

## The Iron Transfer: Untranslatability in Totalitarian Propaganda

At the age of fifteen I was told by my chemistry mistress at school that I was *bolshie*. I was surprised to learn that in colloquial English this meant “bloody-minded, pig-headed, obstructive and deliberately difficult” (Partridge 1984: 111). In my family the Polish word *bolszewik* was often used figuratively by irate parents (both of whom had been through Stalin's Siberian deportation camps) to mean thief, destroyer, wrecker, barbarian. The plural *bolszewicy* had been employed in the early 1920s – soon after the successful repulse of the 1920 Soviet invasion of the freshly restored Polish state – in a translation of ... Ovid's *Art of Making Love*, by a Polish gentleman and poet, Julian Ejsmond, to describe the uncouthness of primitive man:

Ludzie błędzili po polach  
zaciekli, okrutni, dzicy,  
nie uznający własności,  
no po prostu... bolszewicy.<sup>1</sup>

Other historical associations in the various languages of the word *Bolshevik* are undoubtedly more serious and perhaps more sinister.<sup>2</sup> This word and its verbal associates in the language of totalitarian propaganda, induced fear, alienation, repugnance, and ultimately rejection and ridicule in the societies it endeavoured to cow into submission. But also the linguistic experience of those societies for whom this term is colourless other than in its historical sense, arousing at most a bemused or mocking curiosity, will be of importance here. My subject concerns the historical antecedents of the word *Bolshevik*, in an attempt to illustrate the problems posed by the divisions rending the world today caused by differences of historical and cultural experience and embodied in the linguistic codes used by the diverse modern societies. These differences are in fact creating stumbling-blocks not only to translation but effectively also to the full transfer of information on an international scale. I propose to discuss the untranslatability of the language of propaganda.

The concept of a stumbling-block in this sense is certainly not new: some aspects of my hypothesis have been recognised for many millennia. In St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians we read,

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<sup>1</sup> This version of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* II, l.473-474, roughly translates to: “Humans were wandering over the fields;/ [They were] uncouth, savage, wild/ They had no respect for private property,/Well, they were simply Bolsheviks.” Under the People's Republic the word was so sensitive that the copies of both editions kept in the Jagiellonian Library were in the Rara Special Collections, that is they were inaccessible to the ordinary reader. One had to get the Director's permission to order them.

<sup>2</sup> Since the early 1990s when this article was written the word has often been used in Polish political contexts as an offensive epithet for adversaries, some of whom would definitely not identify themselves with bolshevism. The word has kept its pejorative connotation, occasionally but it has also been used in a humorous context, for instance in a satirical song by Paweł Kukiz and Piersi on “bolsheviks” (i.e. former Communist Party members) attending church. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsO3OTf0sB4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsO3OTf0sB4)

. . . it pleaseth God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. (I Cor.1, 21-24)

I shall be concerned with the stumbling-block inducing fear and aggression in those directly endangered, and the foolishness arousing bemused mockery in those observing at a safe distance, in texts composed with the purpose of preaching a Kingdom not of Heaven but of a totalitarian mundanity. Here is a citation of the type of text I have in mind which I have translated from a 1949 publication of the address delivered by Bolesław Bierut, First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party at the 3rd Party Plenum, November 11th, 1949. I have endeavoured to avoid all temptations to update, stylise, or adapt the original; my intention is merely to English the words of the pristine message. Instead let me say that the historical setting was an entrenched Stalinism throughout the Soviet satellite countries. Tens of thousands had been killed or deported so that the system disseminating this propaganda could be installed, before the reluctant eyes of an indifferent world.

The pamphlet has a double title, which may be translated as *In the Struggle for Revolutionary Vigilance* on the cover, and *The Party's Tasks in the Struggle for Revolutionary Vigilance against the Background of the Present Situation* (Bierut 1949). The speech was delivered on the date traditionally celebrated as National Independence Day following the restoration of Poland's sovereignty in 1918, but not recognised in the People's Republic. Here are a few samples, starting with the opening paragraph:

The matters which today the Politburo wants to present to the 3rd Plenum of the Central Committee for its consideration relate to the growth of the Party and the increase in its role in the building of the foundations of a Socialist society in this country. On its path to growth the Party, which already has so many achievements, is also encountering a series of problems which it must recognise to be able effectively to overcome and remove. The Party is fulfilling its tasks in the atmosphere of a more and more intense conflict between two mutually opposed class fronts. Today this struggle has imbued both international relations and our own internal affairs with a particularly intense vigour. It requires the entire Party, each of its individual elements and each of its members to exercise a special alertness and vigilance. (Bierut 1949:5)

The aggressive policies of American Imperialism, spoiling for trouble, are leading all the more clearly to a continuing aggravation of the contradictions in the Capitalist system of economics. Put on the leash of the so-called Marshall Plan, the countries of Europe are already feeling the effects of the extortionate "aid" dispensed by the United States. This "aid" is invariably pushing down the standard of living of the mass of the people by a concealed form of robbery through the devaluation of the currencies in the Marshall countries with respect to the dollar. In return for the compulsory supply enforced by the American trusts of arms and the importation from the United States of all manner of goods, needed and unwanted, the

Marshall countries are obliged to accept a toll not only in the form of the disparagement of their currencies. Their economic and financial dependence is merely an expression of the many-sided yoke of political and economic dependence which is transforming these countries into a collective political vassal of the United States.

This Imperialist cosmopolitanism is unavoidably changing from a glamorous theory and propaganda into the dismal practice of United States dictatorship. The American diktat which being invariably imposed and subjecting the economies of the individual Marshall countries to the interests of the United States must lead to the wasting away and eradication of national sovereignty in the countries of Western Europe. A more and more cynical, a more and more unrelenting "recommendation" by the US representative – that is the brutal order which is already dominating the lives of these nations and delimiting the vestigial and almost extinct political and economic self-determination of the "united" Capitalist Europe. (Bierut 1949:9)

By page 14 of a 75-page pamphlet, the tirade turns into an endeavour to identify the Polish counterparts of the arch-traitors Zinoviev and Trotsky. These turn out to be Comrade Gomułka and his associates, who are accused of having plotted with the prewar *dwójka* (Polish intelligence service) and the Nazis:

In accordance with their traditions, *Dwójka* agents and the Abwehr and Gestapo undertook a campaign to set up a spy network inside the nascent underground left-wing organisations to destroy or gain control of them. (Bierut 1949:18)

They were apparently aided by Comrade Gomułka and his associates, whose motives are subjected to profound analysis:

Their attitude was the expression of a putrescently liberal, opportunistic approach to the class enemy, a reflection of their little theories of a dying out of the class struggle and of a peaceful growth into Socialism. Hence their far-reaching confidence in people from enemy political formations, hence their mystical faith in the *dwójka* agents' facility for "political rebirth," hence their strange inclination to appoint precisely people of this sort to positions of responsibility. The origin of this deficiency was undoubtedly their loss of political poise, the blunting of their class instinct, a sneaking away from the revolutionary positions, the positions of Marxism-Leninism. (Bierut 1949:21)

Finally the session is rounded up with a closing speech from First Secretary Bierut condemning the renegades. The metaphors in the first paragraph of this coda embody the concepts and tactics employed in a good old Stalinist (or any other totalitarian) purge:

Comrades!

This Plenum has proved beyond all doubt that the right-wing nationalist deviation and the political blindness and loss of vigilance are two aspects of the same phenomenon. One is the outcome of the other, they mutually complement each other. In point of fact a right-wing nationalist deviation must always be connected with a lack of vigilance and the state of being purblind politically, because it is political blindness. (Bierut 1949: 61)

Before I proceed to my main textual material, I would like to comment on the semantic composition of the above passages, so typical of the Stalinist tirade. The imagery is restricted – like a fairground huckster's hand of cards – to the same round of metaphors at first startling, then gradually becoming more and more tedious in their predictability. Most are built up of elements the properties of which may best be described by terms such as “aggression,” “pugilism,” “verbal threat” (Pisarek 1976 & 1986). But what is perhaps more interesting is the idiosyncratic blend in the etymological background of the typical component words making up the clichés of propaganda. These verbal components turn out to be a weird combination of euphemistic, mysterious-sounding foreign words, not necessarily stemming from the original language of the propaganda. Here in fact in the Polish text they are a medley of French and German, and even English, or generally Latinate words like *awanturzysta*, *agresywna*, *imperializm*, *amerykańskie trusty*, *dyskryminacja swych walut*, *dyktat* side by side with *dyktatura*. Many were novel to their Polish recipients in 1949, and intended no doubt to endow their utterer with an authority on the linguistic level. But there are also other loans, like the Oriental *haracz* and the Western feudal *wasal*, which had been well-established in Polish by 1949, yet still retained in their semantic identity something of their original cultural background. Not to mention the foreign (but Latin-, not Russian-derived!) names for the new institutions: *Plenum*, *Komitet Centralny*. Interestingly enough, when during the Second World War the Nazis invaded Poland and established their own institutions in the occupied country, they chose a French term, *das Generalgouvernement*, to name the “constitutionally” weird (or perhaps interim?) “state” they set up in Southern Poland. Alongside these the choice for the key action words in the metaphors themselves is distinctly from among the common Slavonic words of the vernacular: *obroża* (animal collar), *jarzmo* (yoke), *blyskotliwy* (flashy), *wyjąłowanie i przekreślenie* (lit. rendering barren and cancelling).

But all this has received ample attention elsewhere (Pisarek 1976 & 1986). What I would like to concentrate on has already been commented on by your personal and collective, joint and several, psychological reactions to the above citations. For many of you they were a collection of the pompous, the ludicrous, and the exotic – the “foolishness of the Greeks” described by the Apostle. Perhaps still for some people they were the “stumbling-blocks” experienced bitterly in their own lives and remembered long after with a shudder of fear and anguish, or repugnance and nausea. For their survivors words such as the above may be a permanent scar on their faculty to perceive and to communicate, in short a semantically encoded obstacle preventing a return to normal life. It is this dichotomy of reception for the propaganda messages issued by totalitarian régimes that makes such texts essentially untranslatable for full contextual access by recipients from another culture.

This, too, has been observed before. A colleague of mine, Dr. T. Polański, told me that in 1945, apparently in the safety of exile in America, the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer recorded his bewilderment at the feeling of alienation he experienced when faced with his own native language then adulterated by the superimposition of the vocabulary of Nazi propaganda terminology. A group of German philologists had published a Nazi-Deutsch/ English dictionary, in which they attempted “to translate the new terms into English, but,” according to Cassirer,

[they] were unsuccessful. They were able to give only circumlocutions of the German words and phrases instead of real translations. For unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, it was impossible to render these words adequately in English. What characterises them is not so much their content and their objective meaning as the emotional atmosphere which surrounds and envelops them. This atmosphere must be felt; it cannot be translated nor can it be transferred from one climate of opinion to an entirely different one. (Cassirer 283-284)<sup>3</sup>

Cassirer and Klemperer were at the stumbling-block end for the reception of Nazi German propaganda texts. There are perhaps many of us now whose reaction to the same material would (and hopefully will continue to) be at most one of curious observation. The other major totalitarianism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has fallen, and we are all inevitably bound to respond to its slogans of threat either with the stumbling-block, or with the foolishness reaction. The origins of its semantics of aggression go back to a source-text which is now well over a century and a half old, and also to some of its translations, which I now propose to examine for the effects of untranslatability.

Karl Marx wrote his *Manifesto* in London in January 1848, shortly before the spectacular events marking that year of revolution throughout Europe. The Communist League for which this text was compiled was a secret society, originally exclusively German but later becoming more and more international. Polish was one of the first languages into which this text was translated, as we learn from the preface to the 1872 German edition. The first English translation appeared in London in 1850, among many other versions into a host of other languages in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Several, including a Polish edition of 1892 and the authorised translation into English of 1888 by Samuel Moore, from which I am quoting, had special forewords contributed by Friedrich Engels. I am referring to an 1883 Geneva translation into Polish by Witold Piekarski, a well-known Polish Socialist of that period.

An epoch later in a new century, after a world war and a revolution, and several tens of millions of dead, a special institute was set up in Moscow for the translation of the writings both of Marx and Engels and their various disciples into all the languages of the world. It is from here beyond all doubt that my fourth text, the Maliniak version into Polish, came, during the interwar period (1920-1938), and was adopted by the Soviet-protected Communist government imposed on Poland in July 1944. By 1947 its 17<sup>th</sup> edition had been published for dissemination in the new People's Republic.

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<sup>3</sup> See also Victor Klemperer's *Lingua Tertii Imperii* and work by the British translation scholar Kate Sturge on translation and Nazi Germany.

I am going to restrict my observations to the German original and the three translated versions described above. To illustrate my hypothesis of how propaganda texts addressed principally to a specific society and intended essentially to intimidate that society are culturally untranslatable to other societies living outside that mode of political, social and cultural reality – I am going to examine only a few selected linguistic aspects of these translations with reference to their political and cultural background. I shall be concerned with the following questions:

1. The way in which the terminology used by Marx for some of his key concepts has been handled in each of the translations.
2. The way in which Marx's ideas and images relating to the specifically German realities of 1847-48 have been treated in each of the translations.
3. The relationship between the two Polish translations.
4. The treatment in translation of Marx's tropology of threat and aggression.

**1. Marxist terminology** Like his late descendant which I have already quoted and in line with a certain predilection of nineteenth-century German philosophers, Marx resorts to French and a variety of Latinate derivatives for terminology that requires special definition within his context and which through his usage has come down to us overwhelmingly in its acquired "new" meaning as essentially "Marxist." Towards the end of the *Manifesto* Marx discusses the loan of ideas and terminology made by the German philosophers of Socialism and Communism from the French writings (1872: 22-23), noting the incoherence of these terms and concepts as transferred mechanically and applied to German circumstances. But he heads his first chapter *Bourgeois and Proletarian*. Instead of giving a brief definition of these terms, he launches into a protracted historical account of the social divisions going back to late Antiquity, using all the historically familiar terminology, especially the noun *Stände* (estates) with a long list of groups fitting into the scheme of social division according to estate (*Freier und Sklave, Patrizier und Plebejer, Baron und Leibeigener, Zunftbürger und Gesell* &c.). Only then does he introduce the concept of the Bourgeoisie, locating it in its historically familiar setting (in 1848) rather than actually giving a definition, and throwing in a new concept, *Klassen*, to replace the outworn *Stände*, in a new situation of conflict:

Unsere Epoche, die Epoche der Bourgeoisie, zeichnet sich jedoch dadurch aus, daß sie die Klassengegensätze vereinfacht hat. Die ganze Gesellschaft spaltet sich mehr und mehr in zwei große feindliche Lager, in zwei große einander direkt gegenüber-stehende Klassen: Bourgeoisie und Proletarier. (Marx & Engels 1872: 5-6)

All the translators feel compelled to add explanatory, if somewhat circuitous or perhaps retrospective footnotes, for instance:

By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage-labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage-labourers

who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live. (Moore 1888: 10)

Maliniak gives a faithful translation of Moore's footnotes, which thereby appear to have acquired the status of marginal comments virtually adsorbed onto the canon of the standard text. Piekarski is the most painstaking philologically. He quotes the original German chapter title, giving an exhaustive account of the historical relationship between the term *Bourgeoisie* as current in French and its German adaptation. Then he notes the inadequacy of the traditional *mieszczanin* as a Polish translation. This brings him face to face with the phonetic and morphological problems involved in the transfer of French *bourgeois* and *bourgeoisie* into Polish. He finally decides to use the term *burżuazja*, which he tells us "has already become somewhat familiar" (Maliniak 1949: 9). The derivative *burżuj* thus appears to have been coined much later, and expressly for the purpose of parody. Yet Marx endows his usage of the word *bourgeois* with the full attributes of nativity, creating a series of natural-looking compounds such as *Bourgeoisieherrschafft*, *Bourgeoisstaat*, and *Bourgeoisvölker*, alongside *Bourgeoisklasse* (also spelled *Bourgeois-Klasse*), *Bourgeois-Ideologen* and *Bourgeois-Sozialismus*.

Just as Marx felt the need for a new principal term to convey his meaning rather than the traditional, etymologically related *Bürger* and *bürgerlich*, linguistically thriving but culturally loaded (which nevertheless appear in the text as ancillary alternatives), Moore (and presumably the earlier English translators as well) turned down the existing, historically determined *burgess* in favour of the French loan. The use of the already extant native variant would have meant a choice semantically too current in Marx's case, but too historical in the case of Moore.

*Die Proletarier* recur only much later, after a long and rather deprecatory incantation to the *bourgeoisie* (the opening words for most of its paragraphs):

Aber die Bourgeoisie hat nicht nur die Waffen geschmiedet, die ihr den Tod bringen; sie hat auch die Männer gezeugt, die diese Waffen führen werden – die modernen Arbeiter, die Proletarier. (Marx & Engels 1888: 9)

But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons – the modern working class – the proletarians. (Moore 1888: 15)

Again Marx makes a semantically significant decision to select a coinage from an ancient word, *proletarii*, which was originally used in Republican Rome to denote the lowest social division in the Roman citizenry, those whose contribution to the state was merely their ability to breed (*proles* – offspring), and were therefore given tax relief in proportion to the number of children they brought into the world. All the translators follow his example and employ modern derivatives of *proles* in their respective languages.

The original sense of the word *proletarii* must have been very familiar to the German philosophers, educated as they were on the texts and traditions of Classical Antiquity, and especially the Classical philosophers. This particular concept had been re-echoed in numerous Renaissance historiographies and treatises on political science. Although there were still a few years to go before the work of Jakob Burckhardt was published and a revival of interest in the Classical traditions of both Antiquity and Renaissance emerged, the pervading atmosphere in Marx's *Manifesto* is one of direct reference to the Classical ideas in political and moral philosophy – albeit a reference of contradiction, challenge, and defiance. This is to be observed particularly in the satirical dialogue conducted with the anonymous plenipotentiaries of the bourgeoisie in Chapter II, *Proletarier und Kommunisten* (1872: 13-20), in which the comments on subjects like public education, communal wives, religion, morality and philosophy are an overt continuation of themes handed down from Plato and Aristotle but presented in a way that appears to be a perversion of the original theses and their traditional elaborations – and which therefore pose a threat to the social order. A threat equally menacing to all bred on an acceptance of the Platonic and Aristotelian primacy for constitutional stability in the state is latent in the choice of the word *Revolution* – a vernacularised form of *revolutio*, the word used by all the translators and commentators of Aristotle from Grosseteste onwards, incorporated by Shakespeare and many other literary advocates of a peaceful social order<sup>4</sup> - for the most abhorred phenomenon of violent upheaval in the state. Marx was not the first to cast a sympathetic glance at *Révolution* of course, but the experience of the previous half-century had only intensified the fear and the panic many throughout Europe felt at the mere mention of this battle-cry word. He is particularly provocative when he uses the adjectival form of the term to describe the historic role of the bourgeoisie: his objective is to shock recipients into accepting his prognosis for the process of social change as inevitable:

Die Bourgeoisie hat in der Geschichte eine höchst revolutionäre Rolle gespielt. Die Bourgeoisie, wo sie zur Herrschaft gekommen, hat alle feudalen, patriarchalischen, idyllischen Verhältnisse zerstört. (Marx & Engels 1872: 6)

Die Waffen, womit die Bourgeoisie den Feudalismus zu Boden geschlagen hat, richten sich jetzt gegen die Bourgeoisie selbst. (Marx & Engels 1872: 9)

Naturally enough, all the translators follow their master in the use of *revolution/revolutionary* and *rewolucja/rewolucyjny* in their texts. But it must be stressed that in the case of Maliniak's translation the word has acquired a new meaning, and a new menace to any ordinary citizen of Poland who had experienced the slaughter and bloodshed of 1917-1920 either in the neighbouring country or at home during the ensuing Polish-Soviet War.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Coriolanus*, Act I, Sc. 1; and Hamlet's ironic comment on the power of death in the graveyard scene, *Hamlet*, Act V, Sc. 1 ("Here's *fine revolution*, an' we had the trick to see't."

**2. German realities of 1848 in translation.** All three translators endeavour to render versions accurate in terms of the historical and cultural detail proper to the original. But there are occasional noteworthy points, determined either by sporadic failure to recognise or cope with some historical and cultural details, or – in the case of Maliniak – the specific purpose for the translation.

Of the three, Piekarski is undoubtedly the most philologically-minded, or perhaps the least confident of his own competence as a translator and of his readers' ability to appreciate cultural differences (this in spite of the German dominance of Polish culture under the Partitions, when he wrote his translation). He peppers his text with footnotes and brackets with the original German terminology. He administers a substantial footnote to the chapter entitled *Proletarier und Kommunisten*, to the effect that the best Polish equivalent for *Kommunisten* is *socjaliści*. However, in the actual text he sticks to *komuniści*. Remarkably, decades later throughout its forty-five-year spell the authorities of the People's Republic never referred to the political system of that state as anything else but *socjalizm*, not *komunizm*, albeit for very different reasons. In general today the Piekarski text, with its quaint nineteenth-century spelling, syntax and vocabulary, reads rather like a contemporary treatise on social issues under the Partitions. It might have been connected with the Late Romantics, Lenartowicz or Norwid. Piekarski's version does not bear the brand-iron recognisable in the Maliniak text to anyone who lived in Poland at any time during the period from 1944 to 1989. Maliniak, for instance, mistranslates the German historical term *Pfahlbürgerschaft* (Marx 1872: 23) by applying a literal rendering, *mieszczarstwo grodowe* (Maliniak 1949: 75), which is meaningless in Polish but also potentially confusing through its similarity to *szlachta zagrodowa*, a term for the specifically Polish social phenomenon of an impoverished section of the gentry estate. Piekarski makes do with the simple term *mieszczarstwo niemieckie* and a citation of the original word in German (Piekarski 1883: 28), while Moore attempts to render the cultural background behind the expression, with *the petty bourgeois (German) Philistine* (Moore 1888: 33).

**3. The relationship between the two Polish translations.** I have already given a general description of the modern reader's impression of the two Polish translations. It is very definitely the Maliniak version that reads like the antecedent of the haranguing type of propaganda text quoted above from Bierut's speech. An example to illustrate this is the treatment of the term *Bauer* – appearing as the old-world *włóścianin* in Piekarski, but as the now politically recognisable *chłop* in Maliniak. A more telling instance of semantic delimitation through application in the official Stalinist translation comes with the familiar propaganda stereotypes *kamienicznik* and *obszarnik* which appear in Maliniak (1948: 52 and 53) for the original *Hausbesitzer* and *Grundeigentümer* (Marx & Engels 1872: 10 and 11). Piekarski renders this by historical terms in no way now tainted with a propaganda association, *właściciel domu* and *posiadacz ziemski* (Piekarski 1883: 15). For a comparison, Moore uses the general terms *landlord* and *landowner* (Moore 1888: 16 and 17). In contemporary semantic usage only Maliniak's terms, *kamienicznik* and *obszarnik*, are restricted exclusively to the field staked out by the official Marxist-Leninist literature disseminated in the People's Republic, although they were current in the pre-1939 socialist literature.

The historic change which separated Maliniak's translation from Piekarski's imposed certain restrictions on his freedom of translation. In some parts of the Manifesto he was forced to accommodate the original meaning to the official political line, by introducing what might have been regarded by an uncritical reader as paraphrases not affecting the general sense. He found himself in this situation with the following sentence, where to "clear" the problem he only mistranslated the modal verb:

Sie [die Bourgeoisie] ist unfähig zu herrschen, weil sie unfähig ist, ihrem Sklaven die Existenz selbst innerhalb seiner Sklaverei zu sichern, weil sie gezwungen ist, ihn in eine Lage herabsinken zu lassen, wo sie ihn ernähren *muß*, statt von ihm ernährt zu werden. (Marx & Engels 1872: 13)

[Burżuazja] nie jest zdolna do panowania, nie jest bowiem nawet zdolna do zapewnienia istnienia swemu niewolnikowi chociażby w granicach jego niewolnictwa, gdyż musi spychać go w dół do poziomu, na którym *winna* go żywić, miast być żywiona przez niego. (Maliniak 1949: 57)

The italicised modal in Maliniak is at least ambiguous: it means both "is obliged to" and "ought to". Maliniak could not use the straightforward *żywić musi* (as in Piekarski 18), because he could never stray from the official caricature presentation of contemporary Western Capitalism as actually starving the working class to death. He could never have admitted that there were any kinds of welfare institutions at all, however austere, beyond the Soviet Block.

Another weirdness of translation into which Maliniak is manoeuvred by the historical restrictions imposed on his work is his choice of *rokoszenie* for the translation of *Rebellen*. Marx advocates the confiscation of the property of *die Emigranten und Rebellen* (1872: 19). The most natural translation of this would have been *emigranci i buntownicy*, as implemented by Piekarski (1883: 24). Yet such a decision was evidently not open to Maliniak. In the interwar period, when he was working on the translation, these were precisely the terms which could have been used by the authorities of the Polish Second Republic to describe the group of Polish émigré Communists in Moscow, who in 1920 had sided with the Soviet invader. The word *rokoszenie* is now used in an exclusively historical sense to denote certain instances of armed political opposition to the king by the Polish *szlachta*, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, on grounds of the right to *de non praestanda oboedientia*. *Rokoszenie* is an outright misnomer in Marx's context and could have been used only to muddle the issue.

**4. The terminology of threat.** Marx uses the tactics of threat both through what he says and the images he uses. Sometimes his images of menace pose well-nigh embarrassing syntactic and semantic problems for his translators. For instance, he employs the verb *aufheben* (to repeal, to do away with) with respect to the bourgeoisie, that is with respect to persons:

. . . diese Person [der Bourgeois, der bürgerliche Eigenthümer] soll allerdings aufgehoben werden. (Marx & Engels 1872: 16)

This sentence is troublesome for all three translators, most so for Moore, but apparently not so much for Maliniak (with *znieść* – to repeal), while Piekarski has no compunction in using the verb *zniszczyć* (to destroy):

This person must, indeed, be swept out of the way and made impossible. (Moore 1888:24)

A indywidualność taka najistotniej zniszczoną być powinna ze szczeniem (Piekarski 1883: 20)

A taka właśnie osobowość ma rzeczywiście ulec zniesieniu. (Maliniak 1949: 62)

But Marx's threats are in the realm of the future, and so too are those in the two earlier translations. Marx made the progress of his "revolutionary working class" "unavoidable" and "imminent," and the same happened in both Moore's and Piekarski's translations. But by the 20<sup>th</sup> edition of Maliniak's translation – dated 1949 – the very words *klasa robotnicza* (working class) had become a threat backed by the reality of a foreign-imposed state. There was no longer a Polish nation, roared Comrade Sokorski, Minister of Culture, there was only the working class. When Marx first enumerated his list of what was to be changed along with the imposition of rule by the proletariat (1872: 19 – a description later repudiated or modified by Engels), he was merely recording a series of proposed reforms, albeit threatening even in their hypothetical nature. But by the 1949 edition of Maliniak's text many of these threats had become a reality, evidenced within the text, for example, by the mere use of capitals for the term *Bank Narodowy* (National Bank), which had become an institutionalised reality embodying the theory and practice of mass confiscation of private property, the contempt for capital, and therefore its unattainability by any other means except through the politically correct channels with no regard for economic credibility. For comparison, Moore translated this passage with a specific connotation of futurity, writing "a national bank" (1888: 28).

The historical circumstances lying outside the four texts themselves therefore exerted a crucial influence on the actual words and images conveyed. Between the years 1944 and 1989, when it was the authorised translation imposed by an alien state organisation, the Maliniak translation in combination with its verbal offspring, texts such as the Bierut speech quoted above, carried a very different and concrete message of menace to its immediate addressees, the citizens cordoned off in the People's Republic. Only those who managed to adopt a Stoic attitude to its threats could afford to ignore it – although by 1989, in view of the puny reality of the power disseminating this propaganda, this meant the overwhelming majority of the population, including most of those actually running the country and paying lip-service to their own promotion literature. Their attitude is perhaps better described as similar to that of the Cynical School rather than that of the Stoa of ancient times. For a large majority, as it later turned out, the growing discrepancy between what was officially disseminated in the propaganda and reality brought on an absolute distrust in anything that

the state authorities – any state authorities whatever, even once the political system changed – had to say. No wonder election turnouts turned out to be so disappointingly low. It might even take several decades more before this phenomenon, engendered in the generations educated on school curricula loaded with official political propaganda, will die a natural death. Such “positive” effects of the propaganda emerged after the system which had worked for them had itself disintegrated.

The general conclusion to this preliminary analysis is that in fact the four texts considered cannot be treated as four equivalents: original and three translations of equal standing. They have each to be accorded their own separate status as different historically determined scriptures addressed to different congregations locked up in culturally well-nigh hermetic temples. They are incompatible with each other in the sense of being each other's equivalents in different languages, as generally described by the term “translation.” A wider and more detailed study of more texts will presumably bear out this observation on a larger scale. We have been living in worlds virtually cut off from each other not for want of translators of words, but of explainers of differences of culture and historical experience.

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