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KOR AND ITS MODEL OF RESISTANCE. STUDY OF DISSENT AND OPPOSITION IN THE COMMUNIST POLAND

Abstract: Social attitudes toward communism in Poland encompassed the whole spectrum of attitudes, from affirmation, through adaptation, to resistance and dissent. The most developed and institutionalized form of dissent was the opposition movement. Komitet Obrony Robotników (Workers' Defence Committee), later transformed into the Social Self-Defence Committee 'KOR' was a new of type opposition against the communist regime; it created a political alternative and new methods of system contestation, which were followed by other groups in the democratic opposition in the 1970s. The main features of the KOR opposition model are: openness, acting without violence, absence of hierarchic organization, decentralization, legalism, solidarity, specified social objectives, political self-limitation, ethical radicalism, pluralism and civic virtue.

Keywords: dissent, opposition, communism, resistance, dissidence, Polish People's Republic (PRL).

Resistance, dissent, opposition

What is opposition in a non-democratic regime?¹ What was the opposition in communist Poland? There are numerous attempts in the scholarly literature to describe this phenomenon more precisely. Before I present

¹ I use this term because I do not intend to resolve in this article the dispute among Polish historians and political scientists about totalitarian or authoritarian nature of the political system in Poland ruled by the communists (the abbreviation of the official name of the state — PRL is used to describe this historical period). Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to take into account in this dispute the position of the Western researchers of non-democratic systems and their typology of contemporary political regimes. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan isolate the following ideal types: democracy, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, post-totalitarianism, and the sultan system. According to them Poland under the communist rule was closer to the authoritarian model

my definition of the political opposition in PRL, I propose a short review of the positions of Polish and foreign researchers on this matter.

Jakub Karpiński in his dictionary *Polska, komunizm, opozycja* defines opposition in the broadest way — as opposing the regime. Sketching historical development of opposition in Poland ruled by communists he indicates that from the mid-fifties the opponents of the communist regime tried to act within the legal framework of the system, whereas from mid-seventies the opposition ‘acted by creating facts, organizing itself and spreading information; it also attempted to exert pressure on the authorities’.²

In his introduction to the history of *Opozycja polityczna w PRL 1945–1980* Andrzej Friszke distils the notions of resistance and opposition. In this approach resistance is a spontaneous, not organized protest against the post-war political order; the political opposition, on the other hand, is ‘a purposeful, planned, based on a programme, organizational or intellectual activity aimed at overthrowing the system or reforming it by limiting the monopoly of the party power and restating the society’s subjectivity’.³ An additional criterion of the oppositionist attitude of a given group or person is, according to Friszke, a negative assessment of their activity by the leadership of the party and the state.⁴ Polemicizing with this opinion Tomasz Strzembosz questions the possibility of the existence of opposition in a totalitarian regime, which Polish People’s Republic was in his opinion. In such situation the protest against the system is transferred from the sphere of armed resistance and political opposition to the non-political sphere of culture and private activity, family and spiritual life. For Strzembosz this form of resistance, not aimed at overthrowing communism but shaping and implanting in people the moral principles hostile to the regime, deserves more attention than activities of indepen-

than to the totalitarian, mostly due to the significant extent of social pluralism, which was reflected in the autonomous status of Catholic Church, and from 1976 in social self-organization independent of the regime — oppositional groups and Solidarity movement. See Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore, MD, and London, 1996, pp. 44–45, 255 ff.

² ‘Od połowy lat siedemdziesiątych [opozycja] działa tworząc fakty dokonane, organizując się i rozprzestrzeniając informacje, stara się także wywierać nacisk na władze’. Jakub Karpiński, *Polska, komunizm, opozycja. Słownik*, Warsaw, 1988, p. 168.

³ ‘Opozycją polityczną [...] było świadome, zaplanowane, oparte na pewnym programie działanie organizacyjne lub intelektualne na rzecz obalenia systemu lub jego reformy w kierunku ograniczenia monopolu władzy partii i przywracanie podmiotowości społeczeństwa’. Andrzej Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL 1945–1980*, London, 1994, p. 5.

⁴ *Opozycja i opór społeczny w Polsce (1945–1980). Materiały konwersatorium z 20 lutego 1991 r.*, ed. Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski, Warsaw, 1991, p. 8.

dent or dissident groups. Institutions of moral protest against PRL encompass, according to this scholar, Churches, Christian educational organizations, Marian sodalities, the Catholic Light-Life Movement, academic pastoral services and scout organizations.⁵

We also notice the definition presented in the introduction to the biographical dictionary *Opozycja w PRL*. The opposition, write the authors, is 'an active resistance against the communist regime in Poland'. According to this proposal, the opposition movement consisted of people who actively opposed the system for many years, in different circumstances, regardless of repressions.⁶

Classical typologies of opposition in the communist system were presented by Leonard Shapiro and Harold Gordon Skilling. Shapiro isolates five types of opposition in his analysis. The first one is characterized by the total rejection of the system ('all-out rejection') and clearly articulated intents to change it. The second is struggle for power and faction conflicts within the communist establishment. The third type of opposition activity is practised by interest groups such as the police, army, economic management, and party activists, who want the state policy to take the direction which is beneficial for them. The fourth one is formed by pragmatic opposition consisting of technocrats and experts, who want to reach improvement and development in their selected sphere of social life. And the fifth, the last category in the typology of the British sovietologist is apolitical dissent against the selected aspects of rule, for example, in defence of human rights, but with no intent to overthrow or change the system.⁷

Gordon Skilling proposed a similar division. He isolates the integral opposition, in which he includes armed rebellions, conspiracy activity, demonstrations, political emigration and other forms of protest against the policy of the regime. Integral opposition is anti-systemic. The remaining three types are different variations of opposition from within the system criticizing particular moves or postulating personal changes at the top but not intending to overthrow or change the system. Faction opposition consists of groups competing for power within the ruling party and disputing about interpretations of ideological doctrine.

⁵ Tomasz Strzembosz, 'Polacy w PRL: sprzeciw, opozycja, opór. (Zachowania opozycyjne w systemie totalitarnym)', *Arcana*, 35, 2000, pp. 121–41.

⁶ 'Poprzez sylwetki opozycjonistów chcieliśmy [...] pokazać rozmaite drogi, jakie prowadziły do podejmowania czynnego oporu wobec władzy komunistycznej w Polsce'. Zbigniew Gluza and Jan Skórzyński, 'Wprowadzenie', in *Opozycja w PRL. Słownik biograficzny 1956–89*, ed. Jan Skórzyński, and Paweł Sowiński and Małgorzata Strasz, 3 vols, Warsaw, 2000–06, vol. 1, p. 7.

⁷ *Political Opposition in One-Party States*, ed. Leonard Shapiro, London, 1972, p. 36.

Fundamental opposition is the internal protest against a particular political line, not directed against the ruling group but demanding reform of the system to a limited extent. Specific opposition is even more limited criticism of the way of ruling and certain aspects of the current policy of the party expressed by the persons who do not question the communist political system.⁸

Both typologies focus attention on internal rivalry in the communist camp. They were developed at the beginning of the seventies, before the growth of anti-systemic opposition groups, which took place in Eastern Europe in the second half of the decade. But Shapiro recorded in 1972 the appearance of a new type of dissidents, who aimed at creating a coherent intellectual opposition against the mono-party rule, re-formulating the strategy leading to political changes and initiating contact with other social groups aggrieved by the system.⁹

Unlike the abovementioned authors, the majority of Polish researchers do not include the inter-party opposition groups in the all-out opposition movement. Roman Bäcker is of the opinion that the opposition attitude is defined by the attitude toward the communist system. The *sensu largo* opposition is characterized by 'activities, which are not compliant with the logic of immanent mechanisms' of totalitarian systems. And *sensu stricto* opposition involves 'the organized, collective activities aimed at manifesting its protest against the whole system.'¹⁰ Bäcker also mentions non-political opposition and describes it as 'conduct compliant with the shared values without taking into account the requirements of the ruling system'. This type of opposition resigns from 'developing political programmes, but creates programmes of activities in other spheres of social life'.¹¹ Krzysztof Łabędź, on the other hand, believes that aiming at the change of political system is an indispensable feature of the opposition. According to him 'political opposition' in PRL is 'the system of more or

⁸ Harold Gordon Skilling, 'Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe', in *Regimes and oppositions*, ed. Robert A. Dahl, New Haven, CT, 1973, pp. 92–94.

⁹ *Political Opposition in One-Party State*, p. 38.

¹⁰ The opposition *sensu largo* is 'działania, które nie są zgodne z logiką immanentnych mechanizmów [systemów totalitarnych]'. The opposition *sensu stricto* is 'zorganizowane, zbiorowe działania zmierzające do zaznaczenia swojego sprzeciwu wobec całego systemu'. Roman Bäcker, 'Opozycja a totalitaryzm. Problemy klasyfikacyjne', in *Opozycja w systemach demokratycznych i niedemokratycznych*, ed. Krzysztof Łabędź and Magdalena Mikołajczyk, Cracow, 2001, p. 58.

¹¹ 'Postępowanie zgodnie z wyznawanymi wartościami bez oglądania się na wymagania stawiane przez system władzy'; Ten typ opozycji rezygnuje z 'tworzenia programów politycznych, ale kreuje programy działań w innych dziedzinach życia społecznego'. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

less organized groups differentiating by their endeavour to deprive the Communist Party of ruling power, in a closer or further perspective, by the gradual limitation of its impact or totally, if the favouring circumstances occur'.¹² According to Michal Kubát opposition in non-democratic systems is political opposition, which actively tries to overthrow the government or political system. Although it is not recognized by the authorities, it is not illegal, since it refers to the letter of the law and constitutional act, which nominally guarantee certain civic freedoms.¹³

A slightly different definition of opposition activity, more precise and not limited to political area, was formulated by Jacques Rupnik. According to the French researcher, the opposition in the Polish People's Republic was the independent social activity ignoring official institutions. Rupnik, nevertheless, stresses the difference between opposition acting in an organized way and spontaneously expressed dissent. Opposition is the articulation of protest against the policy of the regime by a group organized — on a constant or ad hoc basis — in a legal or illegal way, whereas *dissent* is a spontaneous public manifestation of disapproval of, or protest against, the regime policy in different spheres of social life.¹⁴ Polish democratic opposition is described by Rupnik as 'a broadly based human rights movement uniting the different components of the opposition around issues transcending ideological standpoints'.¹⁵

For Robert Zuzowski the key feature defining the opposition attitude in not democratic systems is protest against the regime policy, that is 'dissidence'. A dissident attitude is, nevertheless, not identical with political opposition. While dissidents attempt to persuade or 'force the authorities to listen to their reasons' by criticism, admonishing and persuasion, the participants of political opposition 'assume overthrowing the regime and replacing it with a government elected by them'.¹⁶ But in his analysis Zuzowski uses the notions 'dissidents' and 'oppositionists' interchangeably.

¹² 'System mniej lub bardziej zorganizowanych grup wyróżniających się dążeniem do pozbawienia władzy partii komunistycznej, w bliższej lub dalszej perspektywie, stopniowo poprzez ograniczenie jej wpływów lub całkowicie przy zaistnieniu sprzyjających okoliczności'. Krzysztof Łabędź, *Spory wokół zagadnień programowych w publikacjach opozycji politycznej w Polsce w latach 1981-1989*, Cracow, 1997, p. 16.

¹³ Michal Kubát, *Teoria opozycji politycznej*, Cracow, 2010, pp. 18-19, 30-31.

¹⁴ Jacques Rupnik, 'Dissent in Poland, 1968-78: the End of Revisionism and the Rebirth of the Civil Society', in *Opposition in Eastern Europe*, ed. Rudolf L. Tórkés, London: Macmillan, 1979, p. 61.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁶ 'Dysydenci [...] usiłują zmusić władze do wysłuchania swoich racji. [...] Opozycjoniści z kolei zrzeszeni w politycznych ugrupowaniach zakładają obalenie władz i zastąpienie ich rządem z własnego wyboru', Robert Zuzowski, *Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej KOR. Studium dysydemtyzmu i opozycji politycznej w Polsce*, Wrocław, 1996, p. 17.

He defines the democratic opposition, as the opponents of the communist system in Poland of the seventies of the twentieth century called themselves, as a peaceful, open and organized form of dissidence.¹⁷ The earlier forms of anti-communist opposition were secret or spontaneous (being a reaction to an event or step made by the regime) and transitory. The Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) established in 1976 was the first to conduct dissident activity in a continuous way. Thanks to it the political dissidence became a permanent element of life in the communist regime, and the flexible 'trial and error method' adopted by it was subject to public criticism.¹⁸ KOR, later renamed the Social Self-defence Committee 'KOR' (KSS 'KOR') was not, nevertheless, a political opposition, if my interpretation of Zuzowski's reasoning is right.

A different perspective is presented by Michael H. Bernhard. The American scholar is of the opinion that in the seventies a basic change of strategy of the communist system opponents occurred — it changed from the dissident to the opposition strategy. Dissidence attempted to exert moral pressure — from the inside or outside of the ruling establishment — on the party-state, to reform itself. The new strategy had a new addressee. Instead of trying to influence the conduct of the rulers, oppositionists focused their efforts on the society. 'This critical change of the direction of focus marked the intellectual shift from dissidence to opposition'.¹⁹ The strategy of grass-root level pressure on the rulers exerted by social movements was first applied by the Workers' Defence Committee, and it was the first step on the road to self-liberation of the civic society. Acting outside the official life framework subordinated to the party-state, KOR began to create in Poland a public area in which other independent groups could appear.²⁰

The turn of the communist system opponents to social forces is also noticed by David Ost. Opposition started the grass-root level work — reconstruction of civil society outside politics and the state. KOR activists believed that the society could be democratized by putting the monopolist state structure aside.²¹ Ost describes the attitude proposed and exercised by the oppositionists as anticipatory democracy, since it is characterized

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 18 f.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 192–93.

¹⁹ Michael H. Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland. Workers, Intellectuals, and Oppositional Politics, 1976–1980*, New York, p. 9.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

²¹ David Ost, *Solidarność a polityka antypolityki*, Gdańsk, 2014 (English original *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics. Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968*, Philadelphia, PA, 1990), pp. 9–98.

by the conviction that in the dictatorship system it is necessary to act and behave as free people, to bring the perspective of democracy closer. From this perspective political life becomes more democratic when people behave as if it were already more democratic, when they act as if they were a part of a reborn civic society.²² The opposition strategy is 'a Big Refusal' to participate in the system controlled by the party and rejection of its rules. Oppositionists distanced themselves from the politics understood as taking over and performing rule, and proposed an 'ideology of social democratization'. They did not formulate a precise programme of state reconstruction but creating enclaves of freedom outside of it. This 'anti-politics' attitude revealed its limitations when, unexpectedly for its creators, in August 1980 there occurred an opportunity to accomplish the goal, that is, establishment of an independent, legal civic society in the form of Solidarity movement.²³

The definition of opposition attitudes in the communist Poland proposed in this study is based on some of the aforementioned approaches. The first step while formulating it should be the typology of social attitudes toward the monocentric political system built in Poland in the period 1944–48,²⁴ since the opposition attitude can be isolated and described only in the context of other attitudes of the inhabitants of PRL.

Poles' attitudes toward the communist regime can be, I believe, divided into four types:

- 1) affirmation
- 2) adaptation
- 3) resistance
- 4) dissent.

Types 3 and 4 contain an element of dissent to the rulers' politics (in a particular part thereof or the whole system of ruling), but they differ in the nature of this attitude: active in the case of protest and passive (defensive) in the case of resistance. Types 1 and 2 include the attitude of acceptance and consent for 'real socialism'. They also differ by the passive or active attitude toward social order in PRL. Adaptation assumes a passive acceptance of 'what reality is', due to life needs and opportunism, or because of fear of repressions and the feeling that no change is possible.

²² Ibid., p. 115.

²³ Ibid., p. 118–22.

²⁴ I use the description of a monocentric model of social order and its reference to PRL circumstances presented by Krzysztof Nowak, 'Kryzys legitymizacyjny systemu w perspektywie doświadczenia życia codziennego', in *Spółczesność polskie czasu kryzysu. Przeobrażenia świadomości i warianty zachowań*, ed. Stefan Nowak, Warsaw, 1984, pp. 337–79. Obedience of citizens is a basis for the operation of this order. Refusing obedience is challenging it, that is, dissent.

The attitude of adaptation was connected with positive involvement and the feeling that 'good work' for Poland is reasonable regardless of the existing political reality. And affirmation means a voluntary and active acceptance of communism as 'a good political system', morally better than capitalism, beneficial for the society and the country in the geopolitical reality of the post-war division of Europe.

Boundaries between social attitudes described in such way were not closed. Continuous wandering between them took place. Its dynamics was defined by changes of the situation in our country, social and political crises and other events causing mass emotions, such as pope John Paul II's pilgrimages to his homeland. Influenced by these factors people changed their outlook and attitude toward the ruling regime. From the attitude of adaptation they moved to resistance attitude and sometimes reached the line of active protest. As we know, a more drastic evolution was also possible — from affirmation to protest, or vice versa — from protest (for example, in the forties) to adaptation or even affirmation. Political mobility was not, obviously, a general feature. But it is essential to be aware that political attitudes in the post-war Poland were not unchangeable; they could be subject to far-reaching changes, and one biography could include participation in constructing dictatorship and then a long involvement in the freedom movement.²⁵

Social range of different types of attitudes can be defined only on an estimate basis. But certainly the majority of PRL citizens lived according to adaptation rules. Extreme attitudes of the aforementioned typology — affirmation and protest — related to the smallest groups. The most changeable group (as far as numbers are concerned) included the resistance participants — it became larger during political or economic crises and decreased in the years of stabilization. The aforementioned attitudes of the society were subject to changes on the time axis. It seems that attitudes of dissent against communism were strongest at the stage of building the dictatorship in the forties, and at the

²⁵ Krystyna Kersten describes the society's attitude to communist rule as interpenetrating attitudes of adaptation and resistance, the proportions of which changed in time. 'It was a spectrum ranging from recognition of irreversibility of the situation and search within it of an area for Polish national values, to active struggle with the regime perceived as the foreign agency' / 'Było to spektrum, rozciągające się od uznania nieodwracalności powstałej sytuacji i poszukiwania w jej ramach przestrzeni dla polskich wartości narodowych, po czynną walkę z władzą postrzeganą jako obca agencja'. Kersten puts communists and their supporters, who positively evaluated the system, both from the point of view of shared values and their interest, outside this spectrum. Compare: Krystyna Kersten, 'Opór i przystosowanie', in eadem, *Pisma rozproszone*, ed. Dariusz Libionka and Tomasz Szarota, Toruń, 2005, pp. 384–85.

final stage of the system, in the second half of the eighties, when legitimization of the system was the weakest.

What are the differences between the notions of resistance, dissent and opposition? Resistance includes all social manifestations of disapproval and non-acceptance of the politics of the regime in the name of defence of the basic freedoms and rules of collective life considered legally valid. Krystyna Kersten described the sources of this attitude as ‘counteracting everything that was a threat to cultural community’.²⁶ It was not organized, spontaneous, and defensive. It usually had the form of passive resistance, refusal to fulfil official instructions, silent dissent concerning direction of politics contradictory to traditional values and sense of justice. This type of individual resistance to the communist regime was undertaken in the post-war Poland by farmers who opposed collectivization, demanded guarantees for the private landownership and struggled against discrimination of individual farmers. An important motive of farmers’ resistance was also the defence of religious values against the atheistic ideology of the state. Institutional resistance to the rulers’ attempts of atheization and subordination was put up by the Catholic Church. It was, nevertheless, also a broader spiritual and moral resistance, traditionalist and aimed not only at the independence of the Church and freedom of religion but also at maintaining national identity. The specific forms of resistance put up by the Church (understood here as the community of believers) included pilgrimages, sacral construction, education, activity of lay Catholics’ associations, development of Catholic culture. The resistance to the new order put up by the intelligentsia also has to be recorded. Many scholars, writers and teachers who tried to protect ethic and professional standards shaped in the mid-war Poland protested against destruction of elites, subjection of culture, science and education to political directives, and against ideological monopoly of Marxism and Leninism.

In the proposed approach the most essential feature differentiating dissent from resistance is an active attitude. Therefore, dissent is an active protest against the politics of the regime. In Poland ruled by communists people often publicly manifested disapproval of the material degradation of the country and people, lack of respect for human dignity, erosion of culture and national identity, restrictions relating to religious practice, Sovietization and subordination to the USSR. Anti-regime demonstrations of the broadest range and greatest intensity took place in the years 1944–48, 1956,

²⁶ ‘Tworzy się współwystępowanie dwóch sił: przystosowania oraz przeciwstawianie się temu wszystkiemu, co stanowi zagrożenie dla wspólnoty kulturowej’. Krystyna Kersten, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem. Polska 1944–1956*, London, 1993, p. 14.

1968, 1970/71, 1976, 1980/81, 1988/89. Social protests were repeatable, they had a mass and general nature. Partly spontaneous, but sometimes, and to a gradually increasing extent, they were organized. They were of a mass nature because tens of thousands people participated in them. They were general, since different social layers and groups got involved. They were organized, because with time the forms of leadership, goals and strategies of dissent were formed and developed.

In the first post-war years, besides political struggle carried on by democratic parties — the Polish Peasant's Party and the the catholic Labour Party, anti-communist protest also had the form of armed fight. In the clash with the regime the social side used arms for the last time during the Poznań revolt in June 1956. Later, anti-government protests were carried on by peaceful means, such as strikes, street demonstrations, letters of protest, even though they sometimes took on violent form (in December 1970 in Gdańsk and Szczecin, and in June 1976 in Radom). From 1956 protest was mainly expressed by workers — they were its main force. Its main goal was struggle for better living standards and labour rights, but civic rights were also becoming more and more noticeable in the postulates. Until 1980 it used to be ad hoc and reactive protest, spontaneous and dispersed. From 1980 it became organized and programmatic. The foundations of the workers' self-organization, independent of the state, in the form of strike committees, were established during the December–January crisis of 1970/71 in Gdańsk, Gdynia and Szczecin. However, they did not survive after the end of the strikes. From 1978 the independent workers' movement began to assemble in the Free Trade Unions. This was the road leading to Solidarity.

The intelligentsia played an important role in the protests against communism. In 1968 students, scientists, writers and artists protested against the party politics and demanded freedom of speech and association, academic freedoms and freedom of culture. This was expressed in demonstrations, rallies and strikes at the academic centres. A significant feature of March '68 was students' solidarity with colleagues persecuted for their views. In the following decade the defiant intelligentsia circles organized a public protest against the changes in Constitution strengthening the party's dictatorship, and in *List 59* (Letter of 59) presented the liberal and democratic postulates regarding political system. In 1976 the regime contesting intelligentsia took a decisive step toward political emancipation by creating institutions independent of the regime, which were the germs of the civic society.²⁷ A network of social self-defence

²⁷ The definition of the *civil society* by Philippe C. Schmitter is useful for this rea-

against repressions, circulation of thoughts, information and literary works not controlled by the authorities, creating manifestos and programmes, independent lectures and scientific seminars, protest hunger strikes, demonstrations, boycott of elections — all these activities created the phenomenon of democratic opposition in communist Poland.

Therefore, the opposition was an institutionalized form of dissent. It has an organized, durable and creative (not just reactive), elite, programmatic and anti-system nature. The opposition not only protests against particular decisions of the regime but against the whole system (*per se*) as a one-party dictatorship, imposed and controlled by external forces. The opposition circles construct an ideological and political alternative for monocentric order in the form of pluralist freedom movement. They act outside the institutions of the party-state and create structures independent of it. Their activity is addressed not to the rulers but to the society. The opposition attitude is characterized by:

- ideological rejection of the communist system
- organized effort aimed at the change thereof
- formulating an alternative programme
- creating a counter-elite.

Negation of the system as such did not mean the choice of a revolutionary way to change it. Evolutionism was essential mark of the Polish anti-communist opposition. Its founders believed that social self-organization and peaceful pressure for partial changes may force the gradual democratization of the regime. What was the genesis of this strategy?

Polish opposition in search of a strategy

David Ost's thesis about the lack of a political programme in the opposition thought of the seventies is not fully correct. Indeed, in the literature of that decade we do not find the projects of taking power or scenarios of systemic transformation. Political objectives of the opposition were, nevertheless, drafted in the constitutional manifesto of December 1975, known as *List 59* (written by the lawyer Jan Olszewski, the sociologist

soning. According to him it is 'a set or system of self-organized intermediary groups that: 1) are relatively independent of both public authorities and private units of production and reproduction, that is, of firms and families; 2) are capable of deliberating about and taking collective actions in defence or promotion of their interests or passions; 3) do not seek to replace either state agents or private (re)producers or to accept responsibility for governing the polity as a whole; and 4) agree to act within preestablished rules of a "civil" nature, that is, conveying mutual respect.' Philippe C. Schmitter, 'Civil Society East and West', in *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies*, ed. Larry Diamond et al., Baltimore, MD, and London, 1997, p. 240.

Jakub Karpiński and the pedagogue Jacek Kuroń — the key persons in KOR circle).²⁸ Its starting point was not a critical analysis of the communist system, but the liberal and democratic rules of public life, the observance of which the signatories of the letter demanded. Thus, the Constitution should guarantee fundamental civic and political rights: free elections, judicial independence, freedom of speech and liquidation of censorship, the right to strike and independent union activity, freedom of science, conscience and religion. *List 59* signed by over sixty persons far exceeded the limit of activities which were at that time understood in the Polish discourse as dissident activities — criticizing the communist system but not questioning its political foundations. Olszewski, Karpiński and Kuroń's manifesto was the 'Wittenberg theses' of the Polish democratic opposition — the opposition which aims at the parliamentary democracy and not the reformed version of socialism.

The new anti-communist political strategy was developed as a result of analysis of different forms of opposition against communism taken in the first three post-war decades. The first experience was an attempt of conducting the opposition activity in the parliamentary formula taken by Stanisław Mikołajczyk and his party — Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish Peasant's Party) in the period 1945–47. It ended with the defeat of PSL in the elections rigged by the communists, imprisoning of PSL leaders or their escape and the liquidation of the party. The second experience was the opposition within the system performed by Marxist revisionists from the period of relaxation after Stalin's death until 1968; they hoped that the new leaders of the party would implement limited reforms under the slogan of 'Polish way to socialism'. Hopes for liberalization of the system by the leaders were strengthened by Władysław Gomułka's breakaway from the Soviet orthodoxy in 1956, and by the changes initiated in the next decade in Czechoslovakia by the reformists lead by Alexander Dubček. Two shocks of 1968 — the suppression of the protest of the Polish March and quelling the Prague Spring by the tanks of the Warsaw Pact ruined these hopes. The third experience was the strategy of Catholic politicians accepting the geopolitical need of Poland's alliance with the Soviet Union and declaring their support for the social slogans of socialism. This trend, which was called neo-positivism, attempted — with its symbolic presence in the Sejm (Parliament) — to smuggle through a bit of rationalism in education and economy, defend

²⁸ More about the source of this document and its subsequent versions see Jan Skórzyński, "'List 59" i narodziny opozycji demokratycznej w Polsce', *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 163, 2008, pp. 137–58.

religious freedoms and limit certain absurd steps of PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) rule. The sense of this licensed opposition was undermined by the brutal pacifications of the March '68 protests (and the accompanying anti-Semitic campaign) and of the December '70 strikes, which showed the ineffectiveness of the attempts to soften the face of 'real socialism' within the official institutions.

The failure of both concepts — the revisionist and the neo-positivist — showed that loyalty and rational persuasion are useless as the tools of system democratization.²⁹ Attempts at a direct confrontation with the regime also had a negative effect — whether armed, like the anti-communist underground in the forties or Poznań workers in 1956, or in the form of street demonstrations carried on by students in 1968 and by workers from the Coast in 1970. The return in the end of the sixties to the model of postwar secret anti-communist conspiracy by Ruch (Movement), was also a failure and the members of Ruch found themselves in the dock. Long-term sentences were not balanced by the achievements of the group led by Andrzej Czuma, which did not manage to reach the public opinion in spite of publishing two mimeographed independent papers.

The next stage of development of the opposition, that is the establishment of KOR in 1976, was preceded by a debate how to effectively counteract the communist system. Its main assumptions were formulated in *Tezy o nadziei i beznadziejności* by the philosopher Leszek Kołakowski, a former Marxist, who emigrated in 1968. The Soviet model of socialism is not capable of reforming itself — he stated — it should be removed as a whole. This does not, however, mean that the only hope for changes should be a political revolution. Although the system cannot be repaired, the pressure by the society may make it less oppressive for the people. It should be a constant pressure on the regime aimed at liberalization, but not, like revisionists, from the inside, but from the outside of the system.³⁰

²⁹ An analysis of the political road of revisionists and neo-positivists helped Adam Michnik to formulate in 1976 a new strategy of the opposition — evolutionism. See Adam Michnik, 'Nowy ewolucjonizm', in idem, *Szanse polskiej demokracji. Artykuły i eseje*, London, 1984, pp. 77–87; idem, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*, Berkeley, CA, 1985.

³⁰ Leszek Kołakowski, 'Tezy o nadziei i beznadziejności', *Kultura*, 1971, 6, pp. 3–21. In a later text about Polish intelligentsia and opposition environments related to it Kołakowski stressed that KOR did not formulate a broad political programme, considering the human rights idea a sufficient basis of its activities. He described it as 'an open oppositional anti-totalitarian movement'. The forms of activity of KOR movement included documentation of repressions, building communication network between workers from different industrial centres, publishing clandestine papers, and financial, legal and medical help for the persecuted. See Leszek Kołakowski, 'The Intelligentsia', in *Poland. Genesis of a Revolution*, ed. Abraham Brumberg, New York, 1983, p. 63.

Another former Marxist Jacek Kuroń, sentenced in 1965 to imprisonment for a leftist anti-communist manifesto *List otwarty do partii* (An open letter to the Party) (written together with Karol Modzelewski), announced in 1974 the death of revisionism and emergence of the new opposition — anti-systemic, anti-totalitarian and independence oriented. It was not really a diagnosis but rather a forecast, because the movement mentioned in the text was at its birth stage. Kuroń was strongly against conspiracy and for openness. The opposition was supposed to act within PRL law — without a name, without illegal structures, without contributions and members. The best form would be loose circles discussing, reading and writing — outside the control of the authorities, but openly.³¹ On the other hand, a scout activist and 1968 student movement participant Antoni Macierewicz postulated creating a clear, relatively small opposition group determined to struggle for justice, freedom and independence. He stated that both existing trends of regime contestation proved to be failures: the leftist, for which motivation to struggle against communism was the idea of socialism, and traditionalist connected with the Church and conducting a kind of *Realpolitik* toward PRL. The fault of participants of these forms of opposition was their lack of self-reliance and the fact that they did not count, first of all, on the society and the strength of own circle — with no patronage of any party fraction or assistance of the Church. Legality, in his opinion, could not be a condition of activity, but he accepted the postulate of openness.³²

While Kuroń extended the notion of opposition to any act of regime criticism or independent thinking, also within the official institutions, Macierewicz narrowed it to activists determined to counteract the regime. They both were, in a sense, right. Anti-system contestation needed fully involved people, but it would not be able to function without the support of less radical persons, who did not accept the system, but were not ready to openly challenge the official order. These *fellow travellers* of the opposition created a social buffer zone for the hard core of dissent.

The leader of the '68 generation and of the young oppositional left, Adam Michnik, stressed the value of partial changes. He stated that restraining of the system and extending areas of freedom can be achieved only under social pressure. The opposition has to address society, not the regime, like revisionists or neo-positivists tried to do. Its duty is to

³¹ [Jacek Kuroń], 'Polityczna opozycja w Polsce', *Kultura*, 1974, 11, pp. 3–21.

³² Marian Korybut [Antoni Macierewicz], 'Refleksje o opozycji', *Aneks*, 1976, 12, pp. 65–82.

build an alternative programme to communism. Instead of trying to access the rulers' ear, the opposition should show solidarity with the protests of the ruled and create independent institutions. Conspiracy aimed at overthrowing the dictatorship is unrealistic and dangerous. The power of the USSR and its domination over Poland gives no hope for the quick restoring of democracy and independence. Opposing revolutionism, Michnik proposed evolutionism — a strategy of gradual extension of civil freedoms. Self-organization of society was to be the key to the success of the gradual democratization programme. He believed that workers were the greatest hope — if they managed to establish an independent representation — in which opposition should help — they would be able to exert effective pressure on the government.³³

The vision of social self-organization was mainly developed by Jacek Kuroń. The opposition is made of 'people, who mindfully and actively counteract totalitarianism struggling for the sovereignty of the Polish Nation and State' — he wrote in *Myśli o programie działania*. According to him, social movements which could 'limit the central state authorities' control over certain areas of citizens' life' were an antidote for the communist atomization. Social movements defend particular interests, whereas the opposition should formulate political postulates regarding the whole community: democracy and independence. The addressee of its activities should be society, which will organize and empower itself, and force the regime to take democratization steps. The limits of democratization are drawn by the threat of Soviet intervention, which would be a tragedy for Poland. Therefore, Kuroń was of the opinion that the revolutionary way should be rejected. Extension of civil and labour freedoms was supposed to be achieved by way of peaceful pressure, passive resistance, strikes and negotiations with the government.³⁴

The opposition sociologist and political scientist Jakub Karpiński indicated the objectives of independent activity as *independence from the inside* (*Niepodległość od wewnątrz*) and defined opposition activity as social activity not subordinated to the regime. He stated that questioning the restricted state sovereignty doctrine ruling in the Soviet bloc is out of range of Polish independent groups. Nevertheless, the opposition

³³ Adam Michnik, 'Nowy ewolucjonizm', *Aneks*, 1977, 13–14, pp. 33–48.

³⁴ 'Za opozycję polityczną uważam [...] ludzi, którzy świadomie i czynnie przeciwstawiają się totalitaryzmowi, walcząc o suwerenność Narodu i Państwa Polskiego', którzy chcą 'ograniczyć panowanie centralnej władzy państwowej nad pewnymi sferami życia obywateli'. Jacek Kuroń, 'Myśli o programie działania', *Aneks*, 1977, 13–14, pp. 4–32 (p. 10).

goal is to limit citizens' lack of sovereignty and reduce their readiness to subordinate to the authorities. The necessary condition of freedom of Poland are independent institutions established by the sovereign individuals. It was also the way to develop the future political system solutions. 'It will be easier to achieve the state independence in the future and to develop the shape of sovereignty compliant with the nation's will, if people and institutions' lack of sovereignty is reduced today. The state's submission may be limited if people are less eager to perform and promote it' — Karpiński wrote.³⁵

Between the call for barricades and resignation from dreams about freedom the founders of the oppositional political thought proposed a third road — seeking compromise between Poles' striving for freedom and the regime in Warsaw and its headquarters in Moscow. In face of geopolitical reality and Poland's status as the element of Soviet bloc the democratic aspirations of the nation had to be subject to self-limitation. Democratization was supposed to be achieved by way of a peaceful evolution and negotiations with the regime; the violent revolutionary methods were rejected. The condition of achieving political compromise was the society organized independently of the system. Independent institutions acted toward this end cancelling communists' monopoly in the area of organization, information, and political initiative. They created a parallel world in which reconstruction of civic society began. This perspective of civic self-organization outside the party-state structures was the basis of KOR's political strategy.

The KOR generation

The founders of the Workers' Defence Committee proposed a model of opposition against the communist system in the post-totalitarian phase. I will describe this model more precisely, but first I want to present a draft for the collective portrait of the young generation of oppositionists, who played a decisive role in the establishment of the Committee and in shaping its profile.³⁶

³⁵ 'Łatwiej będzie w przyszłości osiągnąć niepodległość państwa i wypracowywać zgodny z wolą narodu kształt niepodległości, jeśli niesuwerenność ludzi i instytucji zmniejszy się już dziś. Podległość państwa może być ograniczona, jeśli ludzie mniej skwapliwie będą ją realizować i upowszechniać'. Jakub Karpiński, *Niepodległość od wewnątrz*, London, 1987, p. 129.

³⁶ Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR. Komitet Obrony Robotników, Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej*, Warsaw, 2006, passim; Jan Skórzyński, *Siła bezsilnych. Historia Komitetu Obrony Robotników*, Warsaw, 2012, passim.

KOR was established on 23 September 1976 by a very diverse group of people — both in the political and generational sense. An important role was played by the elderly and middle-age generation of anti-communist opposition — such persons like the economist Edward Lipiński, the lawyer Aniela Steinsbergowa, the activist of the pre-war Polish Socialist Party Antoni Pajdak, the former officer of the Home Army Józef Rybicki and Jan Józef Lipski, an intellectual who participated in numerous oppositional activities. Nevertheless, the initiators of the Committee and, later, the engine of its activity, was a young generation of contesters gathered in four circles: Gromada Włoczęgów (The Band of Wanderers) derived from the traditionalist First Warsaw Scout team; the leftist group of Adam Michnik (the so called commandos); the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (KIK) in Warsaw; the group of the students of Lublin Catholic University (KUL). Let us look at their age: Piotr Naimski and Janusz Krupski were 25, Andrzej Celiński — 26, Bogdan Borusewicz, Mirosław Chojecki and Kazimierz Wóycicki — 27, Wojciech Arkuszewski, Antoni Macierewicz and Wojciech Onyszkiewicz — 28, Barbara Toruńczyk, Adam Michnik, Seweryn Blumsztajn and Jan Lityński were 30, Henryk Wujec — 35. Jacek Kuroń, who was 42, was a senior figure in this group. These young people transferred Polish opposition from the stage of open letters, at which the older activists would gladly stay, to the stage of civic and social activities.

What were the common areas of these different groups, which initiated the establishment of KOR? They had the common experience of the March '68 protests, in which almost all the young KOR members took part. It was essential in two aspects. The political — as giving up hope to repair the system without changing its ideological framework. And the police aspect — through the experience of repressions, first arrests and court sentences. In the first half of the seventies an important space for meetings and initiating personal contacts were the independent, house seminars, during which participants got to know and discuss recent Polish history. In 1975 both, the former 'commandos' and scouts from the Gromada Włoczęgów participated in the campaign of letters opposing the change of the PRL Constitution. In the spring of 1976 they acted together in support of two students repressed for their views. It was a test of solidarity for the emerging new opposition and of its ability to defend itself. Soon after the strikes and demonstrations of 25 June 1976 they together manifested solidarity with the protesting workers in an open letter signed by people from KIK (Arkuszewski, Wóycicki), Gromada Włoczęgów (Celiński, Macierewicz) and 'commandos' (Blumsztajn, Lityński, and Toruńczyk).

Opposition circles were at that time at the threshold of the next stage of development: establishing institutions and initiating regular

activity. The protests of June '76 and repressions of their participants played the role of a catalyst. They occurred at the right time. Young contesters of the system were already past their first confrontations with the regime and its secret police, they knew how to behave under arrest and during questioning. They had a network of contacts and the opposition know-how — they could prepare petitions and open letters, collect signatures, and help the persecuted colleagues. They initiated — by the group from KUL — attempts to duplicate books and brought the printing equipment from abroad. They were able to take the initiative, they were self-reliant and eager to act without waiting for the decisions of the opposition authorities of the older generation. They did not have any illusions about the possibility to repair 'real socialism' from the inside.³⁷

Young people who prompted the establishment of KOR and ensured the great dynamics of its activities had the privilege of late birth. They did not experience the most repressive, Stalinist period of the regime and the fear of that time. As compared with the older generations stigmatized by the war and 'Great Fear' of the first decade of communism in Poland they had the gift of short memory. They did not assume in advance that it was impossible in the communist system to openly stand against the regime, since it must end with prison. The political lesson of that generation was the mass social protests of 1968 and 1970, which from their point of view rather showed the potential of the ruled than the omnipotence of the rulers. The Polish People's Republic's authorities, which brutally suppressed these protests without any attempt to initiate dialogue, once and for all lost their legitimization in the eyes of these young people. And in face of the mono-party using lies and violence, the opposition attitude became fully legitimized.

Anti-system involvement was also aided by the lack of stabilization or perspectives of improvement of their financial situation. As compared with the middle-aged generation induced to conformism by the consumer-addressed promises of Edward Gierek, the KOR generation did not have much to lose because they did not yet grow fat on anything — wealth measured by PRL standards, professional career or social status.

Young contesters of PRL were generally reluctant to embrace ideologies and political doctrines. It was cool to distance oneself from any '-isms'. Ideological or political labels were rarely used in the opposition discussions. This is why cooperation between the 'commandos' and scouts from

³⁷ It is reflected in the language of democratic opposition's documents and journalism, in which there were no references — contrary to the student movement of March '68 — to socialist values exposed in the official propaganda.

the Gromada Włoczęgów was possible, in spite of different origins. Bohdan Cywiński's book *Rodowody niepokornych*³⁸ helped to overcome ideological differences. Cywiński work presented traditions of the involvement of Polish intelligentsia from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century in the social progress and national liberation movement. It showed the community of non-conformism connecting socialists, nationalists and Catholics. The book *Rodowody* was highly appreciated by Catholic intellectuals and by the circles of the anti-communist left and opened the road to their anti-totalitarian alliance. Cywiński's book also became the reference reading of the opposition youth.

The common ideological denominator of this generation consisted of human and civil rights, such as freedom of speech and associations. These freedoms were considered the natural rights which no regime can take away. In this respect references were made to the UNO Human Rights Declaration of 1948 and the provisions of the Helsinki Accords of 1975. Distance from ideology was accompanied by choosing goals and areas of activity – specific, realistic, aimed at effectiveness, relating more to the social and civic sphere than to the strictly political one. An example of such approach was initiating the campaign of help for persecuted workers and demanding from communist authorities compliance with law instead of general independence or democracy slogans.

As far as tradition is concerned, they referred not to the national myths of the Warsaw Uprising or the post-war armed underground but to the experience of political dissent against the communist dictatorship, such as an attempt of legal opposition taken after the war by PSL or the democratic movement of October '56. 1956 was a year of great social movement for freedom, which, unfortunately, trusted too much the new leader of PZPR and was used by Gomułka's group to take over power without reforming the system. The isolated March events of 1968 and December protests of 1970 were a lesson that the intelligentsia must support workers' revolt and overcome the divisions between these circles.

The situation in Poland advantaged the crystallization of opposition attitudes. The growing up of dissident youth was facilitated by a relative liberalization in the first half of the seventies. Opening up to the world and the growing financial dependency on the West favoured a readiness to embrace risk and non-conformism because oppositionists felt that the head of the PZPR Edward Gierek would hesitate to apply harsh repressions. This was the regime, which first caused indignation due to its propaganda lies and brutal persecutions of the participants of the June '76

³⁸ Bohdan Cywiński, *Rodowody niepokornych*, Warsaw, 1971.

protests, and later — disdain. Repressions against the opposition — firing from work, 48-hour detaining, bans on publishing and travel abroad, arrests and prosecutor's investigations — were severe, but they could not paralyze the activity of the contesters, who had a close-knit community, self-defence and self-assistance (also financial) networks, had the support of the West and the sense of moral virtue.

The KOR model of opposition

The strategy of the opposition described above was enforced with the establishment of the Workers' Defence Committee. KOR was born in full daylight — as an open social institution announcing its objectives and lineup to the public and presenting an account of its activity to society. The founders of the Committee reported its establishment to the Sejm speaker, but they did not try to register as an association, which deprived the regime of an opportunity to delegalize it. Therefore, in the opinion of opposition lawyers KOR was not illegal — it was a committee founded in a state of necessity, such as natural disaster, to provide help to those in need. The transformation, a year later, into the Social Self-Defence Committee 'KOR' meant the transfer from the ad hoc help to the victims of the system and support for those harmed by the regime to the continuous struggle for civil rights. KSS 'KOR' protested against political repressions, provided help to the persecuted, counteracted the breaking of rule of law, demanded institutional securing of civil rights and freedoms, and supported other independent initiatives. It did not formulate a political programme *sensu stricto*, did not appeal to overthrow the government, and did not plan a national uprising. It was the opposition within the law — they tried not to overstep the penal code bans, they requested the authorities to comply with the law and Constitution, used the existing legislation, and international commitments of Poland to defend human and civil rights. The effectiveness of this assumption was confirmed by the fact that in spite of the long-time efforts of the Secret Service the authorities did not manage to gather incriminating evidence which would enable them to take KOR activists to court — neither in the seventies nor in the following decade. The attitude of oppositional legalism did not include the independent printing and uncensored publications, as censorship was considered illegal by the opposition.

The KOR model of opposition was composed of the following features:
— open activity — this rule was applied in a literary sense, acting under own surname, and in political meaning, openly announcing one's goals;

- non-violence — the issue of rejecting violence was subject to a firm consensus in the whole democratic opposition;
- loose organizational structure — KOR had certain characteristics of an organization: a limited number of members, a commission editing its statements, and a fund, but it had no statutes, authorities or uniform ideology or programme; it was a civic institution around which a broader social movement emerged;
- decentralization — KSS 'KOR' was a centre of social activities, it supported the grass-root opposition projects, such as papers and magazines, founding committees of the Free Trade Unions or Flying University, which were totally independent; their participants took actions according to their conviction and on their own account;
- liberation radicalism — attitude of a man, who is free here and now, fulfils the need for freedom in the world of dictatorship and rejects restrictions and orders of the regime;
- political self-limitation — democratization was to be achieved by way of evolution, not revolution, since the experience of East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia showed that the threat of military invasion of the USSR should be treated as real, so no demands equivalent to the liquidation of 'real socialism' should be made;
- ethical maximalism — attitude of 'life in truth' meant not supporting the regime in any respect, not lying, not participating in the communist theatre of public life;
- specific social objectives — KOR was established to help people persecuted by the state and it was the basic area of its work until the end of its existence;
- solidarity — the rule of defence of colleagues from the opposition and all persons persecuted for political reasons, according to Jacek Kuroń's principle that people are more important than slogans and programmes;
- pluralism and civic mindedness — KOR was created by people of different political views and different ideological sensitivities, whose cooperation was possible because their goal was not to take over power but to empower citizens. The Committee did not play the role of a political party, it was a spokesman of the public interest.

These ten features formed a pattern of independent activities used successfully not only by KSS 'KOR', but by the whole democratic opposition in Poland. Other oppositional groups — Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela (Movement of Defence of Human and Civil Rights), Studencki Komitet Solidarności (Student Solidarity Committee), Ruch

Młodej Polski (Young Poland Movement), Wolne Związki Zawodowe (Free Trade Unions) — also carried on campaigns for civil rights and creating enclaves of freedom publishing uncensored books and magazines, avoiding slogans of revolution or irredentism, and preparing for a long march to independence and democracy. This strategy, including the model of political self-limitation, was continued and developed by the Solidarity movement, in which KOR people played an important role.

(Translated by Elżbieta Petrajtis-O'Neill)

Summary

The communist system implemented in Poland after the Second World War was repeatedly subject to publicly manifested social disapproval. With respect to the attitude to mono-party rule, four types may be described: affirmation, adaptation, resistance, and protest. Resistance and dissent express disapproval for the politics of the regime (in part or in whole). But they differ in their character: passive (defensive) in the case of resistance, and active in the case of dissent. Resistance was, for example, reflected in peasants' defence against collectivization in the form of refusal to join the agricultural production cooperatives, whereas active protest against the politics of the Communist Party was reflected by demonstrations and students' strikes in 1968 and workers' strikes in 1970. Opposition is the most developed, institutionalized and anti-system form of dissent.

The exemplary model of opposition against the communist system was developed by the Workers' Defence Committee. It implemented the strategy formulated by Leszek Kołakowski, Jacek Kuroń, Antoni Macierewicz, Adam Michnik and Jakub Karpiński. The creators of oppositional political thought were of the opinion that only the society organized independently of the regime can lead to the democratization of Poland. Social self-organization outside the structures of the party-state was to be enhanced by independent institutions, which cancelled the communists' monopoly in the area of organization, information and political initiative. They created a parallel world, in which the germs of civic society emerged — the help network for those persecuted by the state, uncensored press and publishing houses, political groups, scientific associations and trade unions. KOR developed a pattern of oppositional activities, which was also used by other groups contesting the system. The most essential features of this new model of anti-communist opposition were: openness, decentralization, political self-limitation, ethical radicalism, solidarity, pluralism and civic virtues.

(Translated by Elżbieta Petrajtis-O'Neill)

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