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## THE CULTURAL BREAK: C. WRIGHT MILLS AND THE POLISH OCTOBER

John H. Summers

I can no longer write with moral surety unless I know that Leszek Kolakowski will know where I stand.

C. Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War Three*

There is not a single article in English that surveys responses by American intellectuals to the events in Poland in October 1956. Yet *Commentary*, *New Leader*, *New Republic*, *Dissent*, *Monthly Review*, and other political magazines in the United States overflowed with breathless reportage and commentary on the significance of the Polish rebellion against Stalinism.<sup>1</sup> *Time* put Gomulka's face on its cover. Publishers in the United States brought out first-hand reports with titles such as *The Warsaw Heresy*, *The Frozen Revolution*, *A Case History of Hope* and *Bitter Harvest: The Intellectual Revolt*

<sup>1</sup>For example: L. Labedz, 'Spotlight on Poland' as reprinted in *The Soviet Cultural Scene, 1956–1957*, edited by W. Z. Laqueur and G. Lichtheim (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 266–77; P. Wiles, 'Poland and Hungary: A Reappraisal' *New Leader*, 40 (11 February 1957), 13, 15; A. Ciolkosz, 'Gomulka's Election' *New Leader*, 40 (18 February 1957), 10–12; L. Blit, 'Can Poland Survive?' *New Leader*, 40 (25 March 1957), 9–11; M. Wankowicz, 'Vignettes of Poland in 1956' *New Leader*, 40 (22 April 1957), 11–13; H. Seton-Watson, 'Eruption in East Europe' *Commentary*, 22 (December 1956), 518–24; L. Blit, 'Poland and the Jewish Remnant' *Commentary*, 23 (March 1957), 215–21; L. Blit, 'Poland's Year of Change', *Commentary*, 24 (October 1957), 310–16; P. Kecskemeti, 'Intellectual Unrest Behind the Iron Curtain', *Commentary*, 24 (November 1957), 397–401; Editor, 'Eastern Europe: The Curtain Cracks', *The New Republic*, 135 (5 November 1956), 5–6; and editorial notes in the issues of 29 October 1956 and 29 January 1957; G. Harrison, 'Notes from Warsaw' *The New Republic*, 136 (11 February 1957), 7–16; and G. Harrison, 'Notes from Warsaw II', *The New Republic*, 136 (18 February 1957), 13–16; K. A. Jelenski, 'The Polish 'Earthquake'' *Encounter*, 7 (August 1956), 31–8; P. Wiles, 'Two Wandering Satellites', *Encounter*, 8 (January 1957), 16–24; P. Wiles, 'In the Land of the Unwashed Brains: A Polish Scrapbook', *Encounter*, 7 (October 1956), 13–19; G. Watson, 'Poland, Left of Centre', *Encounter*, 9 (September 1957), 13–17; L. Huberman, 'A Report on the New Poland', *Monthly Review*, 8 (January 1957), 322–8; L. Labedz, 'Poland: The Evasion of Freedom', *Dissent*, 5 (Spring 1958), 130–7; 'Poems of the Polish Revolution', *The Twentieth Century*, 161 (February 1957), 101–10; A. Herbert, 'Poland: Half Free', *The Twentieth Century*, 162 (August 1957), 131–7; and 'The Swiatlo Story', *News from Behind the Iron Curtain*, 4 (March 1955), 3–36.

*Behind the Iron Curtain*.<sup>2</sup> These reports were followed by numerous anthologies of Polish poetry and prose.<sup>3</sup>

This article chronicles the response to the Polish October by C. Wright Mills, the Columbia University sociologist and political writer. Mills went to Europe for the first time in 1956 on a Fulbright Fellowship. The following Spring he went to London to talk about his recently published book, *The Power Elite*. There he met a crew of British socialists and communists in whose company he spent a great deal of time in the next several years. These relations, hitherto unmentioned in the scanty historical literature on Mills, altered his political thought decisively. No occasion was more important than the trip he took to Warsaw in the summer of 1957 with Ralph Miliband, his closest friend in the British left.<sup>4</sup>

Mills was not the only prominent American intellectual to travel to Poland after 1956 to see what the rebellion had wrought. Michael Harrington made the trip, as did Daniel Bell, who filed a report on his visit in *Partisan Review*.<sup>5</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, took a month-long visit to Poland, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union in 1959. When he returned he wrote an account of his travels for *The Politics of Hope*. 'Poland and Yugoslavia forced this observer to concede the feasibility of what I had always previously supposed to be impossible "liberal communism"', Schlesinger wrote. 'Both countries combine a Communist political and economic structure with a considerable measure of intellectual, cultural, and religious freedom.'<sup>6</sup>

What explains the silence in the historiography? The uprising in Hungary, for one thing. The response by the Soviets to the Hungarian uprising, so different from their response in Poland,

<sup>2</sup>For a rough picture of the situation in Poland in the summer 1957, consult the following first-hand reports: K. Syrop, *Spring in October: The Polish Revolution of 1956* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1957); S. L. Shneiderman, *The Warsaw Heresy* (New York: Horizon Press, 1959); R. Hiscocks, *Poland, Bridge for the Abyss?* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1963); F. Gibney, *The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959); F. Lewis, *A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolutions* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958); and J. Bauman, *A Dream of Belonging: My Years in Postwar Poland* (London: Virago, 1988). The most recent writing on the Polish October uses fascinating material from Soviet archives. See L. W. Gluchowski, 'Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomulka, and the "Polish October"', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 5:1 (1995), 38–46; and L. W. Gluchowski, with E. J. Nalepa, 'The Soviet-Polish Confrontation of October, 1956: The Situation in the Polish Internal Security Corps', Working Paper No. 17, *Cold War International History Project*. Any list of essays and books that purports to illuminate the political and cultural history of Poland in this period must include Tony Kemp-Welch's survey, 'Politics and the Polish Intellectuals, 1945–89' in *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie*, edited by J. Jennings and A. Kemp-Welch (New York: Routledge, 1997), 169–94. Still useful is I. Deutscher, 'The Tragedy of the Polish Communist Party' (1958) as reprinted in Deutscher's *Marxism, Wars, and Revolutions: Essay from Four Decades* (London: Verso, 1984), 91–127; and S. A. Ahsan, *Four Periods of Poland's Post-War Literature*, (Karachi: Karachi University Press, 1959). *Kultura*, a journal of Polish exiles based in Paris, adopted a cautiously pro-Gomulka attitude in 1956 and 1957. See J. Mieroszewski, 'The Political Thought of Kultura' in *Kultura Essays*, edited by L. Tyrman (New York: Free Press, 1970), 245–340; *Explorations in Freedom: Prose, Narrative, and Poetry from Kultura*, edited by L. Tyrman (New York: Free Press, 1970); and *Between East and West: Writings from Kultura*, edited by R. Kostrzewa (New York: Hill & Wang, 1990).

<sup>3</sup>See *The Modern Polish Mind: An Anthology*, edited by M. Kuncewicz (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963); *Poland Since 1956: Readings and Essays on Polish Government and Politics*, edited by T. N. Cieplak (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972); *The Broken Mirror: A Collection of Writings from Contemporary Poland*, edited by P. Mayewski (New York: Random House, 1958), which is introduced by Trilling; and H. Stehle, *The Independent Satellite: Society and Politics in Poland Since 1945* (New York: Praeger, 1965).

<sup>4</sup>The connection between the events in Poland in 1956 and the development of the British left in the fifties remains to be articulated. The primary sources are abundant. Early issues of the *Reasoner* and *New Reasoner* included an essay on Polish theater, one of Adam Wazyk's poems, an article that first appeared in *Po Prusto*, a communist student weekly published in Warsaw, and a long article from *Nowa Kultura*, the weekly journal of the Union of Polish writers. Upon seeing the first issue of the *New Reasoner*, the editors *Nowa Kultura* included a friendly criticism of editors John Saville and E. P. Thompson in their magazine. See R. Zimband, 'Internationalism', *New Reasoner*, 1 (Summer 1957), 98–104; A. Wazyk, 'A Critique of the Poem for Adults' *New Reasoner*, 1 (Summer 1957), 51–4; J. Sawson, 'Notes on the Polish Theater', *New Reasoner*, 1 (Summer 1957), 83–5. Later items on Poland included J. Szczepanski, 'Working-class and Intelligentsia in Poland', *New Reasoner*, 5 (Summer 1958), 73–80; R. L. Meek, 'A Dogmavisionist in Warsaw', *New Reasoner*, 7 (Winter 1958–1959), 12–19 and A. Dressler, 'Humanists and Revisionists' *New Reasoner*, 8 (Spring 1959), 136–8. Apparently Dressler was the key link.

<sup>5</sup>M. Isserman, *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000), 205; D. Bell, 'Conversations in Warsaw,' *Partisan Review*, 28 (March–April 1961), 260–79.

<sup>6</sup>A. Schlesinger, Jr, 'Varieties of Communist Experience' (1960) reprinted in A. Schlesinger, *The Politics of Hope* (Boston, publisher 1963), 265–92.

confirmed many intellectuals' expectations of Communist imperialism. Then, too, the expectations aroused by the Polish October soon died down. The period from 1956 to 1968, when the remnants of October were all but extinguished, has been buried accordingly. Then there is the nationalist perspective that American historians apply to Cold War dissenters. Zygmunt Bauman, Julien Hochfeld, Leszek Kolakowski, Oskar Lange, and Adam Schaff, the communist intellectuals Mills befriended in Warsaw during the trip, are not nearly as well known as they deserve.

Mills himself is still known primarily as an American critic of American society. Born and educated in Texas, he urged his fellow sociologists to look abroad for theory, but he told them to use the resources they found there to develop an indigenous social thought. *The New Men of Power* (1948), *White Collar* (1951), and *The Power Elite* (1956), his trilogy, was the fruit of his ambition. After his death, he exerted a decisive influence on the founders of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the largest and most important New Left organization in the country.<sup>7</sup> The Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti turned him into a symbol of countercultural cool in 'A Parade Tirade (for C. Wright Mills)', a free-form poem appearing in *Liberation* in December 1962. 'The America of the american legion isn't ours,' Ferlinghetti wrote, mocking the 'big phoney scene, having nothing to do with our america'.<sup>8</sup> The two-Americas thesis, old as America itself, shot to the center of the radicalism that grew up around Mills's example in the 1960s. In the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the columnist Ralph Gleason said 'Mills had the effect on his colleagues that Charlie Parker had on the saxophone section of the Guy Lombardo band. He had the jazz mind'.<sup>9</sup> Another writer, Theodore Roszak, compared him to Emile Zola, dramatist for the underclass.<sup>10</sup> Even Norman Mailer, so jealous and so inventive a maker of rhetoric, borrowed 'the power elite' when the time came in *The Armies of the Night*.<sup>11</sup>

But Mills was no less a global figure for his Americanism. His books were translated across the world in the middle decades of the twentieth century, influencing debate in every industrial country. After his visit to Warsaw in 1957 and before his sudden death in 1962, he visited Cuba, where he interviewed Fidel Castro, conferred with counterparts in France and Yugoslavia, and delivered prominent lectures in Austria, Brazil, Britain, Canada, Denmark, West Germany, and the Soviet Union. The list of friends and correspondents generated by his travels abroad became, in the ripening years of the 1960s, a first-class roster and record book of radical thinking, a rallying point in the international genealogy of the New Left. He was the elder figure they all knew in common. 'He served in himself as a hyphen, joining the dissenting intellectuals of two conformist worlds', E. P. Thompson wrote.<sup>12</sup> Thompson praised him as a pioneer in using paperback books as counter-media and compared him to William Morris, no casual comparison in light of the fact that Thompson was the author of a 900-page homage to the man. But it was Mills's attempt to throw open the Cold War to new voices that called out his highest praise. 'His star stood above the ideological no-man's land of orthodox emplacements of West and East, flashing urgent humanist messages. If we couldn't always follow it, we always stopped to take bearings'.<sup>13</sup> They were not alone. In 1968, the Central Intelligence Agency wrote a

<sup>7</sup> On Mills's influence in SDS, see J. Miller, *'Democracy is in the Streets': From Port Huron to The Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987); K. Sale, *SDS* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 36, 42, 49, 338; and A. Jamison and R. Eyerman, *Seeds of the Sixties* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 30–46. On Mills's influence in the Anglo-American New Left, see J. Summers 'The Epigone's Embrace: Irving Louis Horowitz on C. Wright Mills', *Minnesota Review*, 68 (Spring 2007), 107–24; and J. Summers, 'No-Man's-Land: C. Wright Mills in England' in *Penultimate Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics, and Culture in Britain*, edited by W. R. Louis (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 185–99.

<sup>8</sup> Drafts of the poem may be found in University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, Lawrence Ferlinghetti Papers, Manuscripts Collection Folder 33, Box 1.

<sup>9</sup> R. J. Gleason, 'An Epitaph for C. Wright Mills', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 April 1962. Gleason repeated and elaborated his comment on 'The Causes of C. Wright Mills', narrated by Landau and Elsa Knight Thompson, broadcast on KPFA radio on 1 October 1962. The recording may be found in Pacifica Radio Archives, number BB0281a–b.

<sup>10</sup> T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969), 25.

<sup>11</sup> N. Mailer, *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History* (New York: New American Library, 1968), 208.

<sup>12</sup> E. Thompson, 'C. Wright Mills: The Responsible Craftsman', *Peace News*, 1431 (29 November 1963), 8.

<sup>13</sup> E. Thompson, 'C. Wright Mills: The Responsible Craftsman', *Peace News*, 1430 (22 November 1963), 6. Thompson's *Peace News* essays were reprinted in slightly different form as 'The Responsible Craftsman', *Radical America*, 13 (July–August 1979), 61–73; and again as 'Remembering C. Wright Mills' in E. Thompson, *The Heavy Dancers* (London: Merlin, 1985), 261–74.

classified report that identified Mills, along with Herbert Marcuse and Frantz Fanon, as one of the three most influential leaders of the international Left; he had been dead for six years by then.<sup>14</sup>

The first part of this article, based on interviews with Kolakowski and Bauman as well as wide reading in English-language sources, offers a picture of the political situation in Warsaw in October 1956 and sketches the part played by leading Polish intellectuals. The second part discusses the consequences of the trip for Mills's evolving political thought and argues that Poland exposed key ambiguities.

At the end of the Second World War, Soviet officers occupied the highest posts in the Polish Army, and officials in Moscow made the leaders of the Polish Communist Party to understand where their allegiance lay. These were familiar enough measures in the history of state domination. What was distinctive about Soviet rule in post-war Poland was the attempt to seize control over thought. Art and philosophy, music and literature, all creative expression had to answer to the interests of the party. In 1949, the Union of Polish Writers ratified the official style as 'socialist realism'. Public culture constricted into a tedious restatement of authorized knowledge.

Czeslaw Milosz defected soon after the capitulation of the writers and wrote *The Captive Mind* (1953) to explain why. American anti-communists made a hero of Milosz for his book, although he had little good to say about parliamentary democracy, and although he saw Stalinism in Poland as a bastard child of Marxism, not as its necessary entailment. Only because the theory of class struggle struck so closely to the truth of history, Milosz said, could Stalinism elaborate a total philosophy of life around it, and it was because the Stalinist philosophy of life seemed compelling that Polish intellectuals capitulated to the ossified laws of 'socialist realism'. The intellectuals enforced 'politically correct' definitions of reality because Stalinism healed their spiritual divisions and ended their estrangement from common people. The task of conceiving an entirely new social structure made the intellectuals peculiarly relevant. 'Consciousness does not help them to shed their bonds', Milosz observed. 'On the contrary, it forges them.'<sup>15</sup> Not reason, not moral courage, not inner compulsions, not religious belief, but imagination held the possibility of redemption from this new kind of mental slavery. Mills believed *The Captive Mind* was 'one of the great documents of our time'.<sup>16</sup>

Stalin's death in 1953 left in place a Polish communist party that had ruled for about a decade, long enough to cripple the imagination in the ways Milosz suggested, but not nearly long enough to kill it. Janina Bauman, a party instructor in Warsaw, witnessed the vitality of anti-Stalinism when she went to eulogize The Great Leader in a cell meeting.

I was just faltering out the recommended lines one Monday morning when I was suddenly interrupted by an old man, who leaped from his seat. 'Stalin,' he said, 'was never loved in the old days; he was known as a wild cruel man; people feared him, great Lenin positively hated him.' This speaking of the unspeakable came as a bombshell. It was my duty to respond at once, to find the strongest words I could to prove the old man wrong. But I was speechless.<sup>17</sup>

Zygmunt Bauman, Janina's husband, joined the faculty at Warsaw University at this time. Bauman was a junior assistant in the university's Department of Philosophy. He placed himself under the care of a mentor, Julian Hochfeld, who rattled off the rules. If you must think, do not talk. If you must talk, do not write. If you must write, do not publish.<sup>18</sup> The rules, however, began to weaken sometime in 1954, at about the same time the students at Oxford began to raise their voices at the Socialist Club. A Polish sociologist published an article in a party organ, denying that all experience could be understood in terms of class struggle. Crude Marxism locked experience in a prison of binary concepts, according to the sociologist. Instead of suppressing this brazen dissent, the party's leading philosopher, Adam Schaff, wrote a reply, to which the sociologist replied in his turn. The Union of Polish Writers asked

<sup>14</sup> Office of Current Intelligence, 'Restless Youth', No. 0613/68, Central Intelligence Agency, Washington, DC, September 1968.

<sup>15</sup> C. Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, translated by Jane Zielonko (New York: Knopf, 1953, repr. New York: Vintage, 1981), 191.

<sup>16</sup> C. W. Mills, 'On Knowledge and Power', *Dissent*, 2 (1955), 210.

<sup>17</sup> J. Bauman, *Dream of Belonging*, 109–10.

<sup>18</sup> Personal Interview with Zygmunt Bauman, London, 11 November 2004.

party leaders to rehabilitate writers who had been blacklisted under Stalinism. To everybody's surprise, party bureaucrats restored many of them to the annals of Polish culture.

That same year a deputy in the Ministry of Public Security named Jozef Swiatlo defected. Swiatlo's defection embarrassed the party. Officials of his rank rarely abandoned their posts; but Swiatlo meant to make more trouble. At a press conference in Washington, he accused the Polish Ministry of Public Security of hiding a secret police operation within its bureaucracy. Swiatlo went on to talk about the operation through the autumn, speaking over Radio Free Europe in a series broadcast into Poland. He charged the Ministry with rigging trials and falsifying elections, with torturing prisoners and with setting up 'Special Operative Groups' that functioned, in effect, as murder squads. Swiatlo had been responsible for executing many of the practices he disclosed. Because he knew the personal secrets of the ruling elite, he told convincing tales of horror and debauchery. According to Swiatlo, party leaders not only spied on the people. They spied on each other too, and when they were not double-dealing they were gobbling down feasts in their mansions, or enjoying vacations at hunting villas staffed with servants and mistresses and toadies. Two months after Swiatlo concluded his broadcasts, the Ministry of Public Security was reorganized. Its most notorious official was arrested and sentenced to five years imprisonment.

*Po Prostu*, a magazine for young communists, started making dissonant noises as soon as Stalin died, quiet noises initially, but louder with each issue. The magazine sponsored one of the underground 'discussion clubs' that began opening in Warsaw, Ponzan, Lublin, and Krakow. At first, the club met in a private apartment in Warsaw and counted only a few friends as members. Soon the group grew confident enough to announce itself as 'The Crooked Circle Club'. Each Thursday at 6 p.m., more and more students showed up in a public hall in the Old City Square, not only students, but painters, musicians, artists, writers, professors, and judges. The scope of the subject matter enlarged. Before long, the topics circled back to economic troubles in Poland, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the security system. 'The fact that simple human speech was possible again, after years of petrified official speech, had an exhilarating effect on everyone concerned', recalled one participant, who also recalled that everybody knew secret agents were mingling in the audience but nobody seemed to care anymore. 'The Crooked Circle Club was dominated by an atmosphere of sincerity. The things said there may not always have been intelligent, but almost everyone said exactly what he thought.'<sup>19</sup>

The case against censorship had been won on principle. The enforced social isolation had been eased. The intellectuals got down to argumentation. It was only a matter of time before someone gathered up the scattered criticisms into a blast against the regime itself. A poet pulled the trigger. Adam Wazyk had joined the Communist Party before the Second World War. When the time came, he made a show of his loyalty, once writing that Stalin's mind flowed in a 'river of wisdom and reason'.<sup>20</sup> Anecdotes concerning his servility went round in Polish literary circles. 'I like you well enough as a person', Wazyk told a younger poet, 'but if you write one more word against Stalin, I will shoot you with my own hand.'<sup>21</sup>

On 21 August 1955, 'A Poem for Adults' appeared in the journal of the Polish Writers Union. Wazyk's most shocking lines were these: 'Fourier, the dreamer, charmingly foretold/ that lemonade would flow into the seas. Does it not flow?/ they drink sea-water/ crying: 'lemonade!'/ returning home secretly to vomit.' Wazyk's words stung. Party officials had obliged the writers to become ingenious in the arts of allusion and dissimulation. As soon as 'A Poem for Adults' appeared on news-stands, it sold out. As soon as it sold out, black marketers began swapping copies for fantastically high prices. The party's intellectuals fired off a barrage of counter-attacks, and officials, solicitous though they had tried to be, decided that enough was enough. The editor of the journal that published 'A Poem for Adults' was fired, along with the entire editorial board. Yet Wazyk was not expelled from the party

<sup>19</sup> W. Jedlicki, 'The Crooked Circle Club', in *Poland Since 1956: Readings and Essays on Polish Government and Politics*, edited by T. N. Cieplak (New York: Twayne, 1972), 120–9.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in R. Hiscocks, *Poland: Bridge for the Abyss?* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 146.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in F. Lewis, *A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolutions* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958), 72.

for his apostasy, and so the dismissals were looked upon as a scandal, not as a reassertion of party prerogatives, and the intellectuals, by lining up on one side or the other, stoked the debate.

In the early weeks of 1956, the Communist Party of Poland faced a predicament. More and more, the threads of national pride, resentment against Stalin, and anger over the party's methods of rule united in the cause of independence. Radio Warsaw read aloud brazen letters from listeners. 'Why gild reality with nice speeches if it is obvious that the Six Year Plan failed?'<sup>22</sup> Another letter, read that same week, wanted to know,

Why is it that families must share apartments and live in dingy holes? When flats are built, they are given to directors, managers or army officers, but not to the workers. I no longer believe in the good future times of Communism when we shall all have nice apartments.<sup>23</sup>

Three years earlier, this kind of criticism was reserved for discussions held between friends, at home, late at night, after five glasses of vodka, in whispers, in the corner of the one room in the apartment that was assuredly not bugged. Criticism had been 'unspeakable' in a party meeting. Now protesters were in the streets of Warsaw shouting anti-Soviet slogans and holding up rude placards. What would the party leaders do? They complained that criticism had grown 'too negative'. At the same time, they made extraordinary concessions. Perhaps if they had steeped themselves in the political literature of Paris rather than of Moscow, they might have made fewer mistakes. For Alexis de Tocqueville had handed down a famous warning. 'The most perilous moment for a bad government is one when it seeks to mend its ways.'<sup>24</sup> In late March, when news of Khrushchev's speech hit the country, Poland's Communist Government reached its most perilous moment.

Each of the local party precincts received a copy of the speech, with instructions to read it aloud. Zygmunt Bauman was summoned to his local to hear it. What shocked him was the fact that Khrushchev had brought all this into the open. Bauman sped back to the university and read his notes of the speech to his colleagues. At 7 p.m. that evening, 300 people jammed into a lecture hall at the university. The meeting lasted until dawn.<sup>25</sup> In the weeks thereafter, students quit the party's Youth Union in packs. In the countryside, peasants clamoured to leave state farms. In the cities, graffiti defaced walls and sidewalks.

Party leaders dismissed, in a single stroke, the Minister of Culture, the Minister of Justice, and the Prosecutor-General. In April, they started a process that eventually freed 35,000 prisoners, including 9,000 political prisoners. Yet each concession only shook more lies and absurdities into view. Each concession made the dissenters grow bolder. The last week in June, 15,000 workers walked out of the Stalin Locomotive Works, the largest factory in Ponzan. The workers said they had seen the 'cult of the individual' in evidence in their own factories, in the autocratic behaviour of plant managers and trade union officials. The leaders of the strike sent a twenty-seven-man delegation to Warsaw to demand the right to elect self-managing councils. The proposed councils shared much in common with G.D.H. Cole's guild socialism, as with varieties of syndicalism and anarchism. The Ponzan strikers were ignoring their union leaders, trying to break the neck of central management. When the delegation did not report back as scheduled, the strike shifted to protest, then to insurrection. One-third of Ponzan's population poured into the streets chanting 'Bread and Freedom' and shouting 'Down with false communism'. The rioters wrecked a radio station that had been jamming Western broadcasts. They set upon the city jail, stripped the guards of their guns and released the inmates. Finding secret dossiers in the jail's administrative offices, they made a bonfire in the courtyard. This was the biggest spontaneous action in Poland since 1939. By the time the shooting stopped, 75 of the workers lay dead and more than 900 lay wounded. The country was tearing itself to pieces.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Editor, 'Samples of New Polish Criticism', *News From Behind the Iron Curtain*, 5 (March 1956), 40.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in 'Samples of New Polish Criticism,' *News From Behind the Iron Curtain*, 5 (March 1956), 40.

<sup>24</sup> A. de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, translated by Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 177.

<sup>25</sup> Personal Interview with Zygmunt Bauman, London, 11 November 2004.

Enough Poles had achieved enough clarity of opinion and enough political confidence to resume open conflict with the authorities. Many more Poles, however, were beset by moral chaos. As Milosz had observed in *The Captive Mind*, Stalinism sought to rebuild all areas of human life. It tried to eliminate mystery, chance, and absurdity from existence, asked and answered all questions worth asking about the flourishing of the human personality. It presented a 'New Faith'. Khrushchev's speech generated accusation, anguish, disorientation, anxiety, confession, and soul-searching of every manner and variety. Four people fainted and had to be carried away during one reading of the speech in Warsaw. Boleslaw Bierut, ailing leader of the Polish communists, read the speech, suffered a heart attack, and died. The situation cried out for leaders.

Leszek Kolakowski was twelve years old when the Nazis marched into Poland and closed down the schools.<sup>26</sup> Kolakowski passed the early years of the occupation in a country house, devouring the books in its large library, and the later years attending an underground school. After the war, he threw himself against the chauvinism and anti-Semitism and nationalism in Polish culture. He signed up for a Communist youth organization, then became a member of the party. Kolakowski's skill in dialectics marked him as one of the most promising young philosophers in Eastern Europe. What he promised was legitimacy for Stalinism. He was sent to Moscow after college, part of a group of students being trained to replace 'the bourgeois element' in the universities. In graduate school at Warsaw University, he leaped to the top of his class, then started counting the titles and honours. He acquired a lectureship at the university; a research professorship at the Polish Academy of Sciences; the editorship of a series of books for the party's publishing house; a seat on the board of *Nowa Kultura*, the party's journal; a teaching post at the Institute for Training of Scientific Workers, the party's high school; and the good graces of Adam Schaff, the party's leading ideologist.<sup>27</sup> Kolakowski knew how to wind his mind around the Stalinist line. As a philosopher, he gave the bulk of his attention to discrediting Catholic theology, the main ideological competitor to Marxism in Poland. 'The Catholic pit of darkness' was a favourite phrase.

Not long after news of the secret speech reached Warsaw, Kolakowski walked up to a bulletin board at the university and tacked up 'What is Socialism?' It was a manifesto. 'We will tell you what socialism is,' he began. 'But first we must tell you what socialism is not. It is a matter about which we once had a quite different opinion than we have today.'<sup>28</sup> Socialism was not 'A state whose neighbors curse geography'. Or 'A state in which street maps of cities are state secrets'. Or 'A state which does not like to see its citizens read back numbers of newspapers'. Or 'A state in which many ignoramuses rank as scholars'. Taken together, the theses in 'What is Socialism' answered that socialism had become a cult, that it had produced privileged political elites, that it had lent itself to nothing more ennobling than a police state. The party banned the manifesto, which spread rapidly.

Wladyslaw Gomulka had also joined the Polish Communist Party as a young man, although he had joined when the party was illegal.<sup>29</sup> For his efforts to establish the party the Polish police shot him in

<sup>26</sup> It is a great pity that there are no biographical monographs in English about Leszek Kolakowski, but only a miscellany of sources: W. Karpinski, 'Leszek Kolakowski: A Portrait' in *European Liberty: Four Essays on the Occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Erasmus Prize Foundation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1983); L. Labedz, 'Introduction' to L. Kolakowski, *Marxism and Beyond: On Historical Understanding and Individual Responsibility*, translated by Jane Peel (London: Pall Mall Press, 1968), 1–25; 'A Leszek Kolakowski Reader', *Tri-Quarterly*, 22 (Fall 1971), 4–250; Danny Postel, 'Dialogue Between Leszek Kolakowski and Danny Postel', *Daedalus* (Summer 2005): 82–8. Probably the best two sources are Z. A. Jordan, 'The Philosophical Background of Revisionism in Poland' in *Political Thought Since World War II: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, edited by W. J. Stankiewicz (New York: Free Press, 1964), 250–88; and the chapter on Kolakowski in S. Pierson, *Leaving Marxism: Studies in the Dissolution of an Ideology* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 128–74.

<sup>27</sup> On Adam Schaff, see A. Ciolkosz, 'The Rise and Fall of Modern Revisionism in Poland' in *Poland Since 1956*, edited by T.N. Cieplak (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 33–5. Tony Kemp-Welch has used new documentary material from the secret police and Communist Party archives to nail down Schaff's inter-party manoeuvres in 1955 and 1956. See T. Kemp-Welch, 'Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and Polish Politics: The Spring of 1956', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48 (1996), 181–206 (for Schaff, see 183–4, 190).

<sup>28</sup> L. Kolakowski, 'What is Socialism?' as reprinted in *Bitter Harvest: The Intellectual Revolt Behind the Iron Curtain*, edited by E. Stillman (New York: Praeger, 1959), 47–51.

<sup>29</sup> B. Fowkes, *The Rise and Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe* (London: MacMillan, 1993), 91–105; N. Bethell, *Gomulka: His Poland and His Communism* (Harlow: Longmans, 1969); I. Szenfeld, *The Reminiscences of Wladislaw Gomulka* (New York: Radio Liberty Committee, 1974).



the leg, arrested him, and clapped him into jail for seven years. To be a communist agitator in the 1930s in Poland required real courage. (A sensitivity to irony helped. While Gomulka languished in prison, a victim of persecution against communists, Stalin lured the leadership of the Polish communist party to Moscow and liquidated them.) Gomulka organized the underground resistance during the Nazi occupation, work that vaulted him into the position of Secretary General. He was the first leader to hail from native soil; and there was the trouble. Gomulka thought of himself as a communist *and* as a Polish patriot. This threw him into a position of antagonism with Moscow. After the war, he resisted the forced collectivization of agriculture, and refused to support the directive against cooperation with non-communists. Instead, he advocated a special 'Polish road to socialism'. In Stalinist political theology, he committed sins of 'bourgeois nationalism' and 'rightist deviationism.' In 1948, Stalin had him demoted from the leadership of the party. The next year, Stalin removed him from the central committee. Two years after that, Stalin had him expelled from the Communist Party, placed under arrest, and jailed. Gomulka was lucky to escape with his life.

To the intellectuals and workers of 1956, Gomulka stood for a humane, democratic vision of socialism. Milosz had cited his arrest as a symptom of decreasing freedom of thought. Josef Swiatlo, who had taken him into custody, attested to his courage and dignity under questioning. The Ponzan strikers appreciated his proletarian beginnings as a locksmith; and the leaders of the Communist Party saw him as their best chance to head off a bloodbath. At a conference of party activists in April 1956, they announced that he had been set free, to which they added that he never should have been arrested in the first place.

Gomulka did not have to wait long to seize his chance. The Central Committee was due to convene meetings to pick a new leader on 19 October. As far as the Soviets were concerned, the meetings needed the continuing hand of Moscow. The Poles had been much too reckless in implementing the thaw. Khrushchev sent advance word that he expected to be invited. Upon learning that the Poles had no intention of inviting him, he flew to Warsaw anyway. Nobody who witnessed the encounter at the airport forgot it. Khrushchev stepped onto the tarmac. A dozen Soviet generals in dress uniforms appeared behind him. He lurched ahead, shouting 'treason!' and shaking his fist under Gomulka's nose.

The news spread through Poland: the Soviets had arrived, uninvited. Workers began to fortify Warsaw. Army units began to disobey orders from the Soviet military command. The explosion everybody expected seemed especially likely when Khrushchev, exasperated, ordered tanks to the perimeter of the city. Then the crisis passed. On 21 October 1956, Gomulka became First Secretary of the Central Committee, and Poland achieved the first successful revolt against Soviet rule in Eastern Europe. Speaking to the new politburo, Gomulka credited Khrushchev's secret speech for generating

a turn in the political life of this country. People began to straighten their backs. Silent, enslaved minds began to shake off the poison of mendacity, falsehood, and hypocrisy. The rigid clichés, previously predominant on Party platforms and at public meetings, as well as in the press, began to give place to creative, living words.<sup>30</sup>

Khrushchev withdrew 32 Soviet officers and advisors from the Polish security services. A spate of resignations and dismissals further decimated the party.

Janina and Zygmunt Bauman went to the square in front of the Palace of Culture to listen to Gomulka's victory speech. The sheer number of people freely associating struck them as almost incredible.

Lost among the many hundreds of thousands [Janina recalled] I shared the enthusiasm of the crowd. Half of Warsaw's population seemed to have come here of their own free will to hail their returning leader, now back after eight years of persecution and imprisonment. It seemed that – for once – the nation was united; communists, non-communists, and anti-communists alike; workers, farmers, intellectuals, and all.

<sup>30</sup> 'Gomulka's Keynote Speech' as reprinted in *News From Behind the Iron Curtain*, 5 (November 1956), 4.

Gomulka and his allies in the Polish Parliament quickly went to work. They ended Stalin's agriculture programme. (Of the 10,000 collective farms in the country, four-fifths dissolved themselves immediately.) They legalized the workers councils. They ended the jamming of foreign radio broadcasts. They freed Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, leader of the Polish Catholics. (The Soviets had placed Wyszyński under house arrest in 1953, an act so upsetting that the Pope had excommunicated everybody involved.) The intellectuals, excited by these formal freedoms, rushed to give them substance. The Polish Writers Union renounced 'socialist realism'. A popular weekly magazine published instalments of George Orwell's *1984*, a book that had been dangerous and difficult to obtain. Under Stalin, Poles who wanted to mail a letter abroad had had to post their letters in an unsealed envelope, so that censors could have a look. Henceforth, letters could be sealed and mailed directly out of the nation.

Gomulka swept to electoral victory in January 1957, on the strength of a coalition of workers, farmers, and intellectuals. Their spiritual leader, Leszek Kolakowski, wrote an article in the party's theoretical journal on the eve of the election. He urged his comrades to stop looking to the metaphysics of history for ethical suggestion. 'Communist intellectuals,' he asserted, 'have the responsibility to fight for the secularization of thinking, to combat pseudo-Marxist mythology and bigotry as well as religio-magic practices, and to struggle to rebuild respect for completely unrestricted secular reason.'<sup>31</sup> Kolakowski believed the communist party could learn to respect truth, the rule of law, and democracy. The rebirth he envisioned could go forward in so far as culture changed from an instrument of apology and abuse into an expression of human freedom. The election of Gomulka had thrown open the future to the influence of writers, artists, and scholars; so Kolakowski still believed when Mills banged on his apartment door in Warsaw.

He showed up wearing a pair of work trousers with metallic buckles stitched under the knees. The outfit caused the young philosopher to think, 'these pants make him look a little ridiculous'. Yet Kolakowski found Mills to be 'a man of very friendly manners', and they enjoyed a long talk about the necessity of opening up channels of communication between East and West.<sup>32</sup> Kolakowski himself had travelled to Paris the previous autumn, where he had befriended Ralph Miliband. Mills caught him preparing for an extended trip to London, and provoking public discussion with 'The End of the Age of Myths' and 'Permanent vs. Transient Aspects of Marxism', essays that swept through the rubble of Stalinism, looking for a way out. 'If the sort of Marxism in which doctrine was continually established by the Office is now dead in the minds of most intellectuals who considered themselves Marxists, has the concept of Marxism retained any meaning at all?'<sup>33</sup> Kolakowski answered yes, but only if Polish intellectuals reconceived it as 'a very general framework' for analysis. Marxism would live, paradoxically, in so far as the doctrinal distinction between Marxism and anti-Marxism died. 'It does not mean a universal system, but a vital philosophical inspiration affecting our whole outlook on the world, a constant stimulus to the social intelligence and social memory of mankind.' Kolakowski's attempt to validate a pluralistic structure of values provoked the enmity the Soviet periodical, *Questions of Philosophy*, which levelled the most damning insult possible in such circles, comparing him to John Dewey.

Mills also crossed paths with Julian Hochfeld during his sixteen days in Poland. Back in 1953, Hochfeld had teased his younger colleague, Zygmunt Bauman. If you must think, do not talk. If you must talk, do not write. If you must write, do not publish. In the middle of the October revolution, Hochfeld went to London and spoke his mind.

I used to believe, but I believe no longer, that in our world everything, in the final analysis, is decided by material interests and sharp class or State conflicts; I now think that such a view is just an impossible simplification, particularly with regard to our own epoch.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Bauman, *Dream of Belonging*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Telephone interview with Leszek Kolakowski, 11 May 2004.

<sup>33</sup> L. Kolakowski, 'Permanent vs. Transitory Aspects of Marxism' in *Marxism and Beyond*, 193–207.

<sup>34</sup> J. Hochfeld, 'Poland and Britain: Two Concepts of Socialism', *International Affairs*, 33 (January 1957), 2–11.

Hochfeld went on to say that differences between states and economic systems should not inhibit a search for standards among intellectuals. He thought sociology could serve as the common denominator.

Poland had been the most sophisticated centre of sociology in Europe before the war. What little sociological research that went on during the Stalinist period concerned itself with historical problems only. The revolution brought back sociology so quickly, it almost became fashionable. Old, censored articles were published and discussed in the press. The workers' councils suggested new themes for research. The Polish Sociological Institute resumed its operations.<sup>35</sup> Hochfeld, chairman of the Department of Philosophy and Sociology at Warsaw University, led a delegation to the Second World Congress of the International Sociological Association in Amsterdam. Of the six hundred attendees at the congress, forty hailed from communist countries. This was good news to anybody hoping to open up sociological dialogue between East and West. It was better news to anybody looking for sources of renewal in Warsaw, since 'the Poles were the most active and interesting of the satellites at Amsterdam', according to Norman Birnbaum, one of Mills's new friends in London.<sup>36</sup> It was terrific news for a man of Mills's methodological commitments. An entire generation of Polish scholars had been isolated from trends in the United States. They knew nothing about Paul Lazarsfeld's survey methodology.

Twenty years afterward, Adam Schaff still remembered the warning Mills gave them against Lazarsfeld's approach to sociology.

Noticing the imitation by Polish sociologists of the methods used in American empirical sociology, he told me, in essence, you should not do that, you cannot afford that; we already have heaps of empirical data, but we do not know what they are for and what to do with them. He was right.<sup>37</sup>

When Lazarsfeld himself showed up in Warsaw he was distressed to know that his rival had been there first. 'It's much more embarrassing in Europe, where he has a great following,' he complained to an interviewer. 'Ja, Ja, everyone asks of Mills.'<sup>38</sup> Bauman was witness to a denunciation of Mills by Lazarsfeld so cold as to freeze the room. Lazarsfeld brought to these encounters not only ideas, but also an insider's knowledge of grant-getting in the United States, and so appealed to the Polish sociologists, especially to those young men who wanted to emigrate. Lazarsfeld made these men to understand that they must avoid Mills, and they, in reply, treated Mills as 'Typhoid Mary', according to Bauman.

Mills baiting was a favorite pastime among the most distinguished members of American academe: there were no expedients, however dishonest, which the ringleaders of the hue-and-cry would consider below their dignity and to which they would not stoop.<sup>39</sup>

Oskar Lange had visited the United States on a Rockefeller Fellowship in the middle of the Great Depression. In 1938, the University of Chicago hired him as Professor of Economics on the strength of his masterwork, *On the Economic Theory of Socialism* (1938). Lange contended that if socialist

<sup>35</sup> On the changing status of sociology in Poland, see editors, 'Sociological News', *Review of the Polish Academy of Sciences*, 1 (October–December 1956), 73–6; editor, 'Sociological Section of the Philosophical Society' *Review of the Polish Academy of Sciences*, 1 (April–September 1956), 218; Editor, 'Sociological News', *Review of the Polish Academy of Sciences*, 2 (July–December, 1957), 94–6; T. Abel, 'Sociology in Postwar Poland', *American Sociological Review*, 15 (February 1950), 104–6; J. Szczepanski, 'Sociology in Post-War Poland', *Polish Perspectives*, 1 (May 1958), 30–6; and Polish Sociological Association, *Polish Sociology: A Section of Papers from The Polish Sociological Bulletin* (Warsaw: Ossolineum, 1974). Of particular interest is W. Wesolowski, 'Ruling Class and Power Elite', (29–44).

<sup>36</sup> N. Birnbaum, 'Science, Ideology, and Dialogue: The Amsterdam Sociological Congress', *Commentary*, 22 (December 1956), 570.

<sup>37</sup> A. Schaff, 'Foreword' to P. G. Casanova, *The Fallacy of Social Science Research*, translated by S. B. Kapilian and G. Weller (New York: Pergamon Press, 1981), x–xi.

<sup>38</sup> P. F. Lazarsfeld, *The Reminiscences of Paul Felix Lazarsfeld* (New York: Columbia University Oral History Office, 1972), 1, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Z. Bauman and K. Tester, *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 27. Personal communication, Zygmunt Bauman to John H. Summers, 30 August 2004.

planners would pay attention to the market's calculating function, they would not have to rely on the state to dictate prices from afar. Planned economies could behave *as if* market pricing determined their allocation of resources; and socialism could be at least as efficient as capitalism.<sup>40</sup>

For a time, Lange's argument gave Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises a run for their money. They had disputed the efficacy of socialism on the grounds that central planners could never possess the spontaneously generated information necessary to maintain coherence. Lange disagreed. His writings approached socialism and capitalism as points on a continuum, not as binary opposites. This ideological flexibility went hand-in-hand with his shifting political loyalties. Toward the end of the Second World War Lange established ties with the Stalinist government in Poland. He took messages back and forth between Roosevelt and Stalin on the subject of Poland's post-war borders. He became ambassador to the United States and chief delegate to the United Nations.

Lange made his peace with the reformers of 1956 and went to work for the new government. He took a seat in Parliament and a spot on the party's central committee. Gomulka then appointed him chairman of the Government Economic Council. Lange spelled out an emergency economic plan over the objections of the party's economists. He told the editor of *Monthly Review* what he probably repeated to Mills. 'The system of centralized management and planning has become an obstacle to further progress. It has created a vast bureaucratic machine and made the economy inflexible.'<sup>41</sup> Now that relations between Poland and the Soviet Union had been placed upon an equal basis, Lange expected self-government in industry to take its rightful place in a 'socialist democracy'.

Thus did Mills make himself a witness to the wonders and marvels of an intellectual life *in extremis*. Political authority had yet to crystallize in great institutions. Attitudes toward history and human existence had yet to petrify in popular stereotypes. Minds were not made up. For sixteen days he accompanied Leszek Kolakowski, Adam Schaff, Julien Hochfeld, Zygmunt Bauman, Oskar Lange to their meetings and speeches, listened to anecdotes of their battles, discussed their difficulties. What were his first thoughts as he moved through these Warsaw scenes?

He might have thought, with Isaac Deutscher, that the significance of the revolution in Poland lay in its effect on the ideological war between capitalists and communists. With the force of a thousand hammerstrokes anti-communists insisted that Nationalism and Communism were incommensurable. The American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, had insisted and insisted again that the Soviet bloc comprised 'a vast monolithic system' incapable of internal modification; but Deutscher had predicted that Poland might very well ease away from the Soviets. Now, in April 1957, he laid down a jeering preface to his newest entry into the fray, *Russian in Transition, and Other Essays*. 'I shall refrain from quoting back to my critics the things they wrote in 1953 and forgo the all-too-easy satisfaction or amusement that could be derived therefrom.'<sup>42</sup>

The significance of the Polish October was not lost on Deutscher's critics. Anti-communist magazines in the United States carried blow-by-blow accounts of the events: *The Polish Earthquake*. *In the Land of Unwashed Brains*. *The New Republic* waxed prophetic. 'Today, we see only the shadowy outline of new patterns in Eastern Europe and new relationships between East and West. We can only sense that something new, momentous, and as yet indefinable is happening in the world.' Translations of 'Poem for Adults' and 'What is Socialism?' filled the pages of English-language publications. Lionel Trilling conferred his blessing in an introduction to *The Broken Mirror*, one of the many volumes of Polish prose and poetry now appearing in the United States.

<sup>40</sup> For background on Lange, see T. Kowalik, 'Introduction,' in *Economic Theory and Market Socialism: Selected Essays of Oskar Lange*, edited by T. Kowalik (Brookfield, VT: E. Elgar, 1994): ix–xxv; Editor, 'Oskar Lange,' *Review of the Polish Academy of Sciences*, 6 (October–December, 1961), 75–7. Without access to Oscar Lange's economic plans, the best indication I have of his ideas in 1957 comes from a lecture he gave in Warsaw that February. It was printed as a pamphlet, *Some Problems Relating to the Polish Road to Socialism* (Warsaw: Polonia Publishing House, 1957). For an attack on Lange's ideas, see F. A. Hayek, 'Two Pages of Fiction: The Impossibility of Socialist Calculation', in *The Essence of Hayek*, edited by C. Nishiyama and K. R. Leube (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1984), 53–61.

<sup>41</sup> As quoted in L. Huberman, 'The Polish October: An Interview with Oscar Lange', *Monthly Review*, 8 (January 1957), 332–3.

<sup>42</sup> I. Deutscher, *Russia in Transition and Other Essays* (New York: Coward–McCann, 1957), 'Preface', vii.

Those who tried to measure the events in terms of gains and losses to ideological accounts had a confusing time of it. Deutscher could explain why the Soviets let Poland go, but not why they slaughtered the Hungarians. American anti-communists could explain why the Soviets slaughtered the Hungarians, but not why they let Poland go. Moreover, the intellectuals in Warsaw were not exactly running into the arms of capitalists. The last lines of Kolakowski's 'What is Socialism?' reminded readers that he remained dedicated to the cause. 'But now listen attentively, we will tell you what socialism is: Well, then, socialism is a good thing.' Milosz broadcast radio messages over the British Broadcasting Corporation, urging his countrymen to support Gomulka.<sup>43</sup> After the election, Milosz found himself responding to claims that the election falsified the gloomy images in *The Captive Mind*. 'Poland is at the present moment a sort of exception in the Communist bloc,' Milosz explained, 'and my book still preserves its relevance when applied to my country's eastern and western neighbors.'<sup>44</sup> A writer for *The New Leader* expressed his amazement that no blood had been spilled at the moment when the political vacuum in Warsaw seemed to require Soviet tanks. 'This moral achievement is perhaps unequaled in revolutionary history.' How did it happen? 'For some reason, Polish Communists are genuinely the nicest Communists in the world.'<sup>45</sup> What obloquy would have befallen an American leftist uttering these words!

Mills's first thought was to initiate a series of public gatherings. He wanted to invite intellectuals from East and West to come to Warsaw and give lectures. 'One feels that in Poland if anywhere there's a chance just now to get some really creative socialist thinking done,' he said.<sup>46</sup> The thought of creating a public forum was not, in itself, especially distinctive. What was distinctive was the intention behind it. Instead of seeing the revolution as an episode in the push and pull of Cold War rivalries, Mills saw it primarily as a gain for the vocation of intellectuals. He meant to initiate a supranational forum for the free play of reason and sensibility, a neutral place where the din of political conflict would quiet, and intellectuals could think affirmatively about matters of pressing human concern. He believed that the highest allegiance of intellectuals lay with the recovery of fullness and integrity of mind. This order of priorities had always entailed a certain volatility in the face of political commitment, and his experience in Warsaw was no different. He aroused some suspicions because he befriended not only Kolakowski, Hochfeld, Bauman, and Lange, but also Schaff, who occupied a halfway position between the rebellious intellectuals and their Stalinist enemies. Once the mentor of Kolakowski, Schaff became his most important opponent after 1956.

Mills's deepest longings preceded political or ideological commitments. He looked upon his Warsaw forum as an oasis. He wanted to populate this 'no-man's land', in E. P. Thompson's phrase, to serve unmet practical, as well as emotional, needs.<sup>47</sup> There, intellectuals could rest, take stock of their resources, and regain a feeling of belonging. They would not retreat into a private refuge, or construct an invulnerable fortress of mind, but would engage public problems with some distance from predatory processes of politics and ideology. Mills expressed often his wish for such an 'interlude', although 'intermission', with its religious connotations, struck closer to his meaning. His militant piety for human intelligence continued to regard culture as inherently pacific and salvific, a security against inner degradation. The targets of his criticism overlooked his constructive and aspirational sides, understandably so; but his allies knew why British publishers used his name to sell new editions of Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*.<sup>48</sup> If there was less 'sweetness and light' than 'force and fire' in his writings, Mills did not ask his readers to choose between them. Long ago, his immersion in pragmatism had relieved him of the impulse to pit the aesthetic against the functional, the expressive against the critical, the tender-minded against the tough-minded.

<sup>43</sup> As reported by Editor, 'The Word Went Out—Vote Gomulka', *The New Republic*, 136 (January 28 1957), 7.

<sup>44</sup> C. Milosz, 'The Captive Mind', *Encounter*, 7 (December 1956), 67.

<sup>45</sup> Wiles, 'Poland and Hungary', 13, 15.

<sup>46</sup> C. W. Mills to Honning Friis, 27 August 1957.

<sup>47</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'Remembering C. Wright Mills' in Thompson, *The Heavy Dancers*, 274.

<sup>48</sup> See the promotional material on the back of M. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, edited by J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

This combination of need, desire, and belief guided Mills's vision as he moved through the Warsaw scenes in July 1957. He did not register an ideological war between capitalists and communists, or a political struggle between contending factions in the nation. He registered a unity of doing and thinking. The division between mind and power was closing. Caught up in the joy of his discovery, he did not allow for the possibility that his oasis might turn out to be a mirage.

Zygmunt and Janina Bauman had noticed something while watching Gomulka deliver his victory speech that memorable October day, amid the hundreds of thousands gathered together in the public square. The Baumans had noticed that Gomulka kept interrupting himself. Go home now, he kept saying. We have much work to do. Calm down. Any decent politician would have tried to forge solidarity out of the energy of people, to guide them in directions befitting his mandate. In his interruptions Gomulka gave himself away. Here was a man who had dedicated his whole life to Communism. He had been arrested, expelled, tried, shot, and imprisoned for the cause. The Poles might be singing his name in the streets, but their disorderly energy did not inspire him. It frightened him.

The universities ran hot with rumours about the intentions of the new government. Gomulka, they said, had been denouncing the intellectuals in party meetings. One day, Zygmunt Bauman sat alongside Mills and Miliband and half-a-dozen Polish professors, talking in a room in the Philosophy Department at the university. Gomulka came on the radio to deliver a public address. For the first time, he lashed out. He called the writings of Kolakowski 'a disease'. Everybody in the room tightened up. What would happen next? Bauman turned to Mills to explain what Gomulka had said. He was delighted. 'How lucky you are and how happy you must be – the leader of the country responding to philosophical tracts! No one at the top pays any attention to what I am doing.'<sup>49</sup>

The Polish October represented to Mills intellectual resistance to the bifurcating dogmas of the Cold War. Returning to New York, he declared himself for neutralism and argued forcefully for the political independence of Europe, East and West. *The Causes of World War Three* (1958), the best-selling pamphlet where he made his case, put him sharply at odds with anti-communist intellectuals such as Irving Howe, Lionel Trilling, and Sidney Hook, who declined to interpret Poland as a break in the theory of communist despotism.<sup>50</sup> More important, he now saw the possibility that intellectuals might become a force in their own right. His experiences lecturing in the United States had nurtured the prospect, for they had revealed a wellspring of restlessness beneath the cheery façade of professional conferences. His visit to Warsaw made him a witness to its realization. The intellectuals there were not outsiders, nor vanguardists. They occupied pivotal positions in the hierarchy of political society. Therein rested their power. They had mutinied.

However, the expectation of mutiny rested on a fallacy common to modern theories of workers control. Technical indispensability within society did not necessarily lead to political power over it. 'The assumption that political supremacy follows from functional, economic indispensability often underlies theories of the rise to power of one or the other strata in modern society,' Mills had written in 1952, echoing remarks he made in *White Collar*.

Technical and managerial indispensability is thus confused with the facts of power struggle, and overrides all other sources of power. The deficiency of such arguments must be realized positively: we need to develop and to use a more open and flexible model of the relations of political power and stratification.<sup>51</sup>

*The Causes of World War Three* neither developed nor used any such model. Its moral hope outran its political intelligence.

<sup>49</sup> Bauman and Tester, *Conversations*, 28. There is a hidden reference to this incident in Z. Bauman, 'The Social Status of the Intelligentsia', *Polish Perspectives*, 3 (March 1960), 93.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Sidney Hook to Constantin A. Jelenski, 21 December 1956, as reprinted in *Letters of Sidney Hook: Democracy, Communism, and the Cold War*, edited by E. S. Shapiro (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 256–8.

<sup>51</sup> C. W. Mills, 'The Sociology of Stratification', paper for Contemporary Civilization B1: 52Culture, Personality and Society, Columbia College, 1952.

Gomulka, following his attack on Kolakowski, soon consolidated Communist Party rule on terms hostile to the intellectuals. The workers' councils were forbidden to federate, and party delegates and union leaders regained control over management. Oskar Lange's reform programme was 'neither implemented nor rejected', as the saying went. The intellectuals had expected Gomulka to allow opposition parties to shape themselves into some sort of parliamentary system, so that the juncture between state and party would cease to be the exclusive preserve of the communists; but Gomulka reasserted the prerogatives of single-party rule. Only three months after Mills's visit, the new government suspended *Po Prostu*, expelled eight members of the editorial board from the party, and censured six others, measures that effectively silenced the voices of 1956. The propaganda director of the central committee declared 'demoralizing' literature unwelcome. When officials seized the first issue of *Europa*, a Western-oriented journal, poet Adam Wazyk left the party in protest, as did ten other writers. By the time all the resignations and dismissals had been tallied, 28,000 Poles exited the new Communist Party. Amazement at the 'bloodless revolution' transformed into amazement at the 'frozen revolution'. Mills conceded the losses without accounting for them.

I know they are weak beginnings; that they falter and stumble [he wrote in *Causes*]. But talking in Warsaw and Zagreb and Vienna with some of those who have made the cultural break, I have seen the fingers of such men for two hours at a time continuously breaking up matchsticks on the table before them as they talk of possible new meanings of Marxism, as they try honestly to define the new beginnings in Eastern Europe after the death of Stalin.<sup>52</sup>

Mills returned in 1959 and spoke at the Institute of International Affairs, a platform for the sort of neutralist initiatives he was exploring. He also gave three lectures before a joint meeting of the Polish Sociological Society and the Polish Academy of Sciences. A better stage he could not have dreamed up. The Academy of Sciences stood at the center of the cultural life of Poland, funding research in literature, history, and philosophy while maintaining a network of institutes that linked scientific laboratories with the practical needs of the industrial plants. The Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, sponsor of Mills's lecture series, had been established in 1956 by the director of the Academy, Adam Schaff, who wanted to rehabilitate Polish scholars whose careers had been upturned by the Stalinist incursion. Mills's audience teemed with men trying to repair a rupture in their history, men who knew without having to be told the importance of the 'classical tradition' in social thought.<sup>53</sup>

However, by the end of the summer 1961, when he made his third and final visit to Warsaw, the future of the revisionist movement looked bleak. In a series of articles in *Przegląd Kulturalny*, a literary weekly, Schaff was defending 'socialist humanism' against vociferous attacks by the reconstituted party dictatorship of Gomulka's regime. Mills recorded his disappointment in *The Marxists*, his last book, and yet continued to defend the efforts of his Polish comrades.<sup>54</sup> Vain was his hope. Kolakowski was expelled from the Party in 1966, on the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. In 1968, he

<sup>52</sup> C. W. Mills, *The Causes of World War Three* (New York: McGraw Hill and Ballantine, 1958), 128.

<sup>53</sup> Sources regarding Mills's second visit to Poland, in January 1959, are scarce. According to an official report, 'Professor Mills's lectures were received with great interest in Warsaw scientific circles.' See the editorial note, 'Visits by Foreign Scientists to Poland', *Review of the Polish Academy of Sciences*, 4 (April-June 1959), 109. There was another perfunctory notice in 'Visit of C. Wright Mills', *Polish Perspectives*, 2 (June 1959), 88. The Institute for International Affairs, co-sponsor of Mills's lecture series, was a haven for neutralist thought, and remained so for decades thereafter. See the collection *Peaceful Coexistence: Essays in Honor of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Polish Institute of International Affairs*, edited by M. Dobrosielski (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Center for International Studies, 1980). Sentiment for neutralism ran hot in the new Poland, and not only among workers and intellectuals. See, for example, 'The Plan for a Nuclear-Free Zone' as reprinted in *The Independent Satellite: Society and Politics in Poland since 1945*, edited by H. Stehle (New York: Praeger, 1965), 324-33; and J. Kowalewski, 'The Atom-Free Zone and Its Opponents' *Polish Perspectives* (May 1958), 11-18. The idea was to create a 'nuclear-free zone' in central Europe, encompassing Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany. Within the zone, no manufacturing, testing, or stockpiling of weapons would be allowed. This meant that the four powers, France, Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union would have to agree. In October 1957, the Polish foreign minister presented the plan to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

<sup>54</sup> C. W. Mills, *The Marxists* (New York: Dell, 1962), 155; C. W. Mills to R. Miliband, 18 July 1960.

was dismissed from his chair at the university, charged with instigating student protests. He left Poland one year later, as did Bauman. Julien Hochfeld was forced to resign as director of the Institute of Foreign Affairs and was expelled from the party soon after.

Among the offences cited in Hochfeld's disgrace was an essay: 'Mills and the Problem of Contemporary Sociology'.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Julien Hochfeld to C. W. Mills, 23 September 1959; Mills thought Hochfeld was 'one of the best of the Poles' (C. W. Mills to Robert Merton, 30 December 1959).