

Per Prof. Chodakiewicz: Communism did not collapse in Poland – it was transformed

By: *John Czop*

Professor Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, the first and incumbent holder of the Kościuszko Chair of Polish Studies at The Institute of World Politics (IWP), Washington, DC, is concerned that Poland, the country where he was born, is on the wrong track. "Transformation, 1988-1992: The Case of Poland" is the title of the lecture that he delivered on 14 November 2009 at IWP's Second Annual Kościuszko Chair Lectures.

Chodakiewicz gives us new perspectives on what actually happened in Poland during the years when both Western Governments and the mainstream mass media in the West tell us that Communism collapsed. This optimistic view that Communism did in fact collapse is what Chodakiewicz aptly labels the "propaganda of success." Last year, 2009, the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall saw the "propaganda of success" in full swing with official congratulatory commemorations on the peaceful collapse of Communism that were uncritically publicized by the mainstream mass media in the West.

The purpose of Chodakiewicz's lecture was to invite us to balance change with continuity. What Chodakiewicz calls "the propaganda of success" emphasizes change, and Chodakiewicz agrees that change for the better, toward the establishment of a political culture based on Western values, did in fact prevail over continuity only in two cases. First, the former German Democratic Republic, or East Germany, was integrated into the German Federal Republic and this is where the exposure and condign punishment of former Communist officials made more progress than elsewhere in the former Eastern Bloc. Second, the former Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic was the only country where the property of the pre-World War II elite was restored, and is therefore the only country where the social base in wealth for a non-Communist democratic elite exists.

With the exceptions of the former East Germany and former Soviet controlled Estonia, Chodakiewicz sees change trumped by continuity elsewhere in the former Soviet sphere. The "propaganda of success" which trumpeted the collapse of Communism and the triumph of democracy during 2009, the 20th anniversary of the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, extended without basis in fact the unique circumstances of the former German Democratic Republic to the rest of the former Soviet sphere. That is, no other country in the Soviet sphere was partitioned after World War II, and Communist Poland, or Communist Hungary, unlike Communist East Germany, had no non-Communist country peopled by their compatriots which could absorb them as West Germany did with East Germany.

Moreover, during 2009, the inappropriately congratulatory and misleadingly celebratory official observances, staged by both Western governments and the governments of the former Soviet Bloc countries, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the nearly bloodless collapse of Communism were then uncritically publicized by the mainstream mass media.

The effect of this "propaganda of success" has been to occlude the continuity of rule by the Communist elite in Poland, Hungary, and other countries of the former Soviet Bloc. Chodakiewicz tells us what really happened to counter the "propaganda of success". He gives us a far less optimistic assessment which is a much needed corrective to the

"propaganda of success." Chodakiewicz helps us face the future with lucidity.

Chodakiewicz prefaced his description of what really happened by asking his auditors to participate in a demonstration. He asked the approximately 70 of us to pick-up a piece of paper that we found on our seats and to imagine that it represents Communism. Next, he asked us to crumple-up that piece of paper into a ball and then to unravel it. Then, he asked: What have you now in your hands? Answer: The very same piece of paper transformed. This exercise graphically shows how Communism was transformed and not destroyed. Readers recall that a demonstration involving the ripping -up and then the burning of the piece of paper would show the collapse, or destruction, of Communism.

After establishing the context, Chodakiewicz now describes what really happened in Poland from 1988 to 1992. The transformation of Communism was a vast deception operation perpetrated by the Communist elite to persuade Western public opinion that democratic change was in fact underway when the real purpose, throughout the Soviet sphere, of these so called reforms was to strengthen Communism and the Soviet Union that had been weakened by the challenges posed to it by Pope John Paul II, former President Ronald Reagan, and former U.K. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The Kremlin mandated reforms from above had two components: perestroika (restructuring) enforced by glasnost (criticism by rank-and-file party members of mid-level party officials who were not complying with the perestroika reforms).

Chodakiewicz points-out that precisely because mass support for Communism was weakest in Poland and Hungary, the Communist parties of these two countries relied on the Kremlin to protect them from Polish and Hungarian patriots. This is why the Communist leaders in both countries implemented perestroika and glasnost with alacrity.

In Czechoslovakia, by contrast, the Communist leadership enjoyed considerable mass support and resisted the reforms ordered by the Kremlin. Chodakiewicz explains that the Czech and Slovak Communists feared that First Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms from above would undermine their careers, and resisted following Moscow's reformist line. This explains why the Kremlin ordered the KGB to intervene in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Bulgaria, and Romania to implement the perestroika reforms.

In Poland, Chodakiewicz observes, the Communist elite repeated in a new context the deception operation perpetrated by their predecessors in the period, 1944-1947. Then and now many Western observers were duped and reported that the Communists, or today the transformed post-Communists, run a democratic system. During 1944-1947, the Communists organized fake free elections and a bogus free press. They did this to discredit Polish patriots who sounded the alarm that post-war Poland was a captive of the Soviet Union and controlled by the Kremlin's lackeys. Today, they do it for similar reasons.

Chodakiewicz next describes the economic base of Poland's elite.

Today, as a result of the Wilczek reforms enacted in the early 1990s, at the very time of "economic shock therapy" for average Polish people, former Communist upper level civil servants were rewarded for the loss of their formal political power as upper level Communist civil servants with private economic power. Today, these upper level civil servants transformed into private individuals manage the very services they used to manage on behalf of the Communist State for their private profit. Through leasing agreements, or

The Communist Dove of Peace and the Stone from Kobyla Głowa

By: *Jerzy Przystawa*

Commentary: On Monday, the 1st of February 2010, the Polish National TVP1 emitted a Grzegorz Braun and Robert Karczmarek film entitled „Towarzysz General” (Comrade General) presenting the life career of Wojciech Jaruzelski, the first President of Poland after 1989 and former Communist Prime Minister, General Secretary of the Communist Party, Minister of Defence and a Member of the Politburo for decades. After the film, there was a televised debate of notable Polish journalists including Rafał Ziemkiewicz (“Rzeczpospolita”), Łukasz Warzecha (“Fakt”), Jacek Żakowski (“Polityka” and “Gazeta Wyborcza”), Piotr Zaremba (“Dziennik”) i Wojciech Mazowiecki (“Gazeta Wyborcza” and, “Superstacja”). The expressed views were highly controversial both regarding the film and the role of General Jaruzelski in the history of Poland. In view of these controversies, I found it proper to recall an incident from some 16 years ago, when Stanisław Helski, a farmer from Kobyla Głowa assailed General Jaruzelski while the latter was promoting his book in a bookshop in Wrocław. The article, written on the order of “Gazeta Polska” immediately after the event, had not been published.

On Tuesday 11 October 1994 about 4:00 p.m., a serious event occurred in the Wrocław bookstore on Plac Legionów (Square of the Legionnaires) which aroused public opinion for several days. Stanisław Helski, a 65year old farmer and pensioner hit in the face with a rock Wojciech Jaruzelski who was at that time promoting his newest book and signing autographs. It was not a brick as some certain newspapers reported, but a stone from his fields brought in a small purse especially for this occasion. The security officers of BOR guarding the General gallantly and easily “disarmed” the pensioner who neither defended himself nor tried to escape, cuffed his hands behind him all the while shouting at him various colourful comments such as scoundrel, swine, you’ll die in a trash bin,, etc.

The lightly wounded general was taken to the hospital. Apparently the wounds were not serious. Immediately, like a true dove of peace and upstanding Catholic, he magnanimously stated that he forgives his assailant, who “did not know what he did”. The assailant unfortunately did not at all display Christian humility and repentance and stating that on his side, he has “no desire to forgive the General”. He spent the night under arrest; a criminal trial awaited him on the basis of article 156, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code with the possibility of a sentence ranging from 6 months to 5 years of imprisonment. The magnanimity of General Jaruzelski did not make any impression on Stanisław Helski. He declared that in the Christian morality (that is if General Jaruzelski wants to pose as a Christian) there exists the concept of REPARATION. If instead of “forgiving”, General Jaruzelski whereas TO MAKE REPARATIONS to him for the wrongs he has suffered, then perhaps he would be ready to change his position.

It is not necessary to introduce the victim of the incident as General Jaruzelski. However, when he rode in a government limousine under the care of security agents surveillance of BOR across Poland collecting royalties for his books, signing autographs, smiling gracefully and indulgently behind his dark glasses at people with short memories, it is befitting to recall that this is the same man who 40 years ago in 1970 ordered the army to fire upon unarmed workers on their way to work in Gdańsk. The same person, who 11 years later, introduced martial law in

Poland and ordered tanks onto the streets against his own people.

There is in this nation a reckoning of wrongs which have until today not been balanced. I do not doubt that the magnanimous General long ago forgave the mothers whose children were killed as a result of his orders and that he has forgiven Poland for the many wrongs which she suffered during his long rule. But Poland - Has she forgiven the General? - Has she already let everything pass into forgetfulness, assigned given it all to “history,” when there are still alive so many people who experienced first-hand the General's “good deeds”?

Who is this assailant from Wrocław and what terrible fate forced him to take a piece of rock from his fields and assault the so well-wishing General and, further, to shout at the General: “I do not forgive!”

Stanisław Helski, a peasant from the Zamość region (Eastern Poland) jeszczeżna, was a haughty, proud and hardworking man. One must be haughty and hard to go to the forests during the Second World War and join the partisans at age 15. One must be haughty and hard to escape the Germans with two others from a train of prisoners bound for the concentration camp of Majdanek. One must also be brave, haughty, and hard, to later buy from the post-war communist state in Poland a plot of land which has been lying fallow for 15 years, with buildings which are decaying and dilapidated, and in a matter of a few years change the property into a rich and prospering farm. Helski was an excellent farmer and soon by himself raised a herd of 250 bulls - at this mountain of the choicest beef weighing more than 60 tons that could cover the needs of a medium sized town for a month! (Remember: meat was rationed during Martial Law). The sixty quintals (1 quintal = 100 kg) of wheat for each hectare he harvested was two times the then national average! Helski was not only a persistent haughty and hardworking man who would not give bribes for anything and who would not grovel before the party secretaries and other high-ranking members of the nomenklatura. He was an excellent example and host to other farmers from all over Poland who came in order to see how he was doing it. Where did he get his strength and determination in order to do all this in an atmosphere of never-ending harassment which has been imprinted by the communist regime upon the back of each Polish farmer; the daily quarrels for a piece of string for the sheaf-binder, for each kilogram of fertilizer manure, for each gram of fodder, et c. ?

But Helski had had enough of harassment and disputes with corrupt authorities. When in Gdańsk the shipyard workers went on strike, he founded and organized the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union of Peasants of the Voivodeship of Wałbrzych. With other such peasants as the Bartoszcze Brothers and Stanisław Janisz he created “Peasant Solidarity” and became a member of the National Coordinating Committee of Peasant Trade Unions. When the General did not agree to register and recognize these peasant unions, he organized a nationwide hunger strike of peasants in February of 1981 in Świdnica's St. Joseph's Church. Up until the declaration of Martial Law, Helski unceasingly tried to organize the peasant's resistance and self-defence movement.

General Jaruzelski publicly “forgives”, but earlier and under the cover of Martial Law resolved to hurt and humble the proud peasant. In May of 1982, when Helski was preparing his fields to sow seeds, the General sent to his fields a battalion of 14 tractors (under protection of the Militia!) to plough up Helski's fields. Such things happened in the Sudetean where more land was lying fallow than land under cultivation in all of Norway! From these thousands of hectares of neglected