

Polish Opinion

IDEOLOGICAL MARKET-PLACE

Up a few steps from Cracow's halting traffic and collapsing glitter, the editor's room was dark with the silence of late afternoon. The sun poured in but did not reach the armchairs. Sitting there, he explained the situation; a circulation of forty-two thousand is not bad for a cultural weekly in Poland. It's as good as the equivalent government papers get, and the Pax publications, and they have money. And they do not always tell the whole truth. But there it is: there are better things to talk about than church-state relations.

And write about. There is not *so* much freedom in Poland, but verities can be contracted to fill the political space available, and all languages live by the art of implication. However, judging by the last six months' issues of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, an independent Catholic weekly, one would hardly think there was much secrecy involved.

It is one of the thrilling, and really important things about this magazine, that it treats problems of Polish society, culture and religion, with just as much frankness, detachment and relevance as (one thanks God as one says it) some Western reviews treat the parallel problems 'over here'. The iron curtain is a crude concept (it will be remembered that Goering invented the term), and the problems faced by the Church are often the same on both sides of it. Anyway, the Church is bound to take up a critically constructive attitude to both kinds of society, socialist and capitalist, marxist and macchiavellian, without necessarily condemning either *in toto*. It is as a constructive critic of the former that *T.P.* is unique. 'Among the problems facing the Church are Marxian materialism in the socialist bloc and practical materialism in the West, and though the former is a more direct threat, the latter in the long run may prove much more dangerous', the editor writes. Another writer points out how, paradoxically, 'materialism' seems now to pervade the West, while 'idealism' has migrated East: 'Many values now losing ground in the West may well be preserved in this part of Europe'.

In the same article the Editor discusses the two attitudes of Polish Catholics, the 'optimists' and the 'pessimists', the former saying how deep is the Catholic tradition in Poland, the latter noticing how many intellectual and cultural waves are even now breaking on the old ramparts, where tradition and sentiment, he observes, often outweigh faith and effort. New methods and a fresh impetus are needed. One would like to see the 'New Polish liturgical song-book' which has just come out.

Several articles deal with the nature of faith, and issue 79 of *Znak*, the companion philosophical monthly with a circulation of seven thousand, is wholly devoted to this topic. Among the other philosophical articles is one by an author

criticizing the review his historical novel received in a Polish paper, and discussing the role of the individual in history.

A great deal is written on social and cultural affairs. Two excellent articles on the place of a university in society stress the need for economics to serve man rather than vice versa, for the free development of thought, and for the spread and popularization of knowledge as a part of a university's duty—a lesson we could well take to heart in this country. Cardinal Wyszyński's address to the Catholic university of Lublin strikes one at once with its forthright social message: 'It is right to demand services for the common good, but man cannot be made a slave . . . You who are in power, we demand of you some love for us. The time has come when we are no longer satisfied with mere justice which we rightly strive for. Now we ask for your love. In the future age, which is bound to come, man will not only work for justice, but also will rightly speak for love . . . We think of productivity as the most important virtue, but there is a danger of forgetting about man whom production should serve . . . It is the misfortune of the rich countries, and they can guard themselves against it by developing charity, that they do not know how to distribute goods accumulated in too great profusion'. On the subject of tourism, we have a 'Polemics on the motives of rock-climbing', 'Why are such people taken to the Tatras Mountains?' There are articles on the re-employment of the superfluous bureaucrats who have recently been retired, and on the extremely sensitive question of how to make peasant agriculture efficient without offending the peasants.

One of the most fascinating things in *T.P.* is the reporting on some of the speeches made in the Sejm (Parliament) by Catholic members. The most lively account is of the debate on the new five-year plan just before the Sejm recently 'broke up' for the elections. One speaker suggested that more account should be taken of current consumer needs and of informing the public about the plan. The last speaker, as well as criticizing the export of paper for the harmful effects it would have on culture, made some general comments on the Sejm at the end of its session: 'Many of us have entered the Sejm with great enthusiasm . . . So far as I am concerned I was not disillusioned since by nature I am rather a pessimist (laughter) . . . And to the new Sejm, where I do not know that we shall meet again because this depends on voters—those at the bottom and those at the top (laughter)—well, I wish to the new Sejm, more openness. This means more of our deliberations should reach public opinion and the press. I wish bolder discussions and greater differences of opinion and more actual influence—within its scope of course—on what is happening in Poland. Perhaps these wishes will come true, perhaps not. We shall see. Perhaps not all of us will see, but thank you'. (Applause). Our speaker, opening the papers next day, read an item called 'The lack of paper': 'Imagine my astonishment', he writes, 'this was a summary of my speech in the Sejm. But what a summary! I have already experienced many such summaries, but never one like that, I can assure you. I was alleged in that summary to have spoken solely of the lack of paper. I was also alleged to have said that the reports on the Sejm in the press were short

and inaccurate owing to the lack of paper . . . Their inaccuracy at least is confirmed in the present case'. He had worked as member of the Committee on the Economic plan on Culture and Art, and on two sub-committees. This is freedom indeed.

Poland to-day is a strange meeting-place between the school of social realism in Russia and the individualist (to give a cover title as vague as a universal concept) literature of the West. To combine the two streams of novel and poetry writing, each of which has so much and each of which misses so much—that would be an achievement of Polish genius indeed; one might expect it from the people that threw up Conrad. Books and authors from both sides of the 'curtain' are dealt with equally and frequently in *T.P.* There is a review of Eliot's recently translated poems, a criticism of a marxist interpretation of St Augustine, and a survey of how 'A Burnt-out Case' has been received in Poland. Also one notices a review of a 'volume of selected writing,' tantalizingly called 'Language and Cognition'. Linguistic analysis on the Baltic? Someone who has recently stayed in Russia writes: 'Generally speaking the difference between Western and Soviet literature lies in that Western writers describe the world and seldom have any moral aims in sight, whereas Soviet writers always give a moral comment, and subordinate the description to the comment . . . Many everyday problems familiar on one side are incomprehensible on the other. E.g., a district party secretary with his moral conflicts is a complete stranger in the West and conversely many familiar details of Western life are alien beyond understanding to the Russians. Art in the Soviet Union . . . is not meant to give relaxation, but to stimulate moral effort. The results are xenophobia and . . . a tendency to stew in their own juice'.

As a middleman of a more straightforward kind, *T.P.* produces some frank and alert appraisals of life Westwards and life Eastwards as seen by Polish travellers. In the West, 'They are concerned with what is practical, with what is perceptible to their senses, and shy at all 'ideological' questions, abstract thinking, and the contemplation of wider horizons. Their attitude is that of self-centred and prosaic positivism. They seem to have lost the sense of ideals, the political instinct, and the feeling of the drama and the tragedy of life'. We are back with our speaker in the Seym; we do not receive much kinder treatment than the five-year plan; perhaps it is the tragedy of the affluent society that we no longer even need five-year plans. The all-absorbing immediate question, however, for the Pole who looks Westward, is the Oder-Niese line, and West Germany's attitude to the 'Western territories', those sad lands around Breslau (Wroclaw) which became Polish at the end of the war. The feeling is that they were justly taken from the defeated bullies, and should have been Polish for historical reasons anyway. They deeply regret West Germany's present view of 'revisionism' (of Potsdam, not of Marxism), and the tendency of her Western allies to acquiesce in her claims, or at least not to repudiate them. They are glad that, recently, Cardinal Doepfner 'did not hesitate to engage the authority of the Church against the German extremists'. A visitor to Britain has written up

his impressions under the title, 'People love Players'.

The long write-up of impressions gathered from a recent visit to Moscow and Leningrad is more sober, more penetrating, and ironically detached. 'The traffic in the streets is heavy and well-managed . . . consists chiefly of heavy lorries—though apparently the number of private motor-cars is rapidly increasing . . . The housing question . . . is perhaps somewhat relieved by the many luxurious clubs, libraries and waiting-rooms, etc., where people spend much of their free time . . .' Commenting on the attitude of people in Russia to morality, and on the Soviet attempt to inculcate an altruistic ideal, the writer says 'Apparently there is no possibility of devising a moral code not based on the ten commandments'. Back to natural law with a vengeance. One might add to the excerpt already given from a Pole's view of Russian writing. 'It is interesting that in the same way as the romantic style is not abandoned in music, the noble cothurnus is also retained in language, for all the political sobriety and realism of the leaders; there must be some deeper psychological law for this'. We are also told, with plausibility, that, 'It seems unwise to over-estimate their interest in the West and Western art; the man on the Smolny omnibus is mainly concerned with the newest achievements of American technology'.

The contents of this magazine are so diverse, and of such sustained interest that one must be content just to mention a few more of its main topics. There is evidence of many intellectual and religious contacts with France, and of considerable interest in the political and religious situation in Yugoslavia. There is the occasional brush with Pax; there is such frequent use of the term 'middle-class' that one is led to wonder whether it still exists. We find that Jehovah's Witnesses are the only religious body not recognized by the state. (So much for Engels' sympathy for late medieval heretical movements—we all approve of that sort of thing in the other's camp). On a more serious plane, there is great interest in the coming council, as one would expect, and particularly in the prospects of reunion; the Poles are at present almost the only Slavs in communion with Rome. Dr Fisher got a write-up three weeks running, one of them a 'biography'. There are reports of the activities of the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia in Warsaw, an admirable organization very friendly to tourists.

We must wish *Tygodnik Powszechny* long life and good fortune for the study and penetration of those problems it is in a unique position to deal with.

ANTONY BLACK