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ON THE 'INTER-OCTOBER REVOLUTION' (1956–1957): THE HISTORY OF A RADICAL SOCIAL CHANGE IN POLAND AS VIEWED BY JERZY KOCHANOWSKI*

Abstract: The breakthrough of 1956 in Poland has so far been analysed mainly from the perspective of politics. Jerzy Kochanowski has described selected social, economic and cultural aspects and consequences of the radical social change of 1956–57. The present article places Kochanowski's study against a background of the existing literature on the subject, with the reviewer presenting its main theses and formulating some polemical remarks. The most important among them points to a risk of distorting the picture of the 1956 crisis caused by the fact that the author underestimates the impact of the political context of social processes.

Key words: Poland, communism, society, thaw 1956, socio-political crisis, social revolution, modernization, transformation, social transformations.

The attention of the reader holding Jerzy Kochanowski's book is attracted by its cover. It features two contrasting photographs. The first was taken in 1956 by the American photojournalist John Vachon and is a black-and-white picture of a gloomy emptiness in the centre of Warsaw dominated by the Palace of Culture and Science. The other photograph, by the Polish photographer Edward Uchymiak, comes from the 1960s and depicts a crowded Warsaw street — Ulica Krucza seen from the corner of Aleje Jerozolimskie — sparkling with the yellow and red of various vehicles. The photographs are linked by the title *The Inter-October Revolution: Poland 1956–1957* and the message of the whole is abundantly clear. The contrast between the two photographs very vividly symbolizes the radical change which occurred in Poland with the end of Stalinism and before the consolidation of the 'stabilization' of the Gomułka era: the gloomy and empty streets of cities were filled with colour and movement.

* Jerzy Kochanowski, *Rewolucja międzypaździernikowa: Polska 1956–1957* [Inter-October Revolution: Poland 1956–1957], Cracow: Znak Horyzont, 2017, 478 pp.

It is worth appreciating this first impression, because rarely do covers express the author's main thesis so well and reflect the general idea of the book as it is in this case. Kochanowski claims, as we can read in the first sentences of the introduction, that 'the totalitarian nature of Stalinism influenced both the speed and scope of the changes affecting and involving all social, professional and ethnic groups in 1956–57, while the scope, intensity and variety of activities and (self-)mobilization of society can be compared probably only to the post-war period or the beginning of the post-1989 transformation!'. According to the author, in some areas 'the changes were so extensive and profound that we could even venture to say that in this short period were laid the foundations of modernity on which was based social life practically until the political transformation over three decades later' (pp. 15–16, 18–19).¹

While agreeing about the groundbreaking nature of 1956 in Poland's most recent history, historians nevertheless differed in their assessments of its long-term consequences. They stressed the formation of a version of the communist system more liberal than in other countries of the bloc or emphasized the stabilization of the dictatorship achieved thanks to an expansion of its base in society.² There are quite a few books dealing mainly with the political aspects of 1956 in Poland. Surprisingly, so far there has been no book trying to present the social, economic, cultural as well as everyday dimension of this historic moment and its long-term consequences. It seems to be one of the biggest omissions of contemporary Polish historiography and confirms — I think — the thesis that this particular political breakthrough has not generated an interest that would be commensurate with its political and, in particular, social significance. In any case this interest is incomparably smaller than it is in the case of 1980–81 and the phenomenon of the 'Solidarity' trade union. This must be because the revolutionary social movement of the 1980s eventually delegitimized the system, while the breakthrough of 1956, despite its clear anti-regime strand with some national overtones, is more often seen as a moment in which the regime, personified by the national communist Władysław Gomułka, won some legitimization — limited but nevertheless authentic. This contradicts the dominant narrative stressing the continuity of rebellions and the mass scale of society's resistance until 1989.

¹ 'totalitarny charakter stalinizmu wpłynął zarówno na szybkość, jak rozległość przemian dotykających i angażujących w latach 1956–1957 wszystkie grupy społeczne, zawodowe i etniczne, a zakres, intensywność i różnorodność przejawów aktywności i (samo)mobilizacji społeczeństwa są porównywalne chyba tylko z okresem bezpośrednio powojennym lub początkiem transformacji po roku 1989!'; 'zmiany były tak rozległe i głębokie, że można wręcz zaryzykować tezę, że w tym krótkim czasie wylano fundament nowoczesności, na którym opierało się życie społeczne, praktycznie do transformacji ustrojowej ponad trzy dekady później'.

² Krystyna Kersten, 'Rok 1956 — przełom? Kontynuacja? Punkt zwrotny?', *Polska 1944/45–1989: Studia i materiały*, 3, 1997, pp. 7–18; Andrzej Friszke, 'Jakim państwem była Polska po 1956 r.?: Spór historyków', *Więź*, 1996, 2, pp. 131–46; Paweł Machciewicz, 'Zmiana czy kontynuacja?: Polska przed i po Październiku '56' in *PRL: Trwanie i zmiana*, ed. Dariusz Stola and Marcin Zaremba, Warsaw, 2003, pp. 119–58.

The author deserves praise for his successful attempt to fill this gap. As is often the case with pioneering works, it does not exhaust the topic, but impressively reveals a new (or, to be more precise, neglected) research field. The book should be read by people interested in the social history of People's Poland; it will probably be an important point of reference for scholars studying many questions of everyday life in the period.

Personally, I particularly value those historical books whose authors are able to write, observing scholarly standards, in a language so accessible that they appeal to a wide audience. This is what Jerzy Kochanowski's book is like; from the very beginning it was written with the idea that 'ordinary' readers interested in Poland's recent history should be able to read it without getting weary. This is evidenced by its very idea, by its structure, striking title and cover. Ultimately, this is also thanks to the language used by the author: many could envy him the lightness of touch of his writing style. It is an unquestionable asset of the book and an essential — I believe — starting point for its analysis.

The author finds good guides to the social panorama of 1956–57 in caricaturists, and two drawings published in the *Szpilki* (Needles) weekly at the time even become a starting point for his narrative. The first caricature, by Karol Ferster, entitled 'Straszny sen personalnej' (The nightmare of the head of personnel), depicts a procession of people leaving a safe. It is one of those safes in which personnel departments kept secret files and personal information sheets — source of information for the Security Department, a source that influenced people's lives and careers. And so the first individual leaving the safe is a 'hipster', followed by a Stakhanovite, a skimpily dressed woman, a bourgeois woman with a rosary, a Home Army soldier, a secret agent and a man openly admitting to having a family in the USA. The other drawing, 'Moda 1957' (Fashion 1957) by Juliusz Puchalski, featuring a bizarrely dressed man with a hat with a five-pointed star and Hussar wings on his back, holding Marx's *Capital* in one hand and the Bible in another, is treated by the author as a control variable of sorts — because it makes it possible to confirm, from a perspective of several months after the October breakthrough, the durability (or lack thereof) of the changes and phenomena in the social panorama of the country. The author treats both caricatures as a tool organizing the book: interpreting the selection and order of characters leaving the safe, the author presents the subject matter of successive chapters.

Leaving aside the question of structure for a moment, we should appreciate the author's use of caricatures also as the most important iconographic material in the book. Drawings thematically linked to the text and featuring the author's comments-captions facilitate reading, adding a touch of lightness to it. Readers' will certainly be attracted also by several photographs by Tadeusz Rolke and one by the Austrian photographer Erich Lessing. Thanks to the perspective adopted by the author we are not offended by the inclusion in one book of such — it would seem — extremely different materials as the data on crime or alcohol consumption in 1955–58, and rather frivolous poems (like those by Tadeusz Polanowski).

Caricatures as a tool organizing the structure of the book is an unusual but effective solution. For it turns out that during the thaw period it was satirists, used to, as they were, to viewing reality with great insight, to noticing its ills and commenting on them in the form of drawings, who managed to capture much of the atmosphere of the day and everyday experiences of people. Yet, as we know, caricatures do not convey the whole social reality and — the author points out — they should not be treated literally. This, on the one hand, has enabled Kochanowski to present his own additions and interpretations and on the other has made it possible to limit the catalogue of phenomena discussed in the book to the most interesting ones. They are presented in thirteen chapters or essays, dealing with specific topics in chronological order and making up a kaleidoscope of sorts. They are devoted to hooliganism, alcoholism, prostitution, emancipation and sexuality of women, situation of workers in factories, unemployment, youth, religion, emergence of society from isolation — a process manifested in trips to the West, openness to Western culture and dissemination of modern consumption patterns — and finally society's changing attitude towards money and wealth, that is growth of entrepreneurship and materialism. The author admits that he presents only a fragment of Polish reality of 1956–57 and leaves out areas, phenomena or social groups which were undergoing just as revolutionary transformations and deserve separate monographs: rural areas, artists, literature, sport, broadly defined technology, education, housing, national minorities and Western Territories. Such a perspective, although broad, fails to take into account a whole catalogue of topics of varying importance. On the one hand this is understandable: the author could and, as he notes — given the wealth of topics — had to make a selection. On the other hand the omission of, above all, rural themes seems to be problematic because of the resulting imbalance. Among the phenomena presented by the author most concern large cities, yet he is writing about a society that until had recently been largely peasant, a society whose substantial part had migrated from villages just a few years earlier and towards the end of the Six-Year Plan implementation found itself in a social vacuum (which was one of the reasons behind the escalation of the problems described by the author).

It is no accident that the book opens with chapters on hooliganism, drunkenness and prostitution, considered by the author to be the most dangerous ills troubling Polish society at the time. They were spreading as a result of a crisis of the totalitarian state and weakening of control combined with a loosening of social norms. The rise in crime — as the author argues — was painfully felt, which was brilliantly reflected in Leopold Tyrmand's novel *Zły* (1955; Eng. edition *The Man With the White Eyes*, 1959). There were so many victims of thefts, robberies and assaults in those years that these crimes became an experience of a large portion of society. The author sees the reasons for this state of affairs mainly in the growing consumption of alcohol, weakening supervision of society and idleness of the police. He then goes on to describe how the government

tried to stop this plague: by toughening its criminal policy as well as reorganizing and equipping the hitherto neglected police.

While not denying the importance of the sources of hooliganism indicated above, it is hard not to notice that this is only part of the truth and that the author has focused his attention on the social perspective so much that he has left out the political aspect of the sharp rise in crime in the period (which will be discussed in more detail below). As this is the most emphatic example of the perspective adopted by the author, I will venture a general comment: the historian too often underestimates the importance of politics at a time when for an overwhelming majority of society it was very much part of everyday life, at a time when politics was happening not only in offices but also in the streets, meetings and rallies in factories, squares and sports stadiums.

The thaw revealed that the thesis decreed in the Stalinist period that the socialist state would get rid of pathologies like prostitution was ideologically motivated wishful thinking, as we can read in Chapter 2, “Łatwiej je wyzwolić, niż potem opanować”, czyli piękno i piekło kobiet’ (‘It is easier to liberate them than to control them later’ or the beauty and hell of women). Alarming statistics showing an increase in the number of prostitutes and spread of venereal diseases forced the authorities to act: they threw sent to the front line the so-called vice squads set up within the police force. However, the effectiveness of the police and other institutions that should have been interested in the problem was very low. The ideas put forward in the discussion going on in the media ranged from one extreme to another: from abolition through rationing to penalization. Decision makers considered a wide range of measures: providing support for single women at risk of prostitution, setting up crisis centres for prostitutes, combating pimping and carrying out extensive preventive actions. However, the subject quickly died without any measurable results, and the main burden of actions against prostitution until 1989 rested on the police, which the author accurately sums up when he notes that the authorities were proponents of not so much radical cures as homeopathy.

The fact that in the Stalinist era insistence on vocational activity of women went hand in hand with prudishness had equivocal and paradoxical consequences during the October breakthrough. Breaking the numerous taboos in the sphere of femininity, carnality and sexuality was accompanied by a return to traditional social roles whereby men worked and supported their families, and women cared for the families and raised children at the expense of their professional careers — many of them lost their jobs during that period. The subject is mentioned in the third chapter, devoted to the ongoing moral revolution and the situation of women (p. 83); we will learn more in the chapter devoted to unemployment, where we will read, for example, that out of the 180,000 unemployed at the end of November 1956 as many as 144,000 were women (pp. 120, 122).

As the author argues, Western literature and films set trends in fashion, tastes and attitudes. Nudity, symbolized by the sex icon of the day, Brigitte

Bardot, ceased to be a taboo; this could be seen the press as well as in the popularity of strip clubs and numerous beauty contests. The author devotes a lot of attention to a campaign promoting family planning, pointing out that its launch was prompted by a low sexual awareness of society inclined to treat the law adopted in April 1956 and allowing abortion as the easiest contraceptive. And although the campaign did not change this, considering that at its peak in the early 1960s the number of abortions carried out legally and illegally each year was estimated at several hundred thousand, the author is inclined to treat this campaign as one of the most important and lasting achievements of October — a position that seems questionable.

Chapter 4, 'Fabryczne rewolucje 1956–1957' (Factory revolutions 1956–57), is devoted to the catastrophic situation of workers on the eve of 1956. It was precisely the working class that became the main driving force behind the changes after the rebellion in Poznań in June 1956. The author presents factories as a space of intense economic, social, political, class, ideological, cultural conflicts, conflicts of values and goals (p. 97), where old scores were settled, most often by means of a wheelbarrow in which people labelled, rightly or wrongly, 'Stalinists' were carried away, and where the management applied various adaptation strategies — with varying results. The revocation of the Stalinist Work Discipline Act led to a relaxation of work discipline, rapid rise in absenteeism and the government turning a blind eye in fact to a return of the strategy, used already during the occupation, of earning extra money outside one's official work place or even of 'privatizing' state property. The chapter ends with a brief — in view of the existing literature on the subject — history of workers' councils, which were seen as a panacea for the dire economic situation of factories. For some time the workers were put in charge of them (or, rather, were given a semblance of power over them). Yet the councils could not be that kind of panacea for many reasons.

If in the political sphere the years 1956–57 were a period of hope (and then disappointment), in the social sphere they were a time of a fear of unemployment, usually affecting women and being a result of employment — bloated to absurd proportions in the Stalinist period — being reduced to (somewhat) more realistic levels. Unemployment in 1956–57, which the author estimates at around 180,000 people, including nearly 144,000 women (p. 120), is discussed in the next part of the book. This fear of unemployment was a source of conflicts, among which the author mentions a generational conflict involving unqualified personnel who owed their positions to social advancement, were now deprived of political support and were afraid of being replaced by younger graduates of universities and colleges. Kochanowski argues that one of major causes of unemployment was a vocational education system not adapted to the actual needs, and crafts, which had been destroyed in the Stalinist period. Kochanowski devotes most of his attention in the chapter — probably too much — to 'special needs unemployed', that is former military personnel, functionaries of the security services and civil servants. The author's remarks made in this context and concerning an analogy of sorts between the difficult experience of daily living of former Home Army sol-

diers (in the Stalinist period) and social ostracism surrounding former functionaries of the Security Department, the party or the Union of Polish Youth (in 1956–57) should be regarded as decidedly unjustified. Unjustified if only because of the fact that unlike former Home Army members, those who were fired from the Security Department and/or the party received, 'as a consolation prize', gratuities, access to vocational training and new jobs, usually not as ordinary workers (that because of the loss of their emoluments and influence they felt aggrieved and embittered is a different matter). The last — but the most interesting — component of the author's reflection on unemployment is his analysis of the crisis and decline of small towns. As the author convincingly argues, their decline, which began already in the second half of the nineteenth century as a result of modernization, accelerated rapidly during the war (wartime deportations, Holocaust of the Jews) and after the war, as a result of the destruction of private enterprise, abolition of municipal government and abandoning of the traditional role of small towns as local administrative, social and cultural centres. Worthy of note is the author's view that the crisis was reflected in a changed — in comparison with the inter-war period — geography of unemployment, which was especially high in small towns. No actions of the government, including setting up of the so-called intervention fund for the economic activation of small towns, could change that.

It was only in that period that the young became youth in the modern sense of the word — this is a thesis opening the chapter devoted to youth. We can read in it about a rebellion of the young, who became consciously and passionately involved in actions aimed at changing the political reality, and flourishing of youth culture in 1956–57. We can also read there about the disappointed brought by this renewed reality, discouraging the young from becoming involved in politics, prompting them to focus on themselves, to look for safe niches and to move towards consumerism. The author is right when he writes that 'young people indeed were the driving force and high-octane fuel for the revolution of 1956; they gave it momentum, colour, sometimes going into extremes, sometimes protecting it from them' and stresses the formative nature of October 1956 for the generation who — perhaps as the only one — saw their actions as a revolution and defined them as such from the very beginning (p. 156). Judging from the names of authors of the cited accounts, it would be difficult not to notice, however, that Kochanowski's perspective is limited to a rather uniform milieu of left-wing youth in Warsaw and Cracow, close to the *Po Prostu* weekly, *Sztandar Młodych* daily, Studencki Komitet Rewolucyjny (Revolutionary Student Committee) and Studencki Teatr Satyryków (Student Satirical Theatre), like Karol Modzelewski, Jacek Kuroń, Krzysztof Pomian, Stefan Bratkowski, but not young people from other circles, for example those publishing socio-cultural periodicals outside Warsaw, in much more difficult conditions. Nor does Kochanowski really have in mind the experiences of young workers from Poznań, Warsaw, Wrocław and other industrial centres, who made their own contribution to October (not

even the most famous among them, Lechosław Goździk, is mentioned). Yet despite such a narrowing of his perspective Kochanowski does provide an interesting view on the Polish revolution presented as part of a global trend, evident on both sides of the Iron Curtain, of young people rebelling and rejecting old values, which, in their opinion, did not fit in with the changing economic, social and cultural landscape (p. 176).

The starting point for the chapter devoted to the Catholic Church and religion, “‘Trwa ofensywa kleru’, czyli (chwilowe) odwrócenie ról’ (‘The offensive of the clergy continues’ or a (temporary) reversal of roles), is an observation that the anti-Church offensive of the government in the Stalinist period proved counterproductive and in 1956 ultimately failed in its confrontation with society’s attachment to religion: demands for a return of religion to schools, release of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński from internment as well as mass-scale — and ostentatious — religious practices also involving members of the communist party. The author argues that the escalation of national and religious emotions in schools assumed the form of acts of intolerance and even aggression towards non-believing pupils or those from Jewish families. The crisis of the state was conducive to the spread of the Church’s influence, especially in the provinces but also in organizations and associations, either newly founded or regaining their autonomy. It should be noted here that some phrases used by the author reveal that his attitude in this respect is by no means neutral. We read about advocates of a secular worldview who were appalled to see a ‘rising wave of clericalism’ (p. 203) and in the chapter devoted to the moral revolution of the day — about a symbiosis of the party and the Church (p. 83; the author means here a similarity of the moral Puritanism of the communist party and the Catholic Church).

The last chapters are devoted to the overcoming of closed borders and opening — also cultural opening — of Poland to the West, attempts to catch up with modernity identified with Western consumption patterns as well as society’s consumer aspirations and change of its attitude to money and wealth.

The conclusion is an attempt to answer the question about the long-term consequences of the October thaw, which, as the author admits, is not easy. ‘Although the state wobbled,’ he says, ‘its foundations remained intact and the thaw even strengthened the system, if only thanks to more evident than ever before national, sometimes even nationalistic references. Despite the fact that the horse whip was replaced with a rod and the girth was loosened somewhat, the economy still had absurd foundations, the party *nomenklatura* was still in force, the “coalition partners”, ZSL [Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe — United People’s Party] and SD [Stronnictwo Demokratyczne — Democratic Alliance], had, in fact, not much say, and Katyn was nowhere to be found in school textbooks’;³ he stresses, however,

³ ‘Choć państwowy gmach się zachwiał, to fundamenty pozostały niewzruszone, a odwilż wręcz umocniła system, chociażby dzięki wyraźniejszym niż wcześniej odwołaniom narodowym, miejscami wręcz nacjonalistycznym. Pomimo że kańczug zamieniono na różgę, a popręg nieco poluzowano, to gospodarka była wciąż na absurdalnych

that in comparison with Stalinism the post-October reality, despite later disappointments, was a time of 'almost limitless' freedom. He also notes that despite the government's eventual rejection of the October concessions, 'authoritarian socialism deprived of its universal oppressive odium became part of everyday reality, normal, familiar and accepted (for a while) by a significant part of the population' (p. 360).⁴ In medical terms the author sees the revolutionary transformations as a 'vaccine' of modernity and individualism, which thanks to the links to the Western culture secured Polish people for years. In this context the author asks about what would have happened with the opposition generation of the 1960s and 1970s taking part in post-1989 political transformation, if it had not been for the institutions of modern society strengthened/rebuilt on the wave of the October thaw.⁵ Here he means in particular the Towarzystwo Świadomego Macierzyństwa (Society of Conscious Motherhood) and Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne (the Polish Sociological Society), tourist and sports clubs, first environmental initiatives, protection of historic monuments, Jean Paul Sartre's and Kazimierz Brandys' books as well as periodicals like *Polityka* and *Mówią Wieki* (p. 361).

This is the author's answer to the question — not asked directly — about the uniqueness of Poland's political and social experiences in comparison with other countries of the Eastern Bloc after 1956. Somewhat surprisingly, this is not the thought closing the book. What the author sees as the broadest and most durable, formative even, legacy of October 1956 is the press, numerous periodicals revived or created in 1956/57, including those responding to society's new needs, some of which ceased to be published soon after or during the martial law period. Most did not survive the political transformation, but some exist to this day. The author refers to all of them as children of the 'inter-October revolution', listing among them such periodicals as *Katecheta* and *Polityka*. The highlighting of this last title, otherwise a distinguished periodical, is quite surprising. Thus *Polityka*, established by the Polish United Workers' Party leadership as a tribune for presenting the official line of the party and avant-garde of a counter-attack aimed at regaining full control over the press — avant-garde that ruthlessly attacked the editors of *Po Prostu*, who could not defend themselves — deserves, in Kochanowski's view, to be

podstawach, obowiązywała partyjna nomenklatura, "koalicyjne" ZSL i SD miały w rzeczywistości niewiele do powiedzenia, a Katyń nie trafił do szkolnych podręczników'.

⁴ 'autorytarny socjalizm pozbawiony powszechnego opresyjnego odium stał się czymś codziennym, normalnym, oswojonym i przez niemalą część obywateli (do czasu) akceptowanym'.

⁵ Unfortunately, the author had not decided to reflect on the fate of the generation for whom October 1956 was a formative experience, whose active representatives in the years to come would follow completely different paths, which testifies to the formative significance of 1956, about which future opposition members from the 1960s and 1970s heard from accounts by their older colleagues. Let us just name people like Jarosław Abramow-Newerly, Stefan Bratkowski, Andrzej Drawicz, Dariusz Fikus, Andrzej Garlicki, Michał Głowiński, Lechosław Goździk, Jerzy Grotowski, Jacek Kuroń, Józef Lenart, Karol Modzelewski, Walery Namiotkiewicz, Jan Olszewski, Krzysztof Pomian, Bernard (Bolesław) Tejkowski, Marian Turski, Ryszard Turski and Jerzy Urban.

called a 'child' of October 1956 at least just as much as a weekly closed down in October 1957.⁶ Formally, if we take into account the date of the founding of the periodical, Kochanowski is right. It should be said, however, that people active in October continued to distrust the periodical even several decades later. 'Let us not correct the past. For over thirty years I have found *Polityka* alien, sometimes even hostile', said Krzysztof Pomian, beginning his speech on the fortieth anniversary of the periodical, but not denying its merits.⁷ If Kochanowski's assessment is a correction of the past, then it must have been influenced by the subsequent fate of *Polityka* — a periodical that began to evolve when Mieczysław Rakowski became its editor-in-chief in May 1958, standing out by virtue of the reliability of its journalists' work, rejection of extremes, freshness of its views. With time it became the voice of the more enlightened part of the party apparatus and one of the opinion leading journals among intellectuals. Yet, if we were to look for periodicals directly drawing on the legacy of October, it seems that we should point to journals of the Catholic laity, including *Więź*.⁸

As we read the book we have the impression of a certain side effect, as it were. With popular readers in mind the author has narrowed and sharpened his perspective, preferring the intensity of his main theses and arguments over scholarly precision. This has produced some oversimplifications, which would require a few additional sentences of explanation. In several instances the author seems to have got carried away by his own narrative and metaphors. For example, in the fragment about social firefighting and pulling chestnuts out of the fire at the same time (p. 178). Nor am I entirely sure whether Newton's third law of motion (the law of action-reaction) can also be applied to the life of society, as the author argues, when, referring to the law, he says that the deep engagement of some young people led to just as deep disappointment (p. 156).

All in all it is not surprising that as a reader I feel slightly unsatisfied and in a scholarly review point to questions which the author could have presented in a more nuanced manner or analysed in greater detail in a way that would have preserved the character of the book. I do not mean here a situation in which a reviewer formulates suggestions that would require a different book to be written. In this particular case I should simply take note of Kochanowski's decision as a writer to write an essay-like book that meets scholarly standards but is not a comprehensive scholarly study. Nevertheless, what I believe to be a measure of the real success of *Rewolucja październikowa* is

⁶ Mieczysław F. Rakowski and Michał Radgowski, 'Fałszywy kierunek natarcia', *Polityka*, 1957, 22; cf. Michał Przeperski, 'Polityka Stefana Żółkiewskiego, czyli narodziny pewnego modelu', in *Yesterday: Studia z historii najnowszej: Księga dedykowana prof. Jerzemu Eislerowi w 65. Rocznice urodzin*, ed. Jan Olszsek et al., Warsaw, 2017, pp. 364–73.

⁷ 'Nie poprawiamy przeszłości. Przez ponad trzydzieści lat odbierałem *Politykę* jako pismo obce mi, niekiedy wręcz wrogie', Krzysztof Pomian, 'Na czterdziestolecie *Polityki*', in idem, *Wśród mistrzów i przyjaciół*, Gdańsk, 2018, pp. 522–24.

⁸ Magdalena Czocho, 'Więź i polski Październik', *Polska 1944/45–1989: Studia i Materiały*, 11, 2013, pp. 31–44.

the fact that many people who will reach for it in a bookshop will find it an interesting work revealing a fragment of the social reality of People's Poland at the moment of probably its most important breakthrough.

Books by social historians usually present the problems of everyday life and its transformations over a long duration, and in the case of People's Poland — in selected periods or over several decades (1944–89). Among relatively recent publications we will find books exploring the situation of female workers,⁹ history of a city and its people,¹⁰ life of youth and drunkenness,¹¹ housing problems,¹² health and disease in rural areas.¹³ Recently an innovative study has been published, concerning one episode, anti-collectivization revolt in a village — microhistory with elements of the history of Europe, Poland and Kielce region, political, social and economic history.¹⁴ By comparison, Kochanowski's book presents the social phenomena selected by the author over a period of just a dozen (or several dozen) months of particularly dynamic changes. The scale and great speed of the changes are the most important features of the phenomenon; the other features are far more difficult to capture and describe. The author is aware of this, noting that from a distance it is difficult to reconstruct the real, social not political dynamics of the changes, to answer a number of crucial questions.

After all, the first debatable point is when the revolution described by Kochanowski began and ended, and whether — like the subtitle of the book would have it — it really ran its course in 1956–57. I am inclined to agree that this was when its main part took place, but the changes had begun earlier, became very dynamic in 1956 and eventually came to an end in 1958. This is more about sequences of events, and neither date — opening or closing the period — should be treated as absolute, as is evidenced by one of the areas described in the book — the situation in the press. The precursor of journals of the thaw era, the *Przedpole* biweekly, a socio-cultural supplement of the *Sztandar Młodych* daily, began to be published at the turn of 1955 (its publication did not last long). On the other hand, the example of the socio-cultural weekly *Uwaga* is a good illustration of the final period of the revolution: from the late 1957 and early 1958 light and ironic material began to disappear from its pages, replaced by heavy newspeak and propaganda, its profile became distinctly political and content far less varied — this ended in the closure of this thaw periodical after the summer holidays

⁹ Natalia Jarska, *Kobiety z marmuru: Robotnice w Polsce w latach 1945–1960*, Warsaw, 2015.

¹⁰ Piotr Perkowski, *Gdańsk: Miasto od nowa*, Warsaw, 2013.

¹¹ Krzysztof Kosiński, *Oficjalne i prywatne życie młodzieży w czasach PRL*, Warsaw, 2006; idem, *Historia pijaństwa w czasach PRL: Polityka, obyczaje, szara strefa, patologie*, Warsaw, 2008.

¹² Dariusz Jarosz, *Mieszkanie się należy...: Studium z peerelowskich praktyk społecznych*, Warsaw, 2010.

¹³ Ewelina Szpak, 'Chory człowiek jest wtedy jak coś go boli': *Społeczno-kulturowa historia zdrowia i choroby na wsi polskiej po 1945 roku*, Warsaw, 2016.

¹⁴ Dariusz Jarosz and Grzegorz Miernik, 'Zhańbiona' wieś Okół: *Opowieść o buncie*, Kielce, 2017.

of 1958. There are evident examples in other areas as well. Already in 1955 thaw-related settling of scores with socialist realism in scientific and artistic circles was gaining momentum. When it comes to Poland's emerging from isolation and to foreign trips — initially to the USSR, then to other countries of the socialist bloc and finally to the West — worthy of note is the fact that their number increased between 1954 and 1955 from 1,733 to 14,500, that is over eight times. The number of trips to the West went up by 1,440 per cent in that period, although the absolute number was only 801. In the first half of 1956, however, there were no fewer than 2,000 private trips to the West, with the number rising sharply to over 9,000. The total number was over 11,000, thus fourteen times more than in the previous year.¹⁵ When it comes to the channelling of political and social activity after October, the significance of the parliamentary elections of January 1957 is rightly emphasized, but there is no mention of the election to the national councils of February 1958. At that time many independent groups tried — unsuccessfully, as it turned out — to gain a foothold at least on the local level. From today's perspective the campaign before the elections to the national councils appears as one of the last surges of the waning social activity.

These dividing lines are not as spectacular as those symbolic ones adopted by the author and treated just as symbolically by him — after all he does not avoid showing earlier determinants or the consequences of the processes he describes. The author believes that the starting point of the 'revolution', at least in the symbolic sphere, is not really questionable. 'Although transformations in culture, science and consumption had begun before the October turn, the "revolution", often even referred to as the "Polish October Revolution", is believed to have begun from that particular point' (p. 19), writes the author. The end date — autumn 1957 — too is treated symbolically by Kochanowski, who incidentally notes that the closure of *Po Prostu* and the street clashes in Warsaw were symbolic but were part of a bigger jigsaw puzzle: a signal of the stabilization of the regime and its readiness to recover the lost ground on many levels (pp. 19–20). Even taking into account the symbolic nature of both dates, I have the impression that the author has deliberately left the matter blurred in order to be able to justify the title and the main thesis of the book: that the revolution he describes occurred between October 1956 and October 1957. However, in his book we find a lot of evidence to suggest that in October 1956 the revolution was already in progress and was just gaining momentum, which would suggest that his thesis is as striking as it is somewhat spin-doctored. That is why I have some doubts as to whether the term 'inter-October revolution' will be adopted by other scholars to describe the period of rapid social changes of the breakthrough of 1956.

Another element worthy of note is a question going beyond the temporal framework marked by the more or less precisely selected points in time. I mean here the long-term changes in government administration launched after the Oc-

¹⁵ Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949–1989*, Warsaw, 2010, pp. 88, 95.

tober breakthrough, about new solutions: draft laws, council of ministers' ordinances and ministerial directives concerning various areas, solutions 'frozen' in the Stalinist period, 'defrosted' during the de-Stalinization and finalized in the second half of the 1950s. The clearly growing — from 1956 onwards — size of the *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) of the Polish People's Republic and *Monitor Polski* (Official Gazette of Poland), which can be observed on library shelves, gives us only a very general idea of the scale of the legislative and bureaucratic changes. We will probably have to wait a long time for a presentation of the process, which does not lend itself easily to analysis and which requires extensive research.

There are few socio-political phenomena that would generate greater interest among historians, sociologists, philosophers, political scientists and radical politicians looking for inspiration in the past than revolutions. There are several schools of thought and a vast body of literature.¹⁶ I will probably not be mistaken in saying that Jerzy Kochanowski is the first to use the term 'revolution' so explicitly — in the title of the book — with reference to 1956; the term has been used for a long time with reference to the 'revolutionary' social movement 'Solidarity' of 1980–81.¹⁷ When a social historian uses the term revolution to describe a rapid and radical social change,¹⁸ we would expect an attempt to define it and place it within a typology of revolutions. However, in this case we will be very disappointed. Kochanowski limits himself to saying that it is difficult to make this revolution 'fit its classic definitions, but in the end what mattered in late 1956 or early 1957 were not so much scientific theories but feelings. The "revolution" was therefore used in every possible political, cultural or social context, including the "scouting revolution". The general feeling at the time became an inspiration for the title of the book' (p. 19).¹⁹ The footnote below includes several publications on the development of the theory of revolution in social sciences. Reducing the subject to public feeling must be called a safe solution but also simply evasion — the author leaves the reader unprepared to deal with scholarly literature.

Professional historians will wonder whether the revolution in the title of the book is just a rhetorical device or whether Kochanowski sees some similarities

¹⁶ The title of this article draws on several classic studies entitled *On the Revolution*. Polish editions: Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, London, 1790; Henryk Glass, *Uwagi o rewolucji komunistycznej*, Warsaw, 1931; Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York, 1963.

¹⁷ Tomasz Kozłowski, *Anatomia rewolucji: Narodziny ruchu społecznego 'Solidarność' w 1980 roku*, Warsaw, 2017, pp. 21–24.

¹⁸ *O rewolucji: Obrazy radykalnej zmiany społecznej*, ed. Krzysztof Brzechczyn and Marek Nowak, Poznań, 2007.

¹⁹ 'dopasować do jej klasycznych definicji, ale w końcu 1956, czy w pierwszych miesiącach 1957 r. istotne były nie tyle naukowe teorie, ile odczucia. "Rewolucji" używano więc w każdym możliwym kontekście politycznym, kulturalnym czy społecznym, "rewolucji harcerskiej" nie wyłączając. Ówczesne odczucia społeczne stały się inspiracją dla tytułu książki'.

between 1955–57 in Poland and revolutionary movements in other countries as well as other periods, and whether he believes these similarities to be misleading or not. The question was asked for the first time by Marcin Kula, who noted that in 1956 we were dealing in Poland with a protest against foreign domination and at the same time with actions aimed at changing the system, which reminded him of many revolutionary movements in a region once called the Third World.²⁰ Was 1956 a year of a revolution in Poland? Witnesses to and participants in the events were — as has already been said — convinced of that. Significantly, the situation met some of the criteria of some theories of revolution. This is not the place to write about them; it is enough to note that Piotr Sztompka, who has tried to reconcile many scholarly positions, has concluded that revolutions encompass all spheres of life: economy, politics, culture, everyday life and so on; that they bring ‘radical, fundamental changes’ to each of these areas; that the changes are ‘exceptionally rapid, take place over a short period; are associated with an eruption of activity, mobilization of substantial segments of society and mass social movements’, that changes are particularly evident and clearly felt: experiencing a revolution is linked to ‘exceptional emotional states — enthusiasm, euphoria, optimism, hope, sense of power and boundless aspirations — it makes its mark especially strongly on the collective memory’.²¹ When referring his reflection to 1956, we should note that the changes occurring over these dozen or so months were deep, encompassed all areas of social life, were associated with an eruption of social activism, mobilization of large segments of society as well as mass social movements. However, in such important areas as politics and economics the changes were not as fundamental and irreversible as some might have thought in the autumn of 1956.

It is understandable why the author wanted to avoid presenting classic theories and trying to relate them to October 1956. There is no room in his book, addressed to a wide audience as it is, for a description of the evolution of definitions and theoretical reflections. Aware of the difficulties caused by the fact that like all historical episodes revolutions naturally differ widely, I did, nevertheless, hope that the author would signal how he broadly understood the revolution described by him. For example, in his inspiring book *Narodowe i rewolucyjne* Kula understands a revolution as a significant change of the socio-political system imposed on the existing establishment by a grassroots movement.²² Perhaps an honest discussion about theoretical approaches is not possible yet. Despite the seeming abundance, there are so many gaps that it is difficult to speak of an in-depth knowledge of these events. Krystyna Kersten adopted such a premise when embarking on the work on her fundamental study *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland 1943–1948*, that before we begin to create theoretical constructs and arrange events of

²⁰ Marcin Kula, ‘Ku jakiej syntezie polskiego Października’, *Polska 1944/45–1989: Studia i Materiały*, 3, 1997, pp. 229–55 (p. 230).

²¹ Piotr Sztompka, *Socjologia: Analiza społeczeństwa*, Cracow, 2002, p. 539.

²² Marcin Kula, *Narodowe i rewolucyjne*, London and Warsaw, 1991, pp. 21–23.

the end of the war and beginning of peace in series, we should first of all disseminate the raw material: reliable information about these events.²³

If Jerzy Kochanowski sees the breakthrough of 1956 in terms of a revolution, it is mainly a social, economic and cultural revolution — whether he sees it also as a political revolution is hard to say. He is clearly, ostentatiously even, not interested in politics, as he makes clear already in the opening sentence of the book: 'It is not one of the numerous "classic" books on the political aspects of 1956' (p. 15). We may have the impression that when it comes to politics, in his view everything has already been described and time has come for social history. And yet describing social problems in 1956 without a reference to the political context, as Kochanowski does it, seems rather risky. It is worth illustrating this with an example.

The opening chapter of the book, devoted to hooliganism and alcoholism, is very moving. The statistics quoted by the author confirm the link between an increase in the acts of hooliganism and alcohol consumption. Between January and September 1956, 164,623 people were arrested on suspicion of committing such acts under the influence of alcohol, and one year later there were 212,916 such arrests, that is a rise of 23.3 per cent (the number of detained juveniles rose by 53.4 per cent). As the author writes, aggression was increasingly directed against representatives of the authorities, mainly policemen. In the first nine months of 1956, 2,814 officers were assaulted, while in the same period of 1957 there were no fewer than 3,830 attacks, that is 36 per cent more (pp. 34, 37). In the light of these data it is hard not to agree with the author, when he writes that from the second half of 1956 it was easier in parks or bars 'to lose not just a wallet, but also health or even life'. A similar phenomenon could be observed in the Soviet Union, which makes it possible to see it as a consequence of the post-Stalinist liberalization.²⁴ That safety in the streets worsened dramatically is beyond doubt, but did it happen — as the author argues — in 1956–57 and was it caused only by rising alcohol consumption, easing of control and inactivity of the police, previously accused of brutality and violation of the law? (pp. 36–37).

It is worth adding some more data to the statistics given by the author. As early as in 1952–53 the Ministry of Justice, in two concise expert reports on hooliganism, pointed to a rise in crime against life and health, crime committed under the influence of alcohol. Drunkenness was identified as the cause of demoralization and acts of hooliganism perpetrated by young people aged 17–24.²⁵ In comparison with 1955, 1956 was marked by a clear rise in the number of reported/detected assaults on members of the public (25.3 per cent), illegal gun possession (22.6 per cent) and hooliganism (32.8 per cent). There was also a slight rise in the number of thefts of state and community property

²³ Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948*, transl. John Micgiel and Michael H. Bernhard, Berkeley, 1991, p. 8.

²⁴ Brian Lapierre, 'Making Hooliganism on a Mass Scale: The Campaign against Petty Hooliganism in the Soviet Union, 1956–1964', *Cahiers du monde russe*, 47, 2006, 1–2, pp. 349–75.

²⁵ Kosiński, *Historia pijarstwa w czasach PRL*, pp. 636–39.

(4.1 per cent). Significantly, there was no change in the number of reported thefts of private property and the number of murders even went down (by 3.7 per cent), as did the number of foreign currency offences (23.1 per cent) and fiscal offences (10.4 per cent) — these last two cases should be linked to the liberalization of the system and confusion of the state apparatus.²⁶ Thus the rise in crime, although clearly felt and noticeable in the streets until the end of 1956, did not occur on the same scale in all categories of offences and crimes, including the most serious crimes. The above figures were something more than just a reflection of an increased number of reported/detected crimes. They testified to a rise in crime — a topic previously presented in a highly ideologized form, the real picture of which began to be described in 1955/56,²⁷ a topic generating increasing interest/concern also in the following years. It should be noted that the Polish criminal legislation at the time lacked provisions defining hooliganism, as a result of which the matter was regulated by the judicature and case law, acts against public order were also classified as acts of hooliganism, and on the other hand the use of the term was completely discretionary.²⁸

When we look at the dynamics of the phenomenon in 1956, take into account offences against public order being classified as ‘hooliganism’ and note the significance attached to them by the repression apparatus, we will see the political aspect of ‘hooliganism’, left out by Kochanowski. The Ministry of Internal Affairs addressed the problem on 18 September 1956, when it was agreed that the number of ‘acts of hooliganism’ increased after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, especially from early July, that is following the news of the Poznań rebellion. ‘Hooliganism has been on the rise since the Poznań events. There are cases when during large gatherings hooligans act provocatively, using a foul language with regard to the police,’ it was said. The Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, General Juliusz Hibner, concluded that organized mass rallies were rare. ‘We can say, however, that all occasions, even minor incidences, are transformed into mass hooligan demonstrations.’²⁹

²⁶ AIPN, 1585/451, Report on the activity of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1956, no date, fol. 21.

²⁷ Anna Pawełczyńska, ‘O kłamstwie, zakłamaniu, wulgaryzacji i chuligaństwie’, *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1955, 1, p. 2; documentary *Uwaga Chuligan!*, dir. Jerzy Hoffman and Edward Skórzewski, 1955; *Chuligaństwo: Studia*, ed. Jerzy Sawicki, Warsaw, 1956; Tadeusz Cyprian, *Chuligaństwo wśród młodzieży: Problem społeczny i prawny*, Poznań, 1956; Czesław Czapów and Stanisław Manturzewski, *Niebezpieczne ulice: Źródła chuligaństwa: Materiały i refleksje*, Warsaw, 1960.

²⁸ Andrzej Zaćmiński, “‘Poena sine lege’ — czyny chuligańskie w orzecznictwie Komisji Specjalnej do Walki z Nadużyciami i Szkodnictwem Gospodarczym (1951–1954)”, *DN*, 48, 2016, 1, pp. 83–112 (pp. 83, 95); cf. Agata Wądołowska, *Chuligański charakter czynu w świetle prawa karnego i prawa wykroczeń*, vol.1: *Modele prawnokarnej walki z chuligaństwem w Polsce w latach 1950–1997*, Suwałki, 2017.

²⁹ ‘Wzrost chuligaństwa notujemy po wypadkach poznańskich. Są przypadki, że przy okazji większego zgrupowania się ludzi chuligani prowokacyjnie występują, uży-

The above opinions are confirmed by numbers. In the first half of 1956 the average monthly number of reported cases of 'hooliganism' was 2,732 and was 19 per cent higher than the number for the first half of 1955. In July 1956 the number began to rise sharply, exceeding 5,000 in November. A particularly sharp rise was recorded in the regions of Katowice, Cracow, Lublin, Warsaw and Łódź.

The cases of assaults on uniformed policemen in 1956 looked as follows:

January–June (on average)	256
July	492
August	357
September	428
October	466
November	622
December	570

Source: AIPN, 1585/451, Report on the activity of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1956, no date, fol. 27

Thus there is no doubt that after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 'hooliganism', in addition to its dimension of a typical social pathology, began to assume an anti-systemic character, as a politically-motivated act and an act to which political significance was attributed. As the above compilation shows, in October every day 15 policemen on average fell victim to assault, and in November the number rose to even 20. On 16 October 1956 mass incidents all over the country were the main topic discussed during a meeting of the College of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. A few days earlier 'serious incidents' occurred in Wrocław, Łaskarzew, Darłowo and twice in Wałbrzych. 'The nature of this type of incidents is usually anti-police, anti-Semitic, religious and sometimes even anti-state' — was the diagnosis during a discussion of the preparation of the police for repelling such attacks, defend main government buildings and even use the Internal Security Corps units in the streets.³⁰ Such and similarly alarming information reached the most important decision makers; it suggested a possibility of an expansion of local clashes into full-scale rebellions, into new 'Poznań'. This created a mobilizing pressure to look for political solutions that would prevent a nation-wide outbreak, like the uprising in the GDR in June 1953.

wając ordynarnych słów pod adresem milicji'; 'Można natomiast stwierdzić, że wszystkie okazje, nawet przy drobnych zajściach są przekształcone w masowe demonstracje chuligańskie', AIPN, 1584/10, Minutes of a meeting of the College of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 18 September 1956, fols 155, 163–64.

³⁰ 'Wystąpienia tego rodzaju przeważnie mają charakter antymilicyjny, antyse-micki, na tle religijnym, a niekiedy wręcz przeciwpaństwowy', AIPN, 1584/10, Minutes of a meeting of the College of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 11 October 1956, fol. 275.

We can assume that the main motive of many perpetrators was a desire to 'thrash' uniformed policemen — the most visible and readily available representatives of the regime, which was seen as imposed and not representing the Polish national interest. Also in alcohol-related cases, although it must be said that owing to the distorted perspective of documents produced by the repression apparatus lumping together all acts of aggression, also those against the system and against the Soviets, as 'hooliganism', it is impossible to determine their proportions. Political motivation is particularly evident in mass events turning into street clashes, like on 18 November in Bydgoszcz, where devices jamming Radio Free Europe programmes were destroyed, or on 10 December 1956 in Szczecin, where the Soviet consulate was attacked and vandalized.

Several hundred attacks on policemen a month testifies to a turmoil in Polish society in the autumn of 1956 — it is a measure of the anti-systemic national movement and not just a rapid rise in crime caused by a crisis in the repression apparatus and the state. Surprisingly, Paweł Machcewicz's book devoted to this matter is referred to by Kochanowski only in the context of religion (p. 200).³¹ The data cited above demonstrate — I believe — that in October 1956 Poland was a step away from an uprising and bloodshed similar to one that happened in Hungary. The data also suggest that the slow ebbing of the wave of unrest should be linked not only to the political crisis and the return to power of Gomułka, seen as an anti-Soviet politician, but also, perhaps to an even greater extent, to the 'chilling effect' of the tragedy of the Hungarian Uprising, quashed by the Soviet Army.

The above polemical remarks and minor additions do not change the fact that the book under review is the first publication presenting deep and rapid social and civilizational changes taking place in Poland at a turning point in its history, changes that shaped the social reality for nearly thirty years, until 1989; in this reality millions of Poles spent most of their lives. Jerzy Kochanowski's book brings back from obscurity this fundamental but today forgotten aspect of the October breakthrough. Written with a broad readership in mind, it does not exhaust the subject, but should be mandatory reading for scholars studying Poland's recent history, for whom it will be an important point of reference for a long time to come.

(Translated by Anna Kijak)

³¹ Paweł Machcewicz, *Polski rok 1956*, Warsaw, 1993; idem, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956*, transl. Maya Latynski, Washington, 2009.

Summary

The breakthrough of 1956 in Poland has so far been analysed mainly from the perspective of politics. Jerzy Kochanowski's book under review (*Rewolucja październikowa: Polska 1956–1957* (Inter-October Revolution: Poland 1956–57), Cracow, 2017) is an ambitious attempt to present selected social, economic and cultural aspects as well as long-term consequences of the radical social change that occurred between October 1956 and October 1957 and is referred to as 'inter-October' revolution (in reference to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917). Written very fluently, the book explores the fundamental — also with regard to social changes — significance of the breakthrough of 1956 in Poland's history: the modernizing changes happening at the time were so extensive and deep that they laid the foundations for social life in Poland until 1989. Kochanowski's book brings back from obscurity this now forgotten but key aspect of the October 1956 breakthrough. That is why it should be mandatory reading for all those who are interested in Poland's social history, as a point of reference for research into everyday life in People's Poland (Polish People's Republic). This review article places Kochanowski's study against a background of the existing literature on the subject, with the reviewer presenting its main theses and formulating some polemical remarks. The most important among them points to a risk of distorting the picture of the 1956 crisis caused by the fact that Kochanowski underestimates the impact of the political context on social processes.

(Translated by Anna Kijak)

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