

The Triumph of Provocation

By Józef Mackiewicz. Translated by Jerzy Hauptmann, S. D. Lukac, and Martin Dewhirst. Foreword by Jeremy Black. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009. ix + 244 pages. Chronology, notes. ISBN 978-0-300-14569-4. Hardcover. \$48.00.

Marek Jan Chodakiewicz

Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice, and moderation in the pursuit of justice is not a virtue.

Harry Jaffa, in a speech written for Barry Goldwater

First, a disclaimer: I like Józef Mackiewicz very much. This Polish conservative libertarian (or classical liberal) always went against the grain, and he set up an admirable goal for himself. According to him, the task of the Polish émigrés was clearly defined: “Having lost their national sovereignty, they can at least protect the sovereignty of thought” (7). He suffered no myths gladly, nationalist myths in particular. He was one of the first Polish writers to stress that “Hitler’s crimes were committed, however, not only against Poles but against many other nations, and especially, to an incomparably higher degree, against the Jewish nation” (169). He pointed out that “there was a chasm between the fate of the Poles and the fate of the Jews” (102). He was arguably the first to write about the Katyń forest massacre of the Polish officers (1943) and the Ponary forest slaughter of Jewish civilians (1945). He treated all victims with equal empathy.

Mackiewicz thus represents the best traditions of the noble Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He also epitomizes what a Polish nobleman ought to be like: an uncompromising defender of liberty. “One should not forget that democracy is not freedom. Democracy is only equality, while freedom results only from liberalism” (46). And liberalism withers if collective conformity becomes the rule.

Mackiewicz was of the opinion that a writer’s sincerity can be measured not only by what he/she writes but also by what he passes over in silence. In his view, everyone is entitled to write what he wants and what is most dear to his heart, what he considers important. Let Semitophiles and anti-Semites write, as well as pro-communists and anticommunists, pro-Germans and anti-Germans. The negative aspect of a human group lies not in the fact that one of its members writes in a certain way and another writes differently;

it lies in the fact that no one dares to write differently or express a different opinion, even though he/she lives in the free world and neither the Gestapo nor the NKVD threatens him or her with Auschwitz or Kolyma (177). Therefore Mackiewicz bucked “the pressure of the dominant intellectual circles that are trying to create a certain tendency, a trend in thinking, an atmosphere that does not favor human individualism and, therefore, also limits the freedom to make comparisons” (21), by this meaning comparisons between Nazism and Communism in particular.

Mackiewicz’s background is similar to mine. Like mine, his family is from Wilno. His experiences, including a sojourn in Tsarist Russia, are just like those of my family. He fought the Bolsheviks during and following the First World War and detested the Nazis before, during, and after the Second World War. That squares well with the ideas embraced and choices made by my great-grandparents, though not exactly with the actions of their children. Like them, Mackiewicz viewed Marxist socialism as a danger greater than its national socialist offshoot. He considered them equally criminal, even if the “Communists have murdered 143 million people. That is many times more than Hitler managed to murder” (206). He made that statement in 1962, a long time before the disingenuous leftist product of *The Black Book of Communism* [1997] appeared. Mackiewicz bemoaned the tendency to gloss over the crimes of Marxism, even if he recognized the reasons for it. “Such a great moral elevation of Communism over Fascism in the eyes of the world is unquestionably due to Hitler and his criminal methods, which compromised the idea of an anti-Communist crusade” (13).

Unlike my Wilno grandparents who were clandestine soldiers of the Home Army, however, Mackiewicz was a harsh critic of *Armia Krajowa*, Poland’s mainstream independentist and pro-Western underground. He believed that by cooperating with the Soviets at the behest of Warsaw’s Western Allies, the AK was paving the way for a Communist takeover of his country. Thus, Mackiewicz preferred the unequivocally anti-Nazi and anti-Communist *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne* (National Armed Forces, or NSZ) that fought against both enemies of freedom and that “broke out of this collaborative attitude toward the Soviets” (107). I can relate to that also, since a few of my relatives were with the NSZ as well. And Mackiewicz’s émigré existence invites parallels as well: much maligned, he never surrendered.

When growing up, I heard a great deal about the author. His brother Stanisław (aka Cat) was connected to my grandfather's student fraternity, Konwent Polonia, at the Stefan Batory University in Wilno. Back in Soviet-occupied Poland my father was a close friend of his nephew, Kazimierz Orłoś, a literary figure in his own right. Both were involved with the human rights and independence movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Mackiewicz's books were banned, of course, but my father was an underground printer for the Committee to Defend Workers (KOR) so we often had the first pick of the forbidden fruit. Further, our émigré family sent us banned books from the West. Beginning in 1982, Mackiewicz's output was readily available in my new home in California, including at the Szwede Slavic Books and the Hoover Institution.

The goals remain immutable, while the conditions of bringing about the utopia fluctuate. In the time of Mackiewicz, the key element was to deceive the public by enlisting "useful idiots" to legitimize deceptive operations. Mackiewicz dubbed this modus operandi – "provocation."

Yet, paradoxically, I had not read Mackiewicz until relatively recently because I concentrate mostly on non-Polish authors in my American studies. I also tend to avoid books containing strong opinions or *belles lettres* related to the topics of my specific research interest before my empirical inquiry is completed and the archives are mined. I am usually irked by those who hold opinions without properly researching the subject. I wrongly associated Mackiewicz with this group.

With Mackiewicz I was in for a surprise. "If literature and literary criticism, out of some higher political considerations, avoid all confrontation with the reality of life, they should, at least, be prepared to deal with problems that are probable in real life" (171). His is the ultimate deployment of what John Cardinal Newman called "the illative sense" [an epistemological tool allowing for the conversion of probabilities in favor of a conclusion, *Ed.*], and Russell Kirk referred to as "the sword of imagination." Working with limited sources, as the Soviet archives were then totally inaccessible to him, and relying heavily on his rhetorical wit, the author successfully conjured up a world almost precisely as it has independently emerged from my own painstaking research. In fact, his writings are priceless because he refused to be intimidated by

what George Orwell referred to as the "smelly little orthodoxies," or politically correct sensitivities of the day. After I finished my book on Ejszyski (2002), I became an admirer of the Wilno author. I regretted that I could not share his devastating wisdom with my English-speaking friends. His *Katyn Wood Murders* (1951) had long gone out of print with no reprint in sight.

However, when in April 2007 a plenipotentiary of Mackiewicz's London publisher contacted me with an English translation of *The Triumph of Provocation*, I was torn. On the one hand, I was truly elated and asked my friends and colleagues to support the project. On the other, I declined to directly participate in the endeavor myself because of the family connection: at the time, Mackiewicz's relatives were battling in court publisher Nina Karsov over the author's estate. The sordid affair drags on, but that should not prevent one from enjoying the liberal anticommunist's insights of which there are many. I shall concentrate on two concepts that are the author's trademarks: the nature of communism and change; and communism and nationalism.

Mackiewicz created an ingenious formula to help comprehend Marxism-Leninism. He noticed that with communism "nothing changes and everything changes." This is a classical Burkean approach in reverse. The father of modern conservatism admonished his supporters "to change so nothing would change." His was a method for preserving tradition and continuity, except Burke eschewed any deception. Perversely, Marxist dialectics allowed the communists to plagiarize the conservative method to perpetuate their position in power. This phenomenon has been independently described by scholars quite unaware of Mackiewicz's original insights, for example most notably by John Lenczowski in *The Sources of Soviet Perestroika* (1990).

To wit, the communists tend to tactically change their appearance but their way of seeing things remains the same. The essence of Marxism stays immutable, while the conditions of bringing about the utopia fluctuate. In the time of Mackiewicz, the key element was to deceive the public by enlisting "useful idiots" to legitimize deceptive operations. Mackiewicz dubbed this modus operandi – "provocation" (*provokatsiia* in Russian, *provokacja* in Polish).

Mackiewicz's "provocation" has several levels. Communist "provocations" invariably contain the more or less concealed elements of fellow traveling (*poputnichestvo* in Russian) that is, of an apparent

compromise. This compromise allows for diverse interpretations; consequently one does not know for sure where the apparent interests of the provocation's target end and the interests of the provocateur begin. The provocation operation is however arranged in such a way that the quantitative weight of the benefits to the planners is greater than the quantitative weight of the compromises on minor matters made with the operation's target (145–146).

To maintain themselves in power the communists attempted to rob words of their original meaning to force . . . humanity to use language to its own detriment.

Thus Mackiewicz argues that everything in Soviet history—from the “Trust” operation and the NEP of the 1920s through the Thaw of 1956 and the *détente* of the 1970s up to and including the *perestroika* and *glasnost* of the 1980s—had an inedible imprint of a provocation. “It is the communist habit to provide both false information and false conclusions” (169). One must also beware also of the communists “robbing words of their original meaning” (39), the purpose being to maintain their position in power and to spread their kind of revolution worldwide. “It intends to force not just a nation but humanity to use language to its own detriment. This means that, in return for renouncing traditional language, culture, and spiritual freedom, it promises total slavery” (40).

One of the most paralyzing tools of the provocation is “the disproportion in the treatment of Nazi crimes and communist crimes [which] has no moral basis, only a political one” (19). But “where, in what book of divine or human law, is it stated that persecution for one's race or nationality is a greater crime than persecution for one's social origin, religion, or views?” (21). A political calculation, a putative *Realpolitik* to facilitate a “peaceful coexistence” with the Soviets dictated this noxiously dichotomous, selective sensitivity to victimhood. Yet the communist deception rendered any elucidation of a realistic course of action impossible. “Any policy, if considered as the art of predicting the future and influencing historical developments, has to be based on a knowledge of the past. Once this past is falsified, once historical facts are replaced by invented facts, once reality is adjusted to the current form of wishful thinking, such a *Realpolitik* may easily become a completely unrealistic policy” (19). The elimination

of the historical perspective by the communists “allows them endlessly to repeat the same tactics” (105).

The deception would not have succeeded without the phenomenon of fellow traveling. “The most suitable area for communist penetration is not so much politics or economics as human psychology or emotions” (151). To enlist support, the communists took advantage of the frailty of human nature. “Optimism, as we know, is a powerful factor in the life both of individuals and of communities. The Bolsheviks decided to exploit this human inclination toward optimism” (83). The collaborators, naturally, were disposable and their collaboration brought benefits chiefly to the Bolsheviks: “Communists cannot be ‘persuaded’; one can only fit in or not fit in with their tactics at a given stage” (127). And further: “Any discussion with the communists is futile, since for them black is white and white black, which makes any kind of satisfactory conclusion impossible. The communists engage in negotiations only with a view to breaking the resolutions made at these negotiations when it suits them” (192).

There were always plenty of “useful idiots” to collaborate. Some were leftists, liberals in particular, who viewed the communists as fellow progressives, “liberals in a hurry.” But many others were apparently staunch right-wingers, some of them monarchists, conservatives, religious traditionalists and, particularly, Christian nationalists including the most radical brand, like Poland's Bolesław Piasecki (122). Communism ensnared its nationalist enemies on two levels. First, acting from the position of weakness, the communists divided their enemies by appealing to national interest. Lenin argued successfully that it made no sense from the point of view of Estonia to persist in fighting the Bolsheviks when they did not threaten Tallin, unlike the German *Freikorps* and the White General Yudenich. The Estonians agreed to a peace. Why support the Whites, the Red leader asked of Poland's Marshal Joseph Piłsudski, when they wanted to restore Russia's monarchy and reconquer Warsaw? The Poles should therefore refrain from attacking the communists. And the Poles did. Of course, when the fortunes of the Civil War began to favor the Bolsheviks, the latter immediately attacked the Poles and others. Thus, by subscribing to the “lesser evil” theory, nationalism selfishly caused disunity on the anticommunist side. “The absolute majority of nationalistic leaders came to the conclusion that independence might be achieved through certain compromises and cooperation with the Bolsheviks, rather than through cooperation with the

counterrevolutionary forces” (49). Only a coordinated offensive by all counterrevolutionary forces would have stamped out the Soviet menace at its evil inception. Unfortunately, “nationalism, if faced with a choice between an alliance with a neighboring nationalism against Bolshevism, and an alliance with Bolshevism against a neighboring nationalism, would, as a rule, select the latter” (155). To repeat: “Communism is not regarded as enemy number one; in all these cases, egoistic, nationalistic interests are superior to the common interest of both liberation from and a defense against the common enemy” (187).

Second, acting from a position of strength, the communists adopted nationalism for their own purposes. This happened on several levels. Immediately, they realized that nationalism was a great tool of social mobilization and therefore control; hence, they invoked “Russian patriotism” to oppose the Poles in 1920 and promoted National Bolshevism among the subjugated nations starting with Russians, Ukrainians, and Mongolians. They allowed the sock of the captive peoples to remain national, while the stuffing was Bolshevik—“National in form, socialist in content,” as Stalin put it. This allowed the Marxist-Leninist pathology to appear familiar and harmless to some captive peoples (75). It therefore attracted noncommunists and even anticommunist collaborators who succumbed to a system most of them hated. They failed to understand that the ‘Polish People’s Republic was neither ‘Polish’ nor a ‘republic,’ nor of the ‘people.’ It was a member of the Soviet bloc and a branch of international communism” (188).

How Mackiewicz loathed the collaborators! He brokered no compromise with either the communists or their useful idiots since “communism is the total antithesis of freedom” (168). And more: “International socialist system. . . could be best described. . . as a psychological pestilence” (194). In fact, aside from its democidal character (to use R.J. Rummel’s term), “the most characteristic feature of the communist system is total enslavement of the human spirit, the subjugation of human thought and of human intellect” (9). Aside from its obvious criminality, Mackiewicz hated communism because of “the boredom of poverty, the boredom of fear, the boredom of lack of prospects, the boredom of monotony, the hopelessness of a life not worth living” (94). The author never tired of reminding us that “all communist regimes, wherever they exist, actually rule against the will of the population. Communist rule is imposed upon the population by force, fraud, and deceit. Once this force is undermined

the communist system is bound to fall apart (193). It can happen though neither compromise nor negotiation. As pointed out by dissidents in the Soviet bloc, nonviolence itself is a part of the provocation, because it serves the needs of the communist masters. Mackiewicz was skeptical of the various “partly manipulated nonantagonistic opposition movements” (210), “Solidarity” included, most of which were penetrated and controlled by the Soviet secret police. Yet he was fast to admit that “90 percent of those who take part in such opposition movements undoubtedly do so in good faith and in the profound belief that this is what should and must be done” (211).

Mackiewicz held that nonviolence was a dead-end street. He firmly believed that removing the threat of armed anticommunist action only served the interest of the Soviet puppet masters. This put him on a collision course with the Catholic Church in Poland and with the Vatican including pontiffs such as John Paul II who, in the author’s opinion, allowed communism to survive by blessing nonviolence. The true litmus test of change in communism was an all-out armed counterrevolution or a war of liberation, nuclear if need be, and a complete annihilation of the system and its slave drivers. “Every sensible person knows that Communism cannot be overthrown by any means other than war” (193). In fact, “the death of half the human race in an atomic war is not the greatest catastrophe. The real catastrophe would be for all mankind to be living under the rule of the communist system” (195). Extreme times call for extreme measures, as Harry Jaffa recognized for Barry Goldwater. Chinese, Cubans, and Vietnamese take heart: “Despite the general condemnation of war, only those who act gain recognition of their rights and respect in the world” (189). The author goes so far in the service of anticommunism as to question the very idea of national sovereignty:

A policy that serves exclusively the interests of the state and of the nation is an anachronism today. Today’s politics should serve the interests of humanity in order to safeguard it from global catastrophe. . . . We have to renounce the principle of the primacy of national interests over the interests of the idea of freedom. Actions detrimental to humanity cannot be justified today by any considerations relating to a nation. There are no reasons—be they geographical, territorial, divine, or human—that should force one to abandon freedom. . . The only object of our interests, the object of our politics, and the object of our death or life struggle, in view of the current communist

threat, is freedom within the limits humanity can achieve on earth. This is what is at stake. (192)

Communism does not evolve, but the communists do. They may have lost faith in their millenarian utopia, but they have sagely retained and masterfully wielded the dialectical tools of power that help them maintain their position at the top.

However, there is hope. The communists who strive for world domination are only human, and they commit errors and make miscalculations. If such miscalculations become widespread, if they slip out of the control of their communist controllers, the internal upheavals in the Soviet bloc might suddenly change from quantity to quality, argued Mackiewicz. Given favorable circumstances, they might even lead to the overthrow of communism (211). And so it came to pass: communism fell and the communists with it, if on golden parachutes.

A word of caution about the present edition: there are three translators, and in most cases they can be credited with providing a mellifluous reading experience. I encountered a few jarring phrases, such as “the Moor who has done his duty” (104), when it should be “the Negro did his job” (*Murzyn zrobił swoje*); “brotherly Polish Party” when “fraternal” is the standard communist-speak here (136); “those driven from their homeland” when “expellees” would do; or “state of emergency” when “martial law” fits better (210). There are also a few factual errors in Mackiewicz’s opus (there was an assassination attempt on Bierut (174); the number of deaths in Dresden is vastly exaggerated (207); the commanding officer of the 13th Lancers was Jerzy Dąmbrowski, not Dąbrowski (218); the Mass was in Latin, not in Polish in the author’s Wilno (221). The lack of an index is jarringly unprofessional. One hopes that Yale University Press will continue to bring out the numerous other books by this pugnacious reactionary liberal. ♦



The village of Drujsk (near Wilno, now in Belarus) in Mackiewicz’s time. Louise A. Boyd, *Polish Countrysides* (New York, 1937).

The Polish language in Canada

Język polonijny w Kanadzie. By Joanna Lustanski. Toronto: The Canadian Polish Research Institute, 2009. 295 pages. Bibliography, index of Canadian-Polish terms. ISBN: 0-920517-16-1. Paper In Polish.

Katarzyna Dziwirek

Joanna Lustanski’s book adds to the relatively small field of scholarship documenting the speech of Poles living abroad. The author does so for Canadian Polish and argues that varieties such as the one she describes should be considered dialects rather than deviations from the standard.

Lustanski starts with terminology. She presents the debate surrounding the term *Polonia*, which since the 1920s has come to mean roughly “Poles residing abroad.” There is much discussion as to who exactly belongs to *Polonia*. There are two general positions: the exclusive view, according to which to be a member of *Polonia* one must be born in Poland or be a child of Polish immigrants, speak Polish, and feel loyalty to Poland. The inclusive sense of *Polonia*, which the author adopts, is less closely tied to ethnicity. For Lustanski *Polonia* means a group of people who regardless of country of birth and degree of proficiency in Polish maintains Polish traditions, has ties to Poland, and exhibits an interest in Polish culture and an understanding of Polish national interests. The author takes a similarly broad approach to the definition of bilingualism, treating it as a relative rather than absolute term.

Chapter 2 presents a brief history of Polish immigration to Canada and an overview of Polish-Canadian life. For those familiar with Kościuszko and Pułaski it might come as a surprise that there were Poles fighting on the other side in the American Revolutionary War. The first significant group of Polish settlers in Canada were in fact British loyalists who were granted land in Canada after the war. Otherwise, the waves of immigration to Canada mirrored those to the United States with mostly rural migrants arriving between 1860 and 1939 and settling in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, while many of those who came after 1939 settled in the urban areas of Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and Edmonton. Modern-day Polish Canadians are not very involved in Polish-Canadian organizations (only about 5 percent participate), though there are about eighty Polish parishes and Polish is taught at twelve Canadian