

# THE NATION'S PULSE



## I'M A POLE WATCHER

by Thomas Swick

Standing with a group of Poles the first Saturday in June I thought to myself: there may be one or two here who dreamed that one day they would vote in a Polish election, but there cannot be any who imagined that their trip to the ballot box would begin in a parking lot of Lord & Taylor in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania.

The bus was already parked near some trees at twenty minutes to nine when my wife, Hania (who is Polish), and I arrived with another couple, Damian and Iza, and their two young sons. Damian is an ophthalmologist, working at Temple University for a year, and his family had joined him only a week before. This meant that Iza's first excursion in the United States was going to be to her own consulate to vote. We were soon joined by acquaintances of theirs, Krzysztof and Urszula, both from Warsaw and now living temporarily, in West Philadelphia, where Krzysztof has a two-year position at the Wistar Institute.

Gradually, more cars pulled up and families emerged, occasionally carrying thermoses and bags of supplies. (The sun was already warm in a cloudless sky.) It was easy to tell which children had been in America the longest: they wore the more extravagant hats. A boy of six or seven sported a green one designed to resemble a frog, with two eyes set at the front and a tongue inserted between the bifurcated visor. Damian's two boys, by contrast, wore soft, pliable, promotional hats that carried the name of their donor—*Głos Szczeciński* (The Szczecin Voice)—printed on the sides.

The organizer of the trip, Janusz, a regional economist at Penn, arrived with his wife and three children, all of whom (with the exception of Janusz) were dressed in T-shirts declaring: "Filadelfia głosuje na Solidarność" (Philadelphia votes for Solidarity). Turning around they displayed a computer print-out image of Lech Walesa, circa 1981. Our friends Leszek and

Joanna soon connected to the group, having left their two daughters with Leszek's mother, now visiting from Warsaw, and bringing along Joanna's brother, Marek, more recently arrived. Marek also works at Wistar, as a researcher in immunology, with Leszek virtually across the street, at the University of Pennsylvania hospital, where he has an appointment as a research assistant professor of physiology. Mirek, another Penn economist, appeared with his wife Marzena, who teaches in the Slavic department, their four-year-old daughter, Klaudina, and Marzena's mother, who had come for a few months from Gdansk.

Hania and I found seats in the middle of the bus, in front of Janusz's sister-in-law, Marysia, and her husband Grzegorz. Marysia wore a Solidarity T-shirt, with the red, familiar jumbled script painted black, and a smaller message printed beneath it: "Another

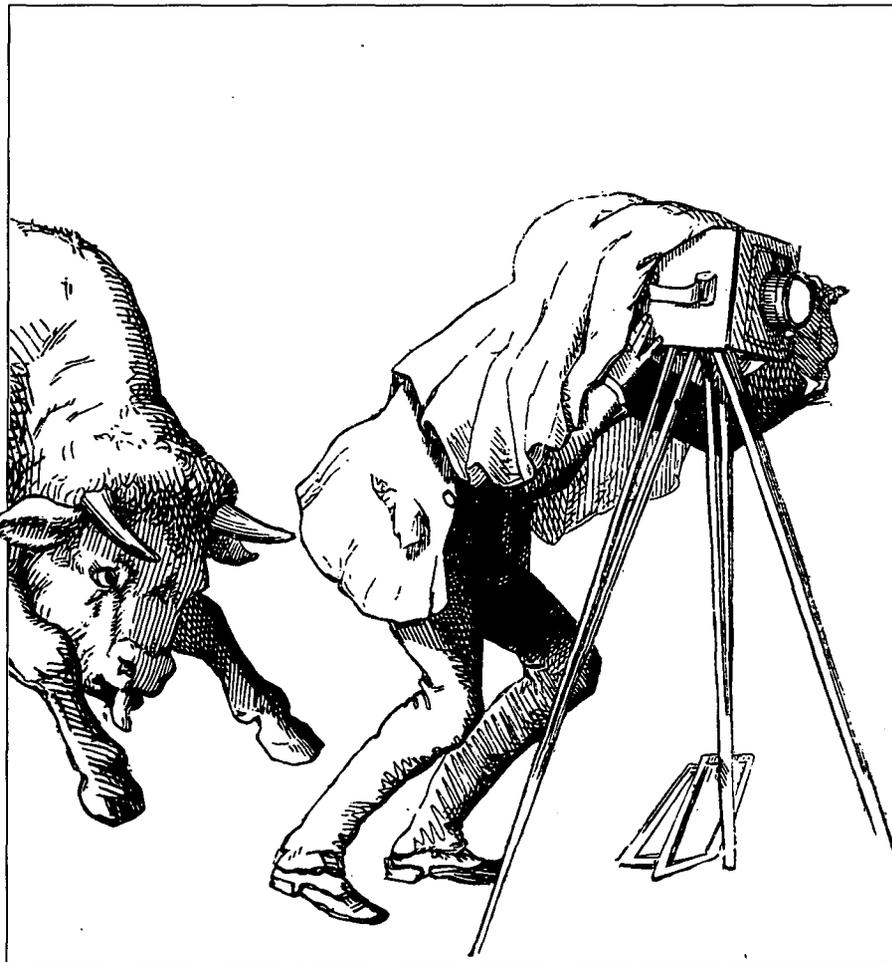
word for freedom." The children occupied the back. There were no empty seats. Shortly after nine the driver pulled out onto City Line Avenue and headed toward the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The atmosphere was vaguely reminiscent of a sports club outing: a couple of cloth calendars, one with a picture of Walesa, the other of the Pope, had been hung against some windows, and a bouquet of red and white carnations teetered precariously from the luggage rack. Hanna, Janusz's wife, took the microphone to sell her T-shirts: \$12 for adults, \$10 for children. "You can have your own picture instead of Walesa's," she advertised, to a chorus of laughter. "Or your mother-in-law's." Small red and white Polish flags sold better at \$1.25.

People moved freely up and down the aisles, exchanging news and

reading material. Solidarity's voting information sheets were distributed to every passenger. Thursday's issue of the *New York Times*, with a front-page story on the Soviet weightlifter denouncing the KGB, was eagerly passed around, as was the article by Timothy Garton Ash, "The End of Communism in Poland and Hungary," from the current issue of the *New York Review of Books*. Children appeared periodically from the back, wordlessly offering their cookies and crackers. Passengers not occupied with reading engaged in conversation. At one point I closed my eyes to listen to the din, expecting to detect a tangled undergrowth of *sz*'s and *cz*'s; though except for the occasional, salient susurrations, the collective sound seemed no different from that produced at any lively American cocktail party.

Once onto the New Jersey Turnpike, I got up to stretch my legs. Grzegorz behind me had finished with the *Times* and returned to Paul Fussell's *The Boy Scout Handbook*. "He's wonderful," he exclaimed to me with relish, "but mean!" Behind him Janusz's son Łukasz, older than the children but not yet interested in the adults, stared out the window. I heard a cheerful mother of three, formerly from Radom, now of Upper Darby, say that her daughter had stayed home to attend her first prom. A day of family milestones. Marek sat reading an article from the *Journal of Immunology*, while Janusz, standing in the aisle, debated voting strategy with Leszek and Joanna. Solidarity had urged its supporters to cross out the names of all the Party candidates who were running uncontested, but an older man, sitting one row from the back, objected to such a ploy, arguing that it would simply give the Party the opportunity to choose whomever it pleased. And some of its members, he insisted, were not as bad as others.

I introduced myself and took the seat beside him. He told me he was a doctor by training who had come to the States for a year and stayed fifteen. "I still haven't acclimated," he told me, in



Thomas Swick is an editorial writer with the Providence Journal-Bulletin.

confiding tones. "I don't have the necessary practical sense. I am a romantic." He invested limited hope in the elections, but explained: "If I myself didn't vote, if I hadn't come today, I would have felt badly inside," and he clutched his shirt in front of his heart and crumpled it in his fist.

At one point in our conversation the bus slowed abruptly, all heads turned to the left, and we heard the word "krowa" coming from the front. Looking out the window we saw on the grass of the median strip a black and white cow. She was not grazing, but lurching awkwardly backwards in visible terror at the traffic. I am not one to attach a great deal of significance to unusual occurrences, but it does seem to me somehow meaningful that riding with a busload of Poles going to vote in parliamentary elections I should see for the first time in my life a cow on the New Jersey Turnpike.

We dipped into the Lincoln Tunnel and passed easily through the Midtown streets, coming to a halt in front of the consulate at the corner of 37th and Madison Avenue. A crowd of people milled about on both sides of the street, and a constant flow came in and out the open doors. I spotted a journalist friend near the entrance, already wearing the Solidarity election pin, with the names of its four candidates typed in red. "Things are going quite smoothly," he assured us, then joked, himself a veteran of numerous American elections: "They're giving out free drinks over at Jerzy Urban headquarters."

Hania and I proceeded inside and up the circular stairway carpeted in red. It was my first visit to this realm of the consulate; when coming for visas I had always been shepherded into a smaller, more hushed wing. Not that this section exuded a lived-in look; the thick carpets and long curtains seemed to be getting a much-needed airing. Upstairs, sunlight filtered through tall windows and sparkled from a chandelier. A painting reminiscent of Tiepolo, depicting bare-chested maidens through diaphanous clouds, occupied the ceiling. Gilt moldings trimmed the sides.

Arrows set atop stands and printed with the letters A-Z and M-Z pointed into two adjoining halls. My wife followed the second (curiously placed on the left) and, after the briefest of waits, reached the registration table. "Celina!" she said to the attractive young woman seated at the end behind a large logbook, "I didn't recognize you at first." Celina, whom we know from various functions, was working as a Solidarity volunteer. She too wore the movement's pin on her fashionable jacket. She checked Hania's name off her list and handed her her ballots;

then, smiling at me, said sweetly: "You can't vote."

Hania waited, again briefly, for a booth to open up. Five or six of them stood in a row, red and white ribbons attached to each curtain. Then a man exited from one and Hania went off to vote for the first time in her life. She came out, looking little changed, walked to the red-and-white-draped ballot box, and dropped in her votes. Behind her a semicircle of people leaned against the consulate bar to do their voting in less secretive surroundings.

We walked to the other room, where a portly consulate official of the peasant/bureaucrat variety asked if he could be of help. He was sweating profusely, either from the heat or the unaccustomed pressure of having to be nice. I noticed that in this room people were eschewing the booths for the top of a piano sitting in the corner.

We returned to the main hall to observe the scene. The flow of people continued up and down the staircase: women in summer dresses, grandmothers who looked as if they were straight from the countryside, a great preponderance of men with mustaches. They had the hard, rough-hewn, somber look of Polish workers, only slightly diminished by their light-hued summer clothing. Shirts were worn with a flat collar open at the neck, and the Polish fashion of socks and sandals prevailed on the feet. Despite the opulent surroundings, no one seemed to feel the least bit awed or out of place. In fact, there was an endearing casualness in the way that people made themselves at home. "Guest in the house, God in the house," is an old Polish proverb, though one heretofore not commonly embraced by the foreign service. A number of voters hesitated before depositing their ballots, not because of second thoughts, but because of a desire to preserve the moment on film. Photographic equipment was in abundance: it might actually have been possible to deduce people's stage of immigration by the type they carried: Russian cameras for recently arrived *wakacjuszy* (or vacationers, as Poles who work abroad temporarily are ironically called); Japanese cameras for immigrants; movie cameras for permanent residents. The sofa in the center hall, at the foot of an enormous red and white banner strung from the window, was a popular place to pose: once we saw three large men squeeze rather comically onto it with expressions of imperturbable dignity. These small human resonances in such grand surroundings made me think of a Sempe drawing.

The same amiable bustle lasted through the afternoon. By five o'clock the first line had formed on the sidewalk outside. I stood across the

street from the entrance, with a small band of Poles passing the time. The temperatures were mild and the shadows slowly lengthening. All around me there was nothing but Polish to be heard. I got talking with a man from Rzeszów, in the south of Poland, who now lives in Brooklyn. "Yes, yes, for good," he said when I asked. He told me something of his background: Solidarity activity, arrest during martial law, seven months interned. "Change is a long way off," he said heavily. "But who knows when we'll get a chance like this again?" I asked his profession. "I was an electrician in Poland," he told me, "but now I'm an auto mechanic. See?"—and he held out a knobby, grease-stained hand unaccustomed to the environs of Madison Avenue.

We stood awhile watching the people as they waited to vote. There was something about the scene—the soft summer air, the labored faces, the pensive, not quite festive mood—

that struck me as familiar. And then I remembered the Pope's first visit to Warsaw—ten years before, almost to the day. There as well, on a much larger scale of course, had been this same subdued, hopeful gathering of national aspirations. And it seemed fitting that election day at the consulate should echo that visit, being that it was, quite clearly, a direct descendant of it.

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*Postscript:* Two weeks later, when the runoff election was held—primarily for the seats guaranteed the Party and its allies—voting took place only in Poland, a tacit admission by the government, perhaps, that the people who had left would not be interested. The consulate in New York returned to its usual Saturday somnolence, and Poles abroad reverted to the more familiar role of distant spectators. □

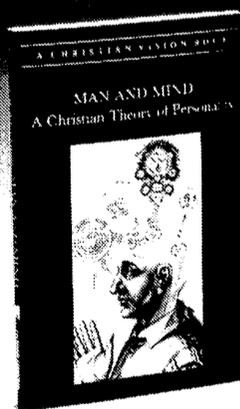
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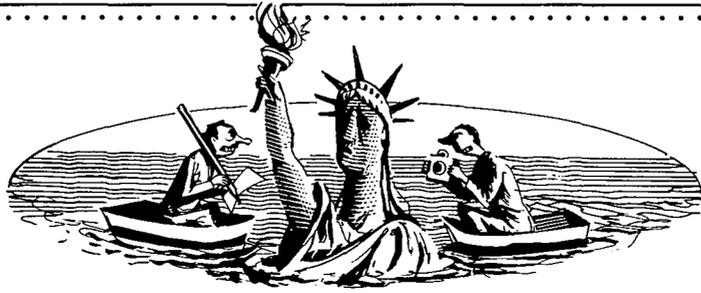
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# PRESSWATCH

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## GRAY MATTER

by Terry Eastland

On Memorial Day two FBI agents interviewed Democratic Rep. Bill Gray at a Washington hotel. The next evening Rita Braver of CBS reported the existence of a "criminal investigation into financial dealings involving" Gray. The investigation involved "personnel," she said, and Gray's "cooperation was not forthcoming." Braver did not exactly say that Gray himself was under investigation, but no one watching the newscast could doubt that he was.

For this story of first impression, Braver relied on unnamed "Justice Department sources." In other words, there had been a leak, and it had occurred when House Democrats were on the defensive over ethics, and when Gray himself was the odds-on favorite to succeed Tony Coelho as Democratic whip.

As it turned out, the leak did no fatal political damage, in part because Gray managed to force from the Justice Department a statement that the congressman was not a "target" of the investigation (which involved an alleged no-show employee on Gray's payroll) and that indeed he was cooperating fully. In mid-June, Gray was elected majority whip. Still, the question persisted: Who leaked, and why?

Sorry, I can't produce the body. And as I write, the Justice Department, which has been investigating the leak, hasn't found the source either. But there are theories about who the leakers might be.

*Theory No. 1: The Office of Attorney General.* No one really believes that Attorney General Dick Thornburgh personally leaked the story. Reporters who cover him believe he's incapable of it. They think he's stiff with reporters and would have a hard time striking the kind of confidential pose needed in order to leak. But others around him, longtime Thornburgh loyalists, are not so ill-equipped, and they do control the

department's news spigots. Thornburgh reduced both the size and importance of the old public affairs staff in part to incorporate media relations into his office. More than one reporter covering the Justice Department believes Thornburgh's minions did the deed.

Why? Two explanations have been offered, both political. One is that Thornburgh's office realized that if the talented Gray were Democratic whip, House Republicans would have a more difficult time challenging the Democratic majority. The other is that Thornburgh's office had more provincial interests: both the attorney general and Gray are Pennsylvania politicians, and hurting Gray helps the Pennsylvania GOP. The second explanation is more believable than the first, but both suffer from a lack of hard evidence.

Aides to Thornburgh say they couldn't have leaked even if they wanted to, maintaining that none of them knew about the Memorial Day interview. This does not mean, however, that they weren't aware of the no-show investigation. Someone else might have leaked to CBS, but one of Thornburgh's staffers might have confirmed

the story, in order to hurt Gray or maybe just to let the reporter know that he is "in the know." That does happen.

*Theory No. 2: The Criminal Division of the Justice Department.* The agents who interviewed Gray were working on a case being developed by Thomas Lee, the U.S. attorney in Philadelphia. FBI interviews of congressmen are normally coordinated with Justice's Criminal Division. That means Ed Dennis, the head of the Criminal Division, or one of his top deputies should have known about the Gray interview. If the division knew, however, it apparently failed to pass word to the attorney general's office.

Did Dennis know? *Newsday*, in the most informative journalism done on the leak, tried but was unable to answer the question. And Dennis, who formerly served as the U.S. attorney in Philadelphia (the story is thick with Pennsylvanians), routinely declines comment. In any case, he, like Thornburgh and his staff, probably knew about Lee's no-show investigation. But it's doubtful that Dennis leaked. He's not a political schemer, nor a Washington insider. Besides, as *Newsday* reports, he

used to be friendly enough with Gray to be his occasional tennis partner.

If the Criminal Division leaked, the source was down below. This is not so unlikely. Back in the spring, Dennis circulated an internal memo saying that "leaks will not be tolerated." The memo was promptly leaked.

*Theory No. 3: The FBI.* The FBI agents who interviewed Gray were from the Philadelphia office; it's unlikely that they would have leaked to a national correspondent. This theory instead points to top officials at FBI headquarters, who approved the interview. Why would they leak?

A couple of reasons. On paper, the FBI is under the Justice Department, and since becoming attorney general last summer, Thornburgh has been trying to exert more control over the agency, which has historically been reluctant to acknowledge Justice Department authority. According to this theory, a leak is just the thing to publicly put Thornburgh on the defensive and thereby weaken his ability to dictate to the bureau.

That's possible, but a second reason, involving Gray, is more plausible. As *Newsday* pointed out, "Gray has made life difficult for [new FBI Director William] Sessions and other senior members of the FBI by promoting the cause of black FBI agent Donald Rochon," who has charged the bureau with racial discrimination. Gray helped make the Rochon case a national story, and the FBI has a strong aversion to bad publicity. Moreover, Robert Ahlerich, the head of FBI's public affairs shop, used to supervise Rochon when both men were stationed in Chicago. Rochon said his boss failed to report racial threats against him.

Ahlerich is on record as saying he acted properly in the Rochon case and denies that he or anyone else in the bureau leaked the Gray investigation to CBS. The problem with this statement is that it is always hard for a spokesman to speak for everyone. The FBI has long been a source of stories about on-



*Terry Eastland is the author of Ethics, Politics, and the Independent Counsel, published by the National Legal Center for the Public Interest.*