

Profession and Propaganda: University Education in the Grip of Ideology and Poverty

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There are many reasons why young people decide to go to university. In the early 1950s in Poland, one of the motives - at least for young men just out of secondary school - was the aversion to military service. Besides, hardly anyone would be thrilled by the prospect of taking up some poorly paid job, usually at an office, in one's home town. The alternative was the university: a couple of years of study, usually in a different, bigger and more interesting city, new friends, an interesting career afterwards - all this fascinated hundreds of thousand secondary school graduates in the bleak reality of Stalinist Poland.

The communist authorities were well aware of those fascinations and dreams, and made admission to the university a rare privilege and a special favor granted by the "state of workers and peasants". One would be constantly reminded that thanks to "people's rule", university education was provided free of charge - an instance of generosity which merited an everlasting gratitude. And since the all-powerful state paid for the education, it had the right to select those who would be allowed to go to university. Needless to say, it was up to the state to decide what exactly the unfortunate recipient of that benefit was to study and what role in the "building of socialism" he or she would be assigned afterwards. One would not be allowed to pay one's way through the university: the system would not leave the individual any margin of choice.

By the time of the final exams in secondary school, the prospective students would have learnt that the school community had been divided - in strict accordance with the regulations in force - into a number of social categories. They had heard about similar arrangements before: in history and literature classes dealing with the remote past. Now they were told that the enrolment procedure at universities and polytechnics gave priority to sons and daughters of workers, regardless of their actual knowledge or abilities. It was called the principle of historical justice. Next in line were children of farmers. In their case, however, the "worker-peasant alliance" did not include offspring of rich peasant families - only "middlers" and "paupers". The classification was based on the amount of arable land owned by the candidate's parents: the less hectares, the better! The unfortunate children of richer farmers - dubbed kulaks by Party

bureaucrats who had borrowed the term from the political jargon of their Russian comrades - had a very slim chance to be admitted. Sometimes, as a form of punishment to their parents, they would be sent to special military labor battalions instead, where they would do slave labor in a coal mine, side by side with political prisoners, prisoners of war from the Wehrmacht and common criminals.

The third group of candidates - usually most numerous in the big university cities - was made up of representatives of the so-called "working intelligentsia stratum". This social group did not deserve the name of a "class". According to the theorists of Marxism-Leninism, it merely "penetrated" the working and peasant classes and was not to be treated with undue lenience under the dictatorship of the proletariat. As a matter of fact, members of this underspecified stratum were in a sense obliged to give constant proof of their loyalty and ideological commitment. They were supposedly susceptible by nature to the evil influence of bourgeois ideology. Thus the "working intelligentsia" members were seen as a kind of social material to be molded by the social engineers from the Party. Too numerous in any milieu for effective control, they became a kind of necessary evil. Thus in the contest for university admission, the sons and daughters of teachers, accountants, mail or bank clerks, booking clerks, and all the other members of the clerical populace - proliferating under communism - were a kind of third estate, an inferior kind of people, a barely tolerated social weed.

At the very bottom of the ladder were the miserable children of so-called "independent professionals" - that is, doctors and lawyers with a private practice - and small shopkeepers and craftsmen with workshops of their own. Miserable indeed, for their applications were as a rule considered at the very end and turned down. After all, the bureaucrats from the admission boards had to demonstrate "class vigilance" to their bosses from the Party committees. And anyway, the social and occupational groups in question, most heavily discriminated against in Poland, was dwindling from year to year. Doctors found jobs in state-owned hospitals and health centers, lawyers were forced to join state-controlled agencies, and pharmacists were expropriated from their pharmacies. Small shopkeepers were driven out of business by tax chicanery, and some craftsmen took refuge in pseudo-cooperative production units or found jobs in state industry. This process took several years. Meanwhile, the stigma of "incorrect" origin attached to thousands boys and girls.

Selection of candidates and elimination of those "of incorrect origin" took more refined forms, too. Regardless of the actual class origin of a candidate, his or her application could be turned down for dozens of reasons, some of which went back even to quite remote past. It had to be verified that the son or daughter of some unimportant clerk did not in fact come from a family of expropriated landowners or former industrialists or entrepreneurs, whose property had been lawfully confiscated under "the people's rule". A father, whether alive or dead, who had been a professional army officer or policeman before the war automatically blocked the son's or daughter's access to university. Likewise, the possession of relatives abroad - in any non-communist country - put the Party sentinels on the alert, and if someone tried to withhold this kind of information, he could have been accused of deliberately misleading the authorities and open disloyalty, which often carried stiff penalties. It happened on occasions that members of the communist youth organization would take satisfaction in "exposing" thus a fellow student and having him expelled from the university.

Regardless of social background, a candidate's file contained confidential reports concerning his or her political views, attitudes towards religious practices, membership in the state-controlled youth organizations and, if applicable, evidence of loyal obedience to the regime.

The whole system was permeated by corruption and there were frequent instances of bogus documents, nepotism, and degrading moral compromise, on the part of both the candidates and their desperate parents. The authorities must have been aware of all this and tolerated such corrupt practices which facilitated the control of society and fostered conformist attitudes. Besides, communists in Poland never fully succeeded in subduing the people by means of a formalized system of commands and prohibitions.

Having neither the means, nor the intention to have the selection system described above applied in every detail at all the institutions of higher education and to all fields of study, the authorities concentrated instead on selected specialties - on the one hand, the most popular ones, and on the other, those which were assigned a special role in the plans of communist indoctrination and consolidation of power. A real apple in the eye of the communist party and government were - following the Soviet example - selected technical branches of special direct or indirect importance to certain branches of the heavy industry, such as mining and defense.

Thus the authorities spared no expense for the development of technical universities or the Academy of Mining and Metallurgy in Krakow.

Education of military and police personnel, which at least until 1956 was conducted under close supervision of Soviet specialists, as well as recruitment for diplomatic service training and institutions dealing with ideology and political science were particularly strictly controlled by the highest-level authorities. Candidates were carefully selected: they came mainly from primitive, uprooted families. Another criterion was that of blind obedience to the forces of political repression and propaganda. Especially welcome were individuals who had participated in the suppression of the opposition, in propaganda campaigns in favor of the communist system in the country or among factory workers, in the organization of local informant networks etc. They often originated from the city or country Lumpenproletariat or pathological families. Interestingly, one could occasionally meet in those circles sons and daughters of Polish repatriates from the north-east, industrial departments of France (Nord, Pas de Calais) - simple-minded communist converts whom the authorities in post-war Poland had promised socialist well-being and lucrative employment in the industrial region of Wałbrzych. Some of those misguided young men became engaged as guards to watch over imprisoned soldiers and officers of the underground Home Army from the wartime years. They were told those were Nazi war criminals.

The special training facilities for the elect offered the students or cadets extremely comfortable conditions; they were, of course, isolated from the rest of society and were worlds apart from the usual troubled circumstances of student life in Poland those days. People knew about them but usually took no interest, unless one aspired to a career in the party and politics. But even among normal universities, which were in theory open to broader circles of young people, there were places where the official political and ideological selection criteria, together with informal links of corruption and favoritism, reigned supreme. This was true first of all of Medical Schools, newly established or detached from existing universities. The profession of a physician or pharmacist was thought of as prestigious and at the same time remunerative. Candidates invariably swarmed into such fashionable studies as architecture, history of art, and the fine arts. Here again, what the examination boards looked for was not so much the candidates' gifts as their correct social background. Thus the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts rejected the application of the granddaughter of a famous painter, stating that "the party will not

lend support to the formation of artistic dynasties". Law studies, in their turn, were to supply the regime with "new type" judges and prosecutors, who in criminal cases would stick not so much to the letter of the law as to the current guidelines of the communist party. This kind of career was frequently offered to "deserving" agents of the political police, whose past could have been very sinister.

An apparent peculiarity was the extremely careful selection of prospective students of humanities. The proportion of well-prepared candidates, even from ideologically acceptable classes, whose applications were turned down, was particularly striking in the case of history and Polish studies (Prokop 1996). It soon turned out that those two disciplines were largely reserved for people with special political credentials: graduates of so-called one-year university preparatory courses. Young Stakhanovites from steelworks and mines, trusted up-country party comrades, or even long-term informers of the political police were sent to special courses where 12 months of instruction was deemed enough to make up for the missing years of education and secure the matura (secondary education certificate). Specially reserved places were waiting for them at universities, for it was this group that was meant to become teachers-indoctrinators of the future. Whether they did is a different question, altogether.

Other candidates of this type - appointed by local party committees - ended up after some brief remedial courses at technical universities, too. Usually they gave up pretty soon; cursing the moment they had agreed to play the role of a mediocre student instead of that of a work champion respected by the entire factory.

In modern language faculties, priority was given to Russian studies: teachers of Russian were badly needed as that language was soon too become an obligatory part of primary and secondary school curricula.

A new doctrine should be disseminated by the press. Therefore, studies for journalists were placed under tight control of the party in the early 1950s. In contrast, sociology disappeared as an academic discipline for quite a few years. It was absorbed by the hastily established chairs of "ideological disciplines" whose function was to propagate so-called Marxism-Leninism and the communist version of political economy at all institutions of higher education, regardless of their profile. The sole function of the new economy was to demonstrate the superiority of communist theory and practice over all the previous economic systems existing in the world.

Issues of propaganda and politics made up at least fifty per cent of entrance exam contents in the early 1950s - written as well as oral - and were intended to provide the main evaluation criterion for the examination boards. Besides, the boards relied heavily on information found on the candidates' files.

The centrally controlled, complex enrolment system, admission limits set up by the party for particular types of studies and categories of candidates (by origin), and abolition of some disciplines and establishment of others proved too much for the bureaucratic machinery of universities. Chaos, corruption and arbitrary, politically motivated decisions resulted in hundreds of young people being turned down despite the passed exam, ostensibly because of "lack of vacancies". The rejected candidates would be offered a chance to study some entirely different discipline (supposedly with too few students), of no interest to them.

Thus in order to promote research on the early years of the Polish state and its thousand-year-long history, heavily publicized by the propaganda, archaeology was given an unheard-of-before prominence at Polish universities. By administrative decision, the discipline would absorb the many candidates for whom no place was found at the dentistry, engineering or law faculties (Dziêgiel 1996:100).

Those who had no intention of studying anything that was offered or could not even dream of admission to any state-run university in Poland went to the Catholic University of Lublin, functioning somehow under the aegis of the Church, despite the chicanery on the part of the communist regime. This small institution, with just a few faculties and a restricted choice of disciplines proved the last resort to many a person. But it was not possible for everyone to take advantage of this opportunity. Some regions of Poland are a long way off from Lublin. Besides, rumors were that the university would sooner or later be closed down. It was also feared that graduates might find it difficult to get a job.

Conformist attitudes were far more easily fostered at universities newly established after the war than in old academic centers with a pre-war tradition. The staff of the new institutions largely consisted of lecturers who had just been promoted in recognition of their loyalty and obedience. For decades the communists tried to break the unity of the academic milieu by establishing small, provincial university branches and rump academic centers called "consultation points" - academically inadequate and fully dependent on their sponsors from the party and ministry. The development of higher education in post-war Poland has been studied in

detail by historians of science. In the years 1937-38 there were 32 institutions of higher education in Poland. Their number had increased by the late 1940s to 54 (Bielecki 1967:147). In the 1970s Poland had 90 educational establishments with a formal university status (Paczkowski 1996:455). One should, however, take note of the specific atmosphere surrounding the formation of such new schools, which would automatically, increase competition for funds from the budget. The possession of a university or technical college was certainly a matter of regional ambition and certainly simplified things for the thousands of local education seekers. But it was not their ambitions and desires that were taken into account. The decision rested with local party lobbies, which had their own vested interest in the establishment of a school of a given type. In the end, the new institution of higher learning would be opened amid much celebration; the rector and deans would be appointed and a numerous administrative staff would find work there as well. The inaugural ceremony would be attended by dignitaries from Warsaw, dressed up in quasi-historic gowns and equipped with appropriate insignia. The newly engaged bureaucratic apparatus would ensure obedience to the authorities for as long as years to come, and, most importantly, it would control the students. Meanwhile, some of the local party officials would seize the opportunity to obtain surreptitiously higher-education diplomas under a hasty and cursory procedure supervised by the newly appointed professors and deans. Young people from the neighboring towns and villages would try - in a disarmingly awkward manner - to imitate the old university tradition of annual student celebrations, fancy-dress processions in the streets or dances, all of which was dutifully reported by the local press.

In some places, on the other hand, the decision to open a university was being postponed indefinitely so as to avoid creating an intelligentsia milieu in areas of strategic importance for the party. Year after year, the obsequious Katowice press kept extolling the "dynamic scientific community of Upper Silesia" concentrating on industrial and technical problems and repeatedly emphasized the lack of interest in the humanities and abstract basic research which allegedly characterized the regional culture. Szczecin, the capital of Western Pomerania received an embryonic technical college immediately after the war, but it was not until the 1980s that the organization of a university met with the approval of the authorities (and received a token financial support). Communists in Poland always viewed universities, politically, as high-risk establishments, far less predictable than vocational-type institutions of higher education. A university could easily turn into a hotbed of criticism, breeding ferment among the students and

lecturers alike, for all the painstaking ideological and political supervision. Control was rendered even more difficult by the varied profile of instruction and the tendency to remove the corset of ministry-imposed curricula.

The legacy that the communist regime took over in 1945 included the Jagellonian University in Krakow, established in 1364, the early-19th Century University of Warsaw, and the Universities of Poznań and Lublin, dating back to the interwar period. Two old universities ceased to exist as Polish schools after the annexation of Wilno and Lvov by Stalin. Most of their professors ended up in Wrocław, vacated by the Germans, or at the newly established after 1945 University of Toruń. The most difficult task was the organization of medical and law studies in Wrocław, as nearly all the professors of those faculties at the University of Lvov had been exterminated by the Nazis in 1941 (Ordyeowski 1991:213).

The establishment of a university could be seen in some circumstances as an act of political subversion. In Lublin, for instance, the hastily opened, state-run Maria Curie-Skłodowska University was intended to compete with the private Catholic University of Lublin, established in 1918. In Katowice, it was decided at last in 1968 - in the wake of massive student protest in Krakow - that a university would come into being in Silesia. It was meant to be obedient to the regime, and most of the posts were taken by candidates proposed by the local party committee. They were expected to be docile and, at the very least, to create a kind of counterbalance to the Jagellonian University, which was deemed reactionary. But both Universities, in Lublin and in Katowice, freed themselves in due time from propaganda and ideological obligations. That was by no means an easy task to accomplish, and the early generations of students could have complained about their aspirations being disregarded. Since the late 1940s, the authorities attempted to control the universities and the student community by means of specialized institutions and services, which remained active in this field (even though the working methods may have changed) until 1989. For instance, as late as in the mid 1980s, any official trip of a university research worker to the United States or to West Germany required - in addition to the passport issued by the police and acceptance by the minister - also a consent in writing from a party official responsible for this kind of foreign contacts at the University. This requirement applied to all research workers, whether party members or not. And, it should be borne in mind, that was a time of pronounced atrophy of the communist regime in Poland.

In the early 1950s, the Association of the Polish Youth (ZMP) kept detailed records of all new arrivals at the university, and particularly of those students who had been members of that organization while still at school. The ZMP wished first of all to control the attitudes of its members and to force them to participate in various forms of propaganda. These included in the first half of the 1950s the virtually obligatory Sunday trips to nearby state farms in order to help the farmers (not too hardworking, for that matter) dig potatoes. In summer, camps were organized the aim of which was to assist the collective farmers and state-farm-hands in the harvest. Once there, it usually turned out that the drunken and demoralized farm workers had failed to provide the students with tools and protective clothing. And besides, they wanted no assistance from town. Out of necessity then, a propaganda event soon turned into a chaotic picnic, occasionally enlivened with no small amounts of alcohol.

Non-members were far less susceptible to the pressure of indoctrination. The communist party ordered the ZMP to carry out various campaigns among the students and held the university activists responsible for their success. An atmosphere of tension and apprehension was being constantly and artificially maintained among ZMP members. It was reinforced with incessant appeals for "vigilance" in the face of the ideological enemy and propaganda subversion. Meetings dragged on, often for the better part of the night, during which activists denounced one another and performed acts of political self-accusation. This led to nervous breakdowns or even, as was the case on one occasion in Krakow, to suicide.

Today, in the 1990s, the opinion is often voiced (convenient to some) that "everyone had to be a ZMP member". In reality, however, it was an organization which, resorting to ruthless pressure and blackmail, had managed to round up a little more than a million members by 1949 and about 2 million - that is, not more than 40 per cent of all boys and girls - by 1955. The latter number translated into some 50 per cent of young workers and 60 per cent of secondary school and university students. In the country, the organization was less successful, as membership was in the order of 15 per cent (Paczkowski 1996:248). It is thus clear that blackmail and other forms of organized pressure worked best among learners, but even in their case those measures were only partially successful.

Most ZMP activists originated from among students coming to the university from provincial towns - uprooted, lost, and troubled by an inferiority complex about their more affluent colleagues. A career in the ZMP invested one with a sense of authority. It also facilitated

progress at the university and promised better career opportunities in the future. Downright opportunists who viewed their involvement in the organization as just a rung of their political career were not uncommon in those circles - the next stage was membership in the communist party and various functions in its apparatus. Hardly out of the university, they acquired the haughty manner of dignitaries, combined with a pseudo--proletarian coarseness, sometimes bordering on vulgarity. The supposedly "working-class-like", rustic manners, ostentatious scorn for politeness and correct language and the affected air of a simpleton in authority: those were the hallmarks of the apparatchik of the 1950s. His style was marked by a disgusting, primitive servility in contacts with superiors. Bad manners and even propensity to drink were seen by those people as proof of their loyalty to "proletarian principles". Quite possibly, it was for them a means of protection against the less numerous but highly dangerous group of promotion seekers from the intelligentsia: tough and cunning players who displayed at meetings and courses a far greater aptitude in quoting the several dozen lines by Stalin they had memorized.

The official marches organized on a giant scale on 1 May or other communist holidays created huge demand for naturalist portraits of communist leaders, first of all, Josef Stalin. This was a source of extra income for students and graduates of the Academy of Fine Arts. The party bosses hired them well in advance, in view of the magnitude of their task, and provided them with paint, canvas and stencils. The artists received (in secret) remuneration for their work. Apparently, the authorities feared that an attempt to have those services performed free of charge might have ended in a disaster that would put the entire celebration in jeopardy. The communist "leaders" had to look the same in all the portraits, in accordance with a specimen approved by the highest-level government bodies. No margin of variation was allowed. A more creative approach was possible, on the other hand, in the case of larger-than-life caricatures of "enemies of the international proletariat". At any rate, no artist would boast about getting such highly questionable commissions (Kobyliński 1990: 140-148).

Participation in those quasi-spontaneous street marches was in practice obligatory, yet - apart from ZMP activists - it was mainly the frightened first year students who showed up in greater numbers. Rule number one was never to carry banner or flag: it would have to be handed back to the organizers at the very end of the celebration. And a person who walked empty-handed had a chance of taking refuge in the first house entrance on the way. Another strategy

was to get lost in the crowd. It was a fashionable thing to do among a group of trusted friends, to say: "As for me, I've never in my life participated in any street march."

Thus in the early 1950s, many a student commencing education at a Polish university felt disappointed, frustrated and embittered. Those reactions were aggravated by the law (also originating from 1950) on "socialist study discipline". It deprived students of a chance to study at two faculties simultaneously and made attendance at all lectures mandatory. It was to be checked by students specially appointed by the university, who had to use special forms to this end. All this was happening in an atmosphere of official propaganda enthusiasm and slogans comparing the university to a "personnel factory" with production plans of its own and strict penalties for breaking the discipline. As a matter of fact, it was not the student's intellectual effort that counted, but his or her "involvement in the student group". The arbitrary plans of some university ideologues stipulated that the group should study together before examinations and make sure that every member (no matter how lazy or thickheaded) would obtain similar results. The others should do "ideological work" with their less successful colleague, to encourage him to obey the discipline.

That kind of discipline was applied to professors, too, who were made responsible for examination results and dropouts. Poor marks - particularly when they affected some less hard-working or gifted ZMP activists or, worse still, "comrades" from the Polish United Workers' Party - could mean trouble for the overly demanding professor, or even cost him his right to lecture or his job. Following the Soviet practice, the old, pre-war professors were carefully screened for "remnants of bourgeois ideology". In some schools there were lecturers, too, who tried to curry favor with the authorities and obtain promotion by means of obedience to the regime or even informing against their colleagues.

The late 1940s and early 1950s were a period of particularly heavy dependence of Polish science and culture on Soviet patterns. This was also the case in the neighboring communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The subsequent rejection of this imposed model, on the other hand, took different forms and proceeded at a different pace in each of the countries concerned. It was the functioning of that model in practice and its gradual erosion that determined the specificity of the culture of each of the captive nations, including the Poles (Connelly, Suleja 1997).

Although the model of the university imposed by the authorities, based on the concept of a centralized, uninspired "personnel factory", was rapidly deteriorating, it nevertheless led to an intellectual stagnation among students, who were not motivated to seek knowledge on their own, while the university was becoming a distorted replica of an inferior secondary school. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that the libraries had been destroyed during the war, and the intentional isolation of communist countries from the rest of the world resulted in a lack of modern teaching materials and excluded the academic circles from the normal international circulation of ideas. Both in secondary schools and in higher education, new textbooks took long to appear. They usually followed the official pattern pertaining to a given discipline. National congresses were held - of various branches of culture, humanities, literary studies, and science - during which the most obedient representatives of the milieu, (chosen by the communist party), declared (or, in a sense, decreed) a "Marxist-Leninist breakthrough" in research methodology and teaching. The attainments of Polish philosophers and sociologists were rejected. Infallibility in this area was an exclusive attribute of Soviet interpreters of Marxist thought, led by Josef Stalin. In Poland, only their imitators had a chance to be recognized; one of those was Prof. Adam Schaff, whose swift career soon secured him the position of an archpriest of the social sciences. The humanities had solemnly renounced "bourgeois objectivity". The leading role in the interpretation of history was played by a certain Prof. Zhanna Kormanova. In the field of modern languages, attempts were made to implement the ideas of another Soviet scholar, Kairov, and eliminate English, French, Italian or Spanish culture and literature from instruction and thus protect students from ideologically alien contents. Linguists were being encouraged to peruse the linguistic enunciations of Stalin, whom the press had meanwhile begun to hail as an all-science coryphaeus. In biological sciences, the existence of chromosomes was denied, and so was the validity of Mendel's theory of heredity: introduced in their place were the ideas of Michurin, Lysenko, Lepeshinska and other Soviet charlatans. Reflection on culture was dominated by the unearthed evolutionary concepts of Morgan, which had so impressed Friedrich Engels in the 19th century. Architects, art historians and students of the fine arts were encouraged to emulate the bizarre model of so-called "socialist realism". Whatever the discipline, Soviet science was inevitably the model to emulate.

During the congresses mentioned above - which amounted in reality to little more than political briefing - the other participants either remained silent, or apprehensively declared their

support for the officially approved science. The few who protested soon had to vacate their posts at the university or at least to resign from any lecturing. In such an atmosphere, new university textbooks represented - once again, in accordance with the Soviet model - joint work of many authors, hidden behind the name of the "editor in chief". Usually it was a scholar trusted by the party bosses from Warsaw. Such new textbooks were not always to be treated with undue seriousness: on some occasions a new ideological convert - a Marxist professor - would immediately on publication of his textbook fall victim to devastating criticism on the part of even more orthodox dignitaries from the ministry, and the book itself would be withdrawn. Such was the fate of the famous textbook on Marxist aesthetics by Stefan Morawski, published in Krakow in the early 1950s.

Sometimes an influential professor with good party connections would impose on younger research workers and students an ideological model of science interpretation, but at the same time he would provide a kind of umbrella over his institution or even the entire discipline, tapping government sources to finance the employment of new staff or to fund research. There were scholars of this kind (jocularly called in the 1960s "academic overlords") who held several academic and administrative posts at the same time and totally neglected their professorial duties for lack of time. This phenomenon became widespread after the establishment of the Polish Academy of Sciences in 1951, which offered a colossal number of posts. A similar situation prevailed in many disciplines, also in other countries of the communist block. In those undemocratic regimes, "courtly" science flourished, whose function (at least in the humanities) was to provide the arbitrary actions of the authorities with "scientific" justification, rather than open up new horizons (Patologia..., 1994).

As new textbooks were unavailable and the existing few consisted mainly of ideological gibberish, those professors who represented a higher professional integrity referred their students to pre-war literature, or what was left of it after the wartime destruction and looting. In practice, particularly in the case of certain humanistic disciplines and philologies, many books from the 1930s or even from pre-World-War-I days were still used. Technical disciplines were slightly better off: students could occasionally resort to German textbooks, and besides, more and more publications of Western specialists were available in a Russian version published in Moscow. They were translated in large numbers, in violation of the copyright law, and printed on poor-quality wood-pulp paper. Future engineers and their professors laughed to tears hearing the

propaganda tirades about the leading position of Soviet technology - which plagiarized, promptly and clandestinely, all new achievements of Western thought. In 1952, when Warsaw officially celebrated the completion of the spired Palace of Culture and Science - a gift of the Soviet authorities and the top achievement of Moscow builders, in the innovative style of socialist realism - students of architecture in Poland would show one another old photographs of the strikingly similar Terminal Tower in Cleveland, Ohio, built decades earlier in a similarly pompous and eclectic style.

Other disciplines were not so fortunate. With textbooks lacking (not even mimeographed copies of teaching materials, produced by universities - so-called skrypty - were available) all one had to rely on was lecture notes. It thus paid off to attend regularly all the lectures and seminars, or at least to be on good terms with ones who did. To be sure, no such thing as a Xerox machine was heard of in those days. Troubled by a persecution mania, the system jealously guarded access even to the simplest duplicating machine. University publishing houses which were supposed to produce skrypty were inefficient. Some teachers used archaic "episcopes" - which had seen the pre-war days or at least the Nazi occupation - allowing one to project an image of a printed page or photograph on screen for a couple of seconds (after a couple more the thing would catch fire). Verbal instruction reigned supreme.

Standards of learning at universities were kept up by the staff: pre-war professors and lecturers tried hard to prevent total demoralization of science. They often met, therefore, with more or less open chicanery and provocation attempts, inspired, in many cases, by communist youth activists. Their books and skrypty would remain unpublished for years or else would be censored, with entire chapters and sections being removed. Participation in conferences abroad was out of the question, which meant isolation from the worldwide trends in a given discipline. This was particularly true of provincial universities, and province meant in those days all places except the capital. Warsaw was always privileged in terms of contacts with the world. Information about possibilities of applying for foreign scholarships or participation in international conferences was sent to other centers of learning so late that any prospective candidate would have no time to submit all of the many required questionnaires, certificates and diploma excerpts. And if by any chance they did make it on time, the documents would be lost forever in the filing cabinets of anonymous ministry clerks. Such practices, in varying forms and degrees of intensity, were not altogether eliminated until 1989.

I mentioned in the opening paragraph aversion to military service as one of the motives for young men to take up studies - sometimes any kind of studies whatsoever. From 1950, the Ministry of National Defense organized a system of military training for students at all Polish universities, integrated into the curricula. At Medical Academies, the training was obligatory for girls, too. Special regulations applied to Roman Catholic seminarians, who had to go into service on completion of their education. In the army, they were subjected to atheistic indoctrination. This form of chicanery was a matter of controversy between the Church and the authorities. Military training of students of lay schools was conducted at fortnightly intervals over a span of three years, at the end of which there was a 30-day field exercise and a final examination, leading to the students' promotion to officer ranks (Dziêgiel 1996:171-186). It was a system which survived, with certain modifications, until 1989. Only then was it decided, upon thorough analysis, that the whole idea of "Military Classes" was not only costly, but inefficient. Indeed, the officers who conducted the instruction were not always appropriately qualified, even though their posts of university instructors were much coveted among their colleagues, who generally preferred big university centers to barracks. Unfortunately, inability to work with students often made them a laughing stock, which ruined their authority. Generation after generation of students held them up to ridicule. The training equipment they used - old and dilapidated - did not help much, either. Also the field exercises made the sorry organizational, technical and frequently also moral condition of the army all too plain. No wonder this form of military service was finally abolished. All in all, however, it was beneficial for students, at least in comparison with regular military service.

Within three years after 1950, the notorious "socialist study discipline" became weakened and practically ceased to exist. An old student habit was back: regular attendance was once again restricted to classes and seminars (as opposed to lectures). The rigid system of ideological lectures on Marxism-Leninism and political economy was increasingly looked upon as a mere formality. Even the lecturers themselves did not seem convinced about the force of their arguments. Some of them even started to flatter the audience with cautious liberalism, expecting a relaxation of the ideological stringency. Years later, many of them ended up in the West and made a name for themselves in Oxford or Paris as "philosophers sensitive to the human condition", moralizing from entirely different positions. Anyway, upon Stalin's death in March 1953, political terror in Poland began to die down, at least at universities. The commands and

prohibitions imposed by the system were more and more openly defied. In violation of formal regulations, students were beginning to look for unofficial sources of extra income. Gradually, the more enterprising ones began to embark on professional careers. After graduation, they wished to find jobs in the town where they had stayed for years, made friends and, some of them, formed emotional attachments of a more serious kind.

The official system adopted after World War II was that of so-called "job assignment", yet another Soviet import, based on the assumption that every university graduate will be given (mandatory) employment in his profession for three years. A person would be directed to one place or another by a special commission, and the employer was to provide lodgings. The reason why the state had paid the students' scholarships for so long was that it needed supply of qualified labor which could be allocated at will. In theory, the decision of the commission was final and allowed for no appeal. At least that was the way the system worked - or so we heard - in the Soviet Union. This was also how it was meant to work in People's Poland, eliminating in the process the threat of graduate unemployment. That, however, was but a promise. The reality - as early as in the 1950s - looked quite different. And so mandatory job assignment applied only to technical professions and some other disciplines where specialists were in short supply indeed. But even in their case it often turned out that there were no lodgings and sometimes even no work for the coming graduates, who could thus either return home or go job-hunting on their own. In the case of graduates with diplomas in humanities, job assignment was never introduced. Looking for a job was their own problem.

For those who went to university in 1950, the authorities had yet another surprise in store: two-stage studies. It was decided in advance that after the third year, 90 per cent of the students should go to work, as People's Poland supposedly badly needed labor. They would not be allowed to obtain a diploma. Few students managed to stay on for another two years and complete an MA program. Hundreds or even thousands of young people were thus forced to leave, with only a certificate of incomplete higher education in their pocket, which made finding a job a particularly difficult task. Later on, they would need many years to make up for that unwarranted backlog. A year later all students were allowed again to complete an MA program: the regulations had been hastily changed. The party bosses never hesitated to experiment.

Students, on their part, were learning how to deal with the bureaucracy of the regime and how to survive in an insane system. And the system ruthlessly ruined - in the name of internal power struggle - the career prospects of hundreds of highly qualified graduates.

[Autobiographical Note: First of all I have my Home Page in the Internet:

<http://www.uj.edu.pl/IE/DZIEGIEL.HTM>

Our Institute of Ethnology: <http://www.uj.edu.pl/IE/EUROPA.HTM>

I was born in 1931. I spent World War Two in Lvov. In 1945 I had to move from Lvov to Katowice (Upper Silesia). There I finished the secondary school in 1950 experiencing political chicanery towards those young people who declined to join organization of communist youth. My situation was by no means exceptional. Most of my friends experienced several kinds of political pressure and intimidation. In spite of our very good results we were divided into several social categories while we were applying for the university studies. Being sons and daughters of middle class (my father was a teacher and he died in the Nazi concentration camp), we were obviously non-privileged. In 1950 most of us were denied to study at the Krakow University those faculties chosen by us. I wanted to study history. Then I begin to study archeology and ethnology. In 1955 I got my MA diploma in ethnology with excellent results. I observed the university life during those five years and I shared plenty of rather awkward adventures with my pals being rather nonconformist youngsters. As I did not decide to join the Polish Communist Party, my application for doctoral studies was rejected. Being jobless I worked in many strange places, as the worker, mountain tourist guide etc. In 1955-1959 I founded with my friends (similar jobless graduates) illustrated monthly magazine. It was closed by the authorities because of political reasons. I had to move from Krakow to Upper Silesia. There I worked as a teacher and free lance journalist. After my return to Krakow in 1970 I was offered post of researcher at the University of Agriculture. I got my Ph.D. diploma at the Krakow University, Fac. of History & Philosophy. In 1977, 1978, and 1980 I did my field research in Iraqi Kurdistan as the member of Polish agro-economic team of experts. My task was anthropological survey of five chosen areas in Dohuk, Sulaimania, and Arbil governorates. Then I wrote (in English) book "Rural Community of Contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan Facing Modernization" Krakow 1981. One copy of the book is available at the US Congress Library also. In 1982 I got my habilitation diploma at the Poznan University.

From 1983 I work at the Institute of Ethnology as full professor of ethnology and the director. Inside the Institute, I am the head of the Dept. of European and Middle Eastern Studies. I am also the member of some editorial boards and the all-national Committee of Ethnology.

In the middle of the 1990s I decided to begin research on the cultural aspects of every day life in the Communist Poland, using my own experiences and observations of my generation, as well as the memoirs published here and there. I am interested in the perspective of a common, unprivileged citizen, not necessary involved in any political conspiracy but in the same time objecting the imposed system of oppression. Then I decided to focus my attention on the urban educated class, well known for me. It is my idea to begin such studies in Poland but also to persuade that sphere of research to my colleagues from neighboring post-communist countries. Some of my papers are now in print in Prague, Zagreb, but also in Poland. One paper is going to be published in international journal *Ethnologia Europea*. My idea is not to present the communist everyday in Central Europe like a kind of period of martyrology. But in the same time I think there is high time to provide historians of culture with basic cultural facts in some way resembling Richard Grunberger's book on the social history of the Third Reich. I plan to publish in English a book on the every day life in Polish People's Republic and that paper sent to you is only one chapter of it. That study is almost completed now. It covers such subjects as: The civilization of everlasting need and poverty (food and other commodities shortages, attitudes, limitations, illusions and cheating). Policy of indoctrination of the secondary school students in big cities and their answer. Western films as the kind of idealistic illusion of the West in the minds of Polish young generation in the Stalinist Era. Profession & Propaganda: Polish students in the communist political system. Polish students in the cultural milieu of the university city. Living realities, peculiar local elites, customs, entertainments, students' dormitories, and their subculture. Western fashion as the form of political protest among Polish students. Hiking and alpinism as the form of political escapism of the Polish educated milieu. Communist philosophy toward the big cities. Policy of making of obedient urban-dweller. Private car as one of means of political corruption. Poland's immediate neighbors (Czech, Slovaks, Hungarians, East Germans and Soviets) - official stereotypes and popular mythology. I hope that you are more or less informed about the general idea of my research now. I am sorry I know about your

issue only from the Internet. I am conscious also, that those subjects are by far more interesting in Central Europe than in America.]

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