

OTHER NOTES AND NOTICES

RECENT CHANGES IN THE STATE SYMBOLS OF POLAND

IN 1985 an article of mine on Polish national symbols appeared in *JASO* (Vol. XVI, no. I, pp. 19-34). In it I discussed some aspects of the role of official state symbolism in the political life of Poland after World War II, and especially during the period of martial law imposed by the communist authorities in December 1981. I suggested that the crown which was worn historically by the eagle on the Polish state emblem and which was removed by the communist regime in 1945, was a symbol of sovereignty, and that it was perceived as such by at least the majority of the Polish public. The communist ideologists claimed that the crown symbolized monarchy and should not be part of the emblem of the socialist state. But for most Poles the removal of the crown signified first of all the loss of independence under Soviet domination.

I am therefore pleased to be able to report that the development of political events in Poland has proved that I was right in my interpretation. In June 1989 the Polish opposition, organized in the Solidarity movement, won the parliamentary election (or rather, it won 35% of the seats which it was possible to win in the open contest), and subsequently founded the first post-war non-communist Polish government. Already last autumn, a group of parliamentary representatives proposed that the official emblem of the state should be changed in such a way that the crown would be restored. It was argued that the crown was a symbol of sovereignty, and that since the country was once again politically independent it was only right that such a fundamental change should be symbolized by the act of restoring the state emblem from before World War II. Nobody in parliament explicitly demanded that the Polish eagle should not be crowned, though some

radical representatives of the Solidarity parliamentary group suggested that Poland was not yet independent enough, and that changes to official state symbols should wait until the new constitution was ready. Some other members of parliament wanted the crown to be topped with a cross to symbolize the religious identity of the nation. But this suggestion was not endorsed by the majority, who felt that Poland should be a home for non-religious people too. Finally, a decision was reached and the crown (without a cross) was restored.

Even the Communist Party members in the parliament (who soon afterwards ceased to belong to any party, since the Communist Party dissolved itself in January) voted in favour of the change. Simultaneously, some radical changes were introduced to the Polish constitution to the effect that it now says nothing about the leading role of the Communist Party or of the proletariat. The alliance with the USSR is also not mentioned any more, and the word 'socialism' has been removed from the text. To indicate that the Polish state had changed its character its official name was changed. Since January 1990 it is no longer called the Polish People's Republic: it is now the Republic of Poland.

ZDZISŁAW MACH