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Leopold TYRMAND: FROM THE NOTEBOOK OF A DILETTANTE

The well-known writer, sports journalist and jazz expert who recently decided to remain in the West continues to describe Communist society as he sees it. This is the full text as published in the Paris émigré monthly.

Motto: ... from a country where no collar
ever fits.....

Gombrowicz, Ferdydurke

Dilettantism

Since I have no philosophical, sociological, historic or political science training, and yet think constantly about philosophy, sociology, history and politics, it must be taken that I think wrongly and out of context of the achievements of those sciences. Falling into the habit of making my thoughts public, I risk the justified reproach of dilettantism. Even though I note that my premises and conclusions are optional, I have decided to write them down and to intersperse them with reminiscences that are practical in nature (naming names), at which I am pretty good. For it has never been said that a dilettante has nothing to say.

Romanticism and Morality

For many decades, and even longer, the Poles have been confusing a romantic attitude with a moral one. To an equal extent, both the leaders and the people, the critics of the former and of the latter. Finally, they get so confused that they will accept any villany and any, even the cheapest, absolution of past faults, calling it political pragmatism or even *raison d'état*.

Moral Convolutions

The West says: These moral convolutions which you offer, which you explain messily and passionately, interest us little. They seem impenetrable, we do not understand them, we see no need of comprehending them....

Let the West learn to understand, then. It may be useful to the West. Actually, it is not so hard. In occupied France, Denmark or Norway, people knew very well with whom to shake hands, even long after the occupation. Moral convolutions decide on the future of the world, they determine in each era the shape of the era to come. Communists are perfectly trained for such games, their ethics are a deadly weapon. Only in countries where Communism has managed to undermine the distinction between good and evil, between the truth and the lie -- has it become a real threat to humanity.

The Power of Small-Mindedness

How many are there in Poland of the scoundrels, the cheats, the hacks and cynical arrivistes who have survived all the different eras and have destroyed good and wise men by their very presence, without having risked anything. All those whose villainy could not even been overpowered by the Communist penal colony, the "iron maiden" of Marxism, the most cruel mill of destinies in all of history. They have always managed to flower among the murderous teeth and crushing stones, their smallness successfully slipped between the teeth of the beast, their shallowness was worth their weight in gold in the Communist machinery of success, their worthlessness proved a value. They decided to feather their nest in the volcano. And they did. From there, they now wink at the world, suggesting that they are being persecuted for innate distinction, for delicacy of feeling and subtlety of mind.

The Third Communism

Among other characteristics -- the aspect of streets and girls, the dance halls and theaters, the fashions, the apartments and the manners of speech are, according to Western correspondents, the gauges of Third Communism in everyday life. This is a correct, though superficial, observation of symptoms. They are ascribed to relative liberalism, which is the consequence of the so-called national Communism and the gradual gaining of independence from

KULIURA (Paris), May 1967

the Soviet ideological center. Yet, in fact, they are a specific sub-culture which has existed from the start among the people's democracies and which have become apparent and more widespread through the advent of the post-Stalinist thaw. This sub-culture is, though only to a certain extent, the product of the social class of proprietors, or profiteers, who are a special phenomenon and one of the main characteristics of the Third Communism. As any other upper class, they have their habits, their manner of dress, artistic and entertainment preferences which seep through to the rest of the population as examples desirable and worthy of imitation and as imperatives of fashion. It also possesses its jet-set, widely admired and gossiped about. A Western correspondent also notes the elegance of the ladies and the peculiarly free satirical theaters (which seem to him to be uncomfortable for the regime, which is a misunderstanding), but he does not associate them with the existence of a special social group which produces them as its sub-culture and expresses through them its needs and desires. All the more, therefore, do the genesis, the functioning, the morality and the influence of that group remain, most frequently, a mystery to him.

European Consciousness

In Europe, those who are under 30 have a different concept of nationalism, something which is incomprehensible to those who are over 50 and who have grown up with that meaning of nation which has been traditionally in force for the last two centuries. Boundaries, foreign policy, balance of power, spying games, territorial claims, national pride, atavistic alliances, signs and symbols -- are so much hot air for those under 30. They have the profound conviction that they are helpless in these matters. In Poland, some of them would die for freedom and for the so-called way of life, some (ridiculously fewer) would die for socialism, but no one ("do be serious...") would die for Wroclaw, Szczecin, Lvov or Vilna. Independence is a most muddled term for the young Pole -- there is some

of it present, again, there is not, why should one use words whose meaning is hard to establish and, besides, is it really so important? Which does not mean that nationalism is absent. There is another, rational-automobile nationalism. Everyone knows that the Germans are the Germans and there is no need to hug and kiss them, but a Mercedes is quite a thing and no one would disagree.

Progress

In 1964, paper napkins were split in half in Warsaw restaurants and cafes. Party papers were printed on the paper thus saved. Party journalists wrote on that paper how, before the war, poor peasants would split a match in half. With money made on this, the hacks would go to the Journalists' Club and eat large dinners, wiping their lips on napkins split in half. This is known as progress.

The People

Under the old capitalism, the people wanted bread and justice. Under present-day capitalism, the people want automobiles and stupider TV programs. Since nothing is lost in nature, only under Communism do the people again want bread and justice. Only, this time, there is not the slightest chance that they may ever want anything else.

Paradise

Communism is an El Dorado for con-men, cheats, swindlers of all shapes and sizes. Under capitalism, living from one's wits requires an agile mind, slyness, energy and creative inventiveness. It also carries a certain risk. Under Communism, it is mostly reduced to making primitive declarations. Unskilled lies, uncouth distortion, a couple of empty phrases, roughshod deceit are enough for breath-taking success and income. A capitalist con-man could weep with envy observing his Polish counterparts and their easy working conditions. The king of Polish con-men is a certain Jan Karol Wende. He works on the basis of the oldest con game of Warsaw swindlers, selling

something which they never had -- a streetcar, the King Sigismund Column (a Warsaw landmark, the equivalent of selling the Brooklyn Bridge -- Trans.). This kind of trading has led Wende to the heights of wealth. The mind boggles to think what millions in Polish and foreign currency he managed to draw from a small enterprise known as the Democratic Party (Stronnictwo Demokratyczne), devoid from its very beginning of any capital or possessions. What is amazing in this business is the genius of Wende, who managed to be a real double-crosser, swindling both the swindler and the swindled. Wende's task, on Communist order, is to pull the wool over the eyes of the population, to confuse it with the existence of a fictitious political party allied with the Communists but allegedly independent of them, representing the interests of artisans, the intelligentsia and the petty bourgeoisie. Society as a whole, however, loses little on the deal, because it remains blissfully unaware of the existence of the Democratic Party and does not want to find out anything about it. In 1964, I conducted a small personal inquiry. I asked about 50 persons in Warsaw -- students, ladies, musicians, waiters -- who is Wende. No one could tell, with the exception of an ancient taxi driver who said that there had been a drugstore of that name on Krakowskie Przedmiescie before the war. And yet, Wende is a leader of his party, a Sejm deputy, member of several state bodies and an eternal "representative" of Poland at the international parliamentary union. This latter, completely grotesque, position is the main source of his financial prosperity and the beginning of public losses, if we consider how much needed hospital equipment could be bought with the currency spent on the pseudo-parliamentarian showing off of Wende abroad. The chief victim of the double-cross is the CC, which shoves millions into Wende, getting nothing, zero, in return, a total loss, while business goes on, the meter runs and Wende rubs his little hands with glee. Where else could he get such a sucker for so long!

The indestructible deputy minister of foreign affairs, Winiewicz, is the classical example of another form of swindler, whose swindling is based on the politeness principle. The road which the pre-war editor of a conservative Catholic paper in Poznan has taken to reach the level of a Communist super-diplomat is not very clear. But the essence of Winiewicz's trick does not lie in this. It lies in the unnatural extension of his career -- in general, one gets one's reward in a spectacular, but brief, rise. But Winiewicz keeps going. Russian Communism had known red aristocrats who joined up out of conviction, and in the end, always paid with their heads for the inevitable conflicts with Lenin, Dzierzhynski or Stalin: they took their philosophical voltes-face seriously and they suffered because of them. Winiewicz and Wende and their like sell their skillfully incorporated pre-war activities with a cynical joke: they do not intend to dispute anything with anybody, their task is to be melting in praise, take the dough and delight in their lovely life. To accept unconditionally and to add a sophistic, rather bold casuistry, which the public watches with amused disdain -- something that the Winiewicz's and the Wende's chiefly want. They dream of not being taken seriously, of nothing being taken seriously, they want everything since 1945 to appear as one crazy joke out of which, by strange coincidence, they managed to get something -- honors, medals, automobiles, darling huge apartments, lovely drapes from New York, sweet crockery from Florence. For they know all too well that Communism is unpredictable and is capable of creating such monstrosities and such lies that only clowning and bootlicking can save the clowns and bootlickers. The worst crimes are none of their business, they are not something which would keep them from remaining in their jobs. To agree to anything on the grounds of one's lack of seriousness -- how facile! And what an achievement in the history of swindling! The names of the Wende's, Winiewicz's, Chajn's, Wycech's, Ignar's, Kulczynski's, Michalowski's and other bright lights of "politics," diplomacy, press, literature, movies

make up the golden book of modern knavery. Gomulka, Kliszko, Moczar still have something in common with the stereotyped revolutionary, a proletarian formerly (but seriously) exploited. But no one can tell me that the Winiewicz's and Wende's have the least thing in common with social liberation and the struggle of the exploited for bread and dignity -- as my friend, Marcel Vanier, a French Communist murdered by the Germans, used to say. It is enough to take a look at them.

Social Injustice

Communism has filled the society it rules with injustice to a degree unknown since the early laissez-faire days. This is a generalized and daily injustice. Its nature lies in its complications and uncommunicativeness, compared to which the sufferings of an ordinary proletarian of 100 years ago are a simple tale for the kiddies. How can one explain the sufferings of a family which has been waiting for an apartment for 20 years? After all, the inadequacies of the economic system are only the less important part of the story here. What can be done with a handicapped man from whom the state has taken his tobacco stand because he was unable to pay the inhuman taxes? Injustice in Communism is like oxygen -- if you want to achieve peace of mind, you must forget about it in order to breathe. This is easier for the Communists, they believe that the present-day injustice serves the justice of the future. But how can this be explained to an artisan who is not permitted by the tax office to make the false limbs for which amputees beg?

"Kremlinogolists"

This is the name given in the US to Communist experts. The colleges are full of them. They know a lot about Poland. One out of every two can cite without a mistake the livestock figures before, during and after the Six-Year Plan. They also know the monthly publication Gospodarka Hodowlana (Livestock Breeding). But they have no idea whether ham is available in the shops or how to find it. For us in Poland, it is the other way around.

Disdain for the Spread of Ideas

It was the mistake of the Americans, the émigrés and other friends of freedom that, in 1956, they gave up the attempt to build some sort of ideological community in Poland, a laboratory country where a new concept of improved, modified, noiseless Communism was being tested, with a better synchronization in the system and the behavior of the authorities. This was a difficult and delicate matter, but it could have been done and it would have paid off, for as the future showed, the Polish experience is still in force to some extent in the rest of the bloc. And the friends of freedom are still unable to comprehend that, in the era of ideological warfare, the only real weapon is ideological ties, as the enemies of freedom know very well. For Communists, another Communist -- in Venezuela or Madagascar -- is the greatest treasure and the most perfect atomic warhead.

Americans, and Free Europe with them, have begun to believe in the superiority of politics, in politics as such, while only ideology, despite constant crises, is still setting in motion a string of consequences which the politician faces with amazement and helplessness. The servants of freedom then felt that the catastrophe of the system was automatically acting to their advantage, that every displeased man was their man, and since society was made up almost wholly of displeased men -- goodie, goodie, we are on top. They started eagerly to persuade the rare pleased ones that they are not happy or that they are not acting right. "Let us win over the influential men!" was the slogan of the neo-pragmatists. "Let us demoralize them with our riches and with our rights. Let us sit down with them at a common table and show them that they are wrong and they will evolve in our direction, while the whole of Poland will become the incubator of change...."

Lovely -- but what's the use? History has heard of no case where pleased profiteers brought anything into the struggle for moral right. And this is all we want. Today, one clearly sees the collapse of the approach of 11 years ago, social passivity and could-not-

care-lessness. Friends of freedom, of national Communists, of a more liberal Cyrankiewicz, of Schaffs and Rakowskis, of the new generation of pragmatic Marxists.... The hell with them (so think many in Poland), is this something to fight for? Much better to manage a holiday in Bulgaria. I am very much afraid that it will be difficult to undo, and the losses are great.

Anti-Semitism

A certain anti-Semite told me: "The world is at stake in the struggle between two kinds of Jews -- those who believe in justice and those who believe in truth." "Can the belief in such beautiful things," I asked, "be the cause of hate?" "It should not," he sighed, "but its intensity has fatal results. So what can we do?"

Gomulka

Gomulka owes his short-lived career in the affections of Poles to a perfectly worked out method of making it clear that he cannot do otherwise. This was sufficient for one year, during which everyone kept repeating that he could not help it. Later on, it became difficult to believe that he must lie, must imprison, must muzzle, must swindle carpenters and steal from old ladies who get parcels from abroad.

A Commission

The conflict between man and commission is the key problem of Communism. Joint decisions in this system are an attempt to avoid responsibility. Before the war, we had boards of directors and built Gdynia. Since the war we have commissions and built Nowa Huta.

Cocktails at Beame's

Jacob Beame was US ambassador to Warsaw. By the middle of the Sixties, no one, except Gomulka and a couple of unidentified fanatics, any longer believed that the whole show had any sense. It was obvious that the first draft was a flop and there was no point in drawing

it any further, at most one could ostentatiously play with one's pencil, in order not to cause unnecessary worry to the Soviet tank drivers stationed near Legnica. However, several tens of thousands of people out of the 30 million made an excellent living out of the simple fact that even a big nothing has to be administered, ruled, written about in book and song. Under those conditions, Ambassador Beam gave a cocktail in honor of Podkowinski.

This was a festival of the absurd. I was there and even today, seven years later, I cannot shake off my amazement. Beam, a lean Yankee from New England, looking like a caricature of Uncle Sam, was making up to Podkowinski, a con-man in the service of the CC, fattened on Western bread. Following the example of their chief, totally confused American diplomats cosseted all-around corrupt journalists and employees of the ideological front who, four years earlier, had hastily thrown off their Stalinist cloak, hidden in a corner for a while, unsure whether they would not be hung by their heels from cornices on Marszalkowska Street, after which, together with Gomulka, they once again came out into the light, dressed up in Italian shirt collars garnered on official trips and started to coexist madly. Beam and the Americans acted according to rules learned painstakingly in diplomacy classes: win over the elite, you never know who is who and what may happen after the next elections (?), changes, shifts, invite them, get them scholarships and luxurious trips, visits to Harvard and California, you never can tell, diplomacy means a risk, shooting in the dark, touching hidden sensibilities, camouflaged trends of public opinion, a changeable game of influence.

There is no force on earth which would make the Americans realize the most obvious fact, something which every plumber and accountant in Poland knows, namely that these colossal journalists keep their posts not because of their quality but because of their nothingness, with which they juggle so cleverly that it looks like importance, talent, potential achievement. And that those who really mean

something will never play footsie with the Americans at caviar and whisky, whatever degree of coexistence they might order their proteges to proclaim, having loaned them out, for the sake of the prettied-up Cold War, to American cocktail parties. Podkowinski and his like surround Beam right in the middle of the reconstructed hall in the small palace on Koscielna (Church Street) -- some street for such a gathering! -- they converse prettily, they criticize everyone and everything, they expose their liberalism, humanism, tolerance, making it discreetly clear that they are for change, for freedom, for friendship. They solemnly suggest that they are fighting ceaselessly for all these, after all Beam -- so clever so experienced, so sharp-witted -- knows how things are, that it is impossible to do it outright, that one must do it carefully and in a roundabout fashion, that in their situation they must give in to pressure, for the sake of appearance, but that they are making efforts in the right direction. After which, they return to their offices for international cooperation and to their editorial rooms and write base lies and senseless accusations of their hosts of yesterday, ceaselessly praising what they ridiculed yesterday. Upon meeting Beam again, they look at him sadly: he knows what they are forced to do! Things he reads about himself and his country over their signature have nothing in common with their real views and opinions, are simply forced out of them under pressure, which they resist and which they will overcome one day, but not just yet. Beam must be patient, compassionate, trusting, he must understand and love them, offer them gin and tonic, scholarships, invitations, trips, because this is better so, and anyway, we all belong to the same culture and civilization, which is a bridge over all those artificial differences. And Beam loves, trusts, gives and, most stupid of all, he believes that he is really doing something, that they mean something, that he is conducting some politico-diplomatic game and that it pays to play along with them.

Bill Griffith from MIT told me in Poland once: "Funny and I don't quite know what to make of it. I talked to Podkowinski and he told me that, during the war, he was a Home Army major, and under Stalin, was in jail. What do you think?" I told him I do not know what happened during the occupation, there are things in heaven and earth about which even Mr. Shakespeare had only vague notions, but I hardly believed that Marian Podkowinski, a lousy movie reporter before the war, suddenly appeared in the rank of major under General Grot. Still, I would not know, I could not say. But I do know how it was under Stalin. Even under the early Bierut, Podkowinski traveled to the US zone of Germany and has remained there to this very day. What he does there, besides writing stories for Trybuna Ludu, that they are so passionately interested in having him there, I would not know, but I do know what he has been writing over all these years and I know that, since the times of Goebbels, no one has done more to harm Polish-German relations and to eliminate any chance of their improvement. A lackey successively -- or, as more delicate minds would have it, spokesman -- of Stalin, Gomulka, Berman, Bierut, Ochab and Gomulka once more, he has lied in print in orders from the Politburo, supported any machination, kept silent on all symptoms which did not follow the line, blackened the most honest and white-washed SS-men in Ulbricht's service. The uninterrupted material well-being (20 years in the West on foreign currency issued by the Polish National Bank!) enjoyed by Podkowinski is quite a trick, impressive even among the Winiewicz's, Michalowski's, Osmanczyk's. Imprisoned under Stalin? Closest to jail he ever got (four blocks from Mokotow) was the cosy flat offered him by Cyrankiewicz, (a friend and protector,) on Filtrowa back in 1951 or 1952 (the contemporary housing norm being two families per one room with kitchen) to rest after his toils in St. Moritz and on the Riviera among girls lured by cognac and nylons from the Marshall Plan, the harmfulness of which he so eagerly explained in Polish papers. What a field for psychiatric study! What complexes and frustrations make this man,

with the face of a small pig with a tiny, sickly nose, present himself as a Home Army man and as Stalin's prisoner? Sublimation of dreams? Dreams of glory? What a startling Communist psychological mill, what a wealth of psychological substructure. And yet, there is something consoling in this, in that professional, generously paid mudslingers are incapable of being open with themselves and dream of being little elves, playing innocently among the flowers and butterflies?

The Puzzles of the Mechanism

Outside observers have no difficulty in noting that all living under Communism are against it. The overwhelming majority of people there believes that they live in the worst social system ever created by man. At least half goes further and believes that Communism is the product of a misguided human mind, a work of the human will, it is true, but a creation of the devil and the joke of demons, Evil incarnate, the masterwork of Satan, a dark force of self-destruction which come to light here and there -- man is forced by nature to hate it, as he instinctively hates disease, poverty, old age and snakes crawling invisibly through the grass. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth scorched by Communism hate it with a sad, desperate, resigned hatred whose color no outsider can discern. Especially since, at a distance, this hatred of Communism decomposed by imprecise human weaknesses. Evil is evil, but one has to live. So people make do in the bosom of evil. This has solely negative consequences, both in the ontological and the moral sense. Only a small group is capable of an active struggle against evil, the great majority believe it to be hopeless and useless. Communists call this socialist awareness. The passivity of the victim in the face of his own crippling has other consequences as well -- if anyone wants to protest, he often meets with the dislike of the mistreated. This is an amazing reaction, rarely encountered in history -- something like the agreement of the crucified to his own crucifixion, for reasons having no connection with salvation, redemption, faith or sacrifice. Communists call this a high level of awareness. While

outside observers wonder and complain that no one is putting up any resistance and there must be something wrong in the calculation since everyone (right!) is against Communism.

Ineptitude

The world knows Communist crimes and persecutions, but has a fatally inadequate idea of what Communism does to man without resorting to persecution.

Wasting Life

What does this mean? Have those who have left behind neither children nor great works wasted their lives? How does one know that one has wasted one's life? At one time, the proof lay in wealth, in a peaceful and dignified old age, continuation of the species, social position, name. But today? Wealth is not necessary for a peaceful old age, grandchildren -- in the face of the nuclear threat and the demographic high -- are a doubtful achievement. There remains participation in great causes, the knowledge of one's usefulness, one's part in collective achievements. For instance: industrialization, the building of socialism, the raising of new cities, the transformation of backward societies. It would be interesting to know how much of all this one could find in the soul of an elderly or dying Communist? Does he feel he has lived a good life or not? Would he do it all once again, if he could? It is not difficult to die in the heat of battle, with the cry "Long live!" on one's lips or to face a firing squad. What is difficult is to raise this cry on a comfortable deathbed, with time to consider everything, thinking that one does not envy anyone anything, that one has done everything in one's life so that one can die in contentment.

The Office

Communism has ruined the relations between the Poles and the office, the office has become for them the symbol and the seat of nonsense and immorality, nothing good can come of it, it must be hated,

feared and swindled. A hundred years will not be enough to put things straight again here.

More about Injustice

I have always been fascinated by injustice, its roots and results, the force of evil, or force in the service of evil and its impunity. Great literature on Communism will begin with the day when the subject of the tragedy of the Communists, the self-degradation and self-destruction of the revolution will give place to a simple recounting of subjugation and injustice. Like in Solzhenitsin.

Helplessness of Literature

Hunger, misery, material chasms disappeared from literature after World War II. Social degradation and the ensuing unhappiness have ceased to appear in drama and the novel, replaced by loneliness, the indifference of one "ego" toward another "ego," crime, boredom, disintegration of ties, fear and alienation in an exaggerated hell, in the slavery of technology, in the phantasmagoria of structure. Obviously, hunger and poverty could offer great material for Communist literature, unfortunately, it is not permitted. One must admit that the political supervisors under Communism show a far-sightedness based on learning from the opponent's mistakes. Literature was instrumental in eliminating hunger and misery from the Western image of life and had always constituted a threat to politicians. Hence the conclusion that the people should erect barricades in defense of the freedom of literature. But how can one explain this to the people?

Evil Punished and Adapted to Circumstances

There is an instructive story of a certain Antoni Marianowicz who, in the Middle Bierut Era (1949/1952), was employed as a centrally guided satirist. On CC orders, he belabored the American way of life, the kulaks, the idle loafers, with a servile smile on his lips which -- in his opinion -- was a smile of superiority over his

employer. In return for the rhymed lies about Dulles and black-marketeers, he received generous wages, with which he bought large amounts of meat from the same black-marketers whom he persecuted with his satires and thus caused an ever greater persecution of them for counter-revolutionary activities. The population at that time was largely deprived of meat, as a result of socialist economic plans -- which Marianowicz adored in his works -- while he, living in the lap of luxury, could afford a daily meat dinner which in turn became the cause of the death of his wife -- who at one time had saved his life -- who died of trichinosis poisoning from illegally slaughtered meat. In this way, fate warned him of taking advantage of immoral gains, except Marianowicz showed no remorse, but married again and continued his trade, and when the sun of Gomulka rose, he began translating American musicals into Polish, in other words, he started living on the wits of others, and finally, the Americans gave him a scholarship and invited him to the US. The moral of this story is gruesome and concerns the sorry disappearance of precision in the mechanism of reward and punishment. Once the hand of God punished without fail, as the lady who killed the lord and many other sinners found out. Indeed, the Americans, wiping Marianowicz's spittle from their eye with one hand and offering him dollars with the other, smiling idiotically all the while, acted like foolish Americans, but why should his wife have been touched by the sword of fire? Is it possible that, in the era of complex planning and alienation, fate is no longer capable of striking the guilty, but only someone standing next to him? Has the slowness and smallness of the mills of the gods become mixed up in their ancient proportions? Is moral symmetry no longer possible in the world of psychoanalysis and immanent criticism?

The Emigration

Small-mindedness, narrowness, slander, litigation, limited prospects, melancholy of redundancy -- the emigration is wrong in busying itself

at every opportunity with masochistic self-accusations and in thinking that it has a monopoly over them. The memoirs of the émigré of the French Revolution are full of the same sort of thing. The real danger lies in the power of life. The Great No which the emigration threw at Communism had a charisma of martyrdom for which one could offer one's life. Today, after 22 years, the émigré anti-Communist, with his faith and his hundredfold justified hate is a childlike innocent, compared to the hate of a Pole in Poland, who could not call himself anti-Communist and the term does not even enter his mind. For the émigré anti-Communist, Communism has become a kind of partner, its disappearance might cause a void, and for some, quite real financial problems. For a Pole from Poland, Communism is his own malignant growth, eating up his life, and only excising it might save something.

Writers Here and There

I am surprised by the subservient attitude of émigré writers toward writers in Poland. The so-called unrequited love, the inferiority complex, the unhealthy belief that life pulsates only over there. As if literature depended on geography, fauna and flora and such like. All theories of roots, impregnation, "charging of batteries," and emanation have always appeared to me to be suspect, they justified various forms of impotence. Was it of any importance where Kafka achieved his blinding analysis? He achieved it in the gentlest social milieu of Europe in his time, and the fairly idyllic aspect of his environment is a paradox. Or where did Joyce start thinking and Camus looking for syntheses? Outside conditions are a dough into which the writer mixes his tastes and flavors and serves up as his work -- only Marxists want the writer to become the property of the conditions. Writers in Eastern Europe have collected, in the last 28 years, a thorough knowledge of the Great Fear, of life where no one can be trusted, including oneself, of the ability to squash consciences to a degree unknown in the history of humanity.

And where is their masterpiece? Let no one believe in censorship, the power of the officials, the muzzling -- these would be solely technical circumstances, of there were a masterpiece, the world would learn about it in this or that or some other way. The servility of the émigré writers toward those in Poland is ridiculous and embarrassing, as is the haughty tone of the writers at home toward the émigrés. Those at home get a feeling of primitive superiority from the fact that they are widely read, this fact plunges the émigré writers in humility, as if they were unable to comprehend that one hears more about Tertz in Russia and in the whole world than about Sophronov, although the latter's books are published in millions of copies. Every year, Free Europe selects the best book from home: a group of émigré writers and critics discusses the matter seriously and objectively, with liberal gravity and kindness, with democratic helpfulness and fair play. What a ridiculous sight (sound?)! Why don't the writers at home discuss, describe, award books published abroad? The logically official explanation is that it is not allowed. This is the truth and yet it is nonsense. They are simply not interested. There is no community, no connection, no awareness of the common growth from a common root. They think they are something better, even the more reasonable among them, and they think that there is no point in talking about those less good, even in cafes. And many a listener of Free Europe begins to wonder why so much attention, objectivity and cosseting are devoted to writers whom he remembers as bumptious Stalinists, why this sugary concord, why these lovey-dovey declarations over the microphone? Such a discussion over a free microphone constitutes an amazing misdirection of award giving, émigré intellectuals hasten into thoughtless, wasteful impartiality, forgetting that its excess leads to the approval of various indecencies. So what if someone wrote a good book in 1966, when back in 1951 he proclaimed anti-human and anti-Polish slogans, in the name of which other, better men were destroyed and abject power over people was

established. Is the life of a writer a cheap kaleidoscope of unconnected fragments where one goes now hand in hand with the red and now with the black? Has no one any feeling of responsibility any more, not even jury members from Free Europe? I cannot see the subtle distinction whereby one can still remind the Nazis of Auschwitz while it is not meet to mention the poems in honor of security police to the authors who wrote them, giving them awards instead. While rewarding a good book, it would not be out of place to mention what paths the author followed a dozen years ago and what he thought about the genius of Stalin, the life story of a writer, especially one getting an award, is not a private matter. This for the sake of moral health and social morality in Poland, for which Free Europe fights so bravely against totalitarian anti-morality.

Mister Chairman Iwaszkiewicz

After my article in Kultura -- so I hear -- Chairman Iwaszkiewicz called me public names in private. Naturally, I would have nothing against his repeating the criticism of my person in print, but I am afraid he cannot afford to do so. So, to close the case once and for all, let me make a couple of private remarks about him, in public.

In a fairly notorious column on Zly (I believe in Zycie Warszawy in 1956), Iwaszkiewicz made fun of my parochial tastes and limited imagination. For instance -- he noted that, in my book, someone sees a can of sardines in a store and associates them with epicureanism or that a young girl in the Café Kameralna is charmed by the night-club atmosphere of the place. "Some epicureanism...." I quote from memory Iwaszkiewicz's jibes or their equivalent, "a can of sardines... a stinking, gruesome bar is a magic grotto for Tyrmand...." Back then, to tell the truth, I bowed my head in disgrace, having made a provincial ass of myself, a greenhorn, in the eyes of Mister Chairman. But I also did think about the

distance which lies between me and Iwaszkiewicz, although we live in the same city and speak the same language. In 1954, when I was writing Zly, Iwaszkiewicz represented us all -- for our money, sweat and toil -- at Peace Congresses, he diligently attended banquets, feasting on caviar and sturgeon in Stockholm and the Crimea, no wonder that sardines were grass to him. But for me and for the overwhelming majority of the Polish nation, they were the purest embodiment of hedonism -- a can of Yugoslav sardines cost 18 zloty (the average wage was 800), they were hard to get, one stood in line for them. The official per diem made possible for Iwaszkiewicz charmed evenings in the Boeuf su le Toit, no wonder that the Café Kameralna smelled nasty to him, but to us, for whom the railroad workers' dance hall took the place of Monte Carlo, the Kameralna naturally took the place of the Copacabana. Iwaszkiewicz added as well that he never saw, in the suburban railway, the scenes described by me. I do not disagree, but we should add here, and be honest about it ("Mister Chairman?"), that, from the dawn of the socialist work effort, Mister Chairman -- unlike the rest of the nation -- had an official limousine at his disposal and this helped him avoid the overcrowded public transportation system, which had to be seen to be believed. In the good old days of soc-realism, Iwaszkiewicz wrote a short story entitled "The Flight of Felek Okon," which somehow does not appear in the fashionable bibliographies of his works. In it, he was creatively concerned with the problems of hooliganism and, according to the canons in force, he came to the conclusion that juvenile delinquency was fostered by the combined efforts of imperialist agents, kulaks and the idealistic philosophy of life. I remember a scene in it, where the villainous private barkeep gets Felek -- a poor misled child of the people -- drunk, which Felek, in whom class consciousness stirs to life, richly curses private initiative, understanding that the barkeep is not only depraving but also exploiting him, charging him double the

normal price in a public catering establishment. Poor Iwaszkiewicz! How poorly did he know that Poland which he believes he knows better than anyone, which he wanted to judge from the height of his pedestal! He did not know that the price of vodka was the same everywhere, that a private inn-keeper was afraid of his own shadow, that a higher price could be charged only in state establishments. This was common knowledge to every child of a drunkard, namely to every Pole. How much one can forgive him for that ignorance....

Personal Well-Being

They wiped the floors with me in my own country in a dreadful way. What have I done to be so despised? I wrote a book which everybody wanted to read -- those who found joy in it and those who detested it. In return for my having written it, those who are in the know refused me the title of a writer. Other writers said the same thing. They decided that, from then on, I would not be included in their anthologies and fancies about literature. I cannot help it. I can only secretly hope that, at a time when even liberians will no longer know their names, my book will still be read on the beaches and in school cloakrooms.