

Correspondence

"The Insignificant Death of Stanislaw Pyjas"

To the Editors: The article by Thomas C. Franco, "The Insignificant Death of Stanislaw Pyjas" (April), is an unfortunate example of supposedly well-meant but nihilistic and despairing commentary on recent events in Krakow, Poland, which the author, despite his year in that city, apparently does not understand.

My wife and I were students in Krakow from 1972 to 1974 on the Frontier Internship in Mission program of the United Presbyterian Church, and we taught English at the Silesian University in Katowice from 1974 to 1976. We established, maintained, and continue to maintain deeply rooted relationships in the religious and intellectual community of Krakow. In addition to our on-going correspondence, we have in the past year enjoyed the company of several friends from that city who have reported to us their own participation in the activities about which Franco writes.

The article is marred by two factual errors and, more important, by Franco's overall attitude, as I've characterized it above. The first error is his portrayal of Pyjas as a Polish "hippie," easily dismissed by the general public by the clever exploitation of his photograph by the government-controlled press. While it is true that "most students at Krakow wear suits and their hair is cut short," by the time we left Poland in 1976 it was no more unusual to see long-haired, "Sixties radical"-looking students and young assistants in even Katowice (a workers' city with an important party base) than in any contemporary Midwestern American university, especially not in Krakow, an intellectual and cultural center of Poland, and particularly among philology students who, like fine arts and drama students, are by and large drawn from families making up the Polish intelligentsia.

The second factual error is one of omission and is so serious it raises the question of whether Franco deliberately excluded it. He writes that the protest organized by the Workers Defense Committee and the Committee for Stu-

dent Solidarity concerning Pyjas's death "fizzled out" for no apparent reason except that "the timing was wrong," and then he goes on to imply that it was because "'Juvenalia' had begun, a Mardi Gras-like festival when students become masters of the city and march through the streets in medieval costumes." Franco omits the very important fact that Juvenalia as a student holiday in 1977 was a flop, its organized event attended only by its organizers, the activists in the Union of Polish Socialist Students. A flop because Juvenalia was boycotted by the protest movement and the students as a whole, and its main event, a torchlight parade at night through the streets and central square of the city, was co-opted by the protestors. Instead of the traditional singing, shouting, dancing, prank-playing, somewhat riotous march, it was a silent march of thousands of students wearing black armbands, a memorial to Pyjas and to the dissident movement he represents. One wonders if Franco even read any of the Western press accounts of this march.

The most serious aspect of the article, as I've indicated, is the author's attitude, which, building upon his glaring omission, conveys an overwhelming sense of helplessness and hopelessness about the Polish situation. "What can you expect when the Poles themselves are victims of their own prejudices and the students are only concerned about a good time?"

Quite the reverse is true. The situation in Poland, while obviously difficult—difficulties apparently not perceived or understood by Franco—has rarely been more hopeful. Poland enjoys the most active protest movement in the Soviet bloc, one that benefits from the greatest amount of government toleration, one that has the support of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, the strongest single institution in that part of the world outside of the socialist governments themselves, and has the only dissident movement in Eastern Europe in which an alliance between protesting workers and disgruntled intellectuals has been achieved and, since June, 1976, maintained.

I do not know of any situation in Eastern Europe that does not look hopeless from the point of view Franco represents. I do not know of any situation in Eastern Europe that, seen from

(Continued on page 58)

WORLDVIEW

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of *Worldview* is to place public policies, particularly in international affairs, under close ethical scrutiny. The Council on Religion and International Affairs, which sponsors the journal, was founded in 1914 by religious and civic leaders brought together by Andrew Carnegie. It was mandated to work toward ending the barbarity of war, to encourage international cooperation, and to promote justice. The Council is independent and nonsectarian. *Worldview* is an important part of the Council's wide-ranging program in pursuit of these goals.

Worldview is open to diverse viewpoints and encourages dialogue and debate on issues of public significance. It is edited in the belief that large political questions cannot be considered adequately apart from ethical and religious reflection. The opinions expressed in *Worldview* do not necessarily reflect the positions of the Council. Through *Worldview* the Council aims to advance the national and international exchange without which our understanding will be dangerously limited.

Philip A. Johnson, *Publisher*

Editorial Board:

Hans Morgenthau, *Chairman*
William J. Barnds
Eugene B. Borowitz
Noel J. Brown
Jorge Dominguez
James Finn
J. Bryan Hehir
Donald F. McHenry (on leave)
Paul Ramsey
Seymour Siegel
Paul Sigmund
Kenneth W. Thompson
Howard Wriggins (on leave)



Correspondence

[from p. 2]

an Eastern European point of view, is filled with more hope and possibility for social justice than is Poland's. Neither the memory of Pyjas, Poland's dissident movement, Poles themselves, nor other Eastern Europeans concerned with human liberties are served by articles such as Franco's.

The Rev. Charles G. Robertson, Jr.

*Pastor, Howesville Presbyterian Church
Jasonville, Ind.*

Thomas C. Franco Responds:

Robertson twists logic as well as meaning when he centers his attack on my so-called "factual error of omission."

I described how the Polish Government manages to keep social and political tensions within manageable limits. Robertson demonstrates his misunderstanding of the article when he states that no other explanation for the failure of the Pyjas protest is offered than bad timing. If factual error is the question here, I'm afraid he makes some rather serious ones.

A delicate balance exists in Poland. Robertson incorrectly characterizes this state of affairs as being "hopeful." Though the "Darkness at Noon" myth of an omnipotent and omnipresent party is hard to maintain in a country where the government shakes in its boots to raise the price of meat, the situation is far from "hopeful." The Pyjas story is proof of this fact.

The party leadership cannot afford to pursue a course of confrontation in Poland. Instead, domestic dissidents and critics of party policy are tackled by what the government calls "political means."

The method employed in the Pyjas case was direct and simple. Explanations in the press concerning his suspicious death were grounded in real or believable tensions; they began with details that were or seemed verifiable and ended up with some far-fetched interpretation, such as the story that Pyjas was secretly an informant.

The official response was to protect the citizens from anything that would interfere with their being content with the state. And the government's tactics succeeded. Contrary doubts outweighed the beliefs that began to crystallize into

a political threat.

Robertson paints a false picture of my attitude about this point, and bases his criticisms on "hearsay" evidence. This unfortunate irony ought to be stressed. Pyjas was not accepted as a martyr by "thousands" of demonstrating students, as Robertson's romantic friends would lead us to believe. That's an honest-to-goodness factual error.

The most striking aspect of the Krakow protest was how fast it ebbed. What remains of Stanislaw Pyjas will never become the subject matter of tragedy.

Sadat as Superstar

To the Editors: My attention has been drawn to Abraham Martin Murray's comments on a Middle East Memo I prepared on February 15 for the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations entitled "Anwar Sadat, Superstar" ("A View of the World," *Worldview*, April). I respect your right to a different opinion on who is responsible for the stalemate in the Middle East peace negotiations, but you have misinformed your readers by falsely stating that "the Conference's contribution is to advance the proposition that there was nothing awesome or courageous at all" about what Sadat did in visiting Jerusalem.

In fact, when President Sadat met in Jerusalem with Prime Minister Begin, the Conference of Presidents hailed that visit. When the Carter administration failed to recognize the historic nature of President Sadat's initiative, it was the Jewish community, led by the Conference of Presidents, that urged the president to accept Sadat's invitation to peace talks and to continue what we called the "powerful momentum" toward peace launched by the first Sadat-Begin meeting.

Even when President Sadat abruptly and without reason broke off the peace negotiations on January 18, Rabbi Schindler, in an open letter of reply to Sadat's letter to the American Jewish community, said, in part:

"History will remember and honor you for daring to speak in Jerusalem of peace between Arab and Jew. . . . Though we have not yet found a common way, we do share a common purpose. It is a lofty purpose, worthy of our striving: Peace with justice, not only to

avoid the tragedies of the past but to reap that rich harvest of the better life which the full and free and cooperative effort between Egypt and Israel, born of peace, can bring."

I cite these statements to underscore the eagerness with which the Conference of Presidents embraced Mr. Sadat's courageous and dramatic flight to Jerusalem. Unfortunately it has since become clear that President Sadat's breaking off of negotiations was not an aberration but part of a carefully calculated plan to cast Israel in the role of the intransigent and obdurate party. In his address to the People's Assembly in Cairo on January 21 (three days after abruptly recalling his foreign minister from Jerusalem) President Sadat revealed his true position, declaring:

"I understand and agree that, indeed, the negotiations should be conducted the way they are conducted all over the world, and that we should meet halfway, but only after Israel has first withdrawn to her 1967 borders. Afterwards, we should sit together and say, what is it we should attain in order to achieve peace? When we have reached that position we can talk about half from them and half from us."

In sum, Sadat insists that only when all the Israelis have withdrawn from Sinai, Gaza, the West Bank, Golan, and East Jerusalem is he prepared to sit down and negotiate the form of a settlement. This is not a prescription for peace; it is a formula for surrender.

We do not underestimate Sadat's "concession" in recognizing Israel's right to exist. But this is only the first step toward a settlement, a necessary beginning, but surely not the final commitment Egypt must make if there is to be peace. Yet President Sadat continues to act as if this is all he must do for peace, insisting that his promises are all that Israel needs for its security.

I do not know if Sadat really believes such foolishness, but he certainly acts as if he does—and it is this posturing, this exploitation of the media to advance these purposes and not the cause of peace that I found so objectionable, dubbing him "superstar." I regret that you found the term offensive. But apparently I am not the only one to regard him so. This is what Joseph Kraft had to say in his column in the *Washington Post* on May 7, 1978:

"When it comes to showmanship, histrionics and flair for the dramatic, Pres-