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Struggle for Power in Poland

On 11 November 1968 the Communist Party of Poland formally known as the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR, after its Polish abbreviation) is supposed to hold its Fifth Party Congress. The prospect of important changes in the top echelons of the Party gives it more than ordinary interest. A very real, but obscurely fought, factional struggle for power in the upper echelons, gradually surfaced over the past year, should come to its climax on the occasion of the Congress. The interaction of many forces within the PZPR, most of them having roots in the early World War II history of the Party, gives Polish Communist political intrigue a unique character and at the same time complicates analysis of the scene which seems to (and perhaps actually does) shift patterns like a kaleidoscope. Therefore a brief look at this background will help in defining the issues which clearly emerge from the current political scene. It is better to leave the more obscure machinations of Polish Communist politics to the speculative study of those whose affair it is to follow such developments intensively in search of a rationale for the bizarre politics of Polish Communism.

Wartime Communism in Poland

A Polish Communist Party formed in the early twenties pursued an ineffectual existence in the interwar period and was summarily wiped out by Stalin and the Comintern in 1938 for reasons that are still not entirely clear.

After Hitler's attack on the USSR in 1941, a handful of Polish Communists in occupied Poland formed the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) and started an anti-Nazi underground. Simultaneously Stalin reassembled a Communist Party (which he called the Union of Polish Patriots) in the USSR from pre-war members of the Party who were living in the Soviet Union and from Communists who fled Nazi-occupied Poland to the USSR. He created this group in order to challenge the claim of the Polish government-in-exile in London to represent Poland. Communists now still prominent in Poland who were members of the wartime underground are Wladyslaw Gomulka (who very early became secretary general of the PPR) and his close colleagues Zenon Kliszko (now a Politburo member), Marian Spychalski (now President of Poland), and Ignacy Loga Sowinski, Mieczyslaw Moczar, then a nobody in the underground PPR, is now a major contender for the top leadership of Poland. The Communist underground movement, known as the Armia Ludowa (AL--People's Army) was relatively insignificant\* compared to the really effective and much larger non-Communist underground known as the Armia Krajowa (AK--Home Army), associated with the London government-in-exile.

\*In fact, unable to make any significant military contribution, the AL resorted to terror tactics against individuals and even hospitals, which provoked severe Nazi reprisals damaging to both the innocent population and the overall underground effort.

Typical of the Communist rule of not sharing power, the AL refused to merge its effort with that of the AK except on condition that it control the AK (the tail wagging the dog!) and this condition, naturally enough, the AK refused to accept.

In any case, the AL underground effort laid the groundwork for the post-war rivalries among Communist leaders -- rivalries and jealousies that persist to this day. After the defeat of the Germans, Communists from Stalin's Union of Polish Patriots (many of them Jews) entered Poland on the coattails of the Red Army and took prominent positions in the Communist movement. These "Muscovites" in the postwar years gradually took almost all the key positions and eventually became the instrument for purging the ranks of the Party of the "domestic" communists such as Gomulka and Spychalski.

#### Communist Seizure of Power

After the war, Gomulka, as Secretary General of the Party, followed a policy of a non-doctrinaire, nationalistic appeal (including proclaiming a special Polish "road to socialism") calculated to expand the ranks of the Party, which numbered only some 20,000 in 1944. Stalin and the Muscovite Polish Communists, who followed Moscow's orders like automatons, saw the practical wisdom of such tactics to attract new members and though they did not trust the overall strategy of Gomulka and his group for seizure of power, they for the time being permitted him to pursue his tactics of collaborating with non-Communist elements.

In the meantime, the Muscovite Communists were not without power. Over the protests of the Western allies, Stalin installed his own hand-picked government (the so-called Lubin Committee) as the legitimate governing body of Poland. From the group of Lubin Muscovite Poles, Boleslaw Bierut became the first chairman (a post equivalent to the presidency), Jakub Berman became a vice-minister, Stanislaw Radkiewicz became head of the security police. Other Muscovites taking prominent posts were Roman Zambrowski, Aleksander Zawadzki, and Edward Ochab (who just recently resigned as President of Poland in favor of Marian Spychalski).

The immediate post-war years were devoted to consolidating the Polish Workers' Party's power by the elimination of the political opposition. Under Gomulka's leadership and with the ominous presence of Soviet military power backing the PPR, it used a wide variety of tricks to emasculate the strong Polish Peasant Party: terror, kidnapping, mass arrests, imprisonment, bribery, fraudulent electoral practices -- every conceivable legitimate and illegitimate weapon. The present Party's power was finally broken in November 1947 when its head, Stanislaw Mikolajzych, finally fled to the west for his life.

The PPR's remaining rival, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), was eliminated by absorption when other tactics failed. Josef Cyrankiewicz,

head of the PPS, on a government visit in January 1948 to the Soviet Union agreed to a betrayal of his party and on his return led it into its fatal merger with the PPR. The merger was consummated in December 1948 to form the Communist party in Poland: the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). Cyrankiewicz was rewarded with the post of Secretary General of the Party. This "socialist" has ever since played a prominent role in Polish politics, holding many posts carrying high titles (he is currently premier).

#### Pro-Moscow Communists Victorious

In June of 1948, Tito was expelled from the family of obedient Soviet satellites. He insisted on running his country's internal affairs independently of Soviet direction (expressed in his jargon as following the "Yugoslav road to Socialism" -- regarded by Moscow as a revisionist-nationalist ideological deviation). Gomulka earlier had sought to advance the Communist cause in part by using the same slogan of a special (Polish) road to socialism, but having served his purpose of appearing as a national Polish Communist to lure a modicum of popular support for the small and distrusted Communist Party, Stalin decided that he was a potential Tito and that his time had come. Gomulka was unequivocally criticized for shortcomings on the very occasion of the merger of the PPS and the PPR in December 1948. In the course of the next year, he was in turn deprived of his party posts and his party membership. In 1951 he was put under house arrest, which lasted until 1956. The Muscovites were victorious.

#### Gomulka: Neither Nationalist nor Liberal

The Muscovites' maladministration and unpopularity from 1950 to 1956 finally caught up with them in the student and worker riots in the summer and fall of 1956 and the Stalinists were obliged to bring back Gomulka (along with his comrades-in-arms Spychalski, Kliszko and others) because of his reputation for being a nationalist and even anti-Soviet. Alarmed, the Soviet leadership, led by Khrushchev, descended on Warsaw for a confrontation with Gomulka and his colleagues amid ominous Soviet troop movements in and toward Poland. Unlike Dubcek in contemporary Czechoslovakia, Gomulka succeeded in convincing the Soviet leaders to leave the solution of the Polish unrest in his hands. He did not disappoint the Soviets. Making use of his nationalist-liberal reputation and initially placing known liberals in key positions in his government, he succeeded in holding the lid on the widespread discontent among writers, students, and other intellectuals who clamored for freedom of expression, among the workers who wanted better wages, and among the peasants who, having themselves broken up the extensive system of collective farming in favor of privately run farms, were permitted by Gomulka to keep their farms.

Having gained his breathing spell, Gomulka gradually began moving against many of his liberal supporters in key positions in the Party, prevented the purge of Stalinist conservatives, and, in time, restored the

tight pro-Soviet dictatorship prevailing before his ascent to power in most sectors of national life, most notable of which perhaps is control of the news media. He was careful, however, not to touch the land returned to the peasants and to keep harassment of the Catholic Church within "acceptable" bounds.

Whether or not Gomulka was sincere in his apparent nationalism of the early and mid-1940's before his purge, what is one to say about his nationalism in 1956 when he was returned to power? The fact is that attempts at liberalization made by persons of some prestige and political influence, among them communists, in late 1955 and 1956 were made without Gomulka and his immediate entourage, who were "shelved" at the time. The liberalization efforts were made against the opposition of the hard-line faction (among them Ochab and Bierut), those Muscovites of old who were obedient to Moscow and brought up by Stalin and capable only of Stalin's type of repressive rule. Gomulka reaped the benefit of the liberalization drive, but it is doubtful that he ever was in sympathy with a liberalized form of Communist dictatorship. The fallacy of many observers of the time was their belief that a nationalist must also be a liberal. Gomulka may have harbored nationalistic notions at one time, but neither his public position nor his reimposition of a repressive dictatorship warrant the belief that he is or was a liberal-minded Communist. In 1956 he had no choice but to accept the liberalized national situation facing him. But it is clear that this acceptance was a pragmatic choice and not one of principle. His temporary alliance with the liberal Communist elements was a matter of opportunism, as was his later reliance on the hardline faction with which he may in fact have had more affinity and with whose help he removed many of the liberals from positions of influence. Viewing his unswerving support of the Soviet Union in international affairs since his return to power, most notably vis-a-vis the aborted effort of the Czechoslovak Communists to follow their own road to socialism, it is hard to believe that at one time he espoused a similar cause for Poland.

#### The Current Power Struggle

It is against this background of intrigue that the current power struggle is being played out. Of the many uncertainties and obscurities which are so difficult for the outsider to fathom, a few things seem fairly certain. The most prominent contenders for power are Gomulka, Moczar, and possibly Edward Gierek. In attempting to follow the maneuverings for power, manifested outwardly by speeches, newspaper polemics by supporters of the various protagonists, by personnel changes in key Party and government positions, and by purges, little can be asserted with confidence about the progress of one or another contender, about who his supporters are, or about their relations to one another.

Another feature of this power struggle which seems indisputable is its opportunistic nature, the total absence of adherence to any principle besides self-advancement. Like Communism in power everywhere, the primary

objective is for the Communist Party not to share political power for fear that the Party may be overthrown or relegated to a secondary position. Beyond that, any means seem admissible in competing for leadership. Gomulka's opportunism has been described above. (A more charitable view of Gomulka has it that he is formulating policies in a day-to-day fashion, from hand to mouth, making concessions now to this group, now to that group, all the while bending an ear to Moscow and trying to conform to Moscow's requirements. Some observers have pointed out, too, that he is getting old and tired and therefore perhaps not a serious contender for power at the forthcoming party congress.)

What about Moczar? It is clear he is making his bid for power by playing on two strong emotions of the Polish people, shared by many Communist rank-and-file: patriotism and anti-Semitism. He has formed a group known as the Partisans, a term which refers to the domestic underground of World War II (of which Moczar was a part) and which evokes memories of camaraderie and the heroics of those bygone days. This large group of Communists and non-Communists may be said to constitute Moczar's power base. Hand in hand with this appeal and its chauvinistic and patriotic overtones, Moczar also has made effective use of anti-Semitism (described in Polish propaganda always as anti-Zionism, with the implication that Polish Communists of Jewish background are being condemned for loyalty to a foreign power rather than for their Jewishness). Implicit in this anti-Zionism is the patriotic theme that with Zionism he is condemning those Muscovites (Jews and other outsiders) who returned to Poland from the USSR with the Red Army. By invoking the anti-Zionist theme, he has succeeded in recent months in purging the Polish Party and government apparatus of a great number of his enemies (he was aided in this task by the fact that he was the head of the secret police at the time as Minister of Interior). It is interesting to speculate whether this attack on old, Moscow-trained prominent Communists on the grounds of Polish nationalism disturbs Moscow at all as being potentially expressive of anti-Soviet sentiment. If not, it may be that Moscow recognizes the gambit for the opportunistic gimmick that it most likely is. Meanwhile, critics of the anti-Zionist campaign have also appeared (they are not speaking very loudly), among them Gomulka himself, though it was he who kicked off the campaign to begin with. (Gomulka has a Jewish wife.) The issue has quite clearly become a political football in the power struggle.

It seems a mark of Moczar's progress toward the summit of power that at the last Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee he was selected as a candidate member of the Politburo and made a Secretary of the Central Committee. That he had simultaneously to relinquish his powerful post of Minister of Interior took away some of the luster of these other promotions.

Edward Gierek is also considered by many observers to be a major contender for power. He is something of an anomaly in that he spent most of his adult life in the West and returned to Poland only after the war. Apparently on the basis of his personality and organizing and administrative abilities, he has forged ahead to become Party boss of the populous and im-

portant industrial region of Silesia, and is a member of the Politburo. It is not clear what his power base is, but one may speculate that he represents an element of the Polish Party, perhaps an educated managerial group whose main preoccupation is to get on with the job of building up Poland technically and economically, a kind of provincial industrial bureaucracy. Gierek is sometimes identified with the Moczar faction, sometimes with the Gomulka faction. Perhaps he switches allegiances, playing the field as is typical of so many Communist opportunists in Poland today.

To summarize the current outlook there seem to be three contending factions: (a) the Gomulka faction, heading what might be called the Old Guard, once "nationalist" and hardline, but now pro-Soviet, hardline when it appears necessary but not merely as a matter of course or as a matter of an automatic rule; (b) the Moczar faction, consistently hardline, against relaxing controls on intellectuals and students, attacking the old Muscovites as an appeal both to Polish nationalism-patriotism and traditional anti-Semitism, with a powerful lever in the secret police; and (c) the Gierek faction heading the new managerial class.

There is a growing feeling among some observers that a new group is forming not identified with any of the above factions, but as yet without leadership -- a group of young apolitical technocrats, pragmatists who have little patience with old dogmatic or revolutionary slogans and who are eager to move into positions of power to practice their innovative ideas. They also have little respect for the three more prominent candidates for leadership at the next Party Congress, feeling that these persons are too old, too wedded to obsolete ideas, and too lost in mires of the power game to be looked upon as providing viable leadership. It is a group looking for a leader and will bear watching.

References:

1. M.K. Dziewanowski. The Communist Party of Poland, An Outline of History, Harvard University Press, 1959. This is the most definitive work on the subject, and is highly recommended.
2. Adam B. Ulam. Titoism and the Cominform. Harvard University Press, 1962. This classic work of Tito's defection from the Soviet Bloc contains an excellent section entitled: "Crisis in the Polish Communist Party," which is reliable, interestingly presented, and brief.
3. Jan Nowak. "The Struggle for Party Control in Poland," in East Europe monthly magazine published by Free Europe Inc., New York, June 1968. A more detailed examination of Polish leadership and second-ranking Communist personalities involved in the power struggle, with an interesting theory of Gomulka's position in the struggle.