

## **Dethroning Stalin: Poland 1956 and its Legacy**

TONY KEMP-WELCH

This contribution examines the Polish experience of de-Stalinisation and its consequences. In 1956, Polish communists first acknowledged that society could no longer be ruled without listening to its voice. Khrushchev's 'secret speech' denouncing aspects of Stalin's rule was published in full. During the ensuing October crisis, Gomułka persuaded the Soviet leadership to restore the outward semblances of national sovereignty. The Polish Party admitted that domestic campaigns against private agriculture and the Catholic Church had failed, and both were promised a permanent place within the 'socialist order'. But workers' hopes for economic rationality and intellectuals' aspirations for a freer public life were soon disappointed. They did not revive until the 1970s.

STALINISM IMPOSED A MONOLOGUE BY CLOSING CHANNELS OF communication between the rulers and the ruled. Although Poland abandoned Stalinism in 1956 and asserted a degree of autonomy from Soviet hegemony, the return to dialogue was slow and uneven. It was not completed until 1989 when the Communist party agreed to talks with political forces grouped around the independent, but still illegal, trade union Solidarity. But the road to dialogue began in 1956.

For any dialogue to become possible, several preconditions have to be met. The first is for people to come out of their sanctuaries, to approach each other and exchange opinions. Dialogue cannot be on the basis of 'I am entirely right'. There has to be a reciprocal acceptance that the other partner is also right, to some extent. Another person's notion of truth has to be acknowledged as a starting point for discussion (Tischner 1984, pp. 15–17). Secondly, the interlocutors have to find a language which allows for concept formation outside the official sphere of communication. For an interchange of views to become possible, words such as strike, election or party, have to have a meaning beyond those imposed by those in power. We see this collision of discourse most sharply in the Gdańsk negotiations between striking workers and the government commission that led to Solidarity in August 1980.

Thirdly, dialogue has to be entered into without the result being known beforehand. This requires the recognition that political debate or demands cannot be won '100%'. To compromise on some issues is not a moral disgrace or defeat, but a way to

progress. For many Poles, this challenged the romantic tradition under which a heroic defeat became a spiritual victory, since struggling for a just cause kept the national idea alive. Equally, political ‘realism’ was distrusted as mere rationalisation of moral surrender. Such maximalism left the field of politics open to others and enabled communists to claim a near monopoly of political realism in post-war Poland (Walicki 1990, pp. 28–39).

A final precondition for dialogue is for society to regain its subjectivity. In spring 1956, Polish society became an historical actor once more, thereby ceasing to be simply the passive object of policies imposed ‘from above’. No longer merely moulded by communist power, it acted increasingly as an independent agent of change, moving Poland in directions condemned and resisted by the Communist party and other members of the Moscow-dominated ‘Soviet bloc’.

### *De-Stalinism*

Stalinism was driven by a dynamic ideology, which varied in intensity but contained one constant feature: the ever expanding control by the authorities over the lives of society, social groups and private individuals. The main thrust of policy—the ‘ideological offensive’ on every front—was to accelerate the process of subjugating Poland to the Soviet model. For many Poles, this process had begun much earlier. In September 1939, two weeks after the Nazi invasion, the Red Army arrived, bringing Stalinism from abroad (Gross 1988). After its second coming, in 1944, a Commission to combat ‘Corruption and Economic Sabotage’ spearheaded the infamous ‘battle for trade’. By eliminating the ‘third tier’ of co-operative associations, existing between the private sector and the state, it had firmly installed ‘socialist construction’ with Gomułka as its enthusiastic leader (Kowalik 1980). The notion of a democratically elected self-ruling society was removed and its replacement was a strongly centralised model. Soon afterwards, Gomułka was deposed for ‘rightist-nationalist deviation’.

From December 1948, political monopoly was held by the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR), purportedly ‘in coalition’ with allied parties. Since it allowed no independent parties to compete for office, or even to exist, we will call it hereafter ‘the Party’. This was by no means an inevitable outcome. Pre-war Poland had pluralist traditions. No less than 28 political parties had contested the 1928 elections (Polonsky 1972, pp. 234–251). However, Stalinism had its own constituencies. Those in their twenties were appointed to top jobs in the Party apparatus, state-run enterprises, engineering and journalism. Maria Hirszowicz notes, the state provided job security and personal reward:

There was the feeling of belonging to the elite, the taste of power, the joy of participation in a chosen group that was arbitrarily reshaping society, the privilege of prying into other people’s lives, the exhilarating experience of acting beyond the law and beyond the social rules that limited the freedom of ordinary citizens (Hirszowicz 1980, p. 182).

The Party vetted key posts to ensure its ‘leading role’ in society and the state (Paczkowski 2003, pp. 115–139). Its *nomenklatura* system grew exponentially from modest beginnings. By 1988, it was secretly admitted by Jaruzelski to be 270,000 strong (Paczkowski 1994b, p. 43). Adding their dependents, this amounts to about one

million persons, some 2–3% of the population. They were privileged, protected from shortages by special shops ‘behind the yellow curtains’ and had weekly packages delivered to their private apartments. Another privilege was political inclusion. The excluded public could see it meant ‘negative selection’: promotion for political loyalty rather than qualifications or ability. Most Poles proved ungrateful for compulsory inclusion in the most progressive portion of humanity. Even at state level, they were incurably ‘revisionist’, prone to deviations of their own, and reluctant to acknowledge the primacy of the Soviet experience, whose historical stages all allies must emulate. They would prefer to chart out their own ‘roads to socialism’. It took those abroad some time to appreciate the differences.

In the early Cold War, the West regarded East European societies as emasculated and absorbed. Military strategists examined the expansionist intentions of the Soviet colossus, seen as a monolith merely biding its time before a final push into Western Europe. Social scientists analysed the ‘regime’, a term deliberately implying illegitimacy. Both focussed on ‘political control’ within communist states, whose unrestricted monopoly of power seemed to incarnate Orwell’s ideal type of totalitarianism. However, a ‘double-think’ soon developed in other government bodies—including both the US Congress and British Foreign Office—which came to see Soviet-type societies as more permeable entities, where cultural dissent was rife and fosterable (Coleman 1989). There was every opportunity to expose weaknesses on the ‘cultural front’. Broadcasting information from Munich that did not accord with communist wisdom (Nałęcz 1994) could challenge what Gramsci had called hegemony. So began the cultural Cold War.

Poles soon heard the Radio Free Europe revelations of lieutenant-colonel ‘Józef Światło’ who had defected to the West. His lurid tales of routine torture of political prisoners, the high life of the communist elite, its links with Moscow and a ubiquitous system of police informing, began to be broadcast back to Poland from autumn 1954 (Błażyński 1986). Such adverse publicity extracted significant concessions from the political authorities: the Ministry of Public Security was abolished; and the Third Plenum of the ruling PZPR (January 1955) set an apparently new course (Paczkowski 1994a); but the initiative from politicians soon petered out. Nonetheless, as Krystyna Kersten notes, historical and cultural roots made Polish society more immune to forcible transformation than many of its neighbours. It was more able to retain the ‘green shoots of recovery’ (Kersten 1993). Above all, Poland retained an autonomous Church, the bulwark of national tradition for a millennium.

The Party always knew that the Church presented the greatest barrier to consolidation of its rule. Chief ideologist Berman had observed, in a secret note to Party leader Bierut:

The Church is a great obstacle to us because in it are concentrated the philosophical bases of ideological reaction, which it ceaselessly relays to the masses. In the popular consciousness, it is the bulwark of Polish tradition and culture, the most complete expression of ‘Polishness’. This traditional understanding of patriotism is the greatest strength of the Church, even stronger and more powerful than the magic of ritual. The Church is the natural source of opposition, both ideological and philosophical.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN) Oddział VI (PZPR) p. 112 t. 26, pp. 213–220.

The Party used juridical and police methods in an effort to reduce its strength: 400 priests were imprisoned on various pretexts in September 1948 alone; the Catholic press was decimated and its charitable organisations shut down; church schools and hospitals were closed, as were convents and monasteries (Kersten 1999, p. 84). Repression intensified after the death of Stalin.

In September 1953, a show trial was held of Bishop Kaczmarek of Kielce, who was accused of ‘weakening the defensive spirit of Polish society in the face of threatened Hitlerite aggression, disrupting the reconstruction of the country and planned economy, and of sabotage on Polish soil in the interests of American imperialism’. The ‘ring-leaders’ received 12-year sentences. Anticipating possible protests, the Ministry of Interior put all informants on immediate alert:

They must report all inimical behaviour, intentions and events. Agents should give particular attention to the Bishop’s Curia, to priests known to have hostile attitudes, to clerical circles and meetings, to bandits, supporters of émigré groups, revisionist and all those who listen to imperialist broadcasts (Kersten 1999, p. 88).

The Primate of Poland was also detained.

During three years of confinement, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński chose modern martyrdom, ‘the road of work, not of blood’. It was better to be a ‘scorned priest’ than a ‘praised Caesar’. He saw Marxism as a Western product transplanted to Orthodox soil. No accommodation was possible without an alteration in its attitudes. Implacable atheism was producing merely sterile orthodoxy, alienating even the more enlightened communists. Whilst such a challenge continued, the Church had to defend national identity. It became the repository of Polish values, sustained over a millennium. Persecution could only strengthen its resolve.

Overtures were made to Wyszyński in April 1956 (Paczkowski 1998, pp. 13–15), but he refused a deal that would allow his return to Warsaw while other bishops remained outside their dioceses: ‘I could return as the last but never as the first’ (*A Freedom Within* 1985, pp. 246–247). That required the repeal of a 1953 edict under which the government controlled Church appointments. His diaries for spring 1956 noted that those who had doubted the Stalin ‘cult’ and suffered for it were now vindicated: ‘Who should be going to prison today, when it turned out that non-communists were the better communists, who understood better the spirit of Marxism?’ Such was the fate of gods wrought by human hands, ‘a doctrine that condemns today what yesterday it raised to the altar’ (*A Freedom Within* 1985, pp. 234–245).

Although Khrushchev’s ‘secret speech’ offered the CPSU a partial explanation for its decimation in the late 1930s, it gave a far from complete assessment of Stalinist crimes. Little or nothing was said about the wider sufferings, especially to recent returnees from the *Gulag* or surviving relatives of the millions who had perished there (van Goudoever 1986, pp. 37–49). Nor did it address Poland directly. However, uniquely amongst the bloc, Polish leaders decided to disseminate the text locally. Printers were instructed to exceed the official print run (3,000) five-fold and numerous private duplicates were made. Kuroń recalls that they changed hands on the black market for enormous sums (Kuroń 1990, p. 95). Over the ensuing weeks, a host of

further questions issued from Khrushchev's selective disclosures (Kemp-Welch 1996, pp. 181–206).

The newly radicalised paper *Po prostu* rallied the young intelligentsia to social protest. It noted 'students always played a gigantic role in Polish revolutionary movements' and called for such a programme in the present day:

Put briefly: to struggle together with the whole of our party, for restoration and development of communist norms of life in building socialism. Over the last decade, our organisation developed many sores and wounds. They will be hard to cure. The cult of the individual, the cult of Stalin deformed the system, introducing many elements alien to the ideology of Marxism–Leninism, such as the dictatorship of individuals, in varied spheres and varying degrees, the paralysis of democracy, jamming, contempt for the masses.<sup>2</sup>

The Club of the Crooked Circle complained to the Central Committee that its members were 'unable to understand why British citizens can listen freely to programmes in English from Warsaw, while Poles may not listen to the Polish Service of the BBC'.<sup>3</sup>

One antidote was an agreement, signed on 15 April, to form a federation of 'youth discussion clubs'. Groups from Kraków, Poznań, Rzeszów and elsewhere empowered the Warsaw Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (KIK) to act as Secretary: to organise and support existing groups and help new ones arise; to represent their interests to the authorities and institutions (particularly where local authorities were being obstructive); to further co-operation between clubs, exchanging experience and information.<sup>4</sup> Discussion clubs mushroomed—for music (including jazz), sculpture and film appreciation. Student theatre and satirical reviews appeared in Gdańsk, Łódź, Kraków and elsewhere. Young people deserted the official Youth Union (ZMP) in droves, leading to an internal party investigation of what were now admitted to be 'youth problems'.<sup>5</sup>

The fractured Party was divided between friends and foes of change (Paczkowski 1995, pp. 309–325). Thus the editor of the Party monthly declared 'the Twentieth Congress stirred up the country, (caused) a healthy storm, a healthy ferment, our ferment'.<sup>6</sup> The head of *Agit-prop* noted that 'the creative intelligentsia, students etc.' had become politically engaged. By contrast, 'our side' was becoming defensive. While some were speaking candidly, others were glossing over issues, or hiding behind dogma and schematic abstractions. This left the door open to those talking 'obvious nonsense' which had 'nothing in common with the art of Marxism, its science, its method, with our ideology'.<sup>7</sup>

The Party leadership announced a widespread amnesty: 35,000 prisoners were released within a month, of whom 4,500 were political, including members of the former anti-communist underground, socialist and populist politicians. In all some

<sup>2</sup>'Co robić?', *Po prostu*, 8 April 1956.

<sup>3</sup>AAN 237/XVIII/161 (*Klub Krzywego Koła*); Jedlicki (1963).

<sup>4</sup>AAN 237/XVIII/161, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup>AAN 237/V/204, pp. 90–93 (29 March 1956) and special report AAN 237/VII/3859, *Meldunki*, 43, 28 May 1956.

<sup>6</sup>AAN 237/V/231 (Roman Werfel).

<sup>7</sup>AAN 237/V/231 (Stefan Żółkiewski).

9,000 political prisoners were freed (Machcewicz 1993, p. 53). Verdicts in the Stalinist show trials of General Tatar and others were quashed and victims rehabilitated. Senior officials from the Stalinist era were dismissed, including the Minister of Culture, the Minister of Justice, Prosecutor-General, Military Prosecutor and last Minister of Public Security before its abolition, Stanisław Radkiewicz (demoted to become Minister of State Farms). Notorious interrogators and torturers—such as Roman Romkowski and Anatol Fejgin—were arrested and it was announced that the personnel of security, *'bezpieka'*, would be reduced by 22% (Piechuch 1990; Roszkowski 1992, p. 231). This marked the end of Stalinism in Poland. However, such harsh treatment and public condemnation was bound to demoralise the Party and security apparatus, as their near-paralysis in the face of the 'June events' would indicate.

### *June*

Many Polish workers thought Khrushchev's 'secret speech' would help restore freedom of expression. They wanted public life to be conducted in a new spirit of openness and sincerity, but there was no hope of progress through existing institutions. Under Stalinism, workers' trade unions were amalgamated into a single Federation with the declared function of 'transmitting directives to the masses' (Kersten 1991, p. 382). New techniques of 'shock-working' and 'socialist competition' split the working class into an aristocracy of labour with well-publicised heroes—Wajda's *Men of Marble*—and an amorphous and impoverished majority.

Strikes were declared outmoded. Workers now owned the means of production and could not strike 'against themselves'. Miners on strike were denounced as 'Hitlerites and class enemies' and crushed by the military (Kamiński 1999). A law on 'socialist work' imposed severe penalties for poor work discipline and absenteeism, in effect classifying recalcitrant or slack workers as enemies of the state. Workers going on strike were punished under this new legislation (Brzostek 2002, pp. 117–131). Forced labour camps were established in several regions (Kopka 2002). The result of such repression was a sharp fall in the number of reported strikes and a similar drop in their duration and support. Unlike neighbouring Czechoslovakia and East Germany, Stalin's death did not change the picture. This only followed from his second, political death, in spring 1956.

Mass meetings called to hear and discuss the 'secret speech' concentrated on 'cults' at their own workplace. This inevitably meant attacks on the authorities. The Ursus tractor factory in Warsaw criticised officialdom at every level. Section chiefs were accused of dictatorial behaviour and administrative directors of aloofness. Executives and organisers, in post for years, had become torpid or sunk into routine. The factory directorate gave scant attention to carrying out proposals embodied in the five-year plan, 'consigning them to their desk drawers', keeping employees in ignorance of what was really going on. Beyond the gates, the Warsaw Party Committee did not concern itself with the factory's problems and simply accepted everything it was told by management. The relevant ministry was failing to supply raw materials.<sup>8</sup> The discontent was not mitigated by official talk of decentralising industrial decision-making.

<sup>8</sup>AAN 236/VII/3859, *Meldunki*, 33, 24 April 1956.

The first workers' revolt did not take place at a newly established site, such as Nowa Huta outside Kraków, nor on territories 'recovered' from Germany, but in Wielkopolska, a region long noted for its tradition of efficient work. Perhaps this ethos inspired discontent. As the outstanding historian of 1956 suggests, 'the economic absurdities of Stalinist planning—bureaucratisation, "organised chaos" and massive waste of resources—may have enraged inhabitants of Poznań to a greater extent than those of less-developed regions' (Machcewicz 1993, p. 109).

The seat of protest was the Stalin Factory (ZiSPO) making locomotives and other heavy machinery, one of the largest and oldest in Poland. Workers sent a delegation to Warsaw with their grievances: recent wage cuts; increased work norms; overlong working hours, especially for young women; lack of health and safety at work; food price increases; and inadequate supplies of domestic coal (Machowski 2001, p. 46). While the delegation was away, wage demands escalated. A handful of workers—about 20 workers in one section—felt that the path to negotiations had been blocked and that there was the need for direct action and they prepared to strike. However, their plans were relayed to Warsaw by the security police. The Provincial Party secretary, Leon Stasiak rang Ochab late that evening 'having just returned from the Railway Repair Yard where voices made clear that there were now groups organising against People's power'.<sup>9</sup> Stasiak realised a crisis was imminent and Ochab agreed. He rang the head of State Security who was just on the point of departure to Moscow 'to discuss the situation in Poznań' (Ochab quoted in Torańska 1987, pp. 49–50). It transpired that the Russians, using radio-telegrams, were more informed than Polish leaders.

On 28 June, the ZiSPO siren sounded at 6.30 am. Hearing this pre-arranged signal, several thousand workers (at least 80% of the work-force) formed up outside the gates and started marching towards the city centre. They were joined by many other employees, housewives and school children *en route*. As the column passed the cathedral, two priests appeared on the steps. Leaders of the demonstration knelt down to receive their blessings. Banners were unfurled: 'We are Hungry', 'We want Bread', 'Down with Exploitation of Workers', and 'Down with the Red Bourgeoisie'. A Polish Radio transmission van was commandeered and driven round the city summoning people to the demonstration in the central Stalin (later Adam Mickiewicz) Square. It called out for 'fewer palaces, more apartments' and 'fewer Polish children to have tuberculosis and anaemia'; it complained that food products were being taken out of Poland, so that children did not have enough to eat; it proclaimed 'We want Freedom' and 'We want UN-supervised elections'.

Protestors tore down red flags. Patriotic anthems were sung. The atmosphere was cheerful and liberated. When the column reached the *Europejskii Cafe*, waiters ran out with drinks and snacks. The crowd in front of the Castle was estimated by some observers at 100,000. While they waited for the authorities, a delegation entered the local authority building and presented their demands. Top of the list was the immediate appearance of government officials to discuss their grievances—but no one came. Demonstrators then moved on to the Provincial Party committee. Red banners were thrown from the windows, busts of communist leaders (including Bierut's) were smashed and other portraits defenestrated. Crowd momentum was now unstoppable.

<sup>9</sup>Stasiak interviewed in *Polityka*, 13 June 1981.

It stormed the prison, releasing surprised inmates and procuring rifles and grenades. It attacked the Polish Radio station, destroying equipment used to jam Western broadcasts and surged on to the courts and Procuracy. Only the State Security headquarters did not fall to the demonstrators.

As Machcewicz shows, the demonstration became an insurrection. The people who had begun the march now came to consider themselves 'The Nation'. As various strands, economic and political, patriotic and religious, converged in a single stream, Poznań crowds came to assume they represented all True Poles from whom a national uprising was anticipated (Machcewicz 1993). It was rumoured that similar clashes were taking place in other major cities. Poznań's Security Headquarters was held to be the 'last bastion of communism' in Poland. Thus the forces of law and order beginning to be deployed against them must be Soviet troops in Polish uniforms. Such sentiments, recurrent in later crises, had some credence in 1956.

Soviet-trained Minister of Defence, Marshal Rokossovsky,<sup>10</sup> held an emergency interview with Party leader Ochab. Since local forces were incapable of handling such insurgency, he advocated a military response (Nalepa 1992). His demand for a free hand to deal with 'adventurists who attack state institutions' was accepted by the Politburo (Torańska 1987, p. 51). Deployment of 10,000 soldiers, 400 tanks and armoured vehicles, left 73 dead and many hundreds seriously wounded. The use of force led to many tragedies. Even when ordered to fire into the air, some shots proved fatal. Children who had climbed trees to escape tanks, or for a better view, fell down dead like birds. Seven soldiers were killed: Gierek and Cyrankiewicz spoke at their funeral.

Since all communication between Poznań and the outside world was blocked, wild rumours abounded. It was said that 30,000 farmers had travelled to Poznań to join the uprising; Łódź had sent 40,000 workers to assist Poznań. A train bringing Security officials had been blown up. Ochab had died during the disturbances. It was widely stated that had Poznań held out a few more days, Western military assistance would have been forthcoming and the emigration would have flown in to the rescue: 'Anders would have brought in an entire armoured corps by air'.<sup>11</sup> Other sources claimed that Polish and Soviet armies had fought pitched battles and that the Soviet consulate in Poznań was demolished. Some said the city had been bombed by Soviet aircraft and that 'all arrested are being taken to Siberia' (Machcewicz 1993, pp. 128–129).

### *Explanations*

Polish communists always claimed that crises were untypical moments of 'disorder', after which normality was rapidly restored, but an opposite view sees crises as normal moments of truth in which the contesting parties come face to face, with no façade to obscure their differences. As Jan Gross suggests, they tear off the spurious mask of

<sup>10</sup>Marshal of the Soviet Union and Poland, Minister of Defence (from November 1949), and Politburo member (from 1950). On his original appointment see *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym* (1991, pp. 55–59).

<sup>11</sup>For General Anders' statement on the 'events' in Poznań (29 June 1956) see Drozdowski (1998, pp. 166–167).



‘unanimity’ to reveal the real conflicts of interest between the rulers and the ruled (Gross 1979, pp. 150–151).

Thus the Poznań demonstrators were presented as ‘hooligans’ who vandalised public property, and mindless marauders with no civic intentions. The media displayed wrecked premises and sorry photographs of the guilty parties. Cinema newsreel showed four repentant hooligans, now apparently regretting their isolated acts of vandalism against public property, whose looted or incinerated shells were the only evidence offered to the public.<sup>12</sup> Looting does take place under the guise of peaceful demonstrations, and political authorities are capable of fomenting it to discredit protestors (as in 1976). They step forward afterwards as the saviours of public order.

Senior Polish officials, dispatched to Poznań by plane, made no attempt to meet the demonstrators. Instead of addressing the cause of the protests, Premier Cyrankiewicz made a lurid threat:

every provocateur or maniac who dares to raise his hand against People’s rule may be sure that, in the interest of the working class, the interest of the working peasantry and intelligentsia, in the interest of the struggle to raise the standard of living of the people, in the interest of the further democratisation of our life and in the interest of our Fatherland, the authorities will chop off his hand.<sup>13</sup>

The future Party leader Gierek placed the blame for the disturbances solely on mistakes of local officials. He reported to the Politburo (7 July) that the Poznań events had a diversionary character, got up by ‘enemies of the people’. Local Party activists had fallen for this provocation. Regional security services and militia had remained passive in the face of agitators in the factories, on the streets, on trains and in repair yards. The central authorities were thus absolved of all responsibility.<sup>14</sup>

The official explanation for Poznań was economic, caused by a tightening of shift-working. When protests were being planned, shortcomings in the security service (UB) had prevented ringleaders from being identified and arrested. The militia was disoriented, particularly in the earlier stages: ‘it had become demoralised and demobilised by criticisms following the XX Congress’. Finally, Party organisations, both locally and nationally, had dwindled into passivity and disorientation. A good number had misunderstood democratisation, lawfulness and Leninist norms of party life to mean ‘full liberalism, rupturing of Party discipline and tolerating unlimited criticism’.<sup>15</sup> [Belgrade however, noted that the workers’ demands were not purely economic. ‘It is obvious even to the most superficial observer, that a considerable majority of the (Poznań) workers are lending support to tendencies which aim at a democratisation of public life’.<sup>16</sup>]

Party leader Ochab added an international dimension. ‘To go on strike against People’s power is to pave the way for imperialism’. ‘Alien elements’ had taken advantage of the Twenty-Fifth International Trade Fair in Poznań (17–31 June) to

<sup>12</sup>‘Poznań po wypadkach’, *Polska Kronika Filmowa*, 28/56, 3 July 1956.

<sup>13</sup>‘Proclamation to the People of Poznań’, 29 June 1956, in Zinner (1956, p. 135).

<sup>14</sup>AAN 237/V/237, pp. 5–29.

<sup>15</sup>AAN 237/V/274, pp. 122–133.

<sup>16</sup>*Borba*, 1 July 1956.

make their demonstration known abroad and to gain publicity for the 'active underground against People's power'. Such provocateurs were anti-Russian and envisaged peaceful co-operation with the capitalist world.<sup>17</sup>

A similar line was taken by the Hungarian Stalinist leader Rakosi: 'A few days before the Poznań Fair, the Americans had sent many groups of parachuting, armed saboteurs'. It was 'the most seriously organised attack against our peoples' democratic order and against the working class we have seen for some time'. 'The enemy' was 'trying to sow confusion between the Party and the worker masses' (Granville 2001, p. 1059). A Hungarian Party resolution declared that

The Poznań provocation is a warning to every Hungarian worker and every honest patriot firmly to oppose attempts at trouble-making and to help the unfettered development of those forces which, on the basis of Marxism – Leninism and in the spirit of the Twentieth Congress, lead our People's Democracy to new successes.<sup>18</sup>

When Rakosi resigned on 18 July, Mikoyan reported to Moscow that reformers in Budapest's 'Petofi Circle' were 'an ideological Poznań without gunshots'. Although they were mostly intellectuals and students, supporters of Imre Nagy, he warned 'We should remember that in Poznań there were no direct counter-revolutionary attacks. Thus, the absence of counter-revolutionary slogans in the Petofi Circle should not reassure the Hungarian communists' (Granville 2001, p. 1058).

Moscow declared that 'imperialist and reactionary Polish underground agents, taking advantage of certain economic difficulties (*sic*), had incited serious disturbances and street disorders' in Poznań. This time, the Polish working class had expressed its 'decisive indignation over the insolent imperialist attack' and rebuffed this action against Peoples' rule. But such foul provocations would continue to be fomented by American monopolists.<sup>19</sup> *Pravda* stated:

everyone now knows that this provocation was the work of enemy agents. The American press did not even consider it necessary to conceal the existence of a direct link between the Poznań events and the overseas centres which direct the 'cold war'. The New York *Journal-American* stated on June 30 with cynical frankness 'Senate has decided to allocate within the framework of aid to foreign states the sum of \$25 million for financing secret activity behind the iron curtain like that which led to the riots in Poznań'.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, Washington itself seems to have been largely overtaken by the Poznań events. The State Department had concluded earlier in June 1956 that 'ten years of Sovietisation has eliminated the main obstacles to Soviet domination', such as social movements and local institutional variations. The outcome was considered to be the consolidation of Soviet control. Even the 'New Course' after Stalin's death and denunciation of the late leader were tactical manoeuvres with the same aim as before:

<sup>17</sup>AAN 237/V/237, p. 87.

<sup>18</sup>Central Committee Statement, 30 June 1956. *National Communism and Popular Revolt: A Selection of Documents* (New York, 1956), p. 331.

<sup>19</sup>*Pravda*, 1 July 1956.

<sup>20</sup>Editorial, *Pravda*, 16 July 1956.

the complete Sovietisation of the satellite countries (Machcewicz 1997, p. 47). In Poland, at least, this was far from the case.

In Moscow's view, anti-Stalinism had gone too far and now threatened to undermine the foundations of Soviet socialism. Soviet leaders called a halt. They tried to draw a line between the original campaign, a necessary stage in which the CPSU had taken a bold lead, despite the obvious propaganda weapon this would give to the imperialists, and the 'new stage' in which the time for self-criticism was over.<sup>21</sup> It was not easy to defend the distinction. The notion that the Stalin cult, predominant for 30 years, could be eliminated in three months was implausible. The CPSU therefore relied on teleology: 'No malicious or slanderous attacks can halt the irresistible course of the historic development of mankind towards Communism'.<sup>22</sup> Soviet editorials sounded confident of communism's bright future, but Polish events were pointing in the opposite direction.

To those who wished for real change, Poznań sent a signal from which the rulers could learn. As Gomułka put it 'the clumsy attempt to present the painful Poznań tragedy as the work of imperialist agents and provocateurs was very naïve politically'.<sup>23</sup> Instead of provocation, there had been a genuine attempt by an authentic working-class to make its voice heard. The problem was that the political authorities did not listen.

A more radical view saw that Stalinism left workers with no independent means of representation. For workers interested in self-management, there was a fleeting promise of a greater involvement in industrial decision-making. In June 1956, Jacek Kuroń and three academic colleagues met Leszek Goździk, the 25-year old First Secretary of the Factory Committee at the large 'Zeran' (FSO) factory in suburban Warsaw (Kuroń 1990, pp. 102–103). Their chosen venue was the staff coffee bar at Warsaw University. Goździk spoke of the ineffectiveness of the workers' council at the factory and the need to introduce elements of democracy (Goździk 1996, pp. 22–45). The young lecturers talked rather of Yugoslav self-management, which was a current fascination (Bobrowski 1957; Brus & Jakubowicz 1957). But workers' self-management had little substance and links between factory workers and intellectuals remained embryonic until the late 1970s.

### *October*

After Poznań, the public mood hardened into resistance (Jankowiak & Rogulska 2002, pp. 16–17). Poles realised there might be more bloody defeats or an explosion on a national scale. Setbacks were inevitable but political change was possible. Once the barrier of fear lifted, the *status quo* seemed much less tolerable. But what forms of change were possible?

The new academic year began with street protests. Security archives report a demonstration at Wrocław University after a power cut in a dormitory. Five-hundred students held a torch-light procession into town. They stopped official vehicles with

<sup>21</sup> *Pravda*, 2 July 1956.

<sup>22</sup> Editorial, *Pravda*, 3 July 1956.

<sup>23</sup> *Trybuna Ludu*, 21 October 1956.

the demand 'We want light' and challenged 'those who aren't giving us light'. When they reached the Provincial People's Council (WRN), employees barricaded themselves in and turned out their lights (Machcewicz 1993, p. 150). The militia intervened before protestors could reach the town hall. Warsaw University students demanded a radical democratisation of the political system. Their open letter envisaged a 'new, genuinely revolutionary, political organisation for young people' and appealed for support. Complete openness (*jawność*) was needed in all spheres of political and economic life.<sup>24</sup>

While the Party elite hid its factional struggles behind a facade of unanimity, a stream of resolutions came up from the rank-and-file members. The lower echelons now sought a real input into policy-making. Tired of talk about the Stalinist era of 'errors and distortions', they wanted open decisions, more openly arrived at. Many hoped the campaigns leading to the next Congress would provide such a context. Above all, they called for reinstatement of Gomułka.

Gomułka's release from detention, which had happened much earlier, was made public on 7 April 1956 (Andrzejewski 1986, pp. 76–78<sup>25</sup>). The Politburo responded to his various missives by dispatching a delegation to see him (Rykowski & Władyka 1989, pp. 132–134). On 5 August he was reinstated in the Party,<sup>26</sup> and from this point onwards he held the ring between Party and society. Since he had been a victim of Stalinist repression, Gomułka's anti-Soviet credentials were taken for granted. The more Soviet leaders piled on the pressure, the more patriotic he appeared to be. On 12 October, Gomułka addressed the Politburo. Claiming not to notice 'groups and factions' in the Party, he saw the main task as leading a million and a half Party members out of a tricky situation. The trust of the working class and the nation had been forfeited. Unless the Party was to rule by bayonets, trust must be regained. It was necessary to mobilise the *aktyw* in factories: democratisation would prevent a reversion to 'old methods'. Central government should be cut: 'there are too many Vice-Premiers'. The press announced his reinstatement to the Politburo and that the Central Committee was due to meet on 19 October (Andrzejewski 1986, pp. 96–109). A turning-point was imminent.

Hours before the Eighth Plenum was due to open, a Soviet plane arrived in Polish airspace requesting permission to land. A large 'military-political delegation' then disembarked, followed by an emotional Khrushchev. Snubbing the Polish Politburo and state officials, he made straight for the Russians assembled on the tarmac. These included 12 of the 28 Russian generals currently posted to the Polish army and Marshal Rokossovsky (Nalepa 1995, p. 86). Turning from 'those on whom I depend', he then bawled at the Poles: 'the treacherous activity of Comrade Ochab is now evident: that number won't pass here'.<sup>27</sup> Shocked Polish leaders noted that Khrushchev's harangue could even be heard by airport staff and drivers.

Soviet tactics were none too subtle. An armoured column had reached the outskirts of Warsaw and others were heading towards the capital (Persak 1997, p. 29).

<sup>24</sup>*Po Prostu*, 21 October 1956.

<sup>25</sup>Jakub Andrzejewski is a pseudonym used by Andrzej Paczkowski.

<sup>26</sup>*Trybuna Ludu*, 5 August 1956.

<sup>27</sup>AAN VI, p. 12, t. 46a, pp. 66–68.

Soviet warships entered the Bay of Gdańsk. Marshal Rokossovsky put soldiers on alert to seize strategic positions in Warsaw, without informing the Politburo. Since other Polish troops from the Internal Security Corps were also preparing to secure Warsaw buildings, including the radio station, a very tense standoff was in the making. Polish leaders moved to the Belvedere Palace to receive their uninvited guests. The first round of talks was tense. Khrushchev announced that the CPSU was ready to 'intervene brutally' in Polish affairs to defend Soviet interests. When Gomułka asked what these were, he received only the vaguest answer, based on West German *revanchism*. He stated that the Polish side was willing to listen to 'the complaints of the Soviet comrades', but could not discuss under duress.

The next round of talks was calmer. Khrushchev stated that Soviet troops in Poland were merely 'on manoeuvres'. He would have a word with Marshals Rokossovsky and Koniev to bring them to an end. However, external relations were held to be critical. Mikoyan elaborated on the NATO threat, stating that the Americans sought to sunder the Polish–Soviet alliance. Khrushchev accused the Poles of wanting to 'turn your faces to the west and your backs on us' (Głuchowski 1995; Volkogonov 1994, pp. 480–482, and 509, note 13). Both stated that Polish instability would weaken the communications between East Germany, where a huge number of troops were stationed, and their command and control centres in the Soviet Union. Poland's defection from the bloc would break the link completely. The Russians could never accept such an outcome.

Gomułka complained about the tank movements and excessive numbers of Soviet 'advisers' within the Polish military and security apparatus,<sup>28</sup> including Marshal Rokossovsky. But his tone was conciliatory. Poland was committed to the Warsaw Pact and to preserving 'the bloc of socialist states'. Molotov retorted that, while the Poles merely had to take care of their own affairs, Soviet leaders had 'to take responsibility for the wider issue of the socialist camp'. The visitors then turned to the question of Polish leadership. They favoured 'old, trustworthy revolutionaries, loyal to the cause of socialism'. In the confused aftermath, the Soviet Presidium authorised preparation of a 'provisional revolutionary committee' to displace Gomułka (Paczkowski 1998, pp. 8–12; Kramer 1995, p. 2).

At the meeting itself, though, they seemed to accept Gomułka. There are two main reasons for this decision. First, Soviet leaders made a shrewd assessment of Gomułka's character and concluded correctly that he remained a loyal communist within the Polish limits of the possible. 'We believed him when he said he realised we faced a common enemy: Western imperialism. We took his word as a promissory note from a man whose good faith we believed in' (Khrushchev 1974, p. 205). Gomułka's later orthodoxy in domestic politics, and international career as an elder statesman in the Soviet bloc, confirmed their judgement. Second, the very real fear of Polish resistance may have acted as a deterrent. Khrushchev later recalled that, despite Rokossovsky's assurances that the Polish army would obey his orders, the number of regiments on whom they could rely was unclear. 'Of course, our own armed strength far exceeded that of Poland, but we didn't want to resort to the use of our own troops'

<sup>28</sup>Numbers in CWIHP Virtual Archive: 'Khrushchev to Gomułka (22 October 1956)', note 1.

(Khrushchev 1974, p. 203). We may assume this calculation was logistic rather than humanitarian: Moscow invaded Hungary two weeks later.

There is the intriguing third suggestion that the Chinese leadership put in a decisive word. Ochab gives a plausible account of his conversations with Chinese leaders in Beijing (in late September 1956). It was a mutual effort to break out of isolation. He saw no scope for this with his immediate neighbours: Czechoslovak and East German leaders Novotny and Ulbricht were 'too limited'. Tito was 'too remote' (they did not meet until 1957). This left China as 'something of an independent factor'. Ochab admitted that Beijing perhaps overestimated Poland's significance within the Soviet bloc. The same was probably true of Warsaw's estimation of China. For Beijing, however, already distanced from Moscow during the anti-Stalin campaign, and perhaps aware that an eventual breach was inevitable, any other communist sympathy was welcome. But Poland also gave Beijing a good chance to complain to Moscow about 'great-power chauvinism'.<sup>29</sup>

Chou-en-Li told Gomułka later that the Chinese Party had supported the Eighth Plenum and played a 'stabilising role'. He had rung Moscow during the October crisis to suggest that Poland should find its own solutions and urged a peaceful resolution (Torańska 1987, pp. 55–60). He emphasised that fraternal Parties should base relations upon equality, which had been lacking in the Polish–Soviet case. Fraternity was between brothers: intra-bloc relations should not resemble those of father and sons. Sovereignty should be respected, but so too should the Soviet Union's 'leading role'.<sup>30</sup>

The Soviet delegation left Poland early on 20 October and the Eighth Plenum resumed with a keynote address by Gomułka. According to Gomułka the XX Congress had sent 'an animating, sound current through the Party mass. As silent, enslaved minds began to shake off the poison of mendacity, falsehood and hypocrisy', so working people demanded to know the truth, without omissions or embellishment. They waited patiently for answers to their petitions. Poznań workers had not taken to the street to protest against People's Poland, but against 'the evil which is widespread in our social system' and distortions of the basic principles of socialism. If the Party lost the confidence of the working class, 'each of us could not in fact represent anything more than ourselves'.<sup>31</sup>

Agricultural co-operatives, Gomułka argued, should be voluntary. It was unacceptable to use psychological compulsion to join, or economic coercion through taxation and delivery quotas. Co-operatives should be genuinely self-governing and have access to state credits for purchasing the means of production. Collectives could only flourish within a spirit of community. Its broadest expression, which could be termed solidarity, was common labour. In an unexpected flourish he asked 'should not the Catholic progressive movement compete with us in the search for forms of collective farms and their realisation? It is a poor idea to maintain that only Communists can build socialism, only people holding materialist social views'. Gomułka's address concluded that the right of 'each nation to a sovereign government in an independent

<sup>29</sup>The Emerging Dispute between Beijing and Moscow, 1956–1958', *CWIHP Bulletin*, No 6/7, 1995–1996.

<sup>30</sup>AAN VI, p.107 t. 5, pp. 85–88.

<sup>31</sup>*Trybuna Ludu*, 20 October 1956.

country should be fully and mutually respected. . . . It was unfortunately not always like this in the relations between us and our great and friendly neighbour, the Soviet Union'. Power had been seized there by 'a mediocre man, an obtuse executive and a rotten climber'. But the cult did not consist of Stalin alone. There was a 'hierarchical ladder', and each country had 'a ladder of cults from top to bottom'.<sup>32</sup>

Following publication of his address, huge pro-Gomułka rallies took place on the Baltic Coast, Poznań, Lublin, Łódź, Kielce, Bydgoszcz and other cities. Such mass mobilisation made alarming reading in Moscow. Meanwhile, Khrushchev convened a communist summit with the leaders of the DDR, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and China. Ulbricht and Novotny were ready for intervention to 'restore order' in Poland (Persak 1997, pp. 37–42), but Khrushchev wished to avoid 'nervousness and haste' (Kramer 1995, p. 53). A political solution looked much preferable: 'Finding a reason for armed conflict (with Poland) would be very easy now, though finding a way to put an end to such a conflict later would be very hard' (Kramer 1995, p. 54). He already knew the intelligence assessment that Polish troops could not be counted on in such a conflict. Some might fight invaders. Polish officials were said to have distributed firearms to the 'workers' militia' who would defend the capital. Entry routes were being blocked off by Polish internal security. Though unconfirmed, such reports discouraged military action.

Also, Gomułka revealed, there was also an economic aspect:

Poland is in a catastrophic economic situation. There is a shortfall of 900,000 tons of grain. Coal mining is in a very bad shape too.<sup>33</sup> After the Twentieth Congress, Poland adopted the same social measures as the USSR, but did not have the means to carry them out. That is why Comrade Ochab turned to the CPSU delegation for a loan.

When Khrushchev remarked that perhaps the USA would give them a loan, Ochab said he would ask but expected to be turned down. Khrushchev considered this reply had been off the cuff (Kramer 1995, p. 53). The final consideration was a personal one. Gomułka was himself willing to restore order, though on his own.

The Moscow summit favourably received two reports of Gomułka's actions earlier that day.

The first was his published appeal to 'Workers and Youth' for 'solidarity, support and trust' in bringing Poland out of its current 'difficulties'. If forthcoming, the Party promised 'widening workers' democracy, increased participation of workers in enterprise management, and a greater role for the working masses in running all sectors of national life'.<sup>34</sup> Such soothing platitudes helped to tie over the immediate crisis.

The other was his famous oration to hundreds of thousands of citizens outside Warsaw's Palace of Culture and Science. His speech is mainly remembered for its sensational announcement about Soviet troops advancing on Warsaw from bases in the west of the country. Khrushchev had assured him they would return to barracks within 48 hours. This statement was edited out of *Pravda's* text. Russian readers were

<sup>32</sup>*Trybuna Ludu*, 20 October 1956.

<sup>33</sup>*Trybuna Ludu*, 20 October 1956. Coal was a major export to the USSR—at very low prices.

<sup>34</sup>*Trybuna Ludu*, 25 October 1956.

also unable to learn that the Polish nation ‘can completely trust its army and the high command (*ovation*) which in our country, as everywhere in the world, is completely and entirely subordinated to the government’. They also could not read that those responsible for past mistakes would be removed from office. However, Moscow welcomed Gomułka’s statement that Soviet troops were needed in East Germany because of the existence of NATO in West Germany which was ‘rearming the new *Wehrmacht* and fomenting chauvinism and revisionism aimed at our frontiers’.<sup>35</sup>

Gomułka’s peroration was a disappointment to the highly-charged crowd, and to the entire nation listening to the live broadcast. Instead of stirring them to further collective achievements, he declared: ‘Enough of meetings and demonstrations. It is time to go back to everyday work—full of faith and confidence that the Party united with the working class will lead Poland on a new road to socialism’. Some 10,000 at the rally refused to disperse. They headed for the Central Committee headquarters shouting pro-Gomułka slogans, ‘anti-Soviet epithets’ and ‘God save Poland’. Protestors demanded the release of Wyszynski, the removal of Rokossovsky and the closure of Soviet bases. Some assembled outside the Hungarian Embassy to express solidarity with Budapest; others congregated outside the Soviet Embassy before being removed. An impromptu gathering outside the Royal Castle site proclaimed ‘Warsaw–Budapest–Belgrade’ (Machcewicz 1993, p. 138).

### *Hungary*

Gomułka’s speech was published in full by *Szabad Nép*, the daily of the Hungarian Workers’ Party. There was simultaneously a vast demonstration in Budapest—the onset of the Hungarian revolution. It supported the changes in Poland, expressed solidarity with the Polish nation and demanded a ‘Hungarian road to socialism’. Imre Nagy became prime minister on 24 October. After a few days’ hesitation, he started to fulfil the demonstrators’ demands. Soviet troops were withdrawn from Budapest and the internal security service (AVH) was disbanded. A multi-party system was restored and the holding of free and secret parliamentary elections was announced.

The new Polish leadership, seeking support for systemic change, looked for backing amongst other members of the Warsaw Pact, where the orthodox Stalinist line still seemed strong. The only possible ally seemed to be Hungary. The Hungarian uprising took the pressure off Poland at a time when relations with the Soviet Union were still strained, but there was also concern that the rising might end in tragedy. The Party Central Committee therefore issued an ‘Appeal to the Hungarian Nation’ on 28 October.

Brother Hungarians!

Stop the shedding of fraternal blood!

We know the programme of the Hungarian Government of National Unity, the programme of socialist democracy, raising living standards, the creation of workers’ councils, full national sovereignty, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary, basing friendship with the Soviet Union on the Leninist principle of equality.

<sup>35</sup>*Trybuna Ludu*, 25 October 1956.



We are far from interfering in your internal affairs. We judge, however, that this programme corresponds to the interests of the Hungarian people and the entire camp of peace (...)

We are both on the same side: the side of freedom and socialism. We appeal to you: enough of blood, enough of destruction, enough of fratricidal struggle. May peace come to reign in Hungary, peace and unity in the nation, so indispensable for the realisation of the broad programme of democratisation, peace and socialism which has been put forward by your Government of National Unity (Tischler 1999, pp. 127–128).

This was signed by Gomułka and Premier Cyrankiewicz. The signatories (together with Ochab) met Khrushchev, Malenkov and Molotov at the Polish–Soviet border on 1 November. The Russians gave notice of their intention to re-invade Hungary. The Poles gave their view that no foreign power had the right to resolve internal crises—whether the current one in Hungary or that in Poland 12 days earlier—by armed force. They agreed that counter-revolution was at work in Hungary. In free elections the Communist Party would get some 8–10%. However, military intervention would lead to a protracted and bloody conflict. The meeting ended without agreement. The Russians then left for Yugoslavia to gain Tito's acquiescence, which they obtained rather easily.

Soviet re-intervention in Hungary, on 4 November, was facilitated by the international situation. Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt to regain control of the Suez Canal, recently nationalised by Nasser. This ruptured the Western alliance and turned world attention away from Hungary. Eisenhower, mindful of the approaching presidential election, accepted the Soviet *fait accompli*. He declared that the United States would not interfere within the Soviet sphere of influence.

Gomułka also accepted the *fait accompli*. When journalists protested that the Polish public would never forgive such a betrayal of Hungary, he replied calmly:

You want me to risk Poland's fate? You want me to declare myself for Imre Nagy even though I do not know him or his motives. The only thing I do know is that his government had no communists and that the mob was stringing up communists on lamp posts. And now you, defending such a government, want me to deliver us to the same fate (Werblan 1991).

Gomułka's main fear was the Hungarian invasion might start a chain reaction in which Poland would be the next victim. Whilst therefore continuing to condemn such military intervention by foreign powers on principle, he accepted it in practice as a lesser evil.

In contrast to Hungary, Poland's October gave pause to the tragic history of Polish–Russian relations, but, amongst the public, anti-Soviet sentiment remained high. The most typical demands were 'Rokossovsky to Siberia' and the removal of 'Soviet advisors' from the Polish Army (including the 28 generals), the Security apparatus, Internal Affairs, and other ministries. On this issue at least, the public and new leader were at one.

Gomułka had told the Soviet Politburo that their advisors should have been withdrawn long ago:

What on earth is happening? These advisors are not needed. Every government must conduct its own affairs. We should go back to those providing the advisors and have them recalled.

How can you have respect if you do nothing about this? It is not a matter for discussion—it must be done (Andrzejewski 1986, p. 95).

That required confronting the Soviet Union on this key issue. Doing so put Polish–Soviet relations on a new footing. Moscow withdrew its ‘advisors’ from the Ministry of Internal Security and the Polish Army.<sup>36</sup> Rokossovsky went on immediate vacation and on 10 November was removed from his post. A curt resolution offered him thanks and a pension. The removal of other Russian advisors was completed by December.

This was a significant public gesture to placate the Poles. However Moscow retained myriad other personnel links within Poland, not least through its swollen Warsaw Embassy. Another channel it kept was secure military communications with Polish representatives in the Warsaw Pact. Hence the changes were more symbolic than substantive: Poland moved towards somewhat greater equality in relations with its eastern neighbour.

The concessions did not placate the public however. ‘Solidarity with the Eighth Plenum’ soon turned to indignation, especially in areas where Soviet troops were still stationed. People commonly demanded ‘a Polish army for Poland’, economic reparations for past Soviet exploitation and the return of eastern territories, including Wilno and Lwów. Some protestors did not want Gomułka to visit Moscow, where previous Polish heroes had perished, but he did head a Polish delegation for talks on 15–18 November 1956. The Soviet side consisted of Khrushchev, Prime Minister Bulganin, his Deputies Mikoyan and Saburov and Marshal Zhukov.

Limited Polish sovereignty was restored. It was agreed that each country could find its own ‘methods, forms and paths for building socialism’ in accordance with their ‘particular historical conditions and national requirements’. The Soviet model was thus no longer obligatory. This was a major revision of principle, but it did not legitimate all ‘methods, forms and paths’ in practice. The fate of the Hungarian Revolution was an immediate minatory example. The very controversial matter of repatriations, concerning the millions of citizens deported to the east in the first Soviet occupation (1939–1941) or now living in former Polish territories, incorporated in the USSR during the period from 1944, was unresolved.<sup>37</sup>

Poland’s pact in Moscow made clear that many bonds remained. The Warsaw Pact would guarantee Polish territory bordered by the Oder-Niesse line. There would be an agreement governing the stationing of Soviet troops and transit rights through Polish territory.<sup>38</sup> The status under which troops could be stationed on Polish soil was agreed in a later ‘top secret’ protocol which stated they were ‘stationed temporarily’.<sup>39</sup> Forces that had marched towards Warsaw one month previously, were now ‘unable to infringe on the sovereignty of the Polish state in any way’.

Four fifths of the remaining talks concerned economic relations. It was agreed that debts to the Soviet Union would be cancelled, further credits would be extended, and backward Poland’s needs would be addressed in further discussions. This set the

<sup>36</sup>AAN PZPR p.112 t.26, pp. 176–177 (22 October 1956).

<sup>37</sup>Report by Gomułka (22 November 1956) in Paczkowski (1998, pp. 19–30).

<sup>38</sup>Gomułka’s notes in Paczkowski (1998, pp. 13–15).

<sup>39</sup>AAN VI, p.112 t. 26, pp. 213–220.

pattern for bilateral relations down to 1970. On such issues as the mining and export of coal, and other raw materials, Gomułka looked naturally towards the East for economic co-operation. Unlike his successor, Gierek, he showed no interest in any opening to the West, fearing that socialism's entanglement with capitalism would lead to 'counter-revolution of a new type'. He showed similar disinterest in further political modernisation, seeking solace rather in recognition of geopolitical 'realities'. The radical 'de-Staliniser' of 1956 was soon transformed into a stalwart of the Soviet camp (Paczkowski 1998, pp. 1–4).

### *Aftermath*

Faced with the need to curb the population, the Party leadership decided to review Church–State relations. Cardinal Wyszyński remained in detention. Half a million pilgrims to the Jasna Góra monastery in Częstochowa on 26 August saw his empty throne, bearing only a bouquet of flowers in patriotic colours. On 26 October, two senior officials, Kliszko and Bieńkowski, visited him at his place of internment. On behalf of 'comrade Wiesław' (Gomułka's name from the underground), they stated that Wyszyński should return to Warsaw forthwith and resume his pastoral duties. This abrupt imperative—ending three years of confinement—was necessary to help pacify 'the socio-economic and foreign political situations'.

The Primate drove a hard bargain. He was positively disposed towards recent changes in the internal life of Poland, 'designed to calm the situation and break with the errors of the past'. He also accepted that Gomułka's speeches to the Eighth Plenum and at the 24 October mass rally were authoritative 'within the framework of differences which may occur in philosophical outlook'. But he set preconditions for his return. First, the 1953 decree governing Church appointments (under which Wyszyński himself had been arrested) must be rescinded. There should be a reinstatement of senior clergy removed (by the government) from their posts, and an end to state vetting of appointments below the rank of Bishop. In particular, Bishop Kaczmarek of Kielce, who had been the victim of a show trial, should be allowed to return. Five new bishops should be appointed in the Western Territories. To formalise the dialogue, Gomułka should agree to reinstate a Joint Commission 'as a permanent intermediary body between the Episcopate and the government'.<sup>40</sup> Finally, to enable the Church to function normally, the Catholic press had to be restored 'in the full sense of the word' (*A Freedom Within* 1985, pp. 268–270). Once these conditions were accepted, Wyszyński returned to his palace on Miodowa Street.

On 29 October, a number of lay-Catholic intellectuals were received by Gomułka. The Party leader noted with satisfaction that Soviet intervention had been averted, but added that meant they had responsibility for rebuilding Poland on their own. Echoing his 24 October speech, he declared: 'Socialism should be built by everyone—the whole nation, including Catholics, not just communists'. His visitors would be allowed their weekly newspaper, *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Gomułka was glad they did not wish to set

<sup>40</sup>This had been part of the programme of Mutual Understandings with which he had become Primate. It convened in November 1956.

up a Catholic party. He thought Church–State relations would flourish if there was good will on both sides (Friszke 1997, p. 40).

One of the lay intellectuals, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, helped to construct an informal alliance between the Club of the Crooked Circle (KKK) and radical Party members working on *Po prostu*. Their common platform was support for Gomułka against any reversion to Stalinism and the rejection of national chauvinism and anti-Semitism in favour of toleration. This informal alliance grew into an All-Poland Club of Catholic Intellectuals which achieved legal status on 27 October. Some 600 Catholics from four cities attended its inaugural session on 5 November. They supported the Gomułka programme and endorsed the Soviet alliance as the basis for Polish sovereignty. At this point, there was no wish to play the role of a political party or to stand in elections: ‘Our activity is solely cultural and social’ (Friszke 1994, p. 188). Inspired by the example of Mounier’s *Espirt*, Mazowiecki sought permission to found a journal. This was eventually granted and the first issue of *Więź* (*The Link*) appeared in summer 1958. Under his editorship, the monthly advocated positive engagement with current Polish society and a willingness to engage in dialogue with Marxism. Such mediation was much needed.

A wave of rallies and demonstrations swept Poland for the rest of 1956. The public did not simply express support for Gomułka and relief at the peaceful outcome. They began to outline a democratic agenda far beyond the confines of official thinking. For the first time under communism, ordinary people felt free to give public expression to their personal beliefs and pent-up emotions. In factories, institutes and universities and even army barracks, ordinary people felt able to express their views. Many found relief simply from speaking out on issues they had been afraid to articulate before. (The same spontaneity would be recaptured during the heady 16 months of Solidarity.) For others, it was a settling of accounts, paying-off old scores. Perhaps little was said of lasting value and some claims were plainly false, such as that Rokossovsky was now commanding Soviet troops in Budapest, but Poles regained freedom of expression, an experience that can be abruptly terminated but cannot be so easily forgotten.

Further impetus came from the Soviet re-invasion of Hungary on 4 November. There was a huge wave of public sympathy following reports of fatalities amongst Hungarian freedom-fighters. To the older generation their cause recalled the Warsaw Uprising. When Polish Radio called for blood donors to help the ‘Hungarian brothers’, there was an overwhelming response. The transfusion service had to conscript volunteers and work overnight to cope with the donors: students, workers, soldiers and even pensioners. There were numerous further collections of money, food and medicines (Tischler 1995). By February 1957, Poles had donated more than 80 wagon-loads of foodstuffs, thread and textiles, shoes and clothing (Granville 2001, p. 1062).

There was simultaneous revulsion against Soviet aggression. Security archives are replete with examples. In Bydgoszcz on 18 November, a crowd, following heavy-handed treatment by the militia, targeted the local ‘Soviet–Polish Friendship Society’. It also attacked and demolished radio-jamming equipment (which had been switched off for some weeks). A week later Warsaw announced its decision to stop jamming all foreign radio stations. A crowd in Szczecin on 10 December caused late-night uproar outside the Soviet Consulate, which was ransacked and vandalised, with files being

destroyed (Machcewicz 1993, pp. 161–163). Warsaw’s Ministry of Interior affected surprise that Szczecin had a Soviet Consulate. There were widespread demands for the end to compulsory Russian language teaching in schools. Pupils would play truant or tear up their text-books. The teaching of Western languages, or religion, was demanded instead.

The need for some confirmatory plebiscite was palpable. The Council of State had announced there would be fresh elections to the *Sejm* on 16 December. They were now postponed until 20 January 1957 to enable the Party to regroup and mobilise support from the population (Machcewicz 2000). The task was immensely simplified by the placing of all candidates under a single umbrella: the Front of National Unity (FNU). Since no other candidates could appear on the list, the most significant statistics were likely to be the numbers of spoiled ballot papers and abstentions.

The Press and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee addressed social groups in posters, running to 100,000 copies, carrying the following slogans:

- Workers! The FNU will develop self-management. Take work-place management into your own hands.
- Peasants! Develop and enrich your households with the FNU.
- Scientists and Artists! For full freedom of creative work, support the FNU.
- Young People! For the programme of independence and the Polish road to socialism vote for the FNU (Machcewicz 2000, pp. 63–64).

In the early New Year, Gomułka made a melodramatic radio broadcast to voters.

Only a socialist Poland can appear on the map of Europe as an independent and sovereign state. The Party is the primary guarantor of this independence, underwritten by the friendship between the Polish and Russian peoples, the guarantor of neighbourly, fraternal Polish–Soviet relations.

His advice to electors was stark: ‘to cross out PZPR (Party) candidates is not only to cross out socialism in Poland. It is crossing out our country’s sovereignty. It is crossing out Poland from the map of European states’ (Gomułka 1957, pp. 212–213).

Cardinal Wyszyński was asked by Premier Cyrankiewicz to endorse the official list. He agreed. Four days before the poll, the press carried his appeal to ‘Catholic-Citizens’ concerning the following Sunday. He declared that religious and political responsibilities went hand in hand. ‘Catholic citizens are to fulfil their conscience’s duty to vote. Catholic priests will conduct their Masses so as to enable the faithful to fulfil their religious duty and their electoral duty without any difficulties’ (Raina 1986, pp. 150–151). As Dudek points out, this marked the greatest political concession the Church had made to the powers that be. It was tantamount to acceptance of the communist political system (Dudek 1995, p. 50). Wyszyński himself came to this opinion and let it be known well ahead of every subsequent election that he would not be voting, but the 1957 results showed how effective a Church–State alliance could be: 94.1% of the electorate turned out and 98.4% voted for the official (FNU) candidates—naturally enough, since there were no other candidates—but there has been no suggestion that the result was falsified.

*Legacy*

1956 offered an ‘October’ legacy: the Party’s willingness to take social aspirations more into account. In 1956, Polish communists first acknowledged that society could no longer be ruled without the Party listening to its voice. Its high point was Gomułka’s triumphant return to power and the reduction of dependence on the Soviet Union and its ‘model’ of socialism. Gomułka admitted that political campaigns against the Church and against private agriculture had failed and granted them a permanent place alongside the ‘socialist order’.

For farmers, October was a time of triumph. Spontaneous de-collectivisation took place. Within three weeks, 75% of state-run co-operatives had disbanded and most others dwindled away. Of almost 10,000 co-operatives that had existed at the end of 1955, only 1,534 remained by the end of 1957 (Jarosz 1997, pp. 169–177). Land and property was re-privatised. One letter to the Central Committee from Kutno district reports ‘the members are stealing all they can. They are pulling down stone walls, chopping down trees and even pulling up paving-stones on the former collective’. Co-operative machinery was driven away to private farms and state granaries were raided at night. Old scores were settled, often brutally. In Olsztyn province, a gang congregated at the Red Army monument, knocking down its star. They headed for the home of the local correspondent of *Chłopska Droga* and broke his windows, but he escaped (Machcewicz 1993, p. 169).

For most workers however, October was a disappointment. The promised self-management soon evaporated. In retrospect, it seems the most significant workers’ self-organisation in 1956 took place on the coast. An independent trade union for seamen and deep-sea fishermen had been formed in October 1956. As the Red Fleet trained its guns on Gdynia, the port of Gdańsk, it was clear that protestors would be shelled if they made trouble. Despite such intimidation, the merchant seamen formed a union with 3,000 members. Its initial aim—as in the Gdańsk Shipyard in 1980—was to defend fellow workers who had been unjustly dismissed. To some extent this was successful: ‘every seaman who suffered an injustice was rehabilitated and received a verification he could show his wife’. The longer term goal was a free trade union. Although this failed for a generation, the interviewee concluded that the initial effort had been an achievement (Zuzowski 1992, pp. 265–269). Whereas the Solidarity movement was born in the glare of world publicity, in 1956 they had been on their own.

The intelligentsia’s hopes of October soon faded. The Writers’ Congress of 29 November–2 December elected a new president, Słonimski, and a board of younger authors including Mrozek and Hłasko. It called for the abolition of all censorship and the restoration of full rights of authors and editors. Demands were also heard for a ‘return to Europe’ of Polish literature, particularly through restoring relations with writers in emigration, such as Gombrowicz and Miłosz, and in establishing normal contacts with the émigré press, above all the Paris-based *Kultura*. The restoration of links with the West became a permanent legacy of October but stringent censorship was restored at home and *Po prostu* was closed down.

‘October’ tends to be employed once the second legacy of 1956 has failed. We may call this ‘June’, following the use of force in Poznań. One lesson the authorities learned from Poznań was to form a motorised militia (ZOMO) armed with tear gas and long,

loaded truncheons rather than live ammunition. This force was used against peaceful protests by students in 1968 and by workers in 1970 and 1976, and in the 'state of war' from 13 December 1981. ZOMO was still used against street demonstrations on 3 May 1989 (Dudek & Marszałkowski 1999, pp. 395–395). However, 'October' resumes in the form of primitive dialogue between the new leader Gierek and shipyard workers on the coast in early 1971 (Wacowska 1971, pp. 224–227). A decade later, it achieves breakthrough status in the week-long negotiation between the government commission and the Interfactory Strike Committee in the Gdańsk Shipyard in August 1980. Its culmination was the 1989 Round Table, leading to the end of communism.

*University of East Anglia, Norwich*

### References

- A Freedom Within. The Prison Notes of Stefan, Cardinal Wyszyński* (1985) (London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).
- Andrzejewski, J. [pseudonym Andrzej Paczkowski] (ed.) (1986) *Gomułka i inni. Dokumenty z archiwum KC 1948–1982* (Warsaw, Krąg).
- Błażyński, Z. (1986) *Mówi Józef Światło. Za kulisami bezpieki i partii, 1940–1955*, 3rd edition (London, Polska Fundacja Kulturalna).
- Bobrowski, C. (1957) *Jugosławia socjalistyczna* (Warsaw).
- Brus, W. & Jakubowicz, S. (1957) *System jugosłowiański z bliska* (Warsaw).
- Brzostek, B. (2002) *Robotnicy Warszawy. Konflikty codzienne (1950–1954)* (Warsaw, Trio).
- Coleman, P. (1989) *The Liberal Conspiracy: the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York, The Free Press).
- Drozdowski, M. (ed.) (1998) *1956. Polska emigracja a Kraj* (Warsaw, Typografia).
- Dudek, A. (1995) *Państwo i Kościół w Polsce, 1945–1970* (Kraków, PiT).
- Dudek, A. & Marszałkowski, T. (1999) *Walki uliczne w PRL, 1956–1989* (Kraków, Wydaw. GEO).
- Friszke, A. (1994) *Opozycja polityczna w PRL, 1945–1980* (London, Aneks).
- Friszke, A. (1997) *Oaza na Kopernika. Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej 1956–1989* (Warsaw, Biblioteka 'Wieżi').
- Głuchowski, L. (1995) 'Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka and the "Polish October"', *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) Bulletin*, No 5, Spring.
- Gomułka, W. (1957) *Przemówienia* (Warsaw).
- van Goudeover, A. (1986) *The Limits of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union: Political Rehabilitations in the Soviet Union since Stalin* (London, Croom Helm).
- Goździk, L. (1996) 'Byliśmy u siebie w domu', in Bratkowski, S. (ed.) (1996) *Październik 1956. Pierwszy wyłom w systemie* (Warsaw, Prószyński i S-ka).
- Granville, J. (2001) 'Hungarian and Polish Reactions to the Events of 1956: New Archival Evidence', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53, 7, November.
- Gross, J. (1979) 'Thirty Years of Crisis-Management in Poland', in Rakowska-Harmstone, T. (ed.) (1979) *Perspectives for Change in Communist Societies* (Boulder, CO, Westview Press).
- Gross, J. (1988) *Revolution from Abroad. The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia* (Princeton, NJ, Guilford).
- Hirszowicz, M. (1980) *The Bureaucratic Leviathan: A Study in the Sociology of Communism* (Oxford, Martin Robertson).
- Jankowiak, S. & Rogulska, A. (eds) (2002) *Poznański Czerwiec 1956* (Warsaw, IPN).
- Jarosz, D. (1997) 'Wieś Polska w 1956 Roku', in Kersten, K. (ed.) (1997).
- Jedlicki, W. (1963) *Klub Krzywego Kola* (Paris, Kultura).
- Kamiński, L. (1999) *Strajki robotnicze w Polsce, w latach 1945–1948* (Wrocław, GAJT wydaw).
- Kemp-Welch, A. (1992) *The Birth of Solidarity*, 2nd edition (London, Macmillan).
- Kemp-Welch, A. (1996) 'Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" and Polish Politics: The Spring of 1956', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48, 2, March.
- Kemp-Welch, A. (ed.) (1999) *Stalinism in Poland, 1944–1956* (London & New York, Macmillan & St Martin's Press).
- Kersten, K. (1991) *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948* (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press).

- Kersten, K. (1993) '1956-Punkt zwrotny', *Krytyka*, 40.
- Kersten, K. (ed.) (1997) *Polska 1956—próbę nowego spojrzenia* (Warsaw, Instytut Historii PAN).
- Kersten, K. (1999) 'The Terror, 1949–1954', in Kemp-Welch, A. (ed.) (1999).
- Khrushchev, N.S. (1974) *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament* (London, Deutsch).
- Kopka, B. (2002) *Obozy pracy w Polsce 1944–1950* (Warsaw, Karta).
- Kowalik, T. (1980) *Spory o ustrój społeczno-gospodarczy Polski 1944–48* (Warsaw, Zeszyty TKN-NOWA).
- Kramer, M. (1995) 'Hungary and Poland in 1956', *CWIHP Bulletin*, 5, Spring.
- Kuroń, J. (1990) *Wiara i Wina. Do i od komunizmu* (Warsaw, NOWA).
- Machcewicz, P. (1993) *Polski Rok 1956* (Warsaw, Mówią Wieki).
- Machcewicz, P. (1997) 'Stany Zjednoczone wobec Polskiego Października 1956 roku', in Kersten, K. (ed.) (1997).
- Machcewicz, P. (2000) *Kampania wyborcza i wybory do Sejmu 20 stycznia 1957* (Warsaw, Wydaw Sejmowe).
- Machowski, E. (2001) *Poznański Czerwiec 1956. Pierwszy bunt społeczeństwa w PRL* (Poznań, Wydaw, Poznańskie).
- Nalepa, E. (1992) *Pacyfikacja Zbuntowanego Miasta. Wojsko Polskie w Czerwcu 1956 r. w Poznaniu* (Warsaw, Bellona).
- Nalepa, E. (1995) *Oficerowie Armii Radzieckiej w Wojsku Polskim 1943–1948* (Warsaw, Wojskowy Instytut Historyczny).
- Nałęcz, D. (ed.) (1994) *Główny urząd kontroli prasy, 1945–1956* (Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa).
- Paczkowski, A. (1994a) *Aparat bezpieczeństwa w latach 1945–1956 2 Vols* (Warsaw, ISP-PAN).
- Paczkowski, A. (ed.) (1994b) *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego i Sekretariatu KC. Ostatni rok władzy 1988–1989* (London, Aneks).
- Paczkowski, A. (1995) *Pół wieku dziejów Polski, 1939–1989* (Warsaw, Wydaw. Naukowe PAN).
- Paczkowski, A. (ed.) (1998) *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego PRL-ZSRR 1956–1970* (London).
- Paczkowski, A. (2003) 'System nomenklatury', in Paczkowski, A. (ed.) (2003) *Centrum władzy w Polsce, 1948–1970* (Warsaw, ISP-PAN).
- Persak, K. (1997) 'Kryzys stosunków Polsko-Radzieckich w 1956 roku', in Kersten, K. (ed.) (1997).
- Piechuch, H. (1990) *Spotkania z Fejginem: (zza kulis bezpieki)* (Warsaw, Wydaw. Lodowego).
- Polonsky, A. (1972) *Politics in Independent Poland 1921–1939. The Crisis of Constitutional Government* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- Raina, P. (1986) *Stefan Kardynał Wyszyński Vol. 2* (London, Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy).
- Roszkowski, W. (1992) *Historia Polski, 1914–1991* (Warsaw, PWN).
- Rykowski, Z. & Władysław, W. (1989) *Polska próba. Październik '56* (Kraków, Wydaw. Literackie).
- Sto sorok besed s Molotovym. Iz dnevnika F Chueva* (1991) (Moscow, Terra).
- Tischler, J. (1995) *Rewolucja węgierska 1956 w polskich dokumentach* (Warsaw, ISP-PAN).
- Tischler, T. (1999) 'Polish Leaders and the Hungarian Revolution', in Kemp-Welch, A. (ed.) (1999).
- Tischner, J. (1984) *Etyka Solidarności*, 2nd edition (Paris).
- Torańska, T. (1987) *Oni. Stalin's Polish Puppets* (London, Collins Harvill).
- Volkogonov, D. (1994) *Lenin: A New Biography* (New York, The Free Press).
- Wacowska, E. (1971) *Rewolta Szczecińska i jej znaczenie* (Paris, Kultura).
- Walicki, A. (1990) 'Three Traditions in Polish Patriotism', in Gomułka, S. & Polonsky, A. (eds) (1990) *Polish Paradoxes* (London, Routledge).
- Werblan, A. (1991) 'Czy los Imre Nagy'a przeraził Gomułkę?', *Prawo i Życie*, 43.
- Zinner, P. (ed.) (1956) *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe. A Selection of Documents* (New York, Columbia University Press).
- Zuzowski, R. (1992) 'An Interview with Włodzimierz Schilling-Siengalewicz (April 1986)', in Zuzowski, R. (ed.) (1992) *The Workers' Defense Committee KOR* (Westport, CT, Praeger).



Copyright of Europe-Asia Studies is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.