic system that had allegedly existed in prehistoric Poland, later to degenerate into a democracy of the gentry only; the knighthood, however, having bereaved the peasants of their possessions and civic rights, had none the less preserved within its class a warped but not entirely lost idea of republican democratism and equality; the thing now was to restore to that idea its original all-national scope. From that greatly popularized synthesis of the history of Poland, the Left drew the conclusion that republican equality and the rule of the people were, so to say, inherent in the very nature of Polishness, that they were primeval and genuinely Polish ideas. All the misfortunes of Poland's modern history resulted from the departure from those ideas by the Polish ruling class, i.e. from the ambitions and egoism of the gentry and from monarchic aspirations. If that was so, then — as Ludwik Miero-

⁴ The Foundation Charter of the Polish Democratic Society of 17 March 1832, reprinted in: *Postępowa publicystyka emigracyjna 1831-1846, wybór źródeł* [*Progressive Emigré Publicism 1831-1846, A Selection of Sources*], ed. by W. Łukasiewicz and W. Lewandowski, Wrocław 1961, p. 199.

sławski, a prominent leader of the Democratic Society in the 1840s wrote — the Polish democracy should seek means of saving the country only “within the national substance”, and forgo all alien theories “lying outside the history, nature and peculiar destiny of Poland.”⁵

One of the consequences of such an attitude was the minimal interest of the émigré democrats in the life of the Polish middle class and in the prospects of development of urban civilization. That was so because that complex of problems was rather faintly rooted in the Polish tradition and — with a few exceptions — remained of least concern to that ideological grouping, composed for the most part of proletarianized and revolutionized former members of the gentry who severed the ties with their class. That indifference to problems of economic development sometimes turned downright into prejudice against modern capitalist civilization. Political émigrés whom historical events had thrown on the pavements of big cities of the West, feeling at heart alien and only transient there and, understandably, unwilling to strike root and settle down permanently, had a natural inclination to idealize somewhat the idyllic landscape of the country they had left, where the simple country-folk were believed to preserve untainted moral virtues, destroyed long ago in the West by the rule of money and business.

With some leaders of militant democracy, this psychological attitude assumed a doctrinal form. Thus e.g. Jan Kanty Podolecki, an ideologist of the Democratic Society in the period of the Springtide of Nations (1848 - 1849), argued that Europe was divided into Romanic-Germanic “town” and Slav “countryside” which had an entirely separate past and present and a wholly different future ahead of them. The attributes of the urban element are: material aspirations, interestedness, individualism; the attributes of the rural element — moral aspirations, community, equality, brotherhood. In her history Poland most fully embodies those rural and Slav aspirations and therefore does not need to seek social education abroad; what is more, “she should only rid her native principles of alien rust and filth accrued in the course of centuries.”⁶ The latter view was exactly copied from Szaniawski who had maintained already 40 years earlier that foreign influence was but rust contaminating native Polish ideas. This does not mean, of course, that Podolecki or any of his comrades suddenly turned conservatist; they were genuine democrats

⁵ Speech made by L. Mierosławski on 29 November 1845, reprinted in: *Postępowa publicystyka emigracyjna...*, p. 539.

⁶ J. K. Podolecki, *O idei społecznej [On the Social Idea]*, “Demokrata Polski” 1847, reprinted in: J. K. Podolecki, *Wybór pism z lat 1846 - 1851 [Selected Writings from the Years 1846 - 1851]*, ed. by A. Grodek, Warszawa 1955, p. 20.

and revolutionaries but the intricate ways of Polish political thought, deprived of the chance of direct verification by practice, again and again led those ideologists uprooted from the native soil, to seek hope in ethnocentrically interpreted tradition and to view the unknown shape of the future through the image of the past.

Also present in those attitudes was distinct romantic inspiration. The romantic school in Poland never constituted a homogeneous political or even intellectual camp but it created a certain style of thinking, feeling and imagination, peculiar to itself. This extremely complex problem goes naturally far beyond the thematically limited scope of the present essay. Only one thing should be emphasized here: that the leading Polish romantics, as a rule deeply involved in the struggle for independence, combined in a peculiar way a revolutionary attitude with impassioned attachment to the old national tradition. The present they lived in disgusted them; almost everything in it was alien, hostile and, luckily, provisional: the enslavement, the stifling of freedom aspirations — but also all the “diminution of ideas”, the bustling of everyday, the pursuit of money, economy and diplomacy. Also the pavements of big cities, the hubbub and soullessness of the modern Babylons. The future, cast in the mould of great romantic ideals, was to be won the revolutionary way: by a new rising of the nation or by a universal war for the freedom of peoples, by disrupting and smashing the Holy Alliance; but that future was to recur to the great idealized past. Maurycy Mochnacki, the most distinguished political writer among the romantics, after the defeat of 1831 argued that progress could not take place without historical continuity, and in Poland the latter had been disrupted by the partitions and by foreign institutions and laws (including the Napoleonic ones), implanted from outside on Polish soil; the revolutionary idea of Poland had therefore to be first the restoration of pre-partition relations.

The more hopeless the situation of the country and of the emigration grew, the more were messianic ideas developing within romanticism: Poland was to be the Messiah of nations re-enacting — for the redemption and worldly salvation of all mankind — the sequence of Christ's passion, sacrifice and resurrection. That notion — developed in many variants, after all — brought to the distressed pilgrims a semi-mystical solace and restored their faith in the sense of history but it also called for endowing the new Predestined People with exceptional spiritual and moral qualities. The result was a peculiar synthesis of universalism and ethnocentrism — two attitudes seemingly so incompatible. In the Messianism of Mickiewicz, in his *Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrimage* (1832) and in his lectures on *Slavonic Literature* (1841 - 1844), we find a severe

condemnation of all political particularism and national egoism: freedom of all Europe from all despotism, annexation and oppression was the common cause of all the peoples of the continent. Falling to Poland in that struggle there was a special mission and she can find its motivation only in her own history and tradition. The civilizational superiority of the West was of no consequence in that matter because it was a civilization based on false principles: "Verily I say unto you — Mickiewicz preached in biblical style in the *Books of Pilgrimage* — it is not for you to learn civilization from foreigners but it is you who are to teach them the true Christian civilization. [...] You are among foreigners like Apostles among idolaters."

Such prophetic and missionary ardour, such high ideological intensity were rather lacking in the literature in the partitioned country. The written word in Poland strove to exist legally in the grip of Tsarist or Prussian censorships. It developed for the most part outside the strict confines of the romantic school although not without its manifest influences.

Finding very frequent expression in that literature was the apologia of tradition but precisely in the traditional form combining prejudice against what was alien with prejudice against what was new. The most frequent cause of discontent and object of derision was — like in pre-partition times already — the spreading of superficial and outward features or customs imported from the West: snobish twaddle in foreign languages or copying the Western fashions and behaviour, all Anglomania or Gallomania in which one saw the danger of Poles getting "foreignized." To those importations one readily opposed the Slav simplicity of customs, the virtues of home life, especially rural, in a moderate well-being, suited to real income and to real needs.

In some cases, the simple traditionalism, free of philosophical complexities, turned into a generalized criticism of capitalist progress, industry and rational economic methods. Significant for the way of thinking are e.g. the moralities of Poland's most popular writer of the middle of the 19th century, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, above all his novel under the eloquent title *Choroby wieku* (*Diseases of Our Time*, 1857). Those diseases were precisely: imitation which was killing the Slav character and the national identity, political economy and agronomy, work for profit and book-keeping which were corrupting simple and kind-hearted folks. "Are we to rejoice over progress that tears life away

⁷ A. Mickiewicz, *Księgi pielgrzymstwa polskiego* [*Books of the Polish Pilgrimage*], in: *Dzieła, wydanie narodowe* [*Works, The National Edition*], vol. VI, 1950, pp. 26, 46.

from us and turns us into apes of the West? — Kraszewski exclaimed. — Let other nations be rich and cunning, and let ourselves be kindly, let us be children of God rather than children of our time.”⁸ It is worth noting that the same Kraszewski a short time later, after a trip to the West, became an ardent advocate of Poland’s industrialization, the editor of Warsaw’s most bourgeois daily paper.

This kind of conservative criticism of capitalism and of bourgeois civilization is well known also from the history of West-European social thought in the 19th century. In Poland it performed certain additional defensive and patriotic functions (of which we already spoke in the first part of this essay) but the arguments it used were similar. That criticism could, after all, draw ample factual evidence from newspapers, accounts of travels and works of economists. With attention in all the three parts of occupied Poland one was watching the industrial crises in the West, one knew quite a lot about the districts of extreme poverty in English cities, about unemployment and slums, about swindles and stock exchange speculations. From the 1830s, there appeared in the Polish press numerous studies on “pauperism” in which criticism of the capitalist system was made from conservative or liberal or socialist positions. The authors of these studies did not, by any means, always conclude by a total rejection of the capitalist road of development. They more often expressed the hope that Poland and the Slav world in general, while bound to assimilate the technological discoveries of the age and to develop native industry, would none the less be able to avoid the worst scourges of capitalism and isolate themselves from the crises shaking the Western world, owing to the supremacy of agriculture and to an allegedly different psychological structure. In those deliberations, agrarian utopia was mixed with frequently quite sober observation of economic processes and with more or less reasonable proposals of reforms that were to protect the Polish peasant and craftsman against proletarianization. Professional and amateur economists were trying to work out a doctrine of some milder, less brutal version of capitalist economy, a theory of more harmonious growth, free of convulsions. They sought inspiration now in Bastiat and Chevalier, now in Say or Sismondi, but it all failed to bring about the emergence of a realistic programme.

More decidedly occidentalist was the position taken by the thinkers and leaders of the so-called camp of “organic work” which from the middle of the century was associating itself more and more readily with the positive philosophy of Comte, Buckle and Spencer. The “organicists”

⁸ J. I. K r a s z e w s k i, *Choroby wieku: studyum pathologiczne* [*Diseases of Our Time: a Pathological Study*], Wilno 1857, vol. I, p. 97; vol. II, p. 148.

did not negate the different character of the Polish social and economic structure and, as a rule, were far from praising indiscriminately everything that was Western and new. However, they defended decidedly the view on the unidirectional character of social evolution and they considered the struggle against civilizational backwardness as an all-important task. This task could only be fulfilled by arousing and steering the energies of strong-willed and well-intentioned people, both ambitious entrepreneurs seeking profit and unselfish social workers; that purpose was to be served by the establishment of formal or informal social organizations because the partitioning Powers either did not want and were unable to take that task upon themselves, or — as was the case of Prussia — their activity in the economic and educational field was aimed at the same time against the Polish possessions and assets.

It was precisely in the Prussian-occupied part of Poland that the first strong and active group of “organic work” was formed in the early 1840s, in Poznań, around Karol Marcinkowski, physician and social leader. Further groups, for the most part with less cohesive organization, were formed in the Kingdom of Poland and in the Austrian-occupied provinces. Their ideological and political character varied but as a rule the “positive” programme attracted centrist and moderate elements, both from the landed gentry and from the urban intelligentsia.

The organicists attacked, sometimes quite hard, the traditionalism of the gentry and the conservative, especially Catholic, social philosophy. They represented themselves as champions of science — natural, technological and social — and they actually did to popularize in Poland the latest achievements of European science. However, an essential ideological controversy set them at variance with the romantics and with the insurrectionist camp, especially with its revolutionary-democratic fraction. The dispute concerned the method of action rather than strategic principles. It is worth noting that this dispute has not died out to the present day in Polish historiography and historical publicism which may be due to the fact that while related to the definite historical context, it set two antagonistic philosophies of life against each other.

The organicists, of whom the intellectually most distinguished representative was the Lwów economist Józef Supiński, used the notion of progress conceived as the cumulation of knowledge, experience and civilizational achievements of mankind. They considered the participation of the Polish nation in the enrichment of that fund as well as the assimilation of other peoples' experience as a self-evident necessity. Their motto was “work at the roots” by which they meant the building of educational, economic and institutional infrastructure, carried on even

in the hardest conditions of national enslavement, by a solidary effort of all social classes. They were also convinced that the ability of the nation to survive and to regain — under favourable circumstances — its own statehood depended first of all on the material bases of its existence and on its economics. In this respect, they had no other model but Western industrial capitalism — such as it was and could be (and which was already expanding into Eastern Europe as well).

Consistently, they had to oppose the conspiratorial and insurgent attempts renewed by each generation because in their view such outbursts threatened to destroy the results of educational and economic work already accomplished and to waste the nation's biological potential and vital energies in the always uneven armed struggle against alien force.

The romantics and revolutionaries were hitting back. Edward Dembowski, the fiery young organizer and leader of the 1846 Cracow insurrection, also a philosopher who combined the romantic outlook on life with the Hegelian dialectics, held organic work in contempt as one of the forms of "eclecticism" putting a stop to the strife of opposed social elements and thereby to progress. The movement party (the "Reds") labelled the group of Warsaw organicists of the period before the Uprising of 1863 "millenarians" i.e. people ready to wait for a millenium until Poland regains her independence through "work at the roots." That surname stuck to them for good. They were being reminded that not only independence but also real civilizational progress and the Europeanization of Poland were not possible without the abolition of the villein service system (*corvée*) still prevailing in the Russian-occupied sector of Poland, and that in turn could not be abolished without the revolutionary enfranchisement of peasants by an insurgent national government. Finally, the prepositivists were criticized for the secondary, imitative and ungenue character of their philosophy, for the prosaism of their ideals, for the faint effects of their activities.

Two different notions of social progress, a different attitude towards the problem of the autonomous character of national culture, a different interpretation of European universalism, a different calibre of ideals, perhaps also a different type of temperament — all that divided people of the two most important currents of Polish social thought and patriotic action in the middle of the 19th century. These two currents — each of them involving, after all, many different shades — were competing for the spiritual leadership of the nation. At least of that part of it to which the conservative and conciliatory programme was alien.

The outbreak of the January Uprising (1863) was the work and the victory of one of those two currents. The fall of the rising marked

a defeat for both of them, a defeat for the whole nation that had suffered a heavy loss of blood; understandably, however, the positivists were the first to recover from the shock of defeat: having recognized that history had more than corroborated their warnings, they entered upon a new, culminant phase of their activity.

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It is fully comprehensible — let us repeat in conclusion — that to a nation deprived of political autonomy, the preservation of spiritual and cultural autonomy constitutes a neuralgic problem. In critical situations, this natural defence and protection of the nation's collective identity can turn into neurotic fear that the native culture, although so rich, so old and so original, can get eroded under the excessive pressure of alien elements.

In the history of Polish thought and culture of the 19th century, one can easily detect two complexes or symptoms of insularity connected with such neurosis. Firstly — the widespread conviction that one only needs to demonstrate that an idea is alien and not national, in order to discredit it. This method was used by nearly all against nearly all. Secondly — that in order to invest an idea, no matter whether conservative or radical, with social sanction, one has to demonstrate that it is a native idea, either in its origin or, at least, in the sense of its particular conformability with the national character.

Obviously, it was not equally easy for everyone to prove it. In that respect the advocates of industrial civilization were in a particularly difficult situation.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

As has been mentioned in the text, there does not exist so far any synthetical work on the subject discussed in the present essay. Also, most of the works on the history of Polish social thought (monographs of the various ideological currents or of the various writers) deal rather marginally with the problem of attitudes towards Western civilizational patterns and towards native cultural tradition. It was not until the last decade that a more vivid interest in this aspect of modern Polish thought was aroused. We shall therefore mention in this bibliographic note only those recent works which have contributed some original approach and more thorough analysis to the subject in question and from which the author of this essay has borrowed quite a few pieces of source information and interpretative suggestions.

As far as the 18th century is concerned (especially its second half), one should cite first of all the studies by Jerzy Michalski *Warszawa czyli o antystołecznych nastrojach w czasach Stanisława-Augusta* [Warsaw, or about Anti-Capital Feeling in Times of Stanislaus-Augustus], in: *Warszawa XVIII wieku* [Warsaw in the 18th

Century], vol. 1, Warszawa 1972, pp. 9-78, and *Sarmatyzm a europeizacja Polski w XVIII wieku* [*Sarmatism and the Europeanization of Poland in the 18th century*] -- in press. These studies, concise but getting down at the heart of the matter, render remarkably well the ideological climate of the Polish disputes between "Enlightenment" and "Sarmatism." A valuable complement of the picture is provided by works dealing with the ideology of the various leaders of that period, especially Krystyna Ziencowska's book: *Jacek Jezierski, kasztelan łukowski, 1722 - 1805* [*Jacek Jezierski, Castellan of Łuków, 1722 - 1805*], Warszawa 1963, and Barbara Szacka's book: *Teoria i utopia Stanisława Staszica* [*The Theory and Utopia of Stanisław Staszic*], Warszawa 1965.

The Polish intellectual and literary culture of the first three decades of the 19th century -- i.e. of the period when epigonic classicism was clashing with sentimentalism and young romanticism -- has recently found an excellent student in the person of Alina Witkowska, an author very sensitive to the problems of tradition and civilization. Much has been added to our subject by such works of hers as *Rówieśnicy Mickiewicza: Życiorys jednego pokolenia* [*Mickiewicz's Contemporaries: A Biography of One Generation*] (Warszawa 1962), Kazimierz Brodziński (Warszawa 1968) and especially her newest book for which she has borrowed from Mickiewicz the ironical title *Stawianie, my lubim sielanki...* [*We Slavs Relish Bucolics...*], Warszawa 1972. Andrzej Zieliński's work *Naród i narodowość w polskiej literaturze i publicystyce lat 1815 - 1831* [*Nation and Nationality in the Polish Literature and Publicism of the Years 1815 - 1831*] (Wrocław 1969) is distinguished by the impressive wealth of source material and by the clear systematization of problems. Problems of interest to us are also touched upon in Jerzy Szacki's work *Ojczyzna - naród - rewolucja: problematyka narodowa w polskiej myśli szlachecko-rewolucyjnej* [*Motherland - Nation - Revolution: the National Problems in the Thought of the Polish Revolutionary Gentry*] (Warszawa 1962) a study very subtle in analysis. Very competent and instructive is Janusz Górski's work *Polska myśl ekonomiczna a rozwój gospodarczy 1807 - 1830: studia nad początkami teorii zacofania gospodarczego* [*Polish Economic Thought and Economic Development 1807 - 1830: Studies on the Origins of the Theory of Economic Backwardness*], Warszawa 1963.

The situation looks worse when it comes to the next period: 1831 - 1863. In the very abundant scientific literature dealing with Polish Romanticism and with the ideologies of revolutionary-democratic groups, the point of view proposed by us has very seldom been adopted. The most noteworthy exceptions are: Andrzej Walicki's book *Filozofia a mesjanizm: studia z dziejów filozofii i myśli społeczno-religijnej romantyzmu polskiego* [*Philosophy and Messianism: Studies in the History of the Philosophy and the Social and Religious Thought of Polish Romanticism*], Warszawa 1970, and Bronisław Baczko's post-word to the re-edition of Henryk Kamieński's *Filozofia ekonomii materialnej ludzkiego społeczeństwa* [*Philosophy of the Material Economy of the Human Society*], Warszawa 1959. The works dealing with the ideology of the Polish "organicists" devote, of course, more attention to the problems of economic development and to the attitude towards Western bourgeois civilization; among those, one should cite above all Barbara Skarga's valuable monograph *Narodziny pozytywizmu polskiego* [*The Birth of Polish Positivism*], Warszawa 1964, and Ryszarda Czepulis' work *Myśl społeczna twórców Towarzystwa Rolniczego 1842 - 1861* [*The Social Thought of the Founders of the Agricultural Society 1842 - 1861*], Wrocław 1964.

Both for comparative and methodological reasons, of great importance to our subject are the numerous works by Andrzej Walicki, devoted to the history of Russian thought, and in particular his book *W kręgu konserwatywnej utopii: struktura i przemiany rosyjskiego słowianofilstwa* [*In the Sphere of Conservative Utopia: the Structure and Transformations of Russian Slavophilism*], Warszawa 1964, and his comprehensive introduction to the 2-volume selection of writings of the "Narodniki": *Filozofia społeczna narodnictwa rosyjskiego* [*The Social Philosophy of the Russian Narodnik Movement*], Warszawa 1965.

On the initiative of the Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a carefully prepared scientific session was held in November 1971 on the subject "The Fight against Foreignism in Polish Culture—Xenophobia and Broad-minded Attitude." The numerous participation in that session of historians of literature, historians of science and philosophy, and historians *tout court*, the lively discussions and disputes, may be recognized as an evidence of growing interest in this subject which indeed is complex and difficult to analyse. The papers and discussion statements presented at the session or submitted later (of which nearly a half deals with the 19th century) will appear in a special volume, edited by Zofia Stefanowska, to be published in 1973 by the Polish Scientific Publishers.

(Translated by Antoni Szymanowski)