Between Continuity and Discontinuity:
A few comments on the post-war development of Polish historical research

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The majority of historians agree that social and political reality significantly influences changes in historical thinking, and thereby the development of historical research. However, when we inquire after the mechanism or mechanisms regulating these influences, controversies appear. Differences in viewpoints result from the fact that the relationship between historiography and social life is understood differently, thus risking a "spread" between two extremities. A number of historians are of the opinion that social reality has a direct uni-directional influence on historiography as a specific form of social memory, thereby decisively determining changes in historical thinking. This view is upheld by Marxist historiography. The eminent Soviet mediaeval historian Jewgienij A. Kosminskij wrote:

> From the Marxist point of view historiography is just one of the disciplines of the history of social thought, and it is therefore always clearly and closely connected with politics. By various means - sometimes visible, at other times invisible - the bourgeois ideology infiltrates (prosoczitsa) into historiography together with this output of bourgeois historiography, which we both appreciate and make use of.[1]

Other historians, who are ideologically distant from Marxism, like to view the development of historical research above all in terms of its autonomous transformation. As far as the post-war development of Polish historiography is concerned, it is, in my opinion, useful to take into account not only the influence of the "environment" in which it had to evolve, but also its internal transformations (needless to say, these were not always the result of changes in the social and political sphere).

In the face of the profound changes that are currently taking place in Poland, it is quite natural that there arises the need to evaluate the past 45 years. This evaluation is being performed by various generations of Poles: those who remember the birth of the new system, and those whose main generational experience occurred during the seventies and eighties, i.e. the period of its crisis and subsequent collapse. More and more frequently we find much reflection concerning the first years of existence of the new Polish state, which is commonly termed the Third Republic. Therefore, when we look back at the post-war development of Polish historical research, the periods from 1945-1989 and 1989 to the present, tend to force themselves on us and are treated as something obvious and not subject to discussion. However, it is necessary to keep in mind the dangers resulting from the application of these turning points. First of all, they suggest that the collapse of the Polish Communist system played a decisive role in changes in Polish historiography essentially because it finally freed it from the dominant influence of ideology, thereby creating new and exceptionally favourable conditions

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[1] E. Kosminskij, *Istoriografija Srednich Wiekow* (V w. - sieriedina XIX w.), [ed.] S.D. Skazin, J.W. Gutnowa et al, Moscow 1963, p. 7.

for its future development. Yet was this really the case? This question will be addressed below. What is more, forcing Polish historiography into the framework of these dates is frequently connected with a desire to juxtapose, what some consider to be the dubious output of historiography during the Polish People's Republic with the "unreproachable" achievements since 1989. This markes a return to the interpretative practices of the bygone era - based on the same black and white pattern. Another unquestionable drawback of such an approach is the mechanical transferral of border dates from the social and political sphere to other disciplines (science in the present case), which would suggest that we are dealing with a mechanism whereby political events or decisions exert a direct and uni-directional influence on culture. While accepting this tendency to group history in general time periods, we would like to treat time primarily as symbolic in order to avoid the aforementioned dangers.

The great majority of the Polish people tended to view the end of the Second World War as a dramatic break with the hitherto existing world, as well as the symbolic beginning of a new reality, which was generally thought of as being alien and imposed from the outside. The process of reorientation and re-evaluation that became the task of Polish historiography after 1945, was to a large extent a reaction against wartime experiences on the one hand, and connected with the birth of a new political and social order on the other. Polish historiography was no exception. After the war, a "crisis of history" encompassing both its universal dimension and historical research was openly talked about[2]. The awareness of the need for change was common among Polish historians. In the first post-war issue of *Kwartalnik Historyczny* (dated 1946), the official organ of the Polish Historical Society, we read:

> These changes are not solely political alterations to the map of the world, nor are they only social and economic refurbishments of the political system, but gigantic changes in mentality and outlook taking place in our internal personality. It may be that we are not fully aware of this, but all of us to a greater or lesser extent feel that under the influence of wartime experiences, under the influence of what we have seen and heard during those long, horrible years something has changed within us; we feel that we are returning to our research transformed, with a newly formed or only gradually forming view on many social and political issues that is quite different from our earlier perception. Internally - if not openly - we approve of many things that would have previously outraged us and, conversely, abhor or at least react with distaste to things that we used to approve of wholeheartedly or felt convenient to tolerate. But, and this above all, we historians feel the need to become conscious of our present attitude to history precisely because we feel that even here there has occurred within us and, indeed, is still occurring something like an involuntary revision of outlook, some profound change in views about what constituted and will continue to constitute the subject of our professional interest, passion and creative research.[3]

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[2] Cf. e.g. G. Barraclough, *History in the Changing World*, (Oxford: 1956), p. 9 ff; H. Butterfield, *History and Human Relations*, (London: 1951), pp. 158-185; H.R. Trevor-Roper, *Historical Essays*, (London: 1957), pp. 2-3 and 285-298; H. Muller, *The Uses of the Past. Profiles of Former Societies*, (Oxford 1954), p. 36 ff.

[3] R. Grodecki, K. Lepszy. Editor's Foreword, *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 1946, no. 1, p. 395. Roman Grodecki (1889-1964) - mediaevalist, bofore the war professor of economic history at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. After the war

As far as the development of Polish historical research is concerned, the first post-war years were characterised by advanced pluralism. This concerned both the organisational (personnel, institutions) and methodological sphere, as well as information disseminated by historiography (interpretative canons, its problematical horizon). There prevailed an atmosphere of discussion and polemic, in which the search for "new paths for Polish historiography"[4] - to use the term coined by Henryk Barycz - went on. Historians tried to find their way in the new reality, to supply various answers to the challenges that it posed. Contemporary realities determined with a fair degree of precision both the possible field of compromise between authoritarian and historical circles, and - to a considerable extent - the arena of inevitable conflict. The following question gained fundamental importance: should the revival of Polish historiography continue after the war years, even with certain far-reaching changes to the traditions of Polish historical research of the interwar period, or should it completely discard models set during the years 1918-1939 and embark upon a comprehensive re-edification of its organisational structures, methodological foundations and interpretative canons? Two concepts are therefore pitted against each other - one based firmly in the idea of the autonomy of science, untrammelled research, and methodological pluralism, the other - initially not voiced explicitly - presupposing a thorough re-edification of the theoretical precepts of historiography, the subordination of science to the state, and aspiring to spread the monopoly and control of the state apparatus over the entirety of scientific life.

With a certain degree of simplification one may state that Polish historians took one of two opposing stands. W³adys³aw Konopczyñski, a professor at Cracow's Jagiellonian University who enjoyed considerable respect among fellow historians, wrote in 1947:

> Are there sufficient grounds for demanding that our historiography radically sever all ties with the past and enter upon an entirely new path? Our answer is this: there are no such grounds. The nation - as opposed to the state - was proceeding along its appropriate path of historical development, historians performed their duties with a reasonable degree of accuracy. They searched for truth freely and honestly, without restricting themselves to any preconceived ideas or modes of thought. Therefore our motto will be as follows: to rebuild and partly reconstruct on old foundation using old materials. Corrections - even significant ones - will be useful, but revolutions and acrobatics are ruled out.[5]

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professor of economic and social history and Polish mediaeval history. From 1945 to 1947 editor of „Kwartalnik Historyczny". Kazimierz Lepszy (1904-1964) - historian, researcher of XVIth century Polish history. Before the war Reader at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. Arrested during Sonderaktion Krakau, detained in Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps until 1941. From 1959 professor and director of the Department of Early Modern (XVIth-XVIIIth century) Polish History. During the first half of the fiftier and advocate of the „methological breakthrough" in Polish historical research.

[4] H. Barycz, "On New Paths of Polish Historiography", *Nauka i Sztuka*, 1946, vo. 2, pp. 324-336. Written in October 1944 under the impression of the collapse of the Warsaw Uprising, the article was printed two years later, in 1946. Henryk Barycz (1901-1993) - historian of education and science, professor at the Jagiellonian University.

[5] W. Konopczyñski, "The Tasks Before Historical Research in Present-day Poland," *Nauka Polska*,1947,vol. 25, p. 155. W³adys³aw Konopczyñski (1880-1952) - historian, researcher of XVIIIth century Polish history. Before the war elected MP from the list of the National People's Union. At the beginning of the war arrested during Sonderaktion

For communistic and communising circles, such views were unacceptable. Those historians connected with the authorities' camp - initially weak and devoid of any importance - discarded the idea of continuity for the following fundamental reasons. The new historiography was a denial of pre-war historiography in many respects. In the opinion of numerous contemporary advocates of change, Polish historiography was characterised by, among other things, a disregard for the role played by social and economic processes, insensitivity to the laws and rules that govern the historical process, psychological naivety and, finally, a tendency to look at history from an élitist point of view. The remedy for all the problems troubling Polish history writing was expected to be found in Marxism. Józef Sieradzki, a political commentator and historian, wrote in 1945:

> Today, history has at its disposal a precise and well-tested method; it classifies phenomena and determines the rules that govern them. This is the path, which leads to its rebirth and provides for the inflow of new forces. Such is the contribution of historical materialism.[6]

The re-edification of Polish historiography on the basis of the theory of historical materialism (which was, in the begining, not only interpreted in the spirit of Stalinist orthodoxy) became the chief goal of the authorities and the initially insignificant circles of communistic and communising intelligentsia who assisted them. Not all of the dilemmas that faced historical research and historians were solved during the first post-war years. For this, two reasons may be put forward. First of all, the aspirations of the authorities, which aimed at a thorough re-edification of the entirety of scientific life, exceeded their physical resources, i.e. personnel and organisational potential. As a result, to give but one example, the "Memorandum for internal use concerning the organisation of science," ordered by Jakub Berman and drawn up by Ludwik Sawicki as early as 16 January 1945, in which the ides of subordinating science to the state (i.e. to the Communist authorities) was expressed and remained as a list of postulates and wishes[7]. Secondly, the Polish Communists played an important role directly after seizing power. The leader of the Hungarian Communist, Mátyás Rákosi, dubbed their actions "salami tactics," in reference to the gradual subordination of successive spheres of social life. In relation to Polish science and culture these goals were carried out under the banner of the "gentle revolution," a term coined by Jerzy Borejsza. It turned out to be nothing more than an introduction to the policy of Stalinization, which was initiated a few years later.

Krakau, detained in Sachsenhausen concentration camp until 1940. After the war was nominated president of the Polish Historical Society, though only for a short time. At the turn of 1948 became the focus of a vociferous witch-hunt instigated by the authorities, was forced to resign from all important posts and take early retirement.

[6] „Odrodzenie" 1945, no 50. Józef Sieradzki (1900-1960) - researcher of mediaeval, XIX th and XXth century history. From 1948 to 1953 Reader at the Jagiellonian University, subsequently professor at the University of Warsaw. Enthusiastic advocate of introducing Marxist methodology into historical research.

[7] This is the view expressed by P. Hubner, "Polish Science after the Second World War," *Ideas and Institutions*, (Warsaw: 1987), p. 26. J. Berman was the member of the Political Bureau of the Polish Worker's Party (and later of the Polish United Worker's Party) responsible for ideological affairs. L. Sawicki (1893-1972) - archeologist, from 1945 to 1949 director of Archaeological Museum in Warsaw.

Differences of opinion within historical circles, and also between historians and the authorities did not, however, exclude the possibility of reaching or even understanding a far-reaching compromise. The idea joining the ruling élie with historical circles was the need for an historical justification of the state's new borders. On the basis of decisions reached at two conferences - in Yalta and Potsdam - these were shifted far to the west and north, thereby encompassing territories that, for hundreds of years, had formed an integral part of Germany. History and historians were tasked with documenting the actual or imaginary "Polishness" of these lands. The result was a veritable outburst of literature concerning this issue. The majority of historians considered it a patriotic duty to take up this subject matter. The idea of Piast Poland was part of a search for a general line of development of the Polish state, as well as an attempt at reinterpreting national history from the contemporary point of view. The return to "the Land of the Fathers," as the Western Lands and Pomerania were called, was interpreted as a return to the traditions of the early-mediaeval Polish state, to the glorious days of Mieszko I and the Boleslaus rulers[8]. Historical analogies were looked for, while the centuries old Polish-German antagonism grew stronger. The then widespread acceptance of the Piast Poland concept was combined with severe criticism of the Jagiellonian idea as enshrined in the tradition of the Commonwealth of Both Nations; its anti-Russian (i.e. anti-Soviet) sentiment strongly emphasized. The new Poland was supposed to be the historical antithesis of the state that had existed before the partitions, and of the interwar Republic. Flagrant and intentional misinterpretations were commonplace. In one of the contemporary publications we read:

> The author's manifest desire is to prove that the present relinquishment of the **princely-kingly, Lithuanian-Polish** (bold type - R.S.) Jagiellonian concept and the final return to the **folk concept** (bold type - R.S.) of Piast Poland is of paramount importance for post-war Poland. That shifting of the People's Republic's borders to the west, towards the very centre of mid-twentieth century Europe, has brought with it conditions of security, development and power which the 1st and 2nd Republic could never have possessed.[9]

At the end of the forties, in through both internal (the elimination of all legal and illegal opposition) and international (the inception of the Cold War) processes, the Stalinization of Polish historiography began. Stalinism in historical research was an attempt at creating an ideological vision of the future in order to endow the totalitarian system brought into being by the party-state with a modicum of legitimacy. This goal was to be attained by two methods: the re-edification of historiography's methodological foundations on the one hand, and the reshaping or liquidation of old and the creation of new organisational structures on the other. As we remember, the idea of re-edifying the methodology of Polish historiography had been formulated in the years 1944-1945. However, at the beginning of the

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[8] See A.F. Grabski, "The Concept of the Poland of the Piasts in Polish Historiography: Zygmunt Wojciechowski's interpretation of Poland's History," *Polish Western Affairs*, 1992, no. 2, pp. 251-272.

[9] E.S. Rappaport, "Poland as a One-nation State," (analytical paper on the predominantly Polish composition of the population of the III Republic), *Myœl Wspó³czesna*, 1946, no. 2, p. 200. E.S. Rappaport (1877-1965) - lawyer. From 1916 to 1939 lecturer at the Independent Polisch University. From 1945 to 1960 professor at the University of £ódŸ, from 1958 director of the Department of Executory Criminal Law.

fifties it gained a radically different significance. Historians were quick to discover that the switch to Marxism was now a *sine qua non* precondition of their continued participation in scientific life. What is more, Marxism itself had been codified. From this moment on, only one interpretation was allowed; this had been tersely though consistently set forth in the "History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik). Abridged course." Zanna Kormanowa, a leading representative of the group of historians who were engaged in the realisation of the policy of Stalinization, had this to say at the 1st Congress of Polish Science in July 1951:

> The decisive moment in the struggle for a new, Marxist history, is concerned with methodology. That history, which is not based on Marxist methodology, and which is not built on the assumptions of historical materialism, **is scientifically barren and cannot be called an art in the full meaning of the word** (bold type - R.S.). The task of ensuring that this obvious truth is realised by the majority of research workers active in the humanities, and especially in the field of history, is daunting, but none the less feasible.[10]

The imposition of the monopoly of one methodology and the ensuing restriction of the terms "science" and "scientific" solely with the knowledge that was based on the theory of historical materialism marked a turning point in the post-war development of Polish historiography. It was a concerted attempt at calling into question the entire output of historiography, finally severing the few remaining ties that still connected it with Western historiography, and incapacitating history and historians. It marked the liquidation of the last vestiges of pluralism that remained in the methods of cultivating history, and the actual collapse of all methodological discussions. The division of historiography into the scientific (i.e. Marxist) form on the one hand, and the ascientific and barren bourgeois on the other made any matter-of-fact polemics impossible. The Stalinist theory of historical methodology was considered an equal to ideology. Competing interpretations were replaced with one interpretation. The multiplicity of truths was brutally superseded by the truth of authority- the first secretary, the Political Bureau, or the party. The authorities aimed at creating an official, truly totalitarian historiography, which entailed the elimination of all competing visions of the past. Within the Stalinist interpretation of the theory of historical materialism itself, the most important role was played by the theory of social and economic formations. This was based on the assumption that the historical process has an essential, intentional and orderly character. The said theory functioned as a pan-historical pattern, as "an obligatory timetable for those journeying over world history." As a result, it fell on the shoulders

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[10] Paper of the Historical Subsection. 1st Congress of Polish Science. Social Studies and the Humanities Section. Copied as a manuscript to be used by participants of the Ist Congress of Polish Science, Warsaw 1951, p. 5. The aim of the Congress was to bring to an end the process of reedification of the organisational structures of Polish scientific life. Following the prior liquidation of, among others, the Warsaw Scientific Society and the Polish Academy of Learning, the Polish Academy of Sciences - based firmly on the Soviet model - was brought into being. Zanna Kormanowa (1900-1988) - historian of the labor movement, from 1948 professor at the University of Warsaw. Before the war closely connected with the Polish Communist Party, from 1941 to 1944 in the USSR. After the war nominated to various posts; director of the Historical Department of the Institute for Schooling Research Workers of the Central Committee of the Polish United Worker's Party (an institution created in 1950 on the model of the Soviet Institute of Red Professorship).

of Polish historians to display- on the basis of exceptionally one-sided material - the veracity of the thesis that the origination of the People's Republic was the final product of the Polish historical process. This was said to have occurred through the implacable and inevitable judgements passed by History. Had the declared advocates of this mode of historical thought succeeded in all of the objectives listed above, then Polish historiography would have undoubtedly shared the fate that overtook historical research in the USSR and the German Democratic Republic. But this did not occur. Why? What determined such an outcome?

The first methodological conference of Polish historians, held from 28 December 1951 to 12 January 1952 in Otwock, had the manifest objective (predetermined by the authorities) of winning a resounding victory on the so-called "historical front" but ended in failure. On the one hand, the most ardent advocates of the Stalinist unification of historical research were simply too weak to impose their will on the majority, while on the other the greatest historical authorities were ready to defend its identity and reach a compromise with the authorities. The price that had to be paid was often high, but it was thanks to this flexibility that Polish historical research did not become a tool in the hands of the system. Under such conditions the nomination of Tadeusz Manteuffel as director of the Historical Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences on 1 January 1953, gained an altogether symbolic importance. This eminent researcher of mediaeval history came from an old aristocratic family that for years had been living on the northeastern borderland of the old Commonwealth. He was a student of Marceli Handelsman, one of the leading figures in Polish historiography of the pre-war period. During the Second World War he had been closely connected with the Polish Underground State, and subsequently became a professor. The nomination, as well as the make-up of the Historical Institute's management, were altogether exceptional for the Communist camp. Probably in none of the other countries that remained under Soviet domination was the management of historical research - usually under the "caring" aegis of the authorities - entrusted to a group of professional historians who had been educated and shaped by "bourgeois science."[11]

The creation of the Historical Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences was based on the Soviet model- a centralised structure designed to supervise and direct historical research- brought the process of organisational re-edification of Polish historical research to an end. However, contrary to the intentions of the authorities, the Institute did not become a bastion of the "new science"; the credit for this goes above all to its management. Indeed, with time it became the haven of opposition-inclined members of historical circles.

The year 1956 brought with it a wave of criticism levelled at the methods employed in scientific policy and at least a partial re-evaluation of the Stalinist heritage. As far as the further development of Polish historiography was concerned, the reestablishment of ties with Western science - which had been severed in the early fifties - was of paramount importance. Here, the French Annales circle had a special role to play. Paradoxically, it was Marxism that formed the bridge that facilitated the resumption of the Polish-French historiographical relationship and its subsequent intensification. In an interview with P.

[11] For wider coverage of this topic see R. Stobiecki, *History Under Surveillance* (£ódŸ 1993), p. 21 and following.

Sainteny (published in 1992), Georges Duby and Bronislaw Geremek reminisced about their then and - to a certain extent - remaining fascination with Marxism in the following words: "not [a fascination] for an ideological and political canon, but rather for a mode of thought, a way of understanding history."[12]

Polish historiography after 1956 only slightly resembled that of the pre-war period and was altogether different from the historiography that had prevailed in the first half of the fifties. Its organisational structure had changed, and a new generation had come to the forefront. This meant that historians who had been educated after the war, in an altered social and political reality, who had already experienced the "Hegelian bite" (to use a term coined by Czeslaw Milosz) and lived through the bleak period of the first half of the fifties, were steadily gaining the ascendancy. This circle, while formally not distancing itself from Marxist methodology, wished to free historiography from the dominant influence of ideology and politics and to widen the sphere of professional research. In 1956 Witold Kula wrote in *Kwartalnik Historyczny*:

> The struggle for a Polish Marxist historiography is by no means over, as many would have it ... let there be a genuine battle of opinions, let there be a specific and content-related discussion. May this lead to the clear-cut delimitation of the border between Marxism and non-Marxism.[13]

The opening up of Marxism to different methodological propositions resulted in the relinquishment of Stalinist orthodoxy and the rebirth of a *sui generis* methodological pluralism, which, however, continued to be limited by the authorities. The Communists had not renounced the plan of creating an official historiography that would represent the interests of the authorities. The problematical horizon of Polish historiography also began to change after 1956. Following a period that witnessed the domination of literature devoted primarily to social and economic history and the history of the labour movement in the broadest sense of the term, there was renewed interest in the history of culture, the methodology of history and the history of historiography, the history of social structures (under the marked influence of Annales), as well as political history and the history of the Church (carried on primarily by the Catholic University of Lublin). A somewhat different entity, which existed on the fringes of historiography, was the Warsaw School of Historians of Ideas, which was active in the sixties.

Polish historiography in the sixties and seventies was characterised by a state of *sui generis* schizophrenia. Stefan Kieniewicz defined it in a paper read at a 1980 meeting of the Historical Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences:

> Its characteristic is the division of the entire field of vision of our research into two separate categories, each of which functions under differing conditions: the early centuries on the one hand, and contemporary history on the other. A researcher of

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[12] Georges Duby, Bronis³aw Geremek, "Common Passions," interview conducted by Philippe Santeny, Paris. 1992. Quotation comes from the Polish edition, Warsaw 1995, p. 24.

[13] W. Kula, "Concerning our scientific policy," *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 1956, no. 3, p. 166.

> mediaeval history or even of modern history up to the end of the XIXth century is free to choose his topic, formulate views and pass judgement. One may say that even here we encounter obstacles... But you will agree with the opinion that such instances are marginal. In general - and as far as research into early history is concerned - there appear and coexist in Poland: monographs and dissertations openly invoking Marxist methodology, works that utilise this methodology with greater or lesser efficiency without invoking it, and, finally, those, which ignore the Marxist doctrine carefree, even if they do not openly disagree with it…The situation…in contemporary history is altogether different. Three categories of problems meet with obstacles when research and publications are involved: the history of antecedents of the grouping that is currently in power; political history (and, in a certain sense at least, the economic history of the People's Republic); the history of Polish-Soviet, and- looking back- also Polish-Russian relations.[14]

It would appear that the diagnosis presented by Stefan Kieniewicz does not require comment. Polish historiography during the sixties and seventies, and to a lesser extent- in the eighties, functioned in a situation in which the authorities defined the scope of unrestricted scientific research through the agency of censorship. However, the fields reserved for official historiography were shrinking at an alarming rate, so that at the end of seventies they did not go beyond (with a few exceptions) the year 1939. When mentioning the far-reaching interference of the censor's office, one cannot overlook the fact that self-censorship constituted its *sui generis* supplement and was present primarily in the language used in historical works on contemporary history. This was classical doublespeak, designed to create and obscure reality instead of describing and explaining it. In general, it was no longer demanded from historians to make an unambiguous methodological (that is political) declaration as in the years that preceded 1956. They were, however, required to tolerate and participate in the creation of contemporary history in the broad meaning of the term - an official historiography full of falsifications, equivocations, and half-truths. It is worth noting here that with the passage of time this doublespeak was less concerned with the details and intricacies of factography and focused on assessments and judgements instead. The history of the war, the occupation, and the People's Republic, was depicted from the point of view of the victorious Communists, while everything that questioned or even potentially questioned their historical mandate to act as the "guiding force of the nation" was intentionally ignored or discredited. The official historiography was interested in the history of the Polish government in exile, the Home Army, of legal and illegal opposition groups in the first post-war years, and also in the history of conflicts (1956, 1968, 1970, and 1976) between the authorities and the Polish people.

The crisis of the Communist system in Poland and the emergence of the *Solidarity* mass movement exerted an important influence on history and historians. The result of this ferment in the field of historiography was the head-on confrontation between official history and the various 'counter-

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[14] S. Kieniewicz, *The Historian and the National Consciousness*, (Warsaw: 1982), pp. 304, 310-311. Stefan Kieniewicz (1907-1992) - historian, researcher of XIXth century Polish history, and student of Marceli Handelsman. During the war associated with the Bureau of Information and Propaganda, and the Union of Armed Struggle - Home Army. After the war professor at the University of Warsaw.

histories" that began to appear in samizdat as early as the second half of the seventies. It is characteristic that the majority of these historical works were preoccupied with contemporary history. They created an alternative, strongly nationalistic and anti-Communist, picture of Polish history. It was in the eighties that emigré historiography, which for obvious reasons had been ignored and discredited for years, was suddenly "discovered" in Poland. The works of pre-eminent emigré historians such as Marian Kukiel and Wladyslaw Pobóg-Malinowski[15] were published in samizdat. It was under the influence of such publications that the picture of XXth century Polish history underwent extensive revision. This concerned primarily Polish-Russian and Polish-Soviet relations, the Polish underground movement of World War II, the occupation, and the first years of the People's Republic. As far as methodology was involved, these works did not introduce anything new. They were written in the spirit of traditional historiography, which was preoccupied with political relations and the role of outstanding individuals: what is more, the great majority was of a public rather that scientific character. However, it was under the influence of such works that official historiography began to change, too. During the eighties there appeared new depictions of the war years and occupation, and a fundamental rehabilitation of the output of the Polish Underground State (as a matter of fact, this term entered the language of historiography in that very decade). In general, one may state that even before 1989 the monopoly of fundamental issues of contemporary history exercised by official historiography had either been seriously undermined or broken. An important step was made towards freeing history from the dominant influence of ideology and depriving it of the role which it had played for years - that of legitimising the system. The actual sense of the Communist philosophy of history was finally revealed. Adam Michnik in his book *On the history of honour in Poland,* which contains an interesting analysis of the various form of defiance exercised by Polish intellectuals during the dark era of Stalinism, wrote:

> History is given meaning by people. To be precise: various people give it various meanings. The same goes for rogues, who sanctify their practices by invoking Progress and Historical Necessity. However, their vision of history is nothing more than a way of deluding themselves and others.[16]

The events of 1989 and the collapse of the Communist system in Poland undoubtedly played an important role in the process of reorientation and re-evaluation of Polish historiography, though I would venture the opinion that one should not overestimate their significance. It would be difficult to support the thesis that they exerted a direct influence on historical research, and/or to infer that research underwent a purportedly revolutionary transformation that was a reaction to the regaining of independence. The new social and political reality had an effect and continues to have a manifold effect on historiography. This was reflected in all fields related to the functioning of historical research-organisational, methodological, and also in the picture of Polish history. The profound changes taking place in the country gave rise to an atmosphere of optimism and were directly connected with the new

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[15] Marian Kukiel (1885-1973) - researcher of political and military history. Before the war a professor at the Jagiellonian University. From 1939 in exile, co-organiser of the gen. W³adys³aw Sikorski Historical Institute in London, founder of the Polish Historical Society in Exile. W³adys³aw Pobóg-Malinowski (1899-1962) - researcher of contemporary history and political commentator. Closely connected with Józef Pi³sudski. From 1939 in exile.

[16] Adam Michnik, *On the history of honour in Poland,"* Prison memoirs, (Paris: 1985), p. 277.

situation in which both history and historians found themselves. In 1989 Adolf Juzwenko, a researcher of contemporary history associated with the democratic opposition, wrote in the reborn weekly *Solidarity*:

> The eighties freed Poles from the fear of taking up politics. History is gradually ceasing to be viewed as nothing more than a substitute for politics. It's as though the interest in history, manifested lately by political activists, is on the ebb. I think that the authorities also attach less importance to it. Let us hope that all this will create an atmosphere conducive to research work and increase the likelihood of history being treated not as a supplement to politics, but all as a branch of knowledge.[17]

Contrary to the expectations voiced in the above quoted article, the situation that arose in Polish historiography immediately after 1989 was different. Historiography and historians came under the pressure of contemporary events. It was not expected that historiography would withdraw into a circle of highly specialized problems and preoccupy itself with its calling, i.e. the search for historical truth, however this may be understood. This was so because society expected something totally different from historical research, notably the explanation of modernity. In practice, this imperceptibly turns into its historical "mandate," and in extreme cases may even lead to its condemnation. It is historiography's role to depict the past as it "should have been" according to our outlook on life, and the political and religious assumptions we adhere to. The reality of the period of change inspired and indeed still inspires a return to the past, in which the search for a historical mandate of ideas (more frequently than programs) expressed by various social and political groupings is carried on. We are presently dealing with an excess of history or the making history of common consciousness. As far as the history of the Polish people is concerned, this is nothing new. It was recognised in literature that: "we constitute … a phenomenon amongst societies, a phenomenon because of our attitude towards national history, which appears as an integral part of the common outlook on life, due to the extent of the social <appropriation> of historical events, and due to the specific functioning of this consciousness." [18] However, the conception of the excess of history as used above is imprecise, it should rather be used in the plural or supplemented by the term "many" histories. New visions of the past come into being as a result of the relinquishment of the vision hitherto considered official (in the broad meaning of the term) that to a greater or lesser extent legitimised the old system. These are characterised by a manifest (if not actual) opposition, but also by mutual competitiveness.

It is therefore no wonder that after 1989 there came a time for re-evaluating the era of "Communist totalitarianism," as many called it. This re-evaluation was carried out with the help and by means of history. Of considerable importance was the fact that during the eighties there took place (and, indeed, still is taking place) a second changing of the guard in historical circles. An even greater role is being played by the generation of researchers who were raised and shaped during the last years of the People's Republic. There cropped up a still unresolved dispute regarding the true character of the Polish

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[17] A Juzwenko, "Humble Historians; Guided History," *Solidarity Weekly*, 1989, no. 15 (52).

[18] D. Zab³ocka, "History as a Value," in *History and National Consciousness*, [ed.] W. Weso³owski, Warsaw 1970, p. 32.

People's Republic, commonly named "Communist." Can one view it as a Polish state or not? Some would like to treat the Republic as nothing more than a Soviet protectorate, and thereby take the period 1945-1989 in *sui generis* "historical brackets" (one cannot help drawing a parallel between these endeavours and French historiography's struggle with the tricky problem of Vichy). Others, while perceiving the significance of this state's extremely limited sovereignty, wish none the less to integrate the Polish People's Republic with the entirety of the nation's and state's history. The aforementioned dispute may, albeit with certain reservations, be seen as the Polish variant of the discussion that was instigated by Francis Fukuyama'a famous article entitled "The end of History?" It is, however, characteristic that in the case of Poland the controversy surrounding Fukuyama'a article focuses only marginally on the methodological aspects inherent in the idea of the end of history, i.e. criticism of the uni-directional, evolutionary, and finalistic way of thinking about the past. One may gather that this is connected with the acute crisis of methodological reflection that we are now facing in Poland. To a certain extent this results from the explicable reaction of historical circles against the years of dominance of the "only correct and only veracious" methodology of historical materialism. The attitude that is gaining influence among Polish historians may be called an abstinence form theory, an escape into "pure" factography. It is for this reason that the discussion regarding contemporary history that is currently under way in Poland - of which the dispute over the People's Republic is only a fragment - frequently, though by no means always (the historiography of this period beasts many valuable works written over the past few years) consists in a simple interchange of signs whereby activities hitherto dubbed patriotic are now considered treasonable and vice versa. The tendency to give grades in patriotism to various people, circles, parties by historians and political commentators who are convinced that it is their divine right to do so, is still all too frequent. This phenomenon has wider dimension and is also perceived by foreign writers and researchers. The French historian Daniel Beavois, who conducts research into Polish history, ascertained the recurrence of polonocentrism brought about by a hypertrophy of national feeling visible both in the new canon of nationalistic popular history and in professional research.[19] The same message is to be found in *God's Playground*, a synthesis of Polish history written already in the eighties by the British historian Norman Davies. In this context it would be helpful to quote a statement made in 1970 by the Polish sociologist Danuta Zablocka: "the renaissance of historical and national issues will carry out its task not only if it re-establishes values that were once depreciated, but also if it does not withdraw into an ethnocentric, megalomaniac, and sick shell, if these qualities are purified by a (judgmental) consciousness …"[20]

A look back at Polish historiography from the vantage points of 1945 and 1989 imposes two differing sets of optics - the pessimistic and the optimistic. The former is naturally directed towards the past and for this reason has - to greater or lesser extent - an evaluative character. Looking from the first vantage point we are to perceive all those negatives aspects connected with the attempt - unsuccessful, as we have tried to show - at turning history into an ideological tool for legitimising the system. The consequences of this policy, realised with a greater or lesser intensity by the Communist authorities, are still visible in Polish historiography. The state of research on twentieth century history provides sufficient

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[19] D. Beavois, "Etre historien en Pologne: les mythes, l'amnesie et la 'verite'," *Revue d'histoire Moderne et Contemporaire*, 1991 vol. 37, p. 382 ff.

[20] D. Zab³ocka, op.cit., p. 36.

evidence of this. Some errors are now incorrigible. To quote but one example, the opportunity of collecting the verbal statements of participants of historical events, of Poles living both at home and abroad, has been irretrievably lost. This generation is inevitably receding into the past. The dynamic *Karta* center, which researches contemporary history in the broadest meaning of the term, is presently trying to fill this gap. Professional reliability does, however, require that we give fair treatment to the unquestionable and enduring achievements of Polish historical contained in many significant syntheses and monographs that are valued both at home and abroad. The vantage point of 1989 has an altogether different origin and utilises an entirely different valuation method. Its optimism stems above all from the fact that it is oriented towards the future, and is connected with new challenges and fresh hopes. In 1994 Henryk Samsonowicz, one of the eminent figures in contemporary Polish historiography and a researcher of mediaeval history, wrote on the changing status of history in Poland and other countries of the former Communist bloc:

> …The third characteristic of the Eastern historiography concerns the fact that history no longer plays a role which went beyond determining the mechanisms governing the past. It has ceased to be (or, should I say, is ceasing to be) a substitutional measure employed by public institutions to give a sense of self-identity, national value, and distinctness from others. Historiography is retreating from propheticism and mythicism, and turning to the analysis of the course of historical processes. It should be stated that this state of affairs is favourable both for society and for historical research itself.[21]

When one considers the approaching integration of Poland into European structures, it becomes important for this tendency to gain a firm footing. Of equal significance is the warning stemming from the past decades. The danger of history becoming idealized is still present, and there is no indication whatsoever that it will disappear. Paradoxically, the more often historians make manifest their aversion to methodology, and- knowingly or unknowingly- persist in remaining in a world of "pure" and "objective" history, the greater this danger becomes.

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[21] H. Samsonowicz, "Degraded Kings," *Polityka* 1994, no. 1.