

Bolesław Piasecki as the victim of post-modernist historical revisionism

Mikołaj S. Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red: Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism In 20th-Century Poland – The Politics of Bolesław Piasecki*
(Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012)

In my presentation I will concentrate on Bolesław Piasecki who was the most known leader of Polish national-radical movement. Many doubt that he was really so devoted to this idea as he pretended to be before the World War 2. Some historians, including myself, argue that Piasecki was an iron pragmatic politician who only began his political career as a radical nationalist, but in the changing political circumstances of war and post-war Poland also changed its ideological camouflage. What is unique – his personality to the present day continues to fascinate his ideological foes. It is quite astonishing that this admittedly second-rate politician who did not play any significant role in Polish history, has already been the subject of two quite substantial biographical publications in English. Upon investigating the shelves of American and British book stores, it is difficult to find any books on important Poles - except perhaps for Pope John Paul II during the 1990s and Lech Wałęsa. Piasecki, however, became the subject of an English-language biography many years before his death, *The Eastern Pretender* by Lucjan Blit. Recent work appeared in 2012: Mikołaj Kunicki's *Between the Brown and the Red*. But whereas Blit's publication was rather a political pamphlet—which the author did not really disguise, nor did he deny his sharp antipathy towards Piasecki—Kunicki's biography is presented as an objective work of scholarship.

Therefore, my speech about Piasecki I decided to build on his recent biography, which is a set of false opinions, misinterpretations and politically correct judgments about the man and his activities. *Between the Brown and the Red* is advertised as “the result of research on the relations between nationalism and communism, and between authoritarianism and religion in twentieth-century Poland.” At all events, the author declared his intention of demonstrating how the Marxist-Leninist regime in postwar Poland attempted to adapt communism to local traditions, including ethno-centric nationalism and Catholicism.

Kunicki claims that *Between the Brown and the Red* is a political biography of Piasecki, but, in reality, he tells the reader very little about his subject. Apart from the book's introductions and the bibliography, the work consists of 188 pages of text and 43 pages of footnotes. For an attempt to describe Piasecki's almost fifty-year political career, it is a paltry number of pages. This is not a product of the author's brilliant gift for synthesis, but an unfortunate reflection of the insufficiency of his research. In general, the work fails to offer any new findings, while in the biographical realm Kunicki summarizes—more or less aptly—what other historians wrote over twenty five years ago.

But is it true that during the past two decades scholars have been unable to say anything new about Bolesław Piasecki and his political activities? Or rather the book is a prove of Kunicki's serious methodological problems. It appears, therefore, that Kunicki did not master his topic, and that he wrote not about Piasecki but about his own leftist ideological preferences. Thus, we see some dates, events, and names (without too many details), but the most important things are missing: i.e. the book's subject-antagonist, his life, private matters, and other non-political aspects.

There have been plenty of Polish-language publications on Bolesław Piasecki, the "Falanga," the Confederation of the Nation, or PAX; a great deal is known about this subject matter. There is no evidence that the author is familiar with most of these works.

In general, the publications appears to be a political denunciation, dressed up somewhat in the form of a historical work, of Piasecki as simultaneously a fascist and a communist. This is phraseology, not historiography. Furthermore, the author abuses the "fascist" adjective without defining it precisely or explaining its Polish context. As a result, such passages likely bring forth in the minds of English-language readers associations with Nazism and the crimes of the Third German Reich. In the US, branding someone a "fascist" is often a tool used by left-wing academics or their supporters to silence anyone daring to question their assertions. Kunicki uses this invective to describe not only Piasecki and his actions and followers, but also the entire interwar Polish Second Republic, which is a blatant distortion. Assertions such as his reference to "proto-fascist Poland" were probably employed by the author to ingratiate himself with the powerful and influential neo-Stalinist *milieu* among Western historians; it is mainly their works that Kunicki lists in his bibliography. Sometimes, the author also uses the terms "fascism" and "nationalism" interchangeably, which is also a misrepresentation. Even more striking is his

manipulation of a famous declaration by Józef Piłsudski who, according to Kunicki, stated that he “got off the tramway called ‘socialism’ at the stop called ‘nationalism’” [!] (pg. 140). In reality, however, interwar Poland’s leader said that he exited the “socialism” tram at a stop called “*independence*” [translator’s emphasis], a fact known well even by high school students in Poland. Based on such a manipulated quote, Kunicki continues his argument. I’d like to believe that this was merely a poor choice of words on the author’s part, rather than the identification of Poland’s independence with “nationalism” – something hated by his thesis advisor, Professor Norman Naimark of Stanford. Curiously, none of the reviewers noticed this.

Apart from this—and the question of whether it is adequate and appropriate to label Piasecki a “fascist”—is the author’s astounding claim that the PAX leader’s initially fascist and later pro-communist affiliations were a product of his Catholic worldview. Kunicki, borrowing from the school of historical revisionism, claims that “the birth of organic nationalism often had its roots in religious revival and enthusiasm”. Thus, anything can be tarred with the brush of “nationalism,” including the liberal Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia (*Kluby Inteligencji Katolickiej*) in Poland. Kunicki fails to recognize that in the Western world, the vast majority of people remain influenced in some way by Christianity. He prefers to deny this, seeing it instead as a source of “nationalist” aberrations.

Kunicki also ties Catholicism to anti-Semitism, which he ascribes to Piasecki. Indeed, Kunicki frames anti-Semitism as the overarching factor conditioning the PAX leader’s politico-ideological activities. Since this is hard to prove—especially during the communist period—the author diligently searched for any evidence of Piasecki’s negative attitude towards Jews. Some of these seem quite far-fetched, such as Piasecki’s reference to some Communist Party (PZPR) members as “Jewish comrades,” or the case of an intoxicated Zygmunt Przetakiewicz (Piasecki’s close collaborator in PAX), who—during an event or meeting in the Journalists’ Club—verbally attacked the communist Roman Zambrowski (who was ethnically Jewish) as a “Jew.” Kunicki also attempted to psychoanalyze Piasecki’s thinking, asking rhetorically: “Did Piasecki believe that a Jew could become a Pole? In all probability, no”.

What is the basis of such an allegation? If Kunicki is right, why did Piasecki’s PAX Publishing Institute publish several editions of books by Roman Brandtstadter, a Polish writer of Jewish descent, a poet, dramatist, and a translator of and an authority on the Bible? Piasecki had no problems with patriotic Poles of Jewish ancestry, or people the left accused of such

descent, e.g. the main ideologue of the “Falanga,” Wojciech Wasiutyński. According to Kunicki, however, Piasecki “doubted the possibility of Jewish assimilation, even within the communist movement,” in which case the author has a point, since a Pole could only become de-Polonized through communism while a Jew could de-assimilate, i.e. de-Judaize himself. How could they become acculturated into Polishness in the atmosphere of Party meetings and briefings (“operatywki”), while hearing and using “new-speak” slang, and while being detached from the Polish intelligentsia and interacting with vulgar apparatchiks – the beneficiaries of communist “[upward] social advancement”? All of this occurred in the dialectical din of Marxism-Leninism, which had nothing in common with traditional Polishness, not to mention servility towards Moscow and the Kremlin of Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev. Piasecki, even if he privately succumbed to anti-Jewish prejudices, did not base his political decisions on sympathies or antipathies, but on iron pragmatism and expected benefits. Thus, the ethnic descent of the political actors with whom he waged conflicts or formed alliances played only a secondary role.

Just as Kunicki fails to grasp the nature of the Jewish question in communist Poland, he also does not understand either the approach of Piasecki or that of the communists towards this issue. The scholar contradicts himself, in fact, by stating that after 1945 “the treatment of anti-Semitism by Stalin’s communists was ‘mild’”, while claiming further on that anti-Jewishness was considered a “serious crime” at this time.

In his section on the Jewish issue, Kunicki attempts to juggle the meaning of words. Thus, for example, he claims that the antithesis of the phrase “true Pole,” allegedly so commonly used by the nationalists, was the “Jew”. Yet, an examination of this from the viewpoint of logic would indicate that the opposite of a “true Pole” is a “non-true” or “false” Pole, i.e. a traitor who deny his Polishness, *not* a non-Pole or a member of the Jewish minority. The Judeo-Communists (“Żydokomuna”), as Professor Paweł Śpiewak argued, were traitors to both Poland and the Jews, which—in this sense—made them the antithesis of Polishness and Jewishness. This simple logic was lost on the author, however.

Kunicki demonstrates his left-wing historical revisionism by attempting to pin all the blame for the crimes of communism on nationalism. If communism was like nationalism, and if both tendencies mutually propelled one another, then—as he claims—“this undermines the Cold War concept of totalitarianism.” Kunicki rejects the understanding of communism as a totalitarian system and, repeating after the revisionists, “presents nationalism as a living and diverse

phenomenon, constantly evolving under the influence of everyday practice, not as a rigid set of beliefs imposed by ideologues.” Thus, communism becomes identical with nationalism—which allegedly debunks the totalitarian model because, as this new theory asserts, the communists were not totalitarians because they were nationalists—and their “nationalism” was the cause of the crimes and errors they perpetrated.

The totalitarian model referred to the aspirations and attempts by the communists (and other totalitarians) to fundamentally transform and completely subordinate society to their rule. That some managed to survive the *Gleichschaltung* [“forcible coordination, bringing into line”], and even to survive and avoid repressions, is not testimony of the regime’s tolerance, or of its acceptance of allowing some to remain outside of its destructive pale, as the revisionists argue. It only shows that the totalitarian system was never completely effective. In spite of fanatical attempts—including mass murder and repression—the communists proved unable to build paradise on earth. But is this a reason to blame the crimes of communism on nationalism?

Kunicki writes:

The communists not only utilized nationalism, but—as Piasecki’s case shows—also prolonged the existence of the nationalist right. Indeed, I argue that PAX was the nationalist right within communism. Piasecki’s story thus questions the commonly-accepted view that fascism in Eastern Europe was destroyed by the victorious Red Army and the rise of communism.

The author thus believes that the exception proves the rule. Indeed, if we assume hypothetically that PAX was a radical nationalist organization (which it was not), then it was the only such outfit in the entire Soviet Bloc. The communist goal was not to save the “nationalist right” in Poland, but to conserve structures which could be utilized to accelerate the victory of communism in that country. This was a simple dialectical operation, but Kunicki apparently fails to recognize this. It was only a lucky coincidence that Stalin died in 1953, which meant that a likely future purge—during which Piasecki and his associates would certainly have been killed—did not occur. The post-1945 story of Piasecki is similar to the early post-revolutionary Bolshevik model of cooptation and continuity, but without the eventual wave of extermination. It is amazing that the author cannot grasp these phenomena and mechanisms.

Summing up the conceptual part of the book, we can conclude that it is quite lacking and fails to rise above the propagandistic enunciations of left-liberal punditry. The factual deficiencies of *Between the Brown and the Red* are even more problematic.

The author dedicated only two chapters—a total of about forty-five pages—to events prior to 1939. It seems to be the weakest section. Kunicki's grasp of the reality of the era is rather poor, which leads to many false particular and general conclusions. To begin with, the author perpetuates many inaccurate views about the Polish National Democratic movement. He states that its activists promoted ideological ethnonationalism (pg. 7), whereas the organizations affiliated with the NDs accepted anyone who declared himself a Pole, regardless of his ethnic descent, which included the descendants of German burghers, in addition to Poles with Czech, Tatar, Russian, French, and Jewish roots.

The author also frequently mentions the ideological conceptions of the prewar Endecja, attempting to associate them with the political and propaganda lines of the communist regime. Both of his claims—one about the ethnically homogenous People's Republic as an alleged fulfillment of the National Democratic program, the other about the communist exploitation of Piast traditions, which also supposedly had an Endek pedigree—is a complete misrepresentation. Neither Roman Dmowski, nor the young national-radicals of the 1930s, who promoted a program of a nationalist Poland, never postulated the total national Polonization of the entire population. The fact that such a homogenization took place is the result of the Second World War. The claim that the creation of an ethnically homogenous Poland by Hitler and Stalin was the realization of Endek dreams is simply false. The nationalists expressed no gratitude for this to either the Nazis or the Soviets.

Polish nationalism had a spiritual, not an ethno-racial character. It was based on the voluntary accession of the individual to the national community. It was open to the descendants – in fact, many nationalists had foreign roots. Thus, theories on the Piast character of Poland as the “only right” one are divorced from reality, especially since Endek propaganda and political literature also invoked the Jagiellonian tradition, using it to encourage nationalist activism in the Eastern Borderlands, a region where slogans about Piast traditions would not find fertile ground.

Kunicki's knowledge of the history of the Endecja is quite deficient in general. When writing about anti-Jewishness at Polish universities, Kunicki claims that it constituted a “regional phenomenon” (pg. 13), in spite of the fact that it also occurred at universities in the United States

and Western Europe, not to mention Germany. It was thus a pan-European phenomenon, or perhaps even a Western one. When mentioning the program-related brochure of the youth wing of the Camp of Great Poland (OWP), *Guidelines on the Jewish Question* [*Wytyczne w sprawie żydowskiej*], he claims that the novelty of the socio-economic and political solutions offered by this publication was the extent of the proposed anti-Jewish measures, which he argues sealed the fate of Jewish converts to Catholicism (pg. 18). The *Guidelines*, in spite of the great significance attached to them by some historians (e.g. Szymon Rudnicki), were the first, but also one of many political brochures attempting to shape the movement's program published by the young nationalists. Further, the *Guidelines* never managed to receive the blessing of the Catholic Church, so the alleged role in sealing the fate of converted Jews ascribed to this pamphlet of a dozen or so pages is exaggerated, to say the least. Kunicki says that the Endeks saw the nation as a “community of past, present, and future generations” – which is true. Yet, he fails to mention that the Endeks borrowed this conception from Edmund Burke, for such an admission would not fit the image he is attempting to frame for the Endeks as primitive and parochial backwater troglodytes. Indeed, the author displays a penchant to describe the Endecja in a caricature-like and comic-book manner, claiming that its main ideological underpinnings were “ethnocentrism, exclusion, and violence” (pg. 20).

Among the author's factual errors, it is worth mentioning one that is very symptomatic: a quote from *Sztafeta* from May 1935, the aim of which was to demonstrate how Piasecki and his *milieu* viewed opportunities for political activism in Poland following the death of Piłsudski (pg. 34). The problem is that this quote is completely inadequate because the illegal nationalist radical periodical was the voice of Piasecki's political competitors at the time, the ONR [Nationalist Radical Camp] “ABC” faction. The two factions—ONR “Falanga” of Piasecki, and ONR “ABC”—had functioned as separate outfits for quite some time, but the final split came in April 1935. Thus, a quote from *Sztafeta* as a window into the views of Piasecki's group is a blunder. Another erroneous “discovery” of Kunicki's is his claim that “the Colonels snuffed out the anti-Semitic riots which the Endecja was attempting to transform into local uprisings” (pg. 37). This further demonstrates the author's poor grasp of the history of Poland during the 1930s.¹

¹ The claim that anti-Jewish riots occurring in Poland during the mid-1930s (e.g. in Mińsk Mazowiecki, Brześć, and Przytyk) were an Endek-organized ploy to foment an uprising against the Sanacja regime is simply absurd. Such incidents (e.g. Przytyk) were spontaneous and the nationalist activists had no influence over the rioting crowds. See Piotr Gontarczyk, *Pogrom? Zajścia polsko-żydowskie w Przytyku 9 marca 1936 r. Mity, fakty, dokumenty* [A

Elsewhere, Kunicki claims that during Piasecki's military service, ONR "Falanga" was run by a team of activists (pg. 35). This is another misunderstanding. In an organization like the "Falanga," and especially in such an organization, there was always only one leader. During Piasecki's absence, it was headed by Witold Staniszkis, which the author mentions elsewhere, albeit in a footnote (footnote 24, pg. 196).

Despite Kunicki's suggestion, Piasecki neither organized nor participated in the blockade of Warsaw University in 1936 (pp. 37 – 38). It was also not carried out independently by his people, but was instead organized by the All-Polish Youth [*Młodzież Wszechpolska*], a part of the Nationalist Party [*Stronnictwo Narodowe*], which had a much broader base of supporters and followers among the university students. Kunicki also greatly exaggerates the strength and influence of the "Falanga." He claims, for instance, that in 1938, the organization succumbed to a crisis, losing even "the earliest bastions of its strength," i.e. student government bodies (pg. 46). In reality, the main power base of the "Falanga" were working-class and small-town youths, which formed about ninety percent of its membership. The intelligentsia was only a small section within the organization, and was limited mostly to the narrow group of Piasecki's closest associates. The Falangists had little influence among university students—which was limited to Warsaw University—but even there they could only dream of winning a majority in the elections to "Fraternal Aid" [*Bratnia Pomoc*]. Student governments, "Fraternal Aid," and other such student organizations were dominated almost exclusively by the All-Polish Youth during the late 1930s, but Kunicki seems unaware of this.

Kunicki's problems with logic and his failure to understand his subject are also reflected in his attempts to prove the integral character of the "Falanga's" nationalism by quoting a fragment (which he translated rather poorly) of Piasecki's brochure, *The Spirit of the New Times and the Youth Movement* [*Duch Czasów Nowych a Ruch Młodych*]: "The good of the nation does not constitute the final criterion for what is good and what is bad, because the good of the nation is not the absolute. God is the absolute and the highest end of man. Thus [striving to achieve] the good of the nation is only the means of reaching this absolute goal" (pg. 31). The original Polish reads as follows: "Dla jednostki dobro narodu nie może być kryterium ostatecznym dobrego i złego, ponieważ dobro narodu nie jest jej celem najwyższym. Celem tym musi być dobro

pogrom? The Polish-Jewish incident in Przytyk on 9 March 1936] (Biała Podlaska–Pruszków: Rekonkwista, Rachocki i S-ka, 2000).

najwyższe – Bóg. [...] Dobro zaś narodu musi być środkiem dla jednostki do osiągnięcia jej celu ostatecznego”² How is this subordination of the good of the nation to God an example of *integral nationalism*?

There are similar objections to Kunicki’s theory that the elements of Piasecki’s interwar ideology were: xenophobia, the exaltation of society’s ethnic homogeneity, religious fundamentalism, and a paramilitary style; all of which are supposedly representative of traditional rightist thought. Regardless of how characteristic these traits were of the “Falanga,” they may easily describe the regimes of the post-1935 Piłsudskiites or Mussolini’s Fascists, albeit it would be difficult to label these “traditionally rightist” (pg. 4). In fact, the basis of the worldview of the traditional conservative Right—both in Poland and elsewhere in Europe—was the defense of social, regional, cultural, and even religious diversity, which caused these traditionalists to view with concern attempts to adopt left-wing ideas aiming at social homogenization and xenophobic drives to forge ethnically homogenous citizenries. Such trends were, furthermore, antithetical to Christian universalism.

The few examples presented above represent only the most important factual errors requiring correction, but there are numerous other mistakes. For instance, Kunicki claims that Piasecki’s anti-Semitism was moderate in comparison to that of his other collaborators (pg. 50). A reader familiar with the punditry of the “Falanga” press, which was personally headed by Piasecki, may be shocked by this. Of course if we compare the activities of this organization with events in other European countries at the time—Romania and Germany especially—then the attitudes of the Polish “Falangists” towards the Jews may be viewed as far from extreme. In the Polish context, however, the anti-Jewishness of Piasecki’s people was indeed extreme, but—as Kunicki rightly emphasizes—they did not propagate racist theories, which they considered incompatible with Catholic teaching and scientifically doubtful.

A characteristic feature of Kunicki’s intellectual helplessness is also that—when lacking detailed knowledge of a certain subject—fills in the gap through mirror imaging. For example, when discussing the anti-Jewish stance of Roman Dmowski and the Camp of Great Poland (OWP), he projects his argument onto Romanian conditions, or onto Hungarian conditions when discussing the religious factor. Such parallels between countries in very different socio-historical

² Bolesław Piasecki, *Duch czasów nowych a Ruch Młodych* (Warsaw: no publisher, 1935), pg. 36.

circumstances lack scholarly merit. He also eagerly compares Piasecki with other European nationalist leaders, e.g. Leon Degrelle of Belgium or Ferenc Szálasi of Hungary: “The Hungarian [Szálasi] partly emulated the Nazi approach to religion, and the Pole [Piasecki] did not” (pg. 33). In the end, Kunicki himself comes to the conclusion that it is difficult to compare the ideological choices and political careers of the two. What is then the point of such contorted hyperboles?

In general, the historical context of the section of Kunicki’s book on the prewar era is extremely simplistic, while the reconstruction of the realities in which Piasecki operated is unidimensional and incomplete. An English-language reader who is not very familiar with the history of Poland will certainly find this quite unhelpful.

The section of the book devoted to the Second World War is equally deficient – both in terms of length (24 pages) and content. Kunicki summarizes the turns in Piasecki’s life during this crucial time are summarized on the basis of only a few publications, without bothering to delve into the details or to contribute new facts or insights. In his publication he also “forgot” to mention a few key facts. He omits to mention that Poland’s western allies failed to honor their treaty obligations towards her, abandoning the country to the invaders in September 1939. When writing about the Soviet decision to sever diplomatic relations with the Polish government-in-exile, he neglects to point out that the background of this break was the discovery of the Soviet massacre of Polish officers and members of the Polish elite at Katyn (in fact, the word Katyn does not appear in his book even once). Describing the Nowogródek area, he writes (incorrectly) that its population included ethnic Lithuanians, and he refers to the collaborationist pro-German Lithuanian secret police, the Sauguma, as the “Sauguna,” demonstrating how precarious Kunicki’s grasp of the character of the Eastern Borderlands of Poland is. This is further reflected in his inappropriate comparison of the Polish Home Army’s struggle against the Soviets in the Eastern Borderlands with the Chetnik vs. communist civil war in Yugoslavia at the time. Yet, the Yugoslav communists were indigenous, whereas the Soviets in the Eastern Borderlands—conquered by the Soviet Union in the fall of 1939—were a de facto occupying force. The locals within Soviet partisan units were a minority. He also refers to the Soviet entry into Poland in 1944 as a “liberation” (pg. 83), although, to be fair, he does mention the repressions that the “liberators” inflicted upon the “liberated.” In light of this, his calling Major Zygmunt Sendzielarz “Łupaszko” a “colonel” (pg. 92) is a minor issue.

As far as the wartime fate of Piasecki is concerned, the author writes that he was categorically opposed to collaboration (pg. 48). If so, how can we explain the episode of Piasecki dispatching “Falangist” Andrzej Świątlicki to sound out the Wehrmacht? Apparently, the author is not very familiar with such meanders. He also writes that Piasecki’s organization remained “staunchly anti-Semitic” (pg. 64), does this mean that it supported the Holocaust? If so, then the author should have elaborated on this and showed the scale of the collaboration. If not, then writing about the “anti-Semitic ferocity” of a small underground organization in the context of the mass murder of millions of Jews by the German Nazi occupiers sounds like a bad joke.

Elsewhere, Kunicki writes that anti-Semitism did not constitute the “cornerstone” of the ideology of the Confederation of the Nation. He also can’t seem to make up his mind whether Piasecki was a racist or not, sometimes answering in the affirmative, and sometimes in the negative.

While the first part of Kunicki’s book was based mostly on Szymon Rudnicki’s publication, the sections concerning the war and the occupation are limited mostly to Kazimierz Krajewski’s monograph on the Cadre Assault Battalions [*Uderzeniowe Bataliony Kadrowe*] and ignores other authors, such as Mariusz Bechta. The author fails to understand Piasecki and the Eastern Borderlands, or the *modus operandi* of secret underground organizations for that matter. Sometimes intuition pushes the author in the right direction, but the post-modernist aversion to research prevents him from following up on his hunches. When writing of Piasecki’s arrest by the NKVD in 1944, he points to Ryszard Romanowski as the denunciator—which is correct—but, in spite of his query at the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), he failed to familiarize himself with the contents of Romanowski’s IPN file, which would have helped him clear up quite a few issues. This seems to be a serious omission.

One of the few merits of the book seems to be the author’s analysis of the motives propelling Piasecki’s collaboration after 1945. This is most likely the effect of the punditry of Jan Engelgard, who attempted to rationalize and defend the correctness of collaboration with the communists in the postwar era. Piasecki called for the recognition of the puppet rump state (controlled by the Soviets and deprived by them of forty percent of its territory) as the de facto Polish state. The path to regaining independence would first require the reconstruction of Poland’s economy from the ravages of war and the erosion of the communist system. Piasecki allegedly foresaw that the Soviet Union would lose its political, ideological, and economic

dynamism, predicting that its collapse would occur in approximately fifty years. He believed that, in the conditions imposed on Poland after 1945, the priority was to focus on conserving and strengthening the cohesion, spirit, and discipline of the nation.

With the benefit of hindsight, we may add that Piasecki failed to foresee one thing: i.e. that the products of the People's Republic (an entity only partly compatible with what Poland really was) would not be Poles faithful to his preferred values, but post-People's-Republic types (post-communists), who were the beneficiaries of negative selection, people who were not only poorly educated but also indifferent toward patriotism and religion, and full of inferiority complexes masked by extremely large egos. They were the Polish-speaking anti-elite groomed by the Soviets to run Poland on their behalf. The traditional patriotic Polish elites and their descendants—or whatever was left of them—which were preoccupied with preserving the continuity of Polish national and cultural identity, were a *milieu* which Piasecki partly attempted to sponsor and protect, were unable to develop under the communist regime and to influence society. In this context, let us look at one more theme to which Kunicki alluded to, but failed to elaborate upon, i.e. the likely motive behind the Soviet decision to coopt Piasecki. “Piasecki's PAX could direct his nationalist-Catholic constituency into the camp of the regime” (pg. 4). Kunicki does not tell us however who Piasecki was to direct, whither, and in what manner.

Kunicki attempts to argue against the theory that Piasecki was a Soviet agent, asserting that he did not find any evidence to support it. This is quite possible given the limited scope of his archival queries and, most important of all, his failure to check the crucial Moscow archives. One will not find materials proving that the Soviets recruited a given individual in Polish archives, so why not argue that Soviet intelligence did not operate in Poland after 1944 at all? Alas, the Soviet services did not adhere to “gentlemen's agreements”; their *modus operandi* was to corrupt and subordinate anyone they wanted to take advantage of. Obviously this subordination would be very strong when a victim's position was weak.

When confronted by the NKVD, Piasecki was deprived of any room to maneuver, which means that his agreement to collaborate could only be a precondition for any talks, a mere formality in fact. Like the post-communist researcher Krystyna Kersten, Kunicki attempts to challenge the credibility of the secret police defector Józef Światło, who was the first to publically accuse Piasecki of collaborating with the NKVD. However, historians have recently set out to corroborate Światło's revelations, finding that much of his knowledge was genuine and

that his statements are generally in line with the contents of declassified communist documents. Why would Światło lie specifically in the case of Piasecki when laying bare the functioning of the communist regime?

What is puzzling is that Kunicki did not take any interest in the problem of Piasecki's collaboration with the communist secret police in Poland (MBP). According to Piotr Gontarczyk's findings, Piasecki took part in secret police (UB) operations and instructed his most trusted associates (such as Ryszard Reiff) to participate in them; all under the codename "Tatar." It is difficult to unequivocally state, on this basis, that he was an UB agent because no registration document has been found, for example, but the ties are undeniable.³ Instead of delving further into this problem, Kunicki prefers to impress the reader by repeating gossip about Piasecki's alleged romance with Julia Brystygierowa, for which there is no evidence save the gossip purveyed by Stalinists in Teresa Torańska's long book of interviews with top communists, *Them [Oni]*.⁴

According to Kunicki, Piasecki's collaboration with the Soviets and the communists was based on ideological motives. He claims that "Piasecki was not a chameleon. In reality, he was a man of the Right and his Catholic PAX Association constituted the nationalist Right under communism." He also attempts to juxtapose Piasecki's stance with the political line of Stanisław Mikołajczyk (pg. 86), but this seems far-fetched. The latter, as the leader of the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), attempted to create a political group in opposition to the communists. The position of *Dziś i Jutro* seems a lot closer to that of the liberal Catholic *Tygodnik Powszechny* [Universal Weekly], which Kunicki fails to acknowledge, most likely because of his political sympathy for the latter *milieu*. Thus, while analyzing the stances of Stomma and Turowicz, he asserts that their strategy helped *Tygodnik Powszechny* survive until 1953 (pg. 92). Such praise for the liberal Catholics distorts the reality of the time since having a political strategy meant very little in a context wherein the communists decided the rules of the game and decided who perished and who survived. At the same time, Kunicki criticizes the Primate of Poland, Cardinal August Hlond, for approving [*zatwierdził*] the activities of Piasecki's group without concern about the latter's "fascist past and biting anti-Semitism" (pg. 86). So, why doesn't Kunicki apply the same

³ Piotr Gontarczyk, "Zagadka agenta <<Tatara>>" [The mystery of agent 'Tatar'], *Gazeta Polska*, no. 30 (26 July 2006).

⁴ See Teresa Torańska's interview with Stefan Staszewski, in Teresa Torańska, *Oni* (Warsaw: Iskry, 2004), pg. 166.

approach to the liberal Catholic group of Turowicz and its compatibility with the communism of Bierut and Gomułka? Why doesn't Kunicki condemn Cardinal Sapieha for approving of the activities of the *Tygodnik Powszechny*? Was the difference between the two collaborationist *milieux* really that great at the beginning? The communists were aiming to pacify society. Both groups served their purpose by channeling the activism of lay Catholics in their accommodation with the realities of the communist state. Why doesn't the author contrast the fate of collaborationist outlets like *Dziś i Jutro* and the *Tygodnik Powszechny* with publications and organizations that were suppressed, such as the *Tygodnik Warszawski* or the underground Nationalist Party (SN)?

Kunicki seems not to understand the twists and turns of Piasecki's political path, viewing his entire active political career (1933–1979) as the life of a man blinded only by “nationalist-fascist” ideology. According to Kunicki, he remained ideologically a Falangist (literally a “fascist”) even when he opted to collaborate with the communists. Perhaps this is how Piasecki rationalized his actions, but how feasible would be the implementation of the conception of the Catholic State of the Polish Nation from the 1930s in Stalinist conditions and with the acquiescence of the Soviets and their communist subordinates? This may seem highly improbable, but—according to the author—that was precisely the intended role and political strategy of PAX.

According to one of Kunicki's arguments, the conception of PAX and Piasecki's postwar activism was “socialist in form and nationalist in content because he always viewed Catholicism as the focal point of Polish national identity” (pg. 3). One thing is unclear: does Kunicki believe that Catholicism supplemented socialism as an element of Polish national identity? Soon afterward, Kunicki posits the “ideological kinship between nationalism and communism.” The fact that the communists utilized nationalism as a tool to mobilize the masses for their own ends is obvious and undeniable. But before capturing full power, they also utilized liberalism to undermine the foundations of traditional society. The kinship between liberalism and communism is closer than that between nationalism and communism.⁵ This escaped Kunicki's penchant for comparativism, however.

⁵ The thesis about this nationalist-communist “kinship” is currently en vogue and frequently exaggerated by liberal historical revisionists. Thus, according to Bob Kiernan, Pol Pot's crimes had a racist, not communist character, because his regime happened to also kill members of ethnic minorities. See Bob Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2002).

All such abstract historical theorizing notwithstanding, Kunicki's claim about the right-nationalist character of PAX is contradicted by facts and by the testimonies of those close to Piasecki, not to mention his own publications. For the leader of PAX, ideology was only an instrument of political activism: when nationalism was popular, he carried high its banner; during the war, he emulated Piłsudskiite insurrectionism; and after the war, when Poland was subjugated by the Soviets, Piasecki joined the communists. Stefan Kisielewski, who knew Piasecki well, explained these radical shifts were parts of the tactical aspect of the struggle for political power.⁶ However, Piasecki always attempted to salvage for himself at least a minimal degree of independence and maneuvering room. Thus, the Confederation of the Nation (KN) was not a continuation of the "Falanga," and PAX was not another reincarnation of the KN. Some of Piasecki's closest associates, such as Jerzy Hągmajer, wrote as much.⁷ Politically and ideologically, these were three very distinct entities which shared the person of the leader and his closest acolytes. Each organization operated in different historico-political circumstances, and each one had a different worldview and program. Only the main strategic objective remained unaltered – the capture of power. What motivated Piasecki was not any particular ideology, for his approach to the latter was strictly utilitarian; it was a means to an end. Thus, contrary to Kunicki's vision, Piasecki did not base his politics on any ideological criteria, but on pragmatic considerations. He accepted whatever brought him closer to his goal, rejecting any unnecessary ballast. In the context of the Soviet occupation, Piasecki's ballast was his prewar and wartime

⁶ Kisiel said of Piasecki: "We were in touch constantly because he and his people came to Kraków frequently and tried to persuade us. They were some sort of intermediaries for the [Communist] Party, and they always kept demanding this or that. But he was a great speaker, and he was quite charming. I especially had very good relations with him because I didn't listen to any of his silly statements, such as the one about socialism being the work of the Holy Spirit and whatever else they wrote. He told me: 'Listen, the Bolsheviks will not leave, so ... you know, fill in the rest for yourselves.' And this is how our discussion continued for years. Later, after the *Tygodnik* [*Powszechny*] was closed down, they took over the publishing, which we considered a dirty trick. But I continued to have relations with him. I regularly traveled to Warsaw, and he even invited me to his house several times. Later, a complete split occurred between us after October [1956], and after that came the tragic death of his son, which is still a mystery to me. They [the PAX-ists] wrote stupid things in 1968. But I continue to maintain my old view that he had great political talent, but the way the cards were dealt at the time was to his disadvantage." Stefan Kisielewski, *Abecadło Kisiela* [Kisiel's ABC's] (Warsaw: Interim, 1990).

⁷ J. Hągmajer, "Przyczynek do biografii Bolesława Piaseckiego" [A contribution to the biography of Piasecki], *Kultura – Oświata – Nauka*, no. 1 (1983).

activism in the “Falanga” and the Confederation of the Nation, so he cut himself off from the past.

In spite of these obvious facts, Kunicki stubbornly defends his thesis according to which PAX was established by the Soviets and communists as an incubator for the Polish radical right. He proves unable to defend this rather absurd claim by resorting to quasi-philosophical musings about the alleged convergence of Soviet communism and Polish nationalism or by finding alleged common features to both ideologies, and especially about the role of Catholicism in all of this. While it is easy to build such abstract theories, particularly when they are divorced from reality, they begin to fall apart when applied to concrete facts or events. So it turned out that PAX did not fulfill any of the political roles the author ascribed to it: neither as an incubator of Endek ideology during the 1950s and 60s, nor as an organizational base for the resurging neo-Endek movement within the democratic opposition of the 1980s.

Piasecki undoubtedly deserves credit for saving 400 – 500 people imprisoned by the UB, which Kunicki writes about only in a footnote (pg. 210). PAX, in turn, provided employment for thousands of people—including nationalists—who, as a “politically suspect” element, were condemned to a miserable existence (along with their families) on the margins of society. The outfit also organized summer camps and vacations for the children of the employees of the INCO-Veritas firm as well as the kids of independentist families that lived in poverty. It is also important to point out that the PAX Publishing Institute was able to publish some books that no other publishing house in communist Poland would have. Such were the concessions granted to PAX by the regime in turn for the organization’s obedience and collaboration.

What Kunicki fails to grasp about Piasecki’s political game are the motives that guided him, or—more precisely—his strategy for survival in the form of playing for time in return for his agreement to collaborate. However, the author fails to put certain facts together and to draw logical conclusions from these. For instance, when assessing the policy of Primate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Kunicki writes that the legal arbitrariness of the communists rendered any deals with them largely illusory, and that the Primate was well aware of this and played for time (pg. 96). But the very same situation applied to agreements with Piasecki. Why doesn’t the author recognize this? After all, he knows that the *milieu* centered around the weekly *Dziś i Jutro* could operate freely and openly, but it was officially legalized only in 1952. This meant that before 1952—but, in fact, also afterwards—Piasecki and his people could be arrested at any time

and put on trial for trumped up offenses. This struggle for survival eventually turned into constant maneuvering to continually broaden the organization's influence within the system.

Kunicki's claim that Piasecki's secret plan was for his Catholic conceptions to gradually seep into the ranks of the Communist Party, which would have allowed the nationalists of PAX to eventually "convert" the communists into Polish patriots, is sheer fantasy (pg. 88). What Kunicki forgets is that the PZPR and its leadership in communist Poland were not sovereign entities, and—even if we make the quite doubtful assumption that such a shift would have been possible in the People's Republic—the Soviet overlords in Moscow had plenty of means at their disposal to prevent such a heresy. Marxism-Leninism remained the Party's official ideology to the end, and all ideological maneuvers—including pseudo-nationalism—were dictated by dialectics. Kunicki, however, does not understand the ideological foundations on which the system rested; otherwise, he would not repeat the claim that communism was not totalitarian, and that would allow him to grasp the game played by the communists and the reactions of PAX. It bears emphasizing that Piasecki and PAX could *only react*, for it was the communists who imposed the rhythm of political life, and while they were constantly on the offensive the PAX-ists could only accommodate themselves to the rules of this game.

PAX propaganda touted the principle of the pluralism of worldviews. This called for a historic *modus vivendi* between the Party and the Church, which was to allow Catholics to become an autonomous actor within the communist movement. Thus, for a share in power—in an unspecified form—Catholics were to subordinate themselves to the regime and to recognize Marxism-Leninism as the dominant paradigm. Did Piasecki treat this conception seriously, or was it only a pretext to justify the presence of PAX as a political actor indispensable to the communists? Kunicki does not explain this (in only one place he seems to consider that it may have been "possible" that Piasecki did not want to subordinate the Church to the communists).

Curiously, the author does not have much sympathy for the defender of the Church's independence, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, either. Without bothering to analyze the Primate's actual statements, he accuses him of being "a staunch believer in the ethno-Catholic narrative of the Polish nation," which—issuing from the lips of the liberal historian—amounts to an invective. Kunicki does, however, sympathize with the *milieu* of the PAX "Fronde" (e.g. Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Andrzej Micewski), whom he praises for rejecting "Piasecki's theological innovations, his anti-Church undertakings, and his admiration for the Party" (pg.

108). Perhaps the “Fronddists” were less inclined to “improve theology,” but their pro-communist statements did not differ from the rest of the PAX-ists and their publications – such was the rules of the game in the People’s Republic. Unfortunately, Kunicki was selective also in his description of the “Fronde,” omitting to mention Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s role in the vicious Stalinist campaign against Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek in 1953 and against the independentist underground resistance.⁸

Kunicki accuses Piasecki of being an obsessive, syncretistic ideologue who attempted to combine nationalism and Catholicism with socialism. When playing his game, however, Piasecki had to propose a concrete plan of action to his NKVD interlocutors to appear credible. The Soviets, and especially the communists, did not need another Polish Workers’ Party [PPR, i.e. the Communist Party] member with a politically suspect background; they needed a useful tool to legitimize their power and to conduct a political disinformation campaign against the independentist underground and the Catholic Church. Piasecki fulfilled these expectations. These were the real roots of PAX. Kunicki admittedly writes about this, but proceeds to supplement these facts with ideological musings about the kinship between nationalism and communism. He forgets that the Soviets had the last word in such matters and seriously underestimates Moscow’s

⁸ Mazowiecki thus commented on the sentencing of Bishop Kaczmarek: “(...) the political stance of a bishop or clergyman can be as much a subject of assessment [*ocenie*] as that of any other citizen. That is why we are not only hurt by, but are also condemning the erroneous views of Bishop Kaczmarek, which have led him toward diversionary activities against People’s Poland and guided his stance in these actions. When we ask ourselves how this could have happened, we see the following explanation. He was motivated by hostility towards social progress, hostile towards social change, and stance in defense of the capitalist system. This stance was also reflected in seeing the place of the Church and Catholicism only in the old conditions, which essentially meant the rejection of the Apostolic approach towards the new times and the new social epoch. (...) what propelled Bishop Kaczmarek and his accomplices towards these harmful views was the identification of faith with a regressive social stance, and the good of the Church with the durability and interests of the capitalist system. This led them to associate with the imperialistic and warmongering policies of the government of the United States. (...) the trial of Bishop Kaczmarek also proved clearly, and not for the first time, just how much American imperialism—which hopes to utilize a new war, i.e. the death of millions of people, to impose the rule of its system of exploitation and social injustice on countries that have chosen a new historical path—attempts to use various means to influence the clergy and the faithful and to push them to fight against their own country, which is the commonweal of all its citizens.” Tadeusz Mazowiecki, “Wnioski” [Conclusions], *Wrocławski Tygodnik Katolicki*, no. 5, 27 September 1953. Mazowiecki also wrote a separate piece slandering the underground, which he co-authored with Zygmunt Przetakiewicz (Piasecki’s right-hand man): *Wróg został ten sam* [The enemy remains the same], published in 1952. See Sławomir Cenckiewicz, “Jak Mazowiecki zwalczał podziemie” [How Mazowiecki combatted the underground], *Do Rzeczy*, 27 February 2013).

influence on whatever happened within the structures of the Warsaw regime. For him, the “Polish road to socialism” during the Gomułka years was nothing more than a disguised version of the “Falanga’s” program, albeit covered with Marxist sauce for camouflage.

Piasecki endorsed all the major communist propaganda campaigns by: condemning the anti-communist underground; supporting the “struggle for peace”; developed contacts with “progressive intellectuals” from the West (“useful idiots” serving Moscow); and combatted the Polish “reactionary clergy.” It seems that the process of Piasecki’s Stalinist mimicry went too far. In 1953—during the crucial episode that was the arrest of Primate Wyszyński—Piasecki proved unable to defend the repressed head of the Polish Church, which, according to the universalist principles of Roman Catholicism, is a hierarchical institution. Thus, the removal of its head by an external opponent changes its institutional character. Ergo, the Church without the Pope is as untenable as the Polish Church without its Primate. The defense of the Primate was thus a test of Catholicism, and Piasecki failed. Kunicki, however, claims that he made some sort of gestures in defense of the Primate. Alas, the gesture was green-lighted by the regime and only served to increase the credibility of the PAX *agentura* in the eyes of the communists. Thus, the PAX-ist voices of protest were weak and unconvincing.