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LIMITED DISTRIBUTIONREAD AND DESTROYITEM No. 9216/55SPECIAL ATTENTION: Mr. GriffithE3
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IV - 5731POLANDRELIGION (2800)
Progressive Catholics (2813)THE FUTURE OF PROGRESSIVE CATHOLICS IN POLAND. PART II.SOURCE PARIS: A Western traveler who returned from Poland recently.DATE OF OBSERVATION: Current period.EVALUATION COMMENT: This excellent report well describes a most confused situation, and on the whole it corresponds to the picture which one is able to form by reading the press and observing events from abroad.

Source of this report and all persons cited are well known to us.

For the first part of the story, please see PARIS Item No. 8943/55.

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Attitude of the Population.

There seems to be a widespread contempt in Poland for the more prominent leaders of the Pax (progressive Catholic) group, although the idea they claim to represent i.e. the creation of a modus vivendi between Communism and Catholicism, is treated seriously and on its merits, and not regarded exclusively as a Communist directed diversion. Uneducated people such as messengers or hall porters who come across the progressive leaders in the execution of their duties are likely casually to refer to them as "son of a bitch, scoundrel," etc. with a kind of matter-of-factness, as if they were merely describing their social position. Many cases are reported in which more active Pax members are openly ostracized by their relatives, who plainly show their distrust and dislike of them by refusing to talk in their presence, cutting them dead in public (especially after some particularly obnoxious progressive Catholic move like for instance a press attack on the Cardinal) etc. Women are said to be especially bold in this semi-public stand

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against "Paxowicze." As some of the Pax men are recruited from among the former landowner class, whose members belong to the most strongly anti-Communist elements in the country (especially, as regards the older generation,) several cases of repudiation by the family are known to have occurred among the so-called "aktyw" i.e. the leading group of the progressive Catholics. As an illustration, the name of "paxowicz" PRZEWLOCKI (fnu) can be quoted in this respect. This is unusual in a sense, because extreme forms of family disapproval are generally reserved for UB collaborators and Party members alone.

Who is Who Among the Progressive Catholics.

The progressive Catholics can be divided into the group of leaders ("aktyw") about a hundred strong, and the group of sympathizers whose number is difficult to assess with any degree of accuracy. The "aktyw" does not comprise only those Pax leaders who reside at WARSAW but also all the Pax members who are responsible for the group's activity in provincial towns. The number of provincial Pax activists is on the increase and it seems that it is the policy of Pax to build up its provincial assets pending an eventual development into a mass organization.

On the whole, Pax can be described as a conspiracy, although it is difficult to say on whose side. The more people are involved in politics, the more their behavior becomes conspiratorial in to-day's Poland. It is a curious form of conspiracy too, because no one trusts anyone else and everybody keeps his secrets to himself. The resulting double talk and ambiguity have to be seen to be believed and almost defy description.

The following example can serve as an illustration of the atmosphere prevailing in circles which collaborate with the regime and for whom the concept of truth has lost all its meaning. A foreign visitor known for his critical attitude toward Communism asked writer IWASZKIEWICZ what he thought about the "thaw," whether it was going to last and who will benefit from it. IWASZKIEWICZ tried to wiggle out of it as best he could without committing himself in any way and finally he said "I think that the thaw will ultimately prove to be of benefit to the regime" -- a statement which can be interpreted alternatively as an approval or as a disapproval of the thaw, as well as of the regime itself. This kind of thing is going on all the time in ordinary conversations, which makes it particularly difficult to judge people by what they say. Their attitude toward each other is by far a better indication in this respect.

What is the impression members of the Pax "aktyw" make on an outside observer? They seem to be a mixed lot, ranging from dexterous political conspirators like PIASECKI himself to fundamentally decent people who have been broken by Communist brainwashing technique (including prison.) Opportunists and gangsters like HORODYNSKI, KURZYMA, possibly ZUKROWSKI and PRZETAKIEWICZ sit side by side in the Pax group with men like ROSTWOROWSKI, (Over)

MICEWSKI or one of the Pax pundits, HAGMAJER, who appear sincerely to believe that theirs is a good cause. For these people, the Vatican condemnation is a real case of conscience and they discuss the future prospects of Pax with anxiety in their voice. "What are we to do?" -- one of them said in desperation, and tears appeared in his eyes as he defended the Pax point of view with conviction. To suspend the publication of the banned weekly would amount in their eyes to abandon the fight, to give in as it were and to leave the field to the Party.

Other Pax types include KETRZYNSKI, austere, rimless and scholarly, difficult to decipher, whose attitude seems to be "let's stick it out and see what comes out of it," Jan KRASICKI who with many others is on a ticket of leave from Communist prison, a broken man with a kind of servility in his behavior, for whom there is simply nothing else to do but to obey -- which he does with as much decency as possible under the circumstances, Karol ROMER, a slick operator ("kombinator") who means no harm... It is important to realize that almost all "Paxowicze," excluding perhaps some Bezpieka agents, are fundamentally on our, i.e. the Western side, and they think of themselves as operating under conditions which have been forced on them and for which they are in no way responsible. They would of course have preferred to take part in the public life of their country under normal, i.e. Western conditions. If, on the one hand, there are in the Pax group cool customers like HORODYNSKI who openly boasts of a large shoot in Eastern Prussia where he goes regularly with young Communist writer Bogdan CZESZKO to shoot deer (na rykowisko) there are also others for whom Pax activity and their part in it are a personal tragedy. Who knows what goes on in these people's souls? A young man connected with Pax broke down in source's presence and, with tears streaming down his face, confessed sobbing that he is a UB informer.

Impact of SWIATLO Revelations.

As to PIASECKI himself, it seems that the picture of him as presented in recent SWIATLO broadcasts no longer corresponds to the present state of affairs. PIASECKI is spoken of by SWIATLO as a simple tool in Communist hands, who goes to talk to bishops with hidden recorders up his sleeve, and generally executes UB orders as a price for comparative freedom and a "Jaguar" car. This picture might have been true as far as it went several years ago, but now PIASECKI and his group have grown in stature and importance and are aware of this. From the Communist point of view, Pax can no longer be simply dropped and their leaders sent back to prison whence they have come, especially now in the era of coexistence with the progressive Catholics playing the role of a bridge between East and West, between Communism and Christianity. The number of Western contacts which the Pax group has accumulated over the last few years must also be taken into account. Thanks to these and other circumstances, PIASECKI might be said to possess today something akin to a hidden position of power, representing

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as he does a politically important element in the present Polish reality.

Considering this relative importance of PIASECKI and his group, the SWIATLO revelations -- although outdated -- have been all the more painful for Pax and welcomed by the population at large. Pax leaders refer to SWIATLO broadcasts with what can only be described as helpless rage.

They try to avoid all discussion by dismissing SWIATLO's story as so much propaganda, and nothing makes them angrier than when they are told that SWIATLO is not a Western, American imperialist invention, but the product of their own system, almost a colleague in fact. One of the "good" Pax men told source jokingly that the only objection he has against SWIATLO is that the damned fellow did not work hard enough in the UE and consequently does not know nearly enough about Communists and their dirty work. SWIATLO is a household word by now and there is not a man in the country who would not have heard the name and known at least something about SWIATLO's anti-Communist stories.

Despite all the contempt in which progressive Catholic leaders are held by the population (as mentioned on page one of this report) the problem of the relations between religion and Communism (which the progressive Catholics claim to try to solve) commands a wide interest among the Polish intelligentsia. Indeed, the contempt itself is evidence of the interest in the problem, as those who condemn progressive Catholics hold the view that these matters should be left properly in the hands of the Church authorities. By no means all those who collaborate with the Pax group are condemned by the people as collaborators, and the delight people take in SWIATLO stories about progressive Catholics does not mean that all Pax men are regarded as Communist stooges. Many good people, especially in the provinces, are in sympathy with the Pax policy in which they see an effort to arrange things as best one can for the Church in Communist-ruled Poland. Source met provincial professional men who were Pax sympathizers and was struck by their obvious good will and ardent patriotism. Neither should the whole matter be unduly exaggerated, however, for the problem of progressive Catholics and the degree of popular support they enjoy are by-products of Soviet occupation and the imposition of Communism in the country.

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