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Leonard Borkowicz's Ideological Choices and His Autobiographical Account of Communism

Early in the morning of 10 March 1982, Leonard Borkowicz noted:

I wonder if it is worthwhile and possible to write a study on the subject: “how and why I stopped cooperating with communism.” The thing would be exclusively for me and would serve to organise my thoughts on the subject.¹

He was not the first to try to deal with his ideological biography,² but the autobiographical testimony he left behind—or rather testimonies—are worth attention for at least two reasons.

Let us begin with the figure of the author, Leonard Borkowicz.³ As a member of the Polish Communist Party, he followed a path marked by

¹ Książnica Pomorska (hereafter KP), Special Collections, Spuścizna po Leonardzie Borkowiczu, sygn. 2999, *Zapiski Leonarda Borkowicza*, z. III, 10 III 1982, p. 47.

² There is a very rich literature relating to the worldview evolution that people associated with communism underwent. As François Furet pointed out, “very early on, alongside the history of communism itself, there appeared a parallel and closely related history of breaks with communism. It continues to this day, in every generation.” (F. Furet, *Przeszłość pewnego złudzenia. Esej o idei komunistycznej w XX wieku*, [transl.] J. Górnicka-Kalinowska, M. Ochab, PIW, Warsaw 2018, p. 175.) It is worth noting, however, that these ruptures most often concern people from the world of culture and science—much less so politicians. As for more recent studies approaching this topic from an interdisciplinary perspective, see: *Komunizm. Tam i... z powrotem*, [eds.] E. Pogonowska, R. Szczerbakiewicz, Lublin 2019.

³ Leonard Borkowicz (until 1944 Berkowicz) was born in 1912 in Vienna into an assimilated Jewish family from Drohobych. In his youth he became a communist activist (KPZU, KPP, KPD) of medium level. He survived the war in the USSR—at that time he was, among other things, a political officer in the Red Army and the 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division. He returned to Poland in 1944 in the rank of a major and held a number of posts: PKWN plenipotentiary for the Białystok region, deputy chief of the Civic Militia, government plenipotentiary to the 1st Byelorussian Front, and finally Voivode of Szczecin.

the history of this grouping and its subsequent mutations,⁴ created by the Moscow headquarters. In the interwar period, therefore, he experienced various forms of oppression and repression associated with the activity in this illegal and anti-Polish organisation. However, while his consecutive prison sentences or incarceration in Bereza Kartuska may have been something to be proud of, his exclusion from the communist community, carried out by the Comintern subordinated to Joseph Stalin, brought not only “great fear,” but also a struggle with the humiliating stigma of being a “suspect element.”⁵

Borkowicz also experienced the reactivation of Polish communists residing in the USSR, who were entrusted with a great task—through political and propaganda activities, reinforced by the armed arm of the Red Army and Soviet security apparatus—of introducing a new regime in post-war Poland. This, in turn, involved “socialisation into power,” which imposed a new role on pre-war revolutionaries and contesters. Now it was them to

... lead, organise and build—a state different from the pre-war one, but a state nonetheless. This imposed on the participants of the movement the obligation not only to find patriotic or even nationalist legitimacy for their power, but also to find themselves in a new situation.⁶

Borkowicz underwent this transformation in an exemplary fashion—throwing off his military uniform, he instantly transformed himself into a complex-free governor, ambassador and president. However, despite possessing a certain amount of capital, measured by his party seniority

In 1949 he became ambassador to Czechoslovakia and in the second half of the 1950s he was appointed chairman of the Central Office of Cinematography for several years. After resigning from this post, he found employment in the publishing house “Książka i Wiedza.” In 1968 he was dismissed from his job and remained retired until his death. He died in 1989 in Warsaw. For more see: K. Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach władzy. Historia Leonarda Borkowicza (1912–1989)*, IPN, Szczecin—Warsaw 2020. This text is largely based on information included in the book, but it is an original study of the analysed topic.

⁴ In December 1941 the first initiative group of Polish communists was sent from the USSR to occupied Poland. Their task was to create a new party. The Polish Workers’ Party “was established in January 1942 on the initiative of and operated under instructions from the Soviet leadership” (R. Spałek, *Na licencji Moskwy. Wokół Gomułki, Berman i innych (1943–1970)*, IPN, Warsaw 2020, p. 79).

⁵ The influence of Joseph Stalin and the Comintern on the Communist Party of Poland and its dissolution has been extensively described by Bogdan Gadomski, using the available source base and literature (B. Gadomski, *Biografia agenta. Józef-Josef Mützenmacher (1903–1947)*, Wydawnictwo Tedson, Warsaw 2009, pp. 135–172).

⁶ Ł. Bertram, *Bunt, podziemie, władza. Polscy komuniści i ich socjalizacja polityczna do roku 1956*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2022, p. 438.

as well as the membership in the KPP generation⁷ or organisational skills, he did not find himself among the party and government elite⁸ due to the fact that he had problems not only with ideological principles and party discipline, but also with “vigilance.”⁹

This had specific consequences—namely, political and professional marginalisation leading to *de facto* exclusion. This process began at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, so Borkowicz’s experience was both separate and different from that of the domestic generation, which experienced a similar anathema later—either as a result of destalinisation or during the anti-Semitic purge of 1968.¹⁰ Let us add that Borkowicz also had his share in both situations. In the light of the above, his autobiographical reconciliation with communism may be interesting. It is not an outsider’s view, because he still, at least until 1981, remained a formal party member who also continued

⁷I treat Borkowicz as a member of the generation of “Polish Jews who joined the communist movement in the 1920s and 1930s, and who were “revolutionaries, rebels, refugees, soldiers, tailors, shoemakers, intellectuals and apparatchiks, victorious builders of communism and victims of its wrath” (J. Schatz, *Pokolenie. Wzlot i upadek polskich Żydów komunistów*, transl. S. Kowalski, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, Warsaw 2020, pp. 387, 31). The way in which Borkowicz abandoned communism, different in relation to Schatz’s respondents, should be emphasised here.

⁸Defining the elite I adopt a positional approach, i.e. I see it as a group of people holding full-time positions in the central apparatus of PPR/PZPR and government institutions, who realised political power through nationwide decisions. Marek Żyromski, *Teorie elit a systemy polityczne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań 2007, p. 305.

⁹In 1945, “when filling the highest positions in the party, its leadership took into account above all: seniority in the KPP, ‘political sophistication,’ ‘ideological vigilance,’ experience in leadership positions, organisational skills.” (M. Szumiło, *Roman Zambrowski 1909–1977: Studium z dziejów elity komunistycznej w Polsce*, IPN, Warsaw 2014, p. 195.)

¹⁰The position expressed by Małgorzata Fidelis is important in this context: “In research on communism, the category of generation can be particularly useful for analysing changing attitudes among specific groups, such as communist leaders. Generational changes in this case reflected to some extent the transformations of the system. There is no doubt that pre-war communists had different motives for their actions; those who introduced the post-war order and those who, for example, implemented the consumer policy in the 1970s, had different ones. At the same time, the diversity of attitudes and motivations within age groups should be examined. It should not be forgotten that generational identification is only one of many identifications. A generation always appears in dialogue with other types of identity, such as social origin, gender, national identification, geographical location. There is no doubt that generation is above all a form of narration about oneself, explaining one’s biography to oneself as well as to specific audiences. From this point of view, it is important to emphasize the perspectives of various groups and individuals, to show the multiplicity of subjective interpretations and the identification (or lack thereof) with a generation.” (*Pożytki z “pokolenia”. Dyskusja o “pokoleniu” jako kategorii analitycznej*, A. Artwińska, M. Fidelis, A. Mrozik, A. Zawadzka, “Teksty Drugie” 2016, no. 1, p. 364.)

to live in Poland. His important personal view, that of an activist from the second or even third row, is too often minimised by mainstream scientific approaches.

Autobiographical testimonies, already mentioned, are another reason to look at the issue under analysis. They can be divided into two groups. The first one are memoirs from the planned but unfinished book *Podróż w czasie* [*A Journey in Time*]¹¹ and extracts from daily newspapers, magazines or books kept by Borkowicz between 2 April and 10 November 1981. Eventually, this led him to an “autobiographical testimony” or the so-called “diaries.” And it is them that make up the second group of analysed documents. They consist of ten A5 notebooks written with a blue ballpoint pen. The notebooks also contain a large number of cut out newspaper articles. Borkowicz started to keep notes on 5 December 1981 and finally stopped making them on 22 May 1984. This was because, especially in the last period, the entries were not systematic and the breaks between them were even several months long (see notebook no. 10 and the break from 8 January to 22 May 1984). For this reason, the notes were referred to as *Zapiski* (*Notes*). All in all, we have at our disposal extensive material - *Journey in Time* is nearly 70 typewritten pages, while *Zapiski*—after transcription—is over half a thousand pages of standardised A4 text.

As far as the latter are concerned, the importance of the studied source should be emphasised, as it belongs to a small collection of personal documents¹² which are beginning to function in scientific circulation and which were left behind by the representatives of KPP(b) generation and refer to the 1980s. While we can easily find memoirs (often fictionalized), accounts or interviews relating to the interwar period, the war and the years 1944–56¹³, there is already a problem with the following years, and in relation to the eighth decade of the last century we can speak directly of

¹¹ KP, Special Collections, Spuścizna..., sygn. 3000, Leonard Borkowicz, *Podróż w czasie*, mps.

¹² In spite of the passage of time, Roman Zimand’s comments on personal documents, though drawn from the position of a literary scholar, remain significant. He has drawn attention to the value of such documents not only due to the “fame” of their author but also to the fact that they have become “independent,” as a research object. R. Zimand, *Diarysta Stefan Ż.*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1990, p. 28.

¹³ This can be linked to the research specificity of the period. For more on this, see: T.P. Rutkowski, *Historiografia i historycy w PRL*, IPN, Warsaw 2019; Tomasz Siewierski, *Specyfika badań nad tzw. ruchem robotniczym w historiografii PRL. Zarys problemu*, [in:] *Letnia Szkoła Historii Najnowszej 2012. Referaty*, ed. K. Dworaczek, Ł. Kamiński, IPN, Warsaw 2013, pp. 179-185; also in *Komuniści i historycy. Polski ruch robotniczy w badaniach uczonych w PRL—wybrane aspekty*, [in:] *Partia komunistyczna w Polsce. Struktury, ludzie, dokumentacja*, ed. by D. Magier, Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie, Lublin—Radzyń Podlaski 2012, pp. 463-479.

a deficit.¹⁴ Against this background, Leonard Borkowicz's notes are worthy of attention not only because of the "political" history of their author, but also because of the panorama of everyday life in Warsaw during martial law, drawn from the perspective of a seventy-year-old intellectual. But that is not all – Borkowicz's personal notes allow us to face the questions: Why did he join the radical left? What kind of worldview changes did he undergo? What did lead him to his anti-communist stance? Did he feel responsible for the system he co-created, and if so, how did he express this?

When Borkowicz took on this new task, he was motivated by a desire to strengthen his "ability to formulate thoughts" and also to enable himself "to remember events, impressions, thoughts."¹⁵ The diary was also intended to discipline him and combat laziness, and to become the main recipient of the thoughts of an increasingly lonely, ageing man¹⁶. It can therefore be assumed that in creating his diary he combined two opposing types of narration—eyewitness and introspection. Małgorzata Czerminska called the former a testimony and the latter a confession.¹⁷ It seems that in Borkowicz's case

¹⁴ Symptomatic of this phenomenon was the behaviour of, for example, Józef Cyrankiewicz, who "burned the diary from the first years of the war, which was kept by his secretary. Apparently later, towards the end of his life, he deleted all the documents" (J.W. Borejsza, *Grypsy Józefa Cyrankiewicza z Konzentrationslager Auschwitz*, [in:] *Yesterday. Studia z historii najnowszej. Księga dedykowana prof. Jerzemu Eislerowi w 65. rocznicę urodzin*, ed. by J. Olaszek, A. Dudek [and others], Instytut Historii PAN, Warsaw 2017, p. 726).

¹⁵ KP, Special Collections, Spuścizna..., ref. 2999, Leonard Borkowicz's notes, notebook I, 5 XII 1981, p. 25.

¹⁶ "The problem of the relationship between the author's intention (and the possibility of reaching it) and the intention of the text concerns the fact that the author, guided by certain intentions, reflexively decides on the willingness and possibility of a spontaneous, one-off (albeit extended in time) written fixation. For example, in the context of personal diaries, Philippe Lejeune points out that systematic note-taking helps to preserve in memory (a modern form of mnemonics) the present self for the future self. It is like leaving a "letter in a bottle," and the value of such a letter increases over time. Paper is like a friend to whom we can confide while escaping social pressure, inventing our own rules of the 'game' (e.g. mixing genres or writing styles, experimenting with written language), and like a mirror in which the image of ourselves develops over time. Lejeune points out that entries are a tool for action because, being a documented form of a dialogue with oneself, *a laboratory of introspection*, they influence the words and actions that will follow. Thanks to the fact that making written notes of daily observations is a creative process and thus more open to tracing contradictions, such human activity, in his opinion, can be considered one of the methods of work." (W. Doliński, J. Żurko, *Wybrane problemy statusu poznawczego tekstów pisanych—wprowadzenie*, [in:] *Rzeczywistość i zapis. Problemy badania tekstów w naukach społecznych i humanistycznych*, [eds.] W. Doliński, J. Żurko, K. Grzeszkiewicz-Radulska, S. Męćfal, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2016, p. 8.

¹⁷ M. Czerminska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt. Świadeństwo, wyznaczenie i wyzwanie*, [2th edition], Veritas, Kraków 2020, p. 19.

the same mechanism was at work as in Roman Zambrowski's case. It is not without reason that the author of his biography, Mirosław Szumiło, included a subsection *In retirement—reflections of an old communist*¹⁸ at the end of the book. In Zambrowski's as well as in Borkowicz's memoirs "two threads interweave—current events and history. By no means reluctant to publish their notes, they both nevertheless applied a kind of self-censorship."¹⁹ This is related to the concept of an autobiographical triangle, created by Czermińska. The literary scholar pointed to the presence of yet another element, namely the challenge. The challenge is the reader. In the case of the analysed material, the main recipient of its content was (was to be?) the author himself, since—at least theoretically—it was not written with the intention of publication; instead, it was to be used for the study and self-analysis of one's own self.²⁰ But was it really so? Deep down, did Borkowicz not dream of a reader? To quote:

After all, I don't count on these notes being read by anyone other than myself (perhaps even by Henrietta, before whom I not only have no secrets, but can also present myself in the form that emerges from these notes). As a matter of fact, there is not much here in the way of introspection or attempts at critical self-recognition; I can see the need for it, yet it is hindered not only by the lack of honesty towards myself (although this does exist...), but also by the inability to grasp, define and convey in writing the symptoms that disturb me in my character, actions and attitudes.²¹

The fact that Borkowicz did not "count on" the reader when writing his notebooks does not mean that he did not think about it and that he excluded the possibility of his work being read in the future. It is proved by the fact that his legacy was handed over to a public institution, which could not (or should not) have happened against his will. Of course, this does not give anyone the right to violate and make public the information of a *strictly* intimate nature.²²

In the book he was preparing, "modestly conceived," Borkowicz wanted to include some documents, recollections, as well as biographical sketches of

¹⁸ M. Szumiło, *Roman Zambrowski*, p. 466.

¹⁹ K. Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach*, p. 453.

²⁰ "Why am I writing all this? Probably only because I want to control my own behaviour today, and after some time these notes, when reread, will serve well to possibly straighten out some of my attitudes, moods, judgements and actions." (KP, Special Collections, Spuścizna..., sygn. 2999, Zapiski Leonarda Borkowicza, notebook III, 27 II 1982, p. 6.)

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² For more on this see: P. Lejeune, *Naruszenie dóbr osobistych*, [in:] id., *Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu. O autobiografii*, ed. by R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, transl. W. Grajewski, S. Jaworski, A. Labuda, R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, Universitas, Kraków 2001, pp. 270-282.

people close to him or who influenced certain historical events. The impulse to create the publication was the “Polish year” 1980 and hopes for “beneficial changes in our not easy reality.”²³ It is in these texts that Borkowicz presents his ideological initiation, drawn in an almost adventurous and sensational way. Moreover, it is presented from the perspective of a man who had already parted with the communist movement, although Borkowicz did not express his anti-communist stance directly in these texts.

So what does Borkowicz write about the sources of his ideological choices? Ordering them chronologically, one should first mention the family environment, with particular emphasis laid on his leftist, politically active father and the political authority of Herman Lieberman, who was Leonard's uncle. Borkowicz contrasted the “liberal atmosphere of our home”, created thanks to them, with the atmosphere of “my uncle's home [where] the mood was conservative, and even aggressively anti-socialist, and I was reluctant to go there, probably also feeling unpleasantly the situation of a poor relative.”²⁴ Therefore, his taking the side of the values affirmed by the well-known uncle and beloved father²⁵ was also influenced by poor financial situation of the closest family, especially felt in confrontation with the wealth of his other uncle, Dr Michał Berkowicz.²⁶ However, what united the older generation of Berkowicz family, regardless of their worldview, was their concern for the fate of young, rebellious Leonard:

Looking back, I see myself as if in a trance, in which politics filled my life completely, not for a moment thinking about my future, about the pain I was causing my parents or the disappointment I was causing my uncle, who had agreed to put up the money [for my education]. For all intents and purposes it must be said that I was a nincompoop, completely irresponsible, blind and unintelligent, preoccupied with an idea of which I knew pitifully little, just as I understood nothing of what was going on in the world or around me.²⁷

²³ KP, Special Collections, Spuścizna..., sygn. 3000, Leonard Borkowicz, *Podróż w czasie*, mps, k. 1.

²⁴ KP, Special Collections, Spuścizna..., ref. 2999, Leonard Borkowicz's notes, notebook VIII, 2 March 1983, p. 40.

²⁵ Leonard Borkowicz wrote very warmly about his father, Emil: “For my good, charming father was also an incorrigible fantasist.” (Ibid., p. 36.)

²⁶ Dr Michał Berkowicz was a lawyer from Kraków, co-owner of an oil mine and a glassworks in Krosno. He was also a member of the Jewish organisation B'nei B'rith (Sons of the Covenant). (K. Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach*, p. 23, 38.)

²⁷ KP, Special Collections, Spuścizna..., ref. 2999, Leonard Borkowicz's notes, notebook IV, 5 XI 1982, pp. 159-160.

Having various radical currents of political life at his disposal, young Borkowicz chose communism.²⁸ As he stated in his memoirs, the communists fought for a good cause “because they have against them policemen, and students, and tenement house owners, and my uncle, the only wealthy man in our family.”²⁹ Thus, there is information about social inequalities, Endec activists and functionaries representing an oppressive state. Moreover, Borkowicz was an astute observer of the surrounding world—he noticed the persecution of Ukrainian socio-political activists and of Jewish population. The multinational city of Lviv gave him adequate nourishment in this regard: “He saw academics in corporatist caps taking over the streets and watching the spectacle of wealthy customers of the ‘George’ café.” The euphoria in Akademicka Street was accompanied by a rush in Krakidały, where traders quickly packed up their poor goods because “. . . riots usually end with Jewish passers-by and stallholders being beaten up.”³⁰

He therefore looked for ways to explain reality and to change it, finding them at meetings of the communist youth and in books. As he wrote:

I began my political education with admiration for the romantic beauty (this is how I perceived it at the time) of *The Gathering of Bread, Mutual Aid as a Factor of Development* [Pavel Kropotkin] and perhaps some other works by this founder of anarcho-communism.³¹

Soon came the works of Lenin, Trotsky, Karl Kautsky or Lucjan Rudnicki. Borkowicz was also strongly influenced by his new acquaintances, especially Jan Blaton, five years his senior, whom he regarded as “a very experienced activist.” He and Blaton shared

²⁸ “The Second Polish Republic, with all its faults, with systemically supported discrimination of non-Polish nationality citizens at the forefront, provided [Jewish groups] with conditions for development. Jewish street became a place of competition between socialists, Zionists, communists and representatives of Orthodoxy. The history of these disputes is not only a struggle for votes, but above all a dispute over the vision of the future of Jews in general. Each of these groups created their own schools as well as youth, women’s and cultural workers’ organisations, which promoted the ideas characteristic of the given movement.” (M. Trębacz, *Radykałowie*, [in:] *Dziedzictwo Żydów polskich*, [ed. by] B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, T. Sztyma, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, Warsaw 2021, pp. 91-92.)

²⁹ L. Borkowicz, *Moje podwójne życie*, [in:] *Komuniści. Wspomnienia o Komunistycznej Partii Polski*, [ed. by] L. Borkowicz, C. Budzyńska [and others], Książka i Wiedza, Warsaw 1969, p. 192.

³⁰ K. Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach*, pp. 38-39.

³¹ KP, Zbiór Specjalne, Spuścizna..., sygn. 3000, Zapiski do książki *Podróż w czasie, wypisy z dzienników*, wrzesień 1980, k. 101.

... common intellectual interests and, above all, an attitude to life, which we approved of: readiness to commit oneself wholeheartedly, loyalty in relations with people, sense of humour, aversion to all rigid and official forms in private life and in the organisation.³²

Significantly, Blaton was the first person from his circle of acquaintances to express reservations “about the rightness of the policies of the German Communists. . . . The Party was very critical of Janek’s objections, and we were worried about this conflict.”³³ Blaton eventually abandoned the radical left, which—many years later—Borkowicz commented as follows:

We communists were amoral, and sowing weeds one can hardly expect grain to grow. That is why we had to lose. During half a century (more than half a century!) of my participation in the communist movement I met many wonderful people, but it is worth noticing that most often they were the ones who left communism. That was the case with Janek Blaton, but the fate of people like Włodek Broniewski or Aleksander Wat was truly tragic.³⁴

One can conclude from the above that already at the beginning of his ideological path young Borkowicz did not display party orthodoxy. Instead of condemning his friend and breaking off contact with him, he engaged in discussions and speculated. The first doubts about the party’s (Komintern’s) guidelines were to overwhelm him even earlier, in 1928.

When I took my first steps in the communist movement, doubts arose in me, vaguely formulated, nebulous, completely ungrounded, and concerning the issue of democracy. The attempt to clarify to myself certain matters concerning the intra-party life was also to become the first disappointment. Things were happening in Lviv where I had the opportunity to get acquainted with a relatively large amount of material about the discussion in the then WKP(b) with the Trotskyists on Trotskyism. I was not familiar with Trotskyist materials except for those present in official and therefore (!) anti-Trotskyist publications. I did not understand much of the merits of the dispute, but on one issue I had fairly well-established views. Namely, on the necessity of internal party democracy. The arguments of the oppositionists that there is no real equality of different opinions, directions or even factions within the party, appealed to me.³⁵

³² K. Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach*, p. 41.

³³ KP, Special Collections, Spuścizna..., 3000, L. Borkowicz, *Journey in Time. My double life*, mps, k. 11.

³⁴ KP, Special Collections, Spuścizna..., ref. 2999, Leonard Borkowicz’s notes, notebook IV, 25 September 1982, p. 94.

³⁵ K. Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach*, p. 42.

Although the reflections were not deep and did not arouse particular scruples, Borkowicz's tendency to reflection and self-analysis is noticeable. It will accompany him in the following years, which will eventually influence the variable (and by no means exemplary) trajectory of his political career and worldview evolution.

The picture presented here could be considered typical of the generation of Polish communists of Jewish origin who started their activity in the second half of the 1920s and entered adulthood in the following decade. Their turn towards a radical idea is a part of a "pan-European phenomenon that Stanley G. Payne calls 'classical modernism,'" characterised, among other things, by an unprecedented involvement of the masses, polarisation of attitudes, convictions about the inevitability of great social upheavals and the creation of comprehensive programmes to change the world of the time.³⁶ In relation to Borkowicz, however, it is important to raise a certain issue. Unlike the vast majority of the generation of Polish-Jewish communists described by Jaffa Schatz, he did not fulfil one of the three "key elements" identified by the researcher. His joining the communist movement was not preceded by his participation in "various non-communist [Jewish origin] organizations" and—last but not least—it is difficult to find in his biography "a nagging awareness of the barrier separating" him from his parents.³⁷ Thus, it is difficult to grasp the process of his eventual breaking with Jewishness. It is impossible to determine to what extent *Yiddishkeit* was present in the lives of the Berkowicz family. Leonard did not leave any testimony that he "received religious education, attended synagogue or participated in any of Jewish festivals."³⁸ This translated into his scant interest in what was happening on the "Jewish street." The path of the left-wing radical he took was nevertheless a part of the Jewish heritage, although—as Stanisław Krajewski pointed out—"in pre-war Poland communists did not enjoy popularity among the Jewish masses and did not have any significant influence on the Jewish community authorities."³⁹

Borkowicz's adolescence was marked by social sensitivity, an element of rebellion against the existing reality, and a search for new/alternative identity. This was accompanied by a need for strong ideological impulses connected

³⁶ K. Kijek, *Dzieci modernizmu. Świadomość, kultura i socjalizacja polityczna młodzieży żydowskiej w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2017, pp. 13-14.

³⁷ J. Schatz, *Pokolenie*, p. 95.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

³⁹ A. Kainer [Stanisław Krajewski], *Żydzi a komunizm*, "Krytyka. Kwartalnik polityczny" 1983, no. 15, p. 182.

with intellectual stimulation. To this can be added a kind of revolutionary militancy manifesting itself in action rather than theorising (he was a skilful propagandist/speaker) and the willingness to take risks and make sacrifices connected with membership in an illegal, 'frowned-upon' organisation; and for many years he also cherished unwavering faith in Moscow's universal principles.

However, this faith was slowly eroding. In interviews given to the journalist Alicja Maciejowska in the second half of the 1980s, Borkowicz emphasised that his departure from communism "was a process and not violent in nature." It happened as a result of "various fractures and side tracks."⁴⁰ *Zapiski* [Notes] drawn up during martial law may be used to find such outlined traces. Two types of reflections should be distinguished. The first are of personal nature, while the second have the character of theoretical reflections on the communist system. They quite often overlap and are difficult to separate.

In 1950 Borkowicz, who was then serving as ambassador, was forced by the party to abandon his wife, which resulted in the break-up of the family. As he noted in 1983,

... then began the process of my departure, probably still unintentional, unconscious; the process of my shaking off, tearing off, ripping off the fog, the smog that had clutched my mind and paralysed it. It took me a long time to break out of this anguish.⁴¹

However, three years earlier, he remembered himself from the mid-1950s as

... a barbarian, as only such a one can be a convinced communist, but I was also one, because I lacked the most elementary education, simple knowledge of facts, the ability to feel the beauty of words and things; and because the knowledge of a few simple formulas from a watered-down version of Marxism-Leninism completely replaced my knowledge of the world and people.⁴²

In this assessment of himself Borkowicz was not so much (and not only) very harsh as unjust. He was remembered in a completely different way by his co-workers and students from the time when, as a "deputy professor," he held the post of the head of the Marxist-Leninist department at the Main School of Planning and Statistics.⁴³

⁴⁰ Reportage by Alicja Maciejowska *Niedokończone rozmowy* (radio series "Czas reporterów," Warsaw—Szczecin 1996). Alicja Maciejowska's private collection.

⁴¹ K. Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach*, p. 418.

⁴² KP, Special Collections, Spuścizna..., Leonard Borkowicz's notes, notebook VIII, 4 II 1980, p. 1.

⁴³ "A special testimony was given to him by Leszek Gilejko, who attributed to his then boss the role of a catalyst in the face of delicate liberalisation that had been progressing since

This did not mean, however, that the moment the world—or at least the more “trusted” part of it—learned of Nikita Khrushchev’s secret paper on Stalin’s crimes, Borkowicz was inclined to condemn the communist system. He had a conversation on this subject in Paris with Dominique Desanti, a French journalist, writer and communist.

I asked him [Borkowicz] what he was going to do. “What do you mean? What are we going to do? In our country the intellectuals are going crazy. The most important at the moment is not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, that is, socialism together with Stalinism. The task of the report is to purify communism and not to kill it. The intellectuals who no longer want Leninism must leave. We are not going to stop them...”⁴⁴

At the same time, Borkowicz dreamt of a deep reform of the party “which was to involve reducing its numbers and fulfilling the criterion of authentic ideology of the members of the communist group”⁴⁵. However, the issue of Stalinism intrigued him so much that years later he returned to it many times, trying to grasp its essence. He was mainly interested in the mechanisms of establishing power and the attitudes of its representatives. That is, of himself.

The omnipotence of the ruling group and its monopolistic domination over the whole society transforms itself into enslavement, impotence, the paralysis of energy and imagination. Why? (A) the power elite that oppresses society cannot itself be free, for that alone stabilises its power and (B) the despotic ruling party must itself be ruled despotically. The line between the organisers of repression and the victims is blurred: one is once a despot and once a victim, and one is always a prisoner of one’s own past, of one’s own doctrine, of the rules of war one has used against others, and even of the political language one has used to lie in public many times.⁴⁶

At no point in his *Zapiski* did Borkowicz refer to his communist efficiency. His analysis has a seemingly cold, laboratory character. He did not apologise to anyone, he did not mention the wrongs he had done – as if he was not part of the system and did not feel responsible for it. But was he really? Does the

1954. Borkowicz “was a man of a very high intellectual level. He was an unusual character, a charming man, and in addition he had an open outlook on many issues and things.” He created a favourable climate for ongoing discussions, often on previously forbidden topics, and provided “the first authentic information about the outside, capitalist world, as it was called then.” (K. Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach*, p. 400.)

⁴⁴ D. Desanti, *Polska... Początek wszystkiego*, “Zeszyty Historyczne” 1976, z. 35, p. 217.

⁴⁵ K. Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach*, p. 422.

⁴⁶ KP, Special Collections, Spuścizna..., Leonard Borkowicz’s notes, notebook VIII, 5 April 1983, p. 105.

fact that he did not “confess his sins” mean that he did not feel guilty about them or did not notice them? When he wrote about communism that it was “a total, total enslavement of people, not only in the sphere of politics and economy, but also the enslavement of minds through false and aggressive propaganda, censorship, self-censorship, the bureaucratisation of language itself, the primitive simplification of ideological discussions,”⁴⁷ was he not formulating an evaluation of himself in the system? After all, he too was subject to this primitive simplification and enslavement. Instead, he placed the responsibility for this state of affairs solely on himself.

All the blame for all my failures in life, for my painful ignorance, for my ignorance of the world and people—today, yes: today—for my clumsy speech, for my lack of education, I place solely and exclusively on myself. I lived according to the plan I had drawn up for myself.⁴⁸

At the same time, he had problems with the methodology of his self-evaluation and with systematising the issue of the worldview evolution he was undergoing.

At this moment I have found myself in the situation of searching, clarifying, understanding certain elements of my worldview. This has obviously been going on for quite a long time, many years in fact, but it has not and will not take on a systematic character. I finally parted with communism at the beginning of the 1970s and, fortunately, I did not and do not return to any of its varieties, variants or deviations. I doubted the possibility and advisability of other varieties of the socialist thought (if you consider [sic!] to include communism here, which is not terrible). My thoughts turn to the regions of liberal conservatism or conservative liberalism, but I do not find a future homeland for myself either in Great Britain, West Germany or France.⁴⁹

He often spoke of his inability to grasp or define his reflections and these, despite the separation, revolved again and again around the ideological choice he had made at the age of 15. Among his long-standing friends, with whom he maintained relations in the 1980s, such an attitude was assessed very critically and gave rise to disputes.⁵⁰ That is why, as time went by, he tried not to bring up this subject in company, and that is why he needed *Zapiski*

⁴⁷ K. Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach*, p. 461.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

⁴⁹ KB, Special Collections, Spuścizna..., Leonard Borkowicz's notes, notebook VIII, 16 March 1983, pp. 57-58.

⁵⁰ “Borkowicz's friend Walenty Titkow remembered ‘some meeting in the hot months of 1980, when there was a discussion among comrades about how things would go on in Poland and whether it was possible to reform the party and the system. Lusiek once bluntly replied:

so much. It would probably not be an exaggeration to say that deleting the sentence “In 1927 I treated myself to a huge bowl of shit, which I have been enjoying for over 50 years”⁵¹ was a form of courage.⁵² Even if (or perhaps especially that?) it was intended only for one reader—the author.

Katarzyna Rembacka

Leonard Borkowicz’s Ideological Choices and His Autobiographical Account of Communism

Abstract

From the age of fifteen Leonard Borkowicz was associated with the communist movement in Poland. He had the potentials to become a role model communist—he was a strong believer, he was devoted and he was loyal. However, as time passed, he became increasingly critical of both his ideology and his role in the system. The autobiographical materials left behind by Borkowicz, which primarily include the typescript of a never published book and his unpublished personal notes from the time of martial law, allow us to follow his ideological evolution. They also make it possible to face the questions: why did he become involved with the radical left movement? What changes did he undergo from ideological point of view? What did lead him to become a strict anti-communist? Did he feel responsible for the system he co-created and, if so, what was his way of expressing it?

Keywords: Leonard Borkowicz, biography, communists, ideology.

“Nothing will come out of this, capitalism must return,” with which he stunned the assembled friends.” (K. Rembacka, *Komunista na peryferiach*, p. 451.)

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵² For the sake of comparison, it is worth quoting the attitude of Józef Sigalin, who was disappointed with the party and its decisions during martial law. At the same time, drafting the outline of his planned memoirs, he noted: “The ideas which in my youth made me join the rebellion, the workers’ and progressive movement, I have remained and will remain faithful to.” Only a few days before his death he was to tell a visiting friend: “I feel like a man who, after forty years of marriage, has realised that he married a whore.” (A. Skalimowski, *Sigalin. Towarzysz odbudowy*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2018, p. 290.)