

Anticommunism as a Paradigm of Thinking On the Works of Józef Mackiewicz

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the views of the twentieth-century Polish writer and journalist Józef Mackiewicz (1902–1985). His perspicacity concerning communist ideology and practice is reflected in his analysis of Soviet propaganda and the Communist Party's apparatus of power. The article shows how Mackiewicz lays bare the weaknesses and antihumanist face of the USSR, and how he unraveled the paradoxes of communist rule in the context of issues related to the functioning of enslaved societies. The article also deals with Mackiewicz's controversial criticism of dissident movements and the policies of Western powers toward the Eastern Bloc.

Who was Mackiewicz, and what makes him stand out from other anticommunist authors? Mackiewicz was a novelist and author of unique reports and political dissertations: for forty-five years he was absent from public awareness in Poland because there was no place for the likes of him in times of communist oppression. In communist times his works were available only in small-run editions from émigré publishers, or in the tiny "secondary circulation" (*drugi obieg*). Mackiewicz wrote uncompromisingly of uncomfortable facts that were not supposed to be talked about directly; even today they are often absent from public discussion. Thus the author of texts on the structure of Soviet tyranny, one blessed with a great talent to connect and draw conclusions from facts, became a widely unknown writer.

One's first encounter with Mackiewicz can evoke a mixed reaction. It is not without reason that he is often called controversial, a word that includes feelings of astonishment and disbelief that probably recur in his readers. There is no doubt that the author's views and the vision of communism he has articulated can generate discussion, but a polemic with Mackiewicz would not be easy. Even though some of his opinions seem extreme to us today, his key

diagnoses of the communist system are painfully relevant. His works are full of a rare passion that reflect the feelings of a man fully convinced of being right, but at the same time not attempting to force anyone into accepting his claims. In his books we find not only a clearly negative judgment about the inhumanity of the communist system, but also an enormous amount of information, facts and opinions subjected to logical analysis, and discerning interpretation. Confronting this material is likely to lead to reassessment of our knowledge and established views on the history of twentieth-century totalitarianism.

Take away from men the time-tested significance of words and you will get them into the state of mental paralysis.

Józef Mackiewicz

I would like to emphasize that it was never Mackiewicz's intent to cause any kind of scandal or quarrel. In one of her letters Mackiewicz's wife, Barbara Toporska, wrote that "a writer is responsible not only for what he writes about but also for what he conceals."¹ Mackiewicz never tried to conceal anything; the primary goal of his texts is to discern the facts and then talk openly about them. He saw this as his duty not only as an intellectual, but also as an ordinary free person.

THE COMMUNIST "ROAD TO NOWHERE"

In the foreword to the collection of texts and stories *Fakty, przyroda i ludzie*, Toporska recalls:

During the Polish-German-American conferences that Józef participated in, there was a custom that members introduce themselves. When it was his turn, he declared: "Józef Mackiewicz. Occupation: author. Nationality: anticommunist. Views:

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¹ Kazimierz Orłoś, "Józef Mackiewicz w świetle listów rodzinnych" in *Zmagania z historią. Życie i twórczość Józefa Mackiewicza i Barbary Toporskiej. Materiały z konferencji w Muzeum Polskim w Rapperswilu z cyklu "Duchowe źródła nowej Europy," Rapperswil, 26–28 września 2006 r.*, ed. Nina Kozłowska and Małgorzata Ptasieńska (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2011), 44.

counter-revolutionist. Country of origin: Eastern Europe.”²

This peculiar manner of self-presentation may confuse a reader unfamiliar with Mackiewicz's works, but the author never joked about matters of real importance. This self-description reflects a remarkably strong personality. The author of the *Road to Nowhere* cannot be identified with any “reactionary” ideology. His biography and almost all of his creative legacy can be summed up in one word: anticommunism. The prefix *anti* should not only be underlined but also given a new shade of meaning because the author's attitude, though bearing traces of a total negation, grew into a universal and critical reflection on what were in his view the most important and tragic events of the twentieth century.

The key point of Mackiewicz's message is that the communist system constitutes “the greatest danger to the world since it began.”³ Mackiewicz's implacability and perseverance in voicing this opinion came not only from personal experience (direct encounters with life under communism), but also from a detailed knowledge of the mechanism of Soviet propaganda that he studied for many years. From the 1920s until his death in 1985, Mackiewicz continued to study and expose the methodology of communism's coercion and the methods fundamental to its destructive force. He dissected the procommunist attitudes of various societies and social groups: intellectual elites, party officials, oppositionists, and ordinary people. He described the communists' plan of gradually gaining power as well as the provocations and other methods they used on the international stage. He commented on the West's lenient attitude toward the dangers of communist totalitarianism, of which the most obvious postwar sign may be the border in the middle of one of the most important European

cities, “a wall dividing the meaning of human words, a wall bristling with machine guns” (*TTOP* 194) that served as a symbol of postwar reality and strengthened the myths about Eastern Europe. However, according to Mackiewicz the most terrifying results of the Soviet occupation were the psychological changes in the thoughts and actions of ordinary human beings. It was in the sphere of mind and spirit that communism wrought the worst damage. The consequences of this damage in postcommunist countries have yet to be studied and explained in detail; Mackiewicz believed they resist the generally used scholarly and statistical methods.

Mackiewicz's anticommunism should not be seen as a general disapproval of reality; it reflected an authentic and deep concern about the fate of peoples, cultures, and societies under the communist yoke:

It is not true that Communism [merely] threatens “Western civilization” and “Western culture.” It threatens every civilization and culture: Roman, Byzantine, Chinese, Indian, Arab. As the enemy not of nations but of man *tout court*, it is also the enemy of man's God and of all the achievements of humanity. (*TTOP* 185)

The author did not treat communism as a local problem of a “barbaric” Eastern Europe. Stressing the fact that its very idea was born within the parameters of the Western world, Mackiewicz drew attention to a certain discord in the perception of communism by democratic societies in the West, whose familiarity with the subject has been foggy and slogan oriented. While the Soviet Union lasted, it was not uncommon to think of it as a distant, powerful, and dangerous empire. In reality, the life of an ordinary inhabitant of the USSR revolved around the day-to-day fight for survival in the gloomy “world of fiction,”⁴ a fight that stripped people of their dignity and pushed spiritual needs and intellectual curiosity aside. The false perception of Soviet power resulted not from ignorance or a lack of information in Western societies, but rather from an inconceivable magnitude of humiliation of the human person

² Barbara Toporska, “Fakty, przyroda i ludzie (przedmowa),” in Józef Mackiewicz, *Fakty, przyroda i ludzie* (London: Kontra, 1984), 15.

³ Józef Mackiewicz, *The Triumph of Provocation*, trans. Jerzy Hauptmann, S. D. Lukac, and Martin Dewhirst, foreword by Jeremy Black (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 200. Henceforth *TTOP* with page number.

⁴ This term was used by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

brought by communist rule. This kind of humiliation cannot be imagined by people who live under noncommunist political systems. Mackiewicz also points out that communist movements and organizations did not trigger a reaction of instinctive disgust in Western European societies. Quite the opposite—it was the firm opposition to those movements that raised revulsion. As years went by, aggressive anticommunism was often replaced by a soft revisionism. Mackiewicz, however, states that one should not attempt to “repair” communism but rather strive to uproot its destructive message.

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According to Mackiewicz, the most terrifying feature of the Soviet occupation was the psychological change in ordinary human beings, in the way they thought and acted.

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Mackiewicz points out that the image of the Soviet Union as a great military power armed to the teeth stands in opposition to the fact that some 90 percent of its population desired its downfall. Thus the Soviet Union must surely have been the weakest great power in history (TTOP 207). In fact, the “imperial” image of the Soviet Union deserves a separate analysis. The author of *The Triumph of Provocation* referred to the variously understood aspects of the functioning of the “empire,” pointing out that the USSR did not fit the definition of one. For instance, a classic definition of imperial activity is “exploitation of the conquered countries for the benefit of its own country (the metropolis) and its own people” (TTOP 199). In this context, Mackiewicz viewed the Soviet Union as a peculiar empire *à rebours*:

Ordinary Russians within the Soviet Union do not reap benefits from the aims and activities of international communism, but are rather its prime victims, frequently living in worse conditions than people in the allegedly “colonial” countries, namely those who have been conquered by the Communist headquarters in Moscow. (TTOP 199–200)

This, of course is debatable, because there are different ways of acquiring satisfaction in life, and Russians enjoyed the prestige of the Moscow-centered empire. One should also note

that the more or less oppressive character of communist governments and differences in the standard of living of citizens of communist countries were never the focus of Mackiewicz’s attention. The writer was of the opinion that the common denominator in any form of communist rule was the creation of a peculiar “prison of humanity”⁵ in which the color of the cage was not of real importance, just as territorial borders of each particular “people’s republic”⁶ did not matter. According to Mackiewicz any form of communism, whether “Polish,” “Romanian,” or “Czechoslovakian,” deserved the same condemnation, since they were all characterized by the same ability to effectively degrade human beings.⁷

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Mackiewicz points out that the Soviet Union prohibited searching for facts, replacing them with slogans and newspeak.

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In his novel *Road to Nowhere*⁸ Mackiewicz superbly captures the atmosphere of these dehumanized times. The last chapters of the novel relate to one of the Soviet authorities’ decrees regarding mass detention of people suspected of “demonstrating” their indifference or propagating aversion to bolshevism, or engaging in what was usually described as “counter-revolutionary activities,” “agitating,” or “spying” (RTN 250). Realistic description of

⁵ Józef Mackiewicz, “‘TRUST’ NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu,” in *Optymizm nie zastąpi nam Polski* (London: Kontra, 2005), p. 138.

⁶ See, for instance, Mackiewicz’s views on postwar conflict about borders on the Odra and Nysa (Oder and Neisse) rivers between Poland and Germany. The question of territorial borders and state independence was approached by Mackiewicz mainly in the context of the so-called “state idea” (“idea krajowa”), which means building a multinational state between Russia and Germany that could guarantee security and stability in East Central Europe.

⁷ Aldous Huxley and George Orwell were two Western writers who came to conclusions similar to those of Mackiewicz. American diplomat George Kennan represented the view that communism would eventually evolve into a system respectful of human rights.

⁸ Józef Mackiewicz, *Road to Nowhere*, trans. Lew Sapieha (London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1963). Henceforth RTN with page number.

roundups, which according to NKVD instructions were to be “firm and decisive but not giving rise to noise or causing panic” (RTN 237) are preceded by and compared to the job of the catcher of stray dogs. The captured animals usually offer resistance and whine pitifully when a rope loop is placed around their neck and they are shoved into a cramped cage. The sight of a captured, yapping dog raises outrage and protests of the passersby, which is why catching them is carried out at dawn when the city is still asleep and the streets are empty. The roundups of inhabitants of occupied Poland carried out by the Soviets in 1941 were similar to that procedure except that the numbers were incomparably larger:

They were taken not singly or by the dozen, but thousands at a time; they were taken openly, in view of the whole town. . . . It was not dogs that were being caught, but men. . . . No one protested, no one shouted. . . no one defended himself or tried to free anyone else. . . no one even complained. . . Everything had the appearance of being calm and peaceful (RTN 309)

The strategy of nonresistance was probably based on a delusive hope of survival. However, the narrative of *Road to Nowhere* does not revolve around the question of “how could it happen.” It could happen and did because it was required by Stalin and his willing executioners, and there was no point in looking for logic in the bloody totalitarian rule of the communists who had mastered the use of a massive apparatus of violence. Purges, deportations, detentions, and an almost unbearable psychological terror inscribed in everyday reality under the Soviets were all intended to strengthen the communist regime. Mackiewicz concentrates on showing the methods that made possible the triumph of a “mass hypnosis” of fear and duplicity. This success was achieved due to an enormous propaganda machine in which a significant part was played by the top-down remake of the meaning of words. “Take away from man the original significance of words and you will get the state of mental paralysis” (RTN 114), states one of the characters. In *The Triumph of Provocation* the author presents a few of the most striking examples of this semantic

manipulation, such as calling aggression “liberation” and slavery “freedom” (TTOP 40), not to mention Sovietization described as “structural change” (TTOP 133). Countless examples of this propaganda gobbledygook can be culled from various periodicals, daily papers, and books of the period. To my knowledge this rich linguistic material has not yet been analyzed exhaustively.

In *The Triumph of Provocation* the author also strives to overturn a common belief that identifies communist doctrine with internationalism. Mackiewicz points out the fallacy of this statement, giving examples of taking perfidious advantage of nationalistic sentiments in regions subjected to communist rule after the outbreak of the revolution. He especially opposes such methods of fighting for power. In a letter to his sister he wrote:

I hate nationalism and chauvinism. I have been living among strangers for so long that I had an opportunity to find out that all men are the same, and every narrowness of opinion regarding both nation and [political] party, I see as a cancer on the body of humanity that transforms life into stupor. . . . Whether it is *Deutschland über alles*, or Poland *über alles*, or the Party *über alles* . . . it's all equally disgusting to me.⁹

Like any totalitarianism, communism poisons life by dullness and fear, impeding day-to-day activities and negating the standards of normal existence. However, it is interesting that in spite of the presence of politics, history, and various social issues in Mackiewicz's works, they do not fit into the left, center, or right side of the political spectrum. He points out that the core of twentieth-century totalitarianism is degradation of the individual. We can then say that the anticommunist views of Mackiewicz had their basis in the principle of human liberty and human rights.

⁹ Kazimierz Orłoś, *Józef Mackiewicz w świetle listów rodzinnych*, 47–48. This “sameness” of all people everywhere in the world expressed itself by the wish to live and let live, an attitude not unlike that of the Sarmatian political writers in Poland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The false perception of Soviet power resulted not from ignorance or a lack of information in Western societies, but rather from an inconceivable magnitude of humiliation of the human person brought by communist rule. This kind of humiliation cannot be imagined by people who live under noncommunist political systems.

Mackiewicz holds radically negative opinions about the pro-Soviet attitudes of people in high public offices, and is adamantly opposed to any consent to submitting to communist rule. This implacable attitude caused a deluge of allegations and protests, not only from supporters of the government of Soviet-occupied Poland¹⁰ but also from patriotic émigrés and anticommunist opposition. Mackiewicz did not tolerate being only partially anticommunist. He did not approve of the semblance of normality offered to the conquered peoples by the communists, feeling that was a cynical game played by the occupiers with the society. The author's key argument consists in stating that compromises and concessions never lead to any long-term benefits but only strengthen and legitimize the system and postpone its final fall. This is why the author of *The Triumph of Provocation* is so difficult to categorize and why he found few readers. Even those who appreciated his literary talent often tried to debase him by stating that his anticommunism was too radical. Mackiewicz is unbending toward his opponents (and also toward himself); for him it is the substance of a message and not its form that is key to him. Facts are always at the very center of his consideration, since according to him they attest only to truth. This notion became the center of his work:

I'm all for accuracy, because I think only truth is interesting. But at the same time truth is usually richer, more complex, and more colorful than its contrived alterations. . . . Truth is also generally more shocking and gloomier.¹¹

¹⁰ Mackiewicz held that "The Polish People's Republic is not a continuation of the history of Poland but a continuation of the history of 1917 Bolshevik Revolution" (*TTOP* 136). This also pertains to countries annexed to the USSR after the war, as well as to the so-called Soviet satellite states.

¹¹ Józef Mackiewicz, "Literatura contra faktologia," *Kultura*, no. 7-8 (1973), in: Józef Mackiewicz, *Katyń*

Truth holds a superior place in Mackiewicz's hierarchy of values. The display of historical facts has a particular significance because it is supposed to be not only the foundation of reflection on the past but also, and primarily, an ethical and moral guidepost for contemporaries and future generations. Fighting for the "sovereignty of thought" and the right to express his own opinion, Mackiewicz points out that the Soviet Union prohibited searching for facts, replacing them with slogans and newspeak. He repeatedly returns to this issue in *The Triumph of Provocation* in which he says the following of the Soviet Union:

All the problems of the world had already been solved by Lenin and it was necessary only to learn answers by heart. Doubt became punishable, and where there is no doubt there can be no reflection and, therefore, no inquiring minds. And so old Russia, famous—perhaps to an exaggerated degree—for its "hair-splitting," was transformed into a collective, repeating mechanically the verses of the Leninist dogma. (*TTOP* 35)

Mackiewicz unceasingly emphasized the differences between prerevolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union. He insisted that these two terms should not be used interchangeably. In that he seems to resemble Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn but, as subsequent parts of this essay will show, he is poles apart from Solzhenitsyn in assessing communism. Asked by Paul, the main character in *Road to Nowhere*, what distinguishes old Russia from the Soviets, Father Seraphim states shortly: "They differ in everything" (*RTN* 87), adding that "The 'Russian soul' personified the spirit of revolt; the 'Soviet soul' is degradingly servile" (*RTN* 88). In this answer one hears echoes of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev, who in their works created the mythical image of the rebellious Russian. Mackiewicz is obviously under the influence of this myth. On the other hand, he is aware that the sovereignty of literature under the communist system is especially endangered because the poetic word is a culture-forming element and by manipulating words, the patterns of taste in

– *zbrodnia bez sądu i kary*, ed. Jacek Trznadel, (Warsaw: Antyk, 1997), 417.

society can be transformed into propaganda tools. The Soviet manipulation of literature, known among other terms as “socialist realism” is one of the many factors contributing to his radical opinion about communist dictatorship.

“I SAW IT WITH MY OWN EYES”. PARADOXES OF COMMUNISM IN THE LIGHT OF SOVIET PROPAGANDA

A faithful rendering of Mackiewicz’s theses and concepts requires placing them in the context of events in his life that significantly affected his outlook. The first such event was his voluntary participation in the Polish-Soviet war of 1919–1921.¹² This direct encounter by a young man (he was seventeen at the time) with a belligerent bolshevism influenced the rest of his life and his personal choices. During the 1920s Mackiewicz studied natural science and entered an unhappy marriage. In 1923 he began to work on *Słowo*, a newspaper run by his older brother, Stanisław, also a talented writer¹³ who in the 1950s became prime minister of the Polish government in exile. Mackiewicz’s work as a journalist encouraged a prolonged reflection on bolshevism’s spread to the peripheries of Eastern Europe. In the 1930s, in addition to his reporting, Mackiewicz made his literary début.

[In his famous speech] **Khrushchev didn’t mention and could not mention the Katyn victims, because the murdered Polish officers never belonged to the Party, they were never communists. And there has never been a case where communists would consider murdering the opponents of their ideology a crime.**

Józef Mackiewicz

In the early 1940s the author and his family remained in the part of prewar Poland that is presently a part of the Lithuanian Republic. This

¹² The fictional description of the time of the Polish-Soviet war can be found in the novel *Lewa wolna* [1965] (London: Kontra, 1994).

¹³ The story of Mackiewicz’s older brother deserves a separate essay. In the middle of the 1950s Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz unexpectedly returned from emigration to Poland and began collaboration with the security forces. This move turned out to be his biggest political and personal failure. Józef Mackiewicz maintained no contact with his brother after the war.

territory changed hands several times during the war; it was briefly ruled by Lithuanians, then Germans, and then the Soviets. Under Soviet occupation Mackiewicz worked as a coachman and a lumberjack, witnessing the mental degeneration of people after their encounter with communism. It was this observation and the accompanying experiences that served as the basis for his novel *Road to Nowhere*.

In the second half of 1941 Hitler launched operation Barbarossa. After German troops marched into the part of Eastern Europe that had been seized by the Soviets in 1939, the situation changed dramatically. For a brief period, writing truth about communism became possible. In *Goniec Codzienny* [*Daily Herald*], a Vilnius paper, Mackiewicz published several articles about everyday life under Soviet occupation. In one he wrote:

If someone would ask me for the shortest definition of the Bolshevist system, I’d say: the state perfectly devoid of public opinion. The state where the concept of citizenship was reduced to the concept of slavery.¹⁴

Mackiewicz presented the tenets of Soviet political thought in a similarly emotional and sharp tone:

Their invention is the Lie raised to an umptieth power, guarded by draconian laws, carried on to such an open shamelessness that it becomes overwhelming. There is no place in it for the will of the general public. Yet on every corner and doorstep, in newspapers, books, or calendars, on the radio, every day, every hour they say that everything that takes place in the state is in accordance with the will of the general public. In the Soviet Union an absolute slavery prevails because the citizenry is deprived of elementary civic liberties, of every single one of them. All that is left are dejection, despair, soft whispers, and fear. But it is said from on high that “everybody is happy, free and smiling.” And it is not just said on high, every citizen should repeat it as a forced prayer, at work and outside work, at home and in the street. Those who are not glad and smiling will be invited to the NKVD.

¹⁴ Józef Mackiewicz, *Goniec Codzienny* no. 2 (1941) in Jerzy Malewski (Włodzimierz Bolecki), *Wyrok na Józefa Mackiewicza*, (London: Puls, 1991), 51.

Lies are the base of laws, lies are omnipresent in school books, lies underlie literature, history, poetry, press, everything, including private conversations.

Nobody is happy within the Soviet system but everybody has to praise it. Day after day . . . 200 million people have to take part in a mental self-flagellation. Here is this peculiar invention, which has not been used by any of the bloodiest tyrants so far.¹⁵

This commentary, while accurate, has one huge drawback for which the author atoned for the rest of his life. *Goniec Codzienny* was a German propaganda newspaper written in Polish, a *gadzinówka*.¹⁶ Agreeing to publish in the Nazi press raised suspicions among Poles that Mackiewicz collaborated with the enemy. Because of this misunderstanding, officials of the Polish Underground State issued a death sentence; it was eventually withdrawn and the author was cleared of all charges.¹⁷ Despite that, after the war this short episode became the key argument for Mackiewicz's opponents. From then on Mackiewicz had to constantly refute allegations of collaboration with the Nazis.

The whole affair achieved even more publicity because in 1943 the Germans discovered a mass grave of Polish soldiers in Katyn. In spring 1943 Mackiewicz, having received a go-ahead from Polish Underground State officials, arrived at the location of the first exhumation with a group of other journalists and medical personnel from across German-occupied Europe. The evidence that he gathered in the Katyn forest—the narratives of witnesses, letters and documents found in the uniforms of the murdered officers (a crushing majority were murdered by a shot to the back of the head)—indicated that this crime was committed by the Soviets. Further research and an inquiry personally carried out by

Mackiewicz¹⁸ resulted in numerous articles and the first book to spell out the truth about Katyn. The traces of the monstrosity that the author saw with his own eyes matched other information about the Soviet system and confirmed for Mackiewicz his earlier opinion of the dark nature of communism. Since then he has often referred to the Katyn massacre in his works.¹⁹

After the discovery of the missing Polish soldiers' burial sites, Soviet propaganda began a disinformation campaign accusing Nazi Minister of Propaganda Goebbels of spreading false information to media.²⁰ Stalin himself vehemently denied that his people had committed the Katyn murders, at first maintaining that he ordered to free the officers, then that the prisoners escaped to Manchuria, and eventually that they were captured and killed by the Germans. This last statement became the official Soviet version for the subsequent half century, or as long as the USSR lasted. There was no end to the lies and rumors, but as Mackiewicz points out, confusion and disinformation suited the Soviets best: "The bolsheviks are great psychologists. They know that among a thousand people who repeat a

¹⁸ Józef Mackiewicz, "Dymy nad Katyniem" in *Fakty, przyroda i ludzie*; also *The Katyn Wood Murders*.

¹⁹ After returning from Katyn, the first thing the author did was give an interview to the aforementioned *Goniec Codzienny*. What was the reason for this controversial decision? In the documentary *Errata do biografii - Józef Mackiewicz*, directed and written by Grzegorz Braun and Robert Kaczmarek (2007), Telewizja Polska, Włodzimierz Odojewski conjectured that Mackiewicz wanted the truth to be known by as many people as possible, and so chose a newspaper with a high circulation rather than a Polish underground leaflet that would reach only patriotic Poles. The translated fragments of the interview ("I saw it with my own eyes") are available at: <<http://tylkoprawda.akcja.pl/teksty16a.htm>>.

²⁰ It should be added that the Nazis also tried to make use of the Soviet crime in their propaganda, such as by accusing Jews of murdering the Poles at Katyn. See the front page editorial in *Prawda* 19 April 1943, "Pol'skie sotrudniki Gitlera." See also Józef Mackiewicz, *Sprawa mordu katyńskiego. Ta książka była pierwsza* (London: Kontra, 2009).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ An informal term for Polish-language newspapers published by German or Soviet occupation administration. The funds devoted to publishing this kind of press were called "reptilian funds" (*Reptilienfonds*).

¹⁷ The whole affair is described in detail by Bolecki in his book *Wyrok na Józefa Mackiewicza* (London: Puls, 1991).

rumor there may be none who would bother to verify the information.”²¹

A secret order signed by the “leader of the Soviet nation” on 5 March 1940 hid the brutal truth: execute. The world was silent, even though intelligence services of the Western powers knew well enough who shot the tens of thousands of deceitfully detained soldiers of the Polish army. It was silent because it did not want to annoy Stalin, who was then an ally of the Allies. In 1949 Mackiewicz wrote:

Sometimes it does seem as if all human vices—from the strongest: crime, treachery, duplicity, slander, up to the smallest and shallow: personal ambitions, gossip, and vanity—shook hands over these tombs.²²

Katyń has become the symbol not only of the pointless death and cruelty of Soviet totalitarianism, but also of the West’s diplomatic disgrace in regard to Eastern Europe. It was a crime that for political and diplomatic reasons was not allowed to be mentioned during the entire period of the Cold War. One could say that the postwar order was founded on the Katyń lie, which is why the crime can now serve as a key to understanding some of the tragic turns of twentieth century history. As such, Katyń becomes a suitable subject of political reflection for contemporary democratic societies.

After the war Mackiewicz found himself in London, began publishing novels, and was recognized as a talented novelist. But the topic of Katyń remained his *idée fixe*. Mackiewicz conscientiously watched its postwar fate and the forced silence on both sides of the political divide. One could ask why the period of the so-called thaw, started by Khrushchev, did not reveal the truth about Katyń. Mackiewicz’s answer is as simple as it is important: it was because the then First Secretary was mainly critical of Stalin’s crimes committed against

other communists. In 1962, while analyzing the consecutive political moves of Moscow and the favorable reaction of Western public opinion, Mackiewicz pointed out the following:

Khrushchev didn’t mention and he could not mention the Katyń victims because the murdered Polish officers never belonged to the Party, they were never communists. And there has never been a case where communists would consider murdering the opponents of their ideology a crime. Just the opposite. . . they have always viewed it as a favor done to the Party. With regard to that, the speech Khrushchev delivered at the Twenty-Second Congress did not change either the attitude or the communist morality.²³

Thus in Mackiewicz’s view, Stalinists put on the mask of anti-Stalinists and, with Khrushchev at the lead, confessed mainly to the political purges executed by them against their own comrades. During his alleged self-examination Khrushchev did not say a word about Stalin’s greatest crimes, such as the mass murders of civilians during the collectivization and “dekulakization” period. Mackiewicz points out that what Khrushchev condemned most strongly in his speech were the crimes of communists against communists, the trumped-up Moscow trials, and the like. Somehow this escaped the attention of Western admirers of the period of “thaw.” Mackiewicz concludes that apart from the ethical aspect of the issue and the unquestionable fact of Stalin’s crimes, “the mutual killings among communists” or “murdering the murderers” was actually received by some with a sort of relief.²⁴ Horrible as this may sound, many people felt a kind of gratitude toward Stalin for executing some of the most notorious communist criminals.²⁵ For Mackiewicz, Khrushchev’s speech provides proof that “the slavery of spirit” and “collective duplicity” were closely related to the communist ideal. Mackiewicz notes that “among the

²¹ Józef Mackiewicz, “Ostrożnie z wiadomościami o Katyniu,” *Lwów i Wilno* no. 23 (1947) in Józef Mackiewicz, *Katyń – zbrodnia bez sądu i kary*, p. 267.

²² Józef Mackiewicz, “Tajemnica szwedzkiego dossier,” *Wiadomości* no. 41 (1949) in Józef Mackiewicz, *Katyń – zbrodnia bez sądu i kary*, p. 325.

²³ Józef Mackiewicz, “Dlaczego Chruszczew nie mógł wspomnieć o Katyniu,” *Ostatnie Wiadomości* no. 4 (1962) in Józef Mackiewicz, *Katyń – zbrodnia bez sądu i kary*, ed. Jacek Trznadel (Warsaw: Antyk, 1997), p. 398.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 399.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

millions of people living in that system who, for thirty years, had compared Stalin to a living deity, nobody is now prepared to stand up and say a word to defend him" (*TTOP* 178). How could this happen? It was because the communist idea included the slavery of spirit and collective duplicity.

After Khrushchev's speech the core of communist ideology remained untouched and undiscussed while the party, after so-called de-Stalinization, carried on with its policy of disinformation. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was written, as Mackiewicz succinctly puts it, "at the demand"²⁶ of the First Secretary. It was not a literal demand, of course, but rather that a work of this kind was necessary to keep the party in power. The blame for the evil past could now be pinned on the dead Stalin, even though it was Lenin who was responsible for building from scratch the system of Soviet terror, and it was Lenin's doctrine that formed the statute of the Communist Party that totaled only a few million members yet ruled over a country of nearly three hundred million citizens.

In *The Triumph of Provocation* Mackiewicz points out other paradoxes of the communist regime as reflected in Khrushchev's above-mentioned strategy:

The mere fact of Communist repression of somebody is not determined by that person's political stance. Hundreds of thousands of the party's most faithful members also fell victim to repression. . . . Communists are usually in the habit of liquidating all those whom they no longer need and who might become an obstacle in the future. . . . It allows them endlessly to repeat the same tactics and, as we have seen, in case of dire need, it even allows them to "rehabilitate" those they once liquidated, so as to begin all over again. (*TTOP* 104–105)

It is worth noting that the same could be said about the countless fellow travelers (*poputchiki*) who, in their journalistic or literary work, decided to spread the "revealed truths" of communism and who were usually pushed aside

after completing the "tasks" required of them. These things are a bit more clear today than in Mackiewicz's time.

One of the darkest periods of world literature occurred at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s when thousands of sugarcoated poems and stories were written, praising the "unfathomable wisdom" and "humanism" of Stalin, the high officials of the party, and the Bolshevik Revolution. Some of the authors of these texts were distinguished and talented poets, and some were Nobel Prize laureates. This behavior, rather common back then, is now covered by a fog of shame, and serves as sad proof of the untrustworthiness, foolishness, and servility of some men of letters. It also confirms Mackiewicz's opinion that any form of cooperation with the communists leaves a dark mark on the human dignity of the collaborator. To quote the opening sentences of *The Triumph of Provocation*:

The most characteristic feature of the Communist system is the total enslavement of the human spirit, the subjugation of human thought and of the human intellect. It would appear, therefore, that the greatest enemies of this system should be found not among the workers, peasants . . . and "ordinary" men and women in the street, but in the so-called progressive circles that have traditionally proclaimed to the masses the ideal of free thought and have regarded matters of the spirit as more important than daily bread. Logically, one would have expected that these intellectual circles in all countries would become the avant-garde of the battle against Communism. Nothing of this sort has happened. (*TTOP* 9)

When confronted with the party, the intellectuals almost always faced moral defeat. The party got what it wanted, i.e., the prestige of the intellectuals' voice. Mackiewicz points out the absurdity of the situation in the 1960s when the victims of Stalinism were called "anticommunist" and considered it an insult. They were not in the least ready to denounce their communist beliefs; they blamed Stalin and not communism for what happened. According to Mackiewicz, the communist system put on different masks depending on circumstances: it was called Bolshevism, Leninism, Stalinism, the "thaw," Gomul'kism, "peaceful coexistence," or

²⁶ See: Józef Mackiewicz, "TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu," p. 77. I refer to this matter later in the article.

even “capitalism.” Yet in Mackiewicz’s view it remained an absolute evil that had to be opposed with all the might by all the people of good will. One should not attempt to reform or improve it, or try to see some positive elements in it that could prove it was capable of evolving. In Mackiewicz’s view, it was wishful thinking to try to tame the USSR because such attempts ignored the core of the problem:

Communism is above all an enemy to freedom of man. However improved the communist system would be, men cannot be free in it. This is why any fight for “human rights” in communism without at the same time fighting against the communist ideology is hypocrisy.²⁷

Accordingly, terms such as “good communism” or “communism with a human face” dangerously falsify the already falsified reality of communism. Recognizing communism’s deceitful ability to camouflage itself is the first and necessary step toward understanding it. Mackiewicz preached his beliefs throughout the 1970s without much success. He was greatly disappointed by the fact that the world did not seem to hear his voice. One might say well and good, but what then should have been done? The USSR had atomic weapons and war was out of the question. Mackiewicz’s somewhat convoluted answer is summarized below.

MACKIEWICZ’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS DISSIDENTS AND “AUTHORITY FIGURES” IN THE FREE WORLD

In 1976 Mackiewicz self-published in Munich a political brochure titled *TRUST No.2: The new plan to destroy anticommunism*²⁸ in which he researched the reasons behind the negative reception of anticommunist slogans in the West. In his view, the responsibility for this state of affairs lay primarily with the communist center in Moscow whose main objective was to continue being in power, but also with those Westerners who so easily believed Moscow’s assurances. In the *Road to Nowhere* one of the

characters uses a metaphor to depict the Soviet Union as “a colossus with feet of clay that one could topple over with a single shot” (RTN 118). If so, how did it happen that such a creation survived for so long after the war? Mackiewicz had already written the following in 1952:

All the mistakes the West made regarding the Soviet Union after the war originate from the same source: reckoning with the opinion of the Soviets and endeavoring to soothe them. . . . The Bolsheviks can say absolutely anything they want, and no proof or arguments will be needed.²⁹

Mackiewicz laments the fact that the free countries applied their measures and ethical norms to the official image of the area enslaved by communism. In reality, communism involves a complete reversal and negation of universal moral standards. The author also notes that the source of communist tyranny was a psychological factor:

Unfortunately, very few people realize what sort of clay the [Soviet] feet are made of. The Soviet Union is the least materialistic state in the world. Its whole power rests on making a skillful use of psychology. (RTN 118)

Taking this into consideration, even a whisper about a force-based attempt to overthrow communism could be considered a threat to the party. This is why the very word “anticommunism,” which raises associations with an open call for the overthrow of the party, was to the regime a particularly distasteful notion that should be instantly eliminated as an unword. According to Mackiewicz, the experienced Soviet propaganda machine found a perfect way of uprooting anticommunist turns of phrase, paradoxically by a partial appropriation of them (see the points below), and also by replacing them with new and inspirational slogans matching the period of the *détente*. Obviously peace rules out war, and so any form of dissatisfaction with communist rule could be channeled into a critique of the system—up to a point, of course. It should be stressed that this

²⁷ Józef Mackiewicz, “TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu,” 138.

²⁸ This and other political brochures by Mackiewicz can be found in Józef Mackiewicz, *Optymizm nie zastąpi nam Polski* (London: Kontra, 2005).

²⁹ Józef Mackiewicz, “Pierwsza bolszewicka książka o Katyniu,” *Wiadomości* no. 28 (1952), reprinted in Mackiewicz, *Katyń—zbrodnia bez sądu i kary*, 375.

criticism had to fit clear guidelines and support a mistaken belief in a peaceful evolution of the USSR. What was called progress, internal evolution, or a change for the better in regard to the Soviet Union, in fact meant only a delay of the process of crushing “the clay legs of the colossus.”

However, the trustfulness with which the public opinion of the free world has treated these transformations would not amount to much were it not for the activities of a new elite of the émigré opposition that began arriving from the Soviet Union in the 1960s and ‘70s. Mackiewicz suggests that in the 1970s Moscow decided to experiment with disinformation by sending a group of dissidents to the West, where they were greeted as if they were oracles fit to pronounce on what was happening behind the Iron Curtain. They were not “evil” anticommunists but rather peaceful “critics of the regime.”³⁰ This new-old³¹ move of Moscow, reminiscent of the Leninist discourse about democratic societies being “deaf and dumb blind men” (*TTOP* 85), turned out to be a great propaganda success for the Soviet Union.

Mackiewicz’s prime examples were Andrei Sakharov, who did not leave the USSR but was allowed to make public statements, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He called them the main pillars of the concentrated disinformation offensive. The paradox lay in the fact that the two Nobel laureates “became propagators of the one and only way of ‘fighting’ communism, which consisted in not using any kind of force or pressure, but waiting for communism’s internal evolution.”³² Mackiewicz summarizes the dissidents’ message in the following way:³³

1. They openly speak of the dreary reality of Soviet life and the abysmal human rights record of the Soviet administration
2. They stress evolution and the forthcoming revival of citizens’ energy in Soviet society
3. They express and cultivate contempt toward the West
4. The implied conclusion to the dissidents’ message is that the communist system must not be overthrown by force and that it is better to wait for the revival of the interior moral powers of Soviet society.³⁴

As mentioned before, the first and most prominent of these postulates agreed with the postulates of the opponents of communism. Mackiewicz seemed to be particularly disgusted by points 2 and 4. On the other hand, he was not surprised that in the political constellation of the time it was Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn that gained almost a monopoly on the “truth” about the Soviet Union. After all, it was a top priority for communists to maintain their power, and this could be achieved by means of the peace message of the new emigration. To achieve this purpose even harsh criticism was allowed because it resonated well with the belief in the moral revival of the degenerate system and a rejection of the notion of a real fight against communism. Mackiewicz was puzzled and disappointed that this dissident offensive was received with open arms in the West’s intellectual circles, and that the lack of inner coherence in the new oppositionists’ message did not raise any polemics or suspicions. He found the discretion with which the West avoided analyzing indications of inconsistency in the overall Soviet dissident movement alarming.³⁵

Mackiewicz was not alone in holding these views. Inconsistency and ambivalence in Solzhenitsyn’s way of reasoning was likewise noticed by his [Solzhenitsyn’s] friend, Dmitri Panin, who commented on it in his essay “Solzhenitsyn i dieistvitel’nost’” [Solzhenitsyn and reality]:

³⁰ Józef Mackiewicz, “TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu,” 76.

³¹ Mackiewicz sees common elements between disorganizing the ‘dissidents’ in the 1970s and the disinformation operation “Trust,” carried out by the GPU (the State Political Directorate) in the 1920s.

³² Józef Mackiewicz, “TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu,” 101.

³³ Apart from Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, Mackiewicz also mentions the activities of such dissidents as Valery Chalidze and Vladimir Maksimov.

³⁴ Józef Mackiewicz, “TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu,” p. 95. See also *The Triumph of Provocation*, 209–210.

³⁵ “TRUST NR 2,” 113.

Solzhenitsyn's suggestions turn us away from the fight against the communist regime in the Soviet Union. His tirades—don't lie, confess, self-limit—bring confusion and chaos, they hinder mobilization of significant efforts against the communist model of the world. Sometimes they sound like mockery. . . . The class of communist oppressors can only be thankful to Solzhenitsyn. . . . And the West has accepted yet another disinformation testimony.³⁶

Thus information of alleged changes in the Soviet Union, spread by the dissidents, agreed with the objectives of Soviet propaganda about "peaceful coexistence." It is important to emphasize, though, that Mackiewicz's allegations concerning Solzhenitsyn cannot be unambiguously accepted.³⁷ The author arrived at his conclusions on the basis of observations, available texts, interviews, and dissidents' comments—i.e., circumstantial evidence. He did not accuse anyone of conscious cooperation with the communists; rather, he indicated that many people served as cats' paws to Moscow's designs. Mackiewicz liked to challenge authority figures, such as the highly respected Soviet dissidents, because in his view searching for truth usually involves asking uncomfortable questions. He was likewise critical of Radio Free Europe, which he accused of propagating the vision of "communism with a human face."³⁸

In the early 1970s Mackiewicz published two books about the policies of the Catholic Church toward communism.³⁹ He reproached the Vatican for the compromises it had made with the state authorities of the Eastern Bloc. He rejected coming to terms with the communists in any shape or form and believed that the

Church's Eastern policy in the times of *détente* had no positive consequences.⁴⁰ Mackiewicz was the opposite of a diplomat and felt unconstrained by any social, political, or historical taboos. This allowed him to obstinately state that "the greatest of all possible catastrophes would not be a war for freedom but capitulation to total slavery" (*TTOP* 179). In 1982, however, after the Solidarity period in Poland and during martial law, he expressed an optimistic belief that the time would come when communism would crumble:

We are all human. The Communists who strive for world domination are only human, too. And errors and miscalculations are human. If they [opposition movements in the Soviet bloc] become widespread, if they slip out of their Communist controllers, the internal upheavals in the Soviet bloc might suddenly change from quantity to quality. Given favorable circumstances outside, they might even lead to the overthrow of Communism. . . . Let us hope that it is still possible for this to happen. (*TTOP* 211)

Mackiewicz did not live to see the long-awaited moment when the oppressed said, "Down with the Soviet rule!" (*TTOP* 211) Nor did he correctly predict the way communism would eventually fail. Maria Szonert referred to this matter in her review of Mackiewicz's book:

Mackiewicz did not see the resolution of the Cold War — he passed away in 1985. Therefore he cannot give us his explanation of such an unthinkable . . . course of events. Nor can he apologize to all those "Polrealists" whom he consistently attacked and offended for decades for their efforts to bring about the liberation of Eastern Europe through nonmilitary means.⁴¹

It is doubtful that Mackiewicz would apologize to anyone for his views, for treating the communist system as criminal, and for seeing cooperation with it in any form or shape as sheer

³⁶ Quoted from Józef Mackiewicz, "TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu," pp. 102–106. The translation from Russian into Polish is by Mackiewicz; I translated it into English.

³⁷ Józef Mackiewicz, "Nierozwiązana zagadka Aleksandra Solżenicyna," *Wiadomości* no. 23 (1972), <<http://tylkoprawda.akcja.pl/teksty20.html>>; Józef Mackiewicz, "Archipelag zbrodni i zagadek," *Wiadomości* no. 13–15 (1974).

³⁸ Józef Mackiewicz, "Mówi Rozgłośnia Polska Radia Wolna Europa," in *Optymizm nie zastąpi nam Polski*.

³⁹ *W cieniu krzyża and Watykan w cieniu czerwonej gwiazdy*.

⁴⁰ In *The Triumph of Provocation* the author asked rhetorically whether the Church was aware that the goal of communism, according to Lenin, was "the destruction of all faith in God." (*TTOP* 201)

⁴¹ Maria Szonert, "The Triumph of Provocation (review)," *The Polish Review* 54, no. 4 (2009), 516.

wickedness. While he lived, he paid a huge price for his intransigency. His legacy consists of providing us with unique information about communism and sketching out a particular ontology of the communist lie. As Jeremy Black notes in the foreword to *The Triumph of Provocation*, Mackiewicz's analyses can help us navigate and interpret other contemporary authoritarian systems and methods of governing, and they often shed light on contemporary international policies toward undemocratic countries. Δ

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History from the Ground up

Terrence O'Keefe

The Polish Experience through World War II. A Better Day Has Not Come, by Aleksandra Ziolkowska-Boehm. Foreword by Neal Pease. Lanham, MD and Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2013. viii + 175 pages. Index, footnotes. ISBN 978-0-7391-7819-5.

While it may seem offensive to quote Josef Stalin on any subject, there is one well-known remark of his that seems apt here: "A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths a statistic." This observation, turned on his own unrestrained power and cavalier attitude about the lives of others, signals him as the lead author of innumerable personal tragedies that generated the dire statistics that are the subject of conventional histories that deal with nations, states, and the relations among them, i.e., history "from the top down." Ziolkowska-Boehm's

collection of deeply affecting personal and family narratives returns us to the level where individuals are caught up in historical events that changed their lives forever, and tells us how they experienced them.

The intended spoils of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact were, for the Russians, the eastern half of Poland and the Baltic States. With their military occupation of eastern Poland during late September 1939, Soviet authorities, working through the NKVD, undertook vast "cleansing" operations, including targeted murders, mass killings, and large deportations of Poles whom they considered to be potential oppositionists (the grisly details are described in Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands*). Though aimed at removing Poland's leadership class from the region, the criteria of "selection" for deportation were gross, doctrinaire, and often arbitrary. During the cattle-car transports and upon arrival at their destinations, death by malnutrition, illness, and exposure to extreme weather was considered "natural" by the authorities. Joanna Synowiec's journeys through this hellish passage are emblematic of thousands of Polish children who were orphaned and used as expendable labor by the Soviets during this terrible period. Her gloomy odyssey – Archangelsk, Uzbekistan, Iran, Mexico, the United States—killed her parents early on, leaving her as the family's responsible "mother" at the age of twelve, unable to prevent the death of one of her two brothers. Her imperative to rescue what could be rescued was so stark that she lost the ability to cry. While she managed to build a decent life in the United States, she never truly recovered from the succession of blows that hammered her during the war years. Her happy memories of a childhood on a prosperous farm near Szemiatówka (today in Belarus) have not vanished, but have been transformed by the nightmare that followed into a constant reminder that such everyday happiness could never be hers again. Hers is a story of irretrievable losses ("A better day has not come").

The longest chapter in this book, "Wartanowicz Family Vineyards in Podole," is an intergenerational saga of an extended family, one branch of which stems from the Armenian immigrations into Poland during the late middle ages. In the nineteenth and early twentieth