Deconstructing self-creation. Mieczysław Rakowski and his political biography

MICHAŁ PRZEPERSKI

L & A. Birkenmajer Institute for the History of Science, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: m.przeperski@gmail.com
Securitas Imperii 41 (2) 2022: 76–97

Abstract

As historiography tends to claim that journalist, and communist politician Mieczysław F. Rakowski (1926–2008) was a "distinct figure" in the People's Republic of Poland. It is mostly so because of his unique ability to self-create his own story and his own political image. Such a discourse was mainly shaped by his *Dzienniki polityczne* (Political Diaries), an extensive, complex text combining elements of a diaristic source and memoirs written after many years, quite often close to pamphlets. The deconstruction of message created by Rakowski turns out to be an indispensable introduction to building a biographical narration that can be woven around the categories of exceptionality and typicality. Thereby, Rakowski's exceptionality finds its confirmation, but at the same time it gains a meaning different from the one the hero himself would prefer. The very deconstruction of Rakowski's retrospective self-creation makes it possible to universalize his experience and to treat it like a point of departure into the wider history of Central European communism.

Keywords

Polish communism, social advancement, political biography, paths of career, Mieczysław F. Rakowski

Let's wait what the story about this party will tell you. […] *I am simply appealing not to mistreat the P*[olish]*U*[nited]*W*[orkers']*P*[arty]. *Because it is abuse often on your own life.* […] *I said at various meetings: such a strange situation has arisen that we do not like ourselves anymore, we do not like this party, this former party. Well, you would like to walk with your head held up high. I announce the end of the 11th Congress of the PUWP. I am asking you comrades to arise. Bring out the banner of the Polish United Workers' Party!,*[1] said Mieczysław Franciszek Rakowski, ending the last ever congress of the PUWP, in January 1990. In this way, he himself became a symbol of the monoparty that ruled Poland for nearly half a century, although he was at its head for only half a year, the shortest of all the leaders.

The speech at the end of the 11th Congress is not the only one that has been remembered. The meeting with the workers of Gdańsk Shipyard Lenin, organized on August 25, 1983[2] may serve as no less significant example. In a speech that lasted well over an hour, Rakowski presented his vision of the development of relations between the trade union "Solidarity" (Solidarność) and the party-state authorities in the years 1980–1981.[3] He was hysterical at the time, poorly masking his nervousness, but above all, shockingly arrogant. The then deputy prime minister of the government of Polish People's Republic made fun of the workers' leader Lech Wałęsa, insulted the rank-and-file members of "Solidarity", and questioned the purity of the intentions of its leaders, to put it mildly.

Especially the latter example seems striking, considering that Rakowski began his career at the highest levels of Polish politics in February 1981 as the author of the slogan *respect your partner*.[4] At the moment this article by Rakowski was published, it was seen as the olive branch of the communist party to the "Solidarity".

---

1 *Poczekajmy jeszcze, co powie historia o tej partii.* [...] *Ja apeluję po prostu o to, by nie znęcać się nad PZPR. Bo jest to znęcanie się często i nad swoim życiem.* [...] *Mówiłem na różnych spotkaniach: powstała taka dziwna sytuacja, że sami siebie nie lubimy, nie lubimy tej partii, już tej byłej partii. Otóż chciałoby się chodzić jednak z podniesioną głową. Ogłaszam zakończenie obrad XI Zjazdu PZPR. Proszę o powstanie towarzyszki i towarzyszy. Sztandar Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej wyprowadzić!* Przemówienie Mieczysława Rakowskiego, koniec XI Zjazdu PZPR (Speech by Mieczysław Rakowski, end of the 11th Congress of the PUWP). For the full version of the speech, see Annex in RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: *Dzienniki polityczne 1987–1990,* t. 10 (Political Diaries, Vol. 10). Iskry, Warszawa 2005.

2 For more see PRZEPERSKI, Michał: Mieczysław Rakowski w Stoczni Gdańskiej – 25 sierpnia 1983 roku (Mieczysław Rakowski at the Gdańsk Shipyard – August 25, 1983). In: KNOCH, Konrad et al.: *Historia Stoczni Gdańskiej* (History of the Gdańsk Shipyard). Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, Gdańsk 2018, pp. 267–296.

3 A partial text of Rakowski's speech can be found in his legacy in the *Hoover Institution Archives* (HIA), Mieczysław F. Rakowski papers, Box 68, Discussion of the speech at the Gdańsk Shipyard, August 25, 1983. It was also published in the press: Wrogowie socjalizmu podeptali idee Sierpnia (The enemies of socialism have trampled on the ideas of August). *Trybuna Ludu*, 27.–28. 8. 1983. Audio recordings of broadcasts incl. in the digital collections of the Gdańsk University of Technology Library, BPG, Premier Rakowski w Stoczni Gdańskiej: transmisja TVP – see http://pbc.gda.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=21099 (quoted version dated 29. 11. 2022), and BPG, Premier Rakowski w Stoczni Gdańskiej: transmisja TVP cd. – see http://pbc.gda.pl/dlibra/docmetadata?id=21100 (quoted version dated 29. 11. 2022).

4 RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: Szanować partnera (Respect your partner). *Polityka*, 1981, No. 3, p. 1.

It seemed trustworthy, because Rakowski for years has been considered a representative of the pro-reform wing within the PUWP, for the lack of a better term often labeled as "liberal" or "social-democratic" (the latter term was especially popular abroad). So, was he liberal and autocratic at the same time?

It is all but surprising that Polish historian Jerzy Eisler defined Rakowski as *a multidimensional and complex figure*[5] in his post of the First Secretary of the PUWP. This makes him a unique persona, because among the leaders of the People's Republic of Poland, hardly anyone received a similar assessment from the professional historians. Those who tried to write about him in depth also encountered another problem, namely, how to separate public Rakowski from the private one? Opinions he tended to formulate in public and for a private use were often extremely distant from each other. This became particularly evident when in 1998 the political diaries, which he had conscientiously kept since 1958, began to appear on the bookstore market. Two scholars, Jacek Luszniewicz and Łukasz Dwilewicz pointed out that they were *the key to Rakowski*.[6] However, it was a very ambiguous key. Another historian Paweł Machcewicz pointed it out clearly, recalling that Rakowski, for many years considered a moderate politician, in 1989 *criticized the PUWP's Parliamentary Club and even* [the communist Minister of Interior between 1981 and 1990 Czesław] *Kiszczak for capitulation* […]. *This is the end of the party's "liberal" long road*,[7] he pointed out.

This brief juxtaposition shows how complex and self-contradictory was the political career of Mieczysław Rakowski. How to find consistency in so many inconsistencies? How to deconstruct his suggestive self-creation? And where such a deconstruction can lead us to?

Curriculum vitae

Mieczysław Rakowski was born on December 1, 1926 in the small village of Kowalewko-Folwark near Bydgoszcz, in the family of a moderately wealthy farmer, Franciszek[8]. These were the areas of northern Greater Poland (Wielkopolska),

5 In Polish: *Wielowymiarowa i złożona postać*. See EISLER, Jerzy: *Siedmiu wspaniałych. Poczet pierwszych sekretarzy KC PZPR* (The Magnificent Seven. The first secretaries of the CC of the PUWP). Czerwone i Czarne, Warszawa 2014, p. 462.

6 In Polish: *Klucz do Rakowskiego*. See DWILEWICZ, Łukasz – LUSZNIEWICZ, Jacek: Dzienniki polityczne jako klucz do Rakowskiego (Political journals as a key to Rakowski). In: ZAWISTOWSKI, Andrzej (ed.): *Ekonomia-społeczeństwo-polityka. Studia ofiarowane prof. dr hab. Januszowi Kalińskiemu w 70 rocznicę urodzin* (Economics-society-politics. Studies donated to prof. dr hab. Janusz Kaliński on the 70th anniversary of his birth). Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, Warszawa 2012, pp. 249–276.

7 In Polish: *Krytykował za kapitulanctwo Klub Parlamentarny PZPR, a nawet Kiszczaka* [...]. *Taki jest koniec długiej drogi partyjnego „liberała"*. MACHCEWICZ, Paweł: „Słuchać potulnie albo odejść". O Dziennikach politycznych Mieczysława Rakowskiego ("Listen meekly or walk away". On Mieczysław Rakowski's Political Diaries). In: MACHCEWICZ, Pawel: *Spory o Historię 2000–2011* (Disputes on history 2000–2011). Znak, Kraków 2012, p. 84.

8 This part of the text is based on the findings presented in the book PRZEPERSKI, Michał: *Mieczysław F. Rakowski. Biografia polityczna* (Mieczysław F. Rakowski. Political biography). IPN, Warszawa 2021.

a transitional border between Poland and Germany.[9] The borders themselves here were relatively freshly established, since the independent Second Polish Republic had existed for only a few years.

When Rakowski was 13, his father was killed by the Germans in the mass execution. He was among the first victims of German terror during World War II, the victim of the Pomeranian Crime (zbrodnia pomorska).[10] Rakowski senior was a representative of the local elite, he used to organize a support for local farmers and was politically active, although it was more of a pro-state commitment than the one motivated ideologically in any way. In a situation when there was no father left and young Mieczysław had to leave his native village with his mother and sister, he found himself in Poznań, the capital of the Greater Poland, then the capital of the newly created, German-occupied Warthegau. Here he survived the war. Initially worked in a shop, later in a factory, where he first came into contact with a leftist thought, with the communist sympathizers. When the Red Army captured Poznań in February 1945, Rakowski did not hesitate for a moment and volunteered to join the ranks of the Polish Army formed alongside the Soviets. He did not manage to fight at the front, but in September 1945 he became an officer, having passed only four classes of a rural elementary school.

In the following years, he did not make a great military career, but managed to pass first a high school diplomas, so-called *mała matura* and *matura*, the latter of which opened way to the university-level education. He served in Kraków, the former Polish capital, and a city considered by the communists as a "nest of reactionaries".[11] It was exactly then that he had the first opportunity to encounter the bourgeois and intellectual world. Already in 1946, he became a member of the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR), and two years later he already had the membership of the PUWP (established by the absorption of the socialist party by the communist one). Shortly after, in 1949, he was among the officers selected for the journalism school at the Central Committee (CC) of the PUWP. He graduated from school, but never returned to the army. He was noticed as an exceptionally zealous, conscientious and hardworking comrade. It meant brilliant perspectives for the upcoming career. In the following years he took the post in the Press Department of the Central Committee of the PUWP.

The year 1952 proved to be one of the most important moments in his life. This was the moment when Rakowski visibly began to differ from his party comrades.

---

9 CHLEBOWCZYK, Józef: *O prawie do bytu małych i młodych narodów. Kwestia narodowa i procesy narodotwórcze we wschodniej Europie Środkowej w dobie kapitalizmu (od schyłku XVIII do początków XX w.)* (On the small and young nations' right to exist. The national issue and nation-building processes in Eastern Central Europe in the era of capitalism /from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century/). Śląski Instytut Naukowy, Warszawa 1983, p. 30

10 CERAN, Tomasz et al.: *The Pomeranian Crime 1939*. IPN, Warszawa 2018.

11 BRZOZA, Czesław: *3 Maja 1946 r. w Krakowie. Przebieg wydarzeń i dokumenty* (May 3, 1946 in Kraków. Course of events and documents). Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 1996.

Young and already outstanding violinist Wanda Wiłkomirska[12] became his wife. The doors of informal bourgeois salons (or what actually remained of them after the years of terror) opened for Rakowski, he himself could have got to know a completely different world. Although he was a communist, he was tolerated. In the same year, he began studying at the party school, known as the Institute for Education of Scientific Staff (Instytut Kształcenia Kadr Naukowych). This school, founded on the model of the Moscow Institute of Red Professors (Институт красной профессуры), was to create a new intelligentsia loyal to the PUWP. However, as it turned out over time, it contributed significantly to laying the foundations for the intellectual opposition in Poland. Among its graduate one may enlist, for example, internationally famous philosophers and historians of idea such as Bronisław Baczko or Leszek Kołakowski.[13]

After defending his PhD dissertation in February 1956, Rakowski returned to the Central Committee, but only for a while. In June that year popular unrest took place in Poznań, shaking the fundaments of the communist power in Poland. Bloodily suppressed, to certain extent it have paved the way for the anti-stailinist uprising in Budapest in October and November and the seizure of power by Władysław Gomułka in Warsaw. In autumn this year, Gomułka took power in Poland, and the hitherto apparatchik was entrusted with the responsible task of co-organizing a nationwide weekly that would represent the views of the new party leadership. As much as Gomułka wanted to break with the Stalinist legacy, at the same time he by no means opted for a far-reaching democratization of the system. This was how the story of the *Polityka* weekly began. Initially, Rakowski became the deputy editor-in-chief (1957–1958), and then the editor-in-chief (1958–1982). He returned to the party apparatus only three decades later, in a completely different circumstances.

Polityka has become an exceptional magazine in the whole communist bloc.[14] Edited according to the strict party guidelines, at the same time looked for other means of expression, trying to write more than the party authorities would allow. Rakowski was undoubtedly the father of this success, without him the whole project would not have been possible. He was trusted by the Central Committee because, although young, he was obedient and from the Gomułka's point of view, trustworthy. At the same time, however, he had his own ambitions, not necessarily coming along the expectations of the communist old guard. Among the Warsaw intelligentsia Rakowski felt at home, more and more often went abroad, he was

12 RAWIK, Joanna: *Maestra. Opowieść o Wandzie Wiłkomirskiej* (Maestra. The story of Wanda Wiłkomirska). Twój Styl, Warszawa 1993.

13 MENTZEL, Zbigniew: *Kołakowski. Czytanie świata*. *Biografia* (Kołakowski. Reading the world. A biography). Znak, Kraków 2020.

14 See e.g. DOMNITZ, Christian: *Zwrot ku Europie. Transformacje sfery publicznej w realnym socjalizmie 1975–1989* (Turn towards Europe. Transformations of the public sphere in real socialism 1975–1989). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2022.

friends of writers and actors. Effectively, he was a man connecting two worlds, otherwise hardly connected, the world of the communist party and the one of intellectual and cultural elites. It also allowed him to build an editorial office that created the most widely read weekly in the communist Poland.

In the 1960s, he gained political experience, and his ambitions grew over time. Although in 1964 he became a deputy member of the Central Committee of PUWP, it was not enough for him. He did not become a "full" member until 1975, and in the meantime, in 1972, became a member of parliament. However, these promotions came already in the era of Edward Gierek (December 1970 – September 1980), who focused on the rapid modernization of Poland, combined with the dynamic development of consumerism. Rakowski hoped that he would become one of the closest associates of the new first secretary. Already at the end of the 1960s *Polityka* quite openly supported Gierek. However, the awaited ministerial promotions did not come. They came only in 1981 in a completely different political reality.

Initially enthusiastic about the Gierek policies, in the second half of the 1970s, Rakowski became more critical. It could have been observed especially in his texts on the economic and political reality, although still within the limits allowed by censorship. The economic crisis and the actual bankruptcy of the modernization à la Gierek was no surprise, and already clearly visible. Yet, against the background of the uniform tone of propaganda in Poland, Rakowski sounded somewhat special.

In August 1980 strikes broke out on the Polish Coast (especially in the Gdańsk Shipyard), as a result of which the authorities had to agree to far-reaching concessions to the protesting workers. The establishment of the independent, self-governing trade union "Solidarity" soon became crucial. Already in August 1980 Rakowski believed that any sort of agreement could have been labelled only a "Brest peace"[15] (with reference to the peace signed by the Bolsheviks with Germany in March 1918), and therefore only a tactical concession. As a result of the strikes, however, Edward Gierek fell, and Stanisław Kania became the new party leader. When in February 1981 the new government was formed by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, Kania proposed that Rakowski should become the deputy prime minister of this cabinet. Indeed, Rakowski soon found himself in the highest circles of power.

In 1981, he was one of the most important communist politicians in Poland, being responsible for negotiations with the "Solidarity" leadership. He had the reputation of a party "liberal", so the trade union's activists expected leniency on his part. Conversely, he believed that because he was a "liberal", the leaders of "Solidarity" should trust him and significantly restrain its demands. These conflicting points of view soon proved irreconcilable. Month after month, Rakowski not only lost popularity among the members of the social movement and in wider circles of his countrymen. Gradually, his hitherto friends started to distance themselves from

15 MODZELEWSKI, Karol: *Zajeździmy kobyłę historii. Wspomnienia poobijanego jeźdźca* (We will ruin the history mare. Memories of a battered rider). Iskry, Warszawa 2013, p. 246.

him. It was the case with the editorial office of *Polityka*, as well the cultural and intellectual circles of Warsaw. He parted ways with Wiłkomirska, and actress Elżbieta Kępińska became his partner, later his second wife. This, however, did not change the fact that Rakowski was not only increasingly frustrated but also less popular. His popularity collapsed for good when in December 1981 he authorized the martial law introduced by Wojciech Jaruzelski to end the "Solidarity" revolution.

In the fall of 1982, Rakowski contributed to the outlawing of "Solidarity", which until then had only been formally suspended. By doing so, he eliminated the very reason for which he became the member of the Jaruzelski's cabinet. In the meantime the latter became the party leader keeping the posts of the prime minister, the minister of defense and the leader of the Country's Defence Committee. It turned out that Jaruzelski did not count on the former "liberal" who no longer had any considerable credibility, being rather a burden than a chance for the cabinet. In 1985, Rakowski was ruthlessly sidelined. During his visit to Moscow, Jaruzelski was persuaded by none other than Mikhail Gorbachev. The last general secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) claimed that Rakowski was too "liberal" for him, and thus, for the Soviet leadership in general.[16] Rakowski spent the period 1985–1987 as deputy speaker of the Polish parliament, being an attentive observer of the political scene, and to a lesser extent its participant. At that time, he came to conclusion that the only way out of the crisis in the Polish economy and political system was to escape forward. Rakowski became truly fascinated with private entrepreneurship, and saw it as one and only rescue for the future of the communist Poland.

In December 1987, he returned to great politics in a great style, becoming a member of the PUWP's Politburo. In June of the following year, he became the secretary of the Central Committee responsible for propaganda, and in September 1988 took up the position of the prime minister. General Jaruzelski, who had been the head of state as the Chairman of the Council of State since 1985, treated him in private talks at the time as "the last resort".[17] Rakowski set out to reform the state with impetus. He introduced laws that substantially facilitated the individual entrepreneurship, and also simplified the inflow of foreign capital. There were also symbolic gestures: on October 31, 1988, he announced the closure of the Gdańsk Shipyard. The official reason was its unprofitability, but in fact it was even more to show that the PUWP would lead Poland out of the crisis without the participation of the (then) underground "Solidarity". After the strikes in spring and summer 1988, the latter started to become an important political player again. Rakowski wanted to cope without Lech Wałęsa, whom he highly disliked personally. But it did not work.

16 *HIA*, Mieczysław F. Rakowski papers, Box 7, Dziennik 1992 (Note from 10. 7. 1992).
17 KOWAL, Paweł: Chciał być polskim Dubczekiem (He wanted to be Polish Dubček). *Polityka*, 2012, No. 5, p. 56.

At the turn of 1988 and 1989, there was a turning point in the Communist Party policy, symbolized by the two-part 10th Plenum of the Central Committee. Rakowski played the role of the strongest supporter of talks with "Solidarity". He realized that the communists might not successfully go about the social outbreak associated with the dramatically deteriorating economic situation of the country. This led to the Round Table Talks, inaugurated on Feburary 6, 1989. They *de facto* brought an end to the autonomous activity of Rakowski as the prime minister. Under the pressure of facts he had to restrain his further reform plans. As a consequence of the agreement signed on April 5, 1989, the elections of June 1989 took place. Although the communists guaranteed themselves the control over the new system of power, it quickly turned out to be unsustainable.

After the June elections, Rakowski reluctantly resigned from the post of the prime minister. On July 19, 1989 Jaruzelski was elected president of the People's Republic of Poland, at the end of the same month, Rakowski became his successor as the First Secretary of the Central Committee of PUWP. The last one, as it turned out. Despite efforts and attempts, the Polish United Workers' Party was a thing of the past. In August 1989, the former satellite parties – the Democratic Party (Stronnictwo Demokratyczne) and the United People's Party (Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe) – turned their backs on the communists. The mission of the last communist prime minister, Czesław Kiszczak, ended with a painful defeat. Instead, on August 24, 1989 Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the new prime minister of Poland. Two days earlier, Gorbachev, in a telephone conversation with Rakowski, made him understand that Polish communists were on their own. No stronger pressure, not to mention any use of force on the part of the Soviets was an option. In the last months of 1989, Rakowski could have only prepared the future construction of a new party, party that was to succeed the PUWP. Its last congress was also the first congress of the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (Socjaldemokracja Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej), the new post-communist left party. Rakowski became only its rank-and-file member. The leadership was taken over by his younger protegees: Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leszek Miller.

From that moment on, until his death in November 2008, Rakowski remained a political pensioner. He tried to advise, support and publish, but in fact he acted only as a commentator, not always listened to. His most important role in this period was the publication of ten-volume political diaries, which appeared in 1998–2005, covering the events of 1958–1990. Thus, he became the most important chronicler of the political history of the People's Republic of Poland. As well as an exceptionally suggestive creator of his own legend.

Facing the self-creation of Rakowski the politician was the most difficult challenge for me while working on his political biography.

In search of the key

The biographer should offer the key to interpreting his character. If he does not, he risks making the narrative incoherent, chaotic, and full of inconsistencies. On the other hand, biographies – especially political ones – are not unambiguous. They almost never rely on a consistent march from point A to point B. Needless to say, cause and effect sequences are *a priori* construct of the biographer.

During last years some very meaningful biographies of the communist rulers were published, including the one of Gustáv Husák by Michal Macháček,[18] in which the access to the post-Soviet archives played a crucial role or the one of Leonid Brezhnev by Susanne Schattenberg, which gave an impressive understanding of a person along to the detailed analysis of the political career.[19] When I started working on Rakowski's biography, I was greatly impressed by the biography of Tadeusz Katelbach, a Polish politician from the Second Polish Republic, also active in exile, by Sławomir Cenckiewicz.[20] This is a truly monumental piece. Extremely detailed, reflecting the fate of the hero in detail, and shedding a beam of light on the entire era. It is also polemical, written with a noticeable and convincingly argued thesis, showing Katelbach as a separate figure, a rebel in the fight for values. Slawomir Kalbarczyk presented a similarly detailed, extremely extensive biography of the four-time Prime Minister of the Second Polish Republic, Kazimierz Bartel.[21] A detailed reconstruction of a political biography, getting to know all the available sources – this is the ideal that both of the aforementioned books seemed to touch. However, research in the voluminous collection of Rakowski's papers at the Hoover Institution in Stanford, finally confirmed my conviction that in the case of the last first secretary of the PUWP it would be a road to nowhere. The amount of detailed information about his political activities is enormous, exceeding the perceptual abilities of one researcher. What is no less important, in terms of factual detail I am not able to outbid Rakowski himself. As already mentioned, he summarized the key years of his political career in ten volumes of journals that he himself compiled and prepared for publication.[22] Those diaries are not the only ones, as for example

18 MACHÁČEK, Michal: *Gustáv Husák*. Vyšehrad, Prague 2017.
19 SCHATTENBERG, Susanne: *Leonid Breschnew. Staatsmann Und Schauspieler im Schatten Stalins. Eine Biographie*. Bohlau Verlag, Köln 2017.
20 CENCKIEWICZ, Sławomir: *Tadeusz Katelbach. Biografia polityczna (1897–1977)* (Tadeusz Katelbach. Political biography /1897–1977/). LTW, Łomianki 2005.
21 KALBARCZYK, Sławomir: *Kazimierz Bartel (1882–1941). Uczony w świecie polityki* (Kazimierz Bartel /1882–1941/. A scientist in the world of politics). IPN, Warszawa 2015.
22 RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: *Dzienniki polityczne, t. 1–10, 1958–1990* (Political Diaries, Vol. 1–10, 1958–1990). Iskry, Warszawa 1998–2005.

the diaries of the politician Józef Tejchma[23] or writer Wiktor Woroszylski[24] could be treated as very important documents of the era, but they are, at the same time, certainly one of its kind.

There is no doubt that Rakowski was unique. He regularly kept records, including events from the lion's share of his political career, which were also later printed in the version approved by the author, are of exceptional quality when it comes to research on the history of communism in Poland. It also means that Rakowski himself created a clear, original vision of the past. He was fully aware of it. In a short introduction to the first volume of his work, he wrote: *Political diaries appear at a time when the history of People's Poland is not only the subject of interest of more or less honest historians, but also of right-wing politicians who striving to eliminate the left from the political life of the country, or to weaken its influence, proclaim the criminal nature of the Polish People's Republic and PUWP. So I have to take into account that my record will be used in the fight against the left to which I belong*.[25]

Therefore, he undoubtedly understood that his testimony from the communist era would be more than a source for the reconstruction of facts and processes. It will also become a clearly audible voice co-shaping the discussion on the latest history of Poland. In the abovementioned introduction, he did not mention that his intended defense of the good name of People's Poland was also a fight for his own good name. It was a fight for a vision of his own biography indeed. At the same time, it was a vision completely different from that one symbolized by the quoted Rakowski's speech from the Congress Hall in January 1990 or from the Gdańsk Shipyard August 1983. Rakowski presented in his own diaries is a trueborn communist "liberal": an opponent of harsh regime, a supporter of dialogue, a modernizer. This vision certainly did not convinced everyone. However, it was also able to arouse recognition among declared anti-communists, making some of them to change the political assessment of the author's activities.[26]

---

23 TEJCHMA, Józef: *Kulisy dymisji. Z dzienników ministra kultury 1974–1977* (The backstage of resignation. From the diaries of the Minister of Culture 1974–1977). Cracovia, Kraków 1991; TEJCHMA, Józef: *Odszedł Gomułka, przyszedł Gierek. Notatki z lat 1971–1973* (Gomulka's gone, Gierek's come. Notes from 1971–1973). Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2006; TEJCHMA, Józef: *W kręgu nadziei i rozczarowań. Notatki dzienne z lat 1978–1982* (In the circle of hopes and disappointments. Daily notes from 1978–1982). Projekt, Warszawa 2002.

24 WOROSZYLSKI, Wiktor: *Dzienniki 1953–1982* (Diaries 1953–1982). Karta, Warszawa 2017; WOROSZYLSKI, Wiktor: *Dzienniki 1983–1987* (Diaries 1983–1987). Karta, Warszawa 2018; WOROSZYLSKI, Wiktor: *Dzienniki 1988–1996* (Diaries 1988–1996). Karta, Warszawa 2019.

25 *Dzienniki polityczne ukazują się w czasie, gdy dzieje Polski Ludowej są nie tylko przedmiotem zainteresowań mniej lub bardziej uczciwych historyków, lecz także polityków orientacji prawicowej, którzy w dążeniu do wyeliminowania lewicy z życia politycznego kraju, względnie osłabienia jej wpływów, głoszą pogląd o przestępczym charakterze PRL i PZPR. Muszę więc brać pod uwagę, że mój zapis zostanie wykorzystany w walce z lewicą do której należę*. RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: *Dzienniki polityczne*, *t. 1, 1958–1962*. Iskry, Warszawa 1998, p. 6.

26 „Liberalna" prasa komunistyczna?, cykl. Kulisy historii odc. 19 ("Liberal" communist press?) – see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ6D1LmVinA (quoted version dated 29. 11. 2022).

The fact that Rakowski left such an extensive relationship made him an exceptional figure. It had a potential that was not limited to scientific categories. There is an irremovable tension between Rakowski's self-creation and many accounts from the period and the dominant assessments of historiography. This, in turn, reveals the potential important from the point of view of constructing a biographical narrative: it allows us to enter into a polemic with an autobiographical story, providing space for the deconstruction of the author's self-creation. At the same time, it makes the latter a potentially attractive intellectual proposition.

Self-creation and its boundaries

Rakowski consistently created his vision of the history of the People's Republic of Poland, and thus also his vision of himself. He liked being in the spotlight. Both as the editor-in-chief of *Polityka* and as the politician in Jaruzelski's team, he was eager to express his opinions in public. Not without reason, at the end of 1989, one of the journalists pointed out that the then First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PUWP was *one of the few politicians whose personal views were widely known to the public*.[27] However, building a monument to one's own political activity is only possible effectively after its completion. Therefore, the memoirs *Jak to się stało* (How it happened), focusing primarily on the author's activities in the 1980s, and the interview *Zanim stanę przed trybunałem* (Before I Stand Before the Tribunal), prepared in cooperation with the leftist journalist Dariusz Szymczycha, were the first important statements by Rakowski, including broader assessments of his political career. Interestingly, already in 1991, in the former book, Rakowski published excerpts from his 1981 journal.[28] A year later, on the occasion of the publication of the latter book, excerpts from the 1990 journal were published.[29] It was not surprising that it was this diary, published by the publishing house Iskry in the years 1998–2005, that became the foundation of Rakowski's self-creation.

Today there is no doubt that Rakowski has manipulated the content of his own diaries.[30]

He did it consciously, in a way that was obviously contrary to his own public declarations. When preparing the publication of the diaries, he re-interpreted his notes, supplemented them with various elements, including reflections of a broader nature, or references to the people about whom he did not actually write a word

27 In Polish: *Jednym z nielicznych polityków którego osobiste poglądy były szeroko znane opinii publicznej*. See TOMIAK, Andrzej: Casus Rakowski. *Gazeta Lubuska*, 20. 12. 1989.

28 RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: *Jak to się stało* (How it happened). BGW, Warszawa 1991, pp. 23–30.

29 *Zanim stanę przed trybunałem. Z Mieczysławem Rakowskim rozmawia Dariusz Szymczycha* (Before I stand before a tribunal. Mieczysław Rakowski is interviewed by Dariusz Szymczycha). BGW, Warszawa 1992, pp. 141–156.

30 PRZEPERSKI, Michał: *Anatomia kreacji. Przypadek Dzienników politycznych Mieczysława F. Rakowskiego* (The Anatomy of Creation. The case of Mieczysław F. Rakowski's Political Diaries). In: *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały*, 2020, No. 18, pp. 223–254.

in the original text. This allowed for the creation of his image as a man with broad horizons, and also allowed for a courtesy to friends – sometimes: former friends – who thus entered the political history of Poland. There is no doubt that the importance (namely: the place it occupies in the whole text) of the *Polityka* weekly in Rakowski's diaries was undoubtedly strengthened *post factum*. It is as if it was only that he understood the importance of the circle of hist friends and cooperators only from the perspective of many years. What is no less important, he built the image of a far-sighted and balanced politician, with the makings of a serious statesman, dealing with the shallowness of Polish politics, which eventually prevented him from spreading his wings fully. Such amendments were introduced to the final, published text of the diaries at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. It can therefore be assumed that they reflected the reflections of Rakowski himself from the time of his political retirement.

Until my research was completed, few historians had seriously questioned Rakowski's self-creation. Most often it was pointed out that when preparing for the publication of the diaries, he most likely just limited his interference to minor stylistic corrections or to those related to descriptions of strictly private matters. To cut a long story short, his own words were unanimously believed. My discovery and proof of this manipulation resulted in a temptation to question Rakowski's self-creation completely and interpret any doubts against him. Choosing between the figure of the "liberal" and the figure of the "'arrogant martinet"[31] that often appears in the narratives on Rakowski presented by the people of "Solidarity", one could have chosen the latter. To certain extent it would be emotionally understandable. After all, I managed to prove that a historical figure blatantly lied in his own diaries.

From the formal point of view, the limits of self-creation turned out to be clear. They were marked by the differences between the original text of the Rakowski's diaries stored in the Hoover Institution Archives and the content published by Iskry publishing house. However, the juxtaposition of the published version with the original one could not be the final result of the biographer's work. It would be an obvious intellectual failure to limit my conclusions to such an observation. Failure of attempts to understand the hero's life path and attempts at objectification. Moreover, it would be a strong argument for considering biography as a genre closer to fiction – or maybe journalism? – distant from scientific writing, based on a clear methodological basis. Therefore, creative deconstruction of Rakowski's autobiography became my ultimate goal. This is in fact how his diaries should be understood in the version published by Iskry.

31 In Polish: *Arogancka stupaja*. Author's interview with Maciej Wierzyński, 9. 1. 2017, in the author's collection.

Uniqueness and typicality

Treating Rakowski's diaries, following the example of the American legal doctrine of the fruit of the poisoned tree, as tainted by the author's manipulation – which makes it impossible to make evidential use of it – was, however, untenable. From the factual point of view, Rakowski's diaries remained a fundamental element of the narrative, as well as a means of attempting to reconstruct the inner states of the protagonist. At the same time, focusing only on the intellectual layer of his activity turned out to be unsatisfactory, for he was a man of action and efficient action, not of abstract considerations. This meant that, more than against the background of the intellectual fashions of the era, it seemed interesting and cognitively inspiring to place it primarily against the background of complex social and moral changes that Poland experienced in the second half of the 20th century. It allowed to see elements of typicality in his fate.

Indeed, Rakowski's profile seems typical of the generation of people entering adulthood during and right after the WWII. His life path and the political choices he made – especially in his post-war youth – were similar to those made by representatives of his age cohort. He experienced social and professional advancement: he could study, gain officer skills, a career in the party-state structures was open to him. To some extent I was convinced by the interpretations he himself gave to his own life. In an interview with Henryk Szlajfer and Jan Ordyński, he discussed the fact that in the spring of 1945 his name was allegedly removed from the list of candidates for service in military counterintelligence due to his criticism towards the superiors.[32] It was supposed to be a sign to the uniqueness and not fitting into the patterns expected in the army. Thus, it was meant to strengthen the myth of Rakowski as a communist "liberal". Actually, however, Rakowski himself was never in danger of donning the uniform of the communist military secret police. The document which became the basis for such deliberations did not refer to the later prime minister at all, but to another man holding the same name.[33] This shows how unreliable the search for uniqueness can be if taken for granted.

The reference to typicality also has other consequences. It allows you to bring to light the specific features of Rakowski. As deputy prime minister, during the infamous meeting at the Gdańsk Shipyard in August 1983, he shouted at the workers that if it was not for socialism, he would *graze cows*. Would it really be so? We will never know. Taking into consideration his diligence, consistency, as well as his talents, one can have serious, reasonable doubts. However, he himself considered the reality of post-war Poland as the only one conceivable. More than that, he even

32 ORDYŃSKI, Jan – SZLAJFER, Henryk: *Nie bądźcie moimi sędziami* (Don't be my judges). Rosner & Wspólnicy, Warszawa 2009, p. 44.

33 *HIA*, Mieczysław F. Rakowski papers, Box 91, Приказ начальника Главного Управления Информации Польского Войска (Order of the Head of the Main Directorate of the Polish Army's counterintelligence), 6. 3. 1945.

treated socialism as a historical opportunity – both in terms of individual fates and the experience of the community. He became an authentic example of social advancement, although he felt its benefits only after he left the ranks of the Polish Army and joined the communist party apparatus. He moved to Warsaw, where, as an employee of the Central Committee of the PUWP from 1949 on, he laid the foundations for the new world. Was this all simply a lucky strike? One cannot state once and for all, but his personality, especially ambition and diligence, are not factors to diminish. In the early 1950s, those features distinguished him from his peers. He was a bit rough, certainly, but at the same time honest and disciplined. In the first half of this decade, Rakowski could have been labelled as a quite typical apparatchik. And to some extent, the patterns of behavior developed at that time did not change in the following decades. The fact that until the very end Rakowski sought promotions within the hierarchy of the Polish People's Republic, may serve as a clear argument supporting this reasoning.

Rakowski internalized the conviction that there is no and cannot be any other Poland than the one ruled by the communists. Was it a fatalistic belief? I think it has become so over time. But it does not change the fact that he wholeheartedly despised the values identified with the Second Polish Republic. He expressed it many times, for example, in the 1960s, in personal conversations with Gomułka.[34] Moreover, from the perspective of the years, he himself indicated that his view on the Second Polish Republic was very schematic and simplified.[35] He felt he was a representative of the Polish people, had a sense of pride in his own social advancement, but it was probably accompanied by a feeling of lack of roots, too. This partly must have contributed to a strong identification with the reality of the People's Republic of Poland. Rakowski was the beneficiary of a revolution that Andrzej Leder called *the dream*,[36] driven out of the imaginary dominant in Poland. The key difference, however, is that Rakowski did not "dream" this revolution. On the contrary, he was actively involved in it and felt far-reaching identification with it, fiercely opposing the questioning or undermining its importance. In the broader perspective, Rakowski's activity was aimed at striving to achieve and maintain political subjectivity by non-political people.[37] In this respect, his emancipation was indisputable: politics became his life passion, which he consistently devoted himself to. Was such an emancipatory process typical of Poles in the second half of the 20th century? Coming with the final answer to this question lays far beyond the ambitions of this text.

---

34 Ibid., Box 1, Dzienniki 1963 (Note from 22. 2. 1963).

35 ORDYŃSKI, Jan – SZLAJFER, Henryk: *Nie bądźcie moimi sędziami*, p. 44.

36 In Polish: *prześniona*. See LEDER, Andrzej: *Prześniona rewolucja. Ćwiczenie z logiki historycznej* (Dream revolution. An exercise in historical logic). Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2014.

37 MARZEC, Wiktor: *Rebelia i reakcja. Rewolucja 1905 roku i plebejskie doświadczenie polityczne* (Rebellion and reaction. The Revolution of 1905 and the Plebeian Political Experience). Universitas, Kraków – Łódź 2016.

Social advancement

Historian Marcin Kula pointed out that the concept of "'social advancement" is difficult to define precisely[38], which complicates the very use of this term in a scientific reasoning. At the same time, however, it contains enough legible content not to refrain from using it. Social mobility has a very serious impact on the lives of individuals who experience it, becoming one of the foundational factors shaping an individual biography while interconnecting with wider social processes.[39] Mieczysław Rakowski's biography is an example of two processes of social advancement that are worth mentioning at this point.

The first one took place between moment of leaving the family home in the spring of 1945 and the assumption of a position in the party apparatus in 1949. To a large extent, it can be seen as an element of intergenerational mobility. The key events that took place at that time were the achievement of formal education, joining the ranks of the communist party, and achieving life and material independence. The second social advancement – an example of intragenerational mobility – is the transition from a political employee of the PUWP to the group of the Warsaw social elite. This was followed by the awakening of Rakowski's ambition to join the ranks of the intelligentsia. This process, which was more clearly visible especially after October 1956, was also accompanied by a growing interest in bourgeois values. However, it was undoubtedly his intellectual and cultural ambitions that played a more interesting role in his later biography, with more far-reaching consequences.

In the 1960s, Rakowski could feel like a man-in-between. He was a unique link between the world of communist officials, to certain extent: communist apparatchiks and the world of artists, creators and the leftist intelligentsia. The latter played the role of a crucial reference group. A clear testimony to this was the theatrical play entitled *Stefan*, written by Rakowski together with the playwright and poet Andrzej Jarecki, staged at Teatr Powszechny in mid-1964. Although it was directed by one of the most outstanding artists of the young generation, Adam Hanuszkiewicz, it quickly fell off the agenda. In the long run, the undertaking turned out to be unsuccessful, as did Rakowski's prose attempts. The quasi-autobiographical novel *W trybie przyspieszonym* (In Expedited Mode) has never been published.[40] It was certainly not a great piece of literature, so was the case with his published reportage.[41]

38 KULA, Marcin: Buława w plecaku? Uwagi o awansie społecznym w dziejach (Mace in a backpack? Comments on social advancement in history). *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 2014, No. 4, p. 13.
39 DOMAŃSKI, Henryk: *O ruchliwości społecznej w Polsce* (On social mobility in Poland). IFiS PAN, Warszawa 2004, p. 43 and next.
40 WOROSZYLSKI, Wiktor: *Dzienniki 1988–1996*. Karta, Warszawa 2019, p. 123 (Note from 2. 11. 1988).
41 RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: *Ameryka Wielopiętrowa* (Multi-story America). Czytelnik, Warszawa 1964.

What is no less important, though, all these activities proved great commitment of Rakowski and his growing aspirations. We will find a lot of evidence of the dynamics of this process in the 1970s. The note drawn up by Rakowski in May 1967, devoted to the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the PUWP, seems to be characteristic: *Only:* [Jerzy] *Putrament,* [Włodzimierz] *Sokorski,* [Stanisław] *Wroński (if he is an intellectual,* [in fact] *he is not) and I (**a partial intellectual**). The rest were as silent as the grave, and that is more than significant*.[42] This "partiality", clearly reflecting a sense of some kind of inadequacy or incompleteness, weakened in the course of events. In the next decade, such doubts were clearly less frequent. Did it mean that the intelligentsia reference group lost its attractiveness for him, and that it was primarily political passion and the desire to make a career that prevailed in Rakowski? I do not think so. His political passion was still extremely important to him. At the same time, I believe that for Rakowski the Warsaw intellectual and cultural elite never lost status of a key reference group.

In my opinion, this is best evidenced by the events of 1981. Rakowski, not only the editor-in-chief of the *Polityka* weekly, but also the deputy prime minister of the government of Polish People's Republic, played significant political role at the time. Meanwhile, his social – and probably partly political – background was gradually gravitating towards "Solidarity". It was becoming impossible to combine loyalty to the political system, to the PUWP, with the kind of ethos of intelligentsia. The symbolic nation-anti-nation axis[43] has been drawn across the hitherto loyalties. A strong polarization emerged: mutual misunderstanding, irritation and anger grew. The final crisis was brought about by the introduction of martial law. After December 13, 1981 Rakowski was abandoned by many of his associates. Symbolic meeting in front of the editorial office of *Polityka* was recalled by the excellent reporter Hanna Krall: *Are you leaving too? I nodded my head. You were supposed to give me your kidney, he said. I regained my voice. But yes, I'll give it to you if you need it, but I can't work here. He was silent, I was silent. I nodded again. And I went away*.[44] Many others followed in her footsteps. It meant a social failure and a serious political cost that Rakowski probably did not expect. But I believe the significance of what happened in 1981–1982 was even more long-term.

The beginning of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1980s are two opposite points on the axis. One means admitting Rakowski to the group of the Warsaw elite, and the other means depriving him of this recognition. Years later, this was characterized by the communist journalist Marek Barański, who wrote that *those*

42 *HIA*, Mieczysław F. Rakowski papers, Box 2, Dzienniki 1967 (Note from 17. 5. 1967). Emphasised by autor.

43 In Polish: *Oś naród-antynaród*. See KULA, Marcin: *Narodowe i rewolucyjne* (National and Revolutionary). Aneks, London 1991, p. 142.

44 In Polish: *Ty też odchodzisz? Kiwnęłam głową. Przecież miałaś mi oddać swoją nerkę, powiedział. Odzyskałam głos. Ale tak, ja ci ją oddam, jak ci będzie potrzebna, ale ja nie mogę tutaj pracować. On milczał, ja milczałam. Znowu kiwnęłam głową. I poszłam*. See TOCHMAN, Wojciech: *Krall – rozmowa* (Krall – conversation). Dowody na Istnienie, Warszawa 2015, p. 45.

whom Rakowski cherished so much, for whom he fought for, cared for their good name, his crew from Polityka*, most of them abandoned him* […]. *Those who remained around him, who still respected him, admired his courage, political sense and journalistic talent, were few*.[45] Barański accurately noted that Rakowski was symbolically excluded from the group of these Warsaw elites, membership of which he considered for a long time to be one of the most important reasons to be proud of. The deprivation he experienced in this field in the 1980s (and beyond) was never expressed directly by him. But it is hard to question, too.

Rakowski did not devote any place in his diary to the problem of this kind of aspirations and, in a sense, of a disappointed love for the Warsaw elite. Reflections on this subject, when they appeared, were most often subordinated to the current political needs. At the same time, they were evidence of strong resentment – sometimes very poorly masked.[46] In a broader sense, Rakowski failed in trying to play the role of an intermediary between the communist authorities and the intelligentsia, although he was a member of both groups. A clear testimony to his failure was the fact that after 1989 he never managed to rebuild his former social position.

"Liberal", although an autocrat

I think he was a man worthy of respect […] *but hopelessly entangled in communist ideology,*[47] said former Czech and Czechoslovak president Václav Havel of the leader of communist Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring, Alexander Dubček. The members of Polish democratic opposition could have formulated similar words about Rakowski. Assuming, of course, that they would be able to hold back the negative emotions that the deputy prime minister, and later the prime minister and the first secretary of PUWP, incited with his public actions. One of Rakowski's paradoxes is the fact that, being a consistent supporter of the modernization of the state, including its system, he was not at all a sympathizer of liberal democracy.

Meanwhile, "liberalism" with which the name Rakowski was often associated, is an obscure and to a large extent ambiguous concept, difficult to define precisely. In my opinion one should interpret it as an attitude within a specific political frame of reference. The main reason why he was labelled as a "liberal" was not a fixed set of views, but rather a relatively constant and consistent attitude towards reality. Its foundation was showing his own initiative and undertaking various activities, which, in his assumption, were to improve socialism in various ways. Reluctance to

45 *Ci, których Rakowski tak hołubił, o których walczył, dbał o ich dobre imię, kwiat* Polityki*, w większości go opuścili* […]. *Tych, którzy wokół niego zostali, którzy go nadal szanowali, podziwiali jego odwagę, polityczne wyczucie i dziennikarski talent, było niewielu*. BARAŃSKI, Marek: *Nogi Pana Boga* (The God's legs). Wilga, Warszawa 2010, p. 43.

46 RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: *Czasy nadziei i rozczarowań* (Times of Hope and Disappointments), Vol. 1. Czytelnik, Warszawa 1985, pp. 26–30.

47 HAVEL, Václav: *To the Castle and Back*. Vintage, New York – Toronto 2007, p. 87.

use force, not to mention terror, and the appreciation of the importance of creative freedom – including freedom of speech – were definitely not the dominant views among the PUWP elites. At the same time, however, his set of enduring beliefs was undoubtedly far from classical liberalism. After all, he was neither a consistent supporter of the free market (although he became one at the end of his career) nor an eulogist of civil society, especially when the latter term became one of the ideological artifacts of the democratic opposition.[48]

Although he was a relatively unconventional politician, his intellectual horizon was marked by ideas of the first half of the 1960s. He was a supporter of a strong state clearly dominating over citizens. Consequently, when it comes to reforms, he considered the top-down reforms, introduced by the authorities, the most effective. It was not only a consequence of observing the practices of exercising power, but also a function of his personal views. For he remained extremely critical of Polish democratic traditions, often considering them *en bloc* as an example of "Polish madness". He was an autocrat, deeply convinced that he knew better what the social expectations were. Such attitudes intensified with his growing position in the power structure which, in a sense, was quite natural. Stanisław Ciosek, one of the Jaruzelski's henchman, recalled Rakowski's own uncritical faith that Poles would trust him when he was the head of government.[49]

Without Prime Minister Rakowski, there would be no Prime Minister Mazowiecki,[50] said in November 2013 Leszek Miller, Rakowski's former associate and Prime Minister of the Third Republic of Poland in 2001–2004. This formulation conceals the assessment that the cabinet of the former did a good job of the systemic transformation from communism to capitalism. This is quite an abuse of logic, however, since Rakowski had completely different goals. He did his best not to dismantle the communist system, but to change it gradually. As much as there are several examples of such a transitional role of Communist leaders, some of whom enjoy the respect of founding fathers (e.g. Slovene Milan Kučan), it is hard to find a better proof of the failure of Rakowski's policy than the fact that the last head of the communist party in Poland became the godfather of Polish capitalism.[51] Therefore – if it were to be measured with hard indicators of political effectiveness – Mieczysław Rakowski had all the reasons to feel like a political loser at the end of his life.

But each and every individual is limited in his agency, although the precise indication of these boundaries – also in retrospect – can be extremely difficult. There is

48 GAWIN, Dariusz: *Wielki zwrot. Ewolucja lewicy i odrodzenie idei społeczeństwa obywatelskiego 1956–1976* (The Big Turn. Evolution of the Left and the revival of the idea of civil society 1956–1976). Znak, Kraków 2013.

49 CIOSEK, Stanisław: *Wspomnienia (niekoniecznie) dyplomatyczne* (/Not necessarily/ diplomatic memories). Prószyński i S-ka, Warszawa 2014, p. 34.

50 Leszek Miller's speech at the session devoted to the memory of Mieczysław F. Rakowski, 9. 11. 2013, recording in the author's collection.

51 KALIŃSKI, Janusz: Kiedy zaczęło się odradzanie gospodarki rynkowej w Polsce? (When did the revival of the market economy begin in Poland?). *Optimum*, 2015, No. 1 (73), pp. 3–13.

a view in historiography, formulated, inter alia, by Paweł Kowal[52], but probably also shared by Rakowski himself, that he became the head of the government too late, not to mention the assumption of the position of the first secretary of the PUWP Central Committee. However, it is hard not to notice that without a deep crisis of both the state and the communist party in the years 1980–1981, the editor-in-chief of *Polityka* would not have anything to look for either in the building of the Council of Ministers at Aleje Ujazdowskie, or in the one at the intersection of Aleje Jerozolimskie and Nowy Świat, where the Central Committee of the PUWP was located. Although in this text I did not refer to the international circumstances, they undoubtedly had a fundamental impact on Rakowski's political life and his agency. In a world where global powers decided about the key moves on the geopolitical chessboard, the role of the leader of the People's Republic of Poland was severely limited – not only by his personal predispositions, but also by the objective circumstances. Such a combination leads to paradoxes. Let us mention, for example, that the most liberal economic regulations were adopted in Poland in the period when there was no actual rule of law. On the other hand, the man who was the driving force behind these pro-market changes was remembered as an autocrat and a preacher of political brutality.

*

Mieczysław Rakowski died on November 8, 2008, but he actually ended his political career at the Congress Hall at the end of January 1990, during the last congress of the PUWP. More than three decades that have passed since then is certainly enough time to try to summarize his political achievements. The emotions it evoked have clearly faded, and documents that until recently were unavailable for one reason or another – may be the subject of research. From the factual point of view, the situation seems quite clear. However, the situation is different when it comes to the interpretation of Rakowski's political biography.

It is not difficult to make a mistake when looking for consistency. One can get carried away by the charm of presentism, or overestimate the importance of the protagonist for the course of historical events. One can look at the world through his eyes or, instead of remaining a historian, turn into a prosecutor. The most serious challenge, however, was to make sense of the biography of Mieczysław F. Rakowski in the discussion with the extremely specific self-creation of his political biography. Perhaps the only point where my narrative about Rakowski strictly coincides with what he himself would be willing to say about himself was the conviction that the protagonist was exceptional. Without this belief, which is located rather in the sphere of emotional attitudes, an attempt to understand his political life would have no chance of success.

52 KOWAL, Paweł: *Koniec systemu władzy. Polityka ekipy gen. Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego w latach 1986–1989* (The End of the System of Power. Policy of the team of General Wojciech Jaruzelski in the years 1986–1989). Trio – IPN, Warszawa 2012, pp. 432–439.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archival sources

Hoover Institution Archives (HIA)
Mieczysław F. Rakowski papers

Secondary literature

BARAŃSKI, Marek: *Nogi Pana Boga*. Wilga, Warszawa 2010
BRZOZA, Czesław: *3 Maja 1946 r. w Krakowie. Przebieg wydarzeń i dokumenty*. Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 1996
CENCKIEWICZ, Sławomir: *Tadeusz Katelbach. Biografia polityczna (1897–1977)*. LTW, Łomianki 2005
CERAN, Tomasz et al.: *The Pomeranian Crime 1939*. IPN, Warszawa 2018
CHLEBOWCZYK, Józef: *O prawie do bytu małych i młodych narodów. Kwestia narodowa i procesy narodotwórcze we wschodniej Europie Środkowej w dobie kapitalizmu (od schyłku XVIII do początków XX w.)*. Śląski Instytut Naukowy, Warszawa 1983
CIOSEK, Stanisław: *Wspomnienia (niekoniecznie) dyplomatyczne*. Prószyński i S-ka, Warszawa 2014
DOMAŃSKI, Henryk: *O ruchliwości społecznej w Polsce*. IFiS PAN, Warszawa 2004
DOMNITZ, Christian: *Zwrot ku Europie. Transformacje sfery publicznej w realnym socjalizmie 1975–1989*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2022
DWILEWICZ, Łukasz – LUSZNIEWICZ, Jacek: Dzienniki polityczne jako klucz do Rakowskiego. In: ZAWISTOWSKI, Andrzej (ed.): *Ekonomia-społeczeństwo--polityka. Studia ofiarowane prof. dr hab. Januszowi Kalińskiemu w 70 rocznicę urodzin*. Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, Warszawa 2012, pp. 249–276
EISLER, Jerzy: *Siedmiu wspaniałych. Poczet pierwszych sekretarzy KC PZPR*. Czerwone i Czarne, Warszawa 2014
GAWIN, Dariusz: *Wielki zwrot. Ewolucja lewicy i odrodzenie idei społeczeństwa obywatelskiego 1956–1976*. Znak, Kraków 2013
HAVEL, Václav: *To the Castle and Back*. Vintage, New York – Toronto 2007
KALBARCZYK, Sławomir: *Kazimierz Bartel (1882–1941). Uczony w świecie polityki*. IPN, Warszawa 2015
KALIŃSKI, Janusz: Kiedy zaczęło się odradzanie gospodarki rynkowej w Polsce? *Optimum*, 2015, No. 1 (73), pp. 3–13
KOWAL, Paweł: Chciał być polskim Dubczekiem. *Polityka*, 2012, No. 5, p. 56
KOWAL, Paweł: *Koniec systemu władzy. Polityka ekipy gen. Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego w latach 1986–1989*. Trio – IPN, Warszawa 2012

KULA, Marcin: Buława w plecaku? Uwagi o awansie społecznym w dziejach. *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 2014, No. 4, p. 13
KULA, Marcin: *Narodowe i rewolucyjne*. Aneks, London 1991
LEDER, Andrzej: *Prześniona rewolucja.* Ćwiczenie *z logiki historycznej*. Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2014
MACHÁČEK, Michal: *Gustáv Husák*. Vyšehrad, Prague 2017
MACHCEWICZ, Paweł: „Słuchać potulnie albo odejść". O Dziennikach politycznych Mieczysława Rakowskiego. In: MACHCEWICZ, Pawel: *Spory o Historię 2000–2011*. Znak, Kraków 2012, pp. 78–84
MARZEC, Wiktor: *Rebelia i reakcja. Rewolucja 1905 roku i plebejskie doświadczenie polityczne*. Universitas, Kraków – Łódź 2016
MENTZEL, Zbigniew: *Kołakowski. Czytanie świata. Biografia*. Znak, Kraków 2020
MODZELEWSKI, Karol: *Zajeździmy kobyłę historii. Wspomnienia poobijanego jeźdźca*. Iskry, Warszawa 2013
ORDYŃSKI, Jan – SZLAJFER, Henryk: *Nie bądźcie moimi sędziami*. Rosner & Wspólnicy, Warszawa 2009
PRZEPERSKI, Michał: Anatomia kreacji. Przypadek Dzienników politycznych Mieczysława F. Rakowskiego. In: *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały*, 2020, No. 18, pp. 223–254
PRZEPERSKI, Michał: *Mieczysław F. Rakowski. Biografia polityczna*. IPN, Warszawa 2021
PRZEPERSKI, Michał: Mieczysław Rakowski w Stoczni Gdańskiej – 25 sierpnia 1983 roku. In: KNOCH, Konrad et al.: *Historia Stoczni Gdańskiej*. Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, Gdańsk 2018, pp. 267–296
RAWIK, Joanna: *Maestra. Opowieść o Wandzie Wiłkomirskiej*. Twój Styl, Warszawa 1993
RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: *Ameryka Wielopiętrowa*. Czytelnik, Warszawa 1964
RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: *Czasy nadziei i rozczarowań*, Vol. 1. Czytelnik, Warszawa 1985
RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: *Dzienniki polityczne, t. 1–10, 1958–1990*. Iskry, Warszawa 1998–2005
RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: *Jak to się stało*. BGW, Warszawa 1991
SCHATTENBERG, Susanne: *Leonid Breschnew. Staatsmann Und Schauspieler im Schatten Stalins. Eine Biographie*. Bohlau Verlag, Köln 2017
TEJCHMA, Józef: *Kulisy dymisji. Z dzienników ministra kultury 1974–1977*. Cracovia, Kraków 1991
TEJCHMA, Józef: *Odszedł Gomułka, przyszedł Gierek. Notatki z lat 1971–1973*. Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2006
TEJCHMA, Józef: *W kręgu nadziei i rozczarowań. Notatki dzienne z lat 1978–1982*. Projekt, Warszawa 2002

TOCHMAN, Wojciech: *Krall – rozmowa*. Dowody na Istnienie, Warszawa 2015
WOROSZYLSKI, Wiktor: *Dzienniki 1953–1982*. Karta, Warszawa 2017
WOROSZYLSKI, Wiktor: *Dzienniki 1983–1987*. Karta, Warszawa 2018
WOROSZYLSKI, Wiktor: *Dzienniki 1988–1996*. Karta, Warszawa 2019
Zanim stanę przed trybunałem. Z Mieczysławem Rakowskim rozmawia Dariusz Szymczycha. BGW, Warszawa 1992

Newspaper articles

RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: Szanować partnera. *Polityka*, 1981, No. 3, p. 1.
TOMIAK, Andrzej: Casus Rakowski. *Gazeta Lubuska*, 20. 12. 1989
RAKOWSKI, Mieczysław F.: Wrogowie socjalizmu podeptali idee Sierpnia. *Trybuna Ludu*, 27.–28. 8. 1983

Internet sources

Gdańsk University of Technology Library, Premier Rakowski w Stoczni Gdańskiej: transmisja TVP – see http://pbc.gda.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=21099
„Liberalna" prasa komunistyczna? Cykl. Kulisy historii odc. 19 – see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ6D1LmVinA

Other sources

Author's interview with Maciej Wierzyński, 9. 1. 2017, in the author's collection
Leszek Miller's speech at the session devoted to the memory of Mieczysław F. Rakowski, 9. 11. 2013, recording in the author's collection