

The **Hidden Dimension**  
*of the* **Transformation**  
*of* **Communism**  
*by Krzysztof Brzechczyn*

Maria Łoś, Andrzej Zybertowicz. *Privatizing the Police-State: The Case of Poland* (Foreword by Gary T. Marx). New York & London: St. Martin's Press, Inc. & Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000, pp 270.

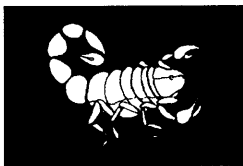
"Transformatology" is a recognized subdiscipline of the social sciences. The fundamental character of changes in Eastern Europe taking place after 1989 have aroused interest among lawyers, economists, sociologists, political scientists and—since more than a decade has already elapsed since the beginning of the transformation of the communist system—also among historians. In contrast to the scores of books and papers about the transformation of communism, Maria Łoś and Andrzej Zybertowicz's *Privatizing the Police-State: The Case of Poland* addresses issues that have only rarely interested the social sciences. Łoś and Zybertowicz analyze the role that the secret services played in the course of the transformation of the communist system in Poland. One has to admit that the work they have been doing up to the present predisposes them remarkably well for realization of such a project. Łoś, who is a Professor of Criminology at the University of Ottawa, has been involved for years in research on the non-state shadow economy in the communist countries. Andrzej Zybertowicz, Professor of Sociology at Nicholas Copernicus University in Toruń, was interested in the process of transition from feudalism to capitalism, and recently has focused on sociology of science and the influence that the secret services exert on the social life.<sup>1</sup>

Their book consists of eleven chapters and is divided into four parts. In Part One, Łoś and Zybertowicz present their theoretical assumptions: the concepts of development of the communist system, its transformation and the mechanisms of influence of the secret services on social life (also dealt with in Chapter Three Anatomy of the Police-State). The procedure Łoś and Zybertowicz adopt can be reconstructed in the following way: they use such metaphors, models, and theories that are useful for the empirical description of the role played by the secret services in the process of transformation. The originality of the book does not consist thus in the application of some new theoretical categories which have been formulated by the authors but in the application of already existing ones for the conceptualization of the impact of the secret services on the social life in Poland of the 1980s and 1990s.

Brian Chapman's two phases of development of the communist system proved to be the most useful for this purpose. In the first, totalitarian, phase of development the Party occupies the pivotal position in the system, exercising control over the media of social communication, the means of coercion, the economy, and the secret police. Party members appointed to the posts in the state apparatus implement the goals of

the ruling ideology and enforce the Party line. The secret police, although the main instrument of governance, are nevertheless subjected to the general control of the Party. In the second phase, the totalitarian state transforms itself into the totalitarian police state, which is characterized by the fact that "its police agencies are no longer pliable tools, but 'become the leading apparatus of the state' and the role of the party is undermined" (17). Łoś and Zybertowicz thus come up with a hypothesis that in the 1980s in Poland and the Soviet Union there occurred a significant autonomization of the secret services, which gives grounds for describing these social systems as post-totalitarian party/police-states. Thus, Łoś and Zybertowicz write: "we cannot properly understand the trajectories of the momentous East/Central European transformation unless we take seriously into consideration the domain of covert actions undertaken by various actors, both domestic and foreign. . . . We postulate that this process . . . has provided an invisible structure to other, more apparent processes that constitute the East European transformation, such as democratization (especially the party system formation), the privatization of the economy and the development of a free market system" (19–20).

Yet, in order to investigate the role of the secret police in the process of transformation one is bound to have at one's disposal some general vision of the transformations taking place. With that objective in mind, Łoś and Zybertowicz embark on a review a range of theories or, to employ the term they use, metaphors of transformation. They distinguish the metaphors of revolution, two-step revolution, transition, systemic transformation, path dependency, multiple transformation, negotiated revolution, and conspiracy. The usefulness of these metaphors for adequate comprehension of the role of the secret services in the process of transformation provides the criterion of their suitability. Some metaphors, such as revolution, are clearly not appropriate for this role because: "Based on our perception of the changes in Poland . . . the rupture this metaphor implies does not re-



flect events adequately. Rather, developments in Poland were marked by caution and careful management as well as the deliberate preservation of the continuity of the legal system and state administrative structures and personnel" (10–11). More useful in this respect are, on the other hand, the metaphors of negotiated revolution, path dependency and multiple transformation which constitute the theoretical base for the book (14).

The methodological stratum of the book includes also examination of the mechanism through which the secret services exerted their influence. Łoś and Zybortowicz employ here the concept of regulation through infiltration. For this purpose, they have recourse to Michel Foucault's interpretation of the metaphor of the "Panopticon." The Panopticon is an architectural design for a circular prison devised by Jeremy Bentham with the central watchtower placed in the middle. All the prison cells have windows that allow the guard to watch the inmates at any moment, but the inmates on their part are unable to watch the guard. In Foucault's interpretation this means that the authorities are seen but their actions are unverifiable. Although members of society realize the existence of the authorities they do not know if they are being watched or not. Sharing, as it does, some features of the "Panopticon" metaphor, the concept of regulation through infiltration further enhances them. An individual is being observed not only by the warder (the authorities), but also by agents of the secret police and every member of society may turn out to be one. This leads to one more characteristic of regulation through infiltration: dispersed power. Resulting from that is the destructive influence on the formation of social bonds autonomous from the authorities, as such bonds become eroded and the atomized individuals left to themselves internalize the preferences of the authorities. The thinking of a typical member of society subjected to police surveillance operates along the following lines: "since THEY know of our every move, all our efforts and sacrifices are bound to be doomed and will provide the

SB [Służba Bezpieczeństwa—Security Service of the Ministry of the Interior] with more information about the inner structures of our personal networks" (48, emphasis in original).

In Part Two, Łoś and Zybortowicz present a thorough examination of the institutions of the police state in Poland in the 1980s, which consisted of the MSW (Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych—Ministry of the Interior) and the intelligence agencies of the MON (Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej—Ministry of National Defense). They also analyze the crimes (which even under the legal system of the People's Republic constituted violations of law) committed by the police state. The problems the authors describe in detail include the imposition of Martial Law, assassinations of opposition activists (those of Grzegorz Przemyk and Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko) and the cases of criminal activities (of economic character) of members of the MSW apparatus. In Chapter Five, "The Role of Secret Services in the Solidarity Revolution," Łoś and Zybortowicz examine the ways in which the authorities manipulated the Solidarity movement. The history of manipulation of the independent trade union Solidarity can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, 1980–81, the authorities tried to manage the Solidarity movement. When this strategy failed, the imposition of Martial Law became necessary. In the years 1981–85 the authorities tried to completely eradicate the opposition from social life. When that proved to be impossible as a result of the strength of social resistance, the authorities changed their strategy again. Łoś and Zybortowicz write: "Following the 1985 Jaruzelski-Gorbachev meeting, the Party inner leadership probably concluded that it was no longer possible to eliminate the opposition. They thus braced themselves for the task of trying to shape the enemy. To facilitate this task they introduced a vital distinction between the 'constructive' and 'destructive' opposition" (90). The long-term objectives of this operation involved "the recognition and inclusion of some segments of the opposition into ruling elite's strategies. Through complex and to a large extent covert operations,

the Solidarity movements was molded and harnessed to follow the path of a negotiated revolution compatible with the interests of Communist elite" (217). In Chapter Five Łoś and Zybortowicz describe also the police arrangements for the Round Table talks: the infiltration of the opposition, attempts to influence the make-up of the delegation of the Solidarity trade union, manipulation of the public opinion, etc.

In Part Three, "After Communism: The Posthumous Life of the Police-State," Łoś and Zybortowicz describe the participation of the secret police in the process of transformation, which can be roughly summed up in the corollary that the communists "appear to have initially traded their politi-

---

### All the prison cells have windows that allow the guard to watch the inmates at any moment, but the inmates on their part are unable to watch the guard

---

cal capital for economic capital and then used the latter to regain political power" (111). Łoś and Zybortowicz examine the role of the police structures in the operation of the command economy and their participation in the process of endowment of the party nomenclatura. They examine in detail two major financial scandals, that of the FOZZ (Fundusz Obsługi Zadłużenia Zagranicznego, Fund for Foreign Debt Servicing) and that of the BIG Bank (Bank Inicjatyw Gospodarczych, Bank of Economic Initiatives). Ample space is provided for examining the transformation of the structures of the police state. The government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki did not dare to attack the collective interests of the functionaries of the communist police state, leaving them enough time to adapt to new conditions. General Kiszczak continued as Minister of the Interior until July 1990 and as many as 14,000 out of the overall number of 24,000 officers of the SB took part in the "verification" or vetting procedure, and over 4,000 passed it successfully. The remainder took advantage of early retirement provisions, left to work in the police or set up their own private security companies. The former SB operatives make up two-thirds of the operational staff of the newly established UOP

(Urząd Ochrony Państwa, State Protection Agency) and 8 percent of the police (132). Needless to say, decommunization did not take place in Poland, and the process of "lustration" (or exposing the former secret agents) was for a long time blocked by the post-communist forces (the book covers the developments until 1998). The destruction of the archives is a separate problem, which began in mid-1989 and lasted until early 1990. It involved three categories of archive materials: the minutes of the sessions of the Politburo and the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the PZPR (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, Polish United Workers' Party, i.e., the Communist Party), the personal files of the MSW and those of the military counterintelligence (155–57). No verification was attempted in the judiciary system. It is not surprising therefore

**Secret agents operate according to the principle of social mimicry; the more they succeed in blending with the social environment, the easier it is for them to gain its confidence and manipulate it**

that the destruction of evidence which could prove the defendant's guilt, the incompetence of the courts and absence of the so-called political will ensured that the crimes committed by the communist police state were not tried in the courts of law. The best illustration of this fact can be found in the trial, described by Łoś and Zybortowicz, of the generals responsible for the December 1970 massacre of workers on the Polish coast, which to all intents and purposes has not even been able to begin so far. Łoś and Zybortowicz characterize the analyzed transformation in the wider context of globalization, which can affect it on various levels, one of its aspects being, for example, the globalization of crime and intelligence services.

In terms of heuristics, two strata could be distinguished in the book under review: the theoretical and the empirical one. Whereas the empirical stratum can be accepted without major reservations, on the theoretical level the legitimacy of the application of the category of the police state (or more specifically post-totalitarian party/

police-state) to the political system in the waning days of the People's Republic arouses serious objections. This in turn puts a question mark on the direction of conceptualization of the collected empirical material. This is because in the opinion of Łoś and Zybortowicz: "The main organizational infrastructure of the Polish police state of the 1980s was comprised of two ministries: the Ministry of the Interior (MSW) and the Ministry of Defense (MON)" (29, 31). The authors are clearly inconsistent here. At one point, in conformity with the quoted definition they accept the broad understanding of the police state comprising two ministries, the MSW and the MON. In Chapter Three, however, they opt for the narrower definition of the police state comprising only the MSW and the intelligence and counterintelligence structures of the MON. Moreover, when they embark on the empirical analysis of the shifts of influence in the party and state institutions, they forget about the narrower definition accepting silently the broader definition of the police state; they even use the hybrid term "the (militarized) police-state" (58).

It seems that the acceptance of the wider definition of the police state, comprising also the military structures, rules out the application of Foucault's categories, because the military hierarchy operates according to principles other than those governing the police hierarchy. One cannot apply the categories of dispersed power to the military structures because military power is highly centralized. The degree of its centralization is much higher than is the case with the civilian segment of power. Moreover, military rule is pretty much verifiable, one is tempted to say even downright tangible, because it grows out of the barrel of a gun.

The way both structures of coercion, the police and the military, operate is also different. The secret informants working for one secret service operative do not know each other and do not suspect their respective existence. In contrast, soldiers under the command of one officer are cooped up together in the barracks most of the time. A secret agent knows only his or her immediate superior. The members of the high com-

mand of the army are known and recognizable by everyone because of their military distinctions. Secret agents operate according to the principle of social mimicry; the more they succeed in blending with the social environment, the easier it is for them to gain its confidence and manipulate it. Soldiers, on the other hand, stand out from their civilian surroundings. Operation of the secret police is based on cooperation of secret agents, who meet in secret with the secret police officer, whose identity is equally secret for uninitiated observers, and passes secret instructions to the agent. Operation of the military structures is based on orders that are openly issued by the commanders at various command levels to their subordinates.

The social power of the secret police, as Łoś and Zybortowicz justly note, rests on the anonymity of influence and blending of the individuals that make it up with the mass of the civic society. It happens to be the case, however, that what decides about the strength of the secret police predetermines also its weakness. In contrast to the secret police, the military rulers have at their command the soldiers in the barracks who constitute a disciplined force and can be quickly used against some political power. The secret police officers are in no position to do so. It is impossible for secret agents to be cooped up in a barracks for the overt use against the political power structure. This fact precludes the possibility of the secret police launching an overt coup which could lead to it taking power all for itself. The processes of autonomization of the secret police are thus limited in comparison with the military.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand when we narrow down the definition of the police state to include only the structures of the MSW (and possibly the intelligence services of the military), then the theses of Łoś and Zybortowicz about the shift of influence from the Party to the police structures look dubious. Let us consider the arguments used by Łoś and Zybortowicz in some detail. For example, deployment of over 8,000 military commissars in various agencies of the state administration during the period of the Martial Law, appointment of over a

dozen high-ranking military officers (colonels and generals) to high posts in the civil service, appointment of five generals to ministerial posts in the cabinet and one as head of the NIK (Supreme Chamber of Control), and appointment of several members of the military to the Politburo and other governing bodies of the communist party, would be more indicative of the militarization of the state and its evolution in the direction of the military dictatorship rather than of the police state (30). (It was popular in the opposition circles during the period of Martial Law to refer to the ruling regime as the military junta.)

Another argument supposedly proving the increase of the political clout of the police structures was a large number of cases of promotion to the rank of general among the police. However, in the words of Łoś and Zybortowicz themselves these promotions included mainly officers transferred from the military to the police. This is in fact evidence proving the militarization of the police structures rather than "policing" the structures of the state.

Still another argument is supposed to be found in the practice under which "voivodeship police chiefs were, as a rule, also members of the voivodeship Party committee executive" (46). Yet, Łoś and Zybortowicz do not say precisely whether this phenomenon began in the 1980s, which would indicate a symptom of the shifting influences in the structures of power, or

whether it originated in the 1970s and 1960s. If the latter was the case, it could also be seen as a symptom of the domination of the Party (party membership in the uniformed services approached 75 percent) in the SB and MO (Milicja Obywatelska, Citizens' Militia) because it was impossible to become the voivodeship MO chief without being a member of the Party.

The only argument in favor of the thesis put forward by Łoś and Zybortowicz is the fact that in 1980 "Regional (voivodeship) militia commanders, who in reality also had under their authority local sections of the Security Service (the SB) were no longer subject to full supervision by the regional Party committees. They were instructed to forward some of the information collected directly to the MSW headquarters, thereby bypassing the local Party secretaries" (30-31). In the first place, at the central level the MSW was still subordinated to the Party. Secondly, this is far too little to justify classifying the political system of the People's Republic as the police state. In addition, several counter arguments could be made. One of them can be found in the limitations imposed by the Party on the cooperation with the SB, which was noticed by Łoś and Zybortowicz: as a rule the SB operatives were not allowed to recruit secret agents among Party members without the consent of the appropriate Party organization (the exception was the military intelligence and the counterintelligence) (46). Moreover,

one could argue that the acts of political amnesty which were announced in 1983, 1984, and 1986 ran against the institutional interest of the secret police, which consisted in having the opposition activists locked up as long as possible. Did the SB operatives spend so many working hours and use so much equipment for surveillance of opposition activists only in order to release them later almost without any consequences? The acts of amnesty were motivated not by the interest of the secret services in the narrow sense, but by the wider interests of the Party leadership. It seems therefore that the secret police was an instrument, (admittedly

**As a rule, the SB operatives were not allowed to recruit secret agents among Party members without the consent of the appropriate Party organization**

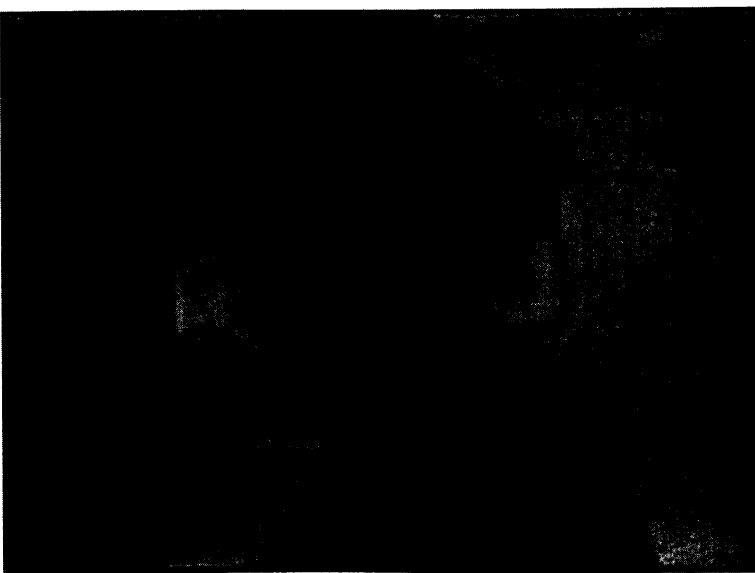
grown to monstrous dimensions and privileged in comparison to other echelons of power), in the hands of the Party leadership.

Yet, the method of conceptualizing the waning period of the People's Republic notwithstanding, the empirical material collected by Łoś and Zybortowicz in their book is of inestimable value. The police structures of the communist People's Republic did not "vanish into the thin air" (216) at the moment of signing of the Round Table agreements. They have exerted, and still do, significant and often sinister influence on the course of the Polish transformation. Maria Łoś and Andrzej Zybortowicz's work reveals a vast body of knowledge about this period. Their book, which takes up the issues by and large ignored by the social sciences, is a must for anyone who is interested in the transformations taking place in Poland and East Central Europe after 1989.

<sup>1</sup> Compare of my review ("Zakulisowy wymiar upadku komunizmu," *Arka*, no 3 [51] (1994): 188-93, of his previous book: *W uścisku tajnych służb*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Antyk, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> More on this: K. Brzechczyn, "Władza tajna policja polityczna. Próba modelu." *Przegląd Politologiczny*, vol. IV, nr 1-2 (1999): 85-88.

RYSZARD DRUCH



# periphery

VOLUME 8/9, 2002/03

JOURNAL OF POLISH AFFAIRS



## Contents

PERIPHERAL VISION	In Search of Truth	FROM THE PUBLISHER	3
VANTAGE POINT	America's Eastern Tier: Poland between NATO and United Europe	MAREK JAN CHODAKIEWICZ	4
	Refusing to Serve: Some Aspects of Consular Guardianship over Polonia	ALEKSANDER KWIECIEŃ	13
	Putting Together the Mosaic of Truth: John Paul II's Complex Judgment on Modernity	MAREK CHOJNACKI	18
BLANK SPOTS	The Announcement of the Verdict	PIOTR GONTARCZYK	22
	Awaking a Phantom	TADEUSZ WITKOWSKI	30
	The Polish and Jewish Identities of Artur Rubinstein	THOMAS NAPIERKOWSKI	50
	Broken Arrow: A Conversation with Janusz Żurkowski, Legendary "Żura," Pilot in the Battle of Britain, and Test Pilot	ALEKSANDRA ZIÓLKOWSKA-BOEHM	55
ILLUMINATIONS	Out of Enchantment, Out of Tiredness: Józef Czapski's Questions about Truth and Beauty	KAZIMIERZ NOWOSIELSKI	62
	Émigré Literature in Poland after "The Black Hole"	BOLESŁAW KLIMASZEWSKI	67
	Love the Wild Swan: A Few Words about Czesław Miłosz's Childhood Readings	LILLIAN VALLEE	72
	Diary of a Naturalist (excerpt)	CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ	76
	The Return; Second-hand War; Transfusion; Eight; Belle Isle	LILLIAN VALLEE	78
	Farewells; * * * <i>Am I a mountain or a bird</i> ; There Is Music No Heart Can Withstand; Stones of Warsaw, Rome and Jerusalem	KRZYSZTOF KARASEK	82
	Escape; Farewell; Tunnel; The Wall	ADRIANA SZYMAŃSKA	86
	Braiding Themselves into Streams; Splinter; T. W., 1996; End of Epoch	JANUSZ SZUBER	89
	We Make Love; Ill-suited; Loneliness; * * * <i>Old house: my universe</i>	STANISŁAW DEUSKI	92
	O Torch, O Rose; A Man Wearing a Cap	KRYSTYNA LENKOWSKA	94
	Stones; It's Raining	JÓZEF KURYLAK	96
	Nothing Sadder, Nothing Lovelier; I Wanted So Much to Tell the Truth	JACEK NAPIÓRKOWSKI	98
	Two Solitudes	MAREK PEKALA	99
	To Stefania P; To L. C; Bavaria, Germany	KRZYSZTOF KOEHLER	100
(P)REVIEWS	The Hidden Dimension of the Transformation of Communism	KRZYSZTOF BRZECHCZYN	102
	A Pioneering Book on Russian Colonialism	ALEKSANDRA ZIÓLKOWSKA-BOEHM	106
	The Encyclopedia of Polish Immigrants and Polonia	KAZIMIERZ DOPIERŁA	107
PROFILE	Contributors		110
	The Artists: Marek Chaczyk, Anna Chojnacka, Józef Czapski, Ryszard Druch, Ewa Pawlak		112