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The Polish Contribution to the Age of Enlightenment

Wkład Polski do wieku Oświecenia

Вклад Польши в эпоху Просвещения

Poland occupies a special position in the European Enlightenment. The ideas that revolutionized the society on the banks of the Seine in the middle of the eighteenth century penetrated in various ways to the banks of the Vistula, fertilizing and inspiring further the well-developed intellectual life of the country until they acquired full brilliance in the last thirty years of the century, the most tragic period in Poland's national existence.

The ideas characteristic of the French Enlightenment took shape under social and political conditions that differed completely from those existing in Poland, hence there can be no question either of imitation or of mechanical adaptation.

Generally speaking, the French Enlightenment was an ideology of the bourgeoisie while the Polish Enlightenment became the philosophy of the patriotically-minded gentry who gave certain concessions to the weak middle class. The growth of capitalism in France gave rise to a new, vigorous class which, fully aware of its strength, used the Enlightenment doctrines in its struggle for an unhampered economic development and participation in government. Moreover, thanks to the unifying policy of Louis XIV, France had already achieved national integration and, in contrast to Poland, had an absolute government based on a bureaucracy recruited from the ranks of the small gentry and bourgeoisie, with the complete exclusion of the nobility.

Poland, on the other hand, was a classical example of a disintegrated state where cliques of magnates, fighting one another, prevented the

formation of a strong central government. Anarchy, which was a constitutional ideal for the magnates in feudal Poland, met with the approval of absolute governments in the neighbouring countries: Russia, Austria and Prussia. In the last thirty years of the eighteenth century they brought about the dissolution of the Polish state as a result of three successive partitions.

As a result of the pauperization of towns and the serfdom of peasants in the Poland of the nobility and gentry, the main representatives of the Polish Enlightenment were those patriotically-minded groups of gentry who aimed at preserving the independence of the country by introducing social and political reforms.

In France the Enlightenment changed the structure of the society; in Poland it aroused patriotism with only small concessions on the part of the gentry to townspeople, and high-sounding rhetoric about justice for peasants.

All this made the ideas of the Polish Enlightenment distinct from those characteristic of the Enlightenment in France and affected methodological problems, natural law and economic ideas. In the Polish interpretation Cartesian rationalism and Newtonian analytical empiricism were deeply permeated by historicism. Natural laws proclaiming freedom, property and equality lost their individualist character in Polish theorists and were apprehended in their political and social aspects. On the other hand, physiocracy, which in other countries postulated complete economic freedom and maintained that only agricultural labour was productive, in Poland attributed productivity to other kinds of labour as well and, moreover, admitted state intervention.

The Polish system of government, based on a tradition going back to the end of the sixteenth century, differed from the system of other European states. Since that time its essential principle had been the idea of the "freedom and equality of the gentry", an idea which was successfully employed to fight against any attempt at strengthening central government. Owing to their insane fear of *absolutum dominium*, the gentry prevented any increase of the prestige of both the King and the Sejm (Polish parliament) since they imagined that a steady, strong central government must of necessity lead to an infringement upon their "golden freedom". In point of fact, this apotheosis of freedom enabled the gentry to acquire exceptional privileges which led to a complete exclusion of the burghers from government and to a reduction of the peasants to a state of virtual slavery. Nowhere outside Poland was the influence of the gentry on the government so powerful and nowhere did the gentry constitute such a high percentage of the

population, ranging in eighteenth century Poland from 8 to 10%, while in France it was between 1% and 2%.

Even the Polish Jesuits, in spite of the teaching of their order, submitted to pressure and, already at the beginning of the seventeenth century, opposed the idea of an absolute monarchy proclaiming the Catholic Church the best guardian of the Republic whose foundations rested on the idea of freedom and equality of the gentry. This "ideal of the state system" confirmed the disorder in the country and led to the rule of quarrelsome magnates.

Structurally Poland was a federation of provinces (voivodships). Since deputies, elected to the Sejm, received their instructions from provincial assemblies (Sejmiki), the Chamber of Deputies became a convocation of the delegates of various districts. Moreover, as the resolutions of the Chamber had to be passed unanimously, every deputy had a right to break up the proceedings and frustrate the Sejm by his single vote — "I do not allow it" (*liberum veto*). Even though, theoretically, the Sejm was endowed with the supreme power in the gentry's Polish Commonwealth (Rzeczypospolita), in practice it became completely paralyzed because — out of fear of a possible infringement upon "the golden liberty" — it was deprived of the right to set up any executive organs or committees. Besides, the Sejm could meet every two years for only six weeks. Current affairs were managed by the King but even his powers were limited as it was feared that he might impose absolute monarchy. The king of Poland, elected for his lifetime by all the gentry (*viritim*) had to court popularity if he wanted to leave the throne to his heir since it was held that the principle of inheritance would limit the freedom of the gentry. Moreover, the King of Poland could make decisions only after consulting the council of Senators and high officials who were appointed for life. And even though the King's counselors could not undertake anything without him, each of them could refuse his obedience if he thought that the monarch was acting against the law. The Sejm, on the other hand, had a right to revoke and annul any decision of the monarch.

The two highest magistratures — the Sejm and the King — blocked each other so that the country was left practically without any effective government. The ideal of government, which was the pride of feudal Poland, was pointedly expressed in the absurd statement that a country is strong by the weakness of its government, that "in anarchy lies Poland's strength". The Jesuit idea of Catholicism as a moral buckler of the Republic gave rise to an argument against religious tolerance.

Legally guaranteed anarchy stood in the way of any bolder decision of nationwide importance. Hence, in difficult moments, when Poland

was facing grave problems, their solution was attempted in an extra-legal way, by the formation of a confederacy. It was a special temporary system of government, adopted for times of general emergency. By forming a confederacy the gentry voluntarily and solemnly pledged to obey the officers of the confederacy so that its tasks could be carried out. Thus, apart from legal institutions, a confederacy Sejm was convoked, which passed resolutions by majority, and an efficient government was formed with the Marshal of the confederacy at its head. This extraordinary form of government was, depending on its objects, a beneficial or a harmful factor in Polish history.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, under the cover of the gentry's Polish Commonwealth, the rule of oligarchy became established in Poland. Polish magnates, thanks to their large estates, which resulted from the eastward expansion, found it possible to subject to themselves middle and small gentry. Without an official change of the system of government, and while retaining the name of a republic, Poland became in fact a federation of small states belonging to individual magnates. The owners — "little kings" — controlled provincial councils, possessed their own *clientele* and armies, administered and exercised jurisdiction in their regions and even pursued separate foreign policies. In the time of the republic the government was conducted by the gentry's Chamber of Deputies, by the King and by the aristocracy's Senate; during the rule of the magnates' oligarchy the state was steered by the divided Senate — the organ of the great feudal lords.

The weakness of the central government resulted, in the provinces, in the absolute rule of the magnates, by which different regions of the country became small independent states. Each magnate maintained his near-royal court: the Radziwill family at Nieśwież, the Potockis at Tulczyn, the Branickis at Białystok, the Sieniawskis at Sieniawa, the Czartoryskis at Puławy. Those courts were crowded with the gentry, who, for personal profit, danced attendance on the lords.

The Jesuits, having turned Poland into a stronghold of Catholicism, exercised a decisive influence on the course of changes in government and society. Their monopoly in education allowed them to impose on the gentry their way of thinking and their outlook. In order to protect the youth against disbelief and heresy the Jesuits denied them approach to real knowledge which at that time was rapidly spreading in Western countries. Jesuit education skilfully combined religious dogmas with an admiration for the freedom of the gentry, inculcated into the young people a feeling of contempt for all those who did not possess "the jewel of the gentry" and taught them the art of abject servility towards the magnates. Grandiloquence was the main outcome of this education. The

gentry was incapable of independent thinking but could deliver pompous orations on the subject of freedom and equality as well as panegyric praises of the magnates.

The picture of the Polish society of that time is painted in dark colours. The gentry, crowding the magnates' court in pursuit of careers, retained very little of their dignity. The peasants, reduced to a state of virtual slavery, lost their sense of humanity. The burghers lingered on in declining towns, which had no political or economic importance.

In the second half of the seventeenth century Poland ceased to be a granary for the Netherlands, England, Spain and even Italy. The export of grain, which was rafted along the Vistula to Gdańsk, was reduced to less than one half of that of the previous century. Western Europe gained access to Muscovy grain via the White Sea and the Arkhangelsk harbour began to compete successfully with Gdańsk.

Poland fell a prey to the magnates who, having overpowered the king, gained control of the Diet and legislation.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century neighbouring countries had vigorous governments, efficient administrations, effective laws and modernized armies supporting their foreign policy, while Poland, surrounded by all those centralized powers and disrupted by social and economic contradictions, was drowning in anarchy and facing dissolution. The position of Poland in comparison with her neighbours is best characterized by figures denoting the size of the army. In the years 1717—1764 the Polish army consisted of 12—16,000 soldiers, while Russia and Austria had 300,000 soldiers each and the Prussian corps numbered 200,000.

Our country appeared to the Encyclopaedists a country of direct opposites. "Poland such as she is now in the moral and physical sense," — we read in the *Encyclopaedia* — "embraces sharp contrasts combining the dignity of the king with the name of a republic, laws with feudal anarchy, deformed features of the Roman republic with Gothic barbarity, abundance with poverty.

Nature endowed this country with everything that is necessary to live, [...] yet Europe knows no people that would be poorer; Poland's chief source of income is the sale of her throne. [...] The greatest degree of dependence and an excess of freedom seem to compete with each other in bringing the country to ruin. The nobility and the gentry can do whatever they will, the core of the nation groans in subjection."¹

Those changes in the system of government which took place in Poland

¹ Ch. de Jaucourt: *Polska, historia i rząd, Historia i prawo polityczne* [in:] *Encyklopedia albo słownik rozmowny nauk, sztuk i rzemiosł*, translated by E. Rządowska, Wrocław 1952, pp. 206—207.

in the middle of the seventeenth century displayed their disastrous effects in full in the eighteenth century and made thinking people realize the need for reforms.

In the history of Polish political thought before the age of Enlightenment there can be discerned two main streams. The first, which may be called didactic and moralizing, made the ethical attitude of the nation, i.e. the gentry, the primary condition of reform, with virtually no change in the system of government. The second, the so-called institutional and legal trend, postulated essential changes in the structure of the system of government as a necessary condition of the country's cure. It is quite obvious that a deeply-rooted belief in the perfection of the system of government of the gentry's Polish Commonwealth for a long time curbed any criticism of political institutions. Hence a moralizing tone prevailed in the political doctrines of the seventeenth century. Only in the eighteenth century, when the complete dissolution of government became evident, was the necessity of reconstructing politico-legal institutions suggested.

* * *

The ideas belonging to the didactic and moralizing trend were not distinguished by any particular originality, since, in general, they exalted the prevailing system and ascribed all the deficiencies and weaknesses of the state to the impairment or lack of civic virtues. Some views were so extreme that they acknowledged moral values as the only decisive factor in the strength of the government, independently of its form. A typical instance of such views was presented in a handbook of civic education for the gentry, published in 1632 and entitled *Civis bonus*, whose author, a professor at Cracow University, Kasper Siemek, attempted to find justification for the gentry's ideas of golden freedom in the wisdom of the ancients. Siemek's view of the gentry as an ethical unit is the most startling. He thought that, thanks to tradition, the gentry, taken as a whole, possessed a great moral strength, which on one hand protected it against making false decisions, while on the other prevented the revelation of negative features of its individual members.

Among other seventeenth-century thinkers Łukasz Opaliński and Stanisław Kożuchowski were representatives of moralizing doctrines.*

The former published in 1641 a treatise entitled *A Colloquy of a Parson with a Country Gentleman or a Discourse on the Present Resolution of the Republic Concerning the Manner of Gathering the National*

* W. Czaplński: *O Polsce siedemnastowiecznej, Problemy i sprawy*, Warszawa 1966, pp. 63—100, 218—241.

Assembly. The characters conducting the dialogue raise arguments for and against the strengthening of the king's power but the treatise concludes with the statement that the amendment of morals is the best way to strengthen the state. "If your forefathers' ancient decency in public service returns," writes Opaliński, "if the true love of liberty and honest devotion to common good prevail in your hearts, you will soon see your country established in happiness."³

Stanisław Kożuchowski was the author of a pamphlet, published in 1661 and entitled *Veritas quatuor causis demonstrata calamitatum Regni Poloniae*, where he presented the causes of the evil in the state of Poland, reducing all of them to deficiencies of social and ethical character. Thus the foremost evil which according to the writer — consists in a mutual lack of trust between the ruler and the gentry, will disappear if the latter subordinate their private interests to the public good. Another condition of the amendment of the state system is a proper selection of officials who should be distinguished by wisdom, courage, usefulness and an ability to keep secrets. He concludes his treaty with a moralizing warning: "When a storm is raging, when the ship of public security is sinking, then we shall not preserve her by throwing the common treasure overboard; nay, only after private goods have been thrown away, can the public affairs sail on in security and be saved. There is none among us who would lack good will, there is none who would not denounce evil, all we need is action and forswearing wrong conduct."⁴

In the eighteenth century a moralizing tone is noticeable in J. J. Rousseau's book intended for Poland. He wrote it in 1770, at the suggestion of Michał Wielhorski, who was the Paris representative of the Confederacy of Bar. Rousseau's book, entitled *Some Remarks on the Government of Poland*, also approves in general of the traditional institutions and shifts the centre of gravity to educational problems. "It is indeed education that ought to impose the national form on the human soul and guide human opinions and affections in such a way that men would be patriotic from inclination, from passion, from necessity. Opening his eyes a child should behold his mother country and continue to see her alone till his death. Such love forms his being; he sees only his mother country and lives only for his mother country. When he is alone, he is nothing [..]." This is why "when loving their country, citizens will serve it devoutly and with all their hearts. Where such love prevails,

³ Ł. Opaliński: *Wybór pism*, Edited by S. Grzeszczuk, Wrocław 1959, pp. 121, 124.

⁴ Quoted after Czaplinski: *op. cit.*, p. 238.

even bad laws can make good citizens and only with good citizens can the state flourish and be powerful." ⁵

At the same time the advocates of the reform of the Polish system of government referred to Confucian philosophy, which had been the object of great interest in Western Europe since the end of the seventeenth century. The Chinese philosopher, praising a system where wise mandarins rule over a highly moral society, was supposed to justify the conception of a state which, notwithstanding its political structure, enjoys political and economic strength thanks entirely to the virtues of the rulers and the ruled. In the year 1785 Confucius' doctrine even became a subject of lectures at Cracow University. ⁶

Ideas similar to those of the so-called legal and institutional trend appeared at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when people began to realize that the prevailing system of government had created convenient conditions for neighbouring countries to influence Polish domestic policy, which could become "a deadly blow against the supreme right of sovereignty and independence."

This trend was, generally speaking, introduced by two writers, Stanisław Karwicki and Stanisław Leszczyński. And even though both of them still indulged in moralizing rhetoric, they shared the idea that the chief weakness of Poland lay in the structure of her system of government.

Karwicki exposed his views in a treatise published in 1709 *De ordinanda Republica seu de corrigendis defectibus in statu Reipublicae Poloniae*. Stanisław Leszczyński, after his unfortunate election to the Polish throne and his forced abdication, presented his reflections on the system of the Republic in an anonymous book, published in 1733 under the title *A Free Voice for the Protection of Freedom*, which some years later appeared in French as *La voix libre du citoyen*.

Neither Karwicki nor Leszczyński questioned the fundamental principles of the Republic but at the same time both of them perceived that the main problem consisted in an opposition between the freedom of the gentry and the power of the king. They agreed, too, that the evil resulting from absolute monarchy could not be opposed to unlimited freedom paralysing any action of state authorities.

Though they were both convinced that the antagonism between the monarch and the liberty of the gentry was the chief source of the weakness of the Polish system of government, yet they differed sub-

⁵ J. J. Rousseau: *Uwagi o rządzie polskim* [in:] J. J. Rousseau: *Umowa społeczna oraz Uwagi o rządzie polskim...*, Warszawa 1966, pp. 201—202, 195.

⁶ Concerning the popularity of Confucius' philosophy in Poland see J. Reychman: *Orient w kulturze polskiego oświecenia*, Wrocław 1964, pp. 278—282.

stantially in their views concerning the possible solution of the problem. Karwicki represents a rather legalistic point of view, while Leszczyński's approach is institutional.⁷ In Karwicki's opinion liberty maintained within the limits of legal order strengthens the gentry's republic, hence the *liberum veto* must be used in conjunction with the law and is then legally justified, while a wilful act of breaking the session of the seym should be punished by special courts. Further, according to Karwicki, a representative who has recourse to the *liberum veto* should first obtain the consent of all the representatives of the regional Diet seymik who has elected him.

In order to rid the gentry's democracy of anarchy Karwicki demanded that the highest organ of government in the Republic — the seym — should be convoked annually, and that it should become a *concilium perpetuum* which would make possible the solving of all current problems and the supervision of the realization of its resolutions. In the system proposed by Karwicki a session of the Diet seym could not be interrupted before it came to the end of the agenda, and for this reason the *veto* of a single representative could refer only to one particular matter but it could on no account cause the termination or the postponement of the session. Karwicki attempted to remove the conflict between individual liberty and the power of the monarch by limiting the privileges of the gentry; thus achieving the efficient functioning of the highest organ of government in the Republic, which the diet remained in his system.

Stanisław Leszczyński's remarks on the system of government in Poland show that the author viewed the problems of his country from a broader perspective. He deplored the social situation of the Polish peasant who, in comparison with the peasant of Western Europe, lived in humiliating dependence, which killed enterprise and the will to work. Leszczyński also thought that the decline of towns and the indignities suffered by town populations did great harm to the country. "The mob," he wrote, "are nothing other in the state than its legs or rather the base on which the Republic is constructed, on which it rests and which carries its burdens. If this base be of clay, then the whole weight resting on it will collapse."⁸

For all his apt remarks concerning social conditions in Poland, Leszczyński resembled Karwicki in his conviction that the conflict between

⁷ The two doctrines were compared by H. Olszewski: *Doktryny prawno-ustrojowe czasów saskich (1697—1740)*, Warszawa 1961, p. 96 et. sqq. 262 et sqq.

⁸ S. Leszczyński: *Głos wolny, wolność ubezpieczający* [in:] J. Lechicka: *Rola dziejowa Stanisława Leszczyńskiego oraz wybór z jego pism*, Roczniki Tow. Nauk. w Toruniu, R. LIV, 1945, Toruń 1951, p. 66.

individual freedom and the power of the king was the main problem of the country. However, the way in which he proposed to solve the problem is bolder and more original. Accepting the Polish system of government together with the *liberum veto* he was yet able to present an entirely new conception which was closest to the idea of parliamentary monarchy. Leszczyński suggested the separation of the legislative and the executive authorities but indicated that the latter should be derived from the former. Performing his function the monarch should co-operate with the ministers who are responsible before the seym. The executive functions (*ius exequiendi*) are concentrated in the hands of colleges each of which has a proper minister as its chairman, who is elected by the seym for a period of six years. Finally, the highest organ — the seym — holds the legislative power and at the same time supervises the other organs.

Leszczyński realized that the efficacy of the reform would depend on the degree to which the current laws were observed. "Let us consider", he wrote, "that as we are legislators by privilege of liberty, we lose this position when the laws are not in execution and they cannot be that if anarchy prevails."⁹

The most representative thinker of the institutional and legal trend was Stanisław Konarski. The works of this well-educated Piarist, who completed his studies in Rome and in Paris, were written in the years before the first partition of Poland. In 1761 there appeared the first volume of his monumental work *Of an Effective Manner of Debate*, and the other three volumes of it were published in the next two years. Konarski already had major achievements as a writer and a teacher to his name. His position as a writer was assured above all by the multi-volume edition of sources, *Volumina legum*, in which he had described the historical development of Polish laws and Polish institutions. The first volume, which appeared in 1732, was soon followed by others; and by 1739 the edition had reached its sixth and final volume. The continuation of this publication almost up to the present day shows its great importance.¹⁰

As Konarski was aware of the changes that political and legal institutions had undergone in the course of history and as he also appreciated the importance of these institutions for the State, he became fully convinced of the decisive role of law in any system of government. "In every country," he declared, "even if the laws be the best and most

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁰ B. Suchocholski: *Stanisław Konarski [in:] Z dziejów polskiej myśli filozoficznej i społecznej*, Vol. II: *Wiek XVIII — Oświecenie*, Warszawa 1956, pp. 75—76

suitable for their time, yet — being human — they will of necessity undergo a constant change, and at one time they could have saved the country but at another they may be its doom.”¹¹

Konarski not only viewed social events in their historical perspective but also judged them from the standpoint of common sense. He was sure that a true understanding of social phenomena and a practical solution of problems could be arrived at not by scholastic speculation but by the use of a "thinking mind." This rationalistic approach made him revise the syllabuses of Piarist schools and introduce, beside the traditionally-taught subjects such as theology and rhetoric, mathematics, science and history so that pupils would acquire some practical knowledge of the reality in which they were living and would learn the art of "proper thinking."

The reform of the Piarist schools, a number of writings on the subject of teaching and also the establishment in 1741 of the Collegium Nobilium, a good school, though one for the élite, placed Konarski among the most eminent teachers. Koliątaj was to write about him "that he was the first to observe the damages wrought by the neglect of the mother tongue and by poor taste in literature, that he was the first to see how far Poland lagged behind other European nations in arts and sciences, how old branches of knowledge were neglected in the country and new ones, which time had brought or perfected, were not introduced or even known; and he tried to mend it all in his own new manner."¹²

Konarski wanted the new school to teach the youth a critical way of thinking and to help them in rousing the gentry from inertness and unreasonable admiration of the existing chaos.

After more than ten years of intensive work on school reform Konarski announced his political credo in the work *Of the Effective Manner of Debate*. He boldly attacked in it the foundations of the state organization pointing out that the worst evil was inherent in the defective form of power which fostered the wrong conception of liberty for the gentry and of *liberum veto*. In his opinion it was not the demoralization of individuals that brought doom to the state but the utopian belief in unanimity, since the hypocritical cry about democracy only concealed the prevailing anarchical individualism. Experience derived from history and plain common sense told Konarski that Polish anarchy was the result of defective state organization — "the wrong form of counsel," just as the wealth and power of other countries resulted from well-

¹¹ S. Konarski: *List pewnego Polaka do JW. Duranda* [in:] *Wybór pism politycznych*, Edited by W. Konopczyński, Kraków p. 307.

¹² H. Koliątaj: *Stan oświecenia w Polsce w ostatnich latach panowania Augusta III (1750—1764)*, Edited by J. Hulewicz, Wrocław 1953, p. 16.

-organized government. For this reason he demanded first of all, that the principle of majority decision be introduced.

Konarski's views caused indignation in the gentry and the magnates inside the country, while outside they met with objections from the foreign powers which attacked every trace of thought that might lead to the strengthening of the Polish State.¹³

Criticizing the *liberum veto* Konarski simultaneously explained his theoretical point of view which ran counter to the traditional conception that the power of State has its sole source in the ethical conduct of its citizens and is independent of the form of its government or the adequacy of its laws. He rejected the prevailing view that improvement of morals can cure all symptoms of evil and of political weakness even though the fundamental principles of government remain unchanged. He opposed to this didactic and moralistic concept his own legal and institutional theory. He argued that properly organized political and legal institutions impose social discipline. They also guarantee a rational order which makes possible economic and cultural growth and, above all, discriminates among citizens, directing the finest and worthiest individuals to the service of the country. For Konarski assumed that human nature is the same even though individuals differ from one another. He attached such great importance to institutions because he believed that owing to them the evil and selfish tendencies of human beings conform to the existing order and people are forced to act in accordance with the general interest. "Once we have got rid of the appalling anarchy and disorder, then shall we also get rid of much evil, dishonour, wickedness and sin infecting the human community. Hence we repeat over and over again that it is necessary to change the manner of counsel and not the people who have always been, and will be, of the same nature, always good and bad, some good, others bad." And so "when this Republic is better governed, then will it be clearly perceived that there are far more good and honest people in it and virtuous citizens than there are wicked ones, so that the decent people might gain courage and be strengthened in spirit."¹⁴

The theoretical discussion is Konarski's truly original contribution, while what he wrote about the specific form of government is clearly modelled on the English parliamentary monarchy.

There are a number of things which can be criticized in Konarski's doctrine: he never mentioned the problem of serfdom, nor did he deal

¹³ W. Konopczyński: *Polscy pisarze polityczni XVIII wieku (do Sejmu Czteroletniego)*, Warszawa 1966, p. 174.

¹⁴ S. Konarski: *O skutecznym rad sposobie*, Vol. III, Warszawa 1923, pp. 251, 252, 237, 238.

with the degraded position of the townsfolk ; he was against religious toleration and opposed the idea of granting equal rights to dissenters ; he established the Collegium Nobilium for sons of the aristocracy. But to be fair, one ought to remember that owing to his knowledge, independent judgement and his practical activity he makes a bright page among the many dark ones in the Polish history of those times.

Konarski died in 1773 at the time when Russia, Austria and Prussia had already made the first partition of Poland, an act which Poland was helpless to prevent and to which the European powers were coldly indifferent.

This lawless act of violence, done in an age which called itself the Age of Enlightenment, shook the whole thinking community of Poland. People came to their senses. The indignity of the partition made it imperative to set law and order against anarchy to save the motherland whose very existence was threatened. A number of efficient measures were taken : the treasury was put in order and so was the administration ; in towns, committees were formed which were to protect the townspeople from the abuses of the gentry and the heads of the districts (*starostowie*). Peace and order ensured a flourishing economy and agriculture became more productive ; factories and mines were founded, banking and commerce increased in towns, and the Black Sea Company was formed which shipped corn to the West in its own vessels. All this economic activity revealed the tendency of feudalism to adapt itself to the capitalist economy whose strength was steadily increasing. Unfortunately this development was hampered by the feudal superstructure. The mass of the gentry insisted on keeping the peasants in serfdom, so much so that in 1780 the seym rejected without any discussion the project of a legal code prepared by Chancellor Andrzej Zamoyski only because it reduced the peasants' burdens in a few minor points.

It was not easy to pull the country out of political anarchy, ignorance and backwardness. But the increased economic activity helped the reformers. The patriotic movement merged with the economic interests of the gentry and the townspeople, both of which were heading towards capitalism. Against the disintegrating tendencies of the oligarchy was set the idea of one State — an idea that appealed to national pride and at the same time made possible the economic and cultural development of the country. But the trouble was that the Polish townspeople did not constitute a separate force aware of its objectives. It was owing to this weakness of the bourgeoisie that the advocates of progress, who called themselves the patriotic camp, were led by the moderately wealthy and well-educated gentry against the aristocratic oligarchy.

The Polish bourgeois did not desire to overthrow the Republic of the

nobility ; he merely wanted to transform it so as to obtain the legal protection of his rights. As a result the Polish Enlightenment, so vehement in its criticism of feudalism, was very cautious when it came to the formulation of constructive programme. Half-hearted projects and timid reforms paved the way for capitalism, which, however, could hardly flourish in Poland, on account of the serfdom of the peasants and the underprivileged position of the townspeople.

Although the downfall of the State could not be prevented and Poland ceased to exist in the last decade of the eighteenth century, yet the intellectual, political and cultural effort that the nation made in those difficult years was considerable indeed. An intellectual rebirth was taking place. Traditional concepts, which had brought about the ruin of the State, were rejected. Criticism was levelled against the social structure, the world-view and the system of values carefully maintained by the Jesuit schools.

The first partition of Poland made the country aware that a reform of the State could not be effected merely by a reorganization of the system of government, let alone by moralizing rhetoric. People came to realize that what was needed was a basic social reform accompanied by a radical change of attitudes, a change that would penetrate to wide circles of gentry and townspeople.

Signs of intellectual animation became more noticeable after the accession of Stanislaus August Poniatowski to the Polish throne in 1764. The king's interest in arts and sciences helped to establish the theatre with its own company of actors ; owing to his interest, there also sprang up political and literary periodicals as well as discussion clubs. In 1773 Joseph Zaluski offered his vast collection of books for public use. The Committee of National Education, formed in the same year, was of crucial importance for Poland, as this was the highest authority in education, both in legislation and in the execution of new laws. The Committee imposed a new system of teaching which broke with the conception — maintained until then — that the knowledge of Latin was the main aim of education, while sciences and mathematics were a mark of libertinism and heresy.

After a period of criticism the time was ripe for the country to develop a new concept of society and system of government. This was more important that in 1788 the National Assembly took up the problem of reform and completed its task with the passing of the Constitution of the 3rd of May 1791.

The aims and desires of the men connected with the reform movements are reflected best and most clearly in the writings of Hugo Kollątaj and Stanislaus Staszic. These two men are the ideological leaders

of the Polish Enlightenment which acquired its own special character from them.

Hugo Kołłątaj, who was the chief political leader of the Polish Enlightenment, also formulated its ideology. Political activity was his element, hence his writings not infrequently reveal signs of haste caused by the situation of those difficult times. But he never echoed other people's ideas thoughtlessly; on the contrary, the originality of his mind and his great realism gave him a critical attitude to both the current events and the main theories of his time.

Kołłątaj had a rare sense of the changeability of events and this sense made him change his tactics, a thing that his enemies often criticized. "Political works," he wrote "have their own incessant course, and their chain does not depend on us. There are as many mutually connected links as there are people and needs and passions among those people, as many as there are nations and changes in government and many unforeseen circumstances besides, and these links make up a chain of political works, they make men ally with some and turn against others, and they likewise make nations and governments ally with some and turn against others. Nothing can maintain for long the same weight, the same measure, the same number."¹⁵ In spite of his changeable tactics and occasional opportunistic moves Kołłątaj was motivated mostly by his profound love of Poland, which he wanted to lead out of feudal backwardness toward knowledge and social progress.

In 1776, at the age of twenty-six, he associated himself with the Committee for National Education and soon became one of the main architects of the educational reform undertaken by it. Though in holy orders himself, he defended in Rome the idea of secular education in Poland. Between 1777 and 1783 he carried out a general reform of the University of Cracow making from it a centre of secular and national education. Thanks to this reform the university, called the Chief Royal School, became the leading educational institution in a uniform school system, in accordance with the intensions of the Committee of National Education.

When the whole country joined in the wide discussion of government reform and when a special seym (later called the Four-year Seym) was convoked, Kołłątaj passed from educational affairs to politics. He opened this second period of his life in 1788 with the publication of his famous work *A Few Letters to Stanislaus Małachowski by an Anonymous Writer*. In it he outlined the programme of the Polish patriotic party and expressed the aspirations of all those who had declared war on the old

¹⁵ H. Kołłątaj: *Listy Anonima i Prawo polityczne narodu polskiego*, Vol. II, Warszawa 1954, p. 25.

order to establish in its place a new system of government that would be the result of a compromise between the gentry and the townspeople. As leader of the progressive party in the Sejm he edited the text of the Constitution of the 3rd of May and at the same time won support for it outside the parliament, in short — he was the mind and heart of the changes. When the reactionaries annihilated the work of the Four-year Sejm, Kołłątaj went abroad for a short time, but having received news of the Kościuszko uprising he hastened back to Poland and took his place at the side of the General. With the fall of the uprising and the loss of national independence his political activity came to an end. After several years in prison, where he was put by the Austrian government, Kołłątaj found himself outside political life. There now came for him a time of contemplation. It was during this period that he wrote his main works: *Historical Principles of the Origin of Humanity. A Critical Analysis*; *The Physical and Moral Order*; and *The State of Education in Poland*. He wrote about that period of his life: "I withdrew so far from the world and its greatness, I buried myself in such a remote corner and lived so poorly that hatred found nothing to envy me, and vengeance and greed had nothing to wrest from me. In this recess I divided the passing hours between my books and my gout."¹⁶

These three periods of Kołłątaj's life, distinguished according to the type of his activity will serve as a background against which his ideas will be presented. And so the first to be discussed will be Kołłątaj's opinions on educational matters, scattered in his different writings; next his attempts to solve social problems and problems of State organization in which he was absorbed in the period of his lively political activity; finally, his theoretical presentation of the problems that had an essential significance for the understanding of the whole doctrine.

E d u c a t i o n. Kołłątaj was definitely opposed to all teaching which imparted to pupils knowledge that was rooted in religious dogma. He maintained that "dogmatic teaching introduced the most distasteful and the most repulsive procedures [...] having subjected reason to blind obedience."¹⁷ Thus he tried to create a new school which would teach the truth about a world that became known gradually, by means of experiment and rational analysis. He wanted "our senses to be the guide of our reason so that there would be no room for imagination."¹⁸

To theology he left the domain of problems inaccessible — as he

¹⁶ Quoted after K. Opalek: „Dociekania filozoficzne Hugona Kołłątaja” [introduction to:] H. Kołłątaj: *Porządek fizyczno-moralny oraz Pomysły do dzieła Porządek fizyczno-moralny*, Warszawa 1955, p. VIII.

¹⁷ Kołłątaj: *Porządek fizyczno-moralny...*, p. 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

thought — to scientific investigation. On the other hand, philosophy was for him "the fruit of the finest ripeness of human reason." He thought that "the higher the degree of perfection that philosophy achieves, the less it is preoccupied with guesswork about the origins of the world and is content to discover the order that governs this world — such as it is — without bothering about how it started." ¹⁹

It was with such an idea of education that Kołłątaj started, at the request of the Educational Committee, to reorganize Cracow University, which he divided into two colleges: moral and scientific. The former comprised the faculties of theology, law and literature; the latter the faculty of physics, chemistry and other sciences, such as mathematics, astronomy and medicine. After its reform Cracow University was to supervise — like the University of Vilna — the lower departmental schools which, in their turn, were to supervise the elementary schools.

Aware that the traditional school was entirely divorced from practical life Kołłątaj tried hard to make the new programme, prepared and introduced by the Educational Committee, fill this gap between school and practical life. "It is both in this country and in all others," he wrote, "that the government and the social life have always had a quarrel with schools and education, so much so that everything implanted in youthful hearts and minds at school, had to be removed and eradicated later in order to inculcate new maxims and a new way of living." ²⁰ At the same time Kołłątaj wanted the new education to cover the whole society, for, living in the age of Voltaire, he was convinced that more than anything else "education gives a distinctive character to each nation." ²¹ For this reason he opposed of the idea of education for an élite and proposed instead his own concept of general education. "It is the true misery of man," he wrote, "not to have a good education and it will always be the true misfortune of a free nation to have unequal education for the 'rich' and 'poor'." ²²

Politics. The reform of education carried out by the Educational Committee bore fruit, for the young men leaving the reformed schools and beginning adult life became advocates of a political and social reform in the country. The political thought of Kołłątaj, who rejected the narrow idea that the gentry were the whole nation, appealed to them greatly. Kołłątaj regarded as the nation "the millions of people speaking

¹⁹ H. Kołłątaj: *Rozbiór krytyczny zasad historii o początkach rodu ludzkiego*, Edited by F. Kojśiewicz, Vol. III, Kraków 1842, pp. 352, 369.

²⁰ Kołłątaj: *Stan oświecenia w Polsce...*, pp. 136—137.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²² Kołłątaj: *Listy Anonima...*, Vol. II. p. 86.

Polish,"²³ the people who, being free, inhabit the Polish land and possess in common the distinctive features called "the national genius."²⁴ Further, the elements integrating the nation were: religion, education, military virtues and the person of the monarch.

According to Kołłątaj a man is a free citizen if he can freely decide about his own person and his property. But "no country can be free where man is a slave."²⁵ Only "that country can truly call itself a nation which uses the same language and whose language suffices for the education, the law and the government."²⁶ On the other hand, features of character such as valour, discipline, readiness for sacrifice, courage, all of which he included in the term "national genius" may influence the degree of unity, depending on the kind of education.²⁷ For this reason a special position in the state belongs to those occupations which strengthen social ties through education, religion and military service "so that the nation could retain its liberties for ever and ever."²⁸ The monarch likewise has an integrating function as "the head of the nation, the father of the homeland and the visible representative of the country's majesty."²⁹

Kołłątaj distinguished three groups of people within the nation. The first is that of property owners, that is the gentry and the rich townspeople owning land, buildings, etc. They form two separate estates: that of the landed gentry and that of the townspeople but together they rule the State because they have the "majesty of the government of the country" in their hands.

The compromise between the gentry and the townspeople is realized only within the first group through their elected representatives who meet for debates either jointly or in separate chambers. "Dividing the rule of the nation between the legislative and the executive branch they make it common for both estates [...] thus only two estates will make up the government of the republic of which the former is the landed estate and the latter — that of the townspeople."³⁰

The second group of the population is made up of teachers, priests and the military, who, owing to the general importance of their respective occupations, have the same privileges as property owners even though they do not participate in government. It is occupation, then, which is

²³ Kołłątaj: *Stan oświecenia w Polsce...*, p. 9.

²⁴ Kołłątaj: *Listy Anonima...*, Vol. I, pp. 209—214.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 167.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 370.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 209—214.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 207.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 220.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 207, 219.

the criterion of classification in the case of the three estates of which Kołłątaj says that they are the "useful or rather beneficent estates because in so much as they do their duty they make the government strong and stable."³¹

Lastly, the third group comprises all the rest of the population not organized into estates. These people enjoy "the freedom both of person and of hands" and remain under the protection of the law of the land: they can freely enter into contracts by which they can become dependent, preserving, however, "complete equality in the contract."³² People who do not belong to any of the estates "shall have no share in the government of the country, but with their personal and movable property fully assured they will be free under the protection of the laws of the country."³³

The social structure as it is outlined above reveals a fusion of feudal and capitalistic elements; the division into estates derives from feudalism, while the sanctioning of private property and freedom to enter into contracts belong to capitalism.

Kołłątaj's aim was to adapt the feudal state system to the changes caused by the developing capitalist economy. This is why he subordinated to the idea of the compromise between the gentry and the townspeople both the social structure that he proposed and the new political system whose stability and unchanging character were to guarantee the principal laws expressing through their content the reconciliation of the townspeople with the gentry, which would retain its superior position.

Kołłątaj believed that an educated and patriotic Sejm (diet) "will raise itself to the first step of dignity by means of a mild revolution and, having perfected the form of free government, will write such laws, without any recourse to terror or coercion, which would be an example for other nations [...]"³⁴

Theory. In the sphere of theoretical problems those of Kołłątaj's views which have essential significance concern the relationship between man and the external world, for Kołłątaj's original economic concepts are deduced from this relationship. According to him man's existence depends on the satisfaction of various needs. They keep us alive, they also guarantee security and a suitable living standard, they assure the preservation of the human species and cause mutual dependence. On the one hand Nature supplies things necessary for the satisfaction of our needs, on the other she gives man suitable physical and mental

³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 207.

³² Kołłątaj: *Porządek fizyczno-moralny...*, p. 126.

³³ Kołłątaj: *Listy Anonima...*, Vol. II, p. 222.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 254.

powers which enable him to satisfy those needs. "Thus we come to see . . . that these needs cannot be satisfied merely by getting and using things that surround us, that we could not use them if we did not possess powers and abilities proper for it." ³⁵

Thus because man exercises his energy, he had an innate right to take possession of the objects of the surrounding world. In this way, the work that he performs to get the necessary things starts private property, this being his right to possess these things. "From which it becomes clear," writes Kołłątaj, "that is our powers and the work performed by them is the property with which we come into this world, then the expenditure of this original property gives us an obvious right to the ownership of things which we have acquired at their cost [. . .]" ³⁶

Fearing the radical consequences of this economic theory which declared that work is "the truest source of the good and honest title of ownership" Kołłątaj decided to make a concession to the defenders of feudalism. For it could be logically deduced from his thesis that peasants had a right to possess the land which they were tilling. To avoid such a conclusion he maintains that the title of the ownership of land is acquired by a threefold investment: a) by making it suitable for cultivation, b) by the accumulation of the means of production, c) by cultivating the land.³⁷ Owing to this distinction he could justify the dependence of peasants on landowners expressing at the same time his opinion that the law should "safeguard the farmer's personal freedom and the landowner's property right. The former should be the master of his own hands, because this is what nature requires, the latter should be the owner of the land because land ownership is under the protection of the same natural law as personal property." ³⁸

Kołłątaj attached great importance to work. This is because work — according to him — not only justifies the right to property, but — contrary to the teaching of physiocrats prevailing at that time — also creates new value. The advocates of physiocracy maintained that the soil is the only "source of wealth" and so farmers are the only productive group in society. Unlike them Kołłątaj thought that "pure income is not produced only by the soil" but that, outside agriculture human hands create new riches. Thus, in contrast to the physiocrats 1) he argued that any work is the source of material wealth; 2) he assumed that the division of labour increases productivity of a country, which was proved, according to him, by the steady increase of wealth in Holland where it was the

³⁵ Kołłątaj: *Porządek fizyczno-moralny...*, p. 55.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 71—72.

³⁸ Kołłątaj: *Listy Anonima...*, Vol. I, p. 281.

result of crafts and trade ; 3) he also took into account the level of consumption which, beside the work put in, influences the value of the goods manufactured.³⁹

Taken as a whole Kołłątaj's economic thought shows the difficult process of the growth, within feudalism, of a new capitalist economy and the accompanying formation of bourgeois society.

Stanislaus Staszic differs from Kołłątaj although they both fought against feudalism, and opposed to it the state system that grew out of a compromise between the gentry and the bourgeoisie. They were also the chief leaders of the Polish Enlightenment and though they wore clerical clothes, they warmly advocated rationalism which clashed with the doctrine of the church. Unlike Kołłątaj, however, Staszic was a man standing somewhat aloof from politics, though he influenced the course of events considerably by his writings and his authority. He was the very type of scientific researcher who reaches theoretical generalizations slowly, without excitement and without hurry. This is how he characterized his main treatise: "The result of this work of mine, conducted incessantly for forty years, is the book [...] *The Human Kind*."⁴⁰

Neither his orders nor the thorough education that he had received in German and French universities could save Staszic from the discrimination with which he met constantly in feudal Poland as a son of a townsman. The merits of his father and of his grandfather, who in turn had had the dignity of the Mayor of Piła for decades, counted for nothing. There was a sound of bitterness in his words when he said: "I was born from honest and virtuous parents, the son of a father [...] who sacrificed so much for his country, yet I had to be ashamed of my birth everywhere, everywhere I found it surrounded by shame, devoid of respect, rejected from dignity and from land."⁴¹

In 1781 the twenty-six-year old Staszic received the post of a tutor at the court of Andrzej Zamoyski. He remained there for more than a decade surrounded by books from the well-stocked library of Zamość which was at that time an important centre of the aristocratic thought directed towards reform. During the times of the Duchy of Warsaw and afterwards of the Polish Kingdom formed at the Congress of Vienna Staszic occupied himself with educational affairs and with the development of crafts and industry, but, above all he concentrated his efforts on the organization and modernization of science in Poland. In 1808 he

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 62 *et. sqq.*

⁴⁰ S. Staszic: *Krótki rys życia mego* [in:] *Pisma filozoficzne i społeczne*, Vol. I, Warszawa 1954, p. 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 5.

became president of the Society for Promoting Sciences and Arts and remained at the head of this principal scientific institution for eighteen years until his death in 1826.

Staszic's principal interest in science was that of a naturalist. Owing to his personal contacts with Buffon, the highest authority in those times on the philosophy of natural science, he translated into Polish the Frenchman's fundamental work, *Les époques de la nature*. Disregarding his priestly calling he expressed, in the preface to the translation, his allegiance to the analytical and empirical method in all scientific investigation. Another fruit of his interest in natural science was the result of long years of field research, his own work, published in 1816, *On the Natural Wealth of the Carpathians and Other Mountains and Plains of Poland*.

The study of natural science formed Staszic's way of looking at social phenomena which he regarded as a manifestation of the same nature, subject to immanent iron laws. "The world has certain fixed, eternal laws," wrote Staszic, "and one eternal power operates in it incessantly. This power makes all beings obey certain general laws [. . .] As mankind is also the necessary result of these eternal laws and of this eternal, ever-operating power, so must the existence, the activity and the development of mankind be the necessary result of these decrees and this eternal power."⁴²

Staszic's first work on a social subject was his pamphlet, *Remarks on the Life of Jan Zamoyski*, published in 1787. He argued there that the only way for the Polish State to escape complete annihilation was to carry out thorough socio-political reforms which would make the throne hereditary, assure legal protection and representation in parliament to the townspeople and lighten the burdens of the peasant population.

Remarks on the Life of Jan Zamoyski stirred the gentry. There appeared a number of polemical works on the subject, but first of all it exercised considerable influence on the opinions of the patriots participating in the sessions of the Four-year Sejm. In 1790 appeared *A Warning for Poland* which is chiefly an attempt to stretch the notion of "the Polish nation" to mean not only the gentry but also the townspeople and the peasants. But the main work in which Staszic formulated his social philosophy was the poem *Mankind* published in 1820 after many years of hard work.

The opinions of the author of *Mankind* belong to the broad current of European thought but they grew out of the Polish reality and expressed the aspirations of those social groups which wanted in the name

⁴² S. Staszic: *Uwagi do Rodu ludzkiego* [in:] *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 203 et sqq.

of national ideals — to change the current feudal conditions restraining the economic and cultural development of the country. Although there are a number of links with Western philosophy in the many writings of Staszic, yet his own contribution is so impressive that he is doubtless one of the more original thinkers of the European Enlightenment.

It is only the original aspects of his thought that will be discussed here and the discussion will focus more specifically on: the idea of progress, Utopian concepts of the state system and the national problem.

The idea of progress. Staszic rejected the theological conception of progress and departed likewise from the views of French thinkers concerning this problem.

The representatives of the former believed that Providence directs the fate of mankind. According to them Providence has its own plan of making the societies of the world happy, so it slowly multiplies the wealth of the earth, making use in this respect of people who, acting from low and selfish motives, do not know that they are merely an instrument in the hands of Providence.

On the other hand, the latter group comprising men like Voltaire, Turgot, Condorcet, maintained that historical progress is realized only through the development of sciences and arts. Unlike them Staszic thought that the whole world reveals an inner order which is the cause of its constant development. Thus the stanzas of *Mankind* are pervaded by a mood of optimism which glories in motion, change, progress.

Everything changes and will yet go on changing ;
 Only the laws of the world are everlasting and changeless.
 Everything in the world changes in its turn
 And ceaselessly progresses to its end.
 Nothing happens by chance . . .

.
 . . . everything on this earth

Is in constant change . . .

Everything progresses to the formation of beings

Better and better, to new qualities ;

For greater perfection everything is striving

Everywhere dead things are becoming feeling beings

Everywhere feeling creatures become living beings

The less perfect beings give way to more perfect ones.

.
 At last the creative power produced man

According to the world's purpose in him is all creation united.⁴³

Thus man appears after a series of evolutionary changes and he is

⁴³ S. Staszic: *Ród ludzki* [in:] *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 131, 13, 14.

also included in the perfecting process if the changes produced by progress are spread to the whole humanity.

Thus, approaching a degree of perfection
Is the only aim of all efforts made by mankind.
Yet for that faculties must develop
Not in individuals but in human kind.⁴⁴

Man steps on the road to civilization out of primitive existence by means of a gradual control over nature ; and consideration of the future makes him accumulate goods. Property is thus initiated (Staszic called it "a hold"). Owing to it man becomes thrifty and his wish to own property is the strongest motive of his activity. According to Staszic property is beneficial if it results from work and this way to acquire property should be open to everybody. Yet it becomes the misfortune of humanity if it is pervaded by the idea of "exclusiveness". Then property owners win a privileged position and impose their rule, their laws, morality, knowledge and culture on those who own nothing.

Thus from the hold departs one road of beneficial property
And a thousand crooked paths in which exclusiveness walks.
On the use of the former and destruction of the latter
Depends progress and the happiness of man's moral being.⁴⁵

The idea of exclusiveness deforms property and is the main obstacle in the development and civilization of societies. The spirit of exclusiveness generates internal social conflicts and wars of conquest between states.

Societies split into groups — the privileged and the oppressed one — are torn by conflicting tendencies which nobody can reconcile so long as the spirit of exclusiveness dominates. The struggle between the oppressing and the oppressed shapes the history of those societies and determines the different values and opinions of the opponents.

Staszic destroyed the myth of the uniformity of culture, art, science and morality mentioning, as an illustration of his thesis, the conditions typical of the feudal system. He wrote about the morality in this system : "In feudal societies morality cannot exist, for morality stems simply out of love for one's neighbour, and there love for one's neighbour is replaced by force and fear. Hence it comes about that in those societies there are constant attempts by the oppressed to overthrow the oppressors ; there is a ceaseless, secret war of some against others, a war of the victims against victors, a war of the poor against the rich, a war of the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 131 *et seq.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. II. p. 40

weak against the strong. There are, in fact, no neighbours and no brothers [...]”⁴⁶

As a result of the prevailing idea of exclusiveness humanity strayed from the road of progress; this is why the abolition of privileged property and the replacement of it by just property, accessible to all, will be the final liberation of humanity.

Mankind recovers the soil, gets back equal rights ;
Subjugation withers away, the peasants' serfdom.
Property comes back, slavery is no longer.⁴⁷

Utopia and reality. A new social system will be born from the ruins of the privileged property that grew out of the idea of exclusiveness. Staszic imagined the ideal structure of this system as an association of owners of small landed estates. This sort of property was to exclude the domination of some over others; it was to guarantee justice and the best possible economic effects. "Let the country give the ownership of the land to those who live on it, and then let it burden them with taxes, but all of them in equal part. The owner will eat less, sleep less, will work day and night and he will stay there and pay."⁴⁸

Such an association of small-scale agricultural producers will form a society held together by ethical ties. The criterion of the worth of its individual members will be the amount of work put in and the degree in which he will participate in the affairs of the community. In this ideal society everybody will have to obey the commands, inculcated in early youth, that "the first duty of man is to work, that only through work does he become a useful citizen [...] that he is equal to any other citizen [...] The greater the number of people whom his deeds have made happy, the more virtuous will he be. To increase the wealth common to all citizens is the highest virtue. Let the other rules of this moral doctrine explain that the community is but a single moral entity of which citizens are the members. Thus only that is truly good for each particular member which is also good for the whole community."⁴⁹

In 1816 Staszic began to realize his ideal community. On his large estate in the district of Hrubieszów he formed the Agricultural Society which divided the land according to the idea that the land should belong to those who till it. At the same time the Society created an organizational frame for this ideal community in order to "improve agriculture and help each other."

⁴⁶ Staszic: *Uwagi do Rodu ludzkiego*, *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 229.

⁴⁷ Staszic: *Ród ludzki*, *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 163.

⁴⁸ S. Staszic: *Przestrogi dla Polski* [in:] *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 251.

⁴⁹ S. Staszic: *Uwagi nad życiem Jana Zamoyskiego* [in:] *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 18.

Staszic was too much of a realist to try to spread his ideal system to the whole country when Poland was so dominated by the gentry. Moreover, he thought that the foreign situation made a radical reform difficult. He wrote: "Nowadays the Republic can leave citizens neither more freedom nor more property but only as much as the alliance of the foreign powers allows." ⁵⁰

Fearing a despotic government as much as a bourgeois revolution he advised the gentry to give townspeople access to government and to pass a constitution modelled on the English parliamentary monarchy. "Only in England," — he argued, "did the gentry do the right thing and got ahead of the kings offering freedom to the townspeople, and only in England are the gentry free now. I say this after long consideration. It is necessary for the Polish gentry to make the townspeople favourably disposed towards them so that kings cannot at some future date turn the burghers against them. In their struggle for liberty, it is necessary that the gentry and the townspeople should make an alliance against the kings." ⁵¹

The project of reforms that Staszic presented to the Great Diet seems modest indeed in comparison with his ideal state system. He wanted the noble estate to assure "justice for the peasants, security and dignity to the townspeople; parochial schools, freedom for the peasants' children to leave the village [...] commutation of serfdom into a fair amount of obligatory work [...] or rent [...] equal freedom of enterprise for everybody [...] navigable rivers, first necessities, then comforts, encouragement of trade, an embargo on foreign goods [...]" ⁵²

The problem of the Nation. As a warm advocate of a compromise between the gentry and the townspeople Staszic directed an appeal to the teachers in the closing part of *A Warning for Poland* calling on them "to make one nation out of the youths of gentle birth and the town youths." This appeal does not restrict the idea of the nation to those two estates but sanctions a compromise which referred to the government of the country.

Contrasting sharply the interests of individual estates with the national interest Staszic defined the nation anew. The novelty of his definition consists in: firstly broadening the concept of the nation and thus indicating more clearly the process of formation of the bourgeois nation; secondly in guaranteeing gentry domination in the national community called "the ruling republic."

⁵⁰ Staszic: *Przestrogi dla Polski*, *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 211.

⁵¹ Staszic: *Uwagi nad życiem Jana Zamoyskiego*, *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 47.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 75 et seq.

The nation in Staszic's definition is characterized not only by such subjective features as language, sense of belonging to the tribe, religion, tradition, culture, but also objective elements which cement the nation, that is the forms of its organization and economic ties. This is why describing the nation he mentions among its characteristics "all institutions of administration of justice and of religion maintained by the people of the country, and likewise the defence of the country done by the same people."⁵³ Further, dealing with the economy, he wrote: "Trade is the easiest, and some say the only, way of forming such a sense of unity in a nation whereby a man can most clearly perceive that his personal good is in no way different from the common good [...]. Domestic trade is the first and of all kinds the most useful one."⁵⁴

Staszic ascribed the leading function in a nation to the gentry whose duty it is to represent the interests of the whole nation. And though he postulated a compromise between the gentry and the townspeople, he wrote without hesitation that "Priority and dignity will be given to the gentry."⁵⁵

In comparison with the views of Kołłątaj Staszic's definition of a nation emphasized more clearly the social and the class foundation of the processes which led him to stretch the concept of the nation so as to mean more than one estate. On the other hand, compared with the conception formulated by Franciszek Jezierski, this definition is clearly conciliatory and meant as a compromise. Franciszek Salezy Jezierski wrote in his essay published in 1791 under the title *Some Words Collected in Alphabetical Order and Accompanied by Explanations Suited to the Matter* that the masses of the working population are the core of the nation and its directing force. As he put it: "We call the majority of poor and hard-working people the mob, in France the mob form the third estate, but in my opinion the mob should be called the first estate of a nation, or more simply the nation."⁵⁶

With the fall of the Polish Republic the Polish Enlightenment came in effect to its end but the following generations were to live by the intellectual and moral heritage of those times. More specifically, the ideas of Kołłątaj and those of Staszic were to become, owing to their great vitality and social value, the hope and the light on the murky way of a nation that had lost its independence. The writings of these

⁵³ S. Staszic: *Narodowość* [in:] *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 277.

⁵⁴ Staszic: *Uwagi nad życiem Jana Zamoyskiego*, *ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 71, 74.

⁵⁵ Staszic: *Przestrogi dla Polski*, *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 330.

⁵⁶ F. S. Jezierski: *Niektóre wyrazy porządkiem abecadła zebrane i stosownymi do rzeczy uwagami objaśnione* [in:] *Wybór pism*, Warszawa 1952, p. 244.

two thinkers had another precious characteristic : in them Western ideas were fitted to the Polish situation and so essentially modified that their originality makes them clearly distinguishable in the broad current of the political thought of the European Enlightenment.

STRESZCZENIE

Na tle Oświecenia europejskiego Polska zajmuje szczególną pozycję. Idee, które w połowie XVIII wieku rewolucjonizowały społeczeństwo nad Sekwaną, różnymi drogami przenikały nad Wisłę. Jednakże francuskie Oświecenie wyrastało w całkowicie odmiennych warunkach społeczno-politycznych, było bowiem, ogólnie biorąc, ideologią mieszczaństwa. Polskie Oświecenie natomiast przede wszystkim stanowiło filozofię polityczną patriotycznie myślącej szlachty, współdziałającej ze słabym mieszczaństwem. Pauperyzacja miast i niewolnicza zależność chłopów w magnacko-szlacheckiej Polsce sprawiły, że nosicielami idei oświeceniowych były przede wszystkim odłamy patriotycznej szlachty, dążącej do zachowania niepodległości przez społeczno-polityczną reformę państwa. Ideał ustrojowy, którym szczyciła się feudalna Polska, sprowadzał się bowiem do twierdzenia, że państwo jest silne słabością władzy.

W historii polskiej myśli politycznej poprzedzającej Oświecenie rysują się dwa kierunki. Pierwszy, umownie nazywany „dydaktyczno-moralizatorskim”, dążył do naprawy państwa przez właściwe wychowanie szlachty, bez zmiany ustroju. Drugi, nazywany „instytucjonalno-prawnym”, w celu uzdrowienia państwowości postulował zasadnicze zmiany ustroju. Głęboko zakorzenione przekonanie o doskonałości ustroju Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej hamowało jednakże krytykę instytucji politycznych. Idea przebudowy instytucji polityczno-prawnych w polskiej doktrynie politycznej mogła rozwinąć się dopiero z nadejściem XVIII w., kiedy ujawnił się zupełny rozkład władzy.

Koncepcji dydaktyczno-moralizatorskiej przeciwstawił się wielki reformator polskiego szkolnictwa, Stanisław Konarski. W swym dziele *O skutecznym rad sposobie* dowodził on, że źródła zła tkwią w ustroju, który prowadzi do powszechnej anarchii.

Konarski zmarł w r. 1773, kiedy trzy ościenne państwa dokonały już pierwszego rozbioru Polski. Bezprawny gwałt w wieku mieniącym się oświeconym wstrząsnął całym myślącym społeczeństwem.

Dezintegracyjnym tendencjom oligarchii magnatów przeciwstawiono wówczas idące jednolitego państwa, które odpowiadałoby ambicjom narodowym i przyspieszyło rozwój gospodarczy i kulturalny kraju. Zdano sobie sprawę, że do tego celu konieczna jest zasadnicza reforma. Sprawa

stała się szczególnie aktualna w r. 1788, gdy Sejm przystąpił do dzieła reformy, uwieńczonego uchwaleniem Konstytucji 3 maja 1791 r.

Dążenia i aspiracje obozu reform odzwierciedlają w swej twórczości Hugo Kołłątaj i Stanisław Staszic. Pierwszy dał się poznać najpierw jako gorący rzecznik i organizator nauczania laickiego. W latach 1777—1783 doprowadził do generalnej reformy Uniwersytetu Krakowskiego, który stał się ośrodkiem świeckiego i narodowego wychowania. W okresie Sejmu Czteroletniego praca Kołłątaja *Do Stanisława Małachowskiego Anonima listów kilka* była filozofią polityczną obozu reform, który doprowadził do uchwalenia szlachecko-mieszczańskiej konstytucji. Po upadku państwowości Kołłątaj poświęcił się studiom teoretycznym. Z tego okresu pochodzą jego trzy główne dzieła: *Rozbiór krytyczny zasad historii o początkach rodu ludzkiego*, *Porządek fizyczno-moralny* oraz *Stan oświecenia w Polsce*.

Stanisław Staszic różnił się od Kołłątaja temperamentem politycznym. Obaj zwalczali feudalizm, przeciwstawiając mu ustrój kompromisu szlachecko-mieszczańskiego. Staszic jednak był typem naukowca stoniącego od czynnej polityki. Jego studia przyrodnicze uformowały sposób patrzenia na zjawiska społeczne, które traktował jako przejawy jednej natury, podlegającej immanentnym prawom.

Polityczno-społeczną filozofię zawierają prace: *Uwagi nad życiem Jana Zamoyskiego*, *Przestrogi dla Polski* oraz *Ród ludzki*. Staszic należy do oryginalniejszych myślicieli europejskiego Oświecenia, w szczególności nowe są jego poglądy na temat postępu, własności i zagadnień dotyczących narodu.

Wraz z utratą niepodległości państwa skończyło się w zasadzie polskie Oświecenie, ale pokolenia następne żyły spuścizną umysłową i moralną tamtych czasów.

РЕЗЮМЕ

На фоне европейского просвещения Польша занимает особенную позицию. Идеи, которые в половине XVIII в. революционизировали общество над Сеной, разными путями проникали в Польшу. Однако французское просвещение выросло совершенно в иных общественно-политических условиях, было, вообще говоря, идеологией мещанства. Польское просвещение было зато, прежде всего, политической философией патриотически мыслящей шляхты, взаимодействующей со слабым мещанством. Обнищание городов и рабская зависимость крестьян в магнатско-шляхетской Польше вызвали, что носителями просветительских идей были, прежде всего, патриотические группы шляхты, стремя-

щейся к сохранению независимости при помощи общественно-политической реформы государства. Идеал государственного строя, которым гордилась феодальная Польша, сводился к утверждению, что государство есть сильным слабостью власти.

В истории польской политической мысли, предшествовавшей просвещению, выделяется два направления. Первое, условно названное „дидактично-нравоучительным“, стремилось к улучшению государства через соответствующее воспитание шляхты без изменения строя. Другое, названное „институтско-правовым“, для оздоровления государства предлагало основные изменения строя. Глубоко закоренелые убеждения о совершенстве строя шляхетской Речи Посполитой тормозило, однако, критику политических институтов. Идея перестройки политико-правовых институтов в польской политической доктрине могла развиться только в XVIII в., когда обнаружился распад власти.

Против дидактично-нравоучительной концепции выступил великий реформатор нашего школьного дела Станислав Конарский. В своем крупнейшем произведении „Об успешном способе советов“ он доказывал, что источники зла кроются в строе, который приводит к всеобщей анархии.

Конарский умер в 1773 г., когда три соседних государства провели первый разбор Польши. Беззаконие в эпоху, называемую Просвещением, потрясло все мыслящее общество.

Тенденциям дезинтеграции олигархии магнатов противопоставляли тогда идеи единого государства, которое соответствовало бы народным амбициям и ускорило хозяйственное и культурное развитие страны. Отдавали себе отчет в том, что для этой цели есть необходима основная реформа. Вопрос стал особенно актуальным в 1788 г., когда сейм приступил к осуществлению программы реформ, увенчавшемуся провозглашением конституции 3 мая 1791 г.

Стремления и запросы блока реформ отражают в своем творчестве Гуго Коллонтай и Станислав Сташиц. Первый был горячим глашатаем и организатором принципа светского образования. В 1777—1783 гг. провел генеральную реформу Краковского университета, который стал центром светского и народного воспитания. В период работы Четырехлетнего сейма произведение Коллонтая „Станиславу Малаховскому несколько писем Анонима“ было политической философией блока реформ, который претворил в жизнь шляхетско-мещанскую конституцию. После упадка государства Коллонтай занимался теоретическими исследованиями. В этот период написал три главных труда: „Критический разбор основ истории относительно начала человеческого рода“, „Физическо-моральный порядок“, „Состояние просвещения в Польше“.

Станислав Сташиц отличался от Коллонтая политическим темпера-

ментом. Оба боролись против феодализма, противопоставляя ему строй шляхетско-мещанского компромисса. Однако Стащиц был типом ученого, сторонившегося политики. Его интерес к естественным наукам сформировал способ видения общественных явлений, которые он трактовал как проявления одной природы, подчиненной имманентным правам.

Его общественно-политическая философия представлена в следующих публицистических произведениях: „Размышления над жизнью Яна Замойского“, „Предостережения Польше“, а также в философско-дидактической поэме „Человеческий род“. Стащиц принадлежит к наиболее оригинальным мыслителям европейского просвещения; особенно новыми являются его взгляды на тему прогресса, собственности и проблем народа.

С утратой независимости государства закончилось, в принципе, польское просвещение, но последующие поколения жили духовным и моральным наследием тех времен.

