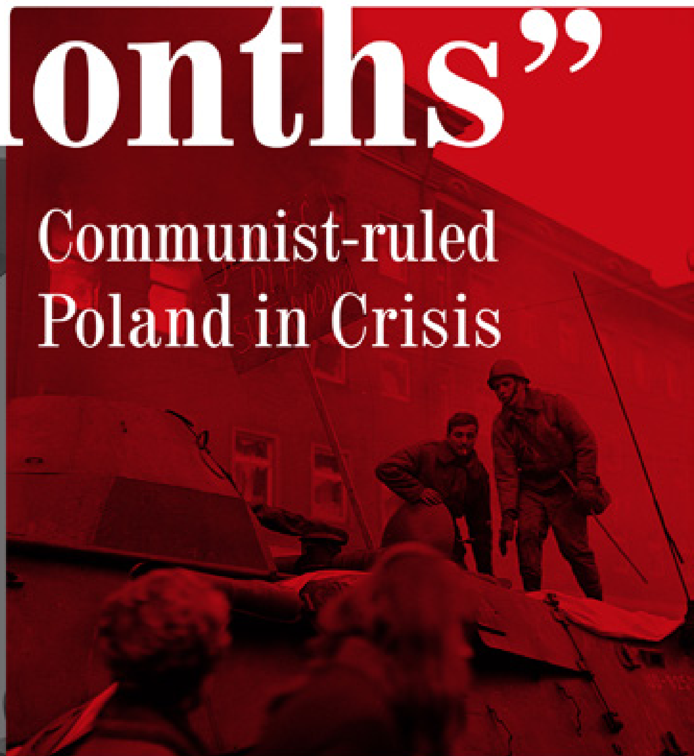
Jerzy Eisler

The "Polish Months"

Communist-ruled Poland in Crisis



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THE INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL REMEMBRANCE
COMMISSION FOR THE PROSECUTION OF CRIMES AGAINST THE POLISH NATION

Jerzy Eisler

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Communist-ruled Poland in Crisis

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INTRODUCTION

The title and the topic of this book call for a few sentences of explanation. First I need to explain why I have decided not to choose the plural "crises" over the singular "crisis", which is a after all a fundamental distinction. But it is an issue I feel unable to solve, although I have professionally dealt with it for over thirty years. I cannot give an unequivocal and well-motivated answer to the key issue whether in the People's Republic of Poland (*Polska Rzeczypospolita Ludowa*, PRL)[1] we had a sequence of crises symbolised by the "Polish months" or whether it was one and the same structural crisis of a non-democratic and unsovereign regime, which every now and then "merely" manifested itself in more or less violent form.

I need to stress at this point that the better acquainted I am with the specific character of the "Polish months", the more inclined I am to agree that they had so many similar or even identical characteristics that one could indeed speak of one crisis of a dictatorial regime (totalitarian until 1956), which subsequently was rather authoritarian, albeit with marked totalitarian tendencies. Nearly all the "Polish months" have one feature in common, namely a part of the society protested against some specific decisions of the

[1] I treat the name "Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa" as appropriate for the years 1952–1989, although the enactment of the PRL Constitution in 1952 practically had no bearing on the political system of the state that was being established after 1944. Nevertheless, although many use the term "PRL" to describe the entire period 1944–1989, one should bear in mind that during 1944–1952 the official name of this state was "the Republic of Poland" (*Rzeczpospolita Polska*).

party and state authorities, and theses would employ all the means available in order to quash those protests.

In each instance, albeit without sufficient grounds for it, the rulers could feel surprised with those social protests. Also, in each instance, the recalcitrant social groups would launch a new round of their fight against the non-democratic regime, although one needs to be very careful in one's general conclusions, and avoid *a priori* dismissal of such factors (which are difficult to prove) as police provocation, which I discuss at length in chapter 4.

On one occasion, however (on the night of 12/13 December 1981) the authorities surprised, nay, attacked the society. Let us add that Wojciech Jaruzelski's historic achievement in the field of semantics is that he branded the police and military operation "martial law". Had he done otherwise, we would probably call the shooting at workers, the presence of hundreds of tanks and armoured vehicles in the streets, the clubbing and spraying of water on people at below zero temperatures "events" or "December incidents" as we did before.

Let us, therefore, recall that the "Polish months" usually had three dimensions: the political crisis proper, which was nothing more than an externalised manifestation of a power struggle among different groups within the party; the social crisis that consisted in efforts of significant sections of the society to expand civil liberties and aimed at democratisation and liberalisation; finally – the economic crisis. Naturally all the three currents are discussed below.

Let us recall here that it has become customary to identify profound political turmoil and social upheavals by the name of the month in which they took place. And so the specific "Polish calendar": June, October, March, December, and another June, August and one more December – how hard it is to overestimate their role in Polish history! Put most simply – this study aims to acquaint the reader with the "Polish months" and try to explain their historical role.

Let me start by emphasising that this terminology was primarily employed by independent and opposition milieus. The names of these months triggered enormous emotions, sometimes even sentiments of martyrdom, as they symbolised fight for one's subjectivity by a significant segment of the soci-

ety, which struggled with a dictatorial regime imposed by a foreign power. However these names also belong to a kind of magic of political language, because they rather tend to blur the picture than explain anything, and in no circumstances do they characterise the events they denote.

Regardless of any doubts that the use of names of months might arouse, in this case such it is largely conventional. In practice, the direct and indirect consequences of each crisis went beyond a given month. So when we say "August", we think not only of the strikes on the Northern Seaboard, but also of the emergence of Solidarity, which officially took place in September 1980. Some scholars, quite rightly, use the term to cover the earlier July strikes in the Lublin region as well.

Similarly, the notion of "March'68" covers the earlier *Dziady* (Forefathers) affair, and the February meeting of the Union of Polish Writers, as well as the dramatic session of the Sejm (parliament), when Party leaders (not only, as they were joined by the leader of the PAX Association, Bolesław Piasecki) brutally attacked the Catholic "Znak" MPs, who stood up to defend the protesting students.

The branding of the crises with the names of months is largely conventional for one more reason. Namely, one term tends to hide events that are rather loosely connected with one another, and sometimes even contradictory. What was the connection the student and intellectuals protests demanding liberalisation with the anti-Semitic and anti-intellectual witch hunt of March 1968? What was the connection between the great social reform movement of October 1956 with the simultaneous faction infighting with the Party.[2] What linked the great workers' protest of December 1970 with the probable if not virtually certain *coup* within the Party leadership? It seems that precisely this complexity and multiplicity of currents was one of the features of some of the "Polish months".

To be sure, one could say that one of their common features were precisely those social protests that had a dramatic and often tragic character, which were recorded in the common memory in the form of dates featured

[2] That is the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR). Throughout this edition, the term "Party" is used. In very rare cases the abbreviation PZPR is employed.

on the Monument of the Poznań June: 1956, 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980. Eventually the year 1981 was added. Let us add here that during the First Congress of the "Grunwald" Patriotic Union (an organisation that masked the anti-Semitism of some of its members by calling it "anti-Zionism") in October 1981, one of the speakers said that he believes that the day would come when the workers would chop off the year 1968 form the Poznań monument. Clearly, there were attempts to manipulate those dates and depending on one's personal experiences and political status (once and now) they were assigned respectively greater or lesser importance, and in extreme cases attempts were made to eradicate them from the pages of history.

One should also bear in mind that the men of the regime far less frequently chose to name the political crises and social upheavals after the months than independent researchers or participants in social protests. In this case the more often used terms were "events", "incidents", "crises" or "turning points", because all these names minimised the depth of the socio-political crises, and primarily the masked their frequently bloody character. At the same time, those milieus were keen to stress the reform-oriented (as the ruling party members understood it) and intra-systemic character of those "events". Many representatives of this orientation would add one more date – 1948. After all, in practice serious research on this very "turning point" was carried out only in the broadly understood Party milieu.

On the other hand, this "turning point" did not arouse much interest among non-communist historians, who did not regard it as a crisis or believed that it was an exclusively internal Party matter and did not affect the society at large. From this point of view the year 1948 somehow resembled a "family row". One could agree with this view, but with one reservation: namely the consequences of the "turn of 1948" in practice affected, directly or indirectly, the majority of Polish society. After all the consequences of changes of the First Secretary of the Polish People's Party and the launching of the campaign against the "right-wing and nationalist deviation" included the beginning of collectivisation of agriculture, the proclamation of socialist realism in art and culture, and a sudden change of course against the Catholic Church and a radical acceleration of the process of Sovietisation of Poland.

To be sure, it was an important moment in the history of Poland ruled by communist, but we should avoid treating it in the same manner as all the great social protests commemorated by the Poznań monument. One should also recall that some Party activists would refer to the events of 1948 during the crises of 1956 and 1968. However all along it had the character of a kind of factional struggle within the Party between competing informal groups of activists.

It is hard to unequivocally determine all these issues, but it does seem that the root of the crises (or one crisis?) lay in the very essence of undemocratic regime sanctioned by a foreign power, but the traits of the individual party leaders naturally had some (albeit not decisive) significance. After all the mechanism of creating the cult of all the party leaders practically remained unchanged. As the years passed the individual first secretaries of the Party's central committee wanted to decide on an increasing number of issues, resolve more arguments, and interfere in more and more areas of life. As a rule, the sycophants in leader's immediate circle would persuade him of his infallibility and unique historical role. This was usually accompanied by the conviction that he has a historical mission to fulfil. Eventually, he could feel isolated and threatened by some of his closest associates. This, however, was rather a result than the cause of a crisis of power.

To be sure, in this book I should also try to answer questions about the common features one could find in the subsequent "Polish months". What is more important from today's perspective: what they had in common or the differences between them? The answer will not be unequivocal, instead it will be, to some extent at least, politically charged. For many people with right-wing views the entire PRL was one large political crisis. Rarely, if ever, do they see the difference between the different stages in Poland's post-war history, and treat the entire period of communist rule as one and homogenous. This is manifested by the consistently made claim that Poland under communist rule was a totalitarian state all along.

On the other hand, some representatives of the left tend to defend the legacy of the PRL at any price. They would be prepared, if pressed, to admit that Stalinism in Poland was criminal, but the subsequent periods – as they see it – should not be judged too harshly, although it was precisely then that

sudden and bloody social protests erupted. It is evident that both these deliberately exaggerated attitudes are not very conducive to historical knowledge and serious efforts to answer those questions.

Let us recall then that whenever strikes and social protests erupted in the PRL, the authorities would invariably accused some alien or foreign forces of inspiring and organising them, including "reaction", "sabotage centres", "West German revisionists", "American imperialists", "Zionists", and other enemies of People's Poland. As a rule street demonstrations and clashes with the forces of repression – ironically enough called "forces of law and order" – were branded "counterrevolution", while the participants were called hooligans, bandits, criminal elements, firebrands and rebels.

At this point one should add that these biased and unfair opinions were soon verified, naturally if as a result there were changes in the state and party leadership. In 1956 this took place less than four months after the Poznań workers' protest, when as a result of the October crisis Władysław Gomułka returned to power and replaced Edward Ochab as First Secretary of the Central Committee. Only then did the new party chief admit publicly that those responsible for the Poznań tragedy were not the workers, who righteously demanded their rights, but representatives of the regime, who proved unable to meet the workers' demands.

A similar set of events was the case when, following Gomułka's deposition, the new First Secretary Edward Gierek, admitted that the striking shipyard workers were right. Moreover, after another wave of strikes in January and February 1971, he decided to withdraw price rise, which was the direct cause of the workers' protests. In 1980, similarly, Gierek's successor Stanisław Kania proclaimed that the strikes on the Baltic seaboard and in Silesia were justified protests of the working class against the abuses of socialism. In each case, the changes at the highest party and government level accompanied the proclamation of another "renewal" or "new policy".

The situation was different in 1976, when no changes at the top occurred, therefore there was no change of judgement of the workers' protests and their character. Yet another kind of perspective is in order when one looks at March'68. Primarily the other months – perhaps except '56 – were dominated by workers' protests, whereas in March we chiefly dealt with protests

of the intelligentsia: students and scientist, academics or artists. The Party, which called itself a "workers' party", eventually was able to admit that the protesting workers were right, but failed to do the same for the intellectuals and the young members of the intelligentsia (students).

In a certain sense, one specific feature of March'68 was the fact that – as in June'76 – there were practically no changes at the top of the regime, and the changes in the staff were not forced by students' protests and the anti-intelligentsia campaign, but were a result and anti-intelligentsia campaign in the party and the media. For example only two Politburo members left: Edward Ochab and Adam Rapacki. The former resigned as Chairman of the Council of State, the latter as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Both left at their request, thus protesting against the ongoing anti-Semitic purge.

Perhaps we should mention one more similarity between March '68 and June'76. In both cases the Party leaders, whose position (at least for some time) was undermined by the social protests, they would apply the same method to improve their mood. In many cities – contrary to public mood – rallies were organised to support the incumbent Party chief and his political line.

To these mass rallies, often organised during working hours, thousands of people were gathered, and their only task was to assure the "leader" of their absolute support. From this point of view, the almost religious slogans featured in photographs taken at the rally of the Party activists in the Warsaw Congres Hall of 19 March 1968: "We believe in you, Wiesław"[3], "If you're for Poland, you're for Gomułka", were practically identical with the Party activists' ovation for Gierek of 2 July 1976 at the Katowice hall, commonly called the "Saucer" (*Spodek*). It was then that the First Secretary's speech was interrupted by chanting: "Gierek–Party; Gierek–Party". The First Secretary joined them and "modestly" threw in: "Party–Poland!", but the activists would not relent and chanted back: "Gierek–Party! Party–Poland! Poland–Gierek!" In the second half of the 1970s the slogan became very popular among Party activists.

[3] Polish communists had a history of underground and illegal activity, banned before the war, and treated as enemy number one by the Nazi authorities, communist activists had pseudonyms, which often, as in this case, virtually became part of their names.

In no way could one compare these orchestrated ovation (for practically defeated party leaders) with the spontaneous cheers for Gomułka by the countless crowds outside the Warsaw Palace of Science and Culture. Let us also remark that after 1980, the First Secretaries of the Party's Central Committee did not (could not or did not want to – or perhaps both) permit such explosions of the "enthusiasm of the defeated", and a true enthusiasm of the masses – particularly after martial law – was not something that counted on.

When one discusses the social protests in the PRL, one certainly should point at their similarities. Namely, when one closely examines the course of the Poznań demonstrations of 28 June 1956, 14 December 1970 in Gdańsk, and 25 June 1976 in Radom, it is hard not to notice their similar course. In each case, the protests initially had a clearly economic character and in each case purely political demands would eventually appear. In all the three cases workers' processions (at this stage of the conflict always peaceful) would head for the provincial party headquarters.

The workers were absolutely right to assume that it was there, and not in the building of the local administration that the actual centres of power were. In each instance there were also attempts at vandalising, plundering and burning (in Gdańsk, Radom and on 17 December 1970 in Szczecin) the provincial party headquarters. One should make it abundantly clear that each time the peaceful protests, restricted to chanting slogans (initially only economic ones) and singing patriotic and religious songs (sometimes revolutionary ones) were quashed by the militia with exceptional brutality, which immediately escalated aggression on both sides. Usually the means employed by the authorities to quash the protests were incommensurate to their character and scope. It was no different in March'68 when the first peaceful rally at the Warsaw University campus was practically crushed with batons by militia men and functionary of the Volunteer Reserve of Citizens' Militia (ORMO).

Apparently it is not easy to define what the crisis in question was (or the crises). The task is made difficult further because at least two generations of Poles were taught in schools that the fundamental difference between socialism (communism) from capitalism was the crisis-free development of the state in the former. On such an interpretation, the PRL naturally was sup-

posed to have been developing smoothly and harmoniously, and the Party that ruled for over forty years looked like a monolith. There usually was no public mention of any divisions, wings, coteries, orientations, informal groups within the Party. At the same time, at least in the official interpretation of post-war Polish history, the political crises and social upheavals were never *de facto* appeared. Was it at all possible that something so totally alien to the practice of real socialism should take place?

This theory, however, did not match the practice. What kind of explanation could one provide for the living memory of the "Polish months", which were precisely dramatic manifestations of a crisis of power, had there not been socio-political upheavals? Let us remember that history is never made without people. All the crisis in the PRL – without exception – were thus entangled or got entangled by sizeable segments of society.

Meanwhile, it was hardly ever publicly mentioned that there were any social groups dissatisfied with the way things were. To the contrary, it was good tone in the propaganda to assure the powers that be about the unfailing and constant social support, and in the 1970s there were additional assurances of the "moral and political unity" of the nation. Naturally this had next nothing or simply nothing in common with the way things were, but it was not about reality, but the good mood of the rulers.

Did we, then, deal with crisis of the PRL regime, and if so, what were their causes and consequences? What kind of influence had the behaviour of large segments of society on the course of this type of phenomena? Did they and how affect the Poles? Finally, to what extent was this type of upheaval characteristic of Poland, and to what extent was it characteristic of other Warsaw Pact countries? In the last case, one could say outright that the periodic eruptions of popular discontent, sometimes violent, were specifically Polish. One should bear in mind that in 1956 the Hungarian crisis, and in 1968 the Czechoslovak crisis brought on incomparably deeper changes from the simultaneous events in Poland, and they hold a more important place in the history of Europe.

Also, the tragic revolt in the German Democratic Republic of 1953 had more resonance on the international arena than the individual "Polish months" – perhaps except the strike wave of summer 1980, which for sev-

eral weeks attracted the attention of the media all over the world. It is hard not to notice that the while quenching the social protests in the PRL the authorities could use the Soviet experience in pacifying the East German uprising of 1953 or the bloody workers' revolts in the Soviet Union itself.

In this book I shall try to answer all these questions as well as some others. I am aware, however, that definite, unequivocal, exhaustive and scholarly satisfying answers could be difficult and sometimes impossible. Given that the upheavals of 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980, and 1981 had been studied and the results (of varying merit) were published, I decided that there is no reason to discuss them here. In the first chapter I outlined the factography of the individual "Polish months". Later on I focused on their comparison and the differences between them.

In some cases I had to merely signal an issue, and quite often did I need to restrict myself to asking research questions. So far no such comparative studies were made; the issue of power crises in the PRL treated as a kind of continuum hardly ever was seriously discussed by historians. For this reason this book is a kind of pioneering study. It contains reflections and thoughts of many years of my studies on this subject.

The first order of business is to clarify the basic notions used here. In this study the notion of "crisis" is fundamental. In *Oxford English Dictionary* crisis is defined as: "A time of intense difficulty or danger ('the current economic crisis'); 2) A time when a difficult or important decision must be made ('the situation has reached crisis point'); 3) The turning point of a disease when an important change takes place, indicating either recovery or death". On the other hand, Polish dictionaries published before 1989 never mentioned any crisis in countries ruled by communists.

Furthermore, economic crises were described in terms of Marxist economics. This is hardly surprising becasue – as we have said – crises of power were hardly ever discussed in the PRL, and the very issue was practically absent or hardly ever appeared in publications that represented the Party's point of view.

I understand the term "crisis" in the PRL as identical with a political crisis, bearing in mind that it was usually accompanied by economic difficulties

and social upheavals. Thus these were temporary disruptions in the political system, detrimental from the point of view of the rulers (but not necessarily of the ruled!), usually combined with at least transient imbalance in the system, whose only centre of decision was the Central Committee of the Party. In practice, this meant that in moments of crisis, often new centres of power would appear, such as the Solidarity independent trade union in 1980, or those that at least for some time would become active before the eruption of the crisis and when it was over they would become dormant again, e.g. the Sejm.

There are two important turning points that one easily discern when one studies the crises and – more broadly – the political history of the PRL. The first one – the year 1980 and the birth of Solidarity, when it turned out that in Poland there was an enormous interest in unfalsified modern history. As a result historical studies of these issues were launched on a greater scale, whereas beforehand they were largely the domain of Party historians, favoured by the authorities. After 1980, there was a significant growth in the number of researchers who – in the light of censorship – were prepared to publish the results of their research abroad and Polish underground presses.

Another turning point is – naturally – the year 1989 and the systemic changes initiated at that time, which led, among others, to the liquidation of censorship and the opening of archives to an incomparably greater extent. Historians, quote understandably, initially focused on research into the first post-war decade, so the Stalinist period is now – undoubtedly – best studied. There are quite a few studies of the final decade of the PRL, some written by non-professional historians. Naturally this was connected with the phenomenon of Solidarity, and the dramatic circumstances of the martial law. Unfortunately, although over thirty years have passed since systemic changes began in Poland, we still have a limited number of reliable historical studies of the years 1956–1980 and, as a result, this period of PRL's history is the least researched, even though it was then that all the events that are called the "Polish months" took place.

1. “THE POLISH CALENDAR”

June 1956

The first social rebellion in the history of the Polish People’s Republic took place in Poznań in June 1956. One should not, however, forget the earlier bloody social and political protests in post-war Poland. Among them, primarily, the demonstrations of 3 May 1946 and the student strikes in the days that followed or the violence in Gdańsk’s harbour district of Nowy Port on 10 August of the same year.

Although the immediate causes of the June 1956 Poznań protests were economic, they only sparked off the events. Equally important was the deep sense of social injustice among many workers. The system, at least verbally, proclaimed universal equality but often reneged on these ideals in everyday practice. One should bear in mind that several years earlier, in the heyday of Stalinism in Poland, such a social rebellion would have been unthinkable.

Human and social scientists have often pointed out that revolutionary protests in different countries in different periods typically took place not when a given system was strictest and most repressive, but when the authorities were making more or less successful attempts to reform or liberalise it, which usually (at least temporarily) weakened the regime. That must have been the case in the Poland of 1956, when – particularly after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – the liberalisation and democratisation that was controlled from the top was gaining momentum.

This process, for some time peaceful and harmonious, was disrupted by violent worker protests in June in Poznań. The protests began in the largest

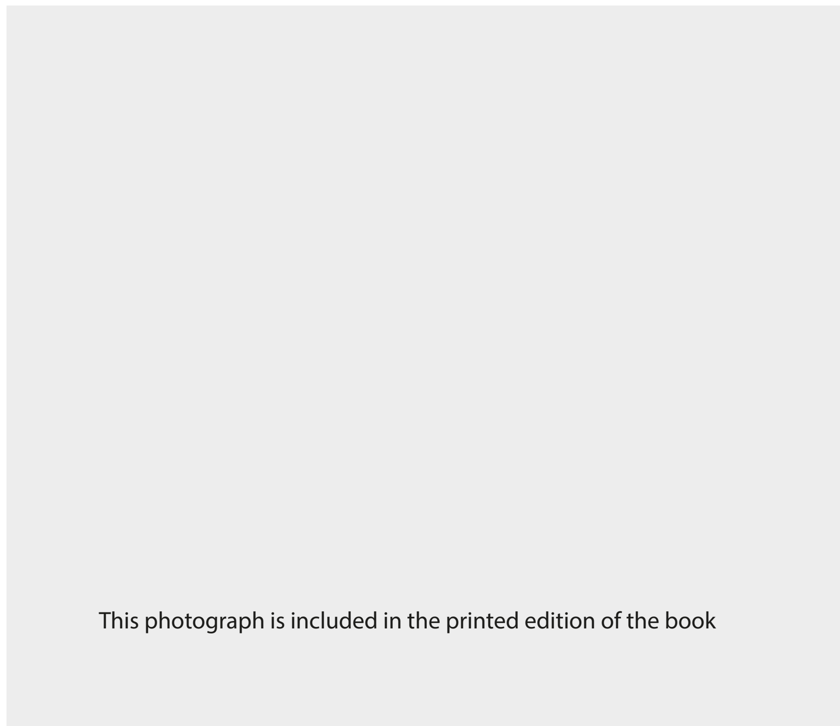
enterprise in the city – The Joseph Stalin Works (formerly and subsequently "Cegielski"). The workers rose in protest over the income tax (which was unfavourably calculated) and further demanded that the work norms (which resulted in lowered wages), and that money due for overtime be paid, that the Saturday work load be reduced to six hours and that safety, hygiene and work organisation standards be improved.

Initially, representatives of government and party authorities showed their understanding for these demands. But the minister of machine industry, Roman Fidelski, who arrived in the Stalin Works on 27 June, reneged on promises made the day before in Warsaw. The workers felt cheated and in the morning of 28 June laid down their tools. Since neither the management nor the party organisation had anything substantial to offer except slogans and appeals to resume work, the workers formed a tight procession and took to the streets, heading for the city centre and the buildings of the provincial committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR) and the nearby seat of the Municipal National Council.

Although – as mentioned above – the immediate causes of the protest were economic and social, there soon appeared a new very strong current of an unequivocally political nature. The demonstrators sang the national anthem, the *Rota*, with modified lyrics: "till into dust and ash the Russian windstorm falls", the religious song *God Thou Hast Poland* with the words "Please restore our free Fatherland, o Lord" instead of "Bless our free Fatherland, o Lord". Quite soon, even in the first stage of demonstration, red and white flags and makeshift banners appeared. Literally, with every passing minute, the determination of the protesters grew and the mood turned more and more radical.

To social and economic slogans such as: "We demand a pay rise", "We want to live decently", "We want bread", "Down with norms", "We're hungry" were soon added overtly anti-communist and anti-government slogans: "Down with the exploitation of workers", "Down with the red bourgeoisie", "We want freedom", "Down with Bolshevism", "Down with the communists", "We demand a free election under UN control" or even "Long live Mikołajczyk". Eventually anti-Russian and anti-Soviet shouts were heard: "Down with the Russians", "Down with the Russes", "Down with the Ruskies, we demand

a truly free Poland". Historian Paweł Machcewicz, who quoted all these slogans, was right to point out that "the classification of demands as economic and political serves an analytical purpose. In fact they very often appeared next to each other, thus forming a whole."



Street demonstration, Poznań, June 1956. Banner reads: "We want bread". (Institute of National Remembrance)

After 9 a.m. the crowd gathered in Stalin Square in the city centre (today Adam Mickiewicz Square) was estimated at 100,000, nearly a third of Poznań's inhabitants. Faced with the authorities' failure to respond, people began to plunder the seats of the local authorities. But truly destructive acts "erupted" only when the peaceful demonstrators were attacked with extreme brutality by the "forces of law and order". At one point a rumour that the worker's delegation was arrested circulated among the crowd. It was false, but a sub-

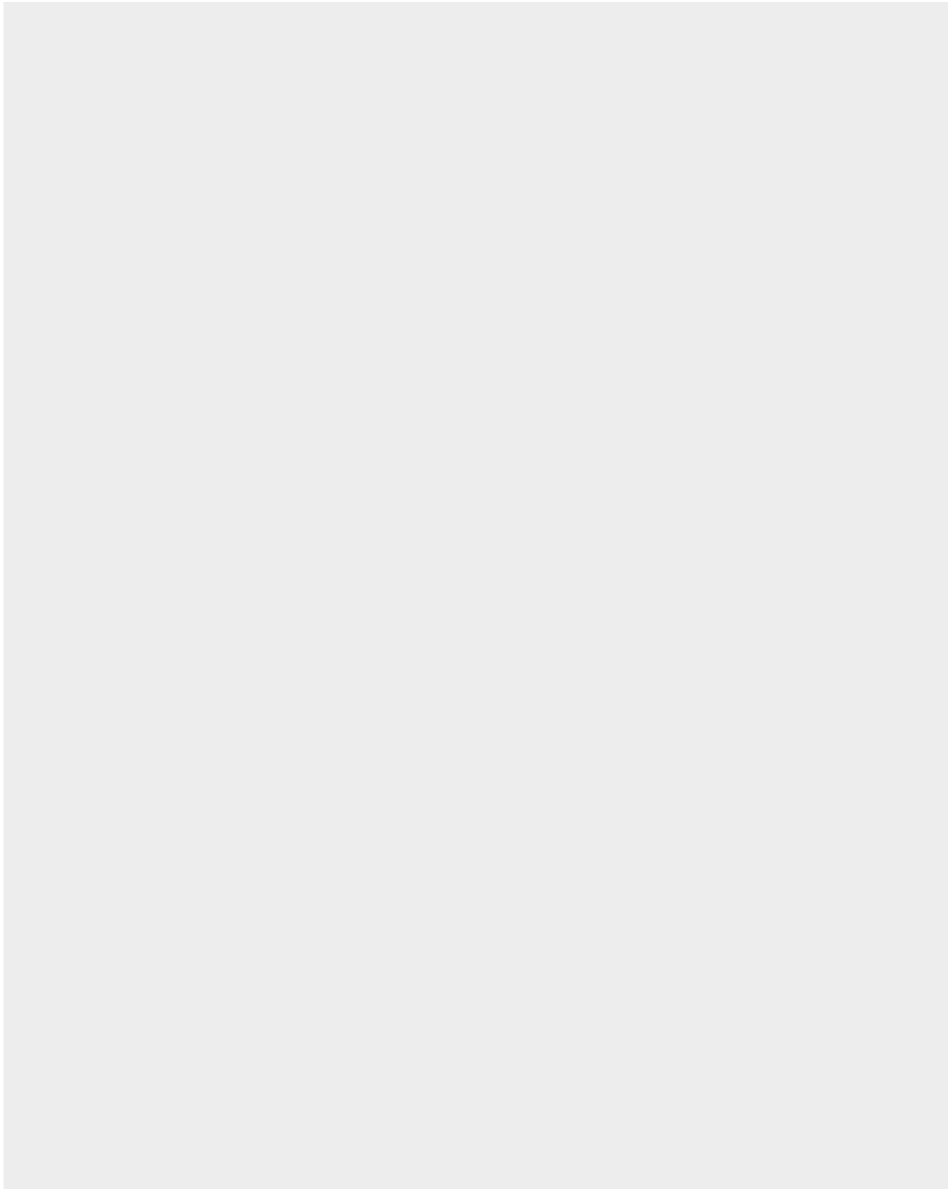
stantial part of demonstrators headed for the prison in Młyńska Street in order to free the "Cegielski men" supposedly detained there.

At the same time, another group made for the Provincial Office of State Security in Kochanowski Street. As they approached they were splashed with water from the windows by means of hydrant hoses. In response, the crowd threw stones at the building. At 10.40 a.m. the first shots were fired from a second-storey window of the besieged building, which naturally escalated the aggression of both the demonstrators and the state security functionaries.

Violent clashes erupted at a number of points all over the city. Molotov cocktails were used, but also firearms seized by demonstrators from Młyńska Street prison storerooms and from the student military training centres of the Higher School of Agriculture, Medical Academy and Poznań Polytechnic as well as from smaller Citizens' Militia stations. Within a several kilometre radius, groups of young people that had trucks and previously acquired weapons disarmed militia posts and stations, thus seizing from a few to over a dozen firearms in each case. According to the Security Office and Citizens' Militia, the demonstrators obtained a total of two hundred firearms ready for use, most of which were soon recovered by the authorities. Ninety-four people were subsequently charged with armed assault.

Although – as mentioned above – the immediate causes of the protest were economic and social, there soon appeared a new very strong current of an unequivocally political nature. The demonstrators sang the national anthem, the *Rota* with modified lyrics: "till into dust and ash the Russian windstorm falls", religious song *God Thou Hast Poland* with the words" "Please restore our free Fatherland, o Lord" instead of "Bless our free Fatherland, o Lord". Quite soon, even in the first stage of demonstration, red and white flags and makeshift banners appeared. Literally, with every passing minute, the determination of the protesters grew and the mood turned more and more radical.

As the PRL had no designated militia formations to intervene in such emergencies, the decision was made to deploy Polish Army units. The clashes, to a certain extent, took the form of a national uprising. After all, that was the sentiment of many participants and witnesses of those events. Furthermore, some of the demonstrators evoked – more or less consciously – the



This photograph is included in the printed edition of the book

Tanks in Poznań's city center, June 1956. (Jarosław Maciejewski, Zofia Trojanowicz, *Poznański czerwiec 1956*, Poznań 1981)

symbols and rhetoric of the Polish uprisings. Boys with Molotov cocktails in their hands, young men firing at the enemy – as state security was then commonly regarded – young girls as paramedics, patriotic songs, many Polish flags – all these images echoed in the minds of many as those from the Warsaw Uprising. Rumours of a nationwide uprising were heard, and the local state security building was one of the last remaining bastions of communist power.

The bloody clashes systematically intensified and threatened to spread to other parts of the country. The state and party authorities did, after all, regard the situation in Poznań as extremely serious, because they imposed a telecommunications blockade almost immediately, and deployed 10,000 troops to restore order; according to Edward Jan Nalepa, these soldiers had 359 tanks (31 of them destroyed or damaged in combat), 31 self-propelled guns, 6 anti-aircraft cannons, 30 armoured personnel carriers, 880 cars, 68 motorcycles and several thousand firearms. In an operation that lasted several dozen hours around 180,000 bullets were fired, mainly for machine guns, which demonstrates both that the decision to deploy troops was wrong and that the fighting was bitter.

Curfew was imposed on the city from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m., but fighting continued the following day. Single shots were heard around Poznań as late as Saturday 30 June, although troop withdrawal began on the same day. Nevertheless it should be stressed that fighting in the streets was carried out with unprecedented bitterness, unheard of in peace time. Antoni Dudek and Tomasz Marszałkowski aptly pointed out that "in terms of the number of people killed in such a short period in one city, only these were the most bloody clashes in the entire history of post-war Poland." Historians have established that no fewer than 73 people were killed in the clashes, with several hundred wounded.

October 1956

Even before the bloody events in Poznań, two informal groups had appeared in the PZPR leadership, which, were in bitter conflict with each other: the "Pulavians" and the "Natolinians". In both cases the name came from the

opposing orientations. The name of the first group comes from Puławska Street in Warsaw, where several prominent figures associated with this milieu lived. The "Natolinians", on the other hand, were named after a Council of Ministers' palace in Natolin in Warsaw's distant suburb, where some people, regarded as members of this faction, met sometimes.

To simplify, one might say that the "Natolinians" tried to shift the entire responsibility for Stalinism in Poland onto those associated with the "Pulavians". Much more than systemic change, they were interested in personal account-settling, which – given that there were quite a few people of Jewish origin – sometimes had anti-Semitic character. The "Natolinians" unofficially sought the support of the Soviet leadership and Soviet embassy in Poland. Sometimes they used populist, nationalist and xenophobic slogans.

The "Pulavians", on the other hand, regardless of their Stalinist past, were ardent supporters of liberalisation and democratisation and often appealed through their media contacts to society, particularly to university students, young workers and the intelligentsia. At the same time they frequently presented themselves as determined reformers, but their sincerity was sometimes questioned. Interestingly, those associated with either orientation eagerly spoke on the formation and functioning of the other group, and at the same time denied the existence of and their involvement in the faction they were associated with.

It should be emphasised that the outbreak of the worker uprising was quite a shock for members of both PZPR factions. Particularly surprising was the scale and its radical and anti-systemic character. The "Pulavians" were particularly worried that the violent revolt could disrupt the limited liberalisation and democratisation controlled from above.

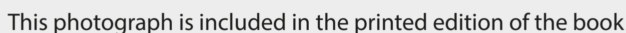
In the summer of 1956 both coteries semi-officially said that it was necessary to reinstate Gomułka, because – they thought – it would defuse the impending crisis. Gomułka, who was secretary general of the Polish Workers' Party (*Polska Partia Robotnicza*, PPR), later accused of "rightwing-reactionary deviation", stripped of party and state functions, and finally in 1951 arrested, which gave him the status of a victim of Stalinism in the eyes of a sizeable section of public opinion. Poles, in the majority, seemed not to realise that due to his earlier functions Gomułka was co-responsible for

everything that had happened in Poland in the early years of the People's Republic. For many of his compatriots he was primarily a prisoner of Stalinism and the only Polish communist who opposed Stalin in 1948.

There is substantial body of evidence to show that Gomułka's status in society was further strengthened by the dramatic circumstances of his return to power during the Eighth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in October 1956. From Lower Silesia in south--western Poland and Pomerania in the north Soviet military columns were heading toward the heart of the country. At the same time on the move were Polish Army units under the command of Soviet Marshal and Poland's Minister of Defence Konstantin Rokossovsky. The atmosphere was further heated by various rumours and hearsay, many of which are difficult to verify today.

When it was announced that Gomułka would lead the Party after the plenum, on 19 October in the morning a Soviet delegation of the CPSU Presidium headed by Secretary General of the Central Committee, Nikita Khrushchev, arrived unannounced by air in Warsaw. Throughout the dramatic high-level Polish-Soviet talks in the Belvedere, which continued overnight until 20 October, mass rallies of support for the policy of the Party, embodied in the eyes of the masses by Gomułka were interrupted at the Warsaw Polytechnic and at the Automobile Factory in Żerań in the north--eastern part of the city.

The mood in Warsaw was militant. There were even rumours, fortunately false, that firearms would be distributed among sympathisers of the "Polish October Revolution" so that they could stand up against the oncoming Soviets. These were indeed dramatic moments, when provocations were likely and their consequences virtually unpredictable. Ultimately, the PZPR leadership convinced the "Soviet comrades" that Gomułka was a good communist and a true friend of the Soviet Union. According to some historians, the stance taken by the Chinese leadership was of certain import, as it opposed Soviet plans of military intervention in Poland. Ultimately, the Kremlin decided not to intervene and on the morning of 20 October the Soviet delegation flew back to Moscow and approved "Wiesław's" appointment as First Secretary of the Party's Central Committee.



Władysław Gomułka speaking to the crowd gathered on Plac Defilad in Warsaw, October 1956. (Getty Images)

On the same day he delivered a historic speech, broadcasted on the radio in which he condemned the crimes and injustice of the Stalinist period. The following day he was elected First Secretary, a fact immediately announced by the Polish Radio and over an hour later by special editions of the newspapers, distributed by students and young workers. In those days Gomułka enjoyed such a great popular support and trust, exceeding by a great margin that enjoyed by any other communist, before or after. For millions he was a true national hero, a man who stood up to Khrushchev this time around.

Three days later, on 24 October, a rally in front of the Palace of Culture and Science was attended by tens of thousands of people. Gomułka delivered a brief speech, in which he again condemned the "perversions of the previous period", and spoke of Poland's sovereignty, on partnership-based relations with the Soviet Union, on restitution of harms done, but he also

made an appeal: “Enough rallies, enough demonstrations. It is time to go to daily work.” The immediate political crisis was now over, but many were reluctant to acknowledge this and awaited further changes, the “second stage” of the October.

Nevertheless for some time yet Poland saw changes, which most people found beneficial. Spontaneous de-collectivisation of agriculture was taking place, Marshal Rokossovsky and Soviet officers and advisors left Poland and a temporary liberalisation of censorship was introduced. There was a marked improvement in the Church–state relations, whose most visible sign was the return of Poland’s primate, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, from Komańcza after three years of internment. But at that time the events in Poland paled in comparison with the Hungarian uprising and its brutal pacification by Soviet troops.

It should be added that in December 1956, after a series of dramatic street demonstrations in Warsaw, Płock, Olecko, Bydgoszcz and Szczecin, the riot militia formation was established – the ZOMO (*Zmotoryzowane Odwody Milicji Obywatelskiej*, Motorised Reserves of Citizens’ Militia). It was equipped with helmets, long batons, shields, tear gas grenades and water cannons, and often referred to as “Golędzinów” where the formation had its barracks. In the “Polish months” to follow it was the ZOMO that was deployed to deal with demonstrators.

March 1968

This term refers to several different, not necessarily connected and sometimes even mutually exclusive and contradictory currents. Furthermore, depending on who looked later at March’68 and why, they took from it primarily those aspects that were most closely related to themselves and their milieu at that time. Thus those who emigrated from Poland after the March events, most often recall the shameful anti-Semitic campaign, which the authorities unsuccessfully tried to camouflage as a campaign against Zionism.

Interestingly, a substantial percentage of those emigrants seems to have succumbed to this propaganda campaign, which denied them their right to be Poles. Many of those who regarded themselves as Poles and declared

their attachment to Polish nationality, would later prefer to say "I am from Poland" to "I am a Pole". Some emigrants from long-assimilated families, precisely in 1968 – when faced with an anti-Semitic campaign – began to return to their Jewish roots. Others would gradually cease to feel Polish, but their sense of Jewishness did not necessarily grow.

For those who were students in 1968, this aspect student protests were usually the most important, and thus contributed if not stimulated the formation of the Polish "Generation'68". Student rallies, strikes and demonstrations have left a most lasting mark. Many see March'68 as an event that had an enormous influence on their later life. Let it be added that this current of "March events" seems to be best researched today. It is known that Polish students of 1968 stood up under slogans of freedom and employed leftist phraseology. Their primary objective was democracy and a liberalisation of the system, and the right to live truthfully. Hence, perhaps, one of the most popular slogans of that time: "Papers lie!"

One should bear in mind that the March protests contributed to the formation of what may be called "Generation'68". Many members of this generation were active in democratic opposition in the 1970s and after August 1980 were activists and advisors of "Solidarity". When the political system changed they took important public positions: MPs, senators, government ministers. These people often consider March'68 to be the most important experience of their lives, and truth – to be the utmost value.

On the other hand, many representatives of cultural, academic and artistic milieus even many years later saw March'68 chiefly as an anti-intelligentsia pogrom, where mass media unprecedentedly attacked writers and scholars identified by name, some of them men of great achievement and merit. As one reads newspapers from those days, one is astonished to find how much space was devoted to rebellions of intellectuals, and what all these publications have in common is that their authors, following party activists, denied the intellectuals not only ideological and moral values but professional qualifications as well. At the same time people were promoted whose advancement was due not so much to their abilities and hard work but to political loyalty.

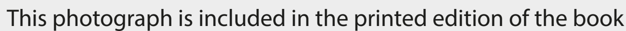
To these currents of March'68 one should add the struggle of the Party leadership with "revisionists among intellectuals, who consistently supported

liberalisation and democratisation of the system, as well as actions that liquidated the many achievements of October'56 in culture, art and science and the secret and opaque inter faction games in the Party leadership. Behind the scenes, three factions within the Party fought for political influence: one, the so-called "partisans" whose patron was the minister of internal affairs, General Mieczysław Moczar, the second – Władysław Gomułka's group and Edward Gierek's "Silesians". This aspect – despite the time interval and the number of documents made available to historians – is still inadequately researched and described. There are still many suppositions, intellectual combinations and hypotheses that are difficult to verify.

The roots of "March'68" might be found in the events of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when it was becoming clear that Gomułka's team were withdrawing from the more liberal policies of "October'56". Conflicts between intellectuals and administrators of intellectual life gradually multiplied and intensified. Again, although fortunately on a scale not comparable with Stalinism the authorities resorted to police and administrative measures and began to counterattack the rebellious elements among the intellectuals more vigorously.

At the same time, in the mid-1960s baby boomers were coming of age that is people who grew up and received their education in People's Poland. The point of reference for their aspirations and dreams could not have been the Second Polish Republic, which they did not see for obvious reasons, but western countries they read about or saw in films or on the increasingly popular television. Young people – as far as possible – tried to look as their peers in the West: boys had long hair, girls wore miniskirts. They listened to western singers and rock bands, mainly on Radio Luxembourg very popular at that time and the local Polish Rozgłośnia Harcerska (Scouting Radio).

At certain naiveté and the lack of political imagination of the youth was cynically and instrumentally exploited by the "partisans" gathered around General Moczar. They owed this name to the fact that many of them, including their leader, had fought in communist partisan units during World War II. There is substantial evidence that in 1968 they skilfully played their hand with respect to a production of Adam Mickiewicz's play *Dziady* (Forefathers) at Warsaw's National Theatre directed by Kazimierz Dejmek. The authorities claimed that



Smartly dressed young women imitating western fashion styles, Warsaw, 1971. (Polish Press Agency, photo Marek Bierut)

during the performances members of the audience shouted anti-Russian or even anti-Soviet slogans, which was quite absurd, as Mickiewicz had written it over 80 years before the Soviet Union was established.

The last performance of *Dziady* was staged on 30 January after which a group of students of Warsaw University and the Academy for the Dramatic Arts organised a street demonstration in order to protest against the authorities' decision to suspend the play. After the performance a procession of about 200–300 people displayed banners with slogans: "We want Mickiewicz's truth" and "We demand more performances". Some demonstrators

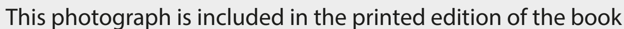
chanted: “We want freedom without censorship”, “Abolish censorship” and “Mickiewicz–Dejmek”.

The procession headed towards the nearby Mickiewicz monument, where white and red flowers and one of the banners were laid. When the demonstration was practically over the militia stepped in a dispersed the demonstrators with clubs. People were picked up, most of them young. A total of 35 people were arrested. Nine demonstrators, deemed most aggressive and charged with breach of public peace were tried by Punitive and Administrative Boards and severely fined.

Several weeks later two Warsaw University students, Adam Michnik and Henryk Szlajfer, were expelled in violation of the law. Among the charges, some of which were not very reasonable, was this one: the day after the last performance of *Dziady* they informed a foreign press correspondent about the street demonstration and the brutal militia intervention. This piece of news re-circulated in the country due to Radio Free Europe.

Colleagues of the two expelled students stood up in solidarity and on 8 March organised a rally in their defence on the University campus, when they also condemned the suspension of *Dziady* and expressed support for the resolution of the extraordinary General Assembly of the Warsaw Branch of the Polish Writers’ Union of 29 February, which criticised this decision and – generally – the cultural policy of the PRL authorities. When the rally was virtually over, the protesters were attacked with clubs by the so-called “workers-activists” and riot units of the Citizens’ Militia.

The conflict, which apparently could have been headed off by political means took on a dramatic turn, which, fortunately, did not turn bloody. The rally triggered a wave of student protests, which continued for three weeks in almost all higher institutions all over Poland. Young people joined the protests as well (particularly the street demonstrations), among them high school students and young workers. Street clashes between young people and the “forces of law and order” erupted then in the following academic centres: Warsaw, Gdańsk, Gliwice, Katowice, Cracow, Lublin, Łódź, Poznań, Szczecin and Wrocław. In many other cities, including Białystok, Bydgoszcz, Olsztyn, Opole and Toruń, rallies were held in campuses, resolutions were passed, but there were no street clashes.



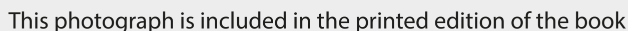
Demonstration outside Warsaw University library, 8 March 1968. (Institute of National Remembrance)

Demonstrations and clashes with “forces of order” took place in four other cities, which did not yet have higher education institutions: Bielsko-Biała, Legnica, Radom and Tarnów. Demonstrations and violent street clashes were an exceptional form of supporting the student movement in the provinces. On the other hand, distribution of leaflets, writing graffiti, which the authorities deemed subversive, took place in several hundred towns and cities in Poland.

At the same time, a wave of rallies organised by the authorities – usually during working hours – swept the country to condemn “troublemakers” and “political bankrupts”, who were allegedly hiding behind “disoriented and dazzled” students. The rallies also saw anti-Semitic slogans.

In the days to follow PZPR activists more or less explicitly expressed support for Gomułka. There was a parallel political purge in the party apparatus,

government offices – both central and local, the army, mass media, schools, health service, academic and cultural milieus – practically all spheres of public life. People of Jewish origin (obviously not only), were blamed for all failures and mistakes and primarily – for the crimes and infractions of the Stalinist period in Poland. In such an atmosphere over 15,000 people emigrated after March'68 over a period of a few years.

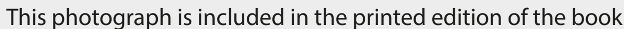


Workplace rally. Next to slogans of support for the Party ("Always with the Party", "We support the policy of peace and progress"), there are banners that condemn hooligans ("Glory to the learners, lashes for the hooligans"), as well as those that call for eliminating Jews, now branded "Zionists", from the Party ("Purge the Party of the Zionists!"). (Polish Press Agency, photo Tomasz Gawalkiewicz)

Although Gomułka's position was undermined in the wake of March'68, he did stay in power. Undoubtedly international events helped him and – paradoxically the Prague Spring in particular. From the outset Gomułka showed reserve towards this reformist experiment, directed at democratisation and liberalisation of the system and creating "socialism with a human face". He believed that this "revisionist plague" threatened Poland and was

afraid that the West, exploiting the unstable political situation in Czechoslovakia, would try to “pick it out from the socialist community”.

It should be borne in mind that the Federal Republic of Germany had not yet officially recognised the western post-war border of Poland on the Oder and Neisse rivers and was simply afraid that Germany could try to (even by armed force) to sever from Poland its western and northern regions. So



Polish troops in Czechoslovakia, summer 1968. The caption “Welcome to Hradec Králové” was probably meant to greet and welcome. The Polish troops that marched in to pacify the country made it sound politically ironic. (The National Digital Archives)

alongside the East German leader Walther Ulbricht he was the most active and ardent proponent among communist leaders who tried to persuade CPSU General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev that it was necessary to stop “counterrevolution” in Czechoslovakia.

At a Political Bureau session the First Secretary minced no words and expressed his disappointment with what Moscow was doing: “The Soviets do all this in velvet gloves. If we had our way, I would have crushed them

a long time ago. [...] This process is leading to Czechoslovakia's exit from our camp. I see difficulties with bringing troops currently. The Soviet side have the right [to do so – transl.], because they had liberated Czechoslovakia, thousands of their soldiers died, and offered economic aid. [...] We can tell the Soviets they we would bring our troops in, because our safety is at stake. To hell with sovereignty! And if they don't want it, let them desist."

Eventually late at night on 20 August Warsaw Pact troops launched military intervention in Czechoslovakia. The first echelon of invading troops was up to 250,000 strong, with 4,200 tanks; together with the second echelon the invaders had a total of ca. 450,000 soldiers and around 6,500 tanks. Operation "Danube", as it was named, deployed among others an army under General Florian Siwicki. The Polish contingent was composed of 24,341 officers and soldiers, 647 tanks, 566 transporters, 191 guns and haulage vehicles, 84 antitank guns, 96 antiaircraft guns, 4798 vehicles and 36 helicopters. Never and nowhere after World War II had Polish troops been involved outside Poland on such a scale. Similar means were used only to crush the workers revolt on the seaboard in December 1970 and even greater during Martial Law in 1981.

December 1970

In December 1970 Poland was shaken by another deep socio-political crisis. As early as some years before more and more people saw that the political, social and economic model promoted by Gomułka's entourage was progressively running out of steam. The authorities wished to stop and reverse these unfavourable trends, so they prepared a limited economic reform, the integral element of which was a drastic price rise for a variety of goods, including foodstuffs, introduced only eleven days before Christmas.

It has been no secret that at that time of year Poles traditionally purchase larger quantities of better quality food, which is more expensive. In any case, people were not officially told about it until the night before, when the stores were already closed and it was impossible to buy a supply of goods at the previous, lower prices. Naturally people were aware that the "price operation" – as it was officially called – affected mainly the poorest families. Nonetheless, even before the price rise many households were trying to make ends meet.

Still before the price raise, on 7 December Gomułka achieved his greatest foreign policy success. That day in Warsaw the PRL and FRG signed a treaty that laid the foundations of mutual relations, in which Germany officially recognised the post-war Polish border in the West on the Oder and the Neisse rivers. Although there is no direct evidence that this diplomatic success was to sweeten the bitter price rise as the authorities surmised – such opinions were often heard.

Regardless of what really happened, the rise directly triggered violent worker protests in several cities on the northern seaboard. The first to go on strike (on 14 December) was the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk, where the workers demanded that the price be withdrawn. Since the management was not in a position to meet the demands, several hours later the workers formed a procession and headed for the PZPR Provincial Committee building. On the way they were joined by random people, primarily young people. The demonstrators sang patriotic, religious songs, but also revolutionary ones (*The Internationale* and *People's Guard March*). They wanted to talk to the First Secretary of the Provincial Committee Alojzy Karkoszka, who was then in Warsaw at the Sixth Plenum. The disgruntled crowd, with virtually no one to talk to, having achieved nothing in front of the Committee building, went roaming on the streets of Gdańsk for the next few hours.

The demonstrators wanted as much publicity as possible, so they shouted more and more radical slogans, but without damaging or destroying anything. As they were returning peacefully to the party building, minutes before 4 p.m. they were suddenly attacked by the Błędnik bridge with petards and tear gas grenades. It should be stressed that it happened almost ten hours (sic!) after the Lenin Shipyard strike began and nearly five hours after the protesters took to the streets.

Clearly, both local and central (Warsaw) authorities had had enough time to start talks with the protesters. Apparently, however, that is not what they wanted or they were unwilling to do. After all, genuine social dialogue was alien to the practice of the real socialism. It was not the first time and, unfortunately, not the last in PRL history that it was easier to deploy militia and troops against workers than to start serious talks with them. Violent street-fighting erupted in the city centre and continued until late at night.

Violent street fighting in Szczecin, 17 December 1970. (The National Digital Archives, photo Andrzej Wituszyński)

This photograph is

included in the printed edition of the book

That day the militia did not use firearms; there were no fatalities, but there were several dozen wounded.

The following day the protests intensified. At a number of points around the city there were clashes with the "forces of order", which this time fired live ammunition. In the morning, shipyard workers appeared in the streets, formed a procession and headed for the provincial headquarters of the militia, because they were certain to find there those people arrested the day before. It was near the militia building in Świerczewski Street [today: Nowe Ogrody], where the fighting took a particularly violent turn and the first people were killed. Aggression intensified on both sides. In front of the Central Station several militia cars and electrical postal trolleys were set on fire.

Later the demonstrators set fire to the seat of the local party authorities. Naturally, only a small part of the crowd, estimated at over 20,000 people, was engaged in it. The majority, of bystanders, never went beyond encouraging those most active with their shouts. Many rejoiced when the building was set ablaze, as it was a symbol of a much hated system. When fire continued climbing the Party headquarters, Gdańsk dwellers branded it "the Reichstag", the desperate crowd did not left fire engines through. On 15 December troops with machine guns and heavy equipment moved in. Despite that (or perhaps *because* of that) street fighting in the city continued practically throughout the day. At least seven people died, several hundred were wounded and around five hundred demonstrators were detained.

The following morning, when Lenin Shipyard workers were trying to leave in procession from gate 2, they were fired upon by soldiers and militia that were blockading the plant. According to official reports, two people were killed and eleven wounded in the incident. The workers pulled back into the plant, where they proclaimed an occupation strike, which was nevertheless broken within several hours.

Meanwhile the strike spread to other cities in the north of the country: Elbląg, Gdynia, Słupsk and Szczecin, where the street fighting was most violent. It should be stressed here than before 17 December there had been no street demonstrations, robberies or cases of arson. But from 17 December onwards Szczecin, the capital of the region of Western Pomerania, was slowly turning into the centre of social protest. In the morning of that day the work-

ers of Adolf Warski Shipyard formed a procession and left through a gate – just as their Gdańsk colleagues – and headed for the Provincial Committee of the PZPR. The first violent clash took place near Dubois Street, where the militia brutally attacked the demonstrators, who then burned a militia jeep, seriously injuring the men inside.

Meanwhile, the crowd outside the Party headquarters grew continuously and a tense atmosphere persisted. Faced with the threat of fire in the building, the First Secretary of the Provincial Committee Antoni Walaszek decided to evacuate the building. Curiously enough, before violent clashes in the area with the "forces of order" erupted, soldiers did not try to prevent plunder or even attempts to set fire to the Party headquarters. Furthermore, there was some fraternising between the soldiers and shipyard workers. Undoubtedly, the soldiers allowed them to put banners on their armoured vehicles, which read: "We demand a pay rise" or "We support the shipyard workers of Gdańsk and Gdynia".

The situation outside the Party headquarters was becoming more and more dramatic. As was the case in Gdańsk, the crowd estimated at over 20,000 people blocked the firemen, allowing only pouring water on the adjacent building as a preventive measure. Neither army units deployed to defend the area nor riot militia detachments were able to seize control. Andrzej Zieliński, at that time an army lawyer, remembered a telephone conversation between Colonel Henryk Ziemiański, who was inside the burning building, the commander of the 12th Division with his deputy for political matters, Colonel Zdzisław Drewniowski: "I heard the dramatic shout of a telephone operator: 'Save yourselves! We're on fire. I'll never forget this shouting'. Then Colonel Drewniowski [...] began hammering: 'Colonel Ziemiański, I order [you] to open fire'. In reply I heard: „Citizen Colonel, I refuse to carry out the order'. And then we heard: 'Who the fuck do I fire at, there are women and children'".

However, the most tragic events of that day took place in Gdynia, where – though there had been no street fighting, robberies or arson either – a veritable massacre took place. At least 18 people were killed. What became a symbol of the tragic December events in Gdynia was a procession of people filmed and photographed, who carried on a door the body of a young man who had

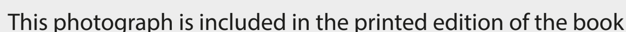
just been killed and a blood – stained white and red flag. This man became a legend as the titular hero of the *Ballad of Janek Wiśniewski*, even though there was no such man. The ballad's author, Krzysztof Dowgiałło, chose the first name and the surname purposely: both were extremely popular so – perhaps as with the unknown soldier – he meant to create a symbolic figure. There was the Janek Wiśniewski that we know of (and he has a street in Gdynia named after him), but at the same time there were or there could have been the actual person who might have been of no consequence. One could add that the famous photograph shows the 18-year-old Zbigniew Godlewski shot that morning near the train stop Gdynia-Stocznia (Gdynia-Shipyard).

From 14 to 19 December, in several cities (not only in the North, but also in Białystok, Cracow and Wałbrzych) at least tens of thousands of people took part – in one way or another – in the clashes. These were often very violent, and the value of damage exceeded 400,000,000 zlotys. 19 public buildings were damaged, including the provincial Party committees in Gdańsk and Szczecin.

To pacify the protests in the North, the authorities deployed 27,000 troops, 550 tanks, 750 armoured vehicles and 2,100 cars. Furthermore, 108 helicopters and 40 navy ships were mobilised. "Together with forces transferred to designated areas but not used in action, and counting groups put at the disposal of the local authorities for the internal protection of buildings in substantial parts of the country, about 61,000 soldiers, 1,700 tanks, 1,750 armoured vehicles and 8,700 motorcars."

Apart from the Martial Law of 1981–1982, never had the Polish Army been put in a state of combat readiness or deployed on such a scale in order to restore public order. In the context of the means applied then, the number of victims of that national tragedy for years has given rise to doubt. Many were certain that the number of deaths must have been higher than officially published. After all, according to official reports there were 45 dead and 1,165 wounded in December 1970.

To the number of soldiers one should add at least 9,000 militia men Security Service functionaries and the Volunteer Reserve Militia (*Ochotnicza Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej*, ORMO), prison guards or even the fire brigade, who were mobilised and deployed. A total of 150,000 chemi-



This photograph is included in the printed edition of the book

Photographer Edmund Pepliński captured a procession of shipyard workers carrying on a door the body of Zbigniew Godlewski, killed that day, 17 December 1970. (FORUM, photo Edmund Pepliński)

cal charges were issued, and the troops (I do not have the data of the militia and security services) fired nearly 46,000 weapons of different calibres and types.

Even if one allows for the "missing" ammunition, and if most of the bullets were blanks or tracer bullets, the figure is still shocking. But one might look at it from a different point of view. The amounts were several times smaller than the amounts used in the pacification of the Poznań worker uprising in June 1956, which seems to have come from a different conception of use of troops in such situations. As was said above, in the mid-1950s Poland did not have special militia formations, trained to disperse street demonstrations. Since there were no such militia formations, in order to regain control over the city the authorities deployed soldiers, who had not been trained to

carry out police tasks, and as a result often fired their weapons at random, at anything they deemed a threat.

In December 1970, the main burden of fighting the demonstrators fell to militia functionaries with helmets, long truncheons, chemicals and firearms. Polish Army detachments were present with heavy units and were not limited to the troops' presence on the streets. The Ministry of National Defence provided the Ministry of Internal Affairs with transport planes and vehicles for troop transport.

Although the most dramatic events took place on the northern seaboard, between 14 and 20 December other parts of the country saw "work interruptions" in 37 industrial plants and factories, with almost 22,300 participating. Mieczysław F. Rakowski wrote years ago: "Throughout the country the operation of distributing leaflets, slogans and graffiti critical of the PZPR and calling for rallies and demonstrations to be organised. There was a real danger that the following week will create a situation that would get out of hand. Poland faced the threat of chaos and bloodshed on a massive scale". Only on 19 December around 100 enterprises were on strike, in 7 provinces out of 17).

It seems, however, that these figures are too low, because only in the Szczecin agglomeration, where the protests were most organised, around 120 enterprises went on strike or organised solidarity action. A body of real power in the city was established – the Municipal Strike Committee with its seat in the Adolf Warski Shipyard. No wonder then that in those days the deputy member of the Political Bureau, Central Committee Secretary Jan Szydlak spoke of a Szczecin republic.

It should be remembered that the violent protests were accompanied, behind the scenes, by a political struggle within the Party leadership. It involved a group of activists of the highest and middle levels, who as early as 15 or 16 December decided that in order to pacify the situation in Poland it was necessary, among others, to replace the First Secretary of the PZPR. Operating clandestinely, and at the same time backed by the Kremlin the "conspirators" instigated a political crisis. On Friday night the head of the Administrative Department Stanisław Kania and the deputy minister of internal affairs Franciszek Szlachcic visited Edward Gierek in his house and persuaded him that he should replace Gomułka as Party leader.

Following the Saturday meeting of the Politburo, without Gomułka, whose health had deteriorated and was taken to hospital, and on Sunday 20 December an urgent Central Committee Plenum convened. There was only one item on the agenda – to replace the First Secretary. Gomułka, who was stepping down in infamy, was replaced by a Politburo member and First Secretary of the Katowice Provincial Party Committee, Edward Gierek. This change, which ended the bloodiest phase of the crisis, was forced both by social protests and the power struggle within the Party leadership. After another wave of strikes in January and February 1971, the authorities called off the December price rise.

June 1976

Due to the relatively limited time span (in fact one day: 25 June 1976) and a small area (Radom, Ursus, Płock) June'76 had long remained in the shadow of other "Polish months" and its first monograph was published only recently. It should be emphasised that in political and social terms the first half of the 1970s was one of the quietest periods in the entire history of the PRL. It was, primarily, a result of a perceivable improvement in the standard of living of many Poles.

However, at least after 1975 it became clear that the greater consumption appetite of Poles could not be satisfied in the long term. Thus the authorities were trying to improve the deteriorating economic situation by substantially increasing the prices of most foodstuffs (much higher than in December 1970), as announced in the Sejm by Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz. In practice, the increase, which again was the immediate cause of worker protests, was already being implemented, as the guidelines and instructions containing new prices already had been sent in sealed bags to all 49 provinces.

The price of the "strategic article", which included meat and its products in the PRL, was to rise by 69 per cent, poultry by 30 per cent, butter and dairy products by 50 per cent, sugar – by as much as 100 per cent. In order to alleviate the consequences of this increase, financial compensation was envisaged, but the authorities' proposition was extremely unfair. Those with the lowest income (under 1300 zlotys a month) were to receive 260 zlotys,

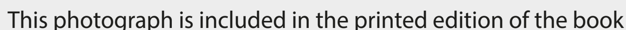
while those with highest income (over 8000 zlotys) – even as much as 600 zlotys. The authorities displayed unprecedented arrogance or, simply, political stupidity by proposing such a solution to a society, which for years (be it only verbally) had been accustomed to the principles of social justice. It seems that this tipped the scales and ignited the worker protest.

On the morning of 25 June, the workers of the General Walter Metal Works in Radom went on strike. After a rally, which went on for less than an hour, soon after 8 a.m. a procession of some thousand people formed and marched out. Some of the demonstrators rode on electric trolleys. These overloaded vehicles, full of young men waving the Polish flags, became a symbol of the Radom revolt.

The telephone lines at the "Walter" Works were then cut off from the city. Moreover, the "ZOMO riot formation was mobilised on an emergency footing and placed on full combat alert" and so was the Part-Time Reserve of Citizens' Militia (*Nieetatowe Odwody Milicji Obywatelskiej*, NOMO), traditionally composed of older functionaries and militia men brought in from stations in smaller towns and hamlets. Traffic control in vital points around the city was reinforced, and a "riding group" was sent out to document the events. This type of civilian functionary (not only in 1976) is discussed at greater length in chapter four.

According to records of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych*, MSW) there were 54 "work interruptions" all over the country: in the Warsaw and Szczecin provinces 9 each, in the Elbląg, Gdańsk, Łódź and Płock provinces – 4 each, and 3 in the Radom province. The provincial militia commands immediately undertook "necessary action aimed at neutralising the emerging conflicts in enterprises" and sent Security Service (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*, SB) to factories, where in the authorities' assessment protests were most likely.

Meanwhile in Radom, before 10 a.m. a crowd of around 6,000 began to gather outside the Provincial Committee in 1 Maja Street. The demonstrators demanded to see First Secretary of the Provincial Committee Janusz Prokopiak, who refused to speak to them and offered to talk with a delegation of workers. The workers rejected the offer, because they feared provocation and that the delegates might be arrested. At the same time the MSW decided to send a column of trucks with a ZOMO riot company from Golędzinów to Radom.



This photograph is included in the printed edition of the book

Protesters riding an electric cart, Radom, 25 June 1976. (Institute of National Remembrance)

Furthermore, a decision was made to send militia in reinforcements from Łódź, Kielce, Lublin and to airlift students of the Militia Officers' School in Szczytno in north-eastern Poland. These forces were armed with water cannons. An additional transport of chemicals was also sent to Radom. But before these reinforcements arrived, some demonstrators stormed the Party headquarters, where they soon started plundering.

One group reached the canteen, where they found canned ham and smoked meat, unseen around the city for a long time. Eventually the plunder and demolition gained momentum: rugs, furniture and TV sets were thrown out of the windows. The Party headquarters was eventually set ablaze, but it is still unknown who did it: one of the demonstrators, a provocateur, ordinary hooligans or plain-clothes functionaries who were in the building. The role of provocation or provocateurs in the "Polish months" is discussed later.

It is sufficient to mention that in the afternoon a small group of civilians appeared in Żeromski Street, who – undisturbed by the militia – methodi-

cally smashed displays of shops, which were later plundered and robbed. This went on for nearly two hours, but – interestingly – these vandals usually did not take anything from the displays. Krzysztof Gniadek, one of the participants of the revolt, recalled many years later: "I saw [it] myself. A man in a suit, blue shirt, black shoes, with an attaché case was strolling along. Then he stopped. Laid the case down, took out a brick, threw it in the window, turned around and walked away in the opposite direction".

Meanwhile, after 2.30 p.m. the ZOMO riot militia was deployed. Violent street-fighting began. The functionaries with long truncheons, tear gas grenade launchers and water cannons attempted to disperse the crowd. The demonstrators threw rocks at the charging militia, put up street barricades and bombarded the militia headquarters with Molotov cocktails (containing not only petrol but also inflammable liquids). Cars in the Party committee car park were burned, so were the building of the Provincial Office and the Passport Bureau of the Provincial Command of the Citizens' Militia.

Vehicles were burning in the streets (including a fire engine sent there to put out the fire in the provincial Party committee). Barricades sprang up in the streets. Helicopters constantly patrolled the city area, monitoring and filming the demonstrators. At the same time, hundreds of photographs for "operational purposes" were taken by plain-clothes functionaries, who had blended in with the crowd. The street fighting continued for several hours, with nearly 1,600 uniformed and several dozen plain-clothes functionaries and was very violent.

Unlike in December 1970, only the militia was deployed to suppress street demonstrations, mostly without (i.e. except the officers) firearms. As a result, no one was shot, and the only fatalities of the Radom street clashes were Jan Łabęcki and Tomasz Ząbecki, who died when a tractor trailer with concrete slabs crushed them when they attempted to push it down a street on approaching militiamen.

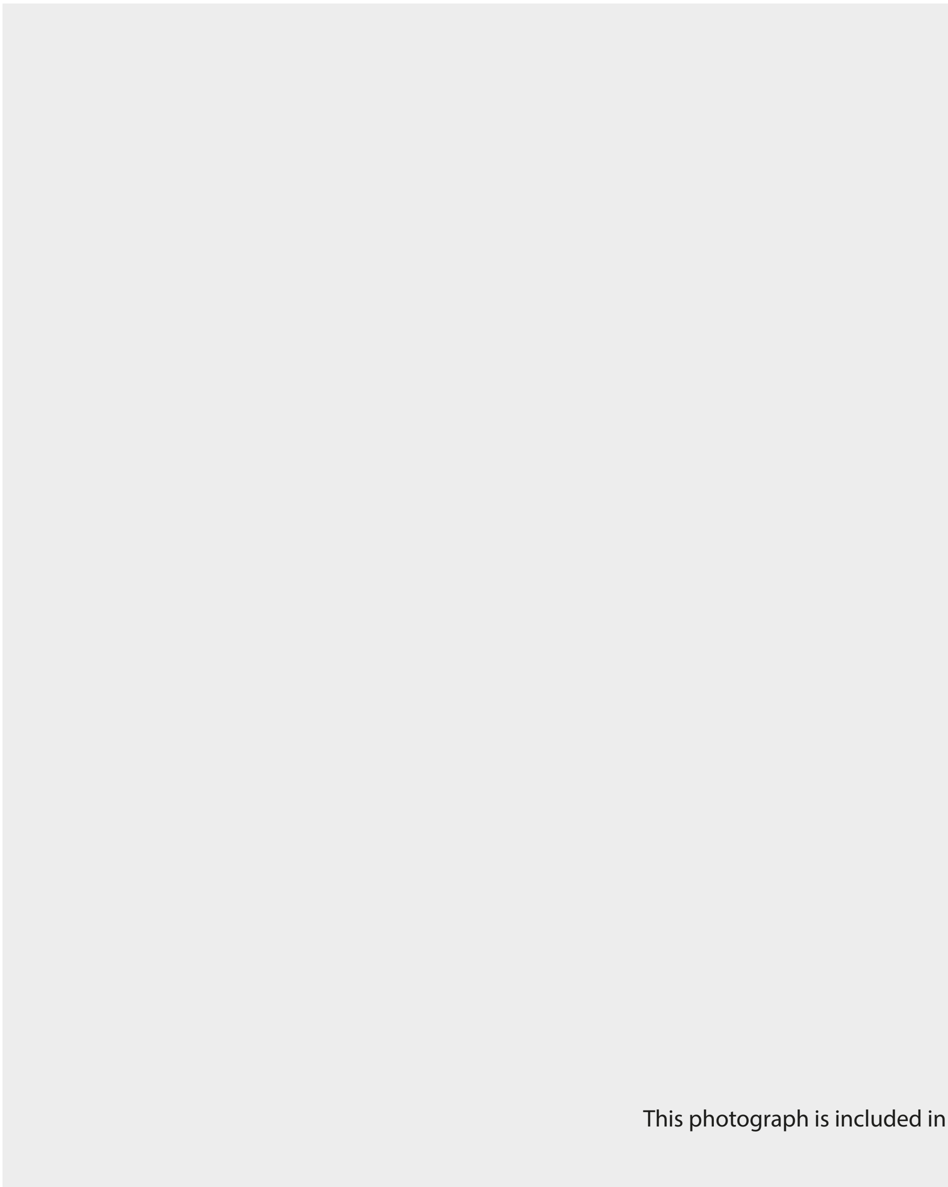
Finally, several hours later, the "forces of order" seized control of the city and began a regular manhunt. Virtually all the people on the streets were apprehended and transported to militia headquarters. Nearly all those apprehended were clubbed, had to run the infamous "fitness trail". One of those beaten up recalled a number of years later: "One had to run fast. [When]

I covered my face, they would hit my hands. They were swollen. Four fingers broken, on each hand." Three days after release the same person was arrested again. Again he was brutally beaten: "When they stripped you and hit your penis, one fainted; when [they hit you] on the heels – one would brick it."

At the same time worker protest erupted in Ursus (Warsaw suburb), where the demonstrators blocked the railway line Warsaw–Poznań, and – on a lesser scale – in the city of Płock (some 120 km northwest of Warsaw). The ZOMO riot troops did not intervene in either city until the evening, when the demonstrations were almost finished and the people were beginning to disperse and go home. That is why one cannot speak of regular street-fighting there. But one should bear in mind that on 25 June a wave of protest strikes swept the country. According to Central Committee figures there were strikes in 97 enterprises in 24 provinces with a total of 55,000 participants.

Faced with such violent protests, the authorities decided to rescind the price rise, which was communicated on the radio and television by Prime Minister Jaroszewicz. Nevertheless – according to official figures – 634 people were arrested in Radom, 172 in Ursus and 55 in Płock. In contrast, according to opposition milieus over 2,000 were arrested in Radom alone. Furthermore, 939 people were immediately dismissed from their jobs in Radom and 180 in Ursus. In the light of figures compiled by the opposition and independent milieux, official figures of people arrested, detained and dismissed appear definitely too low. Jaroszewicz – regarded by most Poles as the person most directly responsible for the price operation – handed Gierek his resignation. It was rejected. Since there was no change in the leadership, there were no voices of criticism of the extremely, unfair assessment of the worker protests. Furthermore, in many cities the party authorities organised – at Gierek's explicit request – rallies of support for the First Secretary and his policy.

On 26 June during a teleconference with first secretaries of provincial committees, Jaroszewicz tried to justify the need to call such meetings: "so that you could say at the rally that you do not condone hooligan methods or methods of imposing the will of a small group of hooligans on the overwhelming majority of the working class, the people. Comrades, I need this as I need sunlight, water and air". Thus in the following days cities all over Poland saw demonstrations condemning "troublemakers" of Radom and



Warsaw, 28 June 1976. After the propaganda rally to support the First Secretary of the Party at the Tenth Anniversary Stadium (seating 100,000), what remained were empty seats and aban-

doned banners. One of them reads: “We are with you, Comrade Gierek”. (FORUM, photo Chris Niedenthal)

Ursus, with full support for Gierek. A total of several hundred thousand people took part in the rallies.

The protesters of June'76 had, therefore reasons to feel satisfied, be it only because the authorities called off a planned price increase, and in fact did not prevent the systematically exacerbating economic crisis. In view of the chaos on the domestic market, in August the authorities finally decided to introduce sugar coupons. From that moment on until summer of 1989, Poland was to be a "land of coupons".

At the same time, in the face of severe repressions against the June protesters, intellectuals began voicing their solidarity with the workers. On 23 September fourteen people published an appeal to the social and state authorities, informing them that the Worker's Defence Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*, KOR) kept a detailed register of people who were given various kinds of help: medical, legal and primarily financial. Over a thousand people received such assistance. Ultimately in July 1977 the last of the convicted of participation in the "June events" were amnestied and released from prison.

August 1980

In the second half of the 1970s negative political, social and economic phenomena accumulated in Poland and they further exacerbated the growing economic crisis. At the same time, Karol Wojtyła was elected pope in October 1978 and visited Poland in June of 1979; this was an awakening for Poles, who – as historian Andrzej Paczkowski put it – when they knelt before the Pope at the same time they rose from their knees.

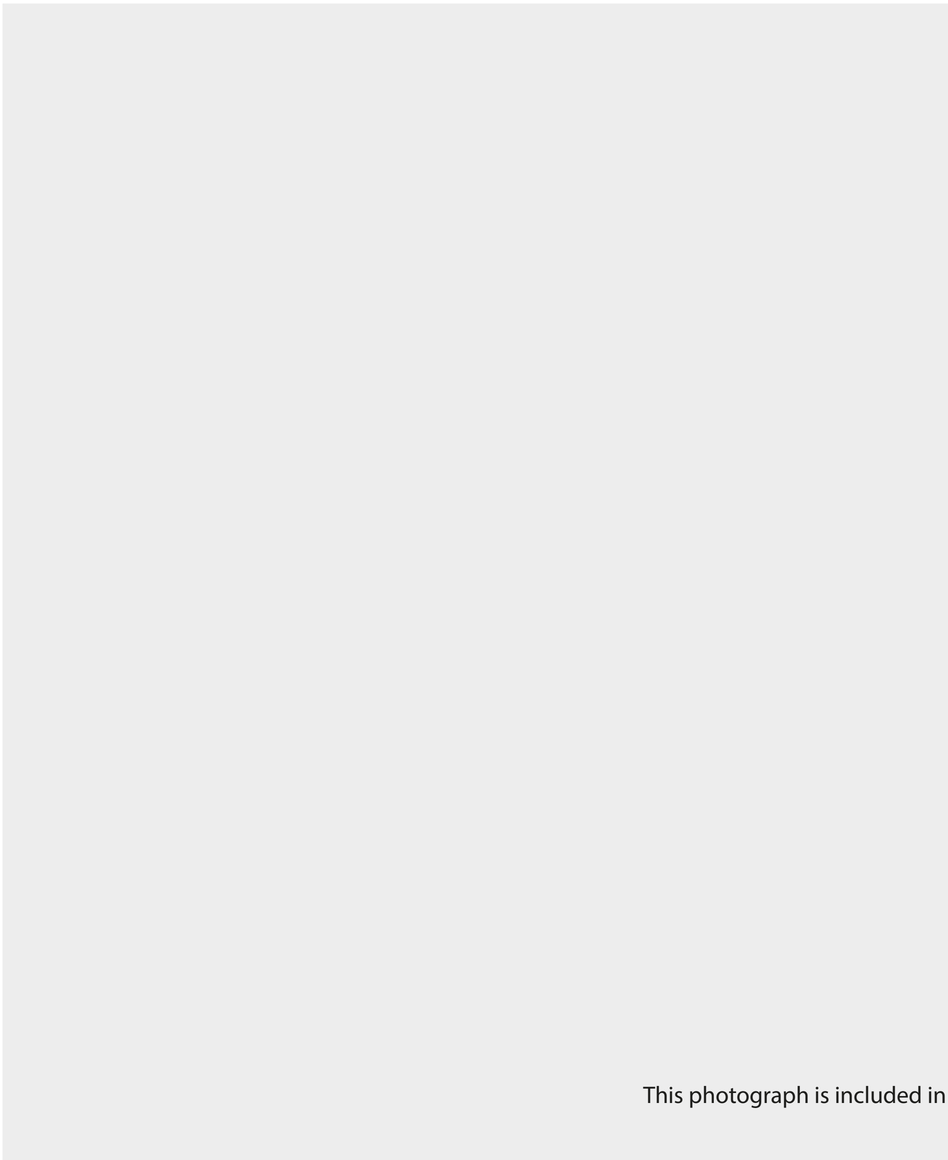
Another eruption of social discontent was only a matter time, although the authorities were trying to save the economic situation with well known methods. Again a decision was made to increase the prices of meat and meat products, this time as of 1 July 1980 by raising their prices in factory canteens and by increasing the assortment of such products in more expensive shops known as "commercial shops". Apparently no one expected that this decision, unannounced in mass media, would be the immediate cause of the largest wave of strikes in the history of Poland.

Meanwhile on the same day several strikes began in different parts of Poland. Initially, there were mainly wages' demands. One week later, when the Świdnik helicopter factory went on strike there were also clear political overtones. Another strike wave hit Lublin on 14–17 July. The protest began as a relay strike (when it ended in some factories and began in others), and eventually turned into a local general strike, which even covered the local railway hub. The protester's demands were accepted by the government delegation, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Mieczysław Jagielski. In total, the July strikes involved around 80,000 people in 177 enterprises in different parts of the country.

For quite some time the authorities did everything not to inform public opinion about "work interruptions", as strikes were officially called in local newspapers. When the Warsaw Municipal Transport went on strike on 11 August, and no buses or trams left the depots, it this could no longer be "brushed under the carpet". Nonetheless the turning point was 14 August, when the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk went on strike.

The workers demanded that Anna Walentynowicz (an activist of Free Trade Unions [*Wolne Związki Zawodowe*, WZZ]), sacked the day before, be reinstated, as well as a wage rise and cost-of-living allowance. A Strike Committee was elected. Its chairman was another Free Trade Unions activist, Lech Wałęsa. Soon further demands appeared (including a monument to the December'70 Victims, security guarantees for striking workers, and reinstatement of Wałęsa, who had been fired from the Shipyard some years earlier).

The following day the strike spread to other factories and plants in the Tri-city (Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot). The protesters also made an unequivocally political demand – the establishment of legal free trade unions, independent of the party and the plant's management. The strikers also wanted political prisoners to be released and equal family benefits with those paid to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the army. Meanwhile the authorities apparently did not understand that their adopted method consisting of wage concessions and no serious proposals of political solutions was doomed to fail. The condition of the Polish economy had already been poor even before the strike wave of the summer of 1980, and this was exacerbated further as a result of drawn out negotiations by the state and party authorities.


This photograph is included in

the printed edition of the book

Striking workers by the gate of the Gdańsk Shipyard, August 1980. Massive popular support demonstrated by the enormous crowd outside the shipyard's entrance and the flowers on the gate. (Getty Images, photo Marc Bulka)

The tide turned on 16 August. The Strike Committee reached an agreement with the management and the end of the strike was proclaimed. Among the workers voices were heard that smaller enterprises, which did not have so much influence, were thus left on their own. Wałęsa reversed that decision and proclaimed continuation of the strike although at that time there were fewer than a thousand people in the shipyard. Some people did return and delegates from other enterprises were pouring in. At night representatives of 21 firms proclaimed the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee (*Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy*, MKS), headed by Lech Wałęsa. A list of 21 demands was formulated, with number 1 being that regarding the right to form free trade unions. The following evening 156 enterprises had joined the MKS, so it was necessary to form a presidium, whose chairman was Wałęsa.

On 18 August strikes broke out in Szczecin, where an MKS was established as well, with Marian Jurczyk at its head. Within a couple of days, practically the entire northern seaboard was enveloped in a general strike. In view of the rising strike wave, more and more opposition activists were arrested. The authorities were right to believe that this milieu supported and provided back-up for the strikers. In such an atmosphere, on 21 August 64 intellectuals appealed to the authorities and the strikers to start a dialogue and work out a compromise.

The following day two signatories, Bronisław Geremek and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, delivered the letter to the strikers at the Gdańsk Shipyard. The MKS Presidium entrusted Mazowiecki with the task of setting up a commission of experts who would assist the workers' representatives in the negotiations with the Government Commission, headed by deputy Prime Minister Mieczysław Jagielski.

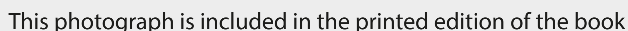
On 24 August the Fourth Central Committee Plenum convened, among other reasons in order to hear the report of Stanisław Kania on the domestic situation, he was responsible for army and security matters in the Party leadership. A personnel reshuffle followed. Sick Politburo members and deputy members were recalled, including Prime Minister Edward Babiuch. Three members of the Central Committee Secretariat were dismissed, with one of them promoted, namely Józef Pieńkowski, who by decision of the Council of State replaced Babiuch as prime minister. Several other changes in the government followed.

Normally in a country of real socialism such a high-level reshuffle would have generated considerable popular interest. But in the summer of 1980 the situation in Poland was far from normal. The strikers were rather unimpressed. More and more people in the leadership realised that Gierek's days were definitely numbered. An increasing number of people in the state – party leadership were aware that as the strike wave spread to other regions of the country, the position of the strikers increased. Today it is also known that some members of the leadership – inspired and supported in this respect by Soviet leaders – contemplated a violent solution of the crisis.

This war of nerves continued for a few days, although it was becoming clear that the PRL authorities, unless they opted for a "violent solution", would be obliged to yield and accept the strikers' demands. Ultimately on 30 August Jurczyk and Deputy Prime Minister Kazimierz Barcikowski, who led the Government Commission for Szczecin signed an accord. The authorities accepted all the strikers' demands. Thus the strike on the northern seaboard was called off. The following day the Gdańsk Shipyard saw a historic moment: Lech Wałęsa, on behalf of the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee (MKS) then representing around seven hundred firms and institutions, signed an accord with the Government Commission, which ended the strike.

The strikers' greatest achievement was the authorities' consent to form independent, self-governing trade unions, which had the right to strike. The victories of the Szczecin and Gdańsk strikers did not, however, mean the end of the socio-political crisis. There was indeed a general strike in Silesia, which began on 29 August. In the light of the significance of the Katowice province for the country's economy, the authorities regarded the "putting out" of the strike in the region as the top priority. On 1 September a Government Commission was established, which two days later signed an accord with the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee in Jastrzębie.

Since Poland was dependent on the Soviet Union and the because of level of awareness in society at that time, open demands had not yet been formulated, but phrased in the official language. Nevertheless the same words were given different meanings than those the communists typically would have them mean, Perhaps here lies the source of the considerable popularity of the slogan: "Socialism – yes, [its] violations – no!" in the first months



The unveiling of the Monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers 1970, 17 December 1980. (EPOKA, photo Jarosław Maciej Goliszewski)

after August'80. Moreover the dynamics of this social movement were being quite deliberately thwarted from the outset. This process was eventually called "self-limiting revolution". Gierek believed that minor changes, reshuffles would suffice for the Poles to accept the old system. Meanwhile it was becoming evident that if the PZPR were to try to win the slightest bit of popular confidence, one of the conditions would be to replace the First Secretary of the Central Committee.

This happened on the night of 5/6 September, when the Sixth Plenum of the Central Committee recalled Gierek and elected Stanisław Kania. Other changes in the leadership followed, and a policy of "renewal" was proclaimed. This, however, did not mean that the strike wave was over, which – although certainly subsiding – continued for another few weeks. Economic demands mixed with political demands, and perhaps even more often with branch and local ones. In total around a million people were striking in 800 enterprises.

Meanwhile, on 17 September representatives of Inter-Enterprise Founding Committees and Inter-Enterprise Workers' Commissions from all over the country met and decided that all the local organisations would register jointly as an Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity (*Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy* [NSZZ] „Solidarność"). The chairman of the National Coordinating Commission was Lech Wałęsa. The authorities that for some time had been trying to incorporate Solidarity into PRL structures, eventually agreed to register the trade union on 10 November.

In hindsight it is clear that the dramatic events of the Polish summer of 1980 marked the beginning of the end of real socialism, not only in Poland. Opposition attitudes in Poland – in the second half of the 1970s were openly manifested by no more than several thousand people – but after August '80 were expressed by millions.

December 1981

For over a year the state-party authorities, with open reluctance, tolerated Solidarity in the public arena, But at the same time the internal affairs and defence ministries were making top secret preparations for martial law. Wojciech Jaruzelski often repeated later that he finally decided to go ahead with the military and police operation only on 12 December around 2 p.m. But by then the entire operation had already been prepared in the smallest detail. In provincial militia commands and army staffs sealed envelopes were opened, and these contained detailed instructions as to who, what, where and when. This is the only plausible explanation for the organisational success, which from the point of view of the then authorities the martial law was.

Clearly, the timing was carefully chosen. From the outset it was evident that it should be carried out on Saturday night, when most factories would not be open, which would make any resistance difficult, or at least delay it by a couple of days. It was also important that the entire Solidarity leadership, if possible, were gathered in one place, far from regional headquarters and large industrial plants, where they could try to hide.

The night of the 12/13 December was, therefore, appropriate for launching martial law. The National Commission of Solidarity was assembled, with its

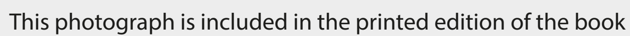
entire leadership participating as well as a panel of experts and advisors to the trade union. The weather helped the organisers as well: it was cold and snowing heavily. Taking all this into account as well as the coming Christmas, which usually puts people into a peaceful mood, one feels compelled to say that from the authorities' point of view the timing was simply perfect.

In the evening on 12 December the Solidarity leadership were receiving signals of increased militia movements. Unconfirmed information began to circulate, bur about midnight the National Commission sitting was over and most delegates and experts left for their hotels. Wałęsa returned home. Meanwhile telecommunications had been cut off for about an hour, and the first wave of arrests began. Yet, apart from those immediately involved, no one knew that martial law had begun. It was a police and military operation, unprecedented in peace time, intended for – as the party slogan had it – "defence of socialism as [if it was the country's] independence". In fact, it was a defence of communist monopolistic power.

An extra-constitutional organ was established, the Military Council of National Salvation (*Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego*, WRON) with General Wojciech Jaruzelski at its head, who was at once First Secretary of the Party's Central Committee, Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence. All over the country a wave of arrests engulfed Solidarity activists and people associated with opposition and independent milieus, which in the official vernacular, was then called "internment". A total of 10,000 people were thus isolated, with over 50 per cent in December 1981. As a rule most activists who evaded internment became engaged in underground activity.

In the early weeks of martial law telephones and telexes were cut off, special passes were required to leave one's place of residence, and only two national dailies appeared: *Trybuna Ludu* and *Żołnierz Wolności*. Television and radio were militarised (for example, newsreaders wore army uniforms), gatherings – even in private homes were forbidden without a permit, all civil liberties were suspended, there was 10 p.m. – 6 a.m. curfew, classes in schools of all types and levels were suspended.

Given the nationwide character of the operation of imposing martial law in December 1981 a total of 30,000 functionaries of the security apparatus (militia, ZOMO riot troops and Security Service [*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*,



General Wojciech Jaruzelski announcing martial law on television, 13 December 1981. (The National Digital Archives)

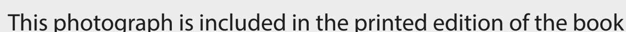
SB], 49,000 militia reserves and over 70,000 soldiers directly deployed (over 200,000 counting reserves) with 1,750 tanks, 1400 armoured vehicles, 500 personnel carriers, over 9,000 cars, hundreds of helicopters and aircraft. Never since World War II had such forces been mobilised in Poland, a quarter concentrated in Warsaw and outside the city.

On 14 December or even the day before, occupation strikes began independently in a number of plants in different parts of the country. Among them were the larger steel mills (Lenin and Katowice), most coal mines, ports and shipyards in the Tricity area and in Szczecin, the largest industrial plants, such as WSK Świdnik, Pafawag (Wrocław), "Ursus" Metal Works, Marchlewski Textile Factory (Łódź), Dolmel (Wrocław) or Motorcar Factory (Tychy).

But in view of the applied military means, the element of surprise, the fear of martial law regulations, and the weather, which favoured the authorities, popular resistance had a range much smaller than originally expected. There were 199 strikes (with 50 strike committees) in around 7,000 enterprises existing at that time. It is difficult to assess whether one should say "only" or – given the rigours of martial law – "as many as" 199 striking plants. Similarly, one does know exactly know how to treat the information that strikes in 40 plants were forcibly crushed.

Let it be added that the authorities adopted and applied the same methods. The striking plants were surrounded by sizeable forces of ZOMO riot militia and army detachments. Equipped with tanks and armoured vehicles, the troops provided cover for direct attacks of ZOMO functionaries wearing helmets, armed with machine guns, shields, long truncheons and hand-held petard and tear-gas grenade throwers. Assaults were often launched at night, with spotlights on, when frightened workers had neither the strength nor the courage to actively resist. Many accounts leave doubt as to the fact that many of those directly involved in the implementation of martial law – either of their own initiative or when ordered – gave vent to their lowest instincts.

What is remarkable, the chief of the Security Service, General Władysław Ciastoń – with some satisfaction – underlined that the only violent street demonstrations in the early days of martial law took place in Gdańsk on 16 and 17 December. It was the only case of firearms being used, and only



This photograph is included in the printed edition of the book

Pacification of the "Wujek" coalmine in Katowice, 16 December 1981. (KARTA, photo Marek Janicki)

there – apart from the nine miners killed at the "Wujek" coal mine – one person was killed: the 23-year-old Antoni Browarczyk, shot in the head.

The scale of the strikes was the greatest in Silesia and the Dąbrowski Basin in southern Poland, where about thirty coal mines stopped work. One should add, for the sake of probity, that at the same time the remaining more than thirty mines did not strike. Nevertheless, an inter-enterprise strike committee, which grouped several coal mines, existed briefly at the "Manifest Lipcowy" coal mine in Jastrzębie. On 15 December ZOMO riot troopers attacked the miners at the mine with extreme violence, petards and tear-gas grenades, and those trying to flee were clubbed. The militia used firearms and wounded several people.

The pacification of this mine – as it turned out the following morning – was only a prelude to the most violent attack on 16 December at the "Wujek" coal mine. There a thousand striking miners were determined to defend themselves. They prepared iron bars, pikes, bludgeons, clubs made

of thick cable, axes, pick-axe and spade handles, wrapped in cloth. Although heavy equipment was deployed, the army and militia forces of about 2,500 men failed to break the miners' resolve. It was only when a large-scale use of firearms by the so-called "special platoon", which immediately led to the death of six miners (three more died of wounds later), 23 were wounded and forced the strikers to surrender honourably. The strikers were guaranteed personal safety, although strike leaders were later put on trial.

The "Wujek" massacre shocked Polish public opinion, but did not alter the determination of many striking miners, as soon as on 23 December only with an assault with armour and a simultaneous helicopter drop was it possible to crush the strike in the Katowice Steel Mill. The following day the strike at the "Ziemowit" coal mine ended. The largest strike of all at the "Piast" coal mine ended on 28 December. The miners decided to continue their protest even over Christmas. Their resolve was broken only when they ran out of the food and realised that they had no chance of success. Thus the martial law authorities won a spectacular victory – they broke Solidarity's resistance.

In no way does this mean that one might minimise the dramatic character of those events, something the government spokesman Jerzy Urban tried to do at a press conference on 29 December. In a kind of summing up of the first two weeks of martial law, he stated optimistically: "Thus, given that today is the first day of general quiet in Poland, nothing is going on, one could say incidents related to martial law brought no more than 8 deaths."

Unfortunately, Urban's assessment was too optimistic as he did not mention two seriously wounded "Wujek" miners, who died in January 1982. As it soon transpired, the balance was not finally closed and more people were killed in the next months. On 22 March 1983, the minister of internal affairs, General Czesław Kiszczak informed the parliament (Sejm) that during the 15 months of martial law 15 people died and 36 demonstrators were shot.

After December'81 the country was in a rather strange situation: the authorities were strong enough to push Solidarity into the underground, but were unable to eliminate it from Poland's public life. On the other hand, Solidarity had sufficient strength to mark its presence from time to time in the months and years to follow (by organising mass independent street dem-

onstrations, and the daily broadcasts of the underground Radio Solidarity, thousands of periodicals, by distributing leaflets), but it was also too weak to force the communists into serious talks about Poland's future. One might say that Solidarity had lost a battle but eight years later won a war. But one should add that in the first place it was Poland's defeat, as it irreparably lost several more years.

2. WHAT WERE THE "POLISH MONTHS"?

Revolts, "incidents", "events"

One of the biggest problems for any historian, who analyses the "Polish months", is the issue of accurate and appropriate description of what happened in Poland in 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980 and 1981. The penultimate is the least problematic; in this case one usually speaks of the largest strike wave in Poland's history. Also hardly controversial is the term „martial law", which is used both by those who imposed it and by their political opponents. The other dates are not so simple to deal with and in order to describe the events designated by those dates, one needs to use different terms.

One should also bear in mind that regardless of their similarities, the "Polish months" differed quite substantially in character, form, scale, complexity, the influence of the "Soviet factor" and the gravity of the consequences. Furthermore, as has been said before, the same term was applied to different, sometimes contradictory or mutually exclusive threads, currents and aspects. Even if considering only the aspect of social contestation, one could easily identify essential differences, which should not be belittled.

There were indeed qualitative differences between June'56 in Poznań and December'70 on the northern seaboard where the authorities deployed thousands of troops, hundreds of tanks and armoured vehicles, in each case thousands bullets of all kinds of ammunition of various calibres, causing, in each case, scores of deaths, and the situation in June'76, when street demonstrations were crushed only by the militia, not carrying firearms.

As has been said before, there were only two deaths in 1976 in Radom, but these two men died in a tragic accident, not at the hands of "forces of order". March'68 was different, not only because it was mainly a students', not a workers' protest, but also because no public buildings were set on fire and the street fighting was not as violent as in 1956, 1970 or even 1976. As a consequence there were no deaths in March'68.

In my first book on March'68, I entitled the chapter on students' rallies, university strikes and street demonstrations in many cities – "Students' revolt" and, as far as I know, this title did not arouse any serious doubts or reservations. I would also use the term "revolt" to denote all that happened in Poland on 25 June 1976, even though in Radom, where the Party building and the Provincial Office as well as the militia Passport Bureau were plundered and set on fire, the several-hours-long street fighting became extremely violent.

I also realise that the term "revolt" can sometimes be – rightly or not – associated with destruction, and some people might associate it with demolition and arson in public buildings, plunder of shops, destruction of vehicles, etc. But since I did decide to use the term "revolt" to denote March'68 and June'76 – in the light of what I have written above – it should be clarified that I had been seeking other terms for June'56 and December'70, which were incomparably more violent and deadly. My search was made more difficult by the fact that, for many years, official publications on June'56 and December'70 – if at all – used euphemisms such as "incidents" or "events". These euphemistic descriptions were meant to camouflage the true character of those tragedies, and if for some reason that would have proved to be impossible – at least to minimise their significance. These words were probably designed to justify official silence, the nature of the publicity regarding these protests as well. If they are called "events" or "incidents", they lose all their significance.

What is interesting; is that this socio-technical exercise was virtually 100 per cent successful and these terms were used not only by party propagandists and pseudo-scholars, but they were absorbed by the Polish public language. Even the graves of some of the victims of December'70 had to be inscribed that they died during the December incidents, as if one were

speaking of some chance occurrences or a car accident. An incident is a term appropriate for force majeure not for a military operation including thousands of soldiers, involving heavy equipment and shooting, with dozens killed and hundreds wounded.

The term "events" also carries similar connotations. When one speaks of "events" one might mean a theatrical premiere, a scientific conference, an important political visit but never setting ablaze party committee buildings or shooting people. Perhaps it is time to drop the euphemisms that make us relinquish all intellectual efforts and now try to consider how one should name what happened in Poland in June 1956 and December 1970.

Revolution or Counterrevolution?

Efforts to find answers were hindered by the representatives of official authorities. For Gomułka, who was able to correctly interpret the essence of the Poznań workers' protests of 1956, all that took place on the Baltic seaboard in 1970 must be deemed "counterrevolution". In a dramatic telephone conversation with the Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, on 17 December 1970, Gomułka was adamant that it amounted to counterrevolution. "You know what Lenin said about dealing with counterrevolution? You certainly know – one must use force, otherwise it would destroy us".

When the Soviet leader reminded him that the protesters were workers, the "working class", Gomułka replied that the information was false: "This is no working class. […] this is counterrevolution and we'll handle it appropriately. Remember Kronstadt. Was that not counterrevolution? And what did Lenin do about it? He crushed the Kronstadt rebellion by force." Brezhnev did not budge: "We have information that the streets of Gdańsk and of other cities are full of thousands, tens of thousands of people, perhaps more. Are they all counterrevolutionaries? They are after all, working people, workers. You're shooting at workers? At the working class? […] If you're shooting workers, with whom would you build socialism, Comrade Gomułka?" The latter remained unconvinced: "There are no ordinary workers there; ordinary workers do not raise their hands against people's power, I repeat – this is counterrevolution".

This conversation – provided that the head of the Polish desk of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Petr Kostikov, relates it correctly – is simply terrifying. Gomułka is shown to be hard-headed and doctrinaire; he perceived social protest only as counterrevolution. Apparently he understood neither the essence of the protest nor did he see the need to use political means to resolve this type of crisis.

One thing should be noted. In the December 1970 worker's protest, Gomułka saw only counterrevolution but… perhaps he was right in his own way. In the official vernacular of the PRL, it had become customary to call all kinds of social protest "counterrevolution". It was perfectly understandable; because the underlying assumption was that the forces of revolution were personified by the communist rulers of Poland. Whether this assumption was correct or not, largely (perhaps decisively) hinged on how revolution was defined. In this case the political views of a given person were of equal importance.

There is no room here to discuss the different definitions of "revolution". Suffice it to say that in this analysis the term is understood to mean a radical breakthrough, a socio-political turn, limited in time, though not necessarily violent and bloody, which was hitherto deemed illegal and having no power at all or socially isolated (for example members of previously banned political parties), or those that operated on the margins of the existing establishment. A political revolution usually brought about (sometimes in parallel) a social economic or cultural revolution, accompanied by a change in the ownership of means of production.

If one adopts this definition, one would need to agree that during 1944–1945 Poland saw a revolution, naturally one brought "on Soviet bayonets". Power was seized by the communists, who were a marginal, albeit conspicuous, political force in pre-war Poland. The Communist Party of Poland was not only an organisation controlled by Soviet agents, but it was also illegal, operating underground, with very limited influence in Polish society. Its members or their ideological heirs did not seize power by winning an election but due to military advantage with Stalin's voice behind them (incidentally not only behind them) and the millions of Soviet soldiers who liberated Poland from the Germans in the same manner enabled „people's power" to become established here.

Subsequently, by means of decrees on land reform and nationalisation of the basic branches of the economy and completely illegal operations (expropriation, arrests, deportations to the heartland of the USRR and killings), Poland saw a total change in the structure of ownership. The state become the main (and often the sole) owner of the means of production (mines, steel mills, factories, shipyards, and frequently forests, pastures, meadows and arable land).

In Poland's case, apart from political and ownership changes, one should mention the territorial changes. Post war Poland retained less than a half of the country's pre-war territory, having lost about a half as a result of the Yalta agreements. So if the war brought a revolution in its wake, it is self-evident that the forces that seized power as a result of it as well as their ideological heirs epitomised (at least in their own opinion) this very revolution.

So, if the communists – in their own eyes – personified the Polish revolution after World War II, it is equally logical that all (from the armed pro-independence underground and the politicians of the Polish Peasant's Party, through the many representatives of the Catholic clergy, participants in the social protests of 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980, and the various opposition groups, including Solidarity) who defied the authorities more or less openly – by definition were counterrevolutionaries. Naturally, from that point of view, the systemic transformation that began in 1989 would deserve to be called "counterrevolution".

Clearly such a vision of recent history is propagated primarily by the extreme left. One should also remember that the term "revolution", as used by communist propaganda, had a definitely positive connotation. Among the classical examples were: the French Revolution as a model of a "bourgeois revolution" and the Russian (October) Revolution as a veritable model of "proletarian (socialist) revolution". Their names were dutifully spelt with capital letters.

Nonetheless, the social acceptance of this notion was far from unanimously positive. Many people, who did not necessarily come from the former "owners" class associated revolution with indescribable crimes, injustice, destruction of the cultural heritage of many generations, the killing or – at best – repressions of large social groups, robbing the rich and wealthy, usu-

ally accompanied with the social advancement of the lower classes, virtually devoid of higher emotions and personal manners, bent on taking revenge on "the rich". Such actions were supposed to be justified by the Leninist slogan "steal what has been stolen!"

The negative connotation of the term "revolution" may have been further reinforced by the images of violent revolutionary upheavals in the Third World presented by the media and in literature. The people saw that one kind of dictatorship – usually pro-West – was replaced by new regimes, often inspired by self-modified Marxism and pro-Soviet or pro-China in their foreign policy. Quite frequently the new dictatorships were even crueller than those recently deposed, among them: Cuba, Nicaragua, Ethiopia or Cambodia, to mention but a few. Furthermore, the experiences of other revolutions, including that in Iran, could not arouse positive emotions.

So it is hardly surprising that the events of the late 1980s were reluctantly called "revolution". It seems that Timothy Garton Ash was aware of the semantic problems; he introduced the neologism "refolution". By replacing the voiced "v" with the voiceless "f", he deprived the word of its sharpness and poignancy.

But regardless of attitudes to the concept of revolution, one should emphasise that in the Poland of the late 1980s there was a second fundamental political change (in fifty years). The force in power was removed (at least to some extent, and naturally not completely) and deprived of some of its influence. The political transformation was accompanied by even more profound social changes. Therefore I agree with those scholars who claim that it was a revolution whose main driving force was Solidarity. Moreover I am prepared to acknowledge that the revolution had already begun in the summer of 1980 and went on virtually for a decade.

But it should be stressed that regardless of whether the designation "counterrevolution" was justified with reference to the social protests of December'70. This form, unlike "events" or incidents that play down their gravity, was probably meant to inflate it. Interestingly, Gomułka was not the only one to exaggerate his description of the December tragedy. In a conversation with East German leaders in September 1971, his successor Edward Gierek said that in the past few months they managed to "regain control of the situation at home, which last December threatened civil war."

It is difficult to say whether Gierek really believed that Poland was on the brink of civil war or whether – for some reason purposely exaggerated it. It might be added that the "December" deputy interior minister, General Franciszek Szlachcic recalled some years later that the term used at that time was "disruptions". On the other hand, another deputy interior minister and simultaneously militia chief, General Tadeusz Pietrzak during a teleconference with provincial militia chiefs held every day in December 1970 spoke of rebellion and called the protesters "rebels".

One may add that in historical literature one also finds other words to describe December'70: revolution, rebellion, revolt, clashes. All of them are more appropriate than the unfortunate "events" or "incidents". Certainly it would be difficult to select an appropriate and precise term that would reflect the nature of what happened in Poland in June 1956 and December 1970.

The Poznań Uprising and the December Uprising

So far hardly any serious attempts have been made to answer the fundamental question: what did actually happen? Were they rebellions of the desperate or workers' or revolts or perhaps insurrections, which should be called workers' uprisings due to their saturation with slogans and contents, not only economic and social but also political or even national? If so then one should define the use of the term "uprising". One Polish dictionary defines it as an act of armed resistance and cites examples of 19th and 20th Century uprisings.

As a rule, Polish uprisings were directed against a foreign power, but those in Poznań or Gdańsk, as well as those that broke out later during the martial law period were directed against Polish rulers and were crushed by Polish, not Soviet troops. May one then apply the term "uprising" in serious discussions on June'56 or December'70? This is a very delicate matter. If one assumes that it was an uprising, then one is compelled to inquire whom it was directed against.

It is evident that the Party and its representatives, who had wielded monopolistic power for over forty years, could not allow any interpretation of such "events" in terms of a national uprising, regardless of whether it was methodologically justified or intellectually abusive. Such an approach could

imply that the protests were directed against a foreign, forcibly imposed power and, as a result, lead to the conclusion that "People's Poland" was not a sovereign state, a conclusion its rulers could not accept.

Today there is no doubt that communist-ruled Poland was never a sovereign state, although its degree of dependence on the Soviet Union varied. I am not one to claim that the ruling groups were foreign governors. Nevertheless it is true that for forty five years Poland's *raison d'état* was officially identified (let it be added that it was hardly ever admitted openly) with Soviet state interest.

I am prepared to believe that those people thought that they represented Polish interests. But by many (perhaps most) Poles they were perceived as foreign rulers, imposed by the Soviets, which enabled many to see all kinds of resistance against the rulers in terms of independence, patriotism, the nation, insurrection, etc.

When one analyses this issue one should avoid extremely subjective or emotional judgement. It should be approached rationally and objectively, if possible. This may be achieved by means of analogy and comparison to similar protest. Let it be added that as early as 1981 this method was applied – independently of each other – to June'56 – by two Poznań historians, Antoni Czubiński and Lech Trzeciakowski.

The former recalled that on 26 April 1920, during several hours of clashes in Poznań, 9 people were killed and 30 were wounded. On the other hand, in the process of crushing a farm workers' protest in western Poland, the army killed 14 people and wounded another 60 while crushing the farm workers' strike in the surrounding region. Finally the famed peasants' revolt of August 1937 cost the lives of 40 people, and in the Cracow incidents of November 1923 (called the "Cracow uprising" by some historians) 32 persons lost their lives (18 civilians and 14 soldiers) with over 100 wounded.

However, according to Aleksander Ziemkowski, who studied this issue for many years, at least 73 people died in June 1956 in Poznań. He claims that the "total number of dead of the Poznań Uprising could be (or even exceed) as many as 100."

It is even more difficult to establish the precise number of the wounded, of whom there were at least several hundred. One should add that many

people with minor injuries in fear of arrest by security functionaries, who were combing the hospitals and clinics, avoided any contact with the public health service. But when some of the wounded could not manage without such assistance, then once their wounds were dressed they would go home without leaving any paper trail.

The later historian, Lech Trzeciakowski, compared the Poznań tragedy to the violent protests of Lyon workers in 1831 and the Paris proletariat in 1848, which were called "uprisings". He stressed that the typical scenario was nearly identical in each case: workers demands, arrogance of the authorities, strike, street demonstrations turning into armed clashes and, finally, crushing the protests by force. This is also how the June'56 events in Poznań unfolded. So he had a point in calling them the "Poznań workers' uprising in 1956".

At that time one dealt with something more than an exclusively socio-economic protest. Even if initially it was only such a protest, it was quickly becoming an insurrection. After all, such was the sentiment of many participants and observers.

Simultaneously – as been said before – aggression on both sides increased and so did the danger of the fighting spreading into other regions. The party and state authorities must have deemed the Poznań situation to be very grave since they decided to use troops. On 28 June at 10 a.m., that is before the violence erupted, the Political Bureau met in Warsaw in order to decide how to deal with the situation in Poznań.

Nevertheless, even before the Politburo met, the minister of defence Konstanty Rokossovsky telephoned the Party chief Edward Ochab asking to be seen immediately. Just as Rokossovsky did, Ochab already knew what was happening in Poznań. At 7.00 a.m. he had been informed that the Cegielski protesters had taken to the streets.

Rokossovsky and Ochab met in private. Many years later the latter recalled that the minister told him that the situation in the city was not good: "The militia and state security cannot cope. I silently agreed with him, and the details of the Poznań situation, he was aware of, showed how much he knew. As a rule, Rokossovsky was very well informed. No wonder, he had two intelligence services at his disposal: ours and Soviet". Ultimately, the minister was allowed to deploy troops, but – according to Ochab – used

them on too large a scale: “he issued orders as if World War III was beginning. He assembled several divisions with tanks and other equipment, and headed for Poznań.”

In 1981 during a famous interview with Teresa Torańska, Ochab spoke about Rokossovsky: “he proposed deploying troops against the armed troublemakers attacking state officers. And asked to be given full autonomy and he would deal with it. I agreed because one had to act quickly. […] My position was approved by the Political Bureau. But perhaps Rokossovsky didn’t do it right, because he assembled several divisions and made for Poznań. Too many troops were assembled, too many. We should have done it more quietly and quickly.” Even if Ochab’s regrets in hindsight were sincere, it is hard not to notice that he had spoken to Rokossovsky before violence erupted, protesters obtained firearms, before the first shots were fired and – as a result – the first people were killed.

Virtually everything I wrote about June’56 can and should be reiterated with reference to December’70. Can one then speak of a “December uprising”? If so, then what are the determining factors? To be sure, among them are the scale and the range of the protests. Between 14 and 19 December several tens of thousands of people took a more or less active part in street clashes in several cities. They would use stones, Molotov cocktails, metal balls, screws, nuts, iron crowbars and – sporadically – firearms. Some shipyard workers wore protective helmets, others protective masks. Sometimes the street clashes took a very violent course.

Another factor that determines whether a historic event can be called an “uprising” is its political (and not exclusively economic) character. The fact that in December’70 protesters attacked party buildings would rather suggest that the protests had a political character (it also shows that the workers were perfectly aware of where the real centre of power was located). Although in “real socialism” countries any kind of opposition or only independent public action (not necessarily violent) almost automatically became undoubtedly political, an analysis of December’70 workers” demands reveals their largely political character. So it was not an exclusively political protest, although there is no doubt that the immediate cause was the above mentioned price rise.

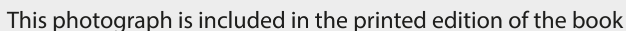
The third factor that determines the character of a given protest, are the means used by the authorities to quell it. The forces deployed to pacify the December'70 protests have been discussed. These forces were certainly disproportionate in their scale and character. Moreover the use of such means was absolutely exceptional in peace time (if "peace" is the right word for what was going on in Poland at that time).

Finally, the best element that usually determines the correct terminology for a given social protest is the number of victims. One should stress that according to official sources there was a total of 45 dead and 1165 wounded. Can one speak of an uprising in the light of such casualties? This depends on one's point of view. However two events should be emphasised. When in 1987 the intifada broke out in Israeli-occupied territories, the media in Poland and in other countries called it a Palestinian uprising, even though there were only 40 dead (yet even one death is of course a tragedy).

What one calls an event is a matter of choice to a certain extent, because regardless of such factors as the scale and character of the protests, the size of the forces used to quell the social rebellion, the intensity of violence, the number of the victims and the size of material losses, what one calls it ultimately depends on one's emotional attitude.

One example seems to confirm this assertion. When the Warsaw ghetto uprising broke out in April 1943, the Polish underground press of various persuasions, faced a serious problem, namely what to call it and how to write about it. Paweł Szapiro, who studied this issue, wrote: "In several hundred texts published over a span of some dozen months, scores of names are used to refer to the ghetto uprising. Among them: fighting, resistance, liquidation, defence, self-defence, war, front, battle, fortress, presidio, siege, armed operation, operation, massacre, murder, destruction, pacification, events, struggle and many others. The fighters are usually called Jews as well as different names, such as: fighters, defenders, ghetto dwellers, Jewish detachments, defenders, workers' battalions and at least several others. […] But one shall not find a more expected term, one that is commonly used today, than 'uprising'."

Paweł Szapiro found that the term "uprising" was used over a dozen times in nine different newspapers. At the same time he pointed out that, as a rule, neither members of the Home Army High Command nor the politicians in



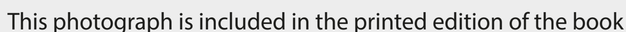
June 1956: demonstrators painting ironic graffiti on Poznań Party headquarters: "Apartments to let". (Institute of National Remembrance)

London (including members of the Polish government-in-exile) used this term. Perhaps, because for generations of Poles weaned on "the tradition of the great Polish uprisings of the 19th century, the fighting in the ghetto lacked the scale, the men, the time-span and the space. Common language usage restricts this term for events of a greater calibre."

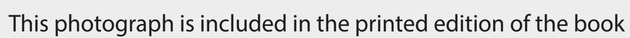
Perhaps the term "uprising" was reserved, at that time, for "an insurgency and armed revolt of Polish society, which in view of the military collapse of the Third Reich and of the depleted offensive capabilities of the Red Army was to bring liberation". Szapiro put forward yet another possible

interpretation. Namely, at that time the word "uprising" [*powstanie*] was for the Poles a sacred word and if such an event were to take place "on Polish territory, only Poles could carry it out". I am not trying to resolve this delicate and complex issue, but it should be stressed that the commonly used term (even by anti-Semites) "Warsaw ghetto uprising" was not permanently introduced into public discourse until after the war.

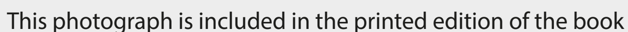
Clearly, the issue of precise and appropriate as well as a generally accepted term for an event is far from being resolved. What is more, one should always be prepared for doubts and reservations from one's opponents. For example, some historians were correct to point out that an uprising must have a pre-established leadership centre, although in 1830, when the November Uprising broke out, there was no such centre. Neither did such a centre exist in December 1970, but at the same time, one should bear in mind that during that tragic week, there emerged decision-making and leadership centres: the Main Strike Committee of Gdynia (active only for several hours on 15 December) and the All-Municipal Strike Committee in Szczecin.



In the background burning Party headquarters, Gdańsk, December 1970. (Institute of National Remembrance)



Szczecin Party headquarters ablaze, December 1970. (Institute of National Remembrance, photo Marek Czasnojć)



Radom protesters watch the burning Party headquarters, June 1976. (Institute of National Remebrance)

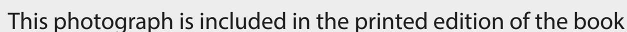
One may emphasise the behaviour of the street fighters of June'56 and December'70 and their historical references. In Poznań, young girls who wore white-and-red armbands and offered first aid to the wounded introduced themselves as "the medical service of the uprising". In this manner, consciously or not, they made reference to the tradition and legend of the Warsaw Uprising. Similarly, young boys (practically children) supplied the fighters with Molotov cocktails.

Paweł Machcewicz aptly remarked that "the actions of the authorities directed at crushing the rebellion also conformed with the uprising scenario. When the forces that, by definition, were designated to crush it (the militia, state security and the Internal Security Corps) failed to do so, the regular army was deployed in Poznań on a massive scale. The scale and the methods used were definitely incommensurate with the actual scale of the resistance. [...] masses of soldiers and equipment were pitted against groups of poorly armed civilians. As a rule, the firepower used undoubtedly exceeded all the actual needs and rational limits."

References to the uprising tradition were also the case in Gdańsk on 15 December 1970. Protesters seized a Topas armoured troop carrier, and later drove it around with a Polish white-and-red flag on it. This naturally alluded to the famous behaviour of the Warsaw Uprising fighters, who would put Polish flags on seized German armoured vehicles and drive around the city in order to raise the people's morale. From the military point of view this did not influence the situation at all. Even a number of armoured vehicles could not alter the course of the fighting, but it did have an enormous propagandistic importance as it boosted people's morale and hope.

Also in June'56 in Poznań the insurgents captured a tank and placed the Polish flag on it and drove it along Kochanowski Street in front of the state security building. There were also cases of fraternisation between soldiers and protesters, for example on 17 December 1970 in front of the Party headquarters in Szczecin. It seems that a similar incident took place in December 1981 in Gdańsk, when the magic word "Solidarity" appeared on a tank in front of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk (probably with the soldiers' consent).

One should also try to answer the frequently asked question why did the army do its utmost to keep civilians away from tanks and armoured carriers. This practice was rooted in the theory of troop deployment in urban warfare, developed before the war by Stefan Rowecki, later the commander of the Home Army, according to which, troops should be deployed in such a manner and on such a scale so as to paralyse the protesters by their very presence. The entire *corpus* of the "forces of order" was to be placed under the command of army officers and not that of police chiefs, and never of political activists. Finally, and what seemed to be crucial, when the troops



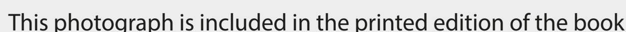
Protesters mounting a captured tank, Poznań, June 1956. (Institute of National Remembrance)

were to use armour, it could never be allowed to fall into the demonstrators' hands. If demonstrators seized tank or an armoured vehicle it would be perceived as a great success (as it was the case in Poznań and Gdańsk) and would thus have an enormous psychological significance. He considered it more dangerous that a captured armoured vehicle could then be used in street fighting. Therefore inasmuch as deployment of heavy armour was a serious mistake with far-reaching and tragic consequences, to defend it against the crowd was absolutely essential. One could easily imagine their being used in further fighting by protesters. The consequences of such an eventuality would be indeed hard to predict.

What has been written above does not mean at all complete conviction of the appropriateness of the term "December uprising" (as I proposed some years ago). Today, I have doubts not only because this proposal was criticised by some historians (although they made me reconsider this difficult, delicate and important issue). These doubts became even deeper when I worked on

my December'70 monograph and studied applications for benefits, pensions and other payments filed with the provincial authorities in Szczecin.

I realised then that all those applicants had been wounded, as they put it, on the way to work or from work, returning from their relatives or from a shop, from school or from their friends. Some wrote that they were waiting for a bus or tram, others that they found themselves near the clashes by sheer accident. I was unable to find a single person who said they were wounded or injured as a demonstrator or while participating in clashes with the militia or the army.



Protesters put up a banner next to hatch on a armored personnel carrier that reads: "Unity with the shipyard workers", Szczecin, December 1970. (Institute of National Remembrance)

It is hardly surprising that given the then current situation many people (especially those actually involved in the clashes) could not and did not wish to tell the truth, as they feared for their own safety and that of their loved ones. So they lied to avoid revenge from the apparatus of repression. In any case, today it cannot be established, which of them consciously and actively participated in the strike, street demonstrations and clashes with the "forces of order". In other words those who stood up against the communist authorities and also those who found themselves in the broadly understood clashes area truly by accident.

This is quite important, particularly in the light of the law on veterans and victims of war-time and post-war repressions, amended on 24 April 1997, which applied to some participants of December'70. Veteran's status was granted on the basis of two conditions: one needed to show proof of one's active participation in – as it was phrased – "action for Poland's freedom and independence", and provide evidence that involvement in such actions resulted in death or grave bodily harm or disabled the person for at least seven days.

But as Ryszard Socha established, most potentially eligible candidates met only one of these conditions. Pitiful and morally wrong practices ensued: people began "bending" their biographies to the existing laws. It is hard to condemn it, but one should not wonder that for some people who were living in very difficult conditions any form of financial aid would improve their situation. So they said that on 17 December at dawn, as they went to work in their haversacks they carried rocks, bolts and other heavy objects, even though only in 1996 that their "pockets and bags were filled with bread. After all they were on their way to work. Widows spoke of the last sandwiches that they made for their husbands. Bread was then a symbol of the workers' peaceful intentions, and a measure of the tragedy. But now bread does not denote a veteran."

Clearly, what happened there does not fit a simple, unequivocal definition and stereotypical interpretation. Furthermore, I am not at all convinced that one could find a single term to describe what happened in December 1970. After all, the conflict continued on least several planes. In the words of Paweł Machcewicz, who wrote about Poznań'56 that due to the multidi-

mensional structure of the conflict, it was “at once a socio-economic revolt, an anticommunist political rebellion and a national uprising – if not in the realm of objective facts, then in the consciousness and motivation of its participants, they attitudes and behaviour.”

Certainly, in both cases some demonstrators consciously took part in an economic strike and later in a street demonstration; finally when violent clashes erupted, particularly when shots were fired and the first people were killed, many became actively engaged in fighting against the “forces of order”. There were also those for whom the protest, from the very beginning, was not only socio-economic in character, but also political, anticommunist, antigovernment and perhaps even pro-independence and thus it took on the features of an uprising from the very beginning. Such people often came from families with ardent anticommunist traditions, those of freedom and independence and often simply those of the Home Army.

It is rather obvious, however, that the thousand-strong crowds watching the burning headquarters in Gdańsk and Szczecin were mostly accidental bystanders. One may be quite certain that very many of them (perhaps most) watched the fires with amazement, disbelief and sometimes with joy.

But one should bear in mind at least one more category of demonstrators, common hooligans who were looking for trouble, all those who would always join street demonstrations, and clash with the “forces of order”. But one should proceed with caution and restraint here, bearing in mind how these people’s role was publicised by the media. In real socialism as a rule, the media talked about hooligans, bandits, thieves, criminal elements, etc. Certainly not everyone thus branded deserved to be stigmatised that way, but one cannot claim that hooligans played only a marginal role. Had it really been so, there would not have been so many people with a criminal record and ex-convicts among those killed, wounded and detained both in June 1956 and December 1970.

3. A BREAKTHROUGH OR CONTINUITY?

Controversies surrounding the year 1956

As has been said, 1980 and 1989 are watershed years in the study of the political and social history of post-war Poland. 1980 symbolises the emergence of the first (in the history of real socialism) mass and independent social movement, Solidarity, a fact that eventually brought the downfall of the communist system, and not only in Poland. On the other hand, 1989 was an exceptional year in the history of all Central and Eastern Europe and marked the end of the post-Yalta order on the continent. The enormous importance of both dates in Poland's post-war history is, therefore, incontrovertible and hardly ever questioned.

1956 poses a more complex problem. Although no one denies the significance for the Polish state, it is difficult not to notice that it is most forcefully emphasised by former Party reformers and those involved in the events of that year. It should also be stressed that when the fiftieth anniversary of those events was celebrated in 2006, the representatives of state authorities, associated chiefly with the Law and Justice Party underlined the differences between June'56 and October'56.

The former was celebrated ceremoniously in Poznań, with the city specially decorated for the anniversary. The official component included concerts, academic conferences, lectures, exhibitions, open-air events, etc., and continued for several days. There was only one event of an appropriate calibre: an academic conference on the international aspects of the Polish October, which was organised by the Polish Institute of International Affairs on

19 October 2006 at the Belvedere. Another conference, *October 1956 – the beginning of the system's erosion*, took place on 26 September at the Pułtusk Academy of Humanities. A discussion on this subject was held at Warsaw University. The media did not devote too much attention to the anniversary. Moreover, certain accents were shifted, focusing not so much on the fiftieth anniversary of the Polish October as on the anniversary of the Hungarian Uprising. Over the span of several days, in Warsaw alone three international conferences were organised. At the same time three monographs discussing the Hungarian revolution of 1956 were published.

Sometimes it was alluded that June'56 belongs to "us" (society), that it was spontaneous, anticommunist and bloody, whereas October'56 was "theirs" (the communists'), controlled from above, intra-systemic and bloodless. It is also significant that October'56 – in this interpretation – was part of the history of intraparty power games, while June'56 remained one of social rebellion.

Naturally both June'56 and October'56 occupy a well-deserved a place in Poland's contemporary history. Perhaps the latter would not have taken place without the former. But was the year 1956 really such an important watershed in PRL history, as is often presented? Historians have often analysed this issue, but there are no simple and unequivocal answers.

The year 1956 marked Gomułka's return to power, with his never clearly formulated slogan, "the Polish road to socialism". Primarily it marked the definitive end of Polish Stalinism, although it obviously did not end the system imposed in Poland after World War II. From today's point of view one might say that it was the beginning of the system, but the "end of the system" lasted over 30 years and under no circumstances – did it proceed smoothly.

The communist system, which was growing in strength until the mid-1950s, after '56 began to decline and its dynamics were a process of gradual warning. The authorities, who were trying to project an image of omnipotence, after '56 were obliged, at least in part to drop some of this omnipotence. But for those who were released from prison in 1956, and for those who were coming in from the cold in public life, the changes were enormous; one might say that practically everything had changed. It is no accident that there was so much talk about Poland's sovereignty, democratisation and

liberalisation of political and social life, about rule of law and justice, and some even about partner's relations with the Soviet Union, as if such a thing had even been possible.

What is interesting is that one may find echoes of such views in certain books written and published after the system changed in Poland. In Edward Gierek's hagiographical biography, its author, a famous left-wing publicist, Janusz Rolicki wrote: "Ever since Gomułka seized the Party's helm, Poland was certainly the Kremlin's partner, and not only an obedient vassal."

It was not Rolicki's slip of the tongue or laconism that put it even more categorically elsewhere: "In matters of internal affairs the PRL's sovereignty was quite substantial after October'56, virtually absolute, but in foreign policy dependence was not uncontroversial either and largely dictated [...] by the status of the Western Territories." Rolicki probably meant that in People's Poland society was receiving more or less clear hints that the only guarantor of Poland's sovereignty in the Western and Northern Territories was the Soviet Union.

Although Rolicki's opinions are certainly exaggerated and even divorced from reality, one cannot but notice that the changes in Poland were then so profound that many scholars overestimated them. Some years ago I myself wrote that after October'56 the state was the same but a different state than that before. Krystyna Kersten already had serious reservations then about this claim, as she found it far-fetched. At that time I did not understand her doubts. As a number of historians did, I focused on the differences between Poland before and after October'56. As in all other cases one may focus on the differences or emphasise the similarities.

For quite some time historians wrote mainly about the differences between the Poland of Gomułka and that of Stalinism. Thus one could read about changes in agrarian policy, mainly about the sudden and spontaneous de-collectivisation of agriculture in the autumn of 1956. Out of more than 10,000 agricultural cooperatives fewer than 2,000 survived until late 1956. Farmers also remembered the abolition of compulsory milk deliveries and the reduction of compulsory quotas of grain, potatoes and livestock.

There was also some discussion about the changes in the Catholic Church – state relations, symbolised by the release of Cardinal Stefan

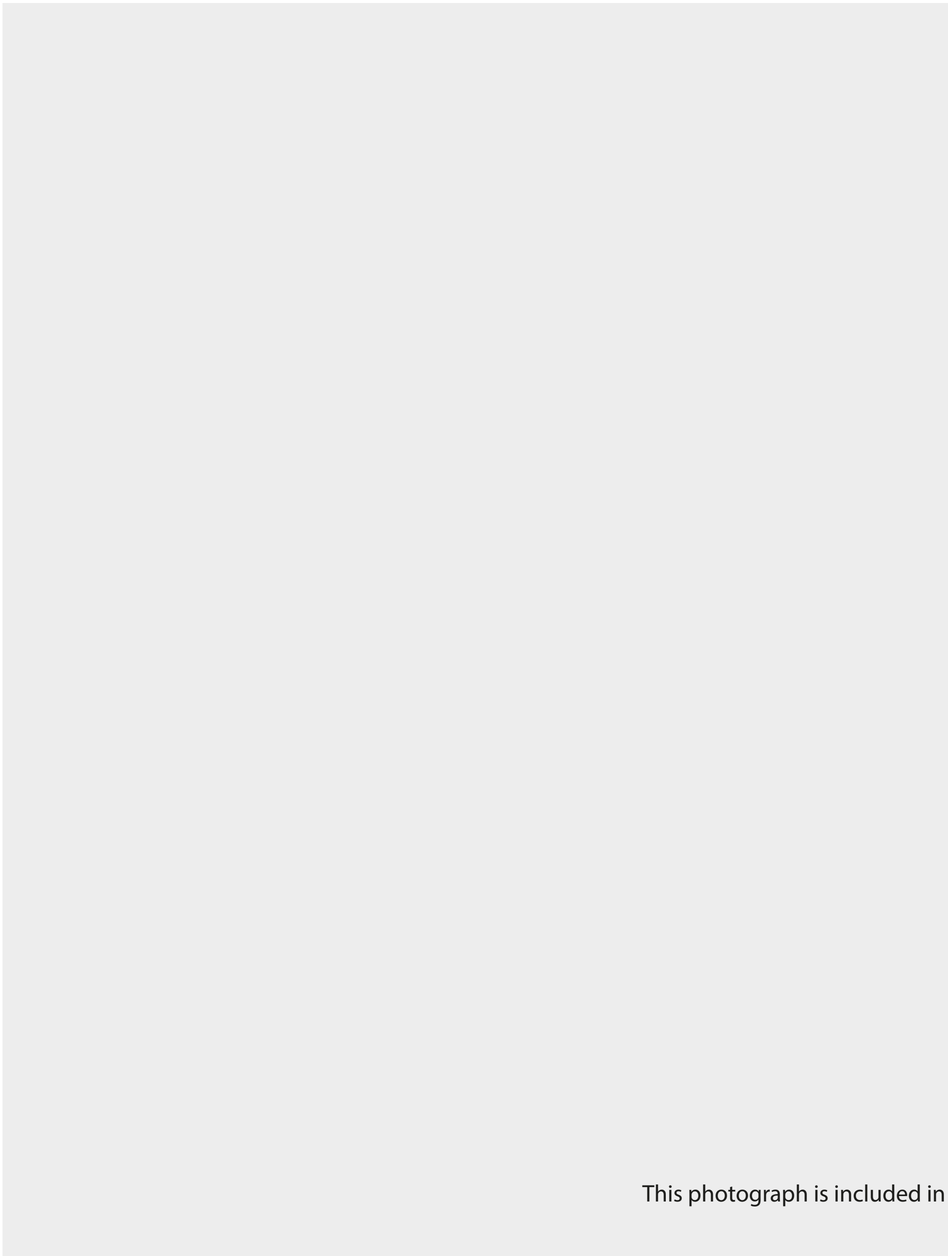
Wyszyński from internment and many clergymen from prisons, including bishops. One should remember that the Joint Government and Episcopate Commission (formerly the Mixed Commission) was reactivated after a few years and reinstated religious education (as an extracurricular and optional subject), and that the government issued a new decree on ecclesiastic positions, dropping some of its prerogatives in matters of Church organisations.

One should also mention the restitution of the *Tygodnik Powszechny* weekly to its rightful editors, and the authorities' sanctioning the establishment and activity of Clubs of Catholic Intellectuals in Kraków, Poznań, Toruń, Warszawa and Wrocław, and finally their consent to have a parliamentary representation of Catholics approved and supported by the primate. Ultimately, after the elections of January 1957, there were eleven MPs in the Catholic parliamentary circle "Znak" (Sign), and Jerzy Zawiejski, in accord with an earlier agreement, was appointed a member of the Council of State.

One fundamental change brought on by October'56 was the end of terror in public life. Tens of thousands of people were amnestied and released from prison. At the same time, the authorities relinquished the use of violence on citizens. Naturally, this does not mean that the PRL was to be a state without political prisoners, but the scale of repressions never (even during the martial law period) reached that of Stalinism. It was the definite end of the era of clandestine assassinations (although "unidentified perpetrators" were heard of from time to time) and persecution affecting large segments of society. The main thrust of the repressions was directed against open political opponents of the regime.

Another important change was the new partnership relations with the Soviet Union (too much of a partnership, as some said). In any case, the news of the departure of Konstanty Rokossovsky (who was simultaneously a Soviet marshal and Poland's minister of defence) to Moscow was, as a rule, received enthusiastically by most Poles. Similarly, most people were happy to hear that the generally hated Soviet military advisors who served in Polish uniforms had disappeared. To be sure, the re-polonisation of the Polish Army was one of the positive consequences of the changes of 1956.

The Gomułka-led leadership was able to regulate a number of other important issues in Polish-Soviet relations. In November 1956 the Polish


This photograph is included in

the printed edition of the book

Polish motorcars (Syrena and Warszawa) ruled Polish streets, and set the living standards of Poles of that time, Warsaw, 1967. (The National Digital Archives)

side negotiated cancellation of debt and obtained a new loan to purchase 1.4 million tonnes of grain. The cancelled debt – one may recall – was to compensate for deliveries of Polish coal to the USSR during 1946–1953 at extremely low prices. After October'56 both countries reached an agreement on the stationing of Soviet troops in Poland, whose presence "could not infringe on the sovereignty of the Polish state" or "lead to their interference in the internal affairs of the PRL". In March 1957 a Polish-Soviet repatriation agreement was signed. On this basis within the space of two years 224,000 Poles living outside its borders on pre-war Polish territory arrived in the country.

There were also profound changes in intellectual and artistic life. The authorities had in practice abandoned promoting socialist realism in culture and art. But a true revival came only after October'56. American films were shown, contemporary literature was published or books deemed inappropriate or detrimental to national interest and thus banned as recently as several months ago; theatres produced plays never shown in Poland or absent for many years.

The press enjoyed an unprecedented scope of activity; more and more taboos disappeared, the temperature of public debate remained high, more and more areas were discussed. A similar reinvigoration appeared in the academic milieu, which was shrugging off Stalinist restrictions and prohibitions. Unfortunately, the liberalisation did not last long. Nevertheless, despite the systematic "tightening of the screw" in this sphere, even as late as the mid-1960s Poland was the most liberal and open country in the region; the current bitter joke for many years was "the jolliest barrack in the socialistic camp".

In the second half of the 1950s the standard of living improved considerably. Naturally the level of consumption was kept at a low level. A privately owned car (even a fairly basic one such as the Syrena or the Mikrus) remained a luxury. On the other hand motorcycles became popular, especially in the provinces, mostly manufactured in Poland. Foreign travel – though theoretically possible – in practice was restricted to a narrow group of people. They included members of the broadly understood authorities (party functionaries, bureaucracy, army, and state security), engineers and technicians, artists, scholars, athletes, professionals and private entrepreneurs.

Most people, after all, travelled to the "people's democracies", mainly to the Black Sea or to Hungary (Lake Balaton). At that time people travelled to the West only very rarely. Nevertheless there is no doubt that after October'56 consumption aspirations began to rise, and general poverty shrank substantially, although there still was quite a lot poverty and even misery.

On a scale incomparable with other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Polish society had a chance to enjoy contemporary culture and science. Translations of valuable books were published as well as interesting works of Polish literature, theatrical life flourished and it was the golden age of Polish cinema. It was then that the Polish Film School flourished. Polish jazz musicians were gaining international recognition; they had the opportunity to match their skills and talent with those of the best musicians at the Jazz Jamboree festival. The annual Film Confrontations in Warsaw gave the public a chance to see the best and often simply the most famous and the most popular foreign films.

All this did have some influence on the general level of society, which was ever better educated. This process was facilitated by the growth of television, which in the 1960s – regardless of state censorship – became educational and promoted culture. The period also saw a development of popular culture (naturally on a limited scale). This process was facilitated by the fact that a young generation born and raised in People's Poland was coming of age. These young people listened to English-speaking bands and singers and tried to dress – if possible – as their peers did in the West.

It is probably true that after October'56 the rulers and the ruled struck a silent deal that could be summarised as "we let you live and you don't disturb our rule". Thus the authorities would welcome society's political passivity, activated only when the Party saw fit. This situation was to be upheld by liberalisation and stimulating modest consumption, generally kept at a low level. A great Polish poet, Tadeusz Różewicz, more than aptly described the period as "our small stability". Let it be added that Marcin Zaremba rather correctly branded the Poland of Gomułka's coarse rule "small instability" due to the numerous conflicts, social tension and upheavals.

However, regardless of the above mentioned differences, there is another way to look at post-October'56 Poland. Certainly, it is worthwhile looking

at it not only through the prism of differences and changes in comparison with the years of Stalinism. Without denying the extent of the changes, one could, after all, focus on what had not changed. Primarily, one should stress that 1956 did not bring a systemic change. The same Stalinist Constitution of 1952 was still in force with the same institutions (the Sejm, the Council of State) whose role was purely symbolic. Just as previously, the true centre of power was the Party leadership that is the Political Bureau and the Central Committee Secretariat.

Neither was there any major revision in the extremely severe legal system. One could still be sentenced to death and executed for a white-collar crime (as was Tadeusz Wawrzecki in the so-called "meat scandal"), or be detained without trial for an extended period of time or go to gaol for writing a book. Although its competences had already been somewhat restricted, the political police (the Security Service) still was the guardian of the regime and undertook surveillance on the citizens. Preventive repressive censorship was still used and if any bolder articles, books or films were released, it was only because the rulers decided so at the given moment. Unlike 1981, censorship was not subject to any statutory restrictions and when social tension subsided it could be smoothly restored to its main function – being the regime's guardian.

Also the scale and extent of the personnel shake-up were not as great as is typically believed. The First Secretary of the Party, Edward Ochab, was replaced by Gomułka, but remained a Politburo member, which was extremely rare in the Party's history. On the whole there were only two new members in the nine members of the Political Bureau appointed at the Eighth Plenum: Gomułka himself and one of his closest associates, Ignacy Lega-Sowiński. So it would be rather difficult to call the new line-up new. One should bear in mind that both the prime minister (Józef Cyrankiewicz) and the chairman of the Council of State (Aleksander Zawadzki) retained their posts. Also, a substantial number of activists deposed in 1956 returned to prominent party and government posts just a few years later. Thus in no way can one speak of a radical reshuffle of incumbents after Gomułka took power.

Neither were there any fundamental changes in Polish-Soviet relations. Regardless of what is written above, it should be stressed that the PRL still

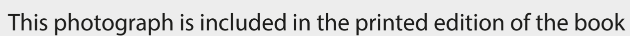
was not a sovereign state. All important foreign and internal policy decisions continued to be consulted with the Kremlin, carried out at its behest or with its approval. Moreover, the issue of PRL's dependence on the Soviet Union's remains among the least studied subjects. It is still easier to ask research questions on this subject than answer them. The Kremlin's role is discussed in the last chapter.

One point now should be emphasised now. When Marshal Rokossovsky and the Soviet advisors were leaving Poland, the Warsaw Pact had existed for over a year. Its structures offered the USSR new ways of controlling its allies, the armed forces in particular. Soviet interests in Poland were protected by the Northern Group of the Soviet Army, several tens of thousands strong with state-of-the-art equipment and – as was shown later – nuclear weapons. Soviet economic interests were looked after by the COMECON, established in 1949 yet did not become active until the mid-1950s.

1970 – a less important turn of history?

The title is provocative to an extent. Was everything that happened in Poland in 1970 less important than what had taken place fourteen years earlier? A simple and unequivocal answer does not seem possible. But one should bear in mind that considerations on this subject are not facilitated by a kind of campaign run by many participants of the individual "Polish months" in order to win the best possible place in our common national memory for those protests they were personally involved in.

To simplify things a little, one could say that this rivalry concerns deciding which of the "Polish months" may be said to be the root from which Solidarity eventually sprang and, by the same token, which of them played the greatest role in the overthrowing of the communist regime in Poland. In the extreme cases – not that few at all, one should add – struggle, for a place in common national memory could also be used as a political springboard and boost the career of one-time participants in the "Polish months". This struggle does not necessarily arise from profit motives, but it is perfectly understandable that events that one took part in are perceived as closest to one's heart and thus are treated as the most important.



Poznań June'56 Monument unveiled in the days of legal Solidarity, June 1981. (Institute of National Remembrance)

That is exactly why I was not very surprised when several years ago I was asked a rhetorical question why no one outside Poznań really cares about commemorating June'56, and why – apart from anniversary pieces in the national press – it is practically never mentioned at all. Later on, when I was gathering materials for a monograph of December'70 I heard a similar question on the Baltic coast: "Why does no one speak about it, why does no one in Poland remember about the December'70 tragedy?" On another occasion I was confronted with the absence of collective memory in Radom: "Why does no one want to remember us?"

Probably, there is no rational answer to these questions. One could quote the old saying: "near is my shirt but nearer is my skin." In other words, one should not be surprised that people who have suffered some ordeal, assign special importance precisely to that event in which they were personally involved and suffered in the process. This is even more understandable given that many of them feel (often rightly) that they had been active in the struggle against the communist regime, and when the system changed in Poland – again – rightly or wrongly – feel that they were used, abandoned and forgotten.

This phenomenon is well known to and extensively discussed by sociologists and social psychologists. In hindsight, this kind of bidding is rather pointless, because all the dates on the Poznań monument dedicated to June'56 (1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980 and 1981) refer to rebellions and social protests, which form our common and dramatic road to freedom, independence and democracy. So does it make any sense to consider the question whether the events of 1970/1971 were less significant and profound than those of fourteen years before? Truly, I would not dare say that December'70 was a less important "turn" in our history.

To assume that it was of a lesser significance raises doubts for one more reason. After all, nearly everything I have written above may and should somehow refer to the entire period when Gierek replaced Gomułka as First Secretary of the Party. He attained power as a result of a violent social upheaval, a workers' uprising and behind-the-scenes activities of some party activists.

One may recall at this point that at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s Poland saw a generation change in the party leadership. Together with Gomułka, an entire generation of old communists were leaving the political stage, some

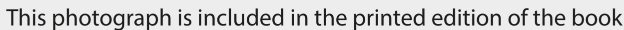
of whom had been active in the Communist Party of Poland before the war. They were replaced by young people, educated and raised in People's Poland, in a school of political thinking, of the Polish Youth Union. This was conducive to a certain idealisation of the Stalinist period in the mass media, something that enabled some opponents of the regime to call the Gierek era "Stalinism without terror".

The 1970s also saw at least two processes within the party: a significant growth in membership (branded "popularisation") and a kind of ideological blurring, as for example in the case of the gradual replacing of the red flag by the white and red flag (this process was called "nationalisation"). The Polish Party (PZPR) cannot be treated by us as any other party operating in a democratic system, which from time to time goes to the polls and by its very nature tries to hold on to power. After all in those days one witnessed the phenomenon of the Party and the state merging together, which is one of the fundamental features of modern dictatorships, and not only of totalitarian ones.

As a result in early 1980 the Party had over three million members and candidates, being around 15 per cent of the adult population. The Party was becoming less and less the avant-garde of the working class and was gradually turning into a rulers' party. A careful observer could identify in its ranks representatives of all kinds of currents: orthodox communists, socialists, social democrats, as well as liberals, conservatives and nationalists. In an autocratic state such as the PRL, the Party became an umbrella for people of various political orientations and different experiences in life, who wished to become involved in politics officially and legally.

At the same time, as a result of an extensive party *nomenklatura* system, appointment to the lowest managerial post without Party membership or at least without Party recommendation was becoming practically impossible. Many people, therefore, joined the party not for ideological reasons but not to deprive oneself of the chance for career advancement. As a result, in certain milieus (for example in the security apparatus, among diplomats and army officers) over 90 per cent or more were Party members.

Another widespread phenomenon was that of high school graduates joining the Party. But there is no academically acceptable way to determine how



Lucky owner of Fiat 126p, colloquially called "Maluch" (tiny), on the way to a holiday resort, August 1978. (Polish Press Agency, photo Adam Urbanek)

many of them joined for ideological reasons and how many were opportunists, who wanted to pass the final high school exams and enrol into a university. To be sure, the authorities tried their best to win as much young people's support as possible. One of the most popular slogans of the 1970s was, after all: "Youth with the Party!"

Yet regardless of all the differences between the Poland of Gomułka and Gierek's Poland, one should stress that after December'70 the system did not change substantially and its constitutive mechanisms were preserved. After December and after October liberalisation was transitory. It was, indeed, weakened (by various means) and yet eventually the authorities were able to resume "hardline" policy. One should, however, stress one point. The "tightening of the screw" (after 1956, 1970 or, one may add, after 1980 or even after martial law) never turned back the clock to the situation of before the "thaw". In all these cases a certain range of positive changes (from society's point of view) proved to be permanent.

The economic and social dimension of the crisis

One should also bear in mind that in every case the political changes were accompanied at least by a temporary economic boom and an improved standard of living for a substantial segment of society. While Gomułka's regime enjoyed GDP growth mainly due to increased employment as a result of absorbing two million of young people from the post-war demographic boom, the growth of the 1970s was based on loans from western banks. Gomułka, upon leaving office left Poland debt free, whereas ten years later Gierek ran up thirty billion dollars of foreign debt. What is more, not all the investments of that "decade of accelerated growth" – as the spin doctors of "success propaganda" called it can be deemed successful, necessary or effective.

Nevertheless, in the collective memory of many (or perhaps most) the years 1972–1975 were remembered as the best and most prosperous, in the entire history of the PRL. It was then that the Polish economy opened up to the world, and as a result Poland began to manufacture foreign-licence products such as the Fiat motor car, Marlboro cigarettes, cassette decks or Massey-Fergusson tractors (the American International Harvester licence). Polish shops began selling Coca-Cola, which for many years was deemed a symbol of "capitalist decadence".

Poland's opening to the world was advantageous not only to Party activists, more and more frequently selected according to the "PML" (passive, mediocre, loyal) principle, but also to other, social circles, particularly to engineers, artists, scientists, academics and athletes. The intelligentsia, to a certain extent more than others, took advantage of the temporary easing of censorship. All this was accompanied by substantially facilitated travel to the West and allocation of a certain amount of foreign currency (130 dollars per person in the mid-1970s), which could be purchased once an official personal approval was obtained (which was not easy); the holders were entitled to buy at an artificially reduced bank rate. One should not forget that at this juncture the authorities made promises to resolve the housing problem by 1985. Farmers still remember that Gierek finally abolished compulsory foodstuffs deliveries and introduced free-of-charge health care; he also boosted farm animal breeding, mainly through fodder imports.

As for as the economic dimension of the "Polish crisis" one should emphasise that experts in the economic history of People's Poland generally agree that its nature was cyclical. Zbigniew Landau divided the entire period of postwar economic activity into four main phases, whose turning points were – as he said – the political turnings points whose causes were "errors of economic policy and the related popular discontent." Thus these were the following periods: 1944–1956, 1956–1970, 1970–1980 and 1980–1989. For our purposes, the most important is the identification of regularly repeated phases: proconsumption, rapid industrialisation, and so-called "economic manoeuvre".

The first was characterised by a "transitory directing of activity at the soonest possible substantial improvement of the standard of living." Such a policy was always short-lived. It was quickly replaced by the policy of rapid industrialisation, which in Poland usually meant the expansion of investment and armaments industries. Consumer goods industries were then overshadowed by the demand of heavy industry. Such one-sided activity led to economic and socio-political difficulties. When these difficulties threatened the long- or short-term plans, attempts were made to counteract them by proclaiming a "manoeuvre" in order to facilitate the reduction of economic disproportions.

Thus, in each case the authorities first tried to satisfy and sometimes even stimulate society's consumption needs only to later concentrate on the expansion of the development of the manufacture of the so-called "means of production", which caused "market tensions" and these proved to be very difficult to control. Because all the "manoeuvres" failed to yield the expected results, there were eruptions of social discontent, which in turn, brought about reshuffles at the top.

One might say that one of the inherent causes of the "Polish months" was the long-held dogma of the primacy of heavy industry (mining, metal and energy production) over the light and food industries, which catered to the needs of the people. In effect, the latter industries agriculture, housing development and to some extent transport – were permanently underinvested. For that reason there were constant shortages of commodities.

Suffice it to recall that for one third of its existence, PRL rationed all kinds of products. In 1980 alone these included: alcohol, petrol, footwear,

sugar, chocolate, cacao, grits, flour, meat and meat products, powdered milk, soap, baby oil, cigarettes, toothpaste, washing powder, rice and cotton wool. It is also difficult to forget the queues (where an average Pole would spend several hours a day) and empty stores. Thus it is hardly surprising that even the smallest price rise or wages reduction could ignite a social upheaval or even a general strike. In 1956, 1970 and 1976, such moves started protests, which took a violent and tragic course.

At this point one comes to the social aspect of the crises. As has been said, it would be a serious mistake to claim that protests erupted because of economic reasons only. Equally important was the sense of social injustice. Real socialism, at least verbally, proclaimed social equality for all citizens, but everyday practice often contradicted these ideals. The workers knew about the standard of living of the "red bourgeoisie" and as a rule were aware that this high standard was largely achieved at their expense.

Even though they had no theoretical background they understood that they lived in a world where there are equals (i.e. themselves) and those "more equal" (technical overseers, management, party activists and apparatchiks of various levels. They often sensed the contempt of some representatives of the workers' party (sic!), who often called them "proles" in private. At the same time the workers were beginning to realise how strong they actually were. They saw the authorities call of their generally unpopular decisions under the influence of worker protests. On several occasions worker protests resulted in reshuffles at the top.

August 1980. The beginning of the end

The changes that took place in Poland as a result of the strike wave of the summer 1980, turned out to be more or less durable, which sounds paradoxical as in the case of the 1956 and 1970 crises. Stanisław Kania, Gierek's successor as First Secretary, as did Ochab in 1956, became the Party leader for only a relatively short period of time. Thirteen months later, in October 1981, he was replaced by Wojciech Jaruzelski, who had been prime minister since February, and minister of defence since April 1968. When he became First Secretary of the Party, he kept his government posts, to which he added

two months later (when martial law was introduced) the post of the chairman of the Military Council of National Salvation. Never in the history of "People's Poland" was so much power concentrated in one man's hands.

At the same time, one should remember that the years 1980–1981 were a period of the greatest political freedom in the history of the PRL. Although no such comparative studies have been carried out, none the less it seems that then liberalisation was deeper than that of 1956. Furthermore the changes turned out to be relatively lasting and the liberalisation and democratisation were not reversed even by martial law. The legislation adopted by Parliament (Sejm) in 1981 (including the law on censorship) was only amended but not abolished. It was possible to eliminate Solidarity from the political scene but the workers' right to strike stayed.

There are many indications that between August'80 and December'81 Poland had a kind of dual rule, which in most historical instances, the older force (usually more conservative) is formal, while the other (typically younger and more dynamic) has real power. Thus one feels compelled to ask which side of the conflict during the period in question represented formal and which side held real power.

It would seem logical to say that the Party – the older force that defended the status quo did represent formal power, whereas Solidarity was the real force. However this answer would not be correct. It seems that there coexisted two real powers. Could one claim that the Party's power was merely formal given that it had the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies behind it, commanded the still enormous coercive apparatus (the judiciary, the military, the militia and state security), as well as central and local state administration and most of the media, particularly television?

On the other hand it would be difficult to deem as merely formal, the power the ten-million strong Solidarity, with its basis in large industrial enterprises (shipyards, steel mills, mines), and influence among the intellectuals and enjoying the support of the Catholic hierarchy and of non-communist public opinion. If this were to be regarded as formal power what would real power consist of?

After all neither side of the conflict was what it wanted to pass for. As has been said the Party (PZPR) should not be regarded as a typical party

functioning in a democratic system. The PZPR was even less of a typical political party than Solidarity was a classical trade union. It was a global phenomenon, something new and completely unique in the history of states ruled by communists.

The Polish word *solidarność* (solidarity) began to designate a social movement in a number of languages, next to the English "solidarity", the French *solidarité*, the German *Solidarität*, etc. Solidarity was the first legal and openly operating organisation independent of the party and state authorities in a "real socialism" country. No other organisation in Poland's history could boast almost ten million members. At the same time (autumn 1981) the Party had less than three million members, with 30 per cent being simultaneously members of Solidarity.

Yet Solidarity was not unique because it had an impressive membership. It became so famous and attracted international publicity primarily because it was a gigantic democratic movement in a dictatorship. It was also important – especially during the martial law period – that virtually all Solidarity members renounced violence and avoided any acts of terror, which distinguished them completely from members of various political movements, who, as they believed, in the right cause did not flinch from such drastic measures. The general adoption of non-violence in a country with such a strong revolutionary and conspiratorial tradition was next to miraculous, and, certainly, it cannot be explained away only by the fear of Soviet military intervention.

Many found it fascinating to see a kind of merging of left-wing and right-wing traditions in Solidarity. Nearly everyone (perhaps except the communists) found something there that they could identify with. No wonder then that both the conservative US president Ronald Regan and the socialist French president François Mitterand thought they were friends of Solidarity (and were generally believed to be such). In the West, Solidarity was openly supported by left-wing and right-wing organisations.

The former saw it primarily as a trade union and a powerful mass movement dominated by the "big industry working class", and emphasised Solidarity's slogans of social and political egalitarianism and perceived it as a force fighting for individual freedom in an undemocratic state. On the

other hand, organisations leaning toward the right were inclined to regard Solidarity mainly as a driving force behind a kind of conservative revolution under the Catholic Church's patronage in the name of Christian and national values so dear to the traditional right, which simultaneously tried to strengthen the prestige and authority of the family.

Often left and right alike found the anticommunist stance of Solidarity's leaders attractive, while Western governments saw it as a factor that weakened the integrity of the Warsaw Pact and a source of substantial problems for the USSR. Objectively speaking, Solidarity was simply an ally of the West in the cold war waged against the Soviet Union and its allies. No wonder, therefore, that it generated such publicity.

It was in a way an eclectic movement and, as has been said, it drew upon different ideological sources. It sought inspiration in the Church's social doctrine (partially so given that the pope was Polish) and in the tradition of democratic socialism, which may have been rooted in the left-wing sympathies of many Solidarity activists, and its advisors in particular. Nevertheless there is no doubt that among Solidarity's slogans were: freedom of the individual, equality before the law, truth, patriotism, dignity, and – above all – the broadly understood solidarity among people.

Although these were hardly new postulates and values (know to humanity for ages), Solidarity gave them a new content and for many people all over the world they became a source of hope for a better future. That is why millions manifested their solidarity with Solidarity in many countries and not because of the operations of some "antisocialist forces" or "sabotage centres". Another of Solidarity's achievements (today rather forgotten) was the creation and promotion of a popular political elite that was an alternative to the party elite, one that after 1989 played a vital role in Polish political life.

The enormous international interest in Solidarity was facilitated by its leader Lech Wałęsa, a figure with an enormous media potential, who has had an extremely successful career. There are only a few people who would have experienced such a rise over a few years: from a mere shipyard electrician, who was subsequently an activist of the Free Trade Unions (deemed illegal by the authorities, to the leader of a great strike, a trade union lead-

er, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and, later, Poland's president. It should be remembered that regardless of how he is perceived in contemporary Poland, Wałęsa showed millions all over the world that it was possible to rise from rags to riches as a self-made man.

As has been said, during 1980–1981 both forces: the Party and Solidarity were not what they perhaps appeared to be, a typical political party and a typical trade union, respectively. Certainly, they represented two opposite sides of the political spectrum so, quite understandably, an acute conflict between them was inevitable. It is difficult to say authoritatively whether a "violent confrontation" could not be avoided, but there is no doubt that such a solution was highly likely. Neither side (albeit to a different degree) understood the essence of democratic mechanisms or the true meaning of the word "compromise".

It seems that many believed it was tantamount to imposing one's will on the opponent. Naturally, to think in those categories, which still echo in contemporary Poland, is far from any idea of dialogue and compromise. Indeed Polish history unfortunately offered very few occasions to learn and exercise democratic mechanisms and standards.

One might venture to say that perhaps martial law would not have been imposed had the Solidarity leadership of 1981 shared the moderate stance of Bronisław Geremek and the Party leadership that of Hieronim Kubiak. The problem was, however, both men were fairly close to each other on the political spectrum and at the same time were at the peripheries of their respective political milieus and hardly representative of them. More marked on either side were the presence and the voices of the radicals such as Albin Siwak in the Party and Andrzej Rozpłochowski in the Solidarity leadership. In such circumstances true compromise was indeed unlikely, although, naturally, the responsibility for this failure was not evenly distributed.

To illustrate what has just been described one may look at the "meeting of three": the primate Józef Glemp, General Wojciech Jaruzelski and Lech Wałęsa that took place on 4 November 1981. At that time the authorities proposed a Council of National Accord, which many correctly perceived as a new form of the Front of National Unity. It seems that the communists wanted to include Solidarity and perhaps even the Church in the proposed

council, on identical or similar terms as the allied parties and the youth umbrella, social women's and milieu organisations, etc.

The other side proposed an accord of the only three forces: the party and state authorities, the Church and Solidarity. In 1981, there was perhaps no one in Poland who would not have felt associated with at least one of them. Some felt affiliation with two pieces of this "puzzle": the Church and Solidarity or the Party and Solidarity, or in extreme cases with all three.

Some people claim that during the Round Table talks the authorities tried to implement the scenario proposed in the autumn of 1981. There is, however, one fundamental difference. Namely, the representatives of the allied parties and all kinds of umbrella organisations (including "our Catholics", as one party activist aptly put it) were incorporated into the government representation and were not independent during the negotiations (perhaps with the exception of the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions [OPZZ]).

At the same time, one should emphasise that the proposal to establish the National Accord Council was probably intended to counterbalance Solidarity's idea to establish the Social Council of National Economy of autumn 1981. Solidarity was prepared to invest its authority in a program of economic reform (which entailed extensive price rises) provided that it would be able to control production, export and import and the distribution of all kinds of goods. Solidarity's representatives also demanded access to the mass media, in particular television. Thus the "meeting of three" did not yield any decisions, because it could not. The objectives of the parties to the conflict were mutually contradictory, and the situation in the country was slowly becoming desperate.

Several months earlier, in the spring of 1980, workers' protests met indeed, enthusiastic support of many milieus, particularly that of the intellectuals. Polish workers enjoyed the support of artists, writers, actors, scholars and journalists, who no longer wanted to live in a world of lies. Polish society stood united as never before in the history of the PRL. Given Poland's dependence on the USSR and the degree of social awareness, demands were not formulated openly, but in a veiled language of official propaganda, with different meanings assigned to the same words. Hence, perhaps the considerable popularity of the slogan: "Socialism – yes; distortion – no!"

Also, from the outset, the dynamics of the social movement were being deliberately contained by Solidarity's leadership. This process was later called the "self-restricting revolution." The political situation was very difficult and further exacerbated by the party leadership, which did not understand that it was no longer possible to run the country in the old style without resorting to violence. The moment August'80 was over; many local party activists declared that there would be no independent and self-governing trade unions.

Thus a wave of strikes spread across the country and the political demands (i.e. high-price compensation called "wałęsówki") mixed with political ones, and – perhaps even more often – with trade and local ones. Anyhow, it seems that at no time between August'80 and December'81, were the PRL authorities really prepared or regarded it correctly and not as a rival and opponent.

No wonder then that for several months there were conflicts and controversies between the new trade unions and the authorities who could not and did not wish to treat Solidarity as a serious political partner. They had nothing in common: neither values, historical background, traditions to draw upon, political experience, attitude to the recent past nor even the language. Solidarity was generally considered the main driving force behind "the renewal" (*odnowa*), something certain representatives of the authorities were envious of.

Meanwhile, in the autumn of 1980 some rank-and-file party members became active and demanded that an extraordinary party congress convene as soon as possible and that thorough changes be implemented, which would go further than a reshuffle. In a number of places the so-called "horizontal structures" began to emerge within the Party, which wished to replace centralised party administration with agreements at the lowest levels. These structures were the object of attacks by the conservative party apparatus, jealous of its privileges. In the spring of 1981 the first – and as it proved to be the last – delegates were chosen for the extraordinary Ninth Party Congress.

Most votes were cast for candidates who were determined to begin reform and cooperate with Solidarity. At the same time, at the provincial-level conferences, well known and established activists were losing support. Thus a far reaching leadership reshuffle was in the offing. This process was brutally

curtailed by a CPSU letter of 11 June and published by Polish newspapers, addressed to the Central Committee of the Polish Party (PZPR), clearly a case of Soviet interference in Poland's internal affairs.

One cannot consider the events of 1980–1981 without examining the international situation at that time. It was a bipolar world, divided into political and military blocs. In the post-Yalta Europe, Poland was in the Soviet sphere of influence (actually ruthless Soviet domination), and no genuine reform movement was possible until thorough changes took place in the USSR. It had been made abundantly clear to the Hungarians (in 1956) and the Czechs and the Slovaks in 1968 before the Poles experienced this.

When one examines the developments in Poland during 1980–1981, the most controversial and heated issue is the possible pressure on Poland's leadership applied by its Warsaw Pact allies, primarily by the Soviet authorities. Today, in light of the growing source base, more and more is learned about the martial law preparations. One way or another, regardless of their own preparations PRL's leaders had been under Soviet pressure.

Nevertheless military blackmail seemed to be the last resort. The Soviets exerted economic pressure on the Poles on an incomparably greater scale. This primarily included restricted supplies of raw materials, particularly oil and gas. At the same time they complained that the Poles failed to fulfil their COMECON commitments and were over-due with supplies of all kinds of commodities, coal in particular. The Kremlin believed that it was a result of "destructive strikes" and the unjustified – given the difficult economic situation – shortening of the working week (so-called "free Saturdays").

General Jaruzelski talked about this a number of times, stressing that during 1980–1981 Poland's gross national income fell by 18 per cent, while wages grew by 25 per cent. At the same time actual work time in Poland was around 34.5 hours on average, against 39.7 in the US and as much as 41.2 in Japan. It should be stressed that while the complex issue of Soviet intervention in the late 1981 threat is still debated, the issue of very strong Soviet economic pressure is virtually uncontested.

In a discussion of dual power one should also mention that the authorities – who wielded the apparatus of coercion – were able to prepare for a violent confrontation with Solidarity, – despite allegations – of organising it.

On 15 March 1981 at a meeting of the leaderships of the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Internal Affairs three possible martial law scenarios were discussed, naturally based on the assumption that those deemed particularly dangerous be previously interned and that society had been "prepared" by appropriate propaganda.

The first scenario, which Andrzej Paczkowski called "mild", assumed that, in principle, everybody would submit to the new regulations and with a limited scale of strikes and rather passive militia and army, martial law would be gradually lifted in individual regions. Scenario two, which Paczkowski called "active", assumed some regions were to experience "mass-scale strikes", with rallies and strikes expected in factories. The army would behave "defensively and protectively" and the militia was to carry out, summary proceedings against those detained, and all to be supported by "active party and propaganda efforts". Finally, the third scenario, described as "insurrection", envisaged a nationwide general occupation strike combined with street demonstrations and attacks on public buildings.

Thus one might assume that in this case what the drafters of this document had in mind was a scale of similar to that of December 1970. In such an eventuality – according to the document – "Warsaw Pact military assistance is deemed possible." It seems that, ultimately, in December 1981 Poland was very close to scenario two. It should also be made clear that regardless of whether Jaruzelski had intimate knowledge of Soviet plans for Poland or not, the true main beneficiaries of martial law were the men at the Kremlin. Their priority was the restoration of order (as they understood it) in Warsaw. The fact that the Polish rebellion was crushed by Poles themselves gave them the chance to avoid the scenario tested in 1956 in Hungary and twelve years later in Czechoslovakia. The order, which they desired so much, reigned in Warsaw, and the Soviets never shed a drop of blood to pay for it.

Probably it will be a long time (if ever) before one could answer – in accordance with scholarly rigour-whether the Polish "experiment" of 1980–1981 could have ended in any other way than it did. The fact remains that another attempt to reform real socialism failed. After 13 December 1981 the number of those who ceased to believe that the system could be reformed grew considerably. If real socialism is deprived of the hegemony of the com-

munist party, preventive censorship, extensive state security apparatus, command economy, atheist indoctrination at all levels of education and instruction, the interference of political authorities in virtually all spheres of human endeavour, the system shall not so much be reformed as substantially and practically changed. The events of late 1980s and early 1990s confirmed this claim.

One should also recall that in the 1980s several changes were introduced, which were beneficial to society. The Polish Peasants' Party made efforts (as did the Rural Solidarity some years before) to obtain a constitutional amendment that guaranteed the permanence family farms, which was generally recognised as establishing individual farmers' rights of ownership, and of a final decision to abandon the idea of collectivisation.

One should mention here that three new institutions were introduced into the political and legal order even though they were never given a chance to spread their wings: the Constitutional Tribunal, the State Tribunal and the Ombudsman. With respect to the last institution – due to the incumbent Ewa Łętowska, who took her duties seriously – one might even assert that an institution characteristic of democracies appeared in an autocratic state.

In a sense Jaruzelski kept his word. Indeed he had said at the beginning of martial law that there would be no return to the situation before 13 December or August 1980. In fact September 1986 was clearly different from both Gierek's days and from 1980–1981. No doubt the Poles living in the final years of the PRL enjoyed the broadest range of freedoms in the entire Soviet bloc, but one finds it difficult to forget that it was a limited range nonetheless. The PRL remained an undemocratic state until its last day. Genuine change did not begin until 1989.

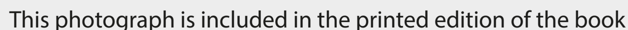
4. SOCIAL PROTEST OR POLITICAL PROVOCATION?

Who protested or the youth rebellion: March'68

The contradiction in the title is only apparent. After all in individual cases one sometimes dealt with both, a social rebellion and political provocation. Two points should be stressed here. First, although historical conspiracy theories have their ardent fans, professional historians are not among them. Second, all provocations can be successful only in a favourable social, mental and political climate.

In times of economic boom, when society is wealthy and on the whole satisfied with what the rulers do, when the state is free from major political conflicts, and in spite of all that, there are dissatisfied people who are able to express their dissatisfaction peacefully (for example in the media), it is indeed difficult to imagine provocateurs who could stir up large-scale social protests. In the PRL, in practice, none of these conditions were ever met.

It has already been said that in time of strikes and social unrest, the authorities would always claim that they had been instigated by some kind of foreign forces: "foreign sabotage centres", "West German revisionists", "American imperialists", "Zionists" or other enemies of People's Poland. Usually the authorities would claim that street demonstrations and clashes with the militia or even the army were of a counterrevolutionary character. The protesters, in turn, were branded by the official propaganda with offensive terms: hooligans, bandits, troublemakers, firebrands, etc. These extremely biased and unfair opinions were, as a rule, quickly verified, but only when such protests led changes at the top.



Rally to condemn the protesters at the Lenin Steel Mill at Nowa Huta, March 1968. Banners read: “Writers should write, students should study”, “Long live Władysław Gomułka”. (KARTA, photo Stanisław Gawliński)

One of the most mysterious issues in the entire history of the PRL is that of the social composition of the individual protests. Were those who during the “Polish months” stood up against the powers that be hooligans and bandits (as the official propaganda claimed) or perhaps heroes and patriots (as they are often called today)? One should stress that from the scholarly point of view there are no simple and unequivocal answers.

Moreover, such answers are not mutually exclusive. One could easily imagine, a common hooligan during a street demonstration waving the Polish

flag, shouting anti-government or anti-communist slogans. His attitude and behaviour are not easily classified. First and foremost one should stress that if one wishes to stick to the facts and common sense as one speaks of the "Polish months", one should always nuance all the aspects and say, for example, "many workers", "some students", "some intellectuals". And one should bear in mind that "some" does not always means "majority".

When one analyses the social composition of the individual, the most doubtful are the attitudes of workers toward the students' protests in March 1968 and those of students to the workers' protests in December 1970. The tradition of freedom fighting, cultivated by Solidarity, seems to contain some falsification. Namely, a wrong assumption had been made to the effect that the protests of 1968 were carried out by the intelligentsia. At the same time, the attitude of the workers toward the student movement was usually described as passive, if not downright hostile. I have tried to oppose this stereotype several times – unsuccessfully – quoting all kinds of sources, analysing actual workers' attitudes to student protests and demonstrating the heterogeneous and varied character of these attitudes.

One should, therefore, begin by saying that it would be a mistake to treat the wave of Polish youth contestation in March 1968 only as a student movement. Even if – which seems fairly certain – the students were the driving force behind those protests, they did not have a narrowly understood academic character and went far beyond issues exclusively specific to that milieu. In those days Polish students – unlike their counterparts in the West – spoke on behalf of nearly all of society, in matters important not only to themselves, but to most Poles.

One should also bear in mind that in many cases young workers or secondary school students took part in street demonstrations. It is difficult to overlook the fact that there were also street demonstrations in towns with no universities in 1968: Bielsko-Biała, Legnica, Radom and Tarnów. It seems that all this should generate more restraint in formulating general conclusions.

Meanwhile, many people still find it hard to believe that most of those arrested in March 1968 were actually workers. Naturally, there were several times more workers than students, but the facts speak for themselves. According to Ministry of Internal Affairs, from 7 March to 6 April 2725 people were

detained all over the country, including 937 workers, exceeding students by over 300. In the light of these figures it would be hard to maintain that workers were passive during the "March events."

I subscribe to a thesis put forward – independently of each other – by Andrzej Friszke and Marcin Zaremba. On the basis of the above figures Friszke asked if one should perhaps question the assertion of the passivity of workers in March'68 even though they "did not protest as a social group, did not operate in their plants, they protested individually or in small groups as a part of a crowd in street demonstrations. But it was, after all, a sizeable part."

Marcin Zaremba, in turn, pointed out that "all those workers mentioned in the reports were young or very young. They were less than thirty. It would mean that in March'68 one actually dealt with a movement, in which one of the essential ties was the generational band. In other words it was not the workers that moved but young people." This is an extremely interesting and important claim. It is quite understandable – young workers were often students' schoolmates, grew up together, belonged to the same boy scouts' troop or sports club.

When one analyses this problem one should not forget secondary school students, including – or perhaps primarily factory technical and vocational schools. Meanwhile Filip Musiał and Zdzisław Zblewski (among others) pointed out that in the early days of "the March events" the Cracow party functionaries and the security apparatus in Nowa Huta were afraid mainly of secondary school students, paying less attention to the attitudes of young workers. Yet this assessment proved to be wrong, as demonstrated in a file note of the ORMO (Volunteer Reserve of the Citizens Militia) functionary, Jan Szopa, of 13 March, who informed the Nowa Huta militia that "since the Warsaw events in workers' hotels (blocs 21 and 22) in the Jagiellonian Development the atmosphere is unsound. 75 per cent of the tenants openly praise the events, rant against the party and the government, and [until] late at night they listen (individually or in groups) to Radio 'Free Europe' programs. […] among the tenants, there are also Cracow university students."

For a number of days a tense atmosphere prevailed in the Lenin Steel Mills; leaflets and graffiti appeared, which expressed solidarity with the

students. Characteristic was an incident in the administration building of the Coke and Chemical Works, where – following pursuit – the 19-year-old locksmith Edmund Klimczyk was arrested. Twelve re-typed student leaflets were found on him, and they were addressed to the citizens of Cracow. It was established that he had managed to put up sixteen such leaflets. Musiał and Zblewski stressed: "During the first interrogation he behaved very bravely. He said that he had drafted the leaflets himself and categorically refused to identify the person who typed them, and made a kind of political declaration, recorded by the interrogating operational SB (Security Service) inspector, Lt. Adam Włodarczyk."

Edmund Klimczyk claimed that "he is not an enemy of the PRL or socialism in Poland, but doesn't like the situation in Poland at all, and that's why he endorses the students' demands without any reservation. He listened carefully to Wł[adysław] Gomułka's speech […] but believes that it doesn't explain away the problem. The problem is, according to him, not the standard of living in Poland, but Poland's limited freedom due to its dependence on the USSR, the all too blatant – contrasting differences in the standard of living in high places with that of the working class, the general waste of state property funds, no chance to criticise the evils in Poland, Gomułka's failure to keep his promises of October'56, the Stalinist speech delivered by Gierek in Katowice. […] Klimczyk is of the opinion that despite the students' defeat, due to their protest much will have to change for the better in Poland, and this is true victory. […] He expressed no regret whatsoever about what he had done. He maintains that nearly all his friends and colleagues share his opinion."

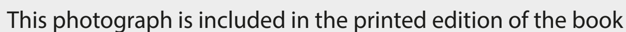
One should underline that one can only rarely read such unequivocal and bold declarations by people detained by state security, however, the graffiti, which the Security Service secured, had been seen not only by young workers. One may conclude that some older workers (not necessarily sympathising with the students) were not to keen to denounce the culprits. But let it be stressed that students, young workers and – to some extent – secondary school students shared a cultural code – they listened to the same music, watched the same films, and often had long hair, wore similar clothes, and felt similarly about a generational revolt.

A twenty years old worker often felt practically nothing in common with a twenty years older colleague, but he often would feel it with a student. Apparently never before and never since was there such a great cultural difference between successive generations. So it was a young people's revolt: of young workers, college students and secondary school students, who took to the streets. It was more difficult to stir the older generations. Their past experiences often played an important role, because they not only were personally affected but sometimes scarred by Stalinism. They were fearful of the powerful personnel manager at work, who could do virtually anything he wanted. They knew that they should not stand out. The young had a different approach to reality and, effectively rejected that strategy. Not to stand out? One must act when someone is harmed, one must protest and call injustice by its name.

Neither young workers (particularly those educated in secondary schools) nor students could avoid seeking the reference point for their aspirations in pre-war Poland (which it was for many members of the older generation), as they did in capitalist countries about which they learned from television programmes, Western films and stories heard from actual eyewitnesses (for example from sailors). The older workers, who were raised in a different reality, who often experienced poverty in pre-war Poland, could relate to First Secretary's arguments to the effect that before the war he had had only two shirts, and now they could boast four shirts. The young workers could not.

One should bear in mind that all revolutions, uprisings, revolts and rebellions are the work of young people. History does not know of any revolution or revolt of fifty-year-olds, although they could have been (and usually were) – leaders, ideologues, commanders. There are several reasons. First, young people engaged in protests were often unaware of the risks involved, due to their inexperience in these matters. Second, young people tend to be uncompromising and radical. Young people are less cautious and calculating. Third, it is obviously easier to take part in street clashes, which require substantial fitness (running away from the police, throwing rocks, sometimes hand-to-hand combat), when one is twenty rather than fifty years old.

Let us return here to the complex issue of the attitude of workers toward the student movement in March 1968. As has been said, it is still commonly


This photograph is included in the printed edition of the book

The militia charging protesters, Warsaw, March 1968. (Institute of National Remembrance)

held that in March'68 even if the workers did not rise against the students, they certainly offered no support. It is not easy to counter such stereotypes. The claim that the workers distanced themselves from the student movement is usually based on two arguments.

First, on 8 March the demonstration at Warsaw University was dispersed by "worker-activists" and later by workers – ORMO members. Similar events occurred in other cities, something that the proponents of this claim see as an argument against the possibility of workers' supporting the students. Secondly, from 11 March on large industrial plants were the scene of rallies were the workers adopted resolutions condemning the "organisers and fomenters" of student protests. Again, one cannot say that the workers supported the students, as the former passed resolutions condemning the latter.

This line of thinking – ostensibly logical – overlooks the fraudulent nature of the system. Who were the "worker activists" that "visited" Warsaw University? Were they really workers' delegates elected in factories? Of course they were not. Did they represent the views, interests and attitudes of workers or

of the party apparatus? They were not, in fact, workers' representatives, but a troop of the Warsaw Party committee. But the question remains whether the workers arrived at Warsaw University campus with clubs in hand in order to beat students.

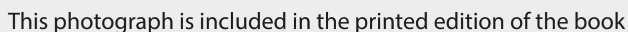
Jacek Kuroń answered this question in March 1981: "After all not all, not most, but a mere handful. But those men were actually employed as blue-collar workers in various plants, primarily in large industrial plants […] There were workers – I know them personally and we're friends – who gritted their teeth, who were furious and quietly cursed this and those men. But they did not have the courage to stand up and say: 'You cannot go there and beat [people] up'. And it was not because they were afraid of the authorities, even though they were indeed afraid. But because they felt no moral support from their colleagues."

On the same occasion Zbigniew Bujak spoke about the worker-thugs in a different tone, based on two workers' accounts: "At Ursus (Warsaw tractor factory) they managed to mobilise very few, mainly ORMO members and party activists." […] So if one assumes that the activists, the ORMO, etc. are real workers, then one can say that those thugs were workers.

What is important is how those men were later received in their workplaces. In large plants, if only a limited number of such thugs were recruited and they were hard to identify, then they would melt into the crowd. In smaller plants, on the other hand, where everyone knew who had been mobilised, those people would later meet – as was the case in Zelmot – for twenty years until 1970; they were frequently humiliated because they had joined the troops and they could be deployed again."

There are many indications that among the "guests" who "visited" the students at Warsaw University there were relatively few workers. For example, General Wojciech Jaruzelski recalled many years later that in this group there were some officers sent there by the leadership of the Main Political Directorate of the Polish Army. There were also many employees of various institutions and ministries. One should stress that among "worker activists" there were also blue-collar workers from large factories, although not from all of them and sometimes this fact was strongly emphasised. For example in Warsaw it was pointed out that the Żerań Motorcar Factory did not send its thugs.

This photograph is included in the printed edition of the book



One of the many rallies organized in industrial plants to condemn March 1968 protesters. Banners read: “Zionists go to Dayan”, “Anti-Semitism – No!”, “Anti-Zionism – Yes!”, “Punish the instigators!”, “Students – Don’t be provoked”. (PAP, photo Henryk Rosiak)

It would be worth recalling what Władysław Bieńkowski wrote almost on the spot about the dispersal of the students’ rally on 8 March: “some real workers were added. But when the action started they appealed to one professor for help to let them hide in the auditorium, because they don’t want to take part in what is happening here.”

The press from this period contains much information on factory rallies, which condemned the “organisers and inspirers” of protests at higher education institutions. For several weeks, virtually every day people heard that the rally participants demanded harsh punishments for “instigators” and “troublemakers”, exposing all culprits, expressed full support for “comrade Wiesław” and demanded that the party and state apparatus be purged of “revisionists”, “cosmopolites” and “Zionists.”

Television also showed footage from the rallies, with people, often sad and tired, listening to endless speeches by party activists. Those assembled flew all kinds of banners: “Anti-Semitism – no! Anti-Zionism – yes!”, “Zionists to Dayan!”. There were also some surreal instances: “Zionists to Siam!”

and some terrible ones: “Moshe to Israel”. Television in filming these rallies had problems with sound recording because there was not enough applause from the participants.

The rallies and meetings were carefully prepared and orchestrated by provincial party committees in tight co-operation with factory party organisations and management. Rallies were organised during working hours and when a rally was announced people would gladly interrupt work and go to a meeting. Many years later Zbigniew Bujak would recall the situation in the Ursus tractor factory: “The hardest thing for them was to find people to carry banners and slogans. They managed to put them only in the hands of party and youth activists. But even they upon arrival were trying to put the slogans against the wall; later they were trampled on by others. Some activists were gathered near the main stand – they were filmed and only they applauded. Others, especially young people, running around on metal roofs and stairs (the rally was held in the old cast-iron foundry) tried to drown out some of the speeches. The others, who were in front of the stand, would quietly listen and, as nothing appealed to them, were hostile to the propaganda.”

Thus despite the tone of March’68 propaganda, the attitude of workers to the student movement was far from unequivocal. Many condemned the violence used against the students. One should bear in mind what Lech Wałęsa wrote about it in his memoirs, when he and some colleagues tried to explain these things to other workers: “If students and intellectuals are the object of a propaganda campaign, this very fact means that they should receive our support. At that time there were about twenty interns, the Politechnic students, in the shipyard, and the next day young people’s clashes with the militia someone spotted a boy, in the locker room, with bruises on the back from a militia clubbing. We took him with us, with a bare back and thus he was walked under the slogan: ‘Will we let our children, children of workers and peasants be beaten?’ On that day the militia was completely defeated in Wrzeszcz (a district of Gdańsk). People had large springs ready and when the militia attacked – they weren’t well prepared yet, they had no shields or covers – people would launch those springs, which hit the attackers. When they took a beating, they suddenly realised that these were not riots by the

intellectuals, but that the workers stood for the students. One of the militia men, bleeding, shouted: 'Oh Jesus! What kind of shit have they got us into!'"

Wałęsa himself said bitterly: "the bonus for clubbing young people was two thousand per head". It wasn't a small sum; it was equal to the monthly remuneration of many a labourer. But there weren't too many volunteers, because they would be condemned by colleagues. We do not know which Warsaw factory this account comes from: "There was one activist, who was driven to town. Later he came back, walked around the plant with a club he had stolen and bragged about it. People looked at him as if he was a rag. I still regret that no one hit him. Everyone thought that someone else would to it and in the end no one did." Although the author probably generalises a bit, it is possible that he aptly reflects the mood and his colleagues' attitude to the "thugs" in many industrial plants.

The situation was similar in other cities. For example an employee of the Construction Office at the Lenin Steel Works, engineer Albin Ksieniewicz recalled: "During meetings and rallies various slogans were uttered, which the workers did not understand and did not know what was going on. There were banners: 'Zionist to Siam'. The workers kept asking: 'Where is Zion, and where is Siam?' Party members were forced to take part in crushing student demonstrations in the centre of Cracow. Copper cable prepared for power station repairs was cut into pieces and people thus armed boarded buses and rode on. It was then that some party members turned in their party cards. They did not wish to take the cable and go to Cracow to beat up their children, students."

In March 1968 students were perfectly aware what workers' support would mean for them, something they were clearly struggling for. Sometimes they would use leaflets addressed directly to them, sometimes through their slightly older colleagues – university graduates – who in March'68 were interns in large industrial plants. Interestingly, university students in their resolutions and leaflets consistently referred to the class category and not that of generation or culture. It seems that – wittingly or unwittingly – they yielded to propaganda pressure.

After all in People's Poland throughout its existence, the decisive category was that of class. This is particularly prominent in one leaflet from

Warsaw that began characteristically: "Proletarians, workers unite!" It is significant that they paraphrased words from Marx's and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*. Interestingly, it was the same communist archetype as the Gdańsk shipyard workers, who hung the slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" on the Lenin Shipyard gate.

Meanwhile, the students who had written that leaflet explained to the workers that the issue of censorship is designed to divide and sow the seeds of conflict between society and the students: "the actions of brave people, who care about the future of our Country and Socialism, are called acts of hooligans. Slander and provocation are meant to mislead you and turn you against your children. To deceive you – this is the only chance of the police organs, who know that fighting against Workers would be hopeless."

I have preserved the original spelling of capital letters, as it shows that the young authors of the letter were "chasing their own tail". How else could one explain the fact that they spoke about driving a wedge between society and the students? Did the students not consider themselves to be a part of society. In the leaflet's conclusion they appealed to the workers to join them and proclaim the slogan, which – in their opinion – was to express the aspirations and objectives of young people: "No education without freedom! No bread without freedom!" The latter might be treated as a kind of message of the entire student movement of March'68.

In 1981 Jacek Kuroń spoke about it interestingly: "Moreover this slogan is a kind of trap: first – is there really no bread without freedom and freedom without bread? Things could go either way. One could identify periods without freedom but with bread and vice versa. Secondly, as far as individual lives are concerned – and human affairs are all about individual matters, I'd venture to say that usually there is bread or there is freedom. This I know from personal experience – the more freedom that I have then the less bread I have and vice versa, although it might be the other way around. And this is the first trap. Naturally sometimes there is a close relationship between bread and freedom, between matters of economics and those of democracy. But this statement should be understood at once as a postulate and as a norm: we want bread and freedom, and we don't want to separate them. The second trap is far more dangerous, namely the implicit suggestion that

society is built along the following lines: the intellectuals went freedom and workers want bread. This is a very dangerous trap."

At that time we dealt with many leaflets of a different kind, which probably originated in workers' circles. For example, on 13 March at the Main School of Planning and Statistics the Security Service seized a typed leaflet, signed "FSO workers." It was addressed to Warsaw students and opens with a pathetic statement: "The working class was and is with all the students, with all the Poles that desire democracy and freedom. Together we fought in the unforgettable days of October'56, for equality and rights, for freedom and democracy, for sovereignty and independence."

Characteristically appeal is made to the memory of October'56, which the students could not remember – for obvious reasons. It seems that for some workers (if one assumes that the leaflets were in fact written by workers and not by students pretending to be workers, who thus tried to maintain the morale of their colleagues) the memory of a common fight for democratisation and liberalisation of political and social life in 1956 was still alive.

Further on in the leaflet – in reference to the FSO rally, where Warsaw students were condemned – the authors lamented the distortions of their opinions by the press: ''It was the apparatchiks, alienated from FSO and the television that prepared those lying and absurd slogans. We apologise to you, it isn't us, it's the press that condemns you. The working class is with the students. Freedom of the press is a pillar of democracy." The conclusion of leaflet ended in pathos, as in began: "Long live Poland, long live the friendship of the workers with the students, academics, writers and working intellectuals." In this case one cannot but think that the leaflet – regardless of its drafter – was full of official propaganda phraseology.

However one should bear in mind the atmosphere created by the media, in which these types of leaflets were printed as well as the large security apparatus, the many informers who penetrated both the academic and the workers' milieus, and finally the workers when Kuroń talked about, who – although indignant about the methods used by the broadly understood authorities, did not have the courage to openly protest against them and support the students (be it only verbally), as they did not feel their colleagues' support.

Certainly the reactions and behaviour of workers in March'68 were more complex and varied than their occasionally presented image. One might say that some workers beat other workers, while others offered then support. Moreover, it is also known that workers offered not only verbal support. This help sometimes had quite a tangible financial dimension. In the files of the Wrocław Commission for University Rallies there is a list of factories, which donated money and sent letters of support to protesting students, among them the Polar Metal Works and workers from Pafawag (railway wagon factory).

Who were the protesters or the young people's revolt – the case of December'70

Nearly everything I have written about the social composition of students in March'68 may be applied to December'70. Also in this case one hears the false thesis that the social protest was predominantly proletarian in character. Naturally the workers in December 1970 set the tone and character of the social protest. But here again and despite the facts, it was often maintained that at this time the intelligentsia (and particularly the students), paralysed by fear after the repressions of 1968, behaved passively and did not support the workers. This stereotype was best exemplified in Andrzej Wajda's film *Man of Iron*, where students in a dormitory were closing windows at the sight of a workers' demonstration. Wajda is an artist and it was his privilege to create such a picture, but the reality was very different.

On the first day of the Gdańsk protest, before the street clashes broke out, over five hundred demonstrators marched on the yard of the Gdańsk Polytechnic, where they exhorted the students to join the demonstration. There they were met by the rector and the first secretary of the school's party committee with a group of teachers. They wanted to speak but they were not allowed to use the microphone mounted in a car with amplifiers and loud-speakers. I tell the unusual story of this vehicle below. "The rector approached the head front of the demonstrators and in a loud, resounding voice said to them: 'Why – gentlemen – have you come here?' A young man jumped out of the van, snatched the microphone and forcefully pushed the rector. For the Polytechnic it was a big affront, something the 'energetic' young man

certainly was unaware of […] After this incident those inside the van began to shout: 'Come with us', 'The press lies', 'No more lies'."

Later some of the demonstrators entered the main hall, where they tried to persuade the students to join the protest. Characteristically Tadeusz Górski and Henryk Kula, who described this incident, emphasised that despite the commonly held opinion, neither side recalled the attitude of the workers in March'68. Yet according to other accounts, it was the workers themselves who referred to the "events of March '68, an apologised for [their] indifference in those days and appealed to the students for support and to join the protest."

It does not seem that one could say with absolute certainly how those talks actually progressed. According to most accounts, appeals to students to join the demonstration fell on deaf ears and the protesters who had achieved nothing, left the premises some forty minutes later and announced that they would return some time again in the evening. Meanwhile Tadeusz Stanisław Piotrowski in his very important and virtually overlooked memory text, attempted to describe the behaviour of the Gdańsk students in December'70.

He preceded his analysis with a statement that for him and his colleagues March'68 was not so much a political and ideological school as it was a kindergarten, because it failed to promote even local leaders that would be conscious of their own rebellion. "Perhaps it could be explained by the lack (at the time) of a university in the Tri-City (i.e. Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot). That there were not enough people who were conscious, politically experienced and determined that also affected the attitude of students, understood as a separate group in December 1970." This is what he used to explain the restraint of students at a time when the workers' demonstration marched onto the premises of the Polytechnic. At the same time he pointed out one more factor – which is often overlooked – and clearly stated that the workers "did not meet with active, enthusiastic reception. After all, the actual incident lasted only a short while, but its witnesses and participants among the students were accidentally people assembled, totally unprepared for active involvement. No wonder then that their reaction was restrained."

Still, true to a promise given the same evening, around two thousand demonstrators appeared again outside the Gdańsk Polytechnic. Again students were being persuaded to support the strike planned by the work-

ers for the following day. One should explain a certain inconsistency that appears in many accounts. Did the students appear at the evening rally or did the workers' demonstration find no one there? In fact the premises of the Polytechnic were cloaked in darkness when the workers arrived, and it is also true that they did not find a crowd of students there. It was then that rumours began to circulate that some could not leave the dormitories, where they were simply locked in.

But the matter is more complicated and if one wishes to understand it better one might find some help in Piotrowski's paper quoted above, which says that the dorm exits were indeed blocked that day, thus there were students – Party activists, who did not let anybody out. If someone persisted, representatives of the Polytechnic department were called in. No force was used, but the students were being persuaded and threatened with "unimaginable consequences." But this did not prevent most dorm dwellers leaving. Some of them took part in the abortive rally and the subsequent demonstrations, and some joined the crowd that attacked the Provincial Committee "individually". Only a few remained in the dorms, probably frightened by the violent character of the events and by the warnings heard from those who blocked the dorm exits. It was these people who formed the common opinion on the attitude of the students when – to use a circumspect style – they reacted rather anaemically to the reappearance of a group of workers pushing a militia patrol car.

There is no doubt that students took part in the Gdańsk street clashes. According to Ministry of Interior figures, there were 13 students among the 329 detained. It was a small percentage but – as has been said above – at that time Gdańsk was not yet major academic centre (the University of Gdańsk had been established just a few months before. In this light and given that the names of two students appeared on official lists of people killed in December 1970, one finds it impossible to maintain that students were passive in December'70. So one could ask in a style resonant with the tone of newspapers of that time: "Who and why are they interested in perpetuating these false stereotypes?"

When the PRL rulers occasionally referred to them, one might suppose that what they had in mind was the ancient "divide and rule" rule. But when

these stereotypes are repeated by wise and honest people, with great merits related to freedom and democracy in Poland, then one is quite puzzled. In 2000 Piotr Zaremba published a book on the Young Poland Movement (*Ruch Młodej Polski*), where one reads, among other information, that on 14 December 1970 the workers wanted to "win over the Polytechnic students. The students did not move, [because] they remembered the workers' passive stance over two years earlier". In a similar vein Zaremba repeats this stereotype in his description of March'68 in the Tri-City area: "Large students' demonstrations, spontaneously backed by secondary school pupils […]. Workers' milieus, including the big shipyard workers (in Gdynia and Gdańsk) remained passive."

To be fair, one should add that Zaremba based his description on an account of members of the Gdańsk opposition intellectuals. Indeed many members of the 1970s opposition milieus still believe that March'68 was chiefly a protest of students and intellectuals, while December'70 – was that of workers. For example, on 11 June 2012 at a conference organised at the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw, a similar opinion was voiced by Wojciech Onyszkiewicz, a former member of the Workers' Defence Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*). Speaking about his motives to become involved in opposition activities in the second half of the 1970s he said that people in his own milieu were conscious of what had had happened in the past: "We have experienced 1968, when the students rose and were left on their own. Then we had 1970, when the intelligentsia abandoned the workers…".

It is extremely hard to counter such veritably indestructible stereotypes. Let me only remark that in December'70 we had a youth revolt, this time of young workers, but predominantly also of students and pupils. When I was preparing the above quotation for publication I added a footnote in which I explained that it was a stereotypical interpretation, quite popular, but false. Sometime later I spoke to Wojciech Onyszkiewicz, who remarked that I must be right with respect to the facts, but added that he had been talking about the sentiment of his milieu as well as his own. This would explain quite a lot. A historian, who describes and analyses the past should thus present it not only as it was, but also write about what the actors and participants thought about it.

To return the main line of the narrative, let us recall that in the light of materials of the Organisational Department of the Central Committee of the PZPR (published in 1998), following the street demonstrations in Gdańsk on 15 March 1968, 194 people were arrested (including 30 students) and as many as "83 young workers, including 58 shipyard workers". One should also add that – according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs this day, at the peak of the events, the size of the crowd was estimated at 20,000 people, among them several thousand of the most active. Evidently one cannot maintain – despite the facts – that in March'68 the workers were passive.

One should also add that in terms of the violence of street clashes and the number of security forces deployed, the clashes of 15 March 1968 are comparable with those in Gdańsk on the first day (14 December) of the 1970 revolt, when troops with heavy equipment were not yet deployed and the militia did not yet use firearms.

The role of political provocation in the PRL crises

Discussion of PRL power crises often involve the issue of political or rather police provocation. Sometimes one hears that social upheavals were the result of machinations of some mysterious forces, sometimes associated with the security services. At the Eleventh Plenum of the Party's Central Committee in 1981, speaking about what had happened in Poznań in 1956 Jerzy Putrament stated authoritatively: "A mine had been planted there. Within our party two powerful factions were fighting each other, and one had planted this mine for the other: at the same time norms were raised, overtime was limited and some other decisions were made. All combined, this has led to the explosion."

Let it be added that Putrament – wittingly or not – was returning in a slightly modified form to conspiracy theories and interpretations of the Poznań tragedy, which were quite popular in the communist establishment in 1956. Suffice it to mention that the then commander of the Silesian Military District, General Wsiewołod Strażewski in a report to the Minister of National Defence of 21 July wrote that an "armed action in Poznań, combined with workers taking to the streets on a mass scale had been prepared and organised beforehand by the enemy."

It seems that with this kind of assessment General Strażewski was playing into the hands of his superiors. Moreover he only repeated what the party and state leadership was saying. On 30 June at a session of the Political Bureau, the deputy minister of defence General Stanisław Popławski, who had commanded the troops in Poznań in 1956, stated authoritatively that the "course of events in Poznań points to organised enemy action. The operation was run by underground staff. The weapons used were of German manufacture." Clearly, unlike Putrament, who saw inspiration in intra-party faction, both military men simply blamed the PRL's enemies.

One should emphasise at this point that conspiracy theories of the "Polish months" are not restricted to 1956. There is a fairly popular view that March'68 also was a great political provocation. But one should explain at this point what one means by "political provocation". If one believes that the rebellions the young people's milieu from Warsaw University around Jacek Kuroń, Karol Modzelewski and Adam Michnik (known as the "commandos") had long been penetrated by state security informers, who in a premeditated manner were carrying out a plan drafted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, one is simply wrong, and in this sense there was no provocation in 1968.

Nevertheless, if by "provocation" is meant action that should have triggered some reaction then it is a political or police provocation. Perhaps the "partisans" used this method to further their own goals and cynically took advantage of students' protests. It was easy to predict that if one bans such the production of a classical play such as Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (Forefathers), then members of the intelligentsia, particularly the young, would protest.

It was not difficult to predict either that if one hits two people in a tight-knit group, as "commandos" (illegally expelling from university two students: Michnik and Szlajfer), their colleagues would protest. That is exactly what happened and on 8 March a rally in their defence was organised in the Warsaw University compound. When the rally was about to end, young people were suddenly attacked with clubs by the militia, ORMO functionaries and the so-called "worker activists". The security forces operation – according to many eyewitnesses and participants – had all the signs of provocation. Regardless of whether it was so or not, one thing is certain – the brutal militia and ORMO assault led to more radical social sentiment and played

a decisive role for the course of events in the country. In this sense one can speak of a provocation.

Similar opinions are expressed about the circumstances of the outbreak of December'70. On 14 December upon hearing that shipyard workers had taken to the streets, the local security staff in Gdańsk deployed an "un-uniformed intervention group in order to carry out reconnaissance and destruction operations within the crowd." What was this "intervention group"? These were plain-clothes functionaries, who had blended in the crowd to monitor the course of events and keep the local security staff informed.

Given that on this day the demonstration was fairly peaceful until the attack (no cases of mugging or vandalism), one might ask what the true objective of this "intervention group" was and what kind of "destruction" in the crowd was planned. Naturally, it is hard to give a definite answer. One should bear in mind, however, that many suggested that a political provocation was possible in December 1970.

Let us also recall what Colonel Artur Gotówko (former head of Gen. Jaruzelski's personal protection team, known as "counterintelligence and physical protection" and in December 1970 a counterintelligence officer) said about the activity of the "intervention group" in an interview with Henryk Piecuch. First, he asked a perfectly legitimate question – how many such groups were actually deployed? He added: "Among several hundred demonstrators, a well--organised group of fifty can really stir things up. It can lead the demonstrators into pre-set a trap, and there were many more security functionaries and their agents in the crowd." There were also open operations – the deputy provincial commandant of the militia for security matters, Col. Władysław Pożoga, informed his superiors that film crews were sent to the Party headquarters in order to film the crowd, which was meant to show the people that they were being watched, which was a psychological instrument.

Perhaps one should recall the story of the van with loudspeakers, which played an important role in the first day of the Gdańsk protest. Let us recall that the demonstrators headed for the Party headquarters, demanding to speak to the First Secretary of the Provincial Committee – Alojzy Karkoszka. But that very day he was absent, as he attended a Party Plenum in Warsaw. In his place the demonstrators were greeted by the Committee's secretary

for organisational matters, Zenon Jundziłł, and he tried to speak but without loudspeakers he was heard only by those near to him. He proposed, therefore, that the demonstrators send a delegation, with which he offered to speak inside the building. In reply, one demonstrator said they would not be appointing anybody ("if we go with you, you'll lock us up. We do have the experience of 1968, when you did [so] with the students, and [also] in 1956"). So a loudspeaker van from the City National Council was brought in.

Zenon Jundziłł exhorted the demonstrators to return to work. He misspoke and addressed the "comrades" which was jeered. Jundziłł was thrown out of the loudspeaker van, which was seized by the protesters. At the same time rumours circulated in the crowd that the workers' delegation, which supposedly entered the building had been arrested. One by one, the protesters who began speaking through the microphone and demanded, among other demands, the release of arrested shipyard workers. One of the demonstrators, Henryk Jagielski, recalled that many people spoke, but he could not remember any names. In 1981 he said: "We're been told, among others, that Cegielski, Ursus and Nowa Huta are on strike, so we're not alone."

This is a very important piece of information, for it demonstrates that lies were used from the protest's outset, although it is not known who and why they circulated false information about strikes in other parts of the country. These doubts were further deepened by the account of Political Bureau member and deputy prime minister Stanisław Kociołek. Namely in December 1970 he had a bodyguard, who later told him: "On 14 December we blended into the crowd and with a group of colleagues we seized control of the Nysa van and I recited various slogans through the loudspeakers."

All this seems to show that this functionary was a member of the "intervention group". If that was the case, it would mean that its tasks included radicalising the mood of the demonstrators and escalating the conflict. Why was it done and in whose interest, we can only surmise. This is hardly of marginal importance, especially because the loudspeaker van became the *de facto* centre of the demonstration and was not officially seized by the militia until late evening.

One cannot but notice some similarities with the events of Poznań'56. On 28 June, outside the Castle, the then seat of the City National Council,

a loudspeaker van also appeared quite early in the day, and the then Secretary of Propaganda of the Provincial Party committee, Wincenty Kraśko, tried to speak from it. His words were jeered at (as was Jundziłł 14 years later), and he was removed from the van. Also in Poznań, the loudspeaker van was used by various random speakers, who recited more or less radical slogans, including one also heard in December 1970: "We demand a price reduction".

Other demands included higher salaries for teachers, restoration of religious instruction in state schools and "fewer Palaces of Culture and more flats to be built". One of the speakers in the loudspeaker van introduced himself as a colonel and war veteran and freedom fighter and exhorted the crowd to go to the prison in Młyńska Street to free the prisoners. Later, the van drove around the city and encouraged the demonstrators: "We have seized power, we control the castle, the Party headquarters, the Młyńska Street prison, we've destroyed the radio jamming facility, and what's left to do is to free the prisoners in Kochanowski Street."

Certain crucial similarities should be pointed out. We have just mentioned people, who gathered outside the Gdańsk Party headquarters, in spite of the facts, maintained that the shipyard workers were not alone in their protests and that the large enterprises had gone on strike (Cegielski, Ursus and the Lenin Steel Mill). Similarly, in Poznań on 28 June 1956, where – as one Security Office functionary noted – "an elderly gentleman said that there is an uprising all over the entire country, that the communist regime had collapsed everywhere, that in Warsaw the whole government was executed, shot and state security destroyed – so what it left to do is to seize only the Poznań state security HQ and the whole of Poland will be free."

If we were to trust the documents of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the person who spread such radical and, at the same time, false news that no doubt led to a further radicalisation of the mood, was one of the demonstrators. It is also possible that also in Gdańsk all the false information about strikes in other cities was spread not so much by state security agents or functionaries who attempted to escalate the radical mood of the crowd but some overzealous demonstrators who wanted to mobilise the people and encourage them to take more radical action.

Let it also be noted that in Radom on 25 June 1976 just as in Poznań and Gdańsk one of the provincial Party secretaries, Jerzy Adamczyk, greeted the crowd and failed (as had Kraśko and Jundziłł before) to pacify the mood. The crowd, estimated at 6,000, demanded to speak to the first provincial party secretary Janusz Prokopiak. He refused and proposed receiving a workers' delegation. Again, the workers were afraid of provocation and that the delegates would be arrested.

Ultimately Adamczyk left the building and met the crowd gathered outside the party headquarters. But he had actually nothing to offer to them. Twenty years later he talked about in a documentary film *Miasto z wyrokiem* (A City Condemned), directed by Wojciech Majewski: "I stood on a chair. I tried to start with the slogan, 'People, the whole country is at work' in order to establish rapport with the crowd, but it failed. The [Polish] national anthem and the 'Internationale' were sung, so I sang, what else was I supposed to do? Then the women, mostly, began speaking in raised voices to the effect that if you don't go to bed with the foreman, you won't get a rise, that people are finding it hard to make ends meet and now price rises are imminent […] I realised that someone was trying to pull me away from the people, who were pushing me the most. I suppose that they were employees of the Security Service or the Citizens Militia in plain clothes".

One should also emphasise that in all these cases the crowd remained peaceful for a fairly long time. In Poznań, the demonstrators themselves protected municipal lawns against trampling and made sure that no one showed any hostility to uniformed militia functionaries. A similar situation was the case for a long time in Gdańsk, according to different accounts, no one bothered the two militia men in front of the Party headquarters. Also in Radom, the demonstrators behaved peacefully for several hours and committed no acts of violence or vandalism.

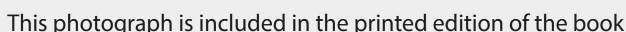
It is understandable that in the case of Poznań and Gdańsk the most interesting are the circumstances of using firearms. This is also true of the martial law period, but the most controversial aspect is that of the responsibility of individual people. Meanwhile scholars find it most difficult to establish who and when was the first to open fire. In the case of the Poznań Uprising, the matter is fairly obvious. It has long been known that the first

shots were fired on 28 June at 10.40 a.m. from a window on the second floor of the Provincial Public Security Office on Kochanowski Street.

December'70 is different in this respect. In all the reports I know that were prepared by subsequent party commissions set up to investigate the circumstances of the tragedy and in some publications by academically-minded Party historians, the dominant and consequently upheld view – in line with documents of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – is that on 15 December at 7.30 a.m., during clashes outside the provincial militia headquarters "shots from firearms were fired at militia functionaries. These were the very first shots fired during the incidents on the Coast." Three militia functionaries were wounded in the process. "Furthermore bullet holes were found on the provincial militia building's facade and six ricochet traces inside…"

It is also important to note that this very piece of information, within less than two hours persuaded Gomułka to take the decision "regarding the use of firearms by the forces of law and the army." It is difficult to say if the information was true. Initially I had thought that it was false, that it was only designed to divert attention from the fact that the militia had used firearms, and to convince the party leadership and later society at large that no shots would have been fired by the militia or the army had there been no shots from the crowd. But one could look at it from a different point of view. Let us state emphatically that the shots were fired from the crowd, but it does not necessarily mean that they were fired by the demonstrators. It is equally possible – and I believe it more likely – that they were fired by provocateurs placed in the crowd. In the PRL access to firearms was restricted. If firearms were in the hands of the dregs of society, they were typically used to commit a specific criminal act. It is difficult to believe that criminals would have brought pistols or revolvers to a demonstration, fired and thus risked confiscation by the militia.

At the same time it should be stressed that soldiers and state security functionaries had a practically unrestricted access to firearms. So it is likely that the shots were indeed fired from the crowd, but by state security functionaries within the crowd. One should bear in mind the "intervention group" deployed on the streets "in order to carry out reconnaissance and destruction action in the crowd".



This photograph is included in the printed edition of the book

Workers (wearing helmets) walking a thief out of a Gdańsk store, December 1970. State security specially retouched this photograph so that it illustrated the low morale of the protesters, who allegedly plundered stores and vandalized public property. (Institute of National Remembrance)

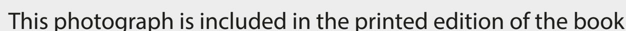
Despite the definite advance in historical studies, it still cannot be determined whether some political forces in December 1970 wanted to use the workers to cause a change of the leading elite and therefore carefully planned a provocation. Such a thesis was put forward by Henryk Mieczysław Kula. On the other hand Antoni Dudek and Tomasz Marszałkowski suggested that the demonstrators might have "used weapons acquired a few minutes earlier".

In my research on December'70, I found nearly two hundred pages of documents and accounts of militia men and soldiers relating to the shots fired from among the demonstrators. It is important that unlike the Poznań Uprising, when – as I have said – approximately two hundred firearms were acquired by the demonstrators, and ninety four were charged with armed assault, while in 1970 the "forces of order" detained only one person who carried a firearm.

The possible provocation is related to one more phenomena that merit some consideration. Namely certain "Polish months" share one more charac-

teristic activity of the crowd, such as common plunder, arson and vandalism. It has been said that in June 1976 in Radom, an unidentified person smashed windows in shops on Żeromski Street – and curiously – took nothing. It was later surmised that they were not necessarily demonstrators but – possibly – state security provocateurs.

One woman from Radom recalled: “I live in Żeromski Street and from my window I saw a large group of men smashing windows and taking things from the shops. There was a squad of militia men standing nearby. I shouted to them from the window, pointing at the robbers, but they didn’t react”. Zbigniew Adamus, in turn, said that a man came up to him and asked on behalf of the strike committee (he didn’t remember which committee) for protection of shops located opposite the party headquarters, because he was afraid of a provocation: “We went there. A young man stepped out of the crowd and began exhorting people to rob the shops that we were guarding. He smashed a pane in the shop window. I shouted: ‘You scoundrel, you came here from a militia station!’ He ran away when he heard these words. Then


This photograph is included in the printed edition of the book

Vandalized stores in downtown Radom, June 1976. (Institute of National Remembrance)

people ran into the smashed shop and broke other windows. I am certain that he was a man from the militia".

In December 1970 a similar situations occured in Gdańsk, Elbląg and Szczecin, where shop windows were smashed and the shops were later plundered. Kiosks and vehicles were burned – not all of them belonging to the militia or the army. It is understandable that plunder and robbery were – as a rule – shamefully ignored (at best their importance was diminished) in studies written by non-communist scholars. On the other hand, in studies by party propagandists the role of theft and robbery was often exaggerated. But, it should be noted that opinions as to who initiated this destructive activity vary.

It is quite likely that those robberies were committed by the demonstrators. According to a Gdańsk shipyard worker: "Already on Monday evening plunder and robbing of shops had begun. People say different things about it, because those guys who were smashing shop displays took nothing but went on smashing glass. This could have been a provocation." Another Gdańsk shipyard worker perhaps gives a more poignant account: "On the other side there was a kiosk with beverages […]. I see militia men running up to that kiosk with petards, with some incendiary devices. I saw them set the kiosk on fire and smash and, vandalise [things]."

It is difficult to deny that also among the demonstrators there were quite a few common thieves. Tomasz Wołek recalled years later that perhaps he was most impressed by the sight of plundered shops. He saw scenes of robbery: theft of furs and TV sets, and the stolen goods were hidden in nearby doorways. He also recalled books stolen from bookstores dumped into a canal near the River Motława. The most depressing sight, for him, was the picture of a hundred to one hundred and fifty drunken shipyard workers wearing helmets and overalls staggering in the streets, often with stolen bottles in hand, only several hundred metres from the party headquarters, which was stormed by the demonstrators.

It is not easy to keep a distance and detached objectivity when one writes about such things, the more so given that mass media usually emphasised the destructive aspect of the incidents. In no case should one assume the perspective of biased and purposefully falsified newspaper accounts, but one should not shun this unpleasant issue. Let it also be borne in mind that such incidents usually attract the dregs of society.

Interestingly, historical conspiracy theories had and probably still have many adherents among former party activists, a sentiment they expressed in their memoirs. For Gierek, the strike wave of the summer of 1980 was not a consequence of popular discontent caused by the economic disaster of the country, accompanied by the irritating success propaganda, but actually of some provocation. Even many years later he blamed many of his comrades from the top party echelon: Stanisław Kania, Stanisław Kowalczyk, Wojciech Jaruzelski and others.

This view was expressed even more categorically by Jaroszewicz: "In order to dispose of Babiuch and Gierek, the so-called 'July incidents' in Lublin were organised." After all, Jaroszewicz – it seems – was rather fond of conspiracy theories. He had a similar explanation for the causes of social protests in June 1976. He said that he was utterly convinced that the Radom and Ursus incidents had been inspired: "I remember, for example, that people unknown in the city appeared in the photographs showing the smashing of shops and burning of buildings in Radom, who evidently controlled the events. These people were pointed out, but who had prepared and sent them? Who protected and hid them later? Who were they? This has never been determined. […] Discontent or even indignation of people and the manifestations of protest were only natural. But this discontent was used for intrigue. It was not the workers of Radom and Ursus who plundered, burned and destroyed their cities. It was not the workers who started brawls. They were not the one who had prepared posters, leaflets and slogans."

Astonishing and contrary to common sense is the belief that "provocateurs and manipulators" would have been able to move tens of thousands people into the streets or into large industrial plants after proclaiming an occupation strike, had there not existed real political and economic roots of popular discontent. One should add that such a perception of complex social protests was not restricted to Polish communists. In the final chapter I endeavour to demonstrate that Moscow had a similar perception with its own substantial share of adherents to conspiracy theories. The Soviet party and state leadership often perceived complex social processes through the prism of political provocation. The communists share this view of the special role of provocation in political events with some anonymous authors of underground publications

sold in the streets in central Warsaw centre at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. This is an example of an extremely simplified, anonymous and anti-Semitic account of the genesis of December'70, full of stylistic and historical mistakes: "On the same day [7 December 1970] at 9 p.m. four gentlemen meet in a flat in Przyjaciół Street. These are: Stefan Jędrychowski, Mieczysław Jagielski, Józef Cyrankiewicz, Jerzy Albrecht. They talk about the planned price rise of foodstuffs and the possibility of utilizing it to provoke workers' protests against it. It was agreed that the proposed draft would be amended at the last minute, which slightly but noticeably, would reduce the level of income of the lowest earners. This was to be a kind of trigger for workers' protests. [...] On 9 December, in Stefan Staszewski's flat a meeting was held, with Jerzy Albrecht Zarzycki-Neugebauer, Andrzej Werblan participating. The subject of the talks was the scenario of the operation on the [Baltic] Coast on 12 December, in the Lenin Shipyard to wit. [...] One more v. important fact that took place on 12 December in four flats of young Lenin Shipyard workers, former Gdańsk Polytechnic students, expelled in March 1968, living in Gdańsk [...] I do not name any names, because – as one of the four told me (13 December 1970), none of them was aware what kind of a game they were playing. [...] the job of the four workers was to inspire stoppage of work at the two shipyard departments, where they were employed, and lead the workers to the management building in order to protest against the price rise.

People who arrived from Warsaw (8 persons, persuaded those four unsuspecting workers that a protest of shipyard employers would cause immediate withdrawal of the price rise, which is favoured only by W. Gomułka and B. Jaszczuk. In order to add to the encouragement, they left envelopes with greenbacks."

One might ask at this point why have I quoted such a statement. I did it only to demonstrate the absurdity of extreme historic conspiracy theories and how mystified, distorted and simplified might have been the presentation of the roots of one of the most profound socio-political crises in the history of the PRL. At the same time, one should bear in mind that this type of pseudo-historical study influenced the consciousness of many. Certainly, the best way to negate them is systematic study of recent history.

5. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE "POLISH MONTHS"

Preliminary remarks

A discussion of the individual outbreaks of crises in the PRL would be incomplete without considering the attitude of the Catholic Church – the only independent force throughout the entire PRL period. I mean the Church not as a congregation of the faithful but an institution. Strictly speaking, I mean the attitude of the Catholic hierarchy to the "Polish months".

It is worthwhile, therefore, to examine whether (and, possibly, to what an extent) the attitude of the hierarchy changed with respect to the events of 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980 and 1981. If such a phenomenon was actually the case, what was the cause? One may recall that all these upheavals (except one) took place when the primate of Poland was Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. The communist system in Poland had already passed through its most brutal phase, when even the Catholic Church had been subjected to ordeals. But, as I have said, from 1956 onwards the authorities stopped using terror on a mass scale in public life, although they never dispensed with harassment and repressions. At the same time, the communists – in contrast with the Stalinist period – did not require the people to participate in, and at least in part abstained from, a total ideological offensive, characteristic of every totalitarian regime.

After October'56 it was enough not to oppose, if all one wanted was to secure a peaceful existence for oneself, while previously people had been required to express their support. Another crucial change was that of the rulers' attitude toward the institutional Church and to the issue of freedom of

conscience. The authorities (not of their own accord, one should add) withdrew the brutal anti-Church measures of the first half of the 1950s and for some time stopped the instituting of total atheism and laicisation of public life. In his book on the Church-state relations Antoni Dudek aptly called the chapter on the years 1956–1958, "Short-lived normalisation".

One may add that this period saw an improvement of the relations with the Church in comparison to the Stalinist period and in the mid 1960s. What I mean is the Polish authorities' anti-Church campaign following the formal letter of the Polish bishops to the German bishops of 1965 and the heated controversy regarding the form and character of the Polish Millennium.

Let it be borne in mind that the change of the communist authorities' policy toward the Church in 1956 was forced by at least two factors. The first factor was the very restrained and simultaneously unshaken stance of the Polish clergy, with respect to matters of the most importance to the Church and the faithful during the political crisis of October'56. The second factor was the determined and very radical stance of large segments of society, which staunchly demanded reinstatement of religious instruction in schools.

When one compares the attitude of the Church hierarchs to the subsequent crises in the PRL, it appears that the clergy's situation was the most difficult precisely in 1956, when Cardinal Wyszyński had been detained for three years and thus could not speak in public. Furthermore, the Episcopate did not have sufficient strength (or perhaps the will or the courage) to speak out publicity and stand up for the rights of the faithful and of the Church. One should bear in mind that the Church's acting head was the bishop of Łódź, Michał Klepacz, simply imposed by the authorities after the arrest of Cardinal Wyszyński in September 1953. The communists blackmailed the hierarchs and threatened to immediately arrest any other person appointed chairman of the Episcopate.

In the spring and summer 1956, the bishops were lobbying intensively for Wyszyński's release. Yet at that time the party and state leadership thought that the authorities' foot-dragging was further exacerbated by the Cardinal's (when he was still in detention in the Komańcza monastery) launching the program of the Great Novena. Its first stage was to renew King John Casimir's Lvov Oath of 1656. This time – in connection with the forthcoming Millen-

nium of Poland's Baptism – this was to be an oath taken not by an individual but by the people. On 26 August 1956 at the foot of the Jasna Góra monastery several hundred thousand pilgrims repeated loudly: "Queen of Poland, we solemnly swear", which toward the end of the Stalinist period certainly had not only a purely religious but also a political significance.

1956

By all accounts, during the political crisis of 1956, neither Edward Ochab nor Władysław Gomułka remembered or did not wish to remember about the still detained Primate Wyszyński. They were reminded of it in a fairly radical, but also in a humorous way by participants of the October'56 rallies, when sometimes people would get carried away and ask: "Where is Comrade Primate?" or demand: "Free Comrade Wyszyński!" Stefan Staszewski, who was then First Secretary of the Warsaw Party committee, recalled some years later that on 24 October, at the end of the great rally in front of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, people shouted in support of the primate, chanting among others: "Wyszyński to the Bureau" – naturally to the Political Bureau.

The party and state authorities could no longer play for time. If they failed to release the primate, whose detention virtually symbolised the Church–state relations in the "former period", this would have brought about far reaching negative political consequences. On 26 October two close collaborators of the new First Secretary – Władysław Bieńkowski and Zenon Kliszko – travelled to the convent of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth in Komańcza. The former recalled many years later that they were sent by Gomułka personally, and that in those circumstances it was simply unavoidable. They presented Wyszyński an outline of the situation in Poland and its international underpinnings, and on Gomułka's behalf requested that he return to Warsaw as soon as possible and resume his pastoral duties.

The Cardinal agreed: "I have thought for the last three years that the place for the Primate of Poland is in Warsaw." But he put forward tough terms. Primarily he demanded abolition of the decree on Church posts of 9 February 1953. He also demanded the reactivation of the Mixed Commission made

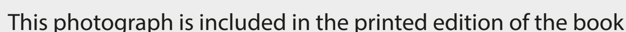
up of representatives of the government and the Episcopate, the release of Czesław Kaczmarek, the bishop of Kielce, and the reinstatement of illegally removed bishops. The primate also demanded "reinstatement of the Catholic press in the strict sense of the term."

The following day Kliszko appeared in Komańcza again, this time in the company of Bishop Zygmunt Choromański. He told the primate that his demands had been accepted and he should immediately return to Warsaw. Kliszko also persuaded the cardinal, who wished to go to Częstochowa to thank Our Lady, that there was little time and Warsaw was the priority. On the same day bishops Choromański and Klepacz, on behalf of the Episcopate sent a letter to Gomułka in which they listed the most important issues to regulate.

They mentioned the decree on Church posts, reinstatement of illegally removed bishops and religions instruction in schools and outside of schools. It is difficult to say whether this letter was written after Bishop Choromański's visit with Cardinal Wyszyński or before it. But most importantly it included the same demands that Wyszyński had made to Kliszko and Bieńkowski the day before. It was evident that then the hierarchs were speaking with one voice.

In the evening of the 28 October, Cardinal Wyszyński returned to his Warsaw residence and resumed his duties, a fact immediately publicised by Polish Radio. From the very moment of his return, the primate became fully engaged in public life: he made speeches, appealed, exhorted, persuaded, calmed, explained, and when necessary "cooled hot heads". Due to his energy as early as 8 November the Joint Government and Episcopate Commission (formerly the Mixed Commission) commenced work.

In the autumn of 1956 Gomułka understood perfectly that in order to pacify the popular mood he would need the support of the Church hierarchy, especially of Cardinal Wyszyński, who was an enormous authority among Poles. In order to utilise this support, the First Secretary made all kinds of concessions and made friendly gestures toward Catholics. To be fair, one should remember that after October'56 Gomułka saved the PAX Association from liquidation. To the surprise of many Party reformers (not to mention the bishops), on 3 January 1957 he met Bolesław Piasecki.



Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński with students at the Primate's Palace in Warsaw, after his return from internment at Komańcza, November 1956. (Polish Press Agency, photo Marian Sokołowski)

The Episcopate made numerous efforts and in December the vicars capitular were finally replaced by titular bishops, established as early as 1951 by Pope Pius XII. The Joint Commission's communiqué was also published, where the principle of religious freedom was confirmed and support for the government was expressed. Finally, on 31 December the state authorities promulgated the above mentioned decree on Church positions. But they were delaying publication in an attempt to exert pressure on the Primate.

Gomułka wanted Cardinal Wyszyński to exhort the faithful to vote in parliamentary elections. With the writer Jerzy Zawiejski, who was a close associate of the primate, acting as an intermediary, a meeting was arranged between Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz and the Cardinal to discuss this matter. As a result of this conversation, when the primate presented the Church's demands, even on the same day the only such Episcopal communiqué in the history of the PRL was published: "Sunday, 20 January is the day of the general parliamentary election in Poland. Catholic-citizens should on that

day fulfil their duty of conscience and vote. The Catholic clergy shall direct the services so that all the faithful can easily fulfil their religious and electoral voting duties."

Never again in the history of the PRL, did the institutional Catholic Church go so far and be so evidently accommodating to the regime. However, it was a situation exceptional to both parties. The Party was going through a very profound crisis and the communists badly needed the Catholic hierarchy's support, so they were inclined to pay a substantial price for it. Gomułka's entourage, it seems, did not treat those concessions as permanent and irreversible. The Church, on the other hand, after the hard and painful ordeals of the Stalinist period needed some time and peace. Probably the hierarchs were offering temporary support to the authorities as well.

As has been said, the rapprochement between the Church and the state did not last. From 1958 on all kinds of incidents and conflicts began to multiply. During 1957–1963 Wyszyński and Gomułka met four times for many hours of conversation. On each occasion they would temporarily lead to a better climate in their relations, but it did not reverse the unfavourable trend. But a true cooling came – as already said – in the mid 1960s. When in March 1968 a wave of protests rolled through Polish universities, the Church–state relations were tense again. The primate had not been granted a passport for two years and in 1966 the authorities twice refused entry to Pope Paul VI, an unprecedented affront in relations with the Holy See.

1968

Cardinal Wyszyński with care and concern followed the „March events", focusing on the problems of university students. Fragments of the primate's notes from March 1968, published by Peter Raina clearly show that the Cardinal was very much concerned about the situation in higher educational institutions and sympathised with the students. He learnt of the rally and street demonstrations of 8 March in the evening of that day. "Young people are being pushed out of the War[saw] Univ[ersity] [campus] by the ORMO, which had been seen in action against the Millennium celebrations in the Wars[aw] Arch[diocese]. Young people demonstrated at several points of

the city, mainly in Krakowskie Przedmieście […], were pushed out, then in hiding in St. Cross Church, at St. Ann's and at the Capuchins' Church."

On 11 March in the afternoon, the primate had a pre-planned meeting with students. As there were heavy clashes going on near the church and nearby Miodowa Street was cordoned off, the cardinal was unable to go to the meeting. He was pondering whether he should go by car or perhaps rather walk. He also wondered if the militia would offer him protection going to St. Ann's Church: "But in such situation to use militia protection would mean to 'lose face' with young people. It is too early for that, due to the unrecognised and unknown background of the commotion." So he telephoned the rector of St. Ann's and asked him to convey to the assembled students as follows: "The primate sends all those assembled in the church his pastoral greetings. He asks everyone maintain the peace and keep the spirit of prayer. Since Miodowa Street is cordoned off by the militia, he is unable to come. He apologises and blesses."

The following day during a meeting with thirty academic ministers the primate spoke about the spreading social protest and remarked ironically that it was astonishing that there were so many thousand Zionists among young people. He also spoke about political games and infighting within the Party; because as many other Catholic hierarchs and a substantial section of society, he treated this infighting as a kind of "family feud". At the end of March, the Episcopate filed a protest to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in which it opposed the launching of tear gas grenades by the militia that was chasing young people.

Earlier on 21 and 22 March, the 107th Polish Episcopal Conference convened. Primate Wyszyński presented the situation in Warsaw, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła – in Cracow, Archbishop Bolesław Kominek – in Wrocław, and Archbishop Antoni Baraniak – in Poznań. An incidental document was published (entitled "A Word of the Polish Episcopate on the painful incidents"). In this document one reads, among other comments: „All the matters that separate people in today's world should be resolved not by violence but by way of profound dialogue. Only such a method can help avoid discrimination, and above all find truth and justice in interpersonal relations. Only this method corresponds with human dignity, for in it is manifested human moral

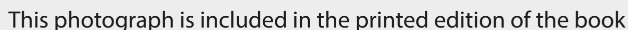
strength. Physical violence does not really solve tensions between people or social groups. Brutal use of force defiles human dignity and instead of serving the preservation of peace, only reopens old wounds."

Later on, appealing to young people, the bishops said: "We try to understand and feel the sources of this anxiety that troubles you and young people all over the world. The roots of this anxiety touch the deepest human affairs: the anxiety about human existence, anxiety related to the pursuit of truth and freedom that is the natural right of every human being in personal and social life. It is anxiety about the future of humanity and of the world."

At the same time the Episcopate sent a letter to Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz. He never replied publicly to the letter, where one reads among other content: "Rubber batons are never an argument for a free society, as they evoke the worst of associations and mobilise [public] opinion against the established order. State authorities cannot replace reason and justice with the rubber baton […]. The issue of freedom of opinion, which the people, the writers and the Episcopate are demanding, now sharply contrasted with the recent student demonstrations. The right to reliable information guaranteed to the citizens in the Constitution and the UN Declaration calls for freedom of the press, restricted censorship and objective news and information." At the end of the letter, the bishops put forward the following demands:

"1. Free those young people who have been detained and jailed.
2. Restrain the drastic methods of punishment and interrogation, [because] information about them has reached society.
3. Persuade the press to inform public opinion about actual events or, at least, to restrain biased reporting, which irritates young people and the society.
4. Effectively persuade the security authorities not to use anachronistic means of repression, which are so compromised in the very complex memories of our nation."

In the second half of April the Main Commission of the Episcopate of Poland regarding the student protests, the repressions and harassment of students or higher educational institutions. At the same time, the Main Commission adopted the "Word of the Episcope regarding the March Events", which was to be later read in all Polish churches on 3 May. The bishops



Students clahsing with the militia, Warsaw, March 1968. (Institute of National Remembrance)

demanded "allowing all members of the nation and citizens of the state to shape the common good according to justified convictions and their conscience. No one may be defamed as an enemy only because of one's convictions. Treating people as enemies only because they desire the good of the nation as they understand it in line with their different views, does not serve social morality, and furthermore deprives the nation of many noble forces and initiatives, which could enrich social life in a number of other spheres."

The bishops also said that subordinating "the nation's representation to one group, deprives this institution of its proper sense, and society is deprived of the possibility of expressing its wishes and opinions as well as of forming the collective life in accord with the will of the citizens. On this path, the regime risks losing contact with society". The Episcopate also mentioned the accusations against Poles of singular anti-Semitism frequently repeated in the West, which raised one more painful issue: "Attempts are being made to ascribe to Poles extermination of the Jews carried out in Nazi death camps. This is profoundly morally damaging and false, particularly if one considered

that millions of Poled died in those camps. In remembrance of those our countrymen and based on all the tokens of brotherly love that the Poles offered to the persecuted Jews, we demand the cessation of this mendacious and harmful propaganda and an end to provoking it."

However the Episcopate's stance and particularly that of Cardinal Wyszyński cannot be considered in separation from the parliamentary representation question filed by five Znak MPs: Konstanty Łubieński, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Stanisław Stomma, Janusz Zabłocki and Jerzy Zawieyski, who stood up in defence of the beaten students. The primate was on friendly terms with Zawieyski and attentively followed the parliamentary interpellation when the Znak MPs were brutally attacked in the Sejm, Cardinal Wyszyński, in a private letter to Zawieyski, expressed his admiration and respect: "Your speech in the Sejm was virtually a 'Reytanian' act, in the context of the frenzied dance of 'dead souls'. […] I salute your civil courage, for it is [an act of] public defence of the nation's right."

On the other hand, on the last day of the parliamentary debate on the Znak interpellation on 11 April, the primate – frightened and deeply disgusted with what was happening in Wiejska Street – said in Warsaw Cathedral: "I, the bishop of Warsaw, so painfully do I experience this 'spectacle' – because I cannot call it otherwise. What is left for me to do? I think I should remind you [My] Dearest Children to defend your hearts, thoughts and feelings against the monstrous hatred and lies that are evident before our eyes. May you have the courage to defend your right to truth, love, mutual respect and justice, to Christ's unity and God's peace! Only this will save us."

In sum, it seems that one might say that in 1968, the primate, the Episcopate and the Polish clergy took a less staunch and radical stance than toward the 1956 crisis. The Episcopate maintained this restrained or – as others claim – too cautious attitude virtually throughout the whole of 1968. Cardinal Wyszyński was equally restrained in his assessment of the involvement of the Polish Army in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. He saw this primarily through the prism of the appearance of state sovereignty and the PRL's dependence on the USSR. An informer of the Security Service reported in August 1968: "Personally Wyszyński believes that one should question whether today we have independence as such, but the cur-

rent general climate is not favourable" The primate was perfectly aware what kind of negative consequences for Poland's image in the West this military operation might have. In one document of Department IV of the Ministry of Internal Affairs one reads: "Primate Wyszyński deems the deployment of Polish troops particularly painful, for other countries would construe this as us being on the same [imperialist] line [as the USSR] – which, after all, goes against Polish tradition."

If one is to trust information collated at the Office for Religious Affairs, the reactions of the clergy to the intervention in Czechoslovakia varied. Some priests expressed their marked anti-communist attitude; others declared full loyalty to PRL's policy. Some recorded statements mentioned the Polish Army's occupation of Zaolzie (Trans-Olza Silesia) in 1938. The stance of some clergymen revealed a certain inconsistency: on the one hand, they condemned military action and on the other they deemed it at least in part strongly justified by the fact that West Germany and the West were trying to "pick out" Czechoslovakia, which could entail a threat to the territorial integrity of Poland. This type of thinking echoed elements of official propaganda, which persistently claimed that behind the events in Czechoslovakia were West German revisionist milieus.

The careful or merely moderate stance of the primate and the Episcopate in 1968 was caused nevertheless – as has been said – primarily by a certain fear of being drawn into an internal party struggle. The state authorities did indeed notice the hierarchs' restraint. In November 1968 Cardinal Wyszyński – after an almost three years' break – was granted a passport. Perhaps the PRL authorities wanted to create the impression that it was a reward for the primate's loyal attitude during the crisis of 1968.

It seems that the Cardinal was aware that in certain opposition and independent milieus he was criticised for his restraint. He mentioned this theme of March'68 when on 29 December 1970 (several days after a great national tragedy) he spoke at a session of the Main Council of the Episcopate of Poland. He said that in 1968 people thought that the Church was not saying enough about young people, even though the primate's letter was read at Warsaw Polytechnic. The Cardinal also recalled: "I wrote a letter to the students. I also gave a speech at St. Adalbert's Church in connection with

the maltreating a female academic in front of St. Cross's Church. I also sent a letter to the Government. In any case, the general opinion was that the Episcopate's stance was hesitant and did not offer young people unequivocal support."

1970

The situation was a little different in 1970, when the Polish Episcopate did not manage to voice its opinion until after the political crisis was over. Naturally this silence was welcomed by the "new leadership", for whom one of the most pressing priorities was improvement in the relations with the Catholic Church. The state and party authorities needs social peace and were perfectly aware that one of the ways to achieve it was precisely by improvement in the Church and state relations. For Gierek's entourage it was easier because in those tragic December days the Church as an institution behaved very responsibly.

One could only agree with Antoni Dudek, who wrote that "just as was the case during the March'68 events on the Baltic Seaboard, the bishops were very restrained, lest their words escalate the conflict. One spectacular manifestation of such an attitude was Primate Wyszyński's personal decision to fulfil the authorities' demand and withdraw the reading of the Episcopate's pastoral letter, which criticised the state's social policy and the law that permitted abortion. The only bishop who failed to oblige was Ignacy Tokarczuk, but even he appealed for peace in his sermons."

Faced with the December tragedy not only the bishops, but also a significant majority of the clergy maintained their restraint, primarily in order not to aggravate the already tense atmosphere in the country. The functionaries of the Szczecin Branch of the Office for Religious Affairs note: "Many priests, of their own initiative, appealed from the pulpits for peace and order. The content of these sermons was so unusual and shocking for the people that some priests were accused of being communists."

The bishop of Gdańsk, Edmund Nowicki, during the strikes and street fighting – at the authorities' request – told his priests to mediate and collect information on the circumstances of the incidents. The priests were also sum-

moned by families of the wounded and the dead. Years later, Father Henryk Jankowski of St. Bridget's parish in Gdańsk, recalled: "I took part in those funerals. One that stuck in my memory was the burial of Mr. [Kazimierz] Stojecki, who had been run over by a tank [the track of an armoured vehicle] by the railway station. All this was [so] dramatic, shocking scenes for those times, but they did not discourage me at all from being on the street."

Being well informed of the situation, the Gdańsk bishop was able to oppose the pressure of the local authorities (including the chairman of the presidium of the Provincial National Council Tadeusz Bejm), which demanded public condemnation of the workers. Furthermore, on 20 December Bishop Nowicki proclaimed a day of prayer for the victims of the tragedy. The attitude of the priests from the Baltic seaboard parishes was in accord with the expectations of the primate, who had to respond to the dramatically changing situation on his own, without consulting the bishops until a session of the Episcopate's Main Council on 29 December 1970.

Meanwhile in his first radio and television speech as Party chief, delivered in the evening on 20 December addressed to the listeners and viewers: "Believers and non-believers, party members and non-members" in lieu of Gomułka's "comrades and citizens". Thus he sent the Church's hierarchy a signal (false, as it soon proved to be) that there would be significant changes in state policy regarding the Church. This impression may have been strengthened by these words in the exposé of the newly appointed prime minister, Piotr Jaroszewicz, delivered on 23 December in the Sejm: "In an attempt to foster joint efforts, within the framework of the Front of National Unity, directed at the cooperation of all citizens (believers and non-believers alike), we shall pursue full normalisation of the state–Church relations, and expect at the same time that the government's efforts will meet with an appropriate understanding of the clergy and the lay Catholic milieus."

The Church replied without much ado. As soon as the following day, the secretary of the Polish Episcopate Bishop Bronisław Dąbrowski wrote a letter to the prime minister, saying that he welcomed his statement made in the Sejm. At the same time, the bishop complained that even though the Episcopate's twenty years' of efforts to improve the state – Church relations, the government "in its former line-up never showed any interest in the

Episcopate's effort's to normalise these relations." Dąbrowski also expressed hope that a new phase in these relations would begin and that he counted on "an era of peace and rule of law – values so needed […] in the country, which is everybody's hope."

At a Politburo session on 29 December, it was decided that the reply would be written by the head of the Office of Religions Affairs Aleksander Skarżyński. It was decided further that the reply would contain a promise to resume talks with the Church's representatives. Unfortunately, as it later proved to be, the resumption of the work of the Joint Commission had to wait until the next „Polish crisis" broke out, i. e. until September 1980. Meanwhile, at the same Politburo session Mieczysław Moczar was instructed to prepare a draft proposal of "further regulation of the state–Church relations." It was clear, however, that the authorities were not very eager to reactivate the Joint Commission, although talks had begun as early as 26 January 1971.

On 25 December 1970, in Warsaw Cathedral the primate mentioned the recent tragedy in a very restrained tone. "We direct our brotherly compassion from this cathedral […] to all the families on the Baltic seaboard, in the port cities of the [Polish] Republic, whose Christmas is so undeservedly painful. We send the Holy Father's blessing, to you, orphaned children and widowed mothers. We send his blessing to you also, brothers in hard and heavy labour, who have lost your comrades in toil, labour, and creative efforts for the common good of our Fatherland. Your pain is [our] common pain!"

Cardinal Wyszyński spoke in a balanced manner, because he had to weigh all kinds of possible consequences. It is no accident that he should so often praise the virtue of prudence. On the other hand – free of these restrictions was Bishop Władysław Rubin able to speak in Rome on 20 December during the mass for the victims fallen during the incidents on the Baltic seaboard. "Once again Polish blood was shed on the streets of our heroic cities, the blood of Polish workers and of Polish youth, to testify to the love of freedom as an expression of the nation's demands for the right to live humanely, to such working conditions that offer every citizen and every family decent material means [for their] living, yet which still condemn him to starvation-level rations and to the toil of seeking be it only the minimum amount sufficient to feed the family or even to save it from starving. […] We know

very well that this harmful state has existed for years and is still deteriorating because our nation has no possibility to develop and act independently, but is forced to give an illegal and harmful levy to foreigners who have brought oppression and violence.

The rightful protest of the Polish worker and Polish youth, which is our hope for a better tomorrow, supported by the stance of the entire nation is being violently suppressed, which has taken its bloody toll in the form of many wounded and dead – men, women and even children. The tragic dimension of these events is further deepened – as we find – that they were killed by bullets fired by Polish militia men and perhaps by Polish soldiers. If that was so, then how painful this order to fire those fratricidal shots, must have been for them?"

On 29 December the Main Council of the Episcopate published *Message to All Countrymen regarding the December Incidents on the Baltic Seaboard* drafted by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła. In this document the Council demanded of the country's rulers, among others, full normalisation of the Church–state relations. The bishops referred to the same practices as they already had in March 1968: "the use of violent measures is not conducive to maintaining peace in social life, particularly when they do not spare the innocent, even children and women. The life of a nation cannot develop in an atmosphere of terror; it should lead to peace in the spirit of justice and social love."

The Main Council usually convened before and prepared the agenda. Its statute of 1969 for the first time specified its remit, which included among others, the right to take decisions on behalf of the Conference when it was not in session. Yet in moments of national importance, the Council issued special communiqués practically without consulting the other bishops. Its remit remained virtually unchanged, because it was rooted in every practice of the Polish Church and not only in the formal requirements of the Catholic Church as a whole. They included, among others, exchange of ideas and information, drafting pastoral letters and memoranda addressed to the authorities and submitted to the Conference of the Polish Episcopate for acceptance, as well as preparing and monitoring the work of the Secretariat. Therefore one might say – following Jan Żaryn – that the Main Council of the Episcopate of Poland was a kind of brain of the Catholic Church in this country.

That the convening bishops were aware of the gravity of the moment (29 December 1970) is confirmed by the fact that the entire session was recorded. The idea was to leave a clear testimony to posterity. Years later, due to the courtesy of Primate Józef Glemp, a unique document, the minutes of this meeting, was published. Thus one is able to discover that during this historic session of the Main Council dominated the voices that openly mentioned the totalitarian system (Bishop Ignacy Tokarczuk, Archbishop Antoni Baraniak) that was only capable of destroying the people, mentioned unfulfilled promises and legitimate workers' rights, to which working people in capitalist countries had been entitled to for decades, and about the tragedy and the dozens of its victims.

The primate emphasised: "What happened on the Baltic seaboard, could have also happened in Łódź, Warsaw, Cracow – everywhere. What kind of situation would we have then, and how would the government behave? Would troops, those that were massed on the Polish border or those near Szczecin be deployed? And if these formations had entered the country, would they later withdraw? Especially the Germans from Szczecin? Who would have influence on this – we do not know." Even if Cardinal Wyszyński's doubts and fears were slightly exaggerated, one could not deny that in December 1970 Poland found itself on a road leading to a great national catastrophe. The bishops were fully aware of that. They also understood that in that exceptional situation they could not remain passive observers. This sentiment was expressed by Archbishop Kominek, who spoke directly about the situation: "The deep causes are all economic – shortage of bread, meat, etc. That is why they will not get a grip on things in the next few months. They shall need us. And we cannot refuse cooperation because of the Church's standpoint in order to relieve society of its burden."

Naturally, the new First Secretary of the Party did not know what exactly was discussed at the Main Council meeting, but was quite well orientated as to the mood among the bishops, because as early as 24 December he received a study prepared by Department IV of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the mood and attitudes in the Episcopate. Andrzej Garlicki published this document in 1996. This is the definitive proof that the hierarchs were then mainly concerned with pacifying the situation and improving the popular

mood. Gierek's ascent to the post of First Secretary was generally welcomed by the clergy. At least that is what the document demonstrates.

For obvious reasons, the most interesting are the views of Cardinal Wojtyła, who was to have spoken in favourable terms about Gierek as the one "who began a reasonable policy toward and with respect to the Church." According to the authors of this study Cardinal Wojtyła was to have argued that in this difficult situation everybody, especially young people, should be pacified. At the same time, however, he made some quite radical statements. On the one hand in his Christmas sermon he said: "When people are hurt and they suffer, the Church rushes to help them, with no regard to political motives, but out of sheer Christian solidarity", and on the other on 31 December in a homily he sharply condemned the bloodshed in the northern cities: "The measure of the tragedy that has been recently played out is and will remain the fact of Polish bloodshed committed by Poles!" And, speaking on behalf of the protests, spoke for the right to bread and to freedom.

During the December crisis the Church hierarchs, as in 1956 and 1968, were primarily trying to pacify the popular mood. To a large extent, or possibly to a decisive degree this was due to a kind of philosophy of Cardinal Wyszyński, who believed that a nation so tried by history as the Poles cannot afford further bloodshed. At the same time and under certain conditions the bishops were prepared to offer occasional support to individual party activists (Gomułka in 1956, Gierek in 1970), provided of course they found it really beneficial for the Church and found it to be in the public interest.

In certain aspects the so-called rank-and-file priests were in a better situation, because they were not required to perceive everything through the prism of politics, national interest, or the interest of the Church. They were able to be and often were closer to the people. One must bear in mind that the "priests on the Baltic seaboard in the tragic December Days took part in nocturnal burials, hurriedly and ordered to keep it a secret." Father Jan Marcin Mazur recalled that after December'70 the Church also supported "victims of prosecutions and their families (in all Polish churches money for the victims was collected. The victims were often intimidated not to accept the Church's support."

The hierarch's moderate and very responsible position helped relieve tension in the relations with the regime and soon led to an agreement on an important issue. On 1 February 1971, the government declared that the Church would become the owner of all the property it hitherto held in northern and western Poland. This took place in June, and the following year, after the Bundestag ratified the Polish-German border treaty of 7 December 1970, Pope Paul VI replaced the temporary apostolic administration with permanent dioceses and aligned their jurisdiction with Poland's western borders. This move eliminated the root of many controversies in the Church–state relations. Also, on 3 March 1971 the primate and the prime minister met for three hours. It was the first meeting at such a high level for many years.

1976

In the 1970s, the role of the Catholic Church in Poland increased considerably. Clearly the regime's attitude to Cardinal Wyszyński significantly improved. In the context of his earlier experiences with Bierut and Gomułka, the fact that the prime minister, Jaroszewicz, sent him seventy five roses on his seventy-fifth birthday and that the authorities requested the pope not to retire the Cardinal when he reached retirement age sounds unbelievable.

However, before the rapprochement, Poland had seen the eruption of yet another socio-political and economic crisis. Mindful of the direct cause of the outbreak of popular discontent in December 1970, the authorities tried to maintain the prices of the basic products, especially foodstuffs, at a fixed and relatively low level. But they could not continue with this practice for ever. Years later, in an interview with Janusz Rolicki, Gierek said – no doubt sincerely: "In the party and state leadership, we all were afraid of the inevitable rise, and were subconsciously trying to put it off as far as possible. In mid 1976 there was no escape from it."

Comprehensive preparations to impose the rise went on for at least several months. Ultimately it was decided that a draft would be presented at the Sejm by the prime minister, and in the days to follow "consultations or activists' leaving in large groups in large industrial plants." Another Sejm

session was scheduled for Saturday, 26 June at 5 p.m., when the final decision was to have been taken.

Certainly, in order to win the favour of the Catholic hierarchy so needed in that situation, as early as 22 June Prime Minister Jaroszewicz approved applications for the construction of 30 churches, as Politburo member Józef Tejchma noted in his diary. Let us recall that although in 1976 the Church applied for permits to build 263 new churches, only 9 were approved by May. Tejchma also noted that "province governors were instructed to carry out conversations with bishops several hours before the public presentation of the matter in order to pre-empt and commit."

With the same purpose in mind, i.e. in order to pacify the clergy, during the evening of 23 June in Sulejówek the authorities organised a four-hour long meeting of Stanisław Kania (who was in charge of church affairs in the Party leadership) with the secretary of the Polish Episcopate, Bishop Bronisław Dąbrowski. Kania began with an account of Gierek's visit to West Germany, and moved on to express anxiety about the "state of war, declared on the state authorities" by the primate, Cardinal Wojtyła and Bishop Ignacy Tokarczuk, with the latter being called by Kania a "true Ukrainian".

Bishop Dąbrowski replied asking rhetorically: "If a 'state of war' exists, then who provokes it?" Kania explained: "The Episcopate does not wish to lose the reputation of being a force that wishes to be in the opposition." He criticised the Church, which – in his opinion - „has the least right to defend the peasants […], because it has always sided with the landowners. Now the hierarchy wants to defend small peasants, but where was it during the land reform." Kania argued that the peasants were doing well, but the representatives of the Episcopate and Cardinal Wyszyński in particular do not wish to see it.

The Episcopate's Secretary replied that he did not understand that line of argument at all: "You are being so emotional today that you are accusing the Episcopate of what never happened." Then he raised the issue of allowing children in summer camps to take part in Sunday masses. The conversation became hostile. Kania said that the authorities have an "unequivocal and positive attitude to Catholic society, to the entire clergy and to the Episcopate, except the troublemakers. This does not mean that this policy has no alternative […]" and if they wished they could act to the detriment of the

Episcopate. The bishop replied that for the authorities the most important issue is the secularisation of society, to which the Church cannot agree. This abrasive exchange lasted about half an hour. The Party secretary informed his interlocutor that in the last seven days thirty permits to erect a church had been approved.

Having discussed economic achievements, Kania went on to mention the most important issue. He told his interlocutor that "a change in price structure" is being contemplated, but stipulated at once that „there are certain proposals, but still debatable, because it is a difficult issue." He added that people are actually expecting it, because "people have been talking about it for a long time and at the VII Party Congress Comrade Gierek promised that the prices would be freed". The bishop replied that prices are raised all the time and a "general rise, although the people do expect it, will hit the poorest and would deepen popular discontent". So Kania tried to convince the bishop that a thorough study had been carried out and in no way can the price rise be delayed any longer. Interestingly, at that point the authorities dismissed other variants of restoring market balance (for example by introducing food rationing). Kania asked the bishop to "treat it as confidential and not to inform anyone, because the party and the government are still in the middle of the dicussion."

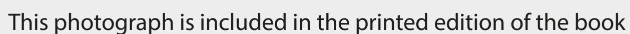
Kind gestures toward the Church on the eve of the "price operation" did not stop the Episcopate from a decisive reaction to the exposed repressions, already expressed in a letter to the prime minister of 16 July. Four days later Kania and Bishop Dąbrowski met again in Sulejówek, this time at the bishops's request, because he wished to intervene with Kania on behalf of workers who were subjected to repression for protesting against the price rise.

The bishop said that the Catholic hierarchy refrained from any official enunciations, out of concern for domestic peace. „But the policy of repression and retribution could lead to such a situation where the agitated and indignant society would no longer be able hear any voice of reason. One should speak to the people in a communicative language. After all, no one in Poland believes that only twenty per cent of one's salary is spent on food. […] The whip and statistics won't scare Poles nor will they educate them. Propaganda and expeditions from Golędzinów do not serve the national interest."

He also added that the militia would not educate the people either, because "it is not an effective instrument in the hands of the government." He also said that „Gierek's popularity is declining. He should appeal to the Nation with words of forgiveness, peace, with words brokering reconciliation." The bishop recalled the Episcopate's letter sent to the prime minister, and at one point asked Kania to hand the First Secretary a letter from the primate.

Kania countered the bishop: "We are one of the safest countries in Europe. This is the militia's achievement. In Radom the militia was unarmed, and that is why it was roughed up by the hooligans. And we are to forgive those bandits and hooligans?" Then he confirmed that indeed "during those disturbances the bishops and the clergy behaved honourably. [...] Bishop Tokarczuk is a regrettable exception. If someone says that what was happening on the streets of Radom was heroic, then he should be tried in court. Bishop Tokarczuk serves Poland's enemies, he's a Ukrainian." Clearly Kania returned to themes he had touched upon during the June meeting with Bishop Dąbrowski. At the end of the conversation he expressed surprise at the fact that the "bishops had not yet received the permits to erect churches."

It seems that confidential interventions of the primate and the secretary of the Episcopate did effect at least some changes in the policy of repression. In order to reduce the number of the repressed, at the end of July those who were sentenced to 3 months' detention by misdemeanour boards were released. However this did not include those sentenced by courts. On 9 September the Episcopate's plenary conference convened. A communiqué was issued, where – in a censored passage – one reads, among others: "The Plenary Conference of the Episcopate turns to the highest state authorities to put an end to all repression against workers who took part in the protests against the excessive price rise of foodstuffs proposed by the government in June of this year. The workers who took part in those protests should be have their rights, status and jobs restored, their suffering compensated and those convicted – amnestied." The demand for amnesty for the convicted was reiterated in a communiqué from another Episcopate conference that took place in November. This theme also resurfaced in Bishop Dąbrowski's talks with representatives of the authorities.



Father Roman Kotlarz, preacher and opposition activist, took part in workers' protest of June 1976, persecuted and subsequently beating up by state security; died on 18 August 1976. (from the collection of Tomasz Świtka)

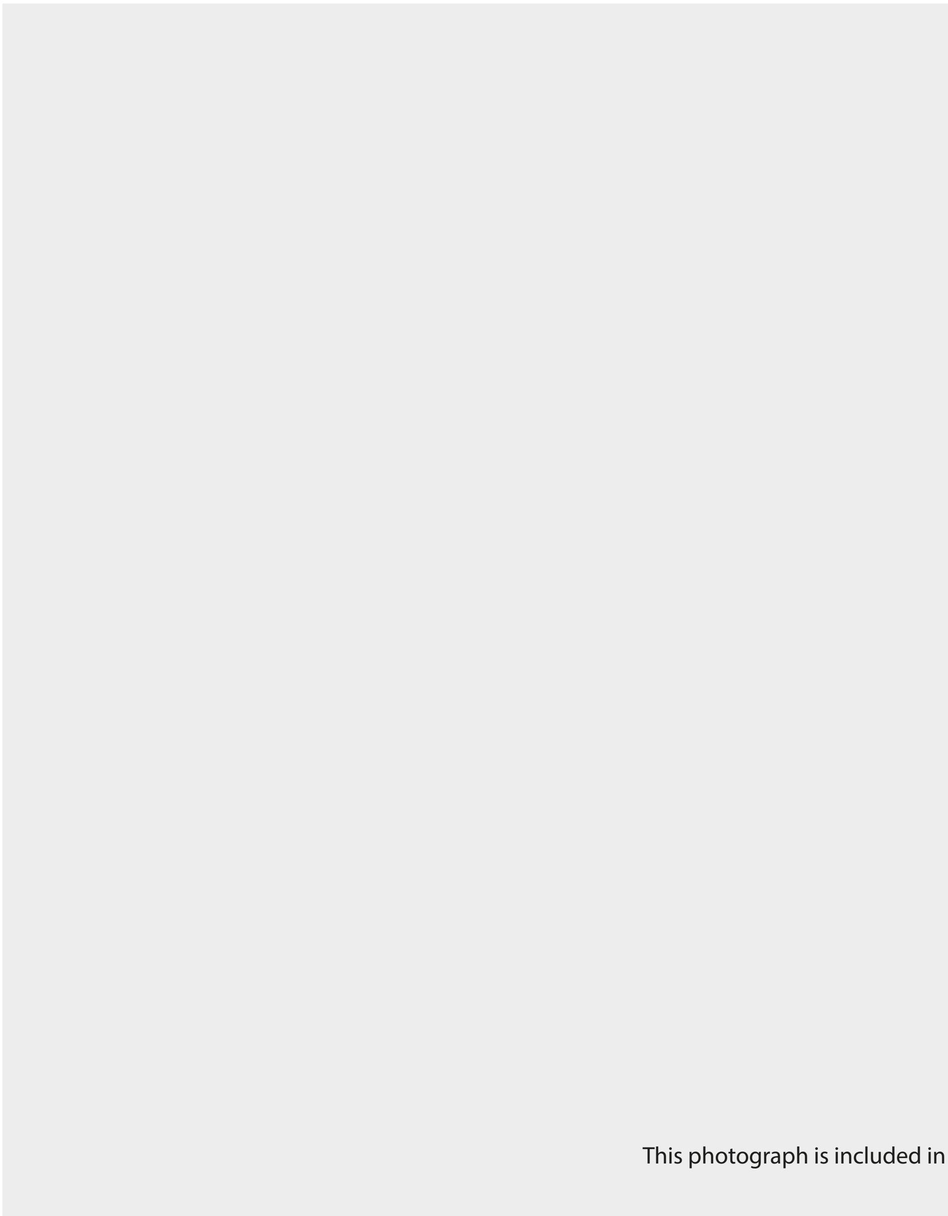
1980–1981

In the late 1970s the role of the Catholic Church increased steadily. The communists' attitude to Catholicism changed as well. In 1977 on his official visit to Italy, Gierek was received by Pope Paul VI. Indeed it would have been difficult to imagine that Gomułka should visit the Vatican ten years earlier. Yet the importance of the Church and of Catholicism increased in October 1978 when Cardinal Wojtyła was elected pope. From that moment on everything changed in the Church–state relations. If in 1966 PRL authorities could afford to refuse entry to Pope Paul VI, then thirteen years later, such a negative reaction to a proposed visit of Pope John Paul II to his homeland was unthinkable.

The authorities were trying with a varying degree of strength to influence the itinerary or the date of the pope's visit, but they actually did not dare oppose it, something the "Soviet comrades" were trying to persuade Gierek's people to do. During the preparations for the Holy Father's pilgrimage, Gierek met Wyszyński on 24 January 1979. It was the first conversation between a primate and a first secretary of the Party, which showed a certain rapprochement in mutual relations.

In the light of the above, it is hardly surprising that when a strike wave rolled across Poland in 1980, the authorities counted on the Catholic hierarchy, and especially the primate himself, taking a passive and conciliatory stance, and would pacify the protesting workers. It was even more important given that in August'80 – in comparison with the previous "Polish months" – the striking workers used religions symbolism on a much larger scale. A portrait of John Paul II was hung on the Lenin Shipyard gate, and Father Henryk Jankowski celebrated a mass, on the strikers' request. In general, virtually from the very beginning religious symbolism was present in the strike movement, which gave rise to Solidarity. Among the 21 demands of the Interfactory Strike Committee there was one regarding broadcasting masses for the elderly and the infirm.

Meanwhile Gierek sought help from Cardinal Wyszyński. Kania, who in the Party leadership was responsible for the relations with the Church, and for the security departments, was trying through the director of the Episcopate's Press Bureau, Father Alojzy Orszulik, to arrange an urgent meeting of the first



Pope John Paul II during his papal visit, June 1979. (FORUM)

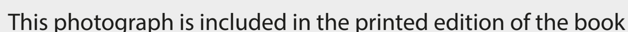
the printed edition of the book

secretary with the primate. The latter was evidently reluctant. Nevertheless, on 25 August, he received Kania in his residence on Miodowa Street, who years later thus recalled this conversation: "The primate was deeply worried, and was happy that the authorities negotiate with the strikers, inquired about the situation and was anxious whether that we might lose control over the events and that there might be bloodshed. He uttered two very perceptive statements. First, 'Perhaps this is not only a workers' but a civil rebellion'. The second was a question: 'What about our neighbours?' He was really afraid of that."

As one sees, Cardinal Wyszyński was worried about the Soviet Union's attitude to the Polish protest movement. In the next chapter I mention reasons why it was not unfounded. Despite the primate's obvious reluctance, he did meet Gierek. The following day, 26 August the Episcopate's Main Council convened on Jasna Góra, and exhorted that "honest dialogue should begin between the elected strike committees and delegations of the political authorities." The bishops also expressed their conviction that domestic peace hinges on the respect of the inalienable rights of the people, among them the "right of employees to freely associate in trade union that would truly represent them."

The faithful who gathered at the foot of the monastery heard a sermon delivered by Cardinal Wyszyński. In the evening – and it was unprecedented – state television broadcast extensive fragments of the sermon. This caused some confusion among many, because in it there were accents that the strikers did not like (in the first place, the Cardinal appealed with equal ardour to the authorities and the protesters for prudence and responsibility). Nevertheless, the very fact that the authorities censored the primate's sermon showed, according to popular sentiment, that the authorities' intentions were not sincere.

It is understandable that Catholic hierarchs welcomed the signing of the accords in Szczecin, Gdańsk and Jastrzębie with satisfaction and relief. At the same time they showed sympathy and friendship with the emerging new independent trade union movement. The primate received Lech Wałęsa as early as 7 September, and assured him of his support. In the months to follow, despite declining health, Cardinal Wyszyński often mediated. It was par-



Holy mass for striking workers, Gdańsk Shipyard, August 1980. (from the collection of Jerzy Eisler)

ticularly visible in 1981 during the Bydgoszcz crisis triggered by the beating up of three Solidarity activists by plain-clothes state security functionaries.

These activists were taking part in a session of the Provincial National Council in Bydgoszcz, where they were planning to speak on behalf of farmers and their right to establish their own independent trade union – Farmers' Solidarity. At the authorities did not wish to unequivocally condemn this act of brutality or effectively search for the perpetrators of the beating (suspecting that Security Service members might be found among them), the Solidarity leadership proclaimed four-hour warning general strike for 27 March.

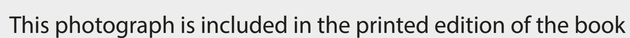
In an extremely tense atmosphere on the eve of the proposed strike, Primate Wyszyński met General Jaruzelski, who only a few weeks earlier had become leader of the government. In a joint communiqué released after this conversation one can read: "a full and objective assessment of the Bydgoszcz events is a matter of urgency." The primate also tried to persuade Wałęsa and Solidarity leaders to maintain restraint and political prudence, which must have contributed to a peaceful resolution of this crisis. It was the last mediation of Cardinal Wyszyński, who died two months later.

Wyszyński successor, Archbishop Józef Glemp tried to continue the primate's moderation and policy of engagement in public affairs, and already on 11 July 1981 for the first time met Prime Minister Jaruzelski. In the subsequent months of the "hot year 1981", the new primate contacted Wałęsa and Jaruzelski several times, the latter appointed First Secretary of the Party on 17 October. Four days later in his new capacity he spoke to Glemp, who several hours later conferred with Wałęsa. To the surprise of public opinion, the unprecedented "meeting of three": Glemp, Jaruzelski, Wałęsa, which nevertheless turned out to be "a day without tomorrow" and did not bring (because indeed it could not) any resolutions. As late as 5 and 9 December the primate received Wałęsa, but it seems that nothing would have stopped imminent confrontation.

The primate was notified about the martial law in Poland on 13 December 1981 by Politburo member Kazimierz Barcikowski, accompanied by the Chief of the Office for Religions Affairs Minister Jerzy Kuberski and General Marian Ryba of the newly established Military Council of National Salvation. The conversation was brief. The primate received this information coldly, and only expressed his disapproval of all actions that undermine dialogue and hinder national consent.

Having said goodbye to his unannounced guests Glemp drove to Częstochowa to attend a meeting with Catholic students that had been scheduled earlier. In the evening of the same day he publicly appealed for "calm, refraining from violence and for preventing fratricidal fighting." He took a cautious stance (according to some Solidarity activists it was too conciliatory), and at any price tried to limit the number of casualties. At the same time the Church's representatives, practically from the outset demanded the release of the interned and arrested and dialogue with Solidarity.

As the authorities wished their relations with the Catholic hierarchy to be good as possible they soon permitted the clergy to visit the interned, including the separately detained Wałęsa. Let one bear in mind that the Catholic Church was the only independent institution that enjoyed a considerable authority and popular trust and which the regime did not attack openly at that time. Some hierarchs almost constantly were trying to mediate between the rulers and opposition millieus.



Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, Solidarity's chaplain, human rights champion, murdered by state security in October 1984. (photo Erazm Ciołek)

Obviously Pope John Paul II also followed the developments with attention, concern and anxiety; he had already on 18 December sent Archbishop Luigi Poggi the chief of Vatican's delegation to Warsaw for permanent contacts with the PRL government. On 20 December he brought to Warsaw the pope's personal letter to General Jaruzelski, but this document was not officially acknowledged, because it was deemed offensive.

The following day the primate and the Episcopate had two envoys fly to Rome – Bishop Bronisław Dąbrowski and Father Jerzy Dąbrowski. The pope received them as soon as on the morning of 22 December, and questioned them extensively about the situation in Poland. The secretary of the Episcopate noted in his diary: "I was very sorry. The sensational news disseminated by the mass media drove people unconscious. I needed to, in the name of truth, relieve the people of this psychological burden. They were very grateful for this. The Holy Father kissed and blessed me." The following day the Episcopate's secretary was back in Warsaw.

The first Glemp–Jaruzelski meeting after martial law was imposed took place on 9 January 1982. At the same the Primate's Committee to Help Persons Deprived of Freedom and their Families was formed, which gathered information about the internees and detainees and, as the name suggests, looked after their families. The Committee would be engaged in distributing aid, both from Solidarity members and sympathisers and coming from other countries, redistributing parcels with clothes, food and toiletries to internment centres. In different towns diocesan groups to help detainees were organised. Many popular actors became engaged in the committees.

Paradoxical as it may sound, it was during the martial law that the Catholic Church won a position it had never had before in post-war Poland. Not only could it successfully influence the central and local authorities, but it also enjoyed extraordinary confidence and support among Poles. Also at this time the churches became sanctuaries for many representatives of the world of culture, art and science, who had earlier been quite distant from Catholicism. A substantial part of the clergy never asked them about their attitude to God or religion, but whenever possible offered help. One could say, therefore, that in those days, The Catholic Church in Poland as an institution achieved permanently such a position as it had earlier held only in times of crisis.

6. MOSCOW VIS-À-VIS THE "POLISH MONTHS"

Preliminary remarks

When one writes about the political history of the PRL, one must always be mindful of the "Soviet factor". There is no doubt that for 45 years virtually all important political decisions in Poland were consulted with Moscow. It is difficult to say, however, whether Soviet control was tight in everyday practice or only during political and social paroxysms.

Naturally without unrestricted access to post-Soviet archives (which is highly unlikely in the near future) this kind of question cannot be definitively answered. This is true not only about Poland, because without Moscow's consent no substantial changes were possible in any Soviet bloc state. In the future historians will surely be able to reveal more of this phenomenon's complexity: when the Soviet authorities acquiesced in something, inspired or encouraged something, and when did we simply deal with Soviet diktat.

Let us begin by recalling some basic facts. Firstly, except during 1956, when the Soviet Communist Party was led by Nikita Khrushchev, the Secretary General of the CPSU was Leonid Brezhnev. He was – let it be added – a completely different man in 1968 or 1970 than in 1976 and in 1980–1981, when he was infirm and unable to control not only the Soviet state but often his own body and mind. Secondly, Soviet policy toward Poland changed over time. When one bears in mind the dynamics of the historical process, one should not forget that sometimes the party leadership's objectives differed from those of the secret services, and sometimes from

those of the Soviet Army command. There were also different channels of communication and different degrees of awareness of individuals and institutions in Poland.

Thirdly, sometimes Soviet leaders would restrain their Polish colleagues (for example Brezhnev and Gomułka in December 1970 in the context of the above mentioned telephone conversation), although more often than not they would encourage them to take more radical steps. The same but – as we said – a slightly different Brezhnev telephoned Gierek in August 1980 and tried to persuade him: "U tebya kontra, nada vzyat za mordu, my pomozhem" (You have counter [revolution] at home, you have to bring [them] to heel, we'll help you). Clearly, this time, unlike December'70, when Gomułka did something similar – Brezhnev proclaimed that counterrevolution was increasing in Poland. After all Gierek also thought that he "was dealing with symptoms of counterrevolution that manifests itself in organised actions of terrorist groups that have influence on the working class." He believed that he could count on Brezhnev's help.

One should also emphasise that in direct contacts with the Polish leaders (particularly in moments of crisis), Soviet leaders would often treat them with distain or even contempt. In a certain sense – paradoxical as it may sound – perhaps that is when they were true to their nature. Usually they would not even to give any semblance of partnership relations with the Poles, for it looked rather like a mediaeval overlord–vassal relationship.

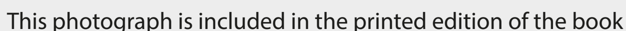
It seems that it was most evident in March 1956, when – following Bierut's death – Khrushchev flew in, formally for the funeral, but the insiders claimed that he wanted to personally supervise the appointment of his candidate Edward Ochab for the post of First Secretary. Never again did a Soviet leader take part in a plenary session of the Central Committee. Never again was Soviet interference in Poland's internal affairs as blatant and direct as in 1956. It is also possible that it was a matter of Krushchev's character, as he made a point of supervising the most important Polish affairs in person. It may have also been a result of Brezhnev's mentality that he – in turn – preferred to watch over Soviet affairs in Poland from a distance. Yet he always knew whom to bet on and from whom to withdraw support.

1956

I have just mentioned that the Soviets interfered with Polish affairs most directly and openly in 1956. Let it be stressed at this point that with the current state of research, practically nothing is known about the possible role of Soviet leaders in June'56. All that is known is that at dawn on 28 June a delegation of the Committee of Public Society set off to Moscow on a scheduled trip (a working meeting of Polish and Soviet leadership). It consisted of Chairman Edmund Pszczółkowski, Antoni Alster, Jan Ptasiński and Zbigniew Paszkowski. Years later Ptasiński claimed that the evening before the departure they wondered whether the trip should be cancelled given the tense situation in Poznań. Alster even consulted Ochab, who nevertheless "advised not to change the schedule, as there are no signs of the situation in Poznań becoming complicated." Despite these assurances on the morning of the departure Pszczółkowski suggested to Ochab that the Moscow meeting be postponed, but First Secretary did not find it necessary. At 5 a.m. Ptasiński also had a brief telephone conversation with the Poznań Party chief Leon Stasiak, who did mention tension in the city, but "did not expect a strike or, even less so, people taking to the streets." Ptasiński recalled later that the delegation members did not learn off the Poznań incidents until they arrived in Moscow and heard about it from the chairman of the KGB, General Ivan Serov. On the same day the Polish delegation returned to Warsaw, and late in the evening Ptasiński flew to rebellious Poznań.

Clearly, when the Polish delegation arrived in Moscow, certain information about the developments in Poznań had already reached the Soviet capital. One may recall here what Ochab said about Marshall Rokossovsky being extremely well informed, because he had access to both Polish and Soviet intelligence reports. Moreover, the fact that the Soviets had an excellent orientation about what was happening in Poland should not be surprising at all. Unfortunately, our knowledge is still quite superficial.

One may say more on the role of the Russians in October'56. It was then – the only such case in PRL history – when a Soviet military intervention had already begun. As we have said, Soviet and Polish troops under Rokossovsky's


This photograph is included in the printed edition of the book

In July 1959, Władysław Gomułka warmly greeted the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. (The National Digital Archives, photo Zdzisław Wdowiński)

command were already on the move. The Soviet cruiser "Zhdanov", assisted by three destroyers and a flotilla of smaller vessels, entered the Bay of Gdańsk. Soviet troops in East Germany were put on full alert. Suffices to say the circumstances of the arrival of the Soviet delegation, which unexpectedly flew in at Warsaw airport in the morning of 19 October (the day the Eighth Plenum) in order to prevent Gomułka's return to power.

Even the Polish border guard was not notified about Khrushchev's trip to Warsaw, so Polish fighters were dispatched to intercept. The Soviet plane

did not receive clearance to fly over Poland until it was made clear that it was a party delegation. It was no better when the plane landed at the Warsaw airfield in Babice. Years later Ochab recalled that the moment Khrushchev disembarked from the aircraft, he started to shake his fist and threaten: "He approached the Soviet generals, a whole row of them, and greeted them first. Obviously it was an affront not only directed at me, but at the whole Polish party. Next to us, stood a sizeable group of people: several dozen chauffeurs, state security functionaries, Soviet military personnel, members of the Polish leadership. It was clear that this incident would become a public secret."

Gomułka gave a similar account of this welcome to the Politburo: „Never had I conducted such a conversation with party comrades, I don't understand how could one use such a tone, such epithets to address people who turn to them in good faith. In the first place Khrushchev greeted Comrade Rokossovsky and the brass and thus stressed: 'These are the people I rely upon'. When he addressed us he said: 'Comrade Ochab's treacherous role is now clear. You won't succeed with this trick'. It took a lot of composure not to react to such a statement."

Gomułka proposed to the Soviet leaders that the talks be continued in more favourable conditions in the Belvedere. Gomułka recalled: "They said that we had actually spat in their face, because we did not agree to receive them before the Plenum. They had a grudge against us because the Politburo commission proposed candidates to the Political Bureau without several comrades: Rokossovsky, Nowak, Mazur or Jóźwiak. I declared that we have no such tendencies, that we do not want to break off our friendship with the Soviet Union. There was a clash. Comrade Khrushchev said: 'You won't succeed with this trick. We are ready to mount an active intervention!'"

Although over fifty years have passed we still have no access to the minutes of the Belvedere talks. So we have no choice but to use accounts of the participants written many years later and having different degrees of credibility. To be sure, the Soviet leader had a grudge against the Poles because they had not consulted the Kremlin about the planned changes in PZPR leadership. The outraged Ochab replied sharply: "And do you consult us on the line-up of your Political Bureau or the Central Committee? Khrushchev laughed: 'Chto vy, chto vy [Oh come on, come on]'."

During the Soviet leader's longer tirade in which he brutally attacked Poland and Poles, Vyacheslaw Molotov tried to throw in a few words, but – according to Cyrankiewicz – Gomułka interrupted him rudely: "You, comrade Molotov, have nothing to say here. The Polish people remember your speech at a session of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union that the 'bastard of Versailles has ceased to exist.'" Molotov fell silent.

According to Stefan Jędrychowski, who took part in the Belvedere talks, all the Polish members took the floor, with Gomułka being among the most active. It was he and Ochab that were to finally convince the "Soviet comrades" that their interests in Poland were not threatened. According to a persistent rumour, at one point Gomułka irritated by the various complaints and accusations of the Soviet leader said: "All right, Comrade Khrushchev, you have said what you had to say. And now I'll say what I have to say, but will do so to a Polish Radio microphone. How about that?" "Wiesław's" threat apparently pacified the Soviet leader.

In an account recorded in March 1971 Roman Zambrowski recalled a different incident that supposedly took place during the Belvedere talks. When Khrushchev was talking about an ideological crisis in the Polish Party, counterrevolution in Poland and the reactivation of anti-Soviet elements, at one point he said arbitrarily that the workers do not agree with the new Polish Party leadership. Zambrowski continued: "Gomułka replied that he was ready to take him to any factory and then he would find out who the worker's agree with. In the argument with Khrushchev Gomułka lost self-control, forgot himself, switched to Polish, spoke quickly, frothed at the mouth, someone started translating but couldn't keep up. Khrushchev watched him helplessly, asking him in vain to switch back to Russian, and a short break was announced. Later on Khrushchev confessed that this scene made quite an impression on him. Only a man who believes deeply in what he says could have forgotten himself to such a degree."

At one point reports began to arrive that Soviet troops stationed in Poland and certain Polish units had left their barracks and were on the move. Rokossovsky was trying to explain that these were part of a scheduled military exercise, but the Polish leadership instructed him to contact the Soviet minister of defence Georgi Zhukov and cancel the exercise. Aleksander Zawadzki asked

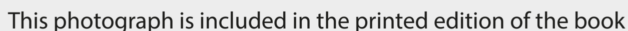
if it was true that Soviet troops were put on full alert. The answer was "no", but Khrushchev allegedly said that for the Soviet Union it would not be a problem to send troops to Poland if need be. The atmosphere was becoming increasingly tense. The decision was made to call a break and postpone the talks. During the break the Soviet delegation together with the "Polish" minister Rokossovsky – notably but not surprisingly – drove to their embassy to confer.

During the afternoon session Khrushchev seemed less antagonistic to Polish reforms. Under the pressure of facts he said that Gomułka, who enjoys the confidence of the Central Committee of the PZPR and the support of the Polish people, was the right man to run the party at a difficult time. He only inquired if Gomułka represents the social democratic orientation, but Cyrankiewicz reportedly assured him that "Wiesław" was a loyal friend of the Soviet Union and at the same time a Polish patriot.

The Belvedere talks were accompanied by some significant popular agitation. The Warsaw Party committee headed by Stefan Staszewski provoked a militant atmosphere among workers and students. The relentless stance of the Polish leadership and the determination of the supporters of democratisation compelled the "guests" to make concessions. Today it is known that developments in the international arena also influenced the decision. In any case the Soviets decided to stop the troops marching on Warsaw, but it took them a few days to return to their barracks.

Nevertheless, it was a breakthrough in Polish-Soviet relations. The joint decision was made to continue talks during Gomułka's visit to Moscow in November. In the morning of 20 October the Soviet delegation flew back to Moscow, and at 11 a.m. the Eighth Plenum resumed its session, now in a more relaxed atmosphere. Nonetheless rallies and meetings in the country continued for several months, and the mood was very militant. For example in a resolution of 22 October during a rally at the Higher School of Agriculture in Olsztyn demands were made that included that Lvov, Vilnius and Königsberg be returned to Poland (although the third had never belonged to Poland), the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and the removal of mandatory Russian-language instruction.

At that time the demand that Lvov and Vilnius return to Poland appeared almost as frequently as the demand that Marshall Rokossovsky be sent back



Defense minister, Marshall of Poland and of the Soviet Union, Konstantin Rokossovsky, during a military parade to commemorate the 7th anniversary of People's Poland, Warsaw, 22 July 1951. (The Archives of Modern Records)

to the Soviet Union. All those anti-Soviet actions took place merely eleven years after World War II, the memories of which were still fresh. People in Poland still remembered not only German crimes but also Soviet ones. For tens if not hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens, Vilnius and Lvov were hometowns; millions more could not and would not forget Soviet crimes.

In this situation it was crucial thing to contain popular discontent. Nevertheless, even though a wave of big rallies, marches and demonstrations – as Paweł Machcewicz wrote – rolled across the country by the end of October, there were some serious street incidents in November and December. On 11 November violent clashes broke out in Płock, and one week later there was a demonstration in Bydgoszcz, were the radio jamming station was on Dąbrowski Hill. Finally, on 10 December during street incidents in Szczecin a group of demonstrators stormed into the Soviet consulate. Nonetheless –

let us repeat – the political crisis was practically over already in October, and the later developments in Poland were largely determined by the course of the tragic Hungarian uprising.

1968

In 1956 what was happening in Hungary was more important for Moscow than the events in Poland, and similarly the Polish situation in 1968 was overshadowed by events in Czechoslovakia, This does not mean that from the strategic point of view Poland was less important for the Soviet Union than Hungary or Czechoslovakia. On the contrary, due its central geostrategic location on the route from the Soviet Union to East Germany, and its size and population potential (the second largest army in the Warsaw Pact) it was perhaps the most important. But it was in Hungary (1956) and in Czechoslovakia (1968) – unlike Poland – that the Soviets lost control of the situation, at least temporarily.

Furthermore, during the Polish crisis of 1968, from the outset (that is *de facto* from the Arab-Israeli war of 1967) the "Soviet comrades" also exerted a substantial influence on the developments. One may recall that in an atmosphere of mutual accusations and grudges. On 5 June at dawn Israel attacked Egypt and thus began the Six-Day War, as it was later called. As a result Israeli troops occupied the Sinai Peninsula, the Arab part of Jerusalem, West Bank and the Golan Heights.

Many observers of the international political arena saw it – quite correctly – as another war by proxy between the US and the Soviet Union. Israel, backed by the United States had American weapons, while the Arab countries had the support of the Warsaw Pact. They were equipped (particularly Egypt) with state-of-the-art Soviet weapons, which the European Warsaw Pact allies did not yet have. That is why the Six-Day War was one of the moments when the world found itself on the verge of thermonuclear war.

In a heated atmosphere, the Warsaw Pact Advisory Committee met in Moscow on 9 June 1967. During this meeting – under Kremlin pressure – it was decided (among other matters) that diplomatic relations with Israel be severed. Only Romania declined to comply, as it was trying to conduct

a more independent foreign policy. As regards Poland, the decision to cut of diplomatic ties was formally made by the Politburo at a session held the next day, where it was also decided that Poland would offer further military aid to the Arab states.

Ultimately Poland broke off diplomatic ties with Israel on 12 June. This fact and Gomułka's speech delivered at the Sixth Trade Union Congress, which had some anti-Jewish overtones, triggered an anti-Semitic campaign in Poland. The war in the Middle East also influenced the internal developments in Poland – it accelerated, among others, changes in the Party leadership, which had been several years in the making. At the same time it aroused substantial interest in society, but despite the unequivocally pro--Arab official stance, significant numbers (particularly intellectuals) rather sympathised with Israel. First, because in the official propaganda it was not absolutely clear what had actually happened in the Middle East – who was the invader and who was the victim. Secondly, some of the intellectuals, that is people from the opinion – making milieus, were of Jewish descent and openly sympathised with Israel, trying to promote the image of the small two-million Israel surrounded by one hundred million Arabs. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly the Arab states' defeat in the war with Israel was perceived as a Soviet defeat in a proxy war with the United States. These sentiments were perhaps best summarised in a popular contemporary saying: "Our Jews defeated their Arabs". It also seems obvious that the party and state leadership were aware of these sentiments.

Strong latent anti-Soviet sentiments in Polish society were expressed openly in extraordinary circumstances. Poland was subordinated and dependent on the Soviet Union. For this reason, when in the autumn of 1967, the "Dziady" (Forefathers) affair broke out in Warsaw, the rumour that the authorities decided to ban the play upon the Soviet embassy's demand was generally treated as credible.

But did the Soviet embassy really deem Dejmek's production of the play anti-Russian and did the Soviet ambassador Averkyi Aristov demand the banning of further similar spectacles? Today one may be almost certain that nothing of the sort happened. After all, many years before, one might read this poignant statement in the Paris-based monthly *Kultura*: "there is

no evidence to suggest that the Soviet embassy in Warsaw applied any pressure to take 'Dziady' of the stage; the Soviet authorities rigorously stick to the principle that one should prevent Poles from entertaining any thought of any analogy between the Russia of the czars and the Soviet Union. [...] There are solid reasons to believe that once the play had been banned, the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw, Aristov did not even try to hide his dissatisfaction and even threatened that to denounce publicly the opinion that the ban was issued at his behest." A similar view was expressed by Mieczysław F. Rakowski, who usually was familiar with whatever was happening in the political life of the day, and he was positive that it was a blatant lie and that the rumour was being spread on purpose. If that was indeed the case, one should ask, who was intent of offending the pride of Poles by brutally reminding Poles that they were living in a non-sovereign country?

Petr Kostikov's memoirs shed some light on this matter. He wrote that in late 1967, the Polish department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which he led, received information from Western press that "in Warsaw a play is staged, a Polish national work, which has an enormous anti-Russian (and today – anti-Soviet) resonance." Kostikov, when inquired about it by the Soviet party secretary for foreign policy, replied soberly that. "Boris Godunov" could be construed as an anti-Polish production.

In order to verify how things stood at the source, the Warsaw embassy was consulted. The matter was becoming increasingly urgent because Western media began to talk about the Soviet ambassador's protests to the Polish authorities because of anti-Soviet protests during theatrical performances of the play at the National Theatre. Meanwhile it turned out that no one at the embassy had yet seen a performance of "Dziady". So they wondered how to go to the theatre and in that highly sensitive situation avoid causing an international incident or even a scandal.

Ultimately on 23 January 1968 embassy representatives went to see the last performance of "Dziady". Based on Halina Zakrzewska's account, Zbigniew Raszewski described an amusing incident on this occasion. Two Soviet diplomats, Councillor Panfilov and Cultural Attaché Sokolov, approached Zakrzewska and introduced themselves. Zakrzewska asked how they liked the play. In reply she heard: „Interesting performance, but the audience's reaction

quite odd. – Odd? How come? The play has been banned, and people say that you had it banned." Both Russians protested vehemently and declared that they saw the play for the first time, and added: "We do not interfere in such affairs. This is slander."

At this point the excited Prof. Maria Janion appeared apparently unaware that the Soviet diplomats could hear her. Janion said: "I hear Aristov is in the audience." When Zakrzewska staunchly remarked that the ambassador was not in the theatre, Janion ignored the Russians who were listening to the conversation and said: "What a pity. He could have heard about those roubles and how people reacted."

Meanwhile Kostikov wrote that the Soviet leadership instructed the embassy to keep calm: "God forbid, don't intervene, do not butt in, and if necessary – talk in a spirit of historical interpretation of works that have a national significance." He also remarked that when the play was finally banned, there were rumours that it was done "at the categorical demand of the Soviet ambassador. Somebody wanted Polish-Soviet issues to appear among the Warsaw controversies." Some time later the Russian asked Kliszko why it was decided to take "Dziady" off the stage. Kostikov recalled Kliszko's reactions years later: „He replied that there was such hysteria that a violent clash with the forces of law was imminent. And this is what 'Wiesław' did not want to allow to happen."

It seems that Kliszko – perhaps unwittingly – underestimated his role and overrated that of Gomułka. Meanwhile, there were many signs that it was Kliszko who stirred the controversy surrounding "Dziady". He saw the premiere and after the performance and – as Raszewski put it vividly – "left the theatre very unhappy. [...] Soon afterwards he telephoned, among others, Minister Motyka with a grudge and during a Party Central Committee session said that Dejmek gave a fideistic and anti-government performance." Rakowski in his diaries wrote about the "Dziady" affair that the entire affair had been provoked by Kliszko, who after the premiere expressed his opinion on the anti-Soviet demonstrations during the performance. As a result it was decided that the production was detrimental to the interests of the party and of the authorities. The editor-in-chief of *Polityka* found such an idea preposterous: "If we decide to produce classics such as 'Dziady', then

we know beforehand that there would be anti-Russian overtones. Such was our history."

In spite of substantial research progress, one still cannot say authoritatively (in accordance with academic standards) who was interested in increasing social tension in 1967 and 1968. Although there is no *prima facie* evidence, there are many indications that the most interested group may have been the "partisans". There are also numerous voices saying that the rumour regarding the Soviet ambassador's intervention came from people in Gomułka's immediate circle, as they wanted to eliminate their opponents within the party.

For people living in the non-sovereign PRL it was usually difficult to allude to the domestic situation without referring to Polish-Soviet relations. Party leaders were indeed aware of that. After the play was taken off the stage, at a meeting of the Cultural Department of the Central Committee it was argued: "It is fairly obvious that in certain situations the anti-Russian attitude in our society could easily transform into an anti-Soviet attitude, and for this reason one should be very responsible. That is what had been missing in Dejmek's production of the 'Dziady'."

It is understandable that for the Kremlin the most interesting issue was not the "Dziady" affair but the political struggle within the Party leadership and the accompanying anti-Semitic purges. The lack of access to post-Soviet archives, mentioned above, makes it very difficult for historians to investigate the role of Moscow in this current of the "March events". As it is often the case in such situations, some indications may be found in Kostikov's memoires, as he was quite well informed: "the turmoil among personnel that rolled across Poland during 1967–1968 was not an object of particular interest to Moscow. We heard news, rumours and comments. People would say – this one is no more, that one left Poland, this one was promoted and this one did not see his plans come through... All this was treated as an internal matter of the Polish party, controlled by the leadership: Gomułka, Kliszko and Cyrankiewicz. We received such information through special channels as well as from our embassy." Naturally we cannot be sure that this account is completely true and that the Soviets in fact did not interfere with the infighting in the Polish Party. And even if they did not, we cannot be certain that KGB leadership or Soviet Army command showed equal restraint.

At the same time Kostikov noted that in 1968 out of all the events in Poland only one incident made an enormous impression at the Kremlin (perhaps even greater than in Warsaw) – the meeting of the Warsaw party activists with the Party leadership, with Gomułka himself, which was held on 19 March at the Congress Hall. The rally was broadcast live on the radio and television and next to Gomułka's name shouted by the cheering crowd, some chanted Gierek's name, as if treating him as "Wiesław's" successor. It was unheard of in communist regimes. Kostikov added: "No one in the Congress Hall mentioned Moczar, but one could hear the echo of his name..."

Gomułka's speech delivered that day met with considerable interest in the Soviet Union. Kostikov informed the Polish ambassador in Moscow, Jan Ptasiński, that the print run of *Pravda*, when it was published, was increased by two million, and that the text of this speech was also published by the "republican and regional newspapers. Relevant excerpts from this speech with comments appeared in internal publications of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party." No wonder, then that on 6 April Ptasiński drafted a brief note about the impressions it made in the USSR. He emphasised that the Soviet leaders spoke favourably about this speech, and – what is more – „during regional conferences of the CPSU (reporting an election campaign was in progress) speakers often referred to it."

Perhaps an even greater impression on the "Soviet citizens" was made by the atmosphere in the Congress Hall. Years later Kostikov recalled: "Our men could not understand how it was possible for the activists in the capital to take such a liberty with respect to the party leader. How could one try to drive a wedge between Gomułka and Gierek, and – moreover – do so in public? People began to fear that games are beginning and that they are similar to those increasingly more ominous in Prague.

The anxiety of our leadership was slightly alleviated by Gomułka, first in a telephone conversation, and later in May speaking directly, in person with Brezhnev. He began by saying that it was an irresponsible antic of the Party's youth; the culprits were punished and the incident did not have broader circulation and importance.[...] Gomułka regarded the March rally incident as irreversibly past and gone." What is interesting Kostikov said that: „in the Soviet leadership it had the dimension of a scandal and the sound of alarm",

and that it led to the „stoppage of the young people's promotions policy, planned by Brezhnev in the CPSU."

In spring 1968 Brezhnev evidently supported Gomułka. As early as 23 March, in Dresden, during a conference of party and state leaderships of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and the USSR regarding the situation in Czechoslovakia, Brezhnev treated Gomułka with ostentations friendliness. As historian Andrzej Garlicki aptly remarked: "Moscow was engaged in a bitter conflict with China, worried with Ceauşescu's disloyalty and the intensifying political conflict in Czechoslovakia, had no doubt that Gomułka in Poland must be supported." The current joke in Poland was that Moczar had everything with which to take "Wiesław's" place as Party chief (if that was indeed his objective in March'68) except one vote – Leonid Brezhnev's.

It seems that at that time the Kremlin had chosen a different man to replace Gomułka. For those in the loop it was no secret that the Soviet leader increasingly favoured Gierek, whom he saw as the future leader of the Polish party. Kostikov tried to defend the Soviet leadership: "That we had seen Gierek as Gomułka's successor did not mean that we were involved in the preparations for a coup to overthrow the first secretary of the PZPR."

But – according Kostikov himself – "sometime between September and November 1968 Moscow was warming to the idea that he [i.e. Gierek] could be Poland's leader." When asked by Katushev about an alternative for Poland, Kostikov replied – as he put it himself – "quickly, decisively and wholeheartedly: 'Edward Gierek.'" According to Kostikov, Katushev could have spoken about that with the top Soviet leaders, including Brezhnev and Gromyko.

Eventually Kostikov was notified that he was to devise "plan of preparations for efforts to become acquainted with Gierek in detail." Kostikov himself confessed: "It was one of the most secret cases I had to deal with in my 16 years at the CC [Central Committee]. I wish to be well understood. I have never heard about any decision that Gierek is to replace Gomułka. [...] We only took into account the situation, the eventuality of Gomułka leaving and that somebody must take over. The point was to know this man beforehand, know what to expect, know whether to support him or exercise restraint."

It was also important because – according to Kostikov – the Polish embassy in Moscow promoted Moczar, not Gierek. It was the job of ambassador Ptasiński, who together with embassy's councillor Bogumił Rychłowski had established "no more less but Moczar's representation and at the same time that of the all-Poland 'partisans' movement. The ambassador practically did nothing else in Moscow but build the image of his friend as [a man] of extraordinary talents, a strategist, a thinker and the only future for his country." Kostikov recalled a party: „Ptasiński want ahead of himself to the point when raised a toast: „Let us drink to your *Motscharstwo.* Yes, friends, *Motscharstwo*! There was no end to cheering: Bravo! To the *Motscharstwo* (*Super Power*)!" Kostikov did not hide his indignation about these demonstrations, according to him, Ptasiński and Rychłowski simply challenged Gomułka' leadership openly.

As has been said, in 1968 Gomułka remained at the helm and succeeded in rebuilding his position largely due to international events, and particularly his role in crushing the Prague Spring. Brezhnev appreciated Gomułka's engagement in "saving socialism in Czechoslovakia" and in November 1968 at the Fifth PZPR Congress and ostentatiously showed Gomułka his support. At the same time the Soviet party chief proclaimed in Warsaw the doctrine of the limited sovereignty of the countries of the "socialist community" and of the right of the other "states in the block" to intervene in a country, where – in the Kremlin's eyes socialism was threatened. This principle, proclaimed less than three months after the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia, was to warn the leaders of Central and Eastern European countries against following the Czechoslovak reformer Alexander Dubček, and on the other hand it was meant to remind them that their countries lay in a Soviet-dominated zone.

1970

In the context of what I have written above, it is hardly surprising that when another Polish crisis broke out in December 1970, the events that were practically spinning out of control were followed at the Kremlin with growing anxiety. To be sure, the "Soviet comrades" denied that it was more important

to pacify the situation in Poland than to keep Gomułka as First Secretary of the Party. But, according to Kostikov, apparently the Soviet leadership did not immediately realise how serious the situation and how deep the crisis was. It was not until the news of the first fatalities began to arrive that members of the Political Bureau and of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in Moscow, convened a number of times and were regularly informed about the developments in Poland."

At the same time Kostikov said it seemed that the "Polish issue" was removed from his department: "Indeed we would obtain all information in a routine manner [...], but I was under the impression that the main flow of information runs through other channels. [...] The developments in Poland became so important to the Soviet Union that there were calls for direct and swift involvement of the Kremlin leadership." Brezhnev and other representatives of the Soviet leadership were worried and probably slightly offended that Gomułka did not telephone to inform them about the developments in Poland.

Moscow decided that ambassador Aristov would urgently meet Gomułka. Concerning the received questions to ask the Polish party chief, Kostikov noted: "The point was to determine the character of the demonstrations, assess the danger of their spreading through the country, present the plans of the Polish Party leadership as to the resolution of the conflict, verify the possibility of withdrawing the decision of the price rise, attempt to assess whether it would be necessary to engage the military and the question whether the Polish comrades deemed it necessary to obtain some kind of Soviet help in the political and economic resolution of the conflict."

The conversation was unpleasant. Gomułka looked seriously ill, Aristov recalled ("he moves with difficulty, speaks with some effort"). The Polish Party leader yelled at and hit his guest: "Why are you running a test on me! [...] You have your own information and you know the character of the demonstrations in Gdańsk." Gomułka consistently maintained that it was necessary to "quell the demonstrations". He spoke about socialism being threatened, about counterrevolutionary elements, another case of sabotage inspired by imperialist centres. [...] The ambassador said that Gomułka angrily stated that the Soviet comrades should have their own orientation in the situation,

because he never prohibited Moczar or Jaruzelski from informing them on the developments through their channels."

Meanwhile, due to the increasingly tragic news coming from Gdańsk, some of the activists at the central level concluded that most probably the deepening crisis could not be resolved without changes at the top of the Party, including the chief of the Party. What began was the so-called „non-group talks" – as Józef Tejchma, a Politburo member, called them, who recalled: "I was a participant and even one of the chief initiators of those talks. A thought crossed my mind and took root there – Gomułka must go immediately, his further attempts to control the situation no longer make sense and make matters worse. If earlier on we were familiarising ourselves with the idea that Gierek could be Gomułka's successor, now it was the only solution, also for me. I telephoned Wojciech Jaruzelski, [as] no political and personnel decision at the highest level was possible. I telephoned the Warsaw secretary Józef Kępa, [for] without his consent there was no certainty how the capital's party activists would behave. I talked with Stanisław Kania, who supervised the Ministry of Internal Affairs. I contacted Stefan Olszowski, who controlled the press. It could look like a conspiracy. What it was, however, was a combination of cool-headed assessment with a spontaneous reaction to the situation at hand. Not knowing anything certain about Moscow's position, I could expect that it would not oppose solutions leading to calming the domestic situation."

Furthermore, years later Gierek tried to argue that the change of first secretaries took place without the participation of the "Soviet comrades". In an interview with Janusz Rolicki he stressed that he had been elected First Secretary of the Party "in a sovereign manner, without any previous arrangements with the Russians." It is understandable that Gierek did not want his taking over of power to be presented as a result of actions undertaken in agreement with the Kremlin, even with his knowledge. To balance this one may quote Andrzej Werblan's account, who recalled that when he outlined the background of the December'70 conflict in a telephone conversation in the late 1970s, Gomułka shouted: "What are you talking about? I was dismissed by Brezhnev, because I have always said openly that he has no political skills."

Clearly, the party leader who was "learning the stage" spoke of a considerable or even decisive role of the "Soviet comrades". On the other hand the man who was replacing him as Party chief claimed that he did so by the will of the people and its sovereign Polish decisions. It seems that the truth should be sought between these extreme opinions. Both opinions were charged emotionally and reflected subjective feelings. Undoubtedly, the "Soviet comrades" apparently played a considerable – in fact quite substantial although not completely known role in the events, which in December 1970 led to replacing Gomułka with Gierek. It is also difficult to forget the social pressure and the uprising spreading across the country, which forced the adoption of political solutions.

In 1971 Cyrankiewicz recalled that on 16 December 1970 he received a message: "The Soviet comrades wish to know the government's assessment of the situation – confidentially, because Comrade Gomułka did not telephone them, and there are serious things happening. I authorised the comrade to conduct such a conversation, shedding light or events in the phase they were in at that time and their causes, proposing – at my request – since Comrade Gomułka is not telephoning, so that – despite all this – Comrade Brezhnev would call him, because a conversation might be useful."

This is an extremely interesting confession. It poignantly demonstrates that in those days Cyrankiewicz was no longer loyal to Gomułka and behind his back he contacted the Soviet leaders. It is difficult to call such actions anything but conspiracy. As regards the question of who was the emissary mentioned by Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz, I shall return to it below. One may add at this point that on 16 December Ambassador Ptasiński returned to Warsaw, and in Kostikov's presence met secretary Katushev, almost at once.

This was quite important, because shortly before departing to Moscow Ptasiński had a telephone conversation with the head of the Organisational Department of the Central Committee, Edward Babiuch, who informed him on the developments in Gdańsk. Ambassador Ptasiński passed this information to his Soviet interlocutors. He tried to convince them, among others, that the price rise "merely detonated the discontent that had been growing among the working class for quite some time." According to Ptasiński, "among party activists there is a crisis of distrust to the party and government

leadership. It was also fuelled by a pessimistic assessment of the condition of the national economy."

He also informed his interlocutors that it was believed in Warsaw that "Jaszczuk contributed to the intensification of the crisis". The ambassador was surprised by Katushev's questions, as he was trying to find out, for example, how Jaszczuk won influence on Gomułka, why Cyrankiewicz did not deal with the economy, or how to explain Gomułka's stance on collectivisation.

Ptasiński tried to answer all these questions diplomatically, but precisely whenever possible. One fragment of the ambassador's diary particularly deserves citation: "Cyrankiewicz, a very talented man, brilliant, for many years avoided economic matters. They were not in his nature. That is why the burden landed on Gomułka's shoulders, who then devoted most of his time and strength to the national economy. That the prime minister should be replaced had circulated for a long time. Among strong men, men with authority in the country, that is men of the future one should include: Gierek, Kociołek, Moczar. [...] Suddenly I was asked what I thought about Gierek. It was not difficult to guess that the Soviet leadership is beginning to contemplate replacing Gomułka with Gierek." According to Ptasiński, it was no secret that the Soviet leadership favoured Gierek, but when the ambassador was asked his opinion about the latter, he replied frankly: "this is the wrong 'hat size' for Poland. This could end badly for Poland."

Clearly, Ptasiński was no sympathiser of Gierek's, which, after all, should be no surprise, when one bears in mind that he was a close associate of Moczar, who treated him as Gomułka's successor. After all Moczar did not let the grass grow under his feet and tried to turn the crisis to his advantage. Kostikov wrote that on 16 December KGB Chief Yuri Andropov received a signal from Warsaw: "Moczar has a proposal of a political, peaceful solution of the conflict by [...] deposing Gomułka without depriving him of his function; this would calm the popular mood and would help maintain continuity of party leadership."

According to this proposal, supposedly agreed on with Gomułka, he was to „resign his function temporarily on account of poor health, and in the meantime one man would be running the Politburo and the Secretariat, namely Politburo member and Central Committee secretary Mieczysław

Moczar. There would also be some changes in the leadership: Cyrankiewicz, Jaszczuk, Kliszko, Spychalski and Loga-Sowiński would go. Other changes would be considered after the necessary economic decisions, with the most important, immediate – the withdrawal of the price rise."

If that was indeed the case, it would mean that Moczar was openly playing for the highest stakes. One "little detail" stands out. Namely, despite what has been written above, Moczar was not a member of the Politburo, but a deputy member and Central Committee secretary responsible for the ministries of defence and internal affairs. After all, according to Kostikov, "at that time Moczar stood no chance with Andropov. Probably it was on his personal order that the KGB took out the dossier compiled by the 'Partisan's' enemies. Everyone who should, read it immediately."

On 16 December the Soviet leadership was determined to bar Moczar's road to power. It was also decided that Brezhnev would nevertheless telephone Gomułka and that a letter would be sent to the Central Committee or the Politburo of the Polish party, to suggest to the "Polish comrades" that they should take „political steps to resolve the conflict." At a Soviet party Politburo session Brezhnev said openly: "It would be good to know who we put our hopes on if Gomułka were to resign. You have read the materials, please speak your mind, I don't want to suggest anything. [...] It was decided unanimously that if Gomułka were to leave, Gierek would have the support of the CPSU leadership."

Petr Kostikov also recalled that the Soviet leaders were considering „how to send Gierek a signal of their eventual support. "At one point Prime Minister Kosygin pointed out that the Polish deputy prime minister was currently in Moscow at a COMECON session, and he was to be the emissary, whom Cyrankiewicz had cryptically mentioned. Kosygin and Brezhnev decided that the prime minister would speak with Jaroszewicz in person the very same day. Both decided that Jaroszewicz would return to Poland the following day and prepare Gierek for any eventuality. "It was then that Kosygin told Leonid Ilych [Brezhnev] that he would be glad to see Jaroszewicz as the man to deal with the economy [serving] with Gierek."

The conversation took place in the COMECON building in the office of the Soviet deputy prime minister and the Soviet permanent representa-

tive with the Council, Mikhail Lisetschko. Years later Jaroszewicz recalled: "Kosygin began by saying that the Soviet party leadership and the Soviet government are seriously worried about the developments on the Polish coast, particularly in Gdańsk. They are even more worried about the situation in the Polish party leadership. It is divided, and a struggle for leadership has begun, with Mieczysław Moczar and his group trying to seize power. By all accounts, the suggestions and encouragement to arson and robbery in Gdańsk are the result of provocateur action. Gomułka is undecided, wavers and shows signs of weakness. He has no idea how to resolve the crisis in Gdańsk and in the party leadership. The situation in Poland unravels as if someone were adding fuel to the fire, showing how and where to attack, what kind of slogans to put forward and there is nobody to interrupt it." According to Kosygin "one would have to be *non compos mentis* to move in virtually unarmed tanks into a crowd without any backup. Unless the plan was to have the crowd destroy them in order to intensify the mood of the street."

According to Jaroszewicz, the Soviet prime minister was to have vehemently opposed Moczar's candidacy for the post of First Secretary. "Although we do not wish to interfere in your internal affairs, but in the light of Moczar's dictatorial ambitions, the Soviet Party would advise the Polish comrades of the Central Committee against Moczar's candidacy for the post of First Secretary of the Central Committee, Kosygin said. But if Moczar does not refrain from pursuing his plan, we shall publish materials that we have at our disposal, which cast a very unfavourable light on his partisan past. I believe – Kosygin said – that our opinion would be relayed to Moczar by one of his friends even today, and would probably cool his zeal." The Soviet prime minister also informed Jaroszewicz about a letter of the Soviet party leadership to the Central Committee of the Polish party, which advised change in the Polish party and state leadership.

At the end of the conversation Kosygin reportedly said: "We discovered today that some members of your party leadership in conversations with our ambassador in Warsaw expect that if the conflict were to spread, there would be a Soviet intervention and military aid. Do not count on any military intervention on our part. You must quickly regain control of the situa-

tion. There will be no military intervention of the USSR in Poland. Up to this moment we have not overcome the political and economic problems in our relations with the West, following the intervention in Czechoslovakia. [...] We cannot put such a spectacle in the international arena every two years."

Kostikov remarked that Jaroszewicz did not reveal everything about his conversation with Kosygin. In the first place it is indeed difficult to believe that he had not told anybody about it for nearly twenty years. Kostikov rightly pointed out that "after all Kosygin did not speak with him so that Comrade Piotr could save this conversation for his memoirs, years later." At one point the Soviet prime minister asked Jaroszewicz (a fact not mentioned in his memoirs) who should be first secretary. Jaroszewicz replied: Edward Gierek. Kosygin said: it seemed that he was the right candidate.

Then the Polish deputy prime minister began to analyse the configuration of forces in the Political Bureau and concluded that if Gomułka's followers were to strike a deal with Moczar, they could jointly block changes at the top. But – according to Jaroszewicz – "not everyone in the military circles and in those of the Ministry of Internal Affairs are supporters of their chief, General Moczar. [...] As far as he knows, Jaruzelski, despite appearances, is not a supporter of Gomułka or Moczar." The following morning Jaroszewicz flew back to Poland and probably related to Gierek his conversation with Kosygin.

The same day at noon, Gomułka opened an important conference and began with the highest-level officials participating. Moczar in a biased manner (minimising the scale of social protests) told of the developments in Szczecin and Gdynia. He tried to use a moderating tone, but the news he brought clearly irritated Gomułka, who complained about shortage of reliable information from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The First Secretary shouted: "There are 2,000 militia men in Gdańsk, but it was the army that needed to shoot. What did the militia do? They should have fired first. As it happened they had fired blanks, after they were given the order to use firearms. The army should have been the second echelon and the militia – the first. But they were firing blanks. It is wrong that the army fires first. This is the militia's job. [...] Because the militia did not shoot, it stirred the troublemaking elements. When fire was opened in Gdańsk yesterday, the demonstrations collapsed."

These are terrible words when spoken by a hero of the "Polish October", when spoken by any politician, nay – by anyone. Gomułka lamented that the militia did not fire live rounds. When one reads his words spoken during this conference one cannot help but think that the First Secretary was utterly confused: politically, morally and simply as a human being. Such statements enable us to understand better why Poland was a scene of tragedy in 1970. This could have happened only when people were no longer an important consideration, and the main focus was on economic indicators and propaganda slogans. Gomułka assessed the situation as follows: "The militia is paralysed by the prohibition to use firearms. Each demonstration, even a peaceful one, ends up in plunder. This emboldens provocateurs. [...] The militia ought to use firearms in the case of robbery, assault, etc."

The First Secretary's words were increasingly sharp and radical. He openly attacked the [security] services of the Ministry of Internal Affairs: "No one here is familiar with the regulations [...]. You have created an atmosphere of rotten liberalism and hooligan waywardness. [...] Who gave the order to fire blank ammunition? How could one defend power in that way? I don't give a hoot about the whole propaganda, if one would have to shoot and thus maintain order. I should dismiss ministers and militia commandants for ignorance of the law."

It would seem that these words may be left without comment, because they speak for themselves. Gomułka said: "Where there is arson, you must shoot. Impose curfew. The government should adopt a resolution on the use of firearms." Moczar tried to tone down Gomułka's rhetoric and persuade that sheer physical strength was not enough and that political measures were also necessary. He also notified those present that "according to the latest information from Czechoslovakia, there shall be relocation of Soviet troops stationed there toward Poland. In Czechoslovakia the militia and state security have been put on full alert." Suddenly, after 1.30 p.m. Brezhnev telephoned Gomułka and a short recess was announced.

We know of the accounts of Brezhnev's exchange with "Wiesław". According to Kostikov, who presented if from the Soviet perspective, for Brezhnev the immediate impulse was information about the situation in Gdynia, which had reached the Kremlin just then. In the office of the Secretary General of

the Soviet Party were assembled: Mikhail Suslov, Konstantin Chernenko, Yuri Andropov [...]. Brezhnev wanted to be informed about the situation in Poland, hear Gomułka's opinion and ask him what kind of "ways out he sees and how to resolve the conflict, what could the USSR do and finally – probably on Andropov's suggestion – try to find out, who provoked him to choose such a brutal, violent method, who persuaded him to shoot."

At this point Kostikov was explaining explicitly that Brezhnev's question about possible Soviet help cannot be construed as an offer of military support. "At this point of the 1970 conflict our leadership did not consider such an eventuality. There was great hope for a Polish solution. [...] The Political Bureau took a tough decision, which blocked a military solution. It was decided that any intervention was out of the question, even if requested by the Polish leadership. Our people still felt the bitter taste of the 'victory' in Czechoslovakia". As in confirmation, Kostikov re-emphasised that Moscow had already ordered that "no one is to leave Soviet Army garrisons in Poland until further notice." The aid declared in this conversation could thus mean only "political support and credit, also in hard currency, in order to rescue the poor financial situation of the Polish economy."

Naturally, one should bear in mind that the order, which Kostikov referred to – even if it had actually been issued – in no event meant that a Soviet armed intervention in Poland was out of the question. As I said, for the Soviets restoration of internal peace was far more important than keeping Gomułka in power. They certainly would not have sent their troops to defend him, but it is virtually certain that they would have decided to invade if the conflict spread and an actual civil war had broken out.

According to Soviet activists listening in on the telephone conversation, Gomułka spoke with the voice of a very ill and suffering man. He stated authoritatively: "these are organised disturbances, brawls against our policy. They are aimed at rousing workers' discontent. They are of a counterrevolutionary character. They are inspired and controlled by instigators. The authorities do not deal with workers but with counterrevolution, joined by criminal elements." Brezhnev did not give up and continued inquiring: "Didn't it all begin among shipyard workers, in response to the price rise? At the same time he expressed his doubt whether the right season had been chosen for

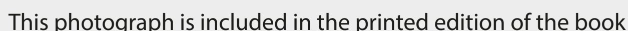
such a price increase and for such a wide range of commodities, and whether it might mean that the incidents could spread on other Polish cities."

Gomułka insisted, however, that it was not about prices. According to him, it was a provoked protest against the regime. He also assured Brezhnev that the party and state leadership were doing everything to prevent it from spreading all over the country. He perceived this popular protest as nothing but counterrevolution. It is difficult to believe that the same man fourteen years earlier had so correctly understood the essence of the Poznań Uprising, although, naturally, never called it an "uprising", but in the poetics of real socialism – "events".

Having put down the phone, Gomułka related the conversation, which he clearly found dissatisfying. Brezhnev reportedly told him that they at the Kremlin could not sleep at night. He also asked about the situation in the army and whether "own means would suffice to restore order." The Party leader argued that "the cause of the events is not the question of price change, but that the background of the incidents is largely political. So far our own forces are sufficient to restore order. If necessary, we would naturally ask the Soviet comrades for help. They may be certain that Poland shall always remain a firm member of the Warsaw Pact."

Clearly, both accounts are complementary in part, and in part similar, which enables one to surmise that they quite accurately reflect the character and the substance of that telephone conversation. There is, after all, one more account given by Cyrankiewicz in 1971 to the so-called "Kruczek's Commission". He reiterated that Gomułka reportedly said: "we shall never surrender power, and [...] when necessary, we will turn to you [...]. Poland was, is, and will be part of the socialist system." According to Cyrankiewicz, the First Secretary of the Party was irritated by the fact that "the Soviet comrades do not support the claim of counterrevolution as the cause of the events." Brezhnev was worried about the future developments and remarked that "perhaps the price reform was too broad."

Naturally, it is difficult to imagine what Gomułka had in mind when he told Brezhnev that if necessary he would turn to the USSR for help. One might nonetheless surmise that he meant military support. That is also what Cyrankiewicz seemed to understand, who in the quoted statement said that on



Władysław Gomułka regretfully says good-bye to the Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, Gdańsk Station, Warsaw, April 1965. (The National Digital Archives, photo Edmund Uchymiak)

Thursday, during one of his monologues the First Secretary said: "And when this starts to spread, we would start shooting, and when that is not enough we would call in the Soviet Army and everything will drown in blood. And would all the patriots be? What would happen to independence?" Cyrankiewicz remarked: "The thoughts of calling in the Soviet Army were of course calculations without the buyer, because – as we know otherwise – Comrade Gomułka never spoke with the Soviet comrades until Comrade Brezhnev telephoned. Not to mention what kind of political defeat for the entire socialist camp an attempt to draw in the Soviet Army into our crisis would be."

There are also voices and contrary opinions. Such an extremely different opinion was presented, among others, by Stanisław Trepczyński in an interview with Grzegorz Sołtysiak: "As far as I know and as I feel, it was quite the opposite. In Gomułka's information the emphasis was laid on 'our own forces are sufficient'. At the same time when he stated that Brezhnev offered 'aid', he was trying to warn that if the situation were to become complicated, intervention was possible. He also wanted to block the ideas of those who might request intervention on their own and, at the same time, put pressure on those who – in his opinion – were not energetic enough in dealing with the clashes. In the wings he said sarcastically: 'You'll see, if we don't get matters in hand in time, they would march in and then we would be nothing'."

A similar opinion was expressed by Paweł Machcewicz, who doubted whether the First Secretary of the Polish party seriously contemplated calling in Soviet troops to help: "In the light of Gomułka's views and of his entire political biography, one might be certain that he would do anything to avoid involving the Russians in the quelling of disturbances in Poland. This motive was probably one of the causes of the extremely brutal, violent course that he imposed to squash the December protests and he did not intend to change it as they were gaining momentum. [...] it is also possible that if it had turned out to be necessary (for example, if the protests spread all over the country, and if the Polish army could not or would not crush them), then he would have called in the Soviet Army to help, but most certainly he would have considered such a solution catastrophic for Poland and deemed it to be his personal and political defeat."

It seems that this issue cannot be resolved in accordance with academic standards. The fact remains that Gomułka never officially asked the Soviet leaders for military help in crushing the worker's rebellion on a day when it was assuming the features of an insurrection. On the other hand, the issue whether the Soviets would have been asked for help if the Polish conflict had flared up remains within the sphere of speculation. Meanwhile the systematically deteriorating situation increasingly worried the Kremlin. On 18 December Brezhnev telephoned Gomułka again.

In this conversation, as Cyrankiewicz recalled later, Brezhnev "expressed even greater concern than the day before and said that the Politburo had

convened regarding the events in Poland, he proposed reconsidering the socio-economic solutions and announced that the Soviet Politburo would send a letter to the Polish Politburo." Gomułka reportedly replied that he "does not believe that such a letter is necessary, that the situation is moving toward normalisation, and that he does not understand what the political and economic measures are supposed to mean."

Regardless of Gomułka's doubts about the seriousness of the "Soviet comrades" in sending any letters to Poland, such a document was already being drafted in Moscow. Kostikov, who had been engaged in the drafting, wrote that in the wake of the Gdynia tragedy and under the impression of the conversation with Gomułka, the Kremlin was convinced that a "political solution of the conflict means replacing the Party chief. [...] Suslov suggested that the letter be addressed not to the First Secretary but to the Political Bureau, the Central Committee. The meaning was to be clear – the Soviet party leadership is not speaking with one man but to the entire leadership of the Polish Party and with the generally elected Party authority – its Central Committee. [...] It was an indirect but rather unequivocal suggestion that the Central Committee convene. [...] At last the letter was ready. First it was sent by diplomatic courier to Aristov to be delivered in Warsaw. Significantly, however, even earlier on [...] embassy knew that there would be a letter from the Soviet party Central Committee, [addressed] to the Politburo, not to the first secretary. It was an important signal, which when passed on where necessary, enabled it to be understood in Warsaw that the Kremlin had withdrawn support for Gomułka. It was also clear that the Soviet leadership had discretely but decisively made it plain that any support for Moczar is out of the question."

It is a pity that Kostikov did not write what he had in mind by "where necessary" or rather "whom necessary". It seems, however, that when he mentioned that in the evening of 18 December Stanisław Kania and Franciszek Szlachcic travelled to Katowice to see Gierek in order to offer him the post of First Secretary, he was suggesting that it was a foregone conclusion, which might imply that the groundwork had been laid by the "Soviet comrades" ahead of time. If that was really the case, then those Polish Party activists who were directly involved in the operation of replacing the First Secretary would never have admitted to it.

Bearing in mind the PRL's dependence on the USSR, I personally doubt that everything had been planned by the Soviets, although I would be inclined to agree with Paweł Machcewicz, who wrote that the intra-party coup was carried out with Moscow's support – "one could even venture to say that it was largely inspired by it." Nonetheless one thing is certain – the role of the Soviet Union in the overcoming of the deep political crisis within the Polish Party leadership that took place in December 1970, was greater than we thought until quite recently.

Meanwhile, on 18 December, after 9 p.m. Gomułka received a telephone call from Ambassador Aristov, who wished to deliver to him the above mentioned letter of the Soviet leadership to the Polish Party Politburo. In March 1971 Gomułka recalled: "I was exhausted so I proposed that he deliver the letter the following day, Saturday morning. He replied that it was his duty to deliver it immediately and that he could also hand it to a Politburo member. I agreed and recommended that he hand it to Comrade Cyrankiewicz, which Comrade Aristov did that evening. I called a Politburo session with the participation of all members for Saturday 19 December."

Still on 18 December, at the Office of the Council of Ministers, Aristov read out and handed Cyrankiewicz the letter from the Soviet leadership, which moved by the situation in Poland expressed its concern as to the future course of events: "We do not have exhaustive information on the subject, but the facts that reach us indicate that your political situation is becoming worrying. [...] The strengthening of the bond between the party and the working class, which has now been weakened in a number of places, cannot be achieved without appropriate political and economic measures. For us all it is understandable that only if we [apply our efforts] to the working class would it help prevent further mobilisation of anti-socialist elements and the prolongation and spreading of the riots. Determining specific steps and the political and economic measures to be taken in the given situation lies only with the PZPR, but it seems important to us that these measures be implemented as soon as possible."

This letter inspires two reflections. First, it is another proof that the PRL was not sovereign. It would be hard to imagine the indignation of PRL authorities if a similar letter (in terms of form and content, but without the

ideological references) had been written by leaders of any Western or even neutral country. There would have been a lot of talk about Poland's sovereignty and interference in Poland's internal affairs. For 45 years the Soviets did not need to worry about such reservations. They could – in their own opinion – to patronise and admonish the "Polish comrades".

Another remark pertains rather to the form than the substance. If one examines this text rationally it appears quite moderate. What exactly did the Kremlin want? After all, no one mentioned recalling Gomułka or that Moscow no longer trusted him, etc. What is important is the fact that for the addressees of the letter, accustomed with such forms of contact, everything in it was perfectly clear, they already knew that the Kremlin would accept "personnel solutions", that is replacement of the First Secretary.

Interestingly, Gomułka did not read the letter until the morning of 19 December, that is the day he "landed" in hospital and thus facilitated his removal from the political scene. In March 1971 he recalled that he understood the concerns of the CPSU leadership about the developments in Poland. He also wrote: "At the same time I was deeply convinced that the information that the Soviet party leadership had received on the situation in our country was inaccurate and as such – false. The letter of the CPSU leadership is in no way related to my decision to resign as First Secretary of the Central Committee. [...] this decision was forced by my illness." Indeed it is difficult to believe that this letter had no bearing on Gomułka's resignation. Rather, it appears that "Wiesław" quite ingenuously tried to defend the sovereign character of his decision. But there is no doubt whatsoever that by withdrawing its support for him in such dramatic circumstances the Polish Party leadership contributed to his ultimate downfall.

1976

It has already been said that unlike December 1970, June'76 did not bring changes at the top of the power structure. The rulers of the PRL very quickly withdrew the price rise, which combined with the extreme brutality of the militia and the Security Service contributed to the pacification of the popular unrest. This time the events moved so fast that the Kremlin men

did not even manage to react, although they had been notified ahead of time of the plans to raise prices. For some time already Gierek's economic policy had worried Moscow, where the memory of December'70 in Poland had not been forgotten.

With particular attention and disapproval Moscow watched the "living above their means" of the Poles and the systematically increasing Polish debt in the West. Kostikov remembered that when he first heard from Mieczysław Jagielski about one thing: "How do I tell it to our bosses? Gierek's team suddenly landed in the same place as Gomułka and Jaszczuk ended their political lives. I just became scared." The Soviet leaders shared these fears, but Gierek and Jaroszewicz consistently tried to convince them that there was nothing to fear, that the price rise is necessary from the economic point of view, that they would prepare society for it and would not repeat Gomułka's mistakes. Kostikov recalled years later: "Our men could not help. Brezhnev even told Gierek not to introduce any price rise. [...] Analyse all the data again. Find a different solution. Those were categorical demands. Not questions, advice, but vehement disapproval. Gierek was furious. The partnership so carefully built step by step was ending in smoke. Brezhnev treated his friend brutally."

The Soviets once again demanded that someone competent explain to them precisely the scale and the principles of the "price operation" before the price rise announcement at the Sejm. In utmost secrecy – as Kostikov claimed later – he flew to Moscow for several hours. He spoke to Kosygin, whom he tried o persuade that the „entire reform was nothing dangerous, because it is economically justified, and socially acceptable." The Soviet prime minister did some calculations on the spot and said that the costs of the increase were erroneously made. He reportedly told Jaroszewicz: "Apart from that, the calculations of compensation were made carelessly and everyone will see that this is some kind of fraud. The plan is wrong and its justification even worse."

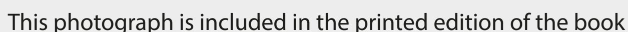
At the end Kosygin asked Jaroszewicz how he was going to win over Polish workers if he failed to convince the Soviet prime minister. Jaroszewicz promised to analyse everything carefully once again and find a "milder way, for the people, to overcome the economic problems". One could easily image

the astonishment and irritation of the Kremlin men when they discovered that the Poles changed hardly anything in the original plan discussed in Moscow. The disappointed and hurt Kosygin did not hide his disappointment: "Why on earth did he come here for a consultation?"

It is hard to determine authoritatively why Warsaw did not take into account the corrections proposed by the Soviet prime minister. Perhaps one consideration was important, namely it would require significant delay of the price rise, which Warsaw wanted to avoid for reasons of prestige as much as strictly economic reasons. Paweł Sasanka suggested that one of the possible reasons was the desire to overcome that economic problem before the Conference of Europe Communist and Workers' Parties scheduled for 29 June: "One should bear in mind the organisational considerations, as the preparations had already been in an advanced stage and it was probably too late to make any substantial changes (such as the extent of the compensation payment system), after all the documents and price list had been printed! Perhaps it could also have been rooted in the conviction that late June is the best time to introduce a price rise: it is the beginning of summer holidays, which gave hope that people would accept the price rise more peacefully." It seems therefore that at least one a lesson was learned from the unfortunate cost of December 1970, when a "price operation" was attempt during the Christmas shopping seasons.

Józef Tejchma pointed out that during the Politburo meeting Jaroszewicz made no attempts to hide the Kremlin's critical position from his comrades. But his account lasted only ten minutes, and he read "from a page, which showed that he was going to say only that much." Gierek in turn summed up the discussion: "We'll show them how one can and should solve serious economic problems. Let them then learn from us."

It seems that not all members of the Polish leadership unreservedly accepted the idea of a considerable price rise. If one is to trust the memoirs of a former KGB resident in Poland, Vitali Pavlov, among the members of the Party leadership who were critical of the "price operation" was a Politburo member and the chairman of the Central Council of Trade Unions, Władysław Kruczek. According to Pavlov, he was trying to arrange a meeting with the Soviet ambassador in Poland Stanislav Pilotovitsch. The KGB



Edward Gierek with equal enthusiasm as his predecessor greeted Leonid Brezhnev, chief of the Soviet delegation, who came to Poland for a session of the Political Advisory Committee of Warsaw Pact countries, April 1974. (FORUM, photo Jan Morek)

resident then pointed out that the ambassador's conversation with Kruczek had lasted several hours. He also noted: "As a result, a long telegram was sent to Moscow, quite worrying in character, one that forewarned of conflict between the authorities and the workers, which might lead to a social explosion unless the planned decision of the price rise is revoked."

Naturally one should treat this kind of confession with special care and quite a lot criticism. In his book Pavlov talked about facts, which by nature

are very hard to verify without access to post-Soviet archives. On the other hand, he was certainly very well informed about the configuration of forces within the Polish Party. If his reconstruction of the events is accurate, it would mean that Kruczek belonged to the "Soviet party" in the leadership.

There are many indications that a swift withdrawal of the price rise as early as 25 June in the evening saved Gierek and at least part of his team from an earlier end of their political careers. A decisive impact on the future course of events come from a personal conversation of Gierek with Brezhnev, which took place in Berlin on 29 June during a Conference of European Communist and Workers' Parties. The situation of the Polish leaders was all the more important as they had earlier been ignoring Moscow's signals of disapproval regarding the planned price rise. Brezhnev, who considered it a serious mistake, had a grudge against Warsaw for not heeding his personal appeal not to introduce the price rise on the eve of the Berlin conference.

According to Andrzej Werblan, who was a member of the Polish Party (PZPR) delegation to the Berlin conference, at the first meeting with Gierek, Brezhnev reportedly comforted him and praised the decision to withdraw the price rise. In response the First Secretary of the Polish Party informed him that the Polish leadership was going to return to the matter and – after better preparation – carry out the „price operation" notwithstanding. This information clearly worried Brezhnev, who summoned Gierek the same day to speak to him individually. Werblan, who had heard about the course of the meeting – already during the conference – from the deputy head of the Foreign Department of the CPSU Central Committee Georgi Shakhnazarov, noted that Brezhnev told his interlocutor: "Don't forget 1970. No more attempts to raise prices. This is not our advice this is our position. The only thing left for you to do is to pacify the situation." The Soviet leader vehemently opposed any attempt to introduce a price rise in Poland.

Werblan remembered that after the conversation Gierek returned nervous and spoke, whispering, with Edward Babiuch, who later that evening informed Werblan that there would be no more attempts to raise prices. According to the latter it was the first such drastic Soviet intervention in Poland's internal affairs. Brezhnev's voice again proved decisive. For the Polish party leadership the situation was all the more uncomfortable because –

as Robert Spałek aptly remarked – a radical about face after returning from Berlin could provide the Poles with „another argument that the Polish regime is far from sovereign."

From August '80 to December '81

By all accounts, from the Kremlin's point of view, the events in Poland in the years 1980–1981 appeared as one "problem to solve". Naturally, the attitude of the Soviet leadership to what was happening in our country, was gradually changing, but practically all the time from August to December, the Soviets demanded that PRL authorities sort out Solidarity. As I said, already in August 1980 Brezhnev was trying to convince Gierek that counterrevolution had appeared in Poland. In the following months he was becoming more adamant in this conviction and more and more energetically insisted that the PZPR leadership sort out the "Solidarity plague".

After all as early 25 August, the Soviet Politburo set up the Commission for Polish Affairs (so-called "Suslov Commission") whose brief was to monitor and analyse information from Poland, as well as systematically inform the Soviet leadership. Among the members were: the chief ideologue Suslov, Yuri Andropov, Konstantin Chernenko and Dymitri Ustinov. These were the highest Soviet party hierarchs (after Brezhnev), who remained in permanent touch with them. It may be noted that Andropov and Chernenko later succeeded Brezhnev.

In August 1993 Boris Yeltsin brought to Poland the information that these files were the Suslov Commission's documents (its secretary was Shakhnazarov). It is difficult to consider that they were not selected. Wiesław Władyka pointed out at once: "In Suslov's file there were only 8 documents on 47 pages. This is not much and it is hard to imagine that only that many were collected at the level of a special commission of the Political Bureau and that only so many remained [...]. Therefore all kinds of doubts and questions are justified (which were voiced by the Polish press) as to the real size of Suslov's file and as to the intentions behind the handing over these specific files to the Polish side, for in their light, at first glance Soviet policy in December 1981 does not appear bloodthirsty. It is even pragmatic and pacifist, lost and

rather helpless. The Kremlin's image seems to brighten up and thus it shatters Wojciech Jaruzelski's claim that the threat of Soviet invasion 'in defence of socialism' was real, and that is one of the reasons why it was introduced in Poland on 13 December 1981."

Clearly, the Russians, also after the collapse of the Soviet Union were still trying (be it only in this manner) to interfere in Poland's internal affairs. They did it on different fronts, and sometimes their actions contradicted one another. Sometimes the archive materials they made available or the interviews given by former party and state activists and military commanders were meant to – more or less explicitly – blame or disavow the leaders of the martial law operation, primarily General Jaruzelski. Their main thesis could be summarised as follows: in December 1981 there was no real threat of a Soviet invasion, and the decision to introduce martial law is solely a Polish responsibility, naturally primarily Jaruzelski's.

One should recall at this point that practically no one questions that in the autumn of 1980 the USSR and other Warsaw Pact countries were making intensive preparations for a military intervention in Poland. In early December, Western newspapers and radio stations (including those broadcasting in Polish) kept asking the same dramatic question: "Will they invade or not?" Due to satellite intelligence the Americans would regularly confirm the movements of Soviet troops near the Polish border and concentration of troops in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. The mood of uncertainly and danger was fostered by the press in the Eastern bloc countries (particularly in East Germany and Czechoslovakia), which was hostile toward Solidarity.

At this point one should try to answer why, ultimately, the Warsaw Pact did not invade Poland in December 1980? Why did the Soviet leaders drop their invasion plans at the last moment? What made them do so? Naturally, with our current historical knowledge we cannot give unequivocal, exhaustive answers. One could, however, point out certain issues and venture certain hypotheses. One thing seems certain: there must have been at least several factors that compelled Brezhnev and his immediate entourage to drop the plan to invade Poland.

Zbigniew Brzeziński, at that time US President's national security advisor, spoke at length in his memoirs about how the Americans were influ-

encing the Kremlin and tried to give the matter as much publicity as possible. Brzeziński discussed the Polish situation with Pope John Paul II over the telephone. On 3 December 1980 President Jimmy Carter spoke about the unprecedented concentration of Soviet forces on the Polish border and warned Moscow that in the eventuality of an armed intervention in Poland, US–Soviet relations would be seriously affected.

On their part Polish party activists, even many years later credited Kania and Jaruzelski with averting a Soviet invasion. It was their staunch stance that persuaded Brezhnev to drop the idea. The fact remains that, in an extremely tense atmosphere, the leaders of Warsaw Pact signatory states met in Moscow on 5 December. The member states were represented by: party chiefs, prime ministers, defence ministers, ministers of foreign affairs and – as an exception – interior ministers. The head of the Polish delegation was Kania, who tried to advise Brezhnev against an armed intervention. He was trying to persuade the Soviet leader that socialism in Poland was not threatened. He explained that given the historical experience and strong anti-Russian and anti-Soviet phobias among Poles, in the case of an armed intervention, strong resistance, including military should be expected.

Many years latter Kania recalled that during his face-to-face conversation with Brezhnev, he explained to him that "young boys will attack tanks with Molotov cocktails as in the Warsaw Uprising, a river of blood will flow. Even if only angels marched into Poland they would be treated as cruel occupiers and as such for many years to come. [...] Pole's sensitivity to sovereignty has no match in Europe." Kania argued that the "broadly understood Soviet interest no less than the Polish interest are arguments in favour of dropping the idea of an armed intervention in Poland." Brezhnev thought for a while and told Kania: "No, kharasho, ne voydyom" (Good, we won't go in) and added: „Ah kak budet uslazhnyatsya, voydyom [...], no bez tebya ne vodyom" (And if the situation deteriorates, we will go in, but without you – we won't go in).

One should bear in mind that for over a year the USSR had been engaged in a bloody war in Afghanistan and could not really afford another protracted conflict. In this case, Brezhnev's age and health also played a certain role. One should not forget that the decision to invade Czechoslovakia was taken by a politician who was 12 years younger and – primarily – not so ill.

It is hard to decide what the decisive factor was, but the fact remains that the USSR dropped the invasion plans and the participants in the Moscow conference only issued a proclamation where they gave the assurance that "socialist Poland, the Polish United Workers' Party and the Polish people can be absolutely certain of brotherly solidarity and support of Warsaw Pact members."

This does not naturally mean that the Soviet leadership lost interest in the Polish crisis. On the contrary, as I said, Moscow continually monitored the developments in Poland. But military intervention was treated as the last resort. On the other hand, Soviet economic pressure on the Polish leadership in the years 1980–1981 was incomparably greater. In the first place it meant limited supplies of raw materials, especially oil and gas. At the same time Moscow had a grudge against the Poles because the PRL failed to fulfil its obligations as a COMECON member and was lagging behind with supplies, coal in particular.

In the Kremlin's eyes, it was a consequence of strikes only, and of the unjustified (as it claimed) shortening of this point that inasmuch as the issues related to the threat of an armed intervention in December 1981 are still controversial, the issue of the strong economic pressure by the Soviet Union is largely uncontested. However what recurs as an object controversy are the circumstances surrounding the preparations for martial law. Initially, the authorities claimed that the decision to introduce it had been taken at the last minute, following the Solidarity leadership meeting of 3 December. The party and state leadership treated the Radom resolutions as a *casus belli* and after the martial law was proclaimed, it was announced that these resolutions tipped the scales in favour of applying extraordinary means. But it was not until after 1989 that evidence began to reveal that preliminary preparations for martial law had begun as early as August 1980.

Nevertheless, as late as 1991 Mieczysław Rakowski denied that the martial law preparations had begun long before 13 December 1981 and argued: "Every government, which concludes that the state is under threat, begins to prepare a concrete plan to introduce a state of emergency. But there is a difference between a plan and the decision to implement it. I say with a full awareness of responsibility, that even at the most critical moments

of 1981, I mean the Bydgoszcz provocation as well as the occupation of the Marszałkowska Street roundabout in early August [1981], that neither Kania, nor Jaruzelski ever mentioned introducing martial law."

The debate whether and – possibly – how early on the authorities were preparing martial law is a mere pretence. It is generally known that such plans are drawn up in every state in case of emergency. As said earlier, Gen. Jaruzelski often repeated that the final decision to mount the militia and army operation was not taken until 2 p.m. on 12 December, and that appears to be true. But the operation had been carefully planned. It was thus a mere impulse that set in motion the entire complex machinery.

The first person to speak publicly about preparations for martial law was a former officer of the Polish Army General Staff and of US intelligence Col. Ryszard Jerzy Kukliński, who was very deeply engaged in them, as he himself admitted. In a famous interview he said that preparations for "martial law took over a year, 380 days and sometimes nights. [...] the decision to introduce martial law in Poland taken under Soviet pressure in early November 1981 was practically irreversible. Had General Jaruzelski broken down at the last moment, the radio and television broadcast would have been made by General Eugeniusz Molczyk or any other determined general."

What stands out in this quote is the claim that the decision to introduce martial law was made under Soviet pressure. When Col. Kukliński gave the interview to the Paris *Kultura* it was to be and was compromising for the PRL authorities, which aspired – at any price – to independence and sovereignty. Today, however, such an interpretation could be – at least to some extent – a convenient excuse for the makers of the martial law, who consistently repeat that they acted under strong Soviet pressure.

That the preparations had been going on for quite some time is quite clear because the list of over 4,000 activists to be interned was drawn up already in February 1981. That would explain why this list (which was published during martial law) contained names of people who were not in Poland on 13 December, for example the spokesman of the Solidarity National Commission, Marek Brunné. The Soviets, who were not directly involved in the martial law preparations, were naturally regularly informed. Already on 3 March 1981 Gen. Jaruzelski who was in Moscow at the 26th CPSU Congress

reportedly spoke with Prime Minister Nikolai Tikhonov and informed him in detail about the state of preparations for martial law assuring him that the Polish leadership "aware of their allies' backing is determined to use the last resort and protect the country from counterrevolution."

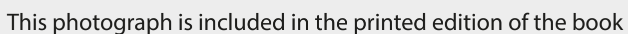
So when on 7 November Kukliński was leaving the General Staff, "the state of preparations for martial law was so advanced that the activation of the entire police – military machine required only the pressing of the proverbial button. The only problem left to solve was to concoct a pretext that would be plausible for the launch of confrontation and the choice of the best moment to strike."

At the same time, during 1981–1989 the PRL authorities consistently claimed that the Soviet side never applied any pressure regarding the introduction of martial law and that it was an action undertaken and carried out by Poles alone. These assurances were particularly ardent when US President Ronald Reagan imposed economic sanctions on the PRL on 23 December 1981, which six days later were extended to the Soviet Union, which – he thought – bore "serious and direct responsibility for repressions in Poland."

From the very beginning the doctrine of "lesser evil" aroused serious doubts among many. So when in 1989 those who had been accused of all kinds of virtually criminal intentions, became members of parliaments, senators and ministers, the image of martial law as a lesser evil underwent certain modification. It was then shown that the alternative to the "lesser evil" was not a "Solidarity's revolution" but an armed intervention of the Warsaw Pact. As if incidentally another interpretation appeared, namely that it was the Soviet authorities that pressed the Polish Party leadership to forcibly stop the Solidarity movement; Brezhnev supposedly threatened to intervene militarily in order that PRL leaders contain „anarchy and counterrevolution".

Although much material regarding the beginning of martial law has been made available, one still cannot answer definitively whether Gen. Jaruzelski, who by proclaiming it, saved Poland from a hecatomb or not. Perhaps one will never be able to answer it.

For many years the controversy has existed, whether Gen. Jaruzelski saved Poland from a planned Soviet military intervention or if this threat was only



Chris Niedenthal's famous picture taken in the early days of martial law: an armored personnel carrier in front the "Moskwa" (Moscow) cinema in Warsaw; ironically, the day's feature: Francis Ford Coppola's "Apocalypse Now". (FORUM, photo Chris Niedenthal)

a bluff. If one could give a definitive answer, it would be much simpler. In the first case Gen. Jaruzelski would emerge as the one who saved Poland from a "greater evil". But if it was shown, there was no real Soviet military threat, then the problem would be far from over. Because if it were shown to be a total mystification, then there would be another question to answer – whether Gen. Jaruzelski knew about it at that time and introduced the martial law in full agreement and in the interest of the Soviet authorities, who were interested in restoring communist "order" in Poland. Or did Jaruzelski not know then that it was a bluff and he acted in good faith, and believed that he is saving the country from an invasion of Soviet troops and, probably many more casualties.

In the second case one would again deal with this "lesser evil". In the first case, it would have been treachery, high treason that should be vehemently condemned. But the two are mutually exclusive. So, either the Soviet Union was preparing for an invasion of Poland in December 1981 or it did not think about such an eventuality in earnest. General Jaruzelski either was "in the loop" or not and then he would have been in the dark. Let it be stressed that the USSR was ready to carry out such an operation virtually at any moment. Let it also be added that the fact that it could do it, does not mean that it was its objective. At the international conference in Jachranka in 1997 Shakhnazarov put it aptly: "[...] the leadership Soviet did not wish to send in troops, but it could."

It is also possible nonetheless that in this case (and in many others) one shall never learn the whole truth, all the more so that inasmuch as one can easily imagine documents to confirm the existence of such a threat (for example, Soviet plans, maps, orders to deploy Warsaw Pact troops before and after the possible invasion), it would be much more difficult to imagine any documents that would exclude such an eventuality. For example, might a hypothetical Soviet Politburo decision that no armed intervention in Poland would take place be sufficient evidence that there was no such threat? Would a document informing about something like this be credible only because it was found in a Moscow archive. Furthermore, one should bear in mind that even if something is out of the question today, it is not necessarily impossible tomorrow.

Undoubtedly, if a civil war had erupted in Poland in December 1981 (whether it was then possible or not), the Soviets would not have watched it idly, but would have chosen to defend their interests and would not have allowed their 450,000 troops in East Germany to be cut off from the Soviet Union. On the other hand, it is impossible to answer in accordance with academic standards whether apart from this unique situation there were any other events, actions, moves that could have then coaxed the Soviet Union to engage militarily in Poland, given that it had been waging a bloody war in Afghanistan.

Perhaps the tragic experiences of the Hungarian Uprising and of the Prague Spring could help one to understand the atmosphere in Poland in 1981. When in 1956 Hungary restored a multiparty system and then Imre Nagy's government proclaimed neutrality and the country's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact; it further appealed to the United Nations for help in guaranteeing its neutrality. All this ended with Soviet tanks on the streets of Budapest. Twelve years later in Czechoslovakia, there was no mention of restoring the multiparty system (only discussion clubs began to operate), and no one even breathed a word about neutrality or leaving the Warsaw Pact. Only censorship was liquidated and a reform – inclined congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party was announced, nevertheless Soviet tanks rolled into Prague.

This time the pacification was incomparably less bloody, but neither instance allows one to answer to a potentially fundamental question: "where was – if at all – the 'threshold of Soviet patience'." When I spoke with Gen. Jaruzelski, he expressed the opinion that – regardless of whether it was feasible or not – such a "threshold" would have been sharing at that time power with Solidarity in the winter of 1981/1982.

Yet regardless of whether in December 1981 Gen. Jaruzelski knew Soviet plans for Poland or not, the fact remains that the chief beneficiaries of martial law were the Kremlin men. From their point of view the most important thing was to restore order in Warsaw (naturally a communist order). The fact that the rebellion was pacified by Poles themselves enabled the Soviets to avoid testing the Hungarian and the Czechoslovak variants in Poland. Order as Moscow wished was restored in Warsaw, and it did not cost the Russians a single rouble. A martial law implemented by Poles – whatever its planners intentions were – met the Soviet Union's wishes.

EPILOGUE

At the end if our considerations, we should repeat that there were more similarities between the "Polish months" than differences between them. Apart from that, the debate as to which of them was the most important and played the most decisive role in the efforts to destroy the communist system is futile. More and more people understand that all those social protests contributed to the change of the system in Poland, and that all of them make up our common dramatic history. It is hard to say whether without then the socio-political system in our country would have changed bloodlessly. Comparisons with other countries do not shed much light either. Suffice it to refer to two examples of states ruled by communists that did not experience such cyclical eruptions of social unrest: Bulgaria and Romania. As we know the Bulgarian regime collapsed and fell without bloodshed, whereas in the neighbouring Romania it fell as a result of a bloody revolution in December 1989.

One should stress that most "Polish months" contributed to a systematic liberalisation of the system. Even if later the regime won back "lost positions", it never did so in full and never won back its old positions, which extended the range of civil liberties every year.

In conclusion I wish to add one more thing – the external and international underpinnings of the "Polish months". Now, it must by stressed that in today's Poland – whether the ruling party is the left or the right – the use of firearms against demonstrators by the "forces of order" is practically out of the question as it was in 1981 in all Western Europe and North America.

Bloody clashes with protesters were the order of the day (and alas still are) in many Third World countries. So when the martial law was introduced in Poland and protests were brutally crushed (also with firearms), in the Euro-Atlantic or – as some prefer Judeo-Christian – civilisation circle, this must have looked barbaric.

This issue was seen differently in 1970, which can in no way be deemed to justify Gomułka and his men. But it would be good to remember that in the 1960s and 1970s in highly developed countries of the West the police and army sent to crush street demonstrations used firearms, which led to casualties. To name but a few: Paris (17–20 October 1961), Kent University, Ohio (5 May 1970), or Londonderry, Northern Ireland (30 January 1972).

There is nevertheless one source of hope. Every year there are ever countries, which would use firearms against protesters and later try to justify it. Poland has some reason to be satisfied and there is some evidence of mental evolution, namely that no Polish government after 1989 (regardless of political orientation) even thought of such a solution to serious political and social crisis. So there is hope that in this specific historical calendar we shall never see new "Polish months".

GLOSSARY

8th Plenary Session (VIII Plenum KC) – the plenary sessions of the Central Committee were numbered from one party congress to another, so when one speaks of a given plenary session one needs to add the date. Perhaps the most famous and the most momentous was the VIII Plenum of 19–21 October 1956, which elevated Władysław Gomułka to power. The Plenum took place in an extremely tense atmosphere (large-scale troop movements of Soviet troops all over Poland, the unexpected visit of Soviet leaders in Warsaw, headed by Nikita Khrushchev himself). This Plenary session ("Plenum" as it is frequently called) symbolised the end of the Stalinist period in Poland.

Army training centre (studium wojskowe) – in communist-ruled Poland virtually all higher educational institutions had such centres, i.e. cells that provided military instruction for future officers. The instructors were professional soldiers. The training included shooting and weapon handling, so weapons were stored in the centres' armouries.

The Bydgoszcz provocation (prowokacja bydgoska) – on 19 March 1981 at a session of the Bydgoszcz Provincial National Council, despite previous assurances, Solidarity representatives were not allowed to take the floor to argue the case of striking farmers, who demanded registration of Peasants' Solidarity. The protesters were forcibly removed from the room and in the commotion unidentified civilians brutally beat up three Solidarity

representatives. In Poland, where one tends to use the word "provocation" too often, representatives of the Party and Solidarity accused one another of causing a very serious political crisis, which ended ten days later and a compromise was reached. Before that happened, on 27 March Solidarity organised a four hour general warning strike, probably the biggest in the entire history of Poland, with some fourteen million people participating.

Catholic Intelligentsia Clubs (Kluby Inteligencji Katolickiej, KIK) – the first KIKs in Cracow, Poznań, Toruń, Warsaw and Wrocław were permitted to operate after October 1956. The KIK movement began to operate on a mass scale in 1980–1981. In a state where freedom of expression was largely restricted, the Clubs offered space for relatively free and often very interesting discussions on religious social, political, economic, and cultural themes, frequently with prominent Catholic activists (including members of the clergy). Many of the scientists, writers, intellectuals and artists were quite remote from Catholicism.

Cegielski's Works (Zakłady im. Hipolita Cegielskiego) – established in the 19th century by Hipolit Cegielski, the largest industrial enterprise in Poznań and in Poland, it was nationalised after World War II. It was a renowned manufacturer of marine engines, railway wagons, locomotives and "special production" of the military. On 28 June 1956 the workers of the plant (then known as Joseph Stalin Works') went on protest strike, formed a peaceable procession, which then headed for the Party headquarters. This was the beginning of the social rebellion, which turned into street fighting that lasted several hours.

Collectivisation (kolektywizacja) – following the Soviet Union, Poland initiated this process in the late 1940s. Initially voluntary and later enforced by state administration and even the police, it consisted of changing the property structure of agriculture. Its character was dominated by ideological considerations and simultaneously economic calculations were ignored. Individual farmers were forced to join cooperatives, where the land, buildings, animals, machines and tools were to be joint property of the members.

Despite the facts, the propaganda claimed that it was the most effective method of farming. The autumn of 1956 saw spontaneous decollectivisation. Out of 10,000 farming cooperatives nearly 2,000 remained. In the years to come the authorities no longer vigorously enforced collectivisation and the existence of individual, "private" farming was something that distinguished Poland among other Soviet bloc countries.

COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance – Rada Wzajemnej Pomocy Gospodarczej) – an economic organisation established in September 1949 in Moscow at a conference of representatives of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union. Later members: Albania (which did not participate after 1961), the German Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Cuba and Vietnam. The organisation was dissolved in 1991. The organisation imposed on its members economic plans and obliged them to specialise in specific areas. Poland was assigned heavy industry, mining and to some extent machine industry.

"Commandos" (komandosi) – a colloquial term for opposition-oriented young people, active from the mid-1960s in Warsaw University. They were given this name because these young and intelligent people would regularly appear at open party and youth organisation meetings, and like real commandos operating behind enemy lines that disrupt and sabotage its actions, these young men would make nonconformist speeches (and most of them were good public speakers) and disrupted the meetings' agendas.

Commercial stores (sklepy komercyjne) – in a communist ruled Poland, in the light of the virtually permanent shortage of meat, a network of commercial stores was established, which sold meat products of supposedly better quality but at higher prices. Such products were – theoretically – available, but one needed to queue for several hours.

Communist Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Polski) – established in December 1918, following the merger of two radically left-wing parties and until 1925 it was named "the Communist Workers' Party of Poland". The

party (under either name) was a section of the Communist International. In Poland the Party operated in the underground and was generally regarded as a Soviet spy ring, controlled from Moscow by the Comintern, but actually by Lenin, and later by Stalin. CPP employed a class hierarchy and national issues had no significance at all. In 1938 it was dissolved by the Comintern on the pretext of being penetrated by "hostile agents". Many of CPP activists who were then living in the USSR were executed in the "Great Purge" or were sent to the Gulag or imprisoned. Paradoxically, most CPP activists survived the purge in Polish prisons, where they were serving time for anti-state activity.

Confrontation (konfrontacja) – a colloquial term (particularly popular during 1980–1981), which meant an ideological and political and even a military conflict that could and did take place in 1981 between Solidarity and the communist authorities.

Council of State (Rada Państwa) – an organ of the executive branch established in 1947 when the Sejm adopted the so-called "small constitution". Its chairman was, by law, the President of the Republic of Poland. When the 1952 Constitution was enacted by the Sejm, the official name of the state was changed and the presidency removed. A number of its prerogatives were taken over by the Council of State, and, for example, it could issue executive orders. The Council, which was sometimes called a "collective head of state", was represented by its chairman, who was frequently greeted in the West as a formal head of state.

Deputy commander for political matters (zastępca dowódcy do spraw politycznych) – in communist ruled Poland the armed forces were not only not to be apolitical (and they were not), but it were to be (and indeed were) politically engaged on the side of the communist regime. In order to achieve this all military units (battalions, regiments, brigades and divisions) from the company level up had deputy commanders for political matters. Their role was unique. Quite often these officers had more power than the nominal commanders. Next to chiefs of staff (and naturally apart from the commander) they were the most important men in the command structure of

a specific military unit; *nota bene*, soldiers of all ranks could turn to deputy commanders without breaking the chain of command.

Deputy member of the Politburo (zastępca członka Biura Politycznego) – in a "Marxist-Leninist" party the Political Bureau (Politburo) was the highest organ of party power between the party congresses. In the PRL it was the *de facto* highest organ of state power. The Political Bureau of the Polish United Workers' Party had between several and twenty members, as well as several deputy members, who were usually elected during party congresses or plenary sessions of the Central Committee. The principal difference between full members and deputy members of the Politburo lay in the fact that the latter could take part in the discussions but had no right to vote.

Economic manoeuvre (manewr ekonomiczny) – a propaganda euphemism for government economic policy operations, announced in December 1976 to be implemented in the years 1977–1980. The "economic manoeuvre" was to primarily consist of restricting production for the domestic markets. Its main, and never attained, objective was the slowing of debt increase and the restoration of market balance.

Fitness trails (ścieżki zdrowia) – in the 1970s Poland saw the growing popularity of fitness trails for joggers. After the worker protests of June 1976 the term was used to denote workers running gauntlet of militia functionaries who would club then, beat them with belts or helmets all over their bodies. This type of cruel punishment has a long tradition, and it was applied in the 19th century in the Russian army, where many Poles were compelled to serve. It was also practiced by German national socialists and Italian fascists. In Poland this brutal method was applied by the militia and state security in June 1956 in Poznań. In December 1970 militia functionaries called the victims of such beating "living torches", because their bodies often required treatment similar to that of burns.

Forces of order (siły porządkowe) – a term borrowed from the official propaganda language for the militia and its auxiliary formations. They were

deployed to suppress with water cannons, petards, tear gas and sometimes firearms, street protests that were illegal from the point of view of the regime. In fact, these were rather "forces of disorder", because their brutality often led to escalation of violence on both sides.

"Forefathers" ("Dziady") – a national drama written by the romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz in the first half of the 19th century. In 1967 the National Theatre in Warsaw staged a production of this play to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, as the director Kazimierz Dejmek later claimed. The authorities decided to ban the play for its anti-Russian, and even – which is preposterous – anti-Soviet overtones. The decision caused students' protests during and after the last performance.

Free Trade Unions (Wolne Związki Zawodowe) – in the spring of 1978 in Katowice and later in Gdańsk founding committees of Free Trade Unions were established. Although not recognised as legal by the authorities, they operated openly (the underground press that they published featured addresses and telephone numbers of specific activists to be contacted by those who needed or wished to). The Free Trade Unions on the northern seaboard, where many future Solidarity activists were engaged, played a significant role in laying the groundwork for the August 1980s.

Gomułka's return to Power (powrót Gomułki do władzy) – Władysław Gomułka was the one Polish communist leader, who most probably played the greatest role in the history of Poland. During 1943–1945 he was the secretary, and later secretary of the Polish Workers' Party, when in 1948 he was accused of "right-wing and nationalist deviation", deposed and given lesser and lesser appointments. In August 1951 he was arrested and detained for over 3 years without trial. At that time in other Soviet-block countries (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Hungary) former communist leaders were executed. Gomułka was released in December 1954 and waited for his moment for over a year and a half. In October 1956, in dramatic circumstances, he returned to power and become First Secretary of the Party. He remained the incumbent for over 14 years (until December 1970).

Historical turn (zakręt historii) – a term quite popular in Poland and quite frequently used (perhaps overused) by publicists and popular science authors, which denotes a turning point in a country's history, when a sudden and momentous change takes place. The indirect reference to a road traffic turn underlines the dramatic, if not tragic, character of a socio-political situation.

"Horizontal structure" (struktury poziome) – a Party pro-reform movement during 1980–1981, known as the so-called "horizontal structures". The origin of the term was the phenomenon of "horizontal" cooperation of the basic and factory Party organisations, circumventing the higher instances (such as the provincial Party committees), a practice, which stood in sharp contrast with the tradition of a Marxist-Leninist type of party with its centralisation of power, the internal truly rigid discipline and the hierarchical structure (orders invariably came from the top down) and the rank-and-file members were subject to party discipline. Party leadership vigorously resisted the "horizontal structures" movement and during the martial law of 1981–1982 some activists of this informal movement were interned together with prominent Solidarity activists.

Intellectuals (also "creative intellectuals", inteligencja twórcza) – a term borrowed from the official vernacular that covers writers, scholars (particularly of the arts and social scientists), journalists, artists, etc. Such people were deemed to have a kind of authority. Today, for a substantial segment of society, this term has a somewhat pejorative ring to it. They are viewed not as wise and intellectually, courageous people but as smug and uncritical followers of the *vox populi*. The political right sometimes uses the term as an epithet for left-wing thinkers.

Internal Security Corps (Korpus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego) – a military formation established in 1945 on the basis of one infantry division, primarily in order to combat domestic enemies: Polish anti-communist partisan units and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. In later years the Corps and its successors were subordinated to the Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry

of Public Security or the Ministry of Internal Affairs and were deployed to crush the social protests of June 1956 and December 1970.

The Jachranka Conference (konferencja w Jachrance) – in November 1997 a major international conference on the dramatic events of 1980–1982 was held in Jachranka near Warsaw. It was attended by the three last First Secretaries of the Party's Central Committee: Stanisław Kania, Wojciech Jaruzelski and Mieczysław Rakowski, as well as several other high-ranking Party dignitaries, there were also some major Solidarity activists. Among participants from other countries there were representatives of the Soviet side: the Chief of Joint Staffs of the Warsaw Pact Marshal Victor Kulikov, his chief of staff Anatoli Gribkov and the secretary of the so-called "Suslov Commission" Georgi Shakhnazarov; on the American side: Zbigniew Brzeziński, former national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter; President Jimmy Carter; chief of the National Security Council Admiral William Odom; Stephen Larrabee, member of the National Security Council under President Carter; Richard Pipes advisor to President Ronald Reagan, and the former head of the Polish Service of Radio Free Europe Jan Nowak-Jeziorański. It was perhaps the biggest such conference in Poland. The audience included several dozen social scientists and arts scholars.

The Jasna Góra Monastery (also Luminous Mount) – located on a hill in Częstochowa dates back to the 16th century is a most important shrine to the Virgin Mary and also the largest pilgrimage centre for those wishing to visit the miraculous icon of our Lady of Częstochowa. In the early 17th century the monastery was surrounded by ramparts and turned into a fortress. Through several centuries it was besieged a number of times, but the shrine become especially symbolic during the Swedish invasion (the "Deluge") in 1655 when Charles X Gustav's army ended their 40-days siege of the Pauline monastery. The following year the Lvov Cathedral was the scene of the Lvov Oath by King John II Casimir, which was a prayer to save the Polish Commonwealth from the Swedish invasion. The Oath was repeated on 26 August 1956 at Jasna Góra. The Oath of the Polish Nation was written by the Primate of Poland Stefan Wyszyński during his imprisonment.

During the communists' rule, the rivalry between the state and the Church was particularly evident during the Polish Millenium Celebrations, led by Wyszyński (who came to be known as "the Millenium Primate") and with the entire Episcopate present, which were held on 3 May 1966 on Jasna Góra. Primate Wyszyński, as papal legate, read out a letter from Pope Paul VI to the Polish Nation and gave the Episcopal blessing. The communist authorities applied all kinds of impediments during the Millenium celebrations (see Millenium). There were even plans to organise concerts of The Beatles and The Animals on 3 May 1966 in Częstochowa in order to divert young people from the religious celebrations. Also on his papal visit to Poland in June 1979 John Paul II said to thousands of the faithful gathered at Jasna Góra "Here we have always been free…"

The Marszałkowska roundabout occupation (okupacja ronda na Marszałkowskiej) – in the summer of 1981, in view of the systematically deteriorating economy, especially in terms of food supply, Solidarity organised many thousand strong hunger marches in a number of cities. The Warsaw Solidarity structures chose a different form of protest. On 3 August they organised a motorcade passing across the city centre flashing national flags and banners. A long line of city buses, vans, delivery trucks and even ambulances was stopped in the very heart of the city centre at the intersection of Marszałkowska Street and Jerozolimskie Avenue. The motorcade was stopped in order to prevent it from driving past the Party Home. For two days, people, both local and visiting, crowded by the vehicles to see artists' performances, to hear political speeches, all in a picnic atmosphere. However, there was one problem for both sides – how to end the blockade of the city's major arteries and save face. Ultimately it was ended after a two-hour general strike in the Warsaw region (5 August).

Millennium – 1966 marked the thousandth anniversary of the baptism of Mieszko I, Poland's first ruler. It was a uniquely momentous event in the history of the Polish Church, as it symbolised the beginning of Christianity on Polish territories. 966 is also the customarily accepted documented beginning of the Polish state. Although the date was rather conventional,

both for state formation and conversion to Christianity (both were long processes and one cannot say that they happened in one year, 966), as it turned out 1966 was a perfect time for a conflict between state and Church authorities. In fact it was a controversy regarding the historical heritage, which Poland was to draw upon at the end of the 20th century. For a number of months the state and party authorities made attempts – regardless of the costs – to disrupt religious celebrations, or at least to distract as many people as possible, especially the young. The authorities also refused entry to Pope Paul VI, and at the same time refused to issue passport to the Primate, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, which prevented him from going to Rome. Let it be emphasised that in communist – ruled Poland people did not keep their passports at home but needed to apply for them, fill in detailed forms and file them with the local Citizen's Militia that would or would not issue a passport. Passports were to be returned within a week.

Molotov cocktails (butelki z benzyną) – quite a popular term for bottles with inflammable liquid (most often petrol) used by street demonstrators, insurgents or front-line soldiers to set fire to vehicles or buildings. This term remained virtually unknown and hardly ever used, although such bottles were used on numerous occasions. There even appeared certain "experts" in this field, who claimed that it is better to use stoneware mead flasks. It was also pointed out that a strip of cloth, dipped in petrol that served as a kind of fuse, should be long enough to protect the user from getting burned accidentally.

Motorised Reserves of the Citizens' Militia (Zmotoryzowane Odwody Milicji Obywatelskiej – ZOMO) – the Polish Stalinist government did not have special riot militia formations to supervise large public gatherings and, if need be, to crush anti-government street demonstrations. Furthermore, the militia did not carry truncheons, as they were seen as a symbol of the capitalist police. So, when a workers' protest erupted in Poznań in June 1956, it needed to be pacified by troops with heavy equipment. The authorities drew conclusions and in view of the dramatic events of that autumn, the decision was made to establish a special motorised militia unit: the Motorised

Reserves of Citizens' Militia. These formations ranged from a few to little less than twenty thousand permanent functionaries equipped with water cannons, petards, tear gas grenades, helmets, shields, and long truncheons. The formation was ultimately disbanded in September 1989.

Municipal National Council (Miejska Rada Narodowa) – after 1950 self-government structures ceased to exist even in its most rudimentary form. They were replaced by "national councils", which were "territorial organs of state power" in provinces, cities, town districts, municipalities. At the same time, in the 1970s the national councils regained some self-government functions, although their largely showy character did not change.

National concord (porozumienie narodowe) – a term borrowed from the official language that was to denote the allegedly perfect unachievable state of permanent freedom from conflict (national and domestic harmony). Many people believed that it was the case after the social contracts of spring 1980 were signed by the striking workers and authorities. At the same time, the authorities accused Solidarity of heading for confrontation and not for national concord.

National Unity Front (Front Jedności Narodu) – the communist rulers of Poland did their best to avoid competition in parliamentary or local elections, which would otherwise be based on a free rivalry of political forces. Only in the first post-war elections (rigged by the communists) and the last election in communist Poland (1989) were there more than one joint list of candidates. The right put up such list and "organise" elections was invariably monopolised by one umbrella organisation for all legal parties and political organisation. Initially it was the National Front (Front Narodowy) and in the years 1956–1983 the National Unity Front, and later the Patriotic Movement for National Renaissance. Each of these were a mere façade that was meant to express the "political and moral unity" of all Poles.

National uprisings of the 19th century (polskie powstania narodowe XIX wieku) – in the Polish patriotic tradition, related to Poland's partition by

Austria, Prussia and Russia, 19th century uprisings occupy a prominent place. Chronologically, the first one is the Kościuszko Uprising (as it was led by Tadeusz Kościuszko) of 1794, i.e., before the final partition. Later, if one does not include Polish involvement in Napoleon's wars, another insurgency erupted in 1830. It was the so-called November Uprising, which turned into a regular Polish-Russian war, which ended in defeat ten months later. In 1846 and 1848 there were armed risings in the Austrian partition and later – during the Spring of Nations – in the Prussian – held territory. Finally, there was the January Uprising (1863–1864), which unlike the November Uprising (with the Polish army involved), was rather a guerrilla war of rather small partisan units. The memory of the 19th century uprisings and their heroes and the repressions they suffered (deportations into the Russian heartland) has always been an important element of the Polish national consciousness.

Natolinians and Pulavians ("natolińczycy" i "puławianie") – the Party had made every effort to present itself as a monolith in the official media. But there was a virtually continuous fight for political power behind the scenes, even though Marxist-Leninist parties strictly forbade any factions. In March 1956, when the First Secretary of the Polish Party died in Moscow, the carefully hidden divisions in the Party leadership became evident. There were rumours in its ranks: the "Natolinians" and the "Pulavians". The former were anti-reform, conservative and dogmatic. The latter, in an attempt to skilfully shape general mood and attitudes, tried to present themselves as dedicated reformers, and some of them indeed were "pro-liberalisation" and "pro-democratisation".

Nomenklatura – a system of personnel selection (by appropriate level of Party apparatus) for managerial posts in administration, industry, the military, diplomacy, culture, science, sport, etc., borrowed from the Soviet Union and characteristic for communist rule. Thus there were posts and functions in the Central Committee *nomenklatura*, and there were others, less prominent, decided on at the level of provincial or district party committees.

Normalisation (normalizacja) – a term often overused by official propaganda, which describes a situation in the country that is favourable from the

point of view of the rulers, following a socio-political crisis and when the agitated popular mood was brought under control for example in Poland during martial law). Perhaps this term is most frequently used as a kind of counterbalance for normality in the context of the situation in Czechoslovakia after the Warsaw Pact invasion of August 1968 and the pacification of the Prague Spring. Generally speaking, "normalisation" would be a favourable course of events for the communist rulers, but not for their political partners, rivals or opponents; dissident elements of society, the Catholic Church (both the congregation and the institution) or recalcitrant intellectuals.

Norms (normy) – one of the characteristic and permanent, features of the real socialist economy was its command and distribution character. The central planner (the true decision-maker, the Political Bureau) determined exactly the manufacturer and the range and volume of products, the prices, the buyers and the sellers. Theoretically everything was logical and precisely determined. In practice, however, things tended to vary, and the central planner, as a rule, did not make allowances for power cuts, delayed supplies, wasteful resource management, chaos in the plants, etc. One of the pieces of this "economic puzzle" were also the production quotas (called "norms"), which specified the predetermined volume of items to be manufactured, which the workers were to meet regardless of these "objective difficulties". It is rather obvious, therefore, that the higher the quotas ("norms") were the harder to meet the norms and the more frequently the actual producers would rebel and shout: "Down with the norms!".

Northern and Western Territories (Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne) – following World War II and the decisions of the great powers made at Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam, Poland's borders were moved westward. Poland eastern territories were annexed by the Soviet Union. To compensate for this Poland was given territories in the north, west and south, officially called "The Regained Territories". An intensive propaganda campaign was launched, which claimed that these were "ancient Polish territories" (even if some areas had never belonged to Poland). The term "Regained Territories" was a historical exaggeration, but had a political and – to an extent – therapeutic sense,

as it, somehow at least, enabled the communist rulers to divert the focus of public opinion from the lost eastern territories, and – at the same time – to keep the Poles afraid of the threat of German revisionism and revanchism. It remains an open question how real the threat was with the passage of time. Nevertheless, many scholars tend to avoid the propaganda term "Regained Territories" and use the ideologically neutral term: "Northern and Western Territories".

Nowa Huta – a town outside Cracow, in which was built a metallurgical combine the Lenin Still Mill. The authorities considered Nowa Huta (in 1951 incorporated into Cracow) to be a model "socialist town", which meant a town with no churches in it. However, history eventually turned the communists into a laughing stock. First, in 1960 the town was the scene of violent crashes over the authorities' decision to remove a cross that marked the site where a church was planned. Later, in the 1980s, this "bastion of socialism" turned into a "fortress of Solidarity". The children of the town's builders violently fought the ZOMO riot militia in the streets.

Office of the Council of Ministers (Urząd Rady Ministrów) – in the PRL a central office that offered all kinds of back-up services to the prime minister, members of the government and other entitled persons. As a rule, the head of the office was an important person, staying in the shadow but one who had extensive contacts and enjoyed the confidence of the prime minister and was a close collaborator. Usually the incumbent kept his position for quite some time: Janusz Wieczorek (1956–1980) and General Michał Janiszewski (1981–1989).

Palace of Culture and Science (Pałac Kultury i Nauki) – erected during three years, 1952–1955, in the social realism style, modelled on similar high-rise buildings in Moscow and is the tallest building in Poland (when it was completed in July 1955, it was the tallest building in Europe west of the Soviet border). It is 237 metres high (with its enormous spire). Originally named after Joseph Stalin, it was built as a "gift of the Soviet people for the Polish nation". It houses a number of scientific and cultural institutions. In 2007

it was registered as a historical monument, but many people regard it as a symbol of Soviet dominance over Poland and demand that it be torn down.

The Paris-based *Kultura* (paryska „Kultura") – monthly published uninterruptedly from 1947 to 2000 (initially in Rome and after 1948 by the Literary Institute). The editor-in-chief was Jerzy Giedroyc. *Kultura*, although it was forbidden in Poland to possess it, let alone distribute it, was widely read and discussed by intellectuals who were critical of the communist regime. Undoubtedly it was one of the most important emigré periodicals, and had readers among opposition activists in Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary and the Soviet Union.

The "partisans" and "Silesians" ("partyzanci" i "ślązacy") – in the mid 1960s, when more and more party activists (especially the junior ones) were critical of Gomułka's rule; two cliques within the Party appeared: the "partisans" and the "Silesians". The leader of the "partisans" was the minister of internal affairs, and during World War II a communist partisan commander in occupied Poland, General Mieczysław Moczar. Many of those associated with this group had had a partisan background, hence the term "partisans". This fraction proclaimed, albeit in a veiled manner, populist, nationalistic, anti-Semitic, and sometimes anti-intelligentsia slogans.

Some members of the other group, the "Silesians" whose patron was Politburo member and First Secretary of the Party in Katowice, Edward Gierek, who was perceived as a good administrator in the southern region of Silesia (hence the name of the clique). The group tried to present themselves as technocrats, and sometimes used populist and nationalistic slogans.

The Party Home (Dom Partii) – a large office building, erected in the years 1948–1952, as the Party headquarters, colloquially called "The White House". The name "Party Home" was used as an official term. After the political system changed and the Party dissolved itself, it became the seat of the Warsaw Stock Exchange (1991–2000). Now it houses a banking and financial centre.

Penal board (Kolegium Karno-Administracyjne) – an institution virtually unknown in democratic and liberal legal systems. Penal boards passed all kinds of extra-judicial, administrative punitive sentences: from three months imprisonment, fines or community service. Typically they dealt with misdemeanours.

Polish bishops' letter (list polskich biskupów) – at the end of 1965 Poland saw a profound crisis in the Church – state relations. Its catalyst was the *Pastoral Letter of the Polish Bishops to their German Brothers in Christ* of 18 November 1965, and the reaction of the Polish authorities to this document. The Polish Episcopate sent letters to Episcopal conferences of the 56 countries taking part in the second Vatican Council, inviting their representatives to the celebration of Poland's Millennium, but it was the letter to the German bishops that triggered an animated reaction of the Polish government. A large-scale public polemic against this document. Yet it was not a polemic *ad rem* but an attack *ad hominem*, particularly on Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. The anger and irritation of the Party leadership and the resultant anti-Church speeches in the media were rooted in the fact that the letter painfully but accurately recalled the thousand-year-long history of Polish-German relations from the first ruler, Mieszko, through the wars with the Teutonic Knights, the Duchy of Prussia the partitions of Poland to World War II. The letter did end on a completely new note – the readiness for mutual forgiveness and Polish-German reconciliation. Gomułka, who was extremely sensitive to Polish-German issues, and interpreted this document as the Episcopate's meddling in foreign policy. In his view, the bishops were interfering with a matter, which only he could have dealt with.

Polish Film School (polska szkoła filmowa) – a colloquial name of a unique trend in Polish cinema, symbolised by a wave of famous excellent feature films made in the second half of the 1950s. These films usually dealt from the Polish point of view with World War II and its consequences. The most distinguished members of the Polish Film School: Andrzej Wajda, Andrzej Munk, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Kazimierz Kutz and Wojciech Hass, and their most famous films included: *Ashes and Diamonds*, *Sewer*, *Lotna* (A. Wajda), and Andrzej Munk's *Eroica*, *Bad Luck* and *The Passenger*.

Polish Peasant's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL) – a political party established in August 1945 (as a counterbalance for the Peasants' Party [Stronnictwo Ludowe, SL], which closely collaborated with the communists) by Stanisław Mikołajczyk, former prime minister of the Polish government--in-exile. PSL, which had 600,000 members, and was the largest political party in Poland, grouped many opponents of the communist regime, not necessarily peasants, and had virtually nothing in common with the many "downtown peasants". After the rigged parliamentary election of January 1947 and Mikołajczyk's (and of other PSL leaders) flight from Poland in the fall of that year, the systematically marginalised PSL was living its last. Finally, in November it was merged with the pro-communist Peasants' Party to form the United Peasants' Party.

Price operation (operacja cenowa) – a propaganda euphemism for a price rise of most important commodities, particularly foodstuffs. Sometimes, as if to compensate, the authorities would reduce the prices of industrial goods, ignoring the fact that foodstuffs are purchased daily while appliances such as TV sets every few or more years. In extreme cases the price of foodstuffs would go up, which was supposedly compensated by the reduced price of… steam engines, as though anybody would wish to own a train.

Private initiative (prywatna inicjatywa) – an official term for private small business (usually a family firm): a store, a bazaar stall, a craftsman's shop, a boarding house, a small factory, a taxi. Originally it was a pejorative term; a private entrepreneur was usually generally suspect in the eyes of the authorities, to say the least. But in its colloquial sense it often had positive connotations, as it expressed admiration for the resourcefulness, energy, cunning, diligence and enterprise of the entrepreneur, i.e. of "private initiative".

Provincial office (Urząd Wojewódzki) – name of building that housed local or regional administration (following the 1975 territorial reform).

Provincial Office of State Security (Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego) – name of a provincial (and, by analogy, also district office of state

security) structure of the Ministry of Public Security in the first post-war years of Poland under communist rule. The name typically had frightful connotations, because that was where people were treated brutally and tortured.

Radio jamming station (stacja zagłuszająca) – a characteristic feature perhaps of all countries ruled by communists was massive jamming of radio programmes transmitted from the West. These were programmes of foreign radio stations in foreign languages including Polish. The jamming stations operated until the last days of communist rule, making it hard for listeners to receive programmes from behind the "iron curtain".

Real socialism (realny socjalizm) – a term both official (but not propagandistic) and academic used by truly non-Marxist scholars. Although, in the social sciences, this term did not become popular until 1968 (the Prague Spring), but it appears and it was quite an apt description of the everyday reality, of the countries of the Soviet sphere of dominance after 1956. Unlike the widely idealised Scandinavian socialism (usually identified with welfare state) the term "real socialism" meant that it was what it was, because it had to be so, and it would never be any different.

Renewal (odnowa) – in communist ruled Poland each new political clique that seized power as a result of social conflict (strikes, demonstrations, street clashes) and political turmoil (behind-the-scenes power-play in the state and party leadership, typically accompanied by factional fighting) proclaimed "renewal", that is announced changes in leadership style, rule of law, economy or culture. Opposition-minded people would use this term into a pun. Namely in Polish the word "odnowa" (renewal) can be written as separate words "od nowa", which means "once again". So if spoken together: "odnowa od nowa" would mean "a renewal, once again".

Religious songs (pieśni religijne) – it become a certain tradition of street demonstrations in communist-ruled Poland to sing all kinds of song. The "repertoire" was quite eclectic. So the demonstrators would sing revolutionary songs (such as the "Internationale"), patriotic songs, among them

– understandably most often – the national anthem and religious songs, particularly "God, Thou Hast Poland" in a version sung during the partitions and during the German and Soviet occupation, with the refrain: "Fatherland and freedom, please give us back, oh Lord!'", instead of "bless our free Fatherland, oh Lord!" On the whole one might say that people sang whatever they had learned at church or at school.

„Right-wing nationalist deviation" (odchylenie prawicowo-nacjonalistyczne) – a Party vocabulary. In 1948 this was the groundless charge levelled at Secretary General of the Polish Workers Party Władysław Gomułka, made by his party comrades. He was accused of overrating the pro-independence traditions of the Polish Socialist Party present in the Polish workers movement. It was a veiled accusation of an anti-Soviet stance and underestimating the role of the USSR in the international communist movement. In fact these accusations, quite absurd as they were, had nothing to do either with right-wing politics or nationalism. It was not the first time and not the last that such a term was not meant to describe a phenomenon but to stigmatise specific people.

Scouts' Radio Station (Rozgłośnia Harcerska) – established in 1957 during the wave of democratisation and liberalisation of 1956 by the Polish Scouting Union (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego, ZHP), and it was the only radio station in the Soviet block that functioned outside the state radio and television structures. It played an enormous role in the musical education of the Polish post-war baby boomers' generation.

Security Service (Służba Bezpieczeństwa) – political police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, established in late 1956 during the changes in the security apparatus. It was an intelligence and investigation organisation that dealt with tracing and opposing all kinds of independent social initiatives and specific people, who – rightly or not – were suspected of any activity directed against the communist regime.

Self-containing revolution, self-limiting revolution (samoograniczająca się rewolucja) – a popular term made popular by a renowned Polish sociologist

Jadwiga Staniszkis's book (*Poland's self-limiting revolution*, Princeton–New Jersey 1984). It describes the stance of the broadly understood Solidarity leadership in 1980–1981. Given the military strength of the regime and in view of the threat of Soviet armed intervention, the Solidarity leadership deliberately reduced the scope of possible changes and did not make far-reaching demands (for example regarding free parliamentary elections) despite the entreaties of local Solidarity activists.

Social advancement (awans społeczny) – phenomenon characteristic for all countries ruled by communists. In Poland it was particularly noteworthy during the first two post-war decades, which saw a social upheaval, and the shortage of qualified and educated specialists was compensated by hiring socially advanced people; these came from poor peasant and worker families, from villages and small towns and were offered the chance to advance socially and in some cases as much the chance to live a civilised live. Without specialist training, they were able to make rapid and successful careers, by sheer "ideological inspiration" and "political dedication". Without secondary education (and sometimes virtually illiterate), they became army or state security officers, or made careers in the administration and party apparatus. They could, with no legal training whatsoever, become public prosecutors or even judges. In later years, with the progress of the changes in the social structure, the phenomenon of social advancement lost much of its negative character.

Success propaganda (propaganda sukcesu) – this term refers to media efforts made in the second half of the 1970s in order to persuade the Poles that their country's economy held the 10th place in the world in terms of industrial production. These efforts were chiefly associated with Jerzy Łukaszewicz, the Central Committee Secretary responsible for propaganda. The more difficult the economic situation in Poland, the more ardent were the propaganda assurances that things were improving. The crisis and Gierek's failure to deliver was evident to anyone who cared to look, but success propaganda kept pumping out the slogan: "Poland is growing and people are living ever better".

State security (resorty siłowe) – the borrowed term, literally translated would read "force departments", a notion borrowed from the Soviet vernacular. Sometimes called "uniformed services", the reference is all kinds of structures of the ministries of defence or internal affairs. For the communists state security structures ("force departments") were a useful tool to intimidate the people, and during political transformations the communists would try to maintain control over them as long as they could.

Tygodnik Powszechny – a Catholic social and political weekly (first issue dated 24 March 1945). The editor-in-chief was Jerzy Turowicz from the first issue until his death in 1999. In 1953 the weekly was illegally seized and handed over to the PAX Association, which published it until 1956, and the 1956 Christmas issue was put together by the old editorial staff under Turowicz. Even though the weekly was subject to strict censorship (as all the press was), the weekly – whose circulation was being limited by restricted paper quotas – enjoyed enormous respect not only in Catholic milieus, but also among dissident left-wing intellectuals. The martial law authorities refused the right of publication to the weekly for the first six months. *Tygodnik Powszechny* survived the transformation and still is an important press title.

Tricity (Trójmiasto) – a popular expression, both official and colloquial, which covers the adjacent coastal city of Gdańsk, and the towns of Sopot and Gdynia that form an agglomeration, the third largest in Poland.

Twenty one demands (21 postulatów) – in August 1980 the striking workers in the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard formulated 21 demands. The first and the most important one was that regarding free trade unions, with the right to strike. For the workers it was not negotiable. The regime eventually yielded and on 31 August they signed the agreement with the Inter-factory Strike Committee.

Van ("Nysa") – the Polish language has its own eponyms: "Adidas" for all sports shoes, not necessarily manufactured by this firm. So it was in the case of the minibuses manufactured by the Van Factory in Nysa. These were used by the militia and other institutions. The name "Nysa" was also used by non-

experts to designate all kinds of vans, such as Nysa's main rival, the "Żuk", manufactured in Lublin.

Volunteer Reserves of the Citizens' Militia (Ochotnicza Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej – ORMO) – a paramilitary organisation established by a resolution of the Council of Ministers of 21 February 1946. The ORMO had a territorial structure and its task was to provide back-up and assistance to the militia. In the 1960s it had over 200,000 members, and in 1980 – over 460,000. Then the membership began to fall. In November 1989 the Sejm (parliament) dissolved the ORMO, which was then 328,510 strong.

West German revisionist (zachodnioniemieccy rewizjoniści) – an expression coined for propaganda purposes, which Poles heard virtually throughout the entire period of communist rule, particularly under Gomułka. The term referred to those West German politicians who openly spoke of the need to change ("revise", hence "revisionists"; sometimes also "revanchists") the post-war Polish-German border in favour of Germany. The current bitter joke in Poland was that for decades the communists were trying to scare children with the "revisionists", as they would elsewhere hear about some monsters or witches. Nonetheless on that occasion at least, the term (in the sense of Polish-German border realignment) was deliberately used in 1968 and used alternately with the term "revisionism" in a different sense, namely that of Party revisionists, who strove for liberalisation in the social-democratic spirit. So this practice cynically conflated those who wanted to regain the territories Germany lost to Poland after World War II with those who wanted to reform the Party.

Work interruptions (przerwy w pracy) – one of the key features of the language of post-war propaganda was the unheard-of tendency to employ euphemisms that were intended to minimise the importance, scope, scale, and character of various events, phenomena, and processes that were disadvantageous from the point of the rulers but not necessarily the ruled. There were traditional and, on the whole, accepted and commonly used names, but for some reason the communists would have them replaced by such

euphemisms. And thus in the communist propaganda discourse the generally known word "strike" became "work interruptions", enigmatic as that was. Theoretically people were supposed not to realise what it really referred to. When someone spoke of "work interruption", did they mean work interrupted for lunch or a workers' rally? But in the reality of communist-ruled Poland, hardly anyone had any doubt that the term indeed referred to strikes.

Workers-activists (aktyw robotniczy) – a key term in the communist "newspeak", in practice untranslatable into English or French. One could say, after the late distinguished Polish sociologist, Jakub Karpiński, that this group constituted the Party leadership that the Party could rely on. One should bear in mind that despite the name the "activists" did not all need to be workers (sometimes they were in the minority). Typically, most were bureaucrats, career soldiers and militia or state security functionaries. "Workers-activists" were usually mobilised by the state and party leadership in difficult moments in order to show support for them or to protest against real or imagined enemies of the Party. Sometimes "workers-activists" was mobilised to use clubs to attack the enemies of the current Party leadership and its political programme (as in March 1968).

Workers' Defence Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników, KOR) – following the June 1976 wave of worker protests against a drastic food price rise, the authorities launched an extremely brutal response. Many were run through the "fitness trails", cruelly interrogated and summarily dismissed, charged with crimes or tried by penal boards. In the following weeks and months several people (mostly young) stood up in their defence, and in the first place offered financial help (money collected among friends and "barristers") decided to risk their careers and give legal assistance to the families of the repressed workers. Appeals and resolutions spouted, and their signatories demanded the release of the protesters.

All these voices of protest against repressions and the aid efforts were forced by a spate of trials of the June protesters. On 23 September, 14 people publicised an "Appeal to Society and PRL Authorities", which announced that the Workers' Defence Committee had been established. In the weeks

and months that followed several others became full-blown members of the Committee. All the members operated openly, even though the authorities deemed their activity illegal. This openness manifested itself further in that the members' home addresses and telephone numbers were published in *Biuletyn Informacyjny*. There were many more anonymous co-workers of the committee. It was quite common that those who became involved openly were dismissed and exposed themselves to more or less painful harassment or repressions. In this activity the Committee appealed not only to state authorities, but to society, and used *samizdat*. In September 1977 the Committee, which was the first such organisation in communist-ruled states, became the Social Defence Committee "KOR". In the spring of 1980, when Solidarity was established, the Committee's members became involved in forming the central and regional structures of the trade union. In September 1981, at the First Congress, the Committee officially announced that Solidarity had fulfilled its mission and ceased to exit.

Worker's hotel (hotel robotniczy) – the "great construction projects of socialism" such as Nowa Huta needed many young men to do physical labour. They would typically come from villages and small towns. Since there was practically no existing housing, these people would be put "temporarily" (usually for a several years) in so-called "workers hotels". These had nothing in common with real hotels for tourists or business travellers.

Suffice it to say that in 1951 of 134 workers hotels (including 7 for women), which housed over 10,000, nearly half (65) were in wooden barracks. 96 hotels had full lighting, 72 – sinks, 71 – kitchens, 63 – day rooms, 45 – water closed, 25 – "baths" and only 5 – laundry rooms. The norms (2 sq. m per person) were only exceeded in 25 of them. Despite that many of the residents, who had come from poor villages without electricity, running water, sewerage or any access to good roads or railways, from homes where people lived together with livestock, saw their life in workers' hotels in terms of social and civilisational advancement.

Young Poland Movement (Ruch Młodej Polski) – an independent political conservative group, established in July 1979 in Gdańsk. It published an

independent periodical *Bratniak*. Their leader was Aleksander Hall. The Movement operated openly, even though the authorities deemed its activity illegal. The members played a significant role in the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard strike of August 1980.

“**Zionists**” (syjoniści) – a term, which had its heyday in the media in March’68. Previously, the word “Zionism” was not widely known in Poland and as such seldom appeared in the media. In the spring of 1968 the words “Jew” and “Jewish” were replaced in public discourse by “Zionist”. The word was so rarely used that many, including the press, had problems with the spelling. This gave rise to a bitter joke, where a son asks his father how to spell “Zionist”. “I’m not sure”, says father, “but before the war it was spelt with a ‘J’”.

Żerań car factory (Fabryka Samochodów Osobowych na Żeraniu, FSO) – the first post-war Polish motorcar manufacturer located in a north-eastern Warsaw suburb, Żerań. The first vehicle was the “Warszawa M-20”, Soviet GAZ-M20 Pobeda licence. Built at the turn of the 1940s and the 1950s, the plant soon became one the largest in Warsaw. It had its political “five minutes” in October 1956, when it became an informal centre of support for the pro-Gomułka reformers. The Żerań factory Party First Secretary Lechosław Goździk was the unquestioned leader of the rebellious city of Warsaw.

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