

# Spotkania—Journal of the Catholic Opposition in Poland

PIOTR JEGLINSKI AND ALEXANDER TOMSKY

Poland is changing rapidly. Even people who live there find it difficult to describe the change of mood. "In our wildest dreams we never thought that this was possible when more than three years ago protests were organized against the changes in our Constitution,"\* said one of the leading members of the Club of Catholic Intellectuals recently. Since then the opposition against the ideocratic regime has gained many concessions from the government and has become a permanent feature of Polish society.

The opposition is now a massive movement of people with different points of view who are united against a system based on lies, corruption and the secret police. With the discreet but firm backing of the Church, they have managed to maintain a number of unofficial institutions which the government tries quietly, but so far unsuccessfully, to eliminate. This movement has helped to create independent trade unions and student unions, the Movement for Human and Civil Rights (ROPCiO), the Social Self-Defence Committee (KSS), the Committee for the Defence of Believers and the Flying University.

The teaching activities of the Flying University, and the circulation of *samizdat* publications in particular, have enlisted the active support of thousands of people who had grown up to think that no substantial change was possible in Poland. The Flying University in its second year of existence has used churches for its lectures. On 22 October over 1,200 people came to the Wrocław Cathedral to hear Professor Bartoszewski's lecture on how to deal with totalitarian oppression. About 700 people came to hear him in the Szczecin Jesuit church the month before. The number of people at these two lectures is ten times higher than those who used to meet in private flats during the academic year 1977-78.

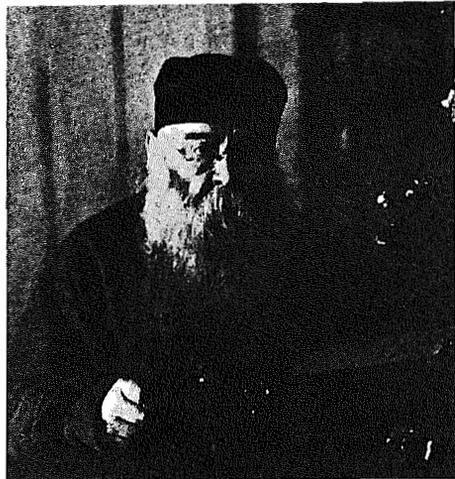
\* Three proposals for changes in the Constitution aroused concern in 1976: the principle of the "leading role of the Party" was to be asserted; the "firm bond" of friendship with the Soviet Union was to be included in the Constitution; and human rights were made dependent on the fulfilment of duties toward the State. See Roman Slowacki, "Catholic Intellectuals and Constitutional Change in Poland", *RCL*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1976, pp. 12-15. Forty thousand people signed protests against the constitutional changes (see *Ruch Oporu*, Institut Littéraire, Paris, 1977, p. 198). *Ed.*

The circulation of the independent press, as the Poles call their *samizdat*, has also increased. The head of the administration of the Party School, Teodor Palimaka, stated on 20 April that "anti-socialist forces have expanded their illegal organizational structures, with their own publishing facilities, financial support and varied forms of communication channels with friends abroad . . ." He listed 19 illegal journals with a total single print run of 20,000 copies, of which about 50 per cent are allegedly being seized by the security forces.<sup>1</sup> In the summer, however, at least 32 different publications were in circulation, and three more have appeared since then.

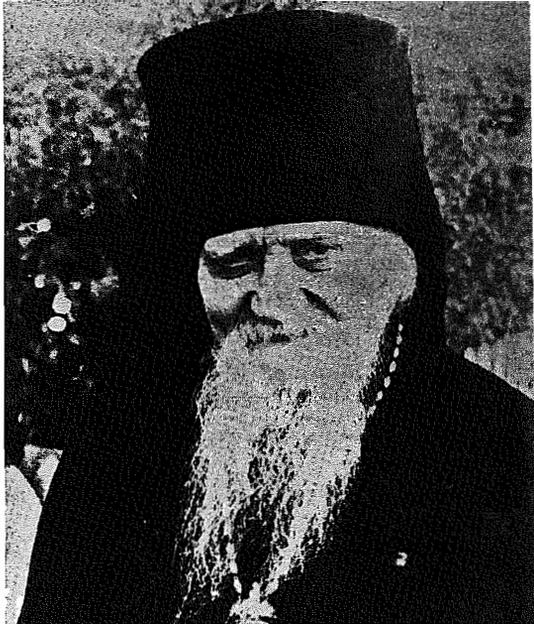
Most of the *samizdat* journals are connected with a particular movement, and although respect for human rights is common to all of them, their discussions of social and political issues betray different emphases. The Movement for Human and Civil Rights (ROPCiO), founded in March 1977, is composed mainly of people who tend towards the democratic right and support Polish national traditions which have strong links with the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. The Social Self-Defence Committee (KSS) was originally founded in September 1976 to defend the workers and their families who had been subjected to government reprisals after the June (1976) strikes. It is composed mainly of ex-Party members and the student activists of 1968: their views range from the liberal to the moderate left. They recognize the importance of the Church in Poland, but have difficulty in seeing what its future role will be (see document pp. 42-6). They realize that because the Church fought for its independence in a controlled society it alone, after the destruction of all democratic institutions, remains a forum for discussions based on different traditions from those imposed by the Party.

The unofficial journal, *Spotkania* (*Encounters*), which made its appearance in October 1977, represents something of a third force. It is produced in Lublin by a group of young Catholics. The editors realized that a discussion was taking place between different groups in the opposition in Poland. Democracy as the future of Poland was taken almost for granted by them all, but the values on which democracy should be based were not. By trying to develop a consciously Catholic attitude towards the world, the five numbers of *Spotkania* which have appeared so far have forced other groups to be more explicit about their social values, and have attracted many who were not satisfied with a return to traditional Polish Christian political attitudes or with imitating the West.

The work of the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) is of particular importance for the intellectual formation of the Catholic opposition. Despite all the pressures and limitations, the Church has maintained from its funds the only university in Eastern Europe which is not state-controlled. At KUL generations of students have been able to grow

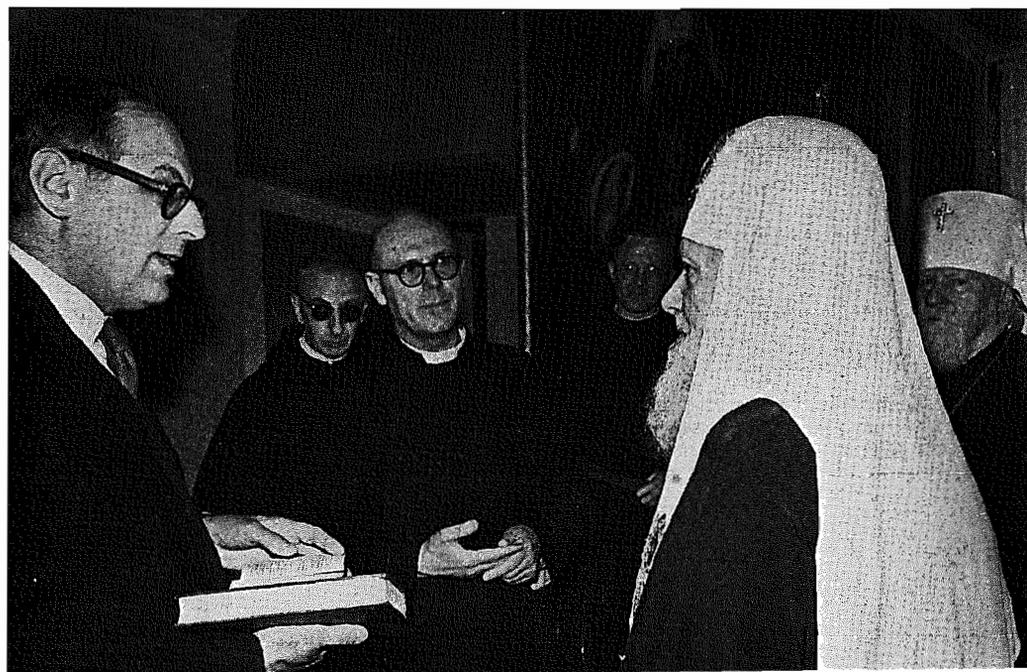


*Above left* Metropolitan Sergi (Stragorodsky) the patriarchal *Locum Tenens*, who issued a declaration of loyalty to the Soviet State in 1927 which was unacceptable to many Russian Orthodox believers. (See "The Russian Orthodox Church 1927-1945", pp. 29-34.) Metropolitan Sergi was elected Patriarch at the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church held in 1943. He died in May 1944. © YMCA-Press



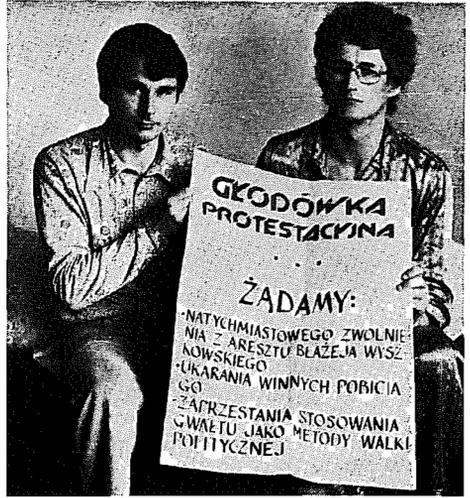
*Above right* Bishop Afanasi, a remarkable spiritual leader of part of the Russian Orthodox Church which went underground after Metropolitan Sergi's 1927 Declaration. In 1943, when the structure of the Russian Orthodox Church was re-established (see pp. 33-4) Bishop Afanasi instructed the faithful to recognize the new Patriarch. In 1921 Bishop Afanasi was made a bishop and the following year, when Lenin launched an anti-religious campaign (see document pp. 46-8) he was arrested. For the next 33 years he spent 76 months in exile and 254 months in prison. © YMCA-Press

*Below* Sir John Lawrence (left) - now Chairman of Keston College - talks to His Holiness, Patriarch Alexi (right) during a visit to the USSR in 1958 with a group of Anglican monks. Metropolitan Alexi became *Locum Tenens* in 1944 after the death of Patriarch Sergi, and was elected Patriarch at the Council of 1945. He died in 1970. © Keston College





Janusz Krupski, chief editor of *Spotkania*, a new unofficial Roman Catholic journal in Poland (see article pp. 23-8). He is studying for a doctorate in history at the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL). © Keston College



Bogdan Borusewicz (left) author of the article "War against the Opposition in Poland", *Spotkania* No. 1, p. 62 (Polish edition printed in London). Krzysztof Wyszowski (right) is one of the founders of independent Polish trade unions. Both are on hunger strike on behalf of Wyszowski's brother who was arrested. © Keston College



Participants in the hunger strike at St Martin's church, Warsaw (see p. 26) organized in May and June 1977. Jerzy Geresz, one of the hunger-strikers, reflected on the significance of this event in *Spotkania* No. 1 © Keston College

under "the humanizing influence of theology",<sup>2</sup> a phrase which may sound out of place in the West but not in Eastern Europe. It was here that a helping hand could be extended in 1968 to some of the expelled socialist students who would not have otherwise completed their degrees.

The first signs of organized protest in Poland came at the beginning of 1973 when the authorities decided to change the name and the leadership of the Polish Student Union (ZSP). The old Union was dissolved and the Socialist Union (SZSP) was to take its place in all universities and polytechnics. Nowhere was opposition stronger than at KUL. The students saw this move as an attempt to infiltrate an institution which had hitherto been free from internal government control. Moreover, the term "socialist" can be offensive to believers in Eastern Europe, because it is often regarded as synonymous with atheism. A committee of the most active students at KUL was quickly formed, and after many public and private discussions the committee decided to hold a referendum on whether or not to accept the authorities' proposed change. This sudden activity among the students indicated a major change of attitude. At KUL any opposition to official ideology had always been discreet.<sup>3</sup> Attempts to take a vote on the issue were discouraged. Nevertheless a delegation was sent to the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Wyszyński, who heads the Episcopate Council of KUL's Management. Cardinal Wyszyński decided for tactical reasons to postpone the decision for a year. In the meantime the students formed their own representative body which for the first time was elected from every department. Thus an informal student body was formed similar to the independent student unions of today. Throughout 1974 the authorities tried unsuccessfully to persuade the students to "come to heel".

The first form of open opposition was successful. For the previous three decades, however, anyone outside the ruling class in Poland has had to pay a high price for opposing the regime. Although in 1970 the strikers' committees from the shipyards brought about a change of government, most of the leaders disappeared in mysterious circumstances afterwards. But in 1976 the Catholic students, although they feared reprisals, formed an anonymous Polish Youth Committee for the Implementation of the Helsinki Agreements with relative impunity and scored a notable success at the European Youth and Students' meeting in Warsaw (19–24 June). The English delegation of Young Liberals read out an open letter from the Committee to the delegates: "For the first time an open letter, prepared and distributed by an opposition group within one of the communist States, was read out in open forum."<sup>4</sup> The letter listed several prosecution cases against students from KUL who had expressed their opinions publicly. Most worrying was the case of Stanisław Kruszynski, arrested in December 1975 and sentenced in

March 1976 to ten months' imprisonment for expressing unorthodox political views in his private correspondence. For a moment the English Liberal speaker was silenced, but 3,000 delegates then left the hall. The organizers were forced to re-open the session and allow the speaker to continue reading his letter in order to save the conference from becoming a fiasco.

By 1976 a broad consensus had been reached between the left (mainly ex-Party intellectuals) and others, particularly the Catholics. Only united public opposition could wrest concessions from the regime. For the first time protests were in some measure successful and, for example, prevented the constitutional changes being adopted in their original form. So the strikes which broke out on 25 June 1976 at Ursus and Radom took place in an atmosphere that was completely changed from that of 1970 when riots on the Baltic coast brought Gierek to power. The arrests and brutal reprisals against the workers which followed the 1976 strikes provoked an unprecedented wave of protests. Workers as well as intellectuals started to write to the authorities. In order to organize legal, financial and medical help for the victims and their families, it was essential to have independent channels of communication. For example, none of the episcopate's official documents in support of the workers could be published. After the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) was founded in September 1976 the bulletins and communiqués of the Committee flooded the country. This was the beginning of Polish *samizdat* as a mass phenomenon. The group of Catholic students who had formed the Polish Youth Committee helped to organize the re-printing of KOR leaflets, and like many other groups in the country became involved in secretly distributing the leaflets.

In May and June 1977 a protest hunger strike was organized in the church of St Martin in Warsaw to put pressure on the authorities to release both the workers who remained in prison and the people who had been arrested for trying to help them. This protest made a deep impression on many Catholic students. Jerzy Geresz, one of the hunger-strikers, writing in *Spotkania*, reflected on the significance of this event. The church of St Martin was chosen partly for reasons of safety (in Poland arrests are not made in consecrated church buildings). But it was even more important that the Church is a place where people do not lie and where life has to be taken seriously.<sup>5</sup> Jerzy Geresz sees the Church as the only persistent moral force where moral norms are systematically taught not only in a context which gives them weight, but in an atmosphere where they can penetrate the subconscious. "Before the Church lies the enormous task of re-establishing moral values in society, of fighting against demoralization, cynicism, lack of belief in anything."<sup>6</sup> Only by living out the truth can a man mature as an individual, states Geresz: "Man with no sense of an ultimate end to

his life has no way of integrating his basic activities. He lives from day to day only, seeking short-term pleasures."<sup>7</sup>

The editorial of *Spotkania* No. 1, written by Janusz Topacz, outlines the aims of the Catholic opposition. The "main source of the world's crisis in political, economic and social life is the lack of moral values", so a Christian social programme must try to apply moral norms to every aspect of social life. The editorial attacks the West for its egoism: although officially Christian, the West guarded its own interests and did not help the enslaved nations. In the '60s young Europeans, unlike those of the 19th century Romantic Movement, were not prepared to show their solidarity with the liberation movements of the Third World. Topacz continues, and as a result many countries became victims of Soviet and Chinese imperialism. This analysis may have been influenced by the Papal encyclical *Populorum Progressio* which also links the success of totalitarian ideologies in the world with western selfishness.

Turning to the Polish situation, Tapacz sees clearly that without the help of primitive materialism totalitarian control would not be possible. Party functionaries, army officers, the police and those people appointed to managerial posts enjoy financial privileges. Behind the facade of a legal system, the Party apparatus and the police cooperate with small businesses and even with the black market. In the name of the new society, totalitarianism undermines generally accepted moral values as part of its overall strategy to divide society into opposing factions. Total control over education and the mass media, pressure to collectivize private agricultural holdings, the struggle against the Church and interference with family life are all helping to disintegrate Polish society. The authorities also promote disintegration in another way. In contrast to official internationalism, the authorities encourage a chauvinism which tends to alienate Poland's natural allies.

If the first issue of *Spotkania* is analytical, subsequent numbers are ready to contend with other currents of thought. Until the tragic events on the Baltic coast in 1970, the Church in Poland had fought for survival primarily by guarding its right to independence and its right to give religious instruction. Since then, however, the issue of human and even national rights has figured more and more prominently in episcopal pronouncements and the Primate's sermons. The tension between those who stress commitment to temporal affairs and those who point to the primacy of the spiritual has increased in the Church. In *Spotkania* No. 2, Fr Ludwik Wisniewski O.P.<sup>8</sup> shows with Thomist clarity that to make work for social justice synonymous with the Christian life is contrary to the Christian Gospel and soon leads to such work becoming divorced from justice, as the history of left-wing Christian movements so amply illustrates. The total liberation of man transcends the world (1 Cor. 2:9). Fr Wisniewski refuses categorically to accept any kind of religious uto-

pianism, but is far more worried by the monastic mentality of many Catholics. This has grown out of the enforced isolation of the Church in Poland. Such Catholics separate the two kingdoms, the religious from secular life, contemplation and prayer from activity, which is a denial of the Incarnation. It is the connection between the two, Fr Wisniewski stresses, which is of primary interest to Christians. He gives credit to Marx and Martin Luther King who both, from different standpoints, saw clearly the Christian's too frequent lack of concern for the misery of man, which the first called alienation and the second spiritual agony. The strategists of the war against the Church are trying to lock up religion in the private sphere. "Let it exist as a strange hobby!" they say. But it is impossible to love God and one's neighbour in private. So Fr Wisniewski concludes that the drama of Christian life consists in the tension between perfecting oneself and perfecting human institutions.

The emergence of the Catholic opposition which is trying to formulate a distinctly Catholic approach to social and political issues, must be worrying the authorities who do not want any direct confrontation with the Church. The existence of *Spotkania* makes such a confrontation more likely. On 21 November 1978 nine flats were searched in Lublin and 13 people interrogated by the Chief Military Procurator from Warsaw. The editors of *Spotkania* accept such trials with surprising humour, and after a house search in January 1978 when, among other things, 21 pages of edited text were irrevocably lost, they printed this little note:

... the articles by contemporary authors have fallen into the wrong hands ... more precisely, we should describe them as closed minds and depraved characters, although we do what we do with them in mind as well. We take on the trouble of writing and issuing uncensored publications in the hope that in the end this will either stop or at least restrict them from engaging in such sports as firing on crowds etc. It is hard to believe that they do such things from vocation and with pleasure.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pamphlet of the Department of Ideological Training of the Communist Party Central Committee, Warsaw, May 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Symon, "Poland: The Catholic University of Lublin", *RCL*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1978, p. 226.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>4</sup> *Dissent in Poland*, London, 1977, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> "Reflections from the Church of St Martin", *Spotkania* No. 1 (London edition), 1978, pp. 53-62.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> "Christians in the struggle for justice", *Spotkania* No. 2 (London edition), 1978, pp. 98-107.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.