

FELIKS GROSS

The State, the Nation, and the Party in Poland

KULTURA I NARÓD: STUDIA I SZKICE. By *Józef Chałasiński*. Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1968. 617 pp. 65 zł.

NARÓD I PAŃSTWO: SOCJOLOGICZNE PROBLEMY KWESTII NARODOWEJ. By *Jerzy J. Wiatr*. Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1969. 440 pp. 50 zł.

PAPERS IN ECONOMICS AND SOCIOLOGY. By *Oskar Lange*. Translated and edited by *P. F. Knightsfield*. Preface to the Polish edition by *Oskar Lange*. Foreword by *M. Kalecki*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1970 [Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970]. xii, 600 pp. £ 6.00.

Professors Chałasiński's and Wiatr's books are concerned primarily with the problems of the state, nation (nationality), and class. Both writers attempt to present a Marxist analysis of the current nationality problems, and their discussion reflects the current ideological trends. Both books appeared during the last exodus of the Jews from Poland. Only a tiny Jewish minority (probably about ten thousand) still survives, in addition to other minorities—Germans, Ukrainians, Belorussians, and some Czechs. But all these minorities are insignificant in number (below 2 percent of the total population, or less than 400,000). Thus in the third quarter of our century, Poland emerges as a nationally, or ethnically, homogeneous state. Its rulers broke away from the historical tradition of the *Rzeczpospolita*, the Commonwealth, which took pride at one time in its pluralistic nature. The Jewish exodus, the violent anti-Zionist campaign, was accompanied by an increase of Polish nationalism which in its appeal and style recalled the traditional antagonistic qualities of the extreme Right. *Habent sua fata libelli*—the books have their own fate, but they also have their own time and cannot be considered out of context, in disregard of the historical situation in which they were written. In an authoritarian state, books on such topics are not accidental. Thus both books should be considered within this current situation. They may contribute to the interpretation of current trends and supply a theoretical basis for new policies.

In America and England in daily parlance the concepts of state and nation are frequently used as synonyms. Similarly, nationalism is often identified or confused with patriotism. In Poland—in fact all over Eastern Europe—those concepts are quite different. The state (*państwo*) is distinct from “nation” (*naród*) or nationality (the term “ethnicity” has come into general use in the United States). This distinction has been of major importance in Polish

political philosophy; moreover, it was a basic premise of major political movements. The nationalistic parties of the Right viewed racial and religious origin, the "racial" collective, as objective indicators of nationality on which full political rights depended. The democratic Center and parties of the Left stressed subjective identification with the Polish people as the principle of nationality (ethnicity), advancing at the same time the principle of equal rights for all Polish citizens. The ideologists of the nationalistic Right, contrary to historical traditions, regarded as Polish "nationals" only those born of Polish stock (although many among them had German names) and of Roman Catholic religion, viewing all the others, especially Jews, as aliens. The ideal Polish state was one of Poles of *sarmatic* origin and Roman Catholic faith. At the turn of the century the ideology of Polish nationalism was already firmly advanced in the writings of the spiritual leader of the "National Party"—Roman Dmowski.

The Democrats, the Polish Socialist Party, and the liberal wing of the Conservatives in southern Poland (Cracow) shared a tolerant, liberal view. By and large, the "subjective" identification of nationality and equal rights for all ethnic and religious groups formed an essential part of their political credo. All those who regarded themselves as Poles were accepted by the Democrats as members of the Polish nation (*naród*). Those who identified themselves as members of various ethnic groups, Jews, Ukrainians, Czechs, Germans, Polish Armenians (an ancient and highly respected minority called *Ormianie*)—argued the Democrats and the Left—should enjoy full rights, as citizens and members of the Polish Commonwealth, according to the ancient tradition of the historical period of tolerance.

A strong antagonism between those two camps marks twentieth-century Polish history. In popular discussions and presentations abroad the political image of the Poles was simplified; all were viewed as "nationalistic" and also anti-Semitic. In everyday reality, however, the political picture was quite different. The democratic Center and the Left as well as liberal conservatives were "patriotic" but not nationalistic, in Polish terminology. "Patriotic" here meant sentiments for one's country and people—loyalties and values rooted in the past. Nationalism was viewed as an ideology antagonistic to other nations, the "hereditary enemies." In fact, a host of enemies formed a major focus of the political ideology of nationalistic parties, and their destruction was the sacred goal.

During the relatively restrained dictatorship of Joseph Piłsudski this basic trend continued. He revised his youthful socialist views and advanced "the state idea." He stressed the principle of the "Commonwealth" of citizens of diverse ethnicity, against the exclusively "racial" and religious nation of the nationalistic Right. But his government failed to grant autonomy and self-government to various ethnic groups; it was unwilling to create a viable and

broad self-government in the Ukrainian territories. Still, Piłsudski was strongly, even emotionally, opposed to the “nationalism” of the Polish Right, and the National Party in turn opposed his rule vigorously. Since his younger, socialist days Piłsudski had opposed Dmowski, and their opposition had deep historical roots. After Piłsudski’s death the “colonels” step by step accepted the philosophy of the nationalistic Right. At the end, the Camp of National Unity (Ozon) of Piłsudski’s right-wing followers allied themselves with the extreme, fascist-like, and violently anti-Semitic ONR (the National Radical Camp), which was influenced by contemporary fascist and racist trends. Its leader was Bolesław Piasecki, who, after the war, stressed his Catholic ideology and was accepted as an influential ally of the Communist Party.

About 1968 the historical controversy came to an end with the emergence of Poland as a “national” state. Extreme nationalism has been associated with communism to form a kind of national-communism. The ONR program on this question was carried out by the Communist government. Few were more strongly opposed to the creed of exclusive Polish nationalism than the prime minister, Józef Cyrankiewicz, was ever since his student years. It must have been a personal surrender for him to witness the victory of a philosophy he had always regarded as backward and inhuman. But the program of the radical national camp won. The moderate wing of the National Party would not have dreamed of such a decisive “solution.”

Against this background the two volumes by Chałasiński and Wiatr must be evaluated. It is not easy to evaluate them, and this writer pondered a year before deciding to try. Professor Chałasiński is a leading Polish sociologist and historian of culture. Before the war he was not a Marxist. Professor Wiatr is a young and able sociologist, usually regarded as representative of the current and binding political philosophy, a *persona molto grata*. All scholarly publications in the social sciences and humanities are subject to careful censorship in Poland. The censorship is exercised by judicial organs, but the “line” is set by the party. The censor often decides who should not be quoted. Changes are suggested. Thus there may be more in these books, or less, than was intended by the authors. Both display an unusual erudition, profusely quoting a variety of authors and books—at times too profusely. They are surprisingly well acquainted with American sociological literature, and move easily within this material.

Both volumes attempt to reinterpret the concept of a “nation” (*naród*) in terms of Communist Marxist theory. They begin their discussions with the arduous effort to define the concept. Professor Wiatr surveys a long list of authors, beginning with Renan. He faces here the same difficulties his predecessors did, but this survey is still useful. Chałasiński defines a nation (*naród*) as a community of values. The core value of a nation, he argues, is

honor. To support his hypothesis he quotes a lecture of a Soviet officer, a Kazakh hero in a Soviet novel by A. Bek (*Szosa Wolokoska*, Polish translation, Warsaw, 1948). The valiant officer explains to the Kazakh shepherds that a rabbit dies from fear and a hero in defense of honor. This is a rather weak empirical basis for a general hypothesis, and it is doubtful whether such views are really shared by Kazakh or Russian peasants. The trouble is that they were never asked. A community of values and institutions is an essential concept in identification of a nation-culture (to use an anthropological term). In this sense Chałasiński suggests a sound sociology. The nation, he argues further, is a harbinger of higher human values. Society is built not solely on class, but the modern advanced society is rooted in both—class and nation (*naród*).

Chałasiński's *Culture and Nation* is a collection of his major essays; some were written for this volume. The chief aim, however, is to reconcile the Communist idea with the national one and to emphasize the significance of a nation in the formation of a future world society. Wiatr's argument shows the dialectical nature of state and nation, nation and class in a non-Communist society. But once socialism is achieved, this conflict happily disappears. The state then undertakes the economic organization of the life of the nation, continues Wiatr. This is, of course, a perfect solution. Eventually the national and class solidarity are integrated in what is called the socialist state. The historical controversy, the problem of nation versus individual, subjective nationality (self-identification) versus "objective" nationality (race, ethnicity, historical continuity), appears here and there, rather "between the lines" than in the direct text.

Wiatr quotes extensively from Dmowski, the chief ideologist of Polish right-wing nationalism. He is critical of Dmowski's views, but he admits that the nationalists "correctly" indicated that an absolute emphasis on the rights of the individual as opposed to broader collective interests is theoretically unconvincing, and in practice leads to harmful tendencies. Furthermore, Wiatr quotes Dmowski on the difficulties of assimilating the Jews, although it must be stressed here that in dealing with the Jewish question Wiatr is tactful and restrained. Chałasiński devotes an entire section to the Jewish problem, emphasizing the marginality of the Jewish intellectuals, whether in America (he quotes extensively from *Commentary*) or Poland. A certain obsession with this entire problem is quite evident; even the continuous repetition of the term Jew is striking. Here one could illuminate the problem of "dual ethnicity" by comparing the experience of such persons as Joseph Conrad—see, for example, his reminiscences (*A Personal Record*) and his letters written in Polish, French, and English—as well as first- and second-generation Polish-Americans.

Both writers suggest what “should be” under (what they call) socialism and not what “really is.” They write with such conviction that it is easy to confuse the wish with reality. One is reminded that the noted French historian Marc Bloch wrote about myth-making in medieval documents: “By a curious paradox, through the very fact of their respect for the past, people came to reconstruct it as they considered it ought to be.”¹ An historical or sociological “socialist realism” is not a new invention.

Wiatr suggests that the Soviet experiment in the ethnic field is a model for the solution of nationality problems. Mass deportation of nationalities (never mentioned by the authors) does not testify to such perfect solutions; the wartime removal of Muslims and others totaling about one million, as described by Geoffrey Wheeler, postwar deportations of many Lithuanians and inhabitants of other small nations,² and the Jewish exodus give evidence that neither the Soviet Union nor Poland is a heaven for small nations or oppressed minorities. Quite the contrary. Perhaps Wiatr could not write about the problem even if he wished, but it is the duty of the reviewer to point out the data that are available.

The ethnic and racial problem is a major issue of our times, and calls for careful and rigorous sociological study based on hard data and including analysis of patterns of conflict and cooperation, conditions conducive to a variety of interethnic relations, and the effects and rationale of public policies. Perhaps the Polish Jews of 1968—university professors, one-time high officials, some of them formerly Stalinists, others revisionists—had to leave because jobs were needed for the young, aggressive out-elite who were pressing the party apparatus? Perhaps international politics called for escalation of ethnic tensions in support of official policy toward a distant, Middle Eastern territory?

Both books, written by men of talent and erudition, are based on authorities or polemical imperatives rather than on analysis of empirical data. No scholar can pursue independent research within the rigid party lines, and it may be unfair to criticize those who have no other choice.

The third book, by Oskar Lange, belongs in a different category. It includes essays and papers written by this gifted economist and historian within his creative span of thirty years (1930–60). This bulky volume encompasses a variety of disciplines: Marxist and social theory, economic theory, economic-mathematical models, and applied economics. These varied contributions of an innovative economist deserve a technical review in appropriate journals. We

1. Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, vol. 1 (Chicago, 1970), p. 91.

2. Geoffrey Wheeler, *Racial Problems of Soviet Muslim Asia* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 29 ff. Robert Conquest, *The Nation Killers* (New York, 1970), pp. 189 ff., and appendix 1, p. 210.

shall here limit our review to his essay on monopoly economy and the state. His early work had already showed the general mode of his thinking and theorizing. Lange approached workers and society in an abstract way. His tragic physical handicap (which he took with serenity) may have had something to do with it. His ability to walk was limited, and so he was much of the time confined to his books. In "The Role of the State in Monopoly Capitalism" (1931) he gives an easy, logical Marxist explication of the advance of totalitarianism. In the age of imperialism, monopoly capitalism uses the state to defend its monopoly position. In consequence, the economic oligarchy takes over the state. The state becomes an exclusive instrument of capitalist monopolists. In its next step the monopoly oligarchy makes a general attack on political democracy, and so on.

Lange writes about highly advanced nations. But, then, how is it possible to explain why fascism and totalitarianism in various forms prevailed in countries such as Italy, Germany (the latter still may fit in Lange's category, but it had no colonies at that time), Rumania, Spain, Hungary, and a host of the less developed countries, while in the United States and England the democratic way of life and democratic institutions were not destroyed, nor were they captured by this capitalistic oligarchy he writes about? How can one explain "the general attack against political democracy" by the Soviet government in Eastern Europe? Neither the editor nor Lange attempted to deal with this crucial issue. The Marxist logic was paramount, even if the facts were different.

How much broader was a simple analysis by the great French historian, *Élie Halévy*, who—unfettered by a rigid doctrine—somewhat later, in a communication submitted to the French Philosophical Society (1936), wrote of the economic, intellectual, and political conditions of the "Age of Tyrannies," which he dated from August 1914, and saw that the continent of Europe was following the road of Caesarism and not the Swiss model of federalism. Lange was very young then, true. But at that very time his colleagues at the same university, and groups even younger than he, were focusing their attention on problems of the primacy of power. In Marxist theory the key to power over society, the primacy of social control, is given to economic power. Mussolini (as a matter of fact Lenin before him) and Hitler have shown, by their initial success, the primacy of political power. It is not economic power but political power and control of the means of violence which supply the keys and tactical-strategic conditions for the initial capture of total power, including economic power. The network of public institutions, the state apparatus, has power of its own; it is not just an annex to the economic structure, it is not solely superstructure. Perhaps fascism and nazism owe their victory, in part at least, to the fact that, chained to theories or frightened into wishful think-

ing, so many honest, wise, and dedicated people did not understand and did not wish to understand what was really happening. Halévy saw it early.

The departure from rigid Marxist theory began in Poland far earlier. But at this critical time, labor leaders who were in the “field” led the workers, faced the practical problems of the day (unlike Lange), and directed more and more of their attention to the problem of the distribution of power—one may mention here only Zygmunt Zulawski, the general secretary of the trade unions.